

Should I Do Foster Care?

Points to Consider

1. Do you have a strong support system of friends and/or family? This is important, as fostering can become very stressful at times. It's good to have someone who will listen if you need to vent. If you don't have a support system already in place and decide to go ahead with fostering, be sure to participate in support groups. Many agencies hold their own support group meetings. If not, consider starting your own with other foster parents.
2. Are you a patient person? Are you willing to continually give and very rarely get anything in return, except for the knowledge that you are helping a family?
3. Many people enter into foster care thinking that they are rescuing a poor child from an abusive parent. These foster parents believe that the child will be grateful and relieved to be out of their home situation. This is rarely the case. Abuse is all that the child may know. The child's bad situation is his/her "normal". Be prepared for the child to be anything but happy about being in your home. In other words, examine your expectations. What are you expecting? Not only from the child, but from his or her parents, the state and the fostering experience itself? High expectations can lead to your fall!
4. Kids in care have sometimes been neglected, physically, sexually, mentally and emotionally abused. The children can be angry, resentful and sad. They may take it out on their foster parents, usually the foster mother. Are you willing and able to deal with what the children may put on you, and not take it personally? This is harder than it seems, especially when you are being kicked or cussed out.
5. Are you willing to have social workers in your home, sometimes every month? Can you work in a partnership with a team of professionals to help the child either get back home or to another permanent placement, such as adoption? This goal requires excellent communication skills on your part, and a commitment to follow the plan set forth by the social workers.
6. Can you say goodbye? Foster care is not a permanent arrangement. The children will move on someday. Permanency is what you want for them. However, you and your family will attach to this child, so don't fool yourself into thinking otherwise. Attachment is a good thing, for both you and the child. If the child can attach and trust you, they will be able to do the same with others in their lives and this leads to a healthier future. Goodbye does not have to mean forever. In some cases, with permission from the birth parent or adopted parent, a relationship with your foster children can remain intact after a move. We have a relationship with a few of our past foster daughters and enjoy seeing them and receiving cards and phone calls. They even still ask us for advice.
7. If you have children of your own, how do they feel about doing foster care? It's important to consider every member of your family when thinking about fostering. Everyone in the house will be living and interacting with the foster child and his or her behaviors. Your children will have to share their home, room, toys, and parents. They sacrifice a lot in becoming part of a fostering family. Ask your children how they feel and listen! Also, be aware that your child may learn or pick up whatever the foster child knows, both the good and the bad. Are you prepared to stand guard at all times, making your home safe for all who live there?
8. What ages of children can you parent at this time? Consider the ages of your own children and where another child would fit into your family. Is a baby right for you? While you won't have to deal with foul language, you will have to give up sleep and basically "start over" if your children are grown. Or would a school age child work better. In this situation, you may not have to worry about day care. Also, consider the sex of the child. These are choices that are all up to you as a foster parent. You will also be given choices on what behaviors that you feel you can and cannot parent at this time. Be aware of the fact that many behaviors may not surface until the child feels safe enough to be him/herself. The social workers are also not always aware of a child's behavior at the time of placement.
9. Finally, do you have a lot of love to give? Are you ready to throw a child his/her first birthday party? Can you help him or her decorate a first Christmas tree or carve a first pumpkin? Help the child to see that families are a great place to grow up and show him/her an excellent role model of healthy family relationships? Give him/her an opportunity to heal and grow?