



# Illinois Families Now and Forever®

Families by DCFS Foster Care, Adoption & Guardianship

## Be on the watch for products that could cause harm

Each year, throughout the year, the federal government announces major product recalls on cribs, strollers, clothing and children's toys that have caused injuries and even fatalities. It can be easy to overlook the notices or to underestimate the harm that could come. Caregivers have to be proactive to ensure that youth are safe in their homes.

DCFS rules require foster caregivers of children age six and younger to check their homes for products listed as unsafe by the Children's Product Safety Act. Caregivers should check the lists and remove any recalled items already at home. The licensing worker will discuss recalls and obtain needed signatures on the safety forms. It is also important to make informed choices about new items that you purchase or accept as gifts. Be on the look out for small pieces that could cause choking or long strings that might strangle.

The website for the national Safe Kids Campaign has a list of recommendations and tips to judge what toys and products may cause harm. See the list at [www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org). The complete list of unsafe products is available on the Illinois Department of Public Health website at [www.idph.state.il.us](http://www.idph.state.il.us). There is also a product recall phone line at 888-414-7678. Ultimately, it falls on the adults in the home to ensure the safety of the most vulnerable young ones.

### SIGN UP FOR SAFETY

Get informed about dangerous products in your home

**SIGN UP FOR EMAIL NOTIFICATION OF  
RECALLED PRODUCTS AT:**

[www.recalls.gov](http://www.recalls.gov)

**FIND OUT MORE ABOUT DANGEROUS  
CHILDREN'S PRODUCTS AT:**

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

**CALL THE ATTORNEY GENERAL'S  
PRODUCT RECALL HOTLINE:**

**1-888-414-7678**

## *Be on guard for TV, furniture "tip overs"*

*Every year an estimated 23,000 children under the age of nine are injured by unsecured televisions, appliances and furniture tip overs. In Illinois, five children died in 2011 and 2012.*

*A television can easily catch the interest of a child who may reach or pull, without realizing the harm. Caregivers should be certain that TVs are on a stable base and that cords are safely positioned. Also be careful not to place items that children might want on top of the television. Appliance stores sell "anti-tip" straps and brackets that can secure items. It would also be wise to consider removing older, heavier televisions from the home altogether.*

The other category of instability injuries includes tables, dressers, bookshelves and entertainment centers. It is important to test these items for worn

or weak joints and to be certain that they are positioned on a flat, sturdy surface. Install drawer locks so open drawers don't become a child's "ladder." Take a few minutes to anchor shelving units to the wall. Tip-over injuries can be prevented.



# High school graduation fees may be reimbursed in foster care



Before long, students will be filing down the aisle toward the graduation stage. This happy occasion comes with costs that go beyond the many hours of homework help and teacher conferences. There is help available for foster caregivers to make this event a memorable one for the child without breaking the bank. For a student in DCFS foster care (not adoption or guardianship), policy covers payment for graduation expenses such as yearbook, pictures, cap and gown rental, class ring, new clothing for the graduation ceremony and other related fees. However, there are some important details in the language.

The student must be in his or her junior or senior year for payment of a class ring. He or she must be in the senior year of high school to obtain payment for other graduation items. As an example, if a youth wishes to purchase a class ring, the foster caregiver could submit the bill to the caseworker, who would then secure direct

payment to the vendor. The total of all items purchased cannot exceed \$512.50.

The specific procedures may differ for families caring for children whose case management is assigned to a private agency. Private agencies receive an administrative fee per child in foster care to take into account non-recurring expenses such as graduation. The agencies are expected to purchase the approved items and not expect caregivers to cover the costs. Be sure to talk to the child's caseworker in advance about what is allowable, especially before making any purchases out-of-pocket.

DCFS does not have any stated policy regarding expenses for eighth grade graduation. Again, talk to the youth's caseworker if you have questions about those expenses. Make plans now so there are no delays to dampen what should be a wonderful day.

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## WATER-wise: Protect children from water hazards inside and out



In 2012, there were 22 accidental drowning deaths of children in Illinois. Adult supervision could have prevented these deaths. Children cannot be left unattended around water even for one moment without the possibility of something tragic happening. Drowning can occur in seconds and with as little as two inches of water in pools, bathtubs, buckets, and even decorative garden ponds.

It is up to the adult caregivers to be diligent about water hazards. Following are some safety tips to help protect children from water-related tragedy:

### Swimming pools

- Keep ladders, patio furniture and toys away from above-ground pools. Toddlers are better climbers than you think!
- Fence in the pool and lock the gate. Pool covers and alarms provide added protection.
- Young children should wear or use personal flotation devices, but they do not replace adult supervision.
- Remind babysitters and all caretakers not to leave children unattended near or in water.
- Appoint an adult who can swim to watch kids during pool parties.
- Learn CPR and keep rescue equipment, phone and emergency numbers by all pools.

### Baby pools

- Don't be lulled into a false sense of security because of the shallowness of baby pools. Children should always be supervised in a baby pool.

- Empty the pool right after use and store it upside-down.

### Bathtubs

- Never leave a young child alone in a bathtub or rely on a bathtub seat for safety.
- Don't allow children to play alone in the bathroom.

### Buckets

- Five-gallon buckets of water pose a threat to babies and toddlers who may topple into them and be unable to get out.
- Empty and store all buckets out of children's reach.

### Toilets

- Secure the toilet lid. Curious toddlers could tip headfirst into a toilet, risking drowning.

### Ponds, fountains and retention pools

- Be aware of access to water hazards and be prepared in case an emergency response is required. Children require constant supervision around these outdoor hazards.

# Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council Bulletin



## **PRIDE training revisions**

The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council has provided counsel to the ongoing rewrite of the Foster PRIDE pre-service training. Members have seen the drafts of the curriculum and offered many comments and recommendations. Overall the council has been positive about the direction of the refreshed content, but they have noted some aspects that could be added or explained differently. The training curriculum author and the work group are sorting through the details.

## **Partnering with Parents Summit joint meeting**

The May meeting of the council will have an altered schedule. The members will handle the regular

business early in the morning in order to clear the rest of the day. The second part of the day will be a joint meeting with the Partnering with Parents councils that serve parents involved in DCFS cases. After several years of joint meetings, both councils see the value of working together. Members often come away realizing that they have much more in common than they might have thought.

## **Meet your legislator in May**

To build awareness during Foster Parent Appreciation Month in Illinois, the council recommends that foster parents meet with their elected representatives. Legislators will be in session 25 days during the month of May, though it is best to set up appointments in their local offices.

*The Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council was founded in conjunction with the Illinois Foster Parent Law. Membership consists of caregivers, agency representatives and other experts in child welfare, who are appointed by the DCFS director. The mandated positions for caregivers are spread among the DCFS regions.*

*The council holds open meetings at least six times a year, and more as needed, in locations around the state.*

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**The next meeting of the Statewide Foster Care Advisory Council will be a teleconference on April 25.**

**Call the Office of Professional Development, Parent and Caregiver Support at 217-524-2422 for details.**

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## *Illinois Adoption Advisory Council update*



The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council meets six

times a year to discuss issues and make recommendations to the Department regarding the concerns of adoptive and guardianship families. The Council is made up of adoptive parents, professionals in the child welfare field and individuals who were adopted.

The adoption council has been monitoring the rollout of the Affordable Care Act. Vince Champagne of the DCFS Office of Health Services updated members on how the program can serve older youth. The council is specifically looking at the transition period as a youth's case closes at age 18, 19, or 21. Cheryl McIntire, the Statewide Adoption

Administrator, has been made aware of the council's concerns about and suggestions for continuous coverage for young adults.

The adoption council has also reviewed the proposed revisions to the PRIDE pre-service training curriculum. Members weighed in with recommendations on the both the format and content.

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**The Illinois Adoption Advisory Council meets on April 4 in Springfield at 10 a.m.**

**Call the Office of Professional Development, Parent and Caregiver Support at 217-524-2422 for details.**

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## *Get digital delivery*

*Many caregivers have decided to skip the paper and request electronic versions of the newsletter, Illinois Families Now and Forever®.*

*When you move to the online version, you still receive all the same valuable information with more benefits. It comes faster, is easier to file, saves money and protects the environment.*

*To make the switch, send an email to [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov) (there is a dot before "james"). Be sure to include your name and mailing address. We will stop the hard copies and send you an e-mail each time a new issue is ready to read online.*

## HPV shot prevents cancers for girls, boys

As youth get physicals for camp and school, doctors are recommending the HPV vaccine to protect against the cancers and other diseases caused by variations of the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI), affecting 50 percent of sexually active men and women at some point in their lives. This is a vaccination that doctors recommend all girls and boys receive at age 11 or 12. While adults might think that is too soon to think about an STI, that is one reason why it's recommended. It is optimal to vaccinate against HPV before any sexual activity occurs. It can also be given up to age 26.

HPV is an infection that someone can carry without showing symptoms. It can be passed through sexual contact. It causes genital warts and most cervical cancer cases. It is also related to cancers of the vulva, penis, throat and anus. There is no cure for HPV after a person is infected.

The HPV vaccine is proven to guard against the most prevalent and serious strains of the disease, essentially preventing cervical cancer and genital warts. There is no evidence that getting the HPV vaccine or discussing it will promote sexual activity. It is given in three shots, spread over six months. The shot is covered by the medical card and physicians can give it as routine treatment.

The Office of Health Services has been checking that children in care are up-to-date with the required and recommended shots. Questions about HPV can be directed to the Office of Health Services at 217-557-2689. The Centers for Disease Control also has information at [www.cdc.gov/hpv/vaccine.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/vaccine.html).

## Free weekend conference for caregivers and parents: **REGISTRATION OPENS April 21**

### KNOWLEDGE IS POWER IFAPA Conference



#### Parenting Together August 22-24, 2014

The Illinois Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (IFAPA) with DCFS will present a free weekend training conference on Friday, August 22 through Sunday, August 24. There will be a full weekend of learning, advocacy and networking at the Hilton Chicago/Indian Lakes Resort in Bloomingdale. Registration will open on April 21.

Under the theme "Knowledge is Power: Parenting Together" participants can earn up to 14 training credit hours, choosing from more than 50 workshop topics. This year, parents who have or had their children in DCFS care will also take part in the conference. The parenting workshops will cover development, education, health and behavior. Topics will span youth of all ages and cover all permanency outcomes, including reunification, adoption or guardianship.

In addition to the workshops, there are several other events planned. Throughout the weekend specially-selected vendors will be on site with items caregivers can purchase.

With DCFS support, IFAPA can offer this conference with no charge to foster caregivers, parents,

adoptive parents, guardians and relative caregivers for meals Friday morning through brunch Sunday or for hotel accommodations. All must share a room with a spouse, a self-selected individual or a roommate assigned by DCFS. The hotel will be paid directly (excluding incidentals) for Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights' lodging.

There are no accommodations for child care and children cannot participate in the conference or be left in the hotel unattended. Caregivers of children with open foster care cases may want to ask the caseworker about program-specific policies for possible respite care or reimbursement for child care or travel that weekend.

This conference typically is a big draw. The registration will be limited, so be sure to download or request a registration packet on April 21 or soon after. Participants should complete it, select their workshop preferences and then return the form as soon as possible. The DCFS Office of Professional Development, Parent and Caregiver Support will send confirmation letters as slots are filled.

To obtain a registration packet caregivers have four options:

- Visit the Illinois Foster and Adoptive Parent Association website at [www.illfapa.org](http://www.illfapa.org). Select events tab
- Download the packet from the DCFS Virtual Training Center (VTC) at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org)
- Send an email to [DCFstraining@illinois.gov](mailto:DCFstraining@illinois.gov) with "IFAPA conference" in the subject line
- Call the DCFS Registration Unit at 877-800-3393 to have a packet sent by mail

## New foster parents learn to share love for baby and mother

Vanice and Katherine Dunson have been DCFS foster parents for just over a year. Their journey started when they saw an ad for foster care while watching television together one night. After seeing the same commercial a few times, they began praying for guidance on the issue and slowly became convinced that they should inquire about fostering. Vanice in particular was intrigued with the idea as he had never had children of his own. Katherine had already raised two children from her first marriage and knew what to expect. She had also worked in a therapeutic school for teenagers. Both Vanice and Katherine grew up in large families, sharing a home with nine and 10 siblings, respectively. However, it would only take one child to turn their life around.

Their current (and only) daughter through foster care arrived at their home when she was only six weeks old. Now, the one-year-old toddler has been the delight of Vanice, especially. He celebrated her birthday in grand style with an indulgent party. This little girl is treated like one of the many grandchildren in the extended family.

It is a delicate balancing act to create loving bonds with such a young child, while helping her stay connected to her family of birth. The Dunsons wanted to honor her parents by training the baby to adopt special names to call them. That way “daddy” and “mom” can

be reserved for her parents. They also support their foster daughter’s mother in other tangible ways. Katherine habitually writes little notes for the mother at every visit. She gives a brief update on current happenings with the baby or any sicknesses or challenges she may be encountering. The child’s mother has been appreciative in her own responses to these notes.

The Dunsons believe that their older age is an asset in raising their baby foster daughter. They are more settled, more seasoned, more relaxed, and wiser than they were in their younger years. As a result, they can be more patient with the little one and maintain a slower pace of life for her.

They cited a loss of personal freedom as their largest challenge of fostering. Before, they were able to go to a movie on a whim; now they have to secure a babysitter. However, they quickly learned to become more flexible and disciplined in their daily lives. They realized that the little one would dictate much of their schedule and learned to live with that. Fortunately, family members often step in to provide a break.

“Ms. Dunson and her family have done an exceptional job in providing a loving foster home for the baby placed in their care,” her caseworker said. “She has a genuine love and care for the child and supports her permanency goal.”



The Dunsons support the visitation plans and work collaboratively with the child’s family. During the Christmas holidays, the child’s mom was on the Dunsons’ gift list.

That kind of consideration goes in hand with the mission of a non-profit initiative that Katherine spearheaded in the 1990s. Single Parents Encouraging Children In Alternative Leisure (SPECIAL) is devoted to helping single mothers plan and budget for wholesome recreational/educational outlets for their children, such as trips to the parks and museums.

While the Dunsons have not been foster parenting long, they have learned a lot so far. The advice they share is to maintain a genuine love for children, practice patience, be flexible, and recognize that no two children are alike. Lastly, and perhaps the most difficult, is to know one’s role of being a temporary parent substitute. That will involve some heartache that you should prepare to work through, they admitted.

## Start planning now to guarantee a great summer camp experience



It may seem too soon to make plans for summer. However, since the best summer day camps and overnight camps tend to fill fast, now is the time to make plans. Camp and activities such as dance and art can be important for a child's social development.

Caregivers' costs for enrichment programs may be eligible for reimbursement under Rule 359 for DCFS-supervised foster families. For private agency foster families, the policy can differ from agency to agency. Every agency receives funds for "nonrecurring expenses"

such as camp for some children. Ask the child's caseworker about the camp policy for children at that agency. Adoptive and guardianship families typically have to cover these expenses within the household. Some camps do offer income-based financial assistance. Before registering for a program, be sure to understand the funding process and be sure to get any needed approvals in advance.

### **Finding the right camp**

With funding cleared, the search for the right camp for a child can take off. Talk to other caregivers for recommendations. Check the community park districts. Area churches may have a youth camp or a youth group that plans summer activities. (Be sure to ask about parent permission for a religious program).

When evaluating camps, inquire about the counselor-to-camper ratio and the counselors' skills

and certifications. Many camps do serve special needs children. Camp personnel should be able to outline their provisions for medication, accommodations for disabilities and behavior management procedures.

### **DCFS Foster Care Homes**

Caregivers whose licenses are supervised by the Central Region foster care program should work with the child's caseworker to:

1. Identify the right program
2. Confirm that the program is eligible for reimbursement under Rule 359
3. Obtain written approval from the caseworker
4. Pay for the camp in advance
5. Submit the expense for reimbursement

Rule 359 caps annual camp expenses at \$260.35. Other enrichment activities will be evaluated for the appropriate prevailing rate. The caseworker can assist with the approval and the reimbursement.



## Young children get a head start in school

tion services, pre-kindergarten programs for children at risk of academic failure (Pre-K), pre-school education programs and Head Start.

To ensure enrollment of children ages three to five in an enriching program, the department set up partnerships with agencies that serve young children. Last year, DCFS, Head Start/Early Head Start and agencies throughout Northern Region came together for six trainings held across Northern Region in Aurora, Joliet, Elgin, DeKalb and Rockford. There were approximately 200 participants

from DCFS, private agencies, Head Start/Early Head Start and Family Advocacy Centers. They discussed the new processes in place to make sure that every child in substitute care between age three and five is enrolled in Head Start or a suitable early education program.

The DCFS School Readiness Team is available to assist caseworkers, foster parents and POS agency staff. Caregivers with questions or who need to explore early education options can contact Mary Beth Corrigan, Statewide School Readiness Supervisor, at 312-814-5509.

## Northern Region Training

The DCFS Office of Professional Development, Parent and Caregiver Support has scheduled sessions of in-service training modules and other courses in locations across the region. To get specific dates and locations, visit the on-line Virtual Training Center at [www.DCFstraining.org](http://www.DCFstraining.org). Click on any of the links under Training Schedule to access course descriptions, in-service training and Educational Advocacy Training or call the DCFS Office of Professional Development, Parent and Caregiver Support at 877-800-3393 during business hours.

The Virtual Training Center (VTC) is your tool to:

- Get training news and information;
- Check available trainings;
- View/print your training transcript;
- Register and take on-line courses;
- Download course materials to use in class or to access after training; and
- Get alerts for changes in course schedules.

### DIGITAL TRAINING MATERIALS NOW AVAILABLE

As we move into the digital age and aim to use fewer printed resources, DCFS Training has made many PRIDE materials easily available on the home page of the Virtual Training Center at [www.dcfstraining.org](http://www.dcfstraining.org).

Anyone may print the materials or download them onto almost any electronic device and bring their device to training class. Trainees who have no digital access should speak with their trainers when they arrive in class, so we can accommodate everyone.

## Who do you call when....?

### **...A child in your home is having a psychiatric crisis that may require hospitalization?**

Call the CARES line at 800-345-9049. However, if a child is a danger to himself or others, call 911 first. The CARES line is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

### **...You want information on becoming a foster parent or on adoption?**

The Adoption Information Center of Illinois (AICI) can answer your questions and connect you with a licensing agency. The toll-free number is 800-572-2390. AICI also maintains information about the children who are featured in the newsletter.

### **...You have questions about your board check?**

Call the DCFS Central Payment Unit at 800-525-0499 if your check comes from DCFS. If your check comes from a private agency, contact the agency.

### **...You need to report a child missing or have information about a youth who has run away?**

To report information on missing youth call 866-503-0184. The toll-free number is available 24 hours a day every day of the week. If you feel the child is in danger, call 911 first.

### **...Your adoption or guardianship is final but you have questions about the subsidy?**

Call the subsidy worker assigned to the case or the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT so you can be connected to the right individual for help.

### **...You are having family problems with your adopted child?**

Contact the Adoption/Subsidized Guardianship Preservation Program that serves your area. Call the Adoption Support Line at 888-96-ADOPT.

### **...You have questions about your child's medical card?**

Call 800-228-6533.

### **...You need to find a phone number for a caseworker?**

Call the main switchboard in Chicago at 312-814-6800 or the State of Illinois Operator at 312-793-3500.

### **...You feel you aren't being treated fairly by DCFS or a private agency?**

If you've already tried to resolve the issue with the caseworker and his or her supervisor and are not sure where to turn, call the Advocacy Office at 800-232-3798.

### **...You are having a hard time getting services for your child at school?**

Most private agencies have an education liaison, and each DCFS region has education advisors who can help. Call your agency or nearest DCFS office to be connected to the right educational resource for your area.

### **...You have questions about programs for youth approaching adulthood?**

Contact the transition coordinator that serves your area, by calling the nearest DCFS regional office. The transition coordinator can advise on programs such as life skills training, preparation for higher education and employment assistance. Details on these programs can also be found at the Get Goal'd website [www.youthincare.illinois.gov](http://www.youthincare.illinois.gov).

### **...You have an idea for an article in the newsletter?**

Each region has reporters to help gather local news. The names and contact information are listed on the back page of each edition. You can contact the Editor, Vanessa James, at 312-814-6800 or send an e-mail message to [vanessa.james@illinois.gov](mailto:vanessa.james@illinois.gov).



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*Celebrating 50 Years of Protecting  
Children and Supporting Families*



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