

## Preparing the Kids in Your Home for Fostering

As adults, you probably went through an array of emotions when making the decision to foster. If you already have children, you may wonder how bringing another child into the mix will impact your home. Any new child, whether biological or foster, is sure to make changes to family dynamics.

Fortunately, these changes can be largely positive if you let your children be involved in the discussion.

### **Kids need to be part of the decision-making process**

When you are ready to discuss fostering with your children, be open with your intentions, goals, and purpose.

Whatever your reason, be sure to express it openly. Some people choose to foster because they want to have a positive impact on a child and make a difference in their community. Others may be drawn

towards the experience of helping birth parents heal and giving them the opportunity to focus on themselves during a stressful time. Others may have lots of love to give and want to invite more love into their homes.

When approaching the conversation about becoming a foster family, you want your children to feel the same excitement that you have. This will make your home a welcoming one. Your biological children most likely

share your values – they may immediately understand why you want to support a family who needs extra help. You may be surprised to learn how much your kids already know about fostering, as they might already have friends or classmates in foster care.

### **Educating your kids about foster care**

Children take time to adjust to new environments and changes in their routines. They may have misconceptions about foster care based on what they have seen on TV or the news. A good starting point would be to ask them what they know about foster care.



*Sit down with your kids for a Q&A session. Here are some questions you can ask them to understand how they're feeling:*

- Are you worried or afraid about anything?
- What will be the easiest and most challenging parts for you?
- Is there anything I can do to help make this easier for you?

When answering their questions, describe the realities of fostering in an age-appropriate manner. One foster parent stated that the first thing she shares with her kids is that all children entering out-of-home care come from a place of trauma. She explains that being placed in foster care is traumatic in itself, in addition to the

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circumstances that brought them into your home.

*Reassure your children that they are not being replaced and that they are enough.* Initially, your children may fear that they will be a lesser priority. They may feel resentful when they realize they will have to share their parents' attention, the physical spaces in the home, or other things like toys and clothes. Something seemingly inconsequential, like changing the seat they usually have in the car or at the dinner table, could lead to resentment. Listen as they express their feelings and take note of their concerns. *Let your kids learn by reading.* Many excellent books exist on fostering. Children's books will show them what to expect in an easy-to-understand manner. See the list at the end of this tip sheet for some books that you can find in our [Resource Library](#).

*Let children know that in your family, everyone gets what they need.* In the beginning, the child who is new to your home will need more attention than your biological children, and everyone in the family can take part in providing that. Share that as parents, you will treat everyone fairly while stressing that fairness isn't always equal. Sometimes, one household member may need more attention or have fewer responsibilities.

*Give kids decision-making tasks.* Involving your biological children will allow them to feel more connected to the process. Have them help prepare the house and the bedroom. They can help paint the walls, choose decorations, or decide what new toys should be purchased. If they are comfortable with the idea, let them know that they can take the lead in showing the child around the home once they move in. One foster parent shared that no matter what the age, she often found that biological children are the best at making a child who is joining your family feel at ease.

*How can you involve your biological children once someone new has joined you?* Put your kids in charge of sharing how your family functions. For example, they can share that your family always has pizza on Monday nights, and Fridays are movie nights. The kids already in your home can share how your family decides what movie to watch and what toppings they usually order on pizza. They can even break the news that the newcomer to the family will have chores just like everyone else! Bonding moments such as these let the children know they have a place and are valued in their home.

*Biological kids may grieve what they have lost once the placement starts.* Your children may grieve the changes to their routine, the individual time spent with their parents, or possibly adjusting to their new role in the family as a younger or older sibling. Acknowledging these feelings, allowing your children to mourn the things that are changing, and finding unique ways to connect with them will keep you all on the right path.

### **When a Placement Ends**

Every family deals with transitions differently, but one foster mom says the key is to start discussing this event with your children before the child is reunited with their birth family. In our webinar [Conversations About Foster Care: A Mom and her Biological Daughter](#), Sarah, now an adult, shares that it was easier when she was a younger child welcoming new children into their home. As she became a teenager, she began to worry more about what the children would be going back to after they had disclosed things about their past. Her mom, Peg, needed to reassure her that as foster parents, their job is to get them back home and to trust in the process.

Figure out how to mark this occasion and honor the shared experience. Once the child has left, you may want to do something fun to help your family regroup, such as planning a day trip and allowing the kids to decide where

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to go.

Most importantly, make sure that you are giving them time to grieve. Continue to check in with them to see how they're processing things emotionally. The grieving process is different for each foster family. Some families like to jump back into fostering right away. Other families need time to adjust and refocus. Again, the decision to foster another child should be a whole family decision.

Through the experience of fostering, Sarah shared that the bond between her and Peg is much closer than most because they have been through the grieving process together so many times. Sarah feels that she and her siblings are more open-minded due to caring for children from different places and that they have more empathy towards others.

Incorporating a child in care into your family can be a challenge, but it can also be incredibly rewarding. Everyone will gain an experience that will expand their definitions of love, giving, sharing, and compassion.



## Resources

From the [Resource Library](#)

- *It's Okay to Wonder (The Joy of Avery Series)*, by Rhonda Wagner
- *Kids Need to Be Safe: A Book for Children in Foster Care*, by Julie Nelson
- *Robbie's Trail through Foster Care*, by Adam Robe
- *What's A Foster Family, Anyway?*, by Martine Golden Inlay
- *Maybe Days: A Book for Children in Foster Care*, by Jennifer Wilgocki & Marcia Kahn Wright
- *Murphy's Three Homes: A Story for Children in Foster Care*, by Jan Levinson Gilman
- *No Matter What: A Foster Care Tale*, by Josh Shipp & David Tieche

Training From [Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Conversations About Foster Care: A Mom and her Biological Daughter](#)
- [What About My Other Children? Learning to See and Meet the Needs of Foster and Adoptive Siblings](#)

Additional Resources

- [Integrating Foster Kids Into a Family With Biological Kids](#)
- [Preparing to Blend Biological and Adopted Foster Children](#)