



# Fostering Across Wisconsin

*A publication of the Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center  
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## The Importance of Maintaining Sibling Relationships for Children in Care

As a foster parent, you may have experienced this scenario: the child in your care has adjusted to your home, has become more comfortable, is making progress in school and therapy, has begun trusting you—and then they go for a sibling visit and the acting out and the non-compliant behaviors start all over again. Or, you arrange for a sibling visit and the kids who were longing to see one another spend the entire time yelling, screaming, or disagreeing with one another. It can be difficult for everyone in the family to process, adjust, and recover.

While it might seem counter-intuitive, by helping to keep siblings together or at the very least helping to ensure they maintain regular contact when placement together is not possible, you are helping to reduce the additional trauma of separation. Family connections are vital to all of us, and the same is true for siblings in foster care. The sibling bond is unique and can often be the longest-lasting relationship in a child's lifetime. Research shows that siblings who are placed together in foster care experience more overall stability, spend less time in foster care, and suffer less trauma. Sibling bonds encourage a sense of personal identity within children who may feel detached from their community and culture. As a foster parent, you can offer a variety of options for siblings to maintain a connection with one another, such as phone calls, video calls, emails, social media, letters, and cards.

A foster/adoptive mom recently shared that her teenage sons would aggressively act out during visits with their brothers, even targeting her. Despite this, she and her husband continued to coordinate and schedule the visits and things have dramatically improved. When asked what changed, one of her sons said he had been reacting to not knowing when he would see his brothers again and the only way in which he knew how to express his emotions was through acting out his grief and anger. Once he knew his foster/adoptive parents were committed to the brothers having and maintaining a relationship, he was no longer feeling fearful, frustrated, and upset at the end of visits.

There may be circumstances when it simply is not possible to place siblings together. And there may be situations in which children who have shared trauma histories can trigger one another and recreate the behaviors of their previous environment. In those instances, helping to support ongoing connections may become more challenging indeed. Working together with everyone involved with the care of the children may help identify safe and appropriate ways to empower the children to stay in touch while everyone continues to heal.

We can all play a role in supporting child well-being and sibling relationships. Simply recognizing how crucial and beneficial those relationships are and doing our best to encourage and strengthen the bonds between siblings is a wonderful and vitally important first step.



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# Youth Perspectives & Insights

While academic evidence may show a piece of the story, perhaps the most compelling examples for keeping siblings connected come from youth themselves:

⇒ “My older sister is the only person who truly understands my experiences. She was there with me the first time I was taken into care, and she was there the last time I was taken into care. We went through the abuse together, we went through the moves together. We became closer than your average sister duo. The fear of packing up was reduced when I was packing with her.

The monsters under my bed couldn't hurt me so long as my sister was with me. In a sense, my sister was like a mother to me. She became my best friend, my mentor, and my caretaker.”  
—SHELLIG99, Foster Club Blog



⇒ “I’ll never forget my teacher calling me out in front of my whole fifth-grade class for ‘fibbing’ about having a brother and sister. My social worker said my siblings got to stay together because they were bonded, and I was too young to know the difference. I would have given anything to be a part of that bond. It really hurts.” —Brandon, youth in care

⇒ “People told me that separating my sisters and me would help me stop being such a mother. I now realize that this is a common

phrase that is told to many kids in foster care. ‘You need to stop being such a parent and start living your own life.’ What they don’t realize, though, is that our lives are intertwined with our siblings. When my sisters are hurt, I am hurt. When my sisters are confident, I am confident. When my sisters are happy, I am happy.” —18saujaz, Foster Club Blog

⇒ “I am sad when I see siblings playing at the park. I am disappointed when I don’t have to share my birthday party. I feel down

when Facebook reminds me it is sibling’s day to celebrate. I am heartbroken they were not at my high school graduation. I am sorrowful when I do not have them as cheerleaders at my sporting events. I am hurt they will not be at my college graduation. There is not a cure to

heal the pain that comes from sibling separation.” —YESHIV, Foster Club Blog

⇒ “When we enter foster care we lose everything . . . our moms, our dads, where we lived. Everything is just so unfamiliar. To have your sibling there is what you need in order to move on, or to move forward in life, in foster care.” —Noy, who first entered foster care at age three, speaking in the [EPIC Ohana video, Brothers and Sisters: Keeping Siblings in Foster Care Connected](#)



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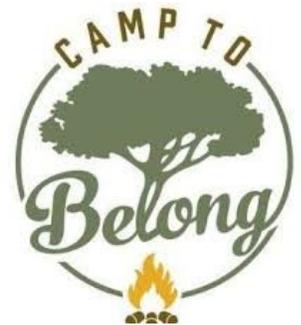
# Connecting at Camp

## *Opportunities for Siblings and Youth in Care*

For a child in foster care, there are challenges and uncertainty around every corner. Aside from the trauma of being separated from home and family, children and youth in care face a multitude of difficulties that make them feel different and alienated from their peers. This may include being placed in a new community or school, having to attend therapy rather than after school activities, and, worst of all, often being separated from siblings.

Thankfully, there are two organizations here in Wisconsin offering children and youth in foster care the opportunity to experience summer camp with siblings, connect with others who understand, and just focus on being kids.

**Camp To Belong** is, “dedicated to reuniting brothers and sisters who have become separated in foster care through a week of camp in the summer and other events throughout the year.” Their week-long camp gives children and youth a chance to get away from everything and spend time with their siblings, and other children just like them. Campers each go home with a special pillow that they help make and that includes hand-written messages. In addition to the summer camp, Camp To Belong has other gatherings throughout the year, including a mini-camp, bowl-a-thon fundraiser, sibling “spooktacular,” and more.



- [Camp To Belong Wisconsin on Facebook](#)
- [Camp To Belong Wisconsin Website](#)



**Royal Family Kids Camp** is another camp catering to children and youth impacted by foster care. They are a faith-based organization, but families are not required to be a faith participant in order to apply. Royal Family Kids Camp is for kids ages six through 12 and there is no cost for foster parents for the five-day camp. In addition to the birthday party, activities, swimming and lakefront events, the camp experience includes a story from the Bible, and campers learn a little more of the story each day. At the end of camp, they sing some songs and put on a presentation when reunited with the parents. The staff and volunteers at Royal Family want to help the children, “create positive memories for the rest of their lives.” Volunteer photographers take photos throughout the entire week at camp and each child is sent home with a memory book/photo album.

- [Royal Family Kids Camp on Facebook](#)
- [Royal Family Kids Camp Website](#)

Camp To Belong and Royal Family Kids Camp are two of the options available for families. Our [Summer Camp Options document](#) has more opportunities, as well. If you need support or guidance in learning more about any of the camp options across Wisconsin, please give our resource team a call at 414-475-1246.

## Resources

### *Tip Sheets*

- [Sibling Conflict in Adoptive Families](#)
- [Parenting Siblings Connected through Trauma](#)
- [Fostering a Child Whose Sibling\(s\) Live Elsewhere](#)
- [Sustaining & Strengthening the Sibling Bond](#)

### *Other Library Resources*

- [The Importance of Sibling Relationships](#)
- [Siblings](#)
- *Siblings in Adoption and Foster Care: Traumatic Separations and Honored Connections*, by Deborah N. Silverstein

### *Courses & Webinars*

- [Sibling Relationships](#)

### *Additional Web Resources*

- [Camp Resource List](#)
- [Camp To Belong Wisconsin](#)
- [Royal Family Kids Camp](#)
- [Sibling Issues in Foster Care and Adoption](#)



Offering foster, relative, and adoptive parents opportunities to grow in knowledge, confidence, and strength



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The team at the Wisconsin Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center are always here for additional information, resources, and support.

Please contact us at:

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