

Tips, Guides, and Information to
Help You with Your Foster Child

In This Issue: *From Someone Who Has Been There: Memories and Tips from an Adoptive Parent * When a Child Faces Loss * Ask Clinical * Shout-Outs to Our Foster Parents * Tips and Pointers * AND MORE!

WIN A FREE GIFT CARD!!

Find out how inside!

SHOUT-OUTS

People We Can Count On--

We acknowledge these foster parents for their consistency in keeping their clinical appointments:

- ★ Mark and Maxine Williams
- ★ Lessie Donaldson
- ★ Diane Smith



When a Child Faces Loss

He may look tough or sullen. Maybe he's actually homesick. And you can help.

When John lived at home, he rarely went to school. Instead, he stayed home and took care of his birth mother, who was

Continued on, p. 2

Word Search

Forward, Backward, Up, Down, or Diagonal—Find the 13 words below from this issue (answer on p. 2)

ADOPTION LOSS PARENT
CLINICAL DEVELOPMENT
PLAY APPOINTMENT PARENT
TEACH SPEECH THERAPY
BEHAVIOR HOMESICK

A	X	K	C	I	S	E	M	O	H	Z
P	B	A	N	R	S	V	X	C	Y	Q
P	L	A	Y	D	N	I	A	T	W	R
O	A	E	H	C	E	E	P	S	U	O
I	P	D	F	H	T	I	T	S	Z	I
N	R	A	D	O	P	T	I	O	N	V
T	M	C	R	G	N	V	Y	L	W	A
M	R	T	H	E	R	A	P	Y	X	H
E	Q	C	L	I	N	I	C	A	L	E
N	L	P	S	N	R	T	O	K	J	B
T	N	E	M	P	O	L	E	V	E	D

When a Child Faces Loss, continued from p. 1

afraid to leave the house. Once he got to his foster home, he still tried to avoid school, and he sometimes ran away to be with his mom. He later revealed that he was afraid that she might get sick or die if he wasn't there with her.

Kids in foster care face many kinds of losses—

- Their birth parents
- The room they are used to
- Their homes
- Their schools and teachers
- Their friends

--And they might be losing all of these at once. Even something positive, like being adopted, can involve losses, too—

- Loss of the dream that their birth parents will one day be able to take them back and be the kind of parents their kids want them to be
- Loss of contact with birth parents
- Loss of the idea of the old family

Loss may have to be addressed again, in different ways and at different times, as the child grows older. It may get triggered by special times when the old family might be particularly missed.

You can help kids with the transition to your home—

- You can let them talk about their homes, schools or families as much as they want to.
- Or you can respect it when they don't want to talk about these things at all—but let them know you're there to listen when they want to.
- Some children might want to draw their homes or families.
- Some might want to write in journals.

- **“At home we did it this way.”** That can sound like a challenge to you and your way of doing things. But it could also be a gift—a hint at how you can make a small change to help them feel more at home.
- **Something to make them feel that the new place can become theirs—**
 - a toy
 - a book
 - a stuffed animal—
- **Something they can hold, or even take to bed with them. (You'd be surprised how even some of the older, tougher-seeming kids may keep things like this, even though they might never ask for them.)**

Even when a child has been doing well, a sense of loss might get triggered when she goes through new experiences or developmental stages—times when the absence of the old family becomes especially noticeable:

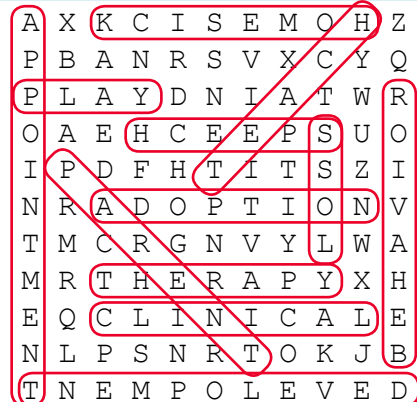
- birthdays
- graduations
- relationships
- proms

Loss may have to be addressed in different ways and at different times, as the child grows older. When you know what to look for, you'll be more prepared to help.



To be eligible to earn a \$20 free gift card, read the article above and find three ways to help a child deal with loss. Call us at 718-232-1500 x310 or x337 with your answer. ***THE FIRST THREE CORRECT ANSWERS WIN!***

ANSWERS TO WORD SEARCH FROM P. 1



From Someone Who's Been There: Memories and Tips from an Adoptive Parent



The Sugrue family on a recent vacation

Debbie Sugrue and her husband fostered and adopted two children through MercyFirst. Currently, she is president of the Foster Adoptive Parent Association for MercyFirst. For the times and places of the Association's monthly meetings, please watch for notices in your monthly check envelope.

Clinical Corner: How did you come to be a foster parent and an adoptive parent?

Debbie Sugrue: We came at it differently from many people, because we were looking to adopt children from the start, and we thought that a good way to do that was going through foster care, since there are so many children in care who are in need of being adopted. We came in from the beginning as pre-adoptive parents. We knew we wanted to adopt and start a family. Children were always an important part of our lives, and we wanted to have children.

CC: What were some obstacles you faced?

DS: Understanding the whole foster care system was a challenge—not knowing how to get things done in the foster care system. We had a great case worker, but it was hard getting an understanding of everything we needed to do.

CC: What are some things you learned that would be important for other foster parents to know?

DS: First of all, the relationship with your case worker is critical—that's where you begin and end everything. My personal experience has been great. You need to make sure that the relationship is established right away by meeting with the caseworker, and make sure that the child has a relationship with the caseworker, too.

Sometimes, a caseworker or someone else won't be able to get back to you right away. Some things you can wait for, but if something is important, go to that person's supervisor, and if necessary the supervisor's supervisor. You need to know who your case worker's boss is. And if you do have to talk with the case worker's supervisor, always circle back and go back to the case worker, to maintain the relationship.

CC: Any other important things you learned, to pass on to other foster parents?

DS: Yes. Other foster parents are your best resources. Not every foster parent takes advantage of this. Talk with other foster parents—where do you live, who is your pediatrician? Also, everyone is certified, so if you need a babysitter, that's another advantage. No one knows what you're going through except another foster parent. Information is key. Most of what I learned about foster care came from other foster parents. When you're at the agency for visiting, that's a great time to talk with the other foster parents and make your connections.

I would say one of the most important things for foster parents to do is to take care of themselves, physically and mentally. Sometimes the kids can get on your last nerve. It's important to reach out to other foster parents, your unit at MercyFirst, your partner. It's important to get out and have some fun. Sometimes that gets neglected when you're a parent, whether you're a foster parent or not. Do something different—a spa day, whatever, something fun. Take care of your mental and physical wellbeing.

CC: When was the moment when you knew it was all worthwhile?

DS: From the moment when the kids entered our lives. We knew that we were changed forever and our lives were changed forever.



In Our Clinical Department

What Is Therapy?

“All they do is play. How does that help?”

When April was four years old, her home was broken into, and her birth parents were severely beaten while she hid under the covers in her bed. She had many nightmares after that, but she never spoke about what happened. But in play therapy, she played out fights between a doll-house family and animal predators; police cars and ambulances arrived, and the family fought off the animal intruders. Over the weeks, April got more confident, and her nightmares decreased.

April was taking part in play therapy, one kind of therapy that can help children and others with their problems. At the Clinical Department at MercyFirst, we make many kinds of therapy available to help our families.

At our **Montague Street** and **Twelfth Avenue** sites in Brooklyn, our clinicians provide psychotherapy to children and families. Soon at our **Rockaway Park** location a clinician will be available to provide psychotherapy onsite and in the homes. We also help to connect children and families with **clinics in the community** that will best suit their needs.



There are different kinds of therapy:

- Younger children may be engaged through **play therapy**, a technique where children are encouraged to play out their concerns in a supportive, therapeutic environment.
- Older children and teens may be helped by different kinds of **talk therapy**.
- **Behavioral plans** can help kids get problem behaviors under control.
- **Family therapy**, with children and foster parents or with children and birth parents, can help families adjust to living together and/or work toward reunification.

We'll help you find the therapy that will be the best fit for you and your child.

Ask Clinical!

I was told that I needed to bring my child in for a psychological evaluation—but he's only three years old! How can this make sense?

A psychological evaluation can tell us a lot about a young child. This can include information about how the child is developing in intelligence, speech and language, and how she uses her muscles. If there are delays in any of these areas, it can have a huge impact on the child's life. It's really important to catch these things early so the child can get help before she enters Pre-K, so she will be prepared to learn in a classroom setting with her peers. Even as young as two or three, a child who has a developmental delay can be helped tremendously by speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, or play therapy. A child from infancy through two years old can be helped by Early Intervention, and a three-to-five-year-old can get services through CPSE. The earlier a delay is discovered, the earlier the child can get help to catch up.

Have a problem or a question? Write us at “Ask Clinical,” MercyFirst, 6301 12th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11219, or call us at 718-232-1500 x337. We'll try to help!



Katherine Gallagher, Psy.D., is one of our psychologists. She tests children to find out what kinds of help they might need in learning, coping with their feelings, and getting along with others.

RECEIVE A \$20 GIFT CARD IF YOUR QUESTION IS PUBLISHED.