



**JOHN SMITH**

IFAPA Peer Liaison

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### I UNDERSTAND... I AM A FOSTER PARENT TOO

IFAPA recognizes that foster parents often need the perspective of peers during the foster parenting and adoption experience.

I can provide support and assist you with questions regarding:

- Licensing requirements
- Training needs
- Respite care
- Behavior challenges
- Working with birth families
- Confidentiality issues
- And much more!



[www.ifapa.org](http://www.ifapa.org)

## Building Healthy Relationships with Foster Children

Forming healthy attachments is crucial in childhood – but this becomes extremely difficult for children who enter the foster care system. Constantly changing schools, homes, friends, and authority figures can leave children feeling disconnected, alone, and without guidance.

When children form unhealthy attachments in childhood, they are at greater risk of developing psychological and behavioral problems later in life. Luckily, there are a number of tools you can use to build a healthy relationship with your foster child.

When you first start getting to know your foster child, you may notice certain behavioral or relationship patterns. Look for signs of healthy or unhealthy attachment so you can give your child the care he or she needs. There are three types of attachment:

- Secure Attachment – this is the ideal attachment between a parent and child. Securely attached children feel confident to explore the world, knowing that they can always return to their parent for safety, comfort, and advice.
- Ambivalent Attachment – children desperately want an emotional connection with their parent, but act out or resist forming a bond when the opportunity arises. Children with ambivalent attachments will avoid strangers or relationships with peers, as well.
- Avoidant Attachment – children are disinterested in their parents and seek comfort from strangers or friends. Children with avoidant attachments do not form emotional bonds with their parents and instead resort to learning about the world in unsafe ways.

Children with ambivalent attachments have difficulty trusting anyone. Show your child that you are trustworthy and reliable by being consistent, emotionally available, and non-judgmental.

Children with avoidant attachments have been taught that parental figures are not a good source of comfort or guidance. Help your child re-learn what a good parent does by setting boundaries, actively listening to your child, and encouraging your child's healthy interests and good behavior.

Now that you understand your child's current level of attachment, you can start building a healthier attachment with your child using these key strategies.

### Body Language

Children are incredibly perceptive. So body language and non-verbal cues are crucial to building a healthy, trusting relationship. Make eye contact with your child and face them whenever you are communicating to show them that you are focused on their needs. Smile when you talk with your child to express warmth and openness.

From an early age, children associate physical touch with emotional comfort. Children who form ambivalent or avoidant attachments with their caregivers are often deprived of physical affection. Teach your child that you are a source of comfort and safety by giving your child hugs, patting your child on the back, or holding your child's hand when he or she is sad, scared, or seeking attention.

### Verbal Communication

Many foster children have been conditioned to feel like they are just one of many children in need of a home and a family. To start unraveling that feeling of insignificance, make yourself available to your child. Be responsive when he or she approaches you and never ignore your child.

Practice active listening with your child to get at the heart of what your child needs. Be patient with your child. Try to say things in a new way if your child seems to be having trouble understanding or following directions.

# NEWS FROM YOUR IFAPA PEER LIAISON

## Activities

Often times when children have formed insecure attachments with past caregivers, it is because they have felt neglected. Engage in play activities with your child that allow him or her to take the lead. Follow along as your child creates an imaginary scenario, plays with figures or dolls, or draws. Choose activities that give your child the chance to tell a story. Then listen carefully and encourage your child to continue expressing him- or herself.

Foster children are at greater risk for developing unhealthy attachments throughout childhood. But that doesn't mean that all hope is lost. On the contrary – you can help your child learn what healthy relationships look like and how to communicate in times of distress.

Get to know your child and his or her needs. Then prove to your child that you are there for them, no matter what. Soon, you'll be able to nurture a healthy, secure attachment with your child and be the safe haven they've always needed.

Rai C. <https://www.scripted.com>

## DATES ON DECK

Tuesday, April 4<sup>th</sup>; (7:00-9:00); Carroll Pizza Ranch; INAY: “Working with Birth Parents”

Friday & Saturday, April 7<sup>th</sup> & 8<sup>th</sup>; IFAPA Spring Conference; Des Moines.

Tuesday, April 20<sup>th</sup> (6:30-8:30) St. Mark Lutheran Church, Storm Lake; “Nurtured Heart Approach”

## FOSTER PARENT MILESTONES

Please join me in thanking the following foster parents for their years of service to Iowa's children as this month marks their renewal anniversary. Thank you for your years of dedication!

- 25+ Years: John & Connie Smith
- 20+ Years: Lisa & Donald Klatt
- 15+ Years: Dayna & Thomas Nash
- 10+ Years: Joe & Kiane Goebel
- 5+ Years: Neil & Gail Halverson; Aleen & Ron Mastne
- ONE YEAR: Angela & Steven Johnson; Crystal & Aron Nieland; Matt & Amy Powell; Jared & Lauren Schmidt

**AND REMEMBER:** I am just an email/phone call away. I am here for you! If you ever have a question, concern or celebration, give me a call. The conversations which I have with other parents are the best part of my day!

-IFAPA John



## From My Side of the Desk!

Dear Parents –

March was a long month for our family. My wife and I both had a lot of things going on in not only our work lives but also our personal lives. And this doesn't count our family life.

Since the first of December we had some extra bodies in our home (little bodies). It had been some time (maybe 20 years) since we had little ones with us. This group of four was not only the largest sibling group we had cared for they may also have been the most demanding.

During the months that the children were with us, Connie & I began questioning if we were still cut out for this or not.

Long story short, we understand now that we may have bit off more than we could handle; we didn't get enough support and we tired in a hurry. Believe me when I say, I feel your pain and know how you feel.

We are now taking a short break to re-evaluate our situation & no doubt, prepare for the next group!

Take Care & God Bless

-IFAPA John