

## Not for Forever: What to Do When Adoption Isn't an Option

When your family chose to become a foster family to help a child in need, you might have thought that—and perhaps were trained for—your home to be a temporary placement for a child before they were reunited with their birth parents. You were also taught that the goal of foster care is reunification; however, there are circumstances where that goal does not work, and alternative permanent options need to be considered. One of those options may be adoption. When a child in your care moves towards adoption, you, as the foster parent, will often be one of the primary people the child's worker will ask to be the adoptive or "no matter what" family for the child and/or their siblings.

The decision to adopt a child can be difficult, and it's okay to say that you don't want to adopt or that you are unsure if you can commit at this time. When your family decides that adoption is not the best option for you and the child in your care, it can be a time of grieving, confusion and moving forward. The Wisconsin Family Connections Center staff is here to support you throughout your decision-making process.

### Difficult Decisions

Adoption is a lifelong commitment, and there are many reasons families like yours choose to become partners in finding a "no matter what" family for the children in their

homes instead of becoming that "no matter what" family themselves. As a foster family, you can be part of this process by supporting the children in your home who will be preparing to move and the children who will remain in your care. The type of support needed differs from child to child, depending on the individual and their age and developmental level. Children tend to respond best when you remain open and honest and give each child age- and developmentally-appropriate facts. This will help all the children in your home continue

building positive, trusting relationships with you and the other adults in their lives. Some ideas of support include but are not limited to starting a conversation about the situation, encouraging children to draw pictures about how they are feeling, and taking extra time to

be one-on-one with each child. You may also want to solicit the help of an expert.

### Transition

Once you tell your worker that you do not wish to be the adoptive resource for a child placed in your home, the child's worker will begin the process of finding an adoptive family. You may want to consider whether any adults were a part of the child's life while they were in your home who may be a potential adoptive family, and be sure to give



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the case worker their information to pursue the possibility further.

Once an adoptive resource for the child has been identified, there will be a transition period during which the child will spend more and more time with their potential adoptive family. If all goes well, the child will transition to the adoptive home full time. The process and length of time can vary depending on the child; everyone will proceed while keeping the child's best interests in mind.

This transitional period can be challenging for you, your family, and the child. It is not uncommon for children to lash out, isolate themselves, or drop grades during this time. Keeping lines of communication open with the transitioning child can help, but keep in mind that the child is going through their own grieving process. On the other hand, some children may willingly go into a new home and seem unphased by the transition. This, too, can be unsettling for you as you may have spent months and possibly years with this child.

Some foster families like yours, who choose not to adopt, do choose to remain in contact with and maintain a connection with the child, as long as the adoptive family agrees. Staying in touch is different for every family and child and works best if it is an ongoing discussion between all the adults involved to ensure the child's best interests are still at the forefront.

### **Grief, Loss, and Healing**

Grieving a child leaving your home is a natural part of the foster parenting experience. Grieving looks different for everyone, and in a family, there will likely be many unique expressions and needs during this time. It is very common for people to display all sorts of emotions during the grieving process, and there is nothing wrong with experiencing grief in your own way. Also,

remember, with grief comes resilience. When you as a family go through a significant life decision and event and come out positive and stronger on the other side, you have strengthened bonds and made new connections. We have created an entire tip sheet on grief, loss, and healing as it relates to foster care, which may be helpful for you.

### **Seeking Out Resources and Support**

Many families who have chosen not to be a permanent home to a child in their care find it helpful to get support from each other, other foster parents, workers, and outside sources such as a therapist or the Wisconsin Family Connections Center's information and referral line. Talking through feelings of grief has many positive emotional benefits. Talking to others can help you sort through your thoughts and feelings and release the stress of holding it all in. A neutral party can assist by being able to hear your story and help reaffirm that you made a decision that was the best thing for you right now. Sometimes, worrying about your family and your choices can start to make it all seem worse and bigger than it is. Talking may be one way to keep anxious thoughts from getting the better of you.

You can find a list of foster parent support groups on our website.

You know your family better than anyone, and you must choose what is best for them. Take pride in the months or years you have given a child that they will likely remember and be grateful for forever. Even if a child is not with you permanently, they will be in your heart forever.



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## Resources

### *Tip Sheets*

- [Helping Children in Care Build Trusting Relationships](#)
- [Foster Care, Grief & Loss](#)

### *From the [Resource Library](#)*

- *Maybe Days — A Book for Children in Foster Care*, by Jennifer Wilgocki & Marcia Kahn Wright
- *The Foster Parenting Toolbox*, Edited by Kim Phagan-Hansel
- [Fostering Across Wisconsin Newsletters](#)
- [Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions](#)

### *Training From [Champion Classrooms](#)*

- [Seasons Change: Understanding Transition & Change for Foster Parents](#)
- [Weathering the Storm of Grief in Foster Care](#)