

# Adoption



# Foster Care

*The mission of Children's Aid Society is to identify and provide services to improve the lives of children and their families.*

**Post-Permanency Newsletter**  
**Summer 2020**

## Creative Alternatives to Family Gatherings during COVID-19

**Sara Garone, NDTR** *Updated April 9, 2020*

Of the many sacrifices we're all having to make during the new normal of social distancing, one of the most difficult is missing family gatherings. Having to skip birthday parties, grandparent visits, and even funerals definitely adds to the emotional burden of this challenging time—even though we know it's for the greater good.

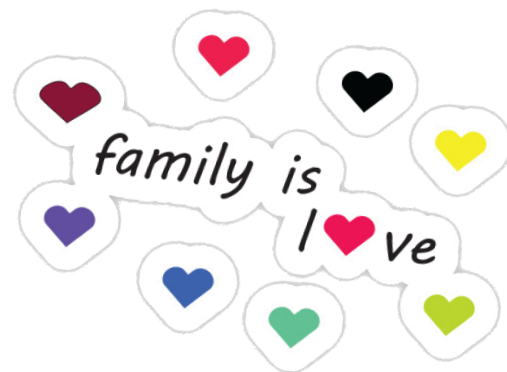
When a family reunion or Sunday dinner isn't in the cards, maybe there's room for us to reframe these circumstances more positively. Perhaps this time could be an opportunity to connect with family in novel ways.

As we await the return of "regular" life, here are seven alternative ideas for spending time with cherished loved ones from afar.

**Plan a Virtual Hangout:** Thank goodness for the Internet! Though we may be physically distanced from relatives, at least we have the blessing of virtual connection. Use online platforms to your family's advantage by jumping in on any of the many video chatting tools currently available. Facetime, Google Hangouts, and Zoom all offer the chance to hear friendly voices *and* see friendly faces.

Beyond the nicety of feeling warm fuzzies, video chatting may also help boost mental health—a benefit we could all probably use these days. Research from 2015 in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* showed that getting more face-to-face socialization with others was associated with reduced likelihood of depression, especially among older adults. (The study did not address the use of video chat specifically, but its outcomes centered on face-to-face interaction.)

**Create a Family Social Media Group:** Online connection triumphs again. If your family members do social media, choose a platform most people are on and create a landing page for your clan, such as a family Facebook group. In this online space, you can connect through photos, videos, and comment threads.



### Upcoming Support Group Meetings

**(3rd Monday Each Month)**

- **July 20<sup>th</sup>** – Bobbie McBurnie-Johnson M.A. – *PAL Support Group, Family Recovery and the Caregiver Support Program*
- **August 17<sup>th</sup>** – Mary Mike Sayers – *Clearfield Area School District Q&A Discussion*
- **September 21<sup>st</sup>** – David Delvaux – *ADHD*
- **October 19<sup>th</sup>** – CORE Teen: – *Relationship Development*
- **November 16<sup>th</sup>** – Autumn Bloom, Play Therapist – *Trauma and How it Affects Children*
- **December 21<sup>st</sup>** – Holiday Party

**6 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Children's Aid Society in Clearfield. Child care is available and a light dinner is provided!**

**Join us virtually or in person!**

**814-765-2686 x205**

### SWAN Post-Permanency Services



**statewide  
adoption and  
permanency  
network**

*These services are available to any family who has adopted and lives in Pennsylvania, whether or not they adopted their child from foster care, and to those families who have provided permanency to children from the foster care system through permanent legal custodianship or formal kinship care.*

*Families self-refer by calling the SWAN Helpline (800-585-SWAN) to request these services. The services are part of a continuum of services that strengthen and support families and assist in strengthening the special needs adoption community at the local level.*



# Creative Alternatives to Family Gatherings during COVID-19

*Continued*

Need some ideas to get you started? Try sharing favorite photos of get-togethers from years past (or even, perhaps, have a funny photo challenge). Post a thought-provoking question of the day. Start a thread of everyone's opinions about the best vacations you've taken together, or the most embarrassing thing dad ever did when you were kids.

If events like weddings and baptisms are still taking place on a smaller scale, this is the place to share photos of them, too. You may be surprised at how much laughter and joy can come from reminiscing and reconnecting in this way.

**Use Old Fashioned Mail:** Difficult times can also make us turn to simpler modes of communication. Why not break out your best ballpoint and sit down to write a letter? No one doesn't like to receive something special in the mail, whether a hand-written card, letter, or hand-drawn pictures from the kids. And, unlike images on a screen, these treasures can be taped up in a visible place to provide ongoing encouragement and sense of connection.

If you're concerned about contracting the coronavirus through letters or packages, you can put fears to rest. The U.S. Postal Service has offered the reassurance that there is currently no evidence that the virus has spread through the mail.

**Eat Together Separately:** Don't family gatherings always seem to center around food? Though you may not be able to enjoy a slice of cherry pie at Grandma's or dig into your brother's famous guac right now, there *are* options for eating "together" as a family.

Consider planning a menu (with easily available ingredients) that everyone in the family can make on the same evening. Each individual or nuclear family can contribute a recipe for one course of the meal. There's comfort and unity to be found in knowing that mom, dad, or your favorite cousins are eating the same meal at the same time as you.

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## Self-Care: Barriers and Basics for Foster/Adoptive Parents

Contributed by: Deena McMahon

When a foster or adopted child has special needs, parents must juggle appointments with mental health therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech therapists, psychiatrists, ophthalmologists, allergists, and asthma specialists. They must attend IEP meetings, keep in touch with the school principal and their child's teacher, check in with the social worker, and establish a schedule for personal care attendants (PCAs). Ongoing appointments and emergencies keep parents so busy that attending to their own feelings and needs may be put on hold.



Self-care, however, is crucial for foster and adoptive parents. The physical and emotional toll of caring for traumatized children can be overwhelming. Children can project hurt onto parents and, at the same time, blame parents for feelings of loss and despair. Parents must understand both the complexities of foster care and adoption, and their child's unique needs. With that knowledge and an ongoing commitment to self-care, parents can more easily remain effective and balanced.

### Barriers to Good Self-Care

Unfortunately, adoptive and foster parents face many barriers to taking care of themselves. To start, the phrase—"Take care of yourself!"—has become so trite that, for many, it has lost all meaning. When someone casually tells an adoptive mom whose kids have special needs to take care of herself, she may feel frustrated and angry. It's easy to say. It's not easy to do.

Second, many who choose to foster and adopt are natural caregivers. They have pets, partners, children, and aging parents who all require care and attention. Most days, the amount of energy they devote to others' needs far exceeds any energy directed to their well-being. In fact, many caregivers are uncomfortable being on the receiving end of others' attention and assistance. They don't want to be too needy, or seem like they are not up to the challenges they have taken on.

Third, many adoptive and foster parents really want to be there for their families. They want to remember birthdays with a homemade cake. They want to be the cheerful volunteer at their child's school. They want to deliver a meal to a sick friend, help out at church, and serve on task forces that address children's needs. So, they work longer and try harder to meet their families' needs.

Fourth, too many parents simply do not know what would help them. They know something is missing, but can't put their finger on just what might make them feel better. Parents are often told, "Call if there is anything you need," but it is hard to call and ask for help, especially when you cannot even articulate what you need. This leaves many parents vulnerable and exhausted. Even more significantly, too many foster and adoptive parents believe they somehow shouldn't need support. Many times I have heard parents say that they are in no position to complain or ask for help since they chose to foster or adopt their children. But even when parents know what challenges the child faces, it is often impossible to predict how living with a certain child will change a family.

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# Self-Care: Barriers and Basics for Foster/Adoptive Parents

Continued

Compounding matters, recent disasters—9/11, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the earthquake in Pakistan, and the prolonged conflict in Iraq—remind us all that there are always other people who are worse off. We are taught as children to be happy with what we have since other people have it much harder. It is little wonder we sometimes feel guilty because our ongoing trauma pales in comparison to these catastrophic tragedies.

## The Road to Good Self-Care

From working with parents, I know that to overcome social, mental, and emotional barriers to self-care, you must first come to understand the importance of taking care of yourself, and then build self-care into your daily routine. You must believe that you are worth taking care of, and that your happiness and well-being are not peripheral to, but essential for good parenting. Once you can accept that:

**Give yourself permission to need something.** It is okay to ask for help. Having needs and trying to meet them is not a sign of incompetence or weakness. It is part of healthy family life. Thirst is your body's signal to drink and prevent dehydration. In the same way, when you feel stressed out, it is time to take a break so you can regain perspective and deal with the issue at hand more constructively.

**Keep it simple.** Make life choices that fit your family. Develop consistent routines. Create a safe environment. Understand and respect both your limits and those of your children. Resist the impulse to over-commit what little time you have. Prioritize. Save energy for things that really matter, and seek outside help as soon as you need it. When possible, take advantage of respite opportunities and PCAs to relieve some of the stress during really rough times.

**Stop comparing yourself to other adults and families.** They do not live your life, and they are not raising your children. Get comfortable with compromising and being different. Your child may talk, think, achieve, behave, and live differently than other children. Instead of measuring your family's worth by other people's standards, set expectations for your family based on your children's capabilities and your family's reality.

**Know which part of the day is the hardest and have a plan to make it go more smoothly.** If getting ready for school is rough, prepare as much as you can the night before. If bedtime is hard, start early and set a predictable routine. Decide beforehand how you will respond to behaviors that make that time of day so trying. Accept that you won't get anything else done, and do only what you must to get through the hard parts.

**Join a parent support group.** Meeting with other parents who have similar experiences and feelings is one of the most powerful and renewing activities for anyone raising children who have special needs. Just knowing that you are with people who "get it" is affirming. Group members may also be able to trade respite care with you. If a group is not an option, find at least one person outside your immediate family with whom you can be real, and whom you can trust to understand.

**Have down time every day.** Maybe it's a morning walk. It might be 10 minutes with the paper and a good cup of coffee. It can be writing in your journal before bed. It could be the drive into work, or times of silent prayer in church. Your mind, body, and soul need time to regenerate from life's stresses. If you have no down time—a time without distractions and demands—you cannot benefit from moments of reflection and calm that may help you to center and stay balanced.

**Routinely have something to which you can look forward.** Maybe it's coffee with a neighbor after the kids are at school. Or a glass of wine Friday night. Or date night with your partner. It could be going alone to the grocery store Saturday morning or having an uninterrupted bath. Remember, waiting too long to reward yourself for a job well done is not an effective way to shape your behavior. Immediate positive reinforcement works for adults too.

**Accentuate the positive.** It may not be easy, but as you step back to evaluate how you and the family are doing, find time to laugh at the silly situations that come up. Recognize the good in yourself and your children. Celebrate every step forward, no matter how small. Stay connected with your partner. Eat something you really enjoy. (Nutrition is important. Indulgence is wonderful.) Find affirmation in the process of raising an adopted child.

Caring for children who have special needs is a matter of the heart. Self-care is a mind-set and a positive choice. If you can find a balance between caring for your children and meeting your own needs, you will ultimately be much better equipped to do both.

## Upcoming Weekly Classes- Join Us Virtually or In Person



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**(For Singles)**

**Beginning June 24th**

**Meets for 8 Weeks (6 pm to 8:30 pm)**

**(Committed and Engaged Couples)**

**Beginning June 30th**

Funding for this project was provided by the United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Grant: 90FM0104-01-00. These services are available to all eligible persons, regardless of race, gender, age, disability, or religion.

## Ways to Help Kids Who Feel Sad About Missed Activities By Amy Morin, LCSW, Updated on April 17, 2020

For the majority of kids in America, the coronavirus pandemic has brought their school years to an abrupt halt. Initially, the disruption may have seemed like it would be a fairly temporary situation. But now that a few weeks has passed, it has become clear that school is going to be out for a while—and in many cases, probably through the end of the school year.

This sudden change is likely overwhelming to everyone. Having the kids home during the weekdays can turn everything upside down. You've probably been scrambling to figure out how to play the role of a work-at-home parent and a homeschool teacher all at once. Your kids may be feeling a bit confused and saddened by the situation as well. At first, a few days off from school may have felt fun. But after a week or two, they may be struggling to understand why they can't go back and why all of their activities have been canceled.

It is important to support them as they adjust to the changes—especially since a lot of uncertainty remains about when their activities will resume again.

### Talk About How Things Are Different Now

Sometimes parents think, “Well if she’s not talking about that field trip that got canceled, maybe she doesn’t remember,” or “He must not miss baseball that much. He hasn’t mentioned it lately.” But just because kids are not talking about something doesn’t mean that they aren’t affected by it. Don’t be afraid to be the first one to bring it up. You aren’t saying something they don’t already know. And you won’t upset them just by raising the issue.

### Create Space for a Dialogue

Ask open-ended questions like, “What is it like for you right now without school or any activities?” or “How are you doing without being able to play ball this spring?”

Talk about how things are different for everyone. Name the changes you see. “We all sleep in a little later and have breakfast together” or “no you eat lunch with your brother instead of your friends.”

You might also help them talk about which things are better when they were in school and which things were worse. Your child might say something like it was better when they got to see their friends but worse that they had to eat school lunch.

Similarly, talk about what’s better and worse about staying home. They might say it’s better that they get to watch more TV but worse that they don’t have recess on the school playground.

Simply acknowledging how life is different—and that some aspects might be better while others are worse—can be reassuring for kids. It can also help them make a little more sense out of a really confusing situation.

### Emphasize the Reasons for Staying Safe at Home

Kids don’t need to be watching news stories about death tolls and community spread. But they will definitely benefit from a discussion about the reasons why staying at home is a safer choice for everyone.

Discuss how staying at home prevents people from sharing germs. And this means fewer people will get sick. Talk about how everyone in the entire world is staying home right now. It’ll help them feel a little less alone.

Explain how it is good to keep everyone in your family healthier, and it is also a kind thing to do for people in your community. So even though it’s sad they’re missing out on some of their favorite activities, staying home is the safest and kindest thing that they can do for everyone.

### Use Empowering Language

Avoid using phrases like “stuck at home” or “can’t get out.” This type of language implies that you are all victims who are trapped in an unbearable situation. It can cause kids to feel even worse about their circumstances.

Instead, use empowering language. Talk about being “safer at home” and “choosing to stay in.” This way kids know that you are making good choices because you want to, not because you are obligated to.

If you are feeling frustrated and anxious by the current situation, avoid talking too much about this in front of your kids. Your feelings will rub off on them. Rather than dwell on how awful things are right now, focus on how good things will be down the road. Tell them that you are looking forward to going and visiting Grandma and Grandpa when it’s safe for them. Or mention that you can’t wait to go to the playground again once social distancing comes to an end.

### Help Them Label Their Feelings

Your kids might need a little help figuring out how they feel. One way you can do this is to assist them in putting a name to their emotions. Keep in mind that they might be feeling a lot of different things all at once.

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### *Are most days a battle from breakfast to bedtime?*

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# Ways to Help Kids Who Feel Sad About Missed Activities

*Continued*

Here are several ways you can help your kids identify their feelings:

- **Print out a list of faces.** If you have younger children who don't read well yet, a list of faces that clearly depicts emotions like "frustrated," "angry," "sad," "happy," and "scared" can be helpful. You might even ask your child to draw those faces on a piece of paper and point to the ones they are feeling right now.
- **Print out feeling words.** Older kids might benefit from a list of printed feeling words. More complicated words like "disappointed" and "embarrassed" can be helpful.
- **Use a feeling thermometer.** Some kids just don't like to put a name to their emotions. They do better with identifying a number on a scale from 1 to 10. They might say, "I'm feeling about a 4 today," when they are struggling. When they are having a good day, they might feel more like an 8. Ask them to draw a mood thermometer. And then check in with them regularly about which number they are.

You can do this by simply asking, "How are you feeling today?" On important days, you might even say something like, "I know you were supposed to have your concert today. How are you feeling about that?" Showing interest in their feelings may help them talk more about how they are doing. And sometimes just naming an emotion can be a powerful way to reduce its intensity.

## Practice Healthy Coping Skills

Clearly, at this point, there may still be more questions than answers. So their uncertainty and anxiety are understandable. Teaching them healthy ways to cope with it now, however, can help them turn to these skills in the future when they are faced with other tough circumstances. As kids work through their complicated feelings, they will need healthy skills to deal with them. So work with your child on identifying strategies that help them feel better when they are dealing with boredom, loneliness, frustration, sadness, or any other feelings that might come up.

## Calm Down Kit

You might create a "calm down kit" as a way to help your child relax when they are feeling angry or anxious. This could be a simple shoebox filled with items that they find soothing—a coloring book, playdoh, or a piece of their favorite candy. When they are upset, you can simply say, "Go do something in your 'calm down kit.'" This can remind them to take responsibility for their own emotions, and you won't always have to be the one to calm them down.

## Mood Boosters

Similarly, you might create a list of "mood boosters" for when they are sad. These might be fun little activities that could cheer them up when they're feeling down. It might be a notebook or piece of paper that lists ideas like, "Call Grandma, and tell her your three favorite jokes," or "Sing your favorite song while dancing around the room." When your child is feeling down, you might suggest they try a mood booster or two. You might also ask your child to draw a picture that shows how they feel right now, or of an activity they might be excited to do once things are back to normal. They may find drawing a picture gives them an expressive outlet that helps them feel better.

Older kids may enjoy journaling about their experiences. Kids who don't like to talk about their feelings may be willing to write them down knowing that you'll read it and respond in writing. It's also ok if they'd rather keep their writing a secret, just knowing they got some stuff off their chest is beneficial.

Some kids may even appreciate writing in a journal together. They might enjoy having a shared journal with a friend who is going through the same thing. Writing about how much they both miss dance class or how sad they are that they can't be on the team together may help them stay connected.

The goal is to help figure out what works for your child and then encourage your child to practice those skills. Provide plenty of guidance and reassurance as they are working through some tough emotions.

## Identify Ways to Stay Connected

Help your child find ways to maintain a connection with the activities they are not able to do anymore. Can they still practice their favorite sport or activity on their own? Can they keep learning about their activities through books?

If they were on a team, can they still speak to the coach on video chat once in a while? Or could they send a handwritten note to an instructor that says they miss being there?

Connecting with the activity—as well as the people in it—can help them feel better. It may serve as a reminder that it is not just them who is missing out. For example, a younger kid might imagine that dance class is still being held without them. Connecting with the instructor or the other kids can remind them that no one is able to participate right now.

## Help Them See That Everyone Is Staying Home

Help your kids see that we are all in this together. And by staying home, they are being part of an even bigger team. Look for images and videos of children from around the world who are staying home right now. Or help them video chat with their friends from school, so they can see that their friends are doing the same things they are. This can help them feel a little bit less lonely. And it can show them that it is not just their world that is weird right now. The whole world is somewhat upside down at the moment.

## Offer Realistic Reassurance

When your child asks questions like, "Will I be able to play softball this summer?" you might be tempted to say, "Yes. Of course!" as a way to reassure them. But it is important that you do not make any extra promises that you can't necessarily keep.

It's OK to say, "I sure hope so," when your child asks a question. But don't attempt to give a timeline until you really have one. Instead, offer reassurance that everyone is working hard to make things safe so that you can get back to community activities as soon as possible.

Focus on community members doing their part—like paramedics, physicians, nurses, and government officials. Talk about how people are supporting one another right now and working hard to solve the problem, even while they are practicing social distancing. Let your kids know that although it is uncomfortable and disappointing for everyone to miss out on so many community activities, all of you can handle it. And they are strong, capable kids who can deal with the situation too.