

JUNE 24, 2014

## Stalking and Other Dangers Facing Foster Parents

Written By: Dr John DeGarmo

Time and time again when I host training seminars I hear stories of foster parents who have been stalked by their child's biological family members. One foster mother told me of a time when a biological uncle followed her from work and slashed her tires in a grocery store. Another had a grandmother park the car across the street from the family and monitor the home, waiting for the foster child to come outside. This occurred several times until law enforcement was called. Still another related to me the ongoing incidents of a birth mother repeatedly making obscene phone calls to the foster home. Along with this, the mother also called the child welfare agency several times, making false reports about the family, and even went so far as to go to the police and make false accusations about the family. My own wife was followed by a biological mother and father in a car one afternoon for roughly thirty minutes, after a visitation between our foster child and the family members was held at the local child welfare agency. These incidents can be very threatening and intimidating experiences for foster parents, and the frequency of such events has increased due to online technology. Birth parents and other biological family members are easily able to spy upon foster parents through these social media sites. The act of birth parents or biological family members stalking, or trailing, foster parents is not a new one.

If foster parents post all of their actions, movements, weekend plans, and vacation destinations through social network sites, birth parents may well have easy and ready access to this information. These birth

parents and biological family members are able to determine where the foster parents will be next, along with the foster child, and arrive at the same location.

Biological parents are also able to post threatening and harmful messages on a foster parent's page. One foster parent told me of an incident where a birth mother was posting messages that were hateful towards her on her social network site. Along with this, the birth mother was also posting false accusations against the foster parents, indicating that the foster parents were using physical means of disciplining her child, such as spanking, and that the foster parents did not like the child or enjoy having her in their home. Unfortunately, as these messages were posted for all to see, it was not only a humiliating experience for the foster parents, but the child welfare agent began a thorough investigation into the foster parents, due to the birth mother's accusations against them.

Other birth family members have been known to create false profiles on social media sites, in order to gain access to a foster parent's site. Creating a fake profile is simple, and one can find directions through various search engines. The number of false profiles on social network sites is alarming, over 83 million, and it is not surprising to discover that many birth parents have done so, as well. One foster parent related to me an incident where a biological uncle had created a fake profile, eventually gaining access to both the foster child's and foster mother's Facebook account. For this reason it's important to keep a close eye on who you and your child are friends with on Facebook and other social networking sites.

## Training Spotlight

**PTSD IN CHILDREN AND TEENS** - Children, youth and families experience trauma in their lives that can have immediate and long-term effects on their ability to function at school, in the home, and with peers. Untreated trauma can have long-lasting effects on our mental and physical health, and our ability to achieve success in adult life. Participants will have an opportunity to identify how different factors and trauma impact brain and emotional development and will gain increased awareness of the signs and symptoms of PTSD in children and youth. (Warren Phillips, PhD) – 6 Hours

Sat., July 19 (9am-4:30pm) - **CEDAR RAPIDS** / Sat., Aug. 2 (9am-4:30pm) - **SIOUX CITY**

## A Step in My Direction

When I despaired, people's kindness helped me find my way back to my children.

Written By: James X Sumrow



James Sumrow with his daughters Jayme & Sheryl.

My kids were taken into custody in 2007. I was using meth and selling also.

I never, ever wanted to hurt my kids. I thought I loved them with all my heart.

At the time, Jayme was 2 and Sheryl was 3. My kids loved to be with me. I rode a bike with a trailer attached to the back that the kids loved to ride in. They would cry when I went somewhere by myself.

But I was also using every day.

### A Hijacked Brain

I grew up in a home with parents who were good to us kids and I had a lot of friends. I was into sports and BMX racing. But at 12 I drank a beer-and-a-half in our backyard and that's when I thought I'd arrived. After that, I moved on to weed and coke and eventually meth. My parents did everything they could to keep me on track, and I managed to finish high school, go to barber college and get a job in my dad's shop, but all my money went to drugs.

By the time my kids were taken, I was living with them in my barbershop and spending my time going up and down alleys stealing copper and aluminum to sell for dope.

My kids had nice clothes and toys, and they ate pretty well. But there were also many times when I'd spent all my money on drugs and they had to eat ramen noodles. Other times I put them in situations they should not have been in.

When my kids weren't with me they lived with their mother. She and I fought all the time. Still, I thought everything was just fine. I believed that if everyone would mind their business my life would be OK. The truth of the matter is that dope was the most important thing and I could not see it. It is sad to admit but my kids came second.

### Allegations of Drug Abuse

Then one day I took some dope over to a motel room where my kids and their mother were staying with a guy who was also selling. I sold him some dope, visited my kids for a few minutes, and left.

The next day both my daughters started vomiting. I just thought they had caught something.

But a couple of weeks later, child protective services contacted my kids' mother saying there were allegations of drug abuse around my kids. When they tested my kids, they tested positive for methamphetamines at very high levels. My kids had eaten it.

[CONTINUE READING JAMES' STORY](#)

## ADOPTION RESPITE

### Last Chance to Use Adoption Respite!

Each adopted child who receives a subsidy from Iowa is eligible to receive five days of respite care per fiscal year at \$17 per day. The current fiscal year for the Adoption Respite Program runs from July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2014. All respite days must be used during these dates and the form must be submitted no later than Friday, July 11, 2014.

### Adoption Respite Program Changes

Starting July 1, 2014, the adoption respite daily payment will increase from \$17 per day to \$20 per day. Families will continue to receive five days per fiscal year. After respite services have been provided, adoptive parents have typically been able to complete the adoption respite billing form electronically and submit through IFAPA's website. **Starting July 1, 2014, IFAPA will only be able to collect paper copies of the Adoption Respite Billing Form and the forms must contain original signatures from the adoptive parent and the respite provider.** Subsidized adoptive families living out-of-state will no longer be eligible for the five days of adoption respite.

[VIEW ADOPTION RESPITE FORM](#)

**5 Ways to Know You're Ready to be a Foster Parent**

[READ ARTICLE](#)