



**NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER  
FOR FOSTER CARE  
& PERMANENCY PLANNING**

at the Hunter College  
School of Social Work

# **INFORMATION PACKET: *Respite for Resource Families***

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## **Respite for Resource Families**

Foster parents face all the challenges of parenthood, plus the additional stress of caring for children who may have many behavioral issues. Respite care is designed to give the resource family a chance to rest and re-vitalize for a few days. These breaks from the extra responsibility of caring for foster children help families avoid burnout. Respite care also gives the foster children an opportunity to participate in different activities with their respite care providers.

Although many foster parents agree that respite provides a much-needed break, there is a concern that if they voice their need for respite, it will be viewed as an admission that they cannot handle the responsibilities of being a foster parent. They also have concerns about the quality of care the respite providers can give their foster children (McMahon, 1999). The National Foster Parents Association (NFPA) holds the position that respite care should be part of the support package offered to all resource families. The NFPA advocates that foster parents receive two days of planned respite care per month for each foster child in their homes.

Respite care can be provided in the resource family's home, with a respite provider coming into the home, or in the home of the respite provider. Respite care may be provided by volunteers, or paid providers working for private and government child welfare agencies. Some states offer respite as part of the support given to all resource families, while other states offer respite only for foster children that are medically frail. A government study (Respite Care, 1994) found that most of the respite care available is provided by other foster parents. This study also found that the barriers to the use of respite care include concerns about the settings of respite care, the skills of respite care providers, and the lack

of transportation to respite. There is a wealth of information available to foster parents who desire respite care in their communities.

## **Policies and Legislation Affecting Respite for Resource Families**

Respite for resource families has become an increasingly important policy issue as child welfare services adopt more stringent requirements. The 1997 Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) has many implications for resource families and their need for respite care. The act aims to move children into permanent placements more quickly. With this goal in mind, it is anticipated that more foster families will become adoptive families. This reduces the number of available foster parents. While the number of foster families declines, there will be greater demands on available foster families to care for more children. The demands on these families should be met through planned support for resource families, including respite care.

Legislation that addresses respite does so under the umbrella of support for all families. A piece of legislation that has been important in establishing respite services is the Omnibus Reconciliation Act of 1993. This act amended Title IV-B of the Social Security Act and created the “Family Preservation and Support Services Programs”. The purpose of these programs is “encouraging and enabling each state to develop and establish...a program of family preservation services and community-based family support services” (Layzer et al, 2001). The legislation defines family support as services for children and families designed to help families (including adoptive, foster, and extended families) that are at risk or in crisis. State child welfare agencies are given block grants to fund family support programs and can allocate the funds as they decide necessary. Foster parents that wish to gain greater respite support need to advocate that their state uses its block grant money toward such programs.

### Statistics for Resource Families

There are currently no statistics available about respite care, but the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), through the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), reports these numbers on foster care for 1999.

581,000	Total number of children in foster care on September 30, 1999
9.9	Average age of children in foster care
274,100	Number of children in Foster Family Homes (non-relative)
32	Average number of months spent in foster care
20	Median number of months spent in foster care
297,000	Number of children who entered foster care
251,000	Number of children who exited foster care
59%	Percentage of children leaving care who reunified with parents
10%	Percentage of children leaving care to live with other relatives
16%	Percentage of children leaving care due to adoption
127,000	Number of children in foster care waiting to be adopted
46,000	Number of children adopted

### RACE/ETHNICITY and GENDER

34%	White, non-Hispanic
39%	Black, non-Hispanic
17%	Hispanic
2%	American Indian / Alaskan Native
1%	Asian / Pacific Islander

7% Unknown / Unable to determine

52% Male

48% Female

## **Respite for Resource Families Best Practice Tips**

### Tips for Developing a Respite Program

(Adapted from the ARCH National Resource Center for Respite and Crisis Care Services Factsheet Number 32.) <http://www.chtop.com/archfs.htm>

- Consider foster care regulations and other state-approved licensing authorities when developing programs.
- Arrange for respite program staff members and respite providers to attend foster parent association meetings. Ask foster parents who have used respite services to speak at foster parent meetings to share their experiences.
- Offer joint training programs for respite providers and foster parents.
- Provide training for respite care providers that includes: child development, concepts of attachment, first aid and CPR, positive discipline techniques, how to respond to children's questions about their foster home placement, the roles and responsibilities of respite providers, and emergency procedures.
- Educate case managers of foster families about the need to provide respite and strategies to support its use.

### Tips for Foster Parents Preparing for Respite

(Compiled from: Fostering Perspectives, Volume 4, Number 1. Fall 1999 and ARCH National Resource Center for Respite and Crisis Care Services Factsheet Number 32.)

- Ask about respite care providers' training and experience to be certain they are prepared to handle children with special needs.
- Have a face-to-face meeting with the respite care provider beforehand. If possible, take you

child to visit the respite family in order to reduce the child's anxiety.

- Explain to the child why the respite stay is occurring and how long it will last. Be clear that this is not another placement.
- Share information with the provider. Tell them about your child's needs, likes and dislikes, and any other concerns or issues.
- Talk about discipline issues with the respite provider. Most providers are willing to follow through with your discipline approach.
- Find out about any special activities the respite care provider has planned. Share this information with your child to help him or her look forward to the respite stay.

## Respite for Resource Families Web Sites

Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting Systems (AFCARS)

<http://www.acf.dhhs.gov/programs/cb/dis/afcars>

The AFCARS web site provides statistics about foster care.

Casey Family Services <http://www.caseyfamilyservices.org>

The Casey Family Services web site hosts a page for foster parents. There are on-line discussions, as well as information about how to become a foster parent in each state.

Child Welfare League of America <http://www.cwla.org>

The Child Welfare League's web site provides numerous publications about foster parenting. The site also offers Frequently Asked Question sheets about foster families and their responsibilities.

Connect for Kids <http://www.connectforkids.org>

This multi-media project of the Benton foundation is designed to help adults make communities better places for families. There are several helpful links with information for foster care families.

Family Support America <http://www.familysupportamerica.org>

Family Support America is a foundation for promoting family support to strengthen families. The site has a section on foster care and tips for supporting foster families. The site provides link to many other organizations.

Foster Parent Community <http://www.fosterparents.com>

The purpose of the Foster Parent Community web site is to share information among foster and adoptive families. The site hosts chat rooms with guest speakers, discussion boards, on-line courses, and links to state resources.

Foster Parent Home Page <http://www.fostercare.org>

The Foster Parent Home Page provides news articles, legal information, books, and a discussion area for foster parents. There is an area on the web site for foster parents to search for grown foster children.

Foster Parenting <http://www.fosterparenting.com>

This on-line magazine contains parenting information helpful to foster parents. It provides lists of foster care specialists by state, and you can participate in on-line trainings.

Fostering Perspectives <http://www.ssw.unc.edu/fcrp/fp>

Fostering Perspectives is a publication dedicated to foster care. The web site allows you to look through past issues and search through the issues by topic. The publication has a section for foster kids. Look for the link to issue number 4 (volume 1), titled Respite Care for Foster Parents.

National Center for Resource Family Support <http://www.casey.org/cnc>

This resource center supported by Casey Family Programs includes fact sheets, handbooks, and information about policy issues related to foster care. The web site contains lists of state contacts in every state.

National Foster Parent Association, Inc. <http://www.nfpainc.org>

The NFPA is a non-profit volunteer organization designed to support foster parents. On the web site, you can sign up for workshops and order manuals for starting respite programs. The site also offers a “tip of the month” to help foster parents.

National Respite Coalition <http://www. chtop.com/NRC>

The National Respite Coalition’s web site provides the latest legislative news that effects respite services.

National Respite Network and Resource Center <http://www. chtop.com/archbroc>

This web site provides many fact sheets regarding respite services for foster parents and other caregivers. It also provides information about legislation that affects respite services. There is a link to a National Respite Locator Service to help foster parents find respite services in their area.

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