

APRIL 22, 2014

## HOW DOES PLAY HELP CHILDREN?



## CHILDREN MAY BE PLAYING, BUT THEIR BRAINS ARE WORKING

People tend to think of play as a break for the brain. We think we are relaxing, zoning out, allowing our brain some time off. In reality, however, several important things happen in the brain as we play! Play affects the brain in lots of ways that have crucial outcomes later in life.

Why is play so important? A newborn baby has over 2 billion brain cells, but connections between these brain cells have not yet been developed and will constitute the majority of the 75 percent of the brain left to grow after birth (Sunderland, 2006). The vast majority of brain growth occurs in the first five years of life. Play builds needed neuronal connections that will influence memory, learning, emotional regulation, and social intelligence for years to come. Let's examine a couple of types of play. [CONTINUE READING](#)

## SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS, CONFIDENTIALITY AND TAXES

**General Policy:** The Department of Human Services is responsible to keep client social security numbers confidential except in specific circumstances, for a specific purpose, and only with a signed release for that purpose. When a foster parent accepts placement of a foster child, they sign the Foster Family Placement Contract, in which it states they agree: *To hold confidential all information received from the Department and Juvenile Court Services, the child, the child's family, and medical personnel, consult with the social worker or juvenile court officer before any disclosure of information, and release no information to unauthorized persons.*

Foster parents may only use social security numbers upon written release from the child's parent or guardian for the specific purpose requested.

**Policy Specific to Foster Parents Claiming Foster Children as Dependents for Tax Purposes:** The Department does not give tax advice to foster parents. Generally, for example, foster parents qualify to claim foster children on their income taxes if the child resided in their home for more than 6 months of the calendar year. As noted above, this can only occur if foster parents have a signed release from the child's parent or guardian allowing them to share the child's social security number for the purpose of tax preparation.

The child's DHS caseworker may be asked by a foster parent for a foster child's social security number in order to claim them on their income taxes. The following is guidance in response to this request:

- **When the Department is the Guardian:** The Department may release the social security number to the foster parent when DHS is the guardian. However, the foster parent will need to get a letter from the Department to allow them to give that social security number to their tax preparer for income tax purposes only.
- **When the Department is Not the Guardian:** The foster child's parents retain their right to authorize or not authorize the release of their child's social security number to foster parents. Some of the foster child's parents may be claiming their child on their income taxes.

If asked by a foster parent, the DHS caseworker should facilitate a conversation between the foster parent and the parent to procure the appropriate release of information. If the foster parent is comfortable pursuing the discussion directly, the caseworker can provide the release (form 470-0429, *Consent to Obtain and Release Information*) to the foster parent to obtain the parent's signature. In either of these scenarios, the caseworker should ensure the foster parent is aware the parent has the right not to sign the requested release.

## TIPS ON MAKING BIRTH FAMILY INTERACTIONS MORE MEANINGFUL

Children enter foster care for many reasons. Frequently a child can not safely return home for several months. A lot can happen in the life of a 2-year-old, a 7-year-old or even an 11-year-old in a few days' time. A two-year-old may begin putting a few words together to form sentences. A seven-year-old may get a good-behavior note from his or her teacher. An eleven-year-old could write a poem or journal entry he or she is especially proud of. Imagine being the biological parents and missing out on so many of these things.

At the same time, you as the foster parent may be busy and won't necessarily remember, between visits, what special little everyday kinds of things have happened with the child. My Happy Pack is a plan to help the child share with their biological parents those special things that have happened since their last family interaction.



To help make family interactions more meaningful, a foster parent can provide My Happy Pack to the child to transport the things they want to show their biological parents. My Happy Pack would be a backpack or bag for a child to use only for family interactions with their biological parents. Between family interactions the child can be encouraged to put things into My Happy Pack that he or she is excited to share with their biological parents. Here are some examples of items that might be included:

- A favorite book
- Something cute or funny that the child said that you have jotted down on a piece of paper
- New words the child is saying, if it's a younger child
- A picture the child drew or colored
- A note from the child's teacher or an assignment the child is proud of
- A snapshot of the child doing a favorite activity
- A letter the child has written to their biological parents

Whenever something comes up that the child may want to share with his or her biological parents, encourage him/her to put it into their My Happy Pack. This gives biological parents a place to start their interactions; it lets them know what their child has been doing since the last family interaction, and allows the biological parent an opportunity to feel more involved in their child's life. And the child will be very proud and excited to share their My Happy Pack!

A key in partnering with biological parents is communication. You as the foster parent can also include notes to the biological parents, share stories, or provide information about how the child is doing in your home. A Happy Pack is a gift you can give a child that will have a lasting impact on their lives!

## ANGER DE-ESCALATION

This workshop explores the various primary emotions embedded within anger and the way they manifest themselves in foster and adoptive children's lives and in our own. Issues of separation, loss and grief will be presented as the genesis of anger demonstrated in foster/adoptive homes. A role-play will launch participants into the defusing stage, followed by great new, practical and easy-to-use methods of discipline to add to a parent's strategy toolbox, all helpful in de-escalating anger in both kids and adults.

(Kim Combes, LBSW, M. Ed.) – 6 Hours

**DAVENPORT** (Clarion Hotel)  
Sat., May 17 (9am-4:30pm)

## PUTTING THE MYTHS & MISUNDERSTANDINGS ON CHILDHOOD SLEEP DISORDERS TO BED

Sleep is vital to our health and ability to lead successful lives; however, sleep is often misunderstood. When we don't sleep well it affects all other aspects of our world. This course will address healthy and developmentally normal sleep as well as red flags that signal there might be an issue. Together we will explore the three major categories of childhood sleep disorders, dyssomnias, parasomnias, and psychiatric/medical. Included in our discussions will be nightmares, night terrors, nocturnal enuresis, sleep-onset association disorder, separation anxiety and more. Good sleep hygiene techniques and ways to make sure that everyone in the house is getting enough rest will also be discussed! (Joann Semann Smith, PhD) – 6 Hours

**IOWA CITY** (Clarion Hotel)  
Sat., May 10 (9am-4:30pm)