

Is Fostering a Good Fit for Us? Things to Consider

Wanted: Special families for special kids—take the challenge through foster care.

The ad caught your eye. You have been thinking about doing foster care for a long time. You think you want to commit yourself and your family to fostering a child. But how do you involve your kids in the decision making and prepare them for the addition of a foster youth? Whether your kids live at home with you, or are out on their own, listen to their thoughts and ideas about fostering.

Talk about Foster Care

Depending upon the age and maturity of your children, the first step to making a decision about family foster care is to have a discussion with your kids. Kids may have many questions about the youth that are in foster care. Eventually, your family will want to discuss what ages, gender, and types of kids fit best for your family. Have a family meeting and talk about the special needs of kids in foster care. What abilities and skills do family members have to help meet these needs?



Consider discussing the following topics:

- ◆ **Purpose of foster care.** Foster care provides kids the care they need (such as getting medical treatment, counseling, living in a safe, nurturing home, exposing kids to healthy family life, supporting kids to attend school) for positive changes to happen for the child and their family. Kids in foster care can often be reunited with their family or sometimes adopted.
- ◆ **Types of kids in foster care.** Kids come from many different circumstances. Some-

times they have experienced abuse, neglect, truancy from school, special medical and emotional needs, or may have behavior issues. Sometimes kids in foster care have no serious problems.

- ◆ **Situations.** Many times, parents of kids in foster care are unable to take care of their children due to their own problems (drugs, alcohol, mental illness, incarceration, limited understanding or interest in being a parent, deceased parents or no family).
- ◆ **Behavior problems.** Like all of us, some kids have no issues while some may be aggressive, quiet, hyperactive, withdrawn, immature, or fearful. They may act out sexually, hoard food, have sleeping problems or have drug and alcohol abuse issues.
- ◆ **Time frames.** Kids can be in foster care from one day to several years, depending on the changes that their family and the kids make and if other family members are able to care for them.
- ◆ **Ages.** Youth can be in foster care anywhere from birth to age 18.

- ◆ **Emotional problems.** Often kids in foster care can show many emotions, such as anxiety, anger, sadness, depression, stress, and rage due to the experiences they have gone through. They can also be content, satisfied and happy. Like all of us, their experiences help to make them who they are. Many kids are resilient and thrive even in spite of hard times. Other kids have a harder time making sense of their past, and it's the foster parents' job to help them.

Continued on the next page

Is Fostering a Good Fit for Us? Things to Consider, continued

- ◆ **Adults in charge.** Assure your kids that you are responsible for the care and supervision of the youth in care. Assure them that you will establish guidelines that will be fair to all.
- ◆ **Expect good days and challenging days.** Like parents of kids everywhere, there will be days when the household runs smoothly but also days when there may be chaos and stress. Reassure kids that together you will support and teach them how to handle the stressful days and will celebrate the good days.
- ◆ **Sharing with others.** Remind kids that they will share parents, toys, house, bedrooms, time, family, and friends. Talk about the rewards of sharing with others.
- ◆ **Supervision.** Let kids know that sometimes youth in foster care will need to be closely watched and supervised just to keep everyone safe. You as the adult and parent will have this job.
- ◆ **Household Rules.** There may be a change in rules depending upon the age and problems of the foster child. Rules for showers, bed, computer, phone, playing and other basic rules might change. (For more on this, see the FCARC *Household Rules* tipsheet at: <http://wifostercareandadoption.org/library/12/HouseholdRules.pdf>.)
- ◆ **Discuss the adjustment.** It may take time for the family and the foster youth to get used to living with each other. Talk about how to let each other know how they are dealing with the changes in the family.
- ◆ **Time spent with parents.** Reassure your children that there will be time set aside for them. This is a very important issue according to kids who had their families provide foster care.
- ◆ **Confidentiality.** Because of rules and laws, private information about the foster child cannot be shared with others. Kids will need

to be given guidance on what can and cannot be shared outside of the family and with whom. Practice situations with them so they know how to respond.

Get more Information about Foster Care

Read books and watch videos about foster care (Note the suggestions at the end of this tip sheet.) Ask the licensing agency worker to meet with your kids to talk about foster care and its impact on the family. Ask the case worker to connect your family to a current foster family who has blended their kids with kids in care so you can learn more from them about their fostering experience. Talk to the kids of a foster family to learn about their experiences.

Making the Decision

Assure your children that their thoughts and ideas are important, and that they are a part of the decision to foster. For adult children, ask their opinion about your skills and abilities to parent children with challenging behaviors and emotions. (And in fact, some licensing agencies require a reference from your adult children.)

Read between the lines—sometimes your kids may not voice their opinion for fear of hurting feelings or thinking that their opinion is less important than others. Over time, some kids may have changing opinions about doing family foster care depending upon their experiences and age. Check in often with them to see how they are feeling about the foster care experience.

Seeing the positive

Overall, it seems that fostering has a positive effect on kids whose family provides foster care. They often are more open to different cultures and backgrounds, are more compassionate, accepting, loving, and giving to people in need. Overall, if prepared, providing foster care to others can have a positive effect on your kids and your family.



Resources on the next page

Sources for this tip sheet

Addressing the impact of foster care on biological children and their families by Maha Younes and Michele Harp, 1993. Child Welfare League of America, Inc.

What do Children Think about Foster Care?

"Fostering Perspectives," N.C. Div. of Social Services
http://ssw.unc.ed/fcrp/Cspn/vol11_no3_what_do_children_think.htm.

All in the Family Home: The Biological Children of Parents Who Foster

http://www.fft.org/research_outcomes/abstracts18_heidbuurt.pdf.

Foster Care & Adoption Resource Center Library Resources

(You can find the following by going to this link
wifostercareandadoption.org/plugins/library/advancedsearch.asp.)

Things Little Kids Need to Know, by Susan Uhlig

The Star: A Story to Help Young Children Understand Foster Care by Cynthia Miller Lovell.
Children's book.

How Micah Helped Build a Family: A Story for Foster & Adopted Children by Deirdre O'Gorman Goldsmith.

Another Place At The Table by Kathy Harrison.
Book for older youth.

Finding Our Place—A Guide for Young People Entering Foster Care by Christy Barich and youth writers.

Keeping It Secret: Teens Write About Foster Care Stigma by Youth Communication.

To Whom it May Concern: Poetry by Readers of Represent: The Voice of Youth by Al Desetta.
Teen book.

Fostering Across Wisconsin, article "Sensational Sisters" by Jacob Scobey-Polacheck Vol. 1. No 2.
<http://wifostercareandadoption.org/media/Volume%201%20Number%202.pdf>

Articles for Foster and Adoptive Parents

<http://www.wifostercareandadoption.org/snaw/336/page.htm>

Popular books and movies that have themes related to foster care and adoption

I Am Sam is a 2001 film telling the story of an intellectually disabled father (Sean Penn) and his efforts to retain custody of his daughter.

Goodwill Hunting tells the story of Will Hunting (Matt Damon), a troubled man from South Boston who, although a math genius, works as a janitor at MIT. Will must learn to overcome his deep fear of abandonment in order to learn how to trust and love the people who care about him.

Anne of Green Gables tells the story of an 11-year-old orphan, Anne Shirley, who is bright, eager to please, and takes much joy in life.

Antwone Fisher is about a sailor in the navy who finds himself confronting his traumatic past after being sent to a naval psychologist (Denzel Washington). Fisher eventually breaks down and reveals a horrific childhood in foster care. Through the guidance of the psychologist, he not only confronts his painful past but also begins a quest to find the family he never knew. Based on a true story.

Lilo and Stitch follows a lonely Hawaiian girl named Lilo who's being raised by her older sister, Nani, under the watch of social worker Cobra Bubbles. When Lilo adopts a funny-looking dog (and names him "Stitch," she doesn't realize her new best friend is a wacky extraterrestrial created by mad scientist Dr. Jumba.

The Secret Lives of Bees tells the story of Lily Owens, whose life is shaped by her blurred memory of her mother's accidental death and feels unloved by her father. Lily is faced with trying to find out who she is because she is not allowed to ask questions about her past. She find out who she really is when she learns about her mother's past.

White Oleander is the story of a teen's journey through a series of foster homes and her efforts to find a place for herself in impossible circumstances. Each home is its own universe, with a new set of laws and lessons to be learned. With determination and humor, Astrid confronts the challenges of loneliness and poverty, and strives to learn who a motherless child in an indifferent world can become.