

How Does Providing Foster Care Affect Children in Your Home?

Your Children and Foster Children - the Pros and Cons

[By Carrie Craft](#)
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Children in the foster care system are usually in state's custody for reasons beyond their control – usually [abuse](#) and [neglect](#). Abuse and neglect has an impact on a child's behavior as well as on their mental state as studies are now confirming.

Know that the following can be brought into your foster home and be prepared to address these behaviors and issues in your home and around your children:

The Possible Cons of Foster Care on Your Children

- **Cursing** – Some foster families do not allow cursing in their home. These same families may be very surprised at the level of swearing some foster children use on a daily basis, this includes very young children. My daughter learned several new curse words from foster placements.

Action to be taken. Communication with your children will be very important as you provide foster care. Talk about what words are appropriate and not appropriate. Some older children in the home may find little ones cursing amusing. Remind older children not to encourage the swearing by laughing. This can be another behavior that you choose to not allow in your foster home.

- **Dishonesty – Lying and Stealing** - While difficult to parent, lying and stealing are often survival skills. While in the birth home some children had to engage in such behaviors in order to survive their environments. This is very confusing to foster children and makes them very difficult behaviors to extinguish. Children will need to learn new skills to replace the dysfunction of lying and stealing, but along the way your children are being exposed to these behaviors. Your children may even have their possessions disappear. Your children may begin to question their faith and trust in others.

Action to be taken. Speak with your children about the behavior and about your expectations for their behavior. This can be another behavior that you choose to not allow in your foster home.

- **Safety** – There may be times when your child's safety may be put at risk. Some foster children may have violent outbursts or rage when angry. This may include hitting, biting, kicking, and throwing of objects. Your child's things may get broken.

Action to be taken. Establish a plan with your children on what to do when this occurs. Let your child know that he needs to tell you immediately when this occurs. Also let your child know if he needs to go to his room or your room while you are handling the behavior.

- **Sexualized behavior** - Some children who have been sexually abused sexually act out. This acting out may range in behavior from the minor, very knowledgeable about sex; to the major, sexualized play or sexual activity.

Action to be taken. Tell your foster care social worker what behaviors you are willing to parent and not parent in your home. Keep in mind that sometimes a child's history is not fully known before placement in a foster home.

Think of actions you can take to protect your children from being sexually abused. Keep lines of communication open with your children and discuss good touch and bad touch. Role play ways of saying "no". Make sure your child knows to tell you immediately if anything happens that make her feel uncomfortable with a foster child.

- **Insecurity in home** – Some children may become confused on what "[permanency](#)" means. My daughter at the age of four, asked when it was her turn to go to her new family. She thought children coming and going from a home was normal.

Action to be taken. Tell your child the story of how she joined your family. Talk about the role of foster parents and how your family is temporary for foster children, but your child is permanent and forever.

- **Loss** - Your children may become attached to the different foster children that enter your home. It may be painful for them to say goodbye.

Action to be taken. Talk to your children about the transition process on their age level. Keep pictures of past foster children in the home. Ask for continued contact with past children, if appropriate and all involve agree that it would be a positive. Many children have been a part of a fostering family and have extended their definition of family and sibling.

The Pros of Foster Children and Your Children Sharing a Home

After reading the above, you may wonder why you should continue to consider fostering while your children are in the home. Know that there are also several positive aspects of exposing your children to foster children.

- Your child may **learn how to serve** others and the community by welcoming in those in need into their home.
- Your children may **learn how to share** – not only their toys, but their space and important people.

- Your children may **learn that there can be an extension of caring adults** in one's world, as foster children gain more caring adults through foster parents and others in the foster parent's extended family and new siblings.
- Your children will also hopefully **gain a broader world view** as they learn about different cultures, races, and family values. They may not always be positive, but there will be numerous opportunities for discussion and learning.
- Your children will also become very **familiar with a broad range of emotions** as foster children express themselves. If the expressions are not appropriately expressed, you will be there to help your child understand that there are better and healthier ways to share feelings.
- Your children will also **learn a lot about grief and loss**. As foster children experience their losses, your child will learn how the losses of others impact them. They will also have the opportunity to experience their own grief and loss and foster children come and go from their lives. This does not have to be a negative.
- Your children will also **learn about choices and consequences** and the impact they have on those around them.

[Whether or not you decide to become a foster parent](#) is a huge decision, a decision that will impact not only you as parents, but your children, home, extended family, friends, and neighborhood. You are asking a stranger to join your family on a temporary basis. Yes, it is a child, but a child that you may not know much about prior to placement.

Know what you are willing to bring into your home and [ask the questions you need to ask before saying yes](#). Foster parenting has its rewards, but it also has its negative points, especially when you consider the impact it may have on your children.

<http://adoption.about.com/od/marriage/a/How-Does-Providing-Foster-Care-Affect-Children-In-Your-Home.htm>

Kids Get Lost in the Chaos of Foster Parenting - Your Children Need You Too

By Carrie Craft

It's very easy as a foster parent to focus on the needs of the foster children placed in your home. After all, that's why you chose to be a foster parent in the first place, to help children in need. It becomes even more difficult when the foster children placed in your home have extreme behaviors and it seems like your children's needs are getting pushed to the side.

However, if you have children of your own, whether at home or out of the home, it's equally important to not lose focus on them.

They are still your children and need you too. Here are a few ideas on how to not lose focus on your children while fostering.

1. **Listen to the concerns of your children.** Are they having difficulty with one of the foster children? Try not to explain away or make excuses for the foster child's actions. We as adults understand that there are real needs driving the behavior of the foster child, but your child does not need to know these details. Your child is also not mature enough to understand that a foster child may steal their belongings due to past drama. Your job is to listen to your child. Are your children telling you that they don't want to do foster care anymore? Are they telling you that they need a respite break from the foster placements? These are things that need to be discussed as a family. Taking the time to listen to your child's concerns will mean a lot to your child.
2. **Spend time with your children.** They will tell you when they need time with you, so listen. Don't include anyone else in this time. Just like the foster children benefit from one on one time with you, your children need this time too. Take a moment to tuck them in at night. If appropriate for age, have their bedtime a little bit later than the foster children so you can have some quality time together.
1. **Enjoy your child's growing-up years.** While you get distracted with the needs and interests of the foster children, don't forget to spend time focusing on the needs and interests of your children. Go to their games or dance recitals. Volunteer at your child's school or coach a team. This gives you time with your child when your focus will be only on them and their interests. Do not miss these opportunities to enjoy your child growing up. Make sure that your foster child's visitation schedule or therapy appointments do not conflict with your child's activity schedule. It will go by all too soon, and while you may have helped numerous foster children in need, you will not be happy knowing that you may have missed out on some of your child's special moments as well.
2. **Protect your children from exposure to negative behaviors.** We all want our children to be safe and are often very selective of who and what enters our homes. We may have rules about what they can view on television and movies. We may limit computer time. We may also have limits on how far they can stray from the house without supervision.

Do not overlook what a foster child may bring into your home and family. Continue to monitor play between a foster child and your child and listen to their conversations for several months after placement. Do not get too comfortable. Some foster children can honeymoon for several months. When a foster child is throwing an extreme tantrum, or having an angry outburst that may include inappropriate language - make sure your child is not in view of this if at all possible. Ask them to go to your bedroom or watch a movie in the family room. Try to protect your children as much as possible. If your foster child acts out a lot, it may be wise to create a family safety plan. Be sure to discuss the event with your child after, to help them process what they have witnessed.

3. **Be your child's champion.** Sometimes foster children have behaviors and your child may be a victim of these behaviors. Your child may be physically hurt or wronged by a foster child. For example, your child's belongings may be taken or destroyed by an angry foster child. Don't make excuses for the foster child or expect your child to ignore the infraction. Let your child know that you will not overlook this loss. Your child does not need to be a part of the consequence, and it is not necessary to confront the foster child in front of your child. All that will be important to your child is the knowledge that you heard them, understood their feelings, and that some action will be taken on their behalf.

<http://adoption.about.com/od/marriage/a/How-Not-To-Let-Your-Kids-Get-Lost-In-The-Chaos-Of-Foster-Parenting.htm>

Listening to Your Children Regarding Adding to Your Family

Adding to Your Family through Foster Care or Adoption

By Carrie Craft

Adoption/Foster Care Expert

Whether you're just starting off on your foster care or adoption journey, or have been fostering for years, it's not unusual for your children to have definite opinions about your family's foster care experience or your plan to adopt.

Some children may love the notion of having new friends or new brothers and sisters entering their family. Other children may feel otherwise and find the idea of foster care or adoptive children very intrusive.

When children share their feelings on foster care or adoption, especially negative feelings, it's at times difficult to know which comments are coming from an underlying need and which are typical, common, and to be expected when the idea of adding to the family is up for discussion.

How do you know when your child is seeking attention or just upset with a foster child, and when to take action on their concerns? When is a child's statement really saying, "I want things my way" versus when a child is saying, "I have these concerns about a foster child, foster care, or adoption". It's important to take the time and listen to your child.

Things that your child may say regarding foster or adoptive parenting.

1. I want to be the only child.

This may mean your child is trying to say:

- I'm worried that I will no longer be important.
- I'm being replaced.
- You don't like me anymore.
- I'm not enough.
- I'll have to share my parents, my things, and my space.

2. I want to be the only boy or girl.

This may mean your child is trying to say:

- I may not be special or unique anymore.
- Will I receive as much attention if I'm not the only boy or girl?
- I am not enough for you.
- I'll have to share my belongings.

1. I want to be the youngest.

This may mean your child is trying to say:

- Who will I be if I'm not the baby anymore?

- Will I be forgotten?
2. **I don't want another sibling.**

This may mean your child is trying to say:

- Will my relationships with my other siblings change forever?
- What if my siblings like the new brother or sister better than me?
- Will my parents have enough love for everyone?

The challenge with the above statements is that it's up to the parents to see the child's point of view and try to understand their fears and help them process their feelings and concerns. These concerns alone may be enough for you to decide to hold off on adding to your family.

There are some feelings that your child may share regarding foster care or adoption that are much easier to discern as a reason to rethink your family's continuation with foster care or an adoption home study.

Some possible valid concerns may include.

- I want peace back in my home.
- I'm tired of the chaos and drama.
- I miss it just being our family.
- I need time in my family with my people.
- I'm tired of my home, family, self being mistreated by foster children or the foster care system.

It's up to each family to decide, if these concerns can be met with a pause, a break, or a closure of the family foster care license. You are experts on your children and are the only ones who can decide what is best for your home and family. It just may not be the right time to add to your family through an adoption or a foster care placement.

<http://adoption.about.com/od/marriage/a/The-Importance-Of-Listening-To-Your-Children-Regarding-Adding-To-Your-Family.htm>

Phases of Placement

There are three phases of a foster placement: **PRE-PLACEMENT**, **PLACEMENT**, and **POST-PLACEMENT**. Each phase has distinct challenges associated with it that foster families must be prepared to face. This handout gives tips for each phase on what challenges foster families can expect and how to handle those challenges.

No matter which placement phase you are in, it is a good idea to be involved in a **FOSTER PARENT SUPPORT GROUP**. Foster parent support groups can be beneficial for many reasons, including talking out problems, feeling emotionally supported, and learning from the experiences of other foster parents. If your organization does not have a support group, check with your social worker to see if there are other foster parents who are open to mutually mentoring each other. You also may want to consider **ONLINE SUPPORTS** for foster parents, such as message forums, blogs, or even online training courses, like the ones offered on FosterParentCollege.com®.

Pre-Placement

- Be prepared for the fact that your family structure and dynamics *will* change after accepting a foster child into your family. Family roles and interactions will change due to the presence of a new person in the family. Talk to your whole family about the possible changes that might occur.
- Include your whole family in the process of deciding whether or not to foster a child and which child to foster.
- If at all possible, have pre-placement visits with the potential foster child. Afterward, discuss how all parties felt during the pre-placement visits in order to determine if the placement should take place.
- Spend time reviewing your pre-service and foster parent training materials. Take additional training classes if necessary or desired.
- Review the foster youth's case file for more information about his or her history, special needs, and strengths.
- Ask your social worker for more specific information about the foster youth. (*For more information, see the "Pre-Placement Things to Do" handout for this course.*)
- Prior to the placement, talk to your social worker about what supports you may need during the placement.
- Establish when contact will take place with the assigned social worker and the foster youth's team.
- Seek information regarding the foster youth's potential visits with his or her birth family and clarify your role in the process.
- Expect a certain degree of conflict due to the differences in the life experiences of the foster youth as compared to the life experiences of your own children.



- Proactively identify any risks that the placement may present to your own children. Involve your social worker in this discussion and, prior to the placement, identify safe boundary rules. Written contracts on risks can be helpful. *(For more information on this, see the “Safety Boundaries in the Foster Home” handout for this course.)*

Placement

- Understand that, in most cases, foster youth are being placed with strangers. This often will amplify their needs for safety and support.
- Pay close attention to your foster child’s reactions and emotional responses to you and your family. Adjust your actions as needed for the benefit of the child.
- Understand that the beginning of the placement will be overwhelming for all parties—foster parents, individuals already living in the home, and the new foster child.
- Allow time for your family to adjust to the new family member and the changes in family dynamics as a result. Relationships between family members may suddenly become closer or more distant as the family is shuffled around into their new roles.
- Schedule and follow up with individual “check-ins” with your own children and the foster youth to address any concerns that develop. This is especially true if you notice any major changes in behavior during the placement. *(For more information, see the “Safety Boundaries in the Foster Home” handout for this course.)*
- Expect that issues of fairness, dissimilarity, and risk factors will surface amongst the children in your home. Respond directly to the challenges as they arise.
- Seek out foster family supports as needed during the placement. *(For more information, see the “Self-Care Support for Foster Families” handout for this course.)*

Post-Placement

- Before the foster child leaves your home, provide lots of reassurance, support, and consistency. Offer to give the child a memento from your home or for the child to leave something with you to remind you both of each other. This can help ease the transition, especially for younger children.
- Expect all members of the family to experience grief and loss of some kind at the end of the placement. Allow family members to process these feelings at their own pace and in their own way. Give each person the opportunity to talk about their feelings through individual check-ins or family meetings.
- Post-placement is a time for reflection. Use this time to assess the placement that has just been completed. Involve your children in the assessment.
- If the placement was difficult, take some time for your family to re-group before considering taking on another foster child.
- Request a post-placement discussion with your social worker.



- Continue attending foster parent support group meetings to help process the feelings you may have after the placement has ended.
- Most importantly, **LEARN FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE**. Providing foster care is challenging, yet it can be a rewarding experience for all involved.

The information in this handout was adapted in part from: the Children's Research Triangle (http://www.childstudy.org/foster_care.php).

Pre-Placement Things to Do

Preparing for a new foster child to enter your family can be a busy and exciting time. It can be difficult to know what to expect, but a foster family can benefit from planning ahead, to address possible problems before they arise. You can keep track of your preparations by checking them off on this Pre-Placement Checklist. By preparing thoroughly and getting as much information as possible, a foster family can make the process of integrating a new family member smoother and less stressful.

Pre-Placement Checklist

- Review the information in the foster youth's case file to determine if he or she would be a good match for your family.
- If possible, participate in pre-placement visits with the potential foster child. Afterward, discuss how all parties felt during the pre-placement visits in order to determine if the placement should take place.
- Within the limits of confidentiality, include your children in the matching process.
- Focus on preparing your family for change to come as a result of a placement. Include your children in this discussion.
- Go over the following questions with your social worker to gain more information about the potential foster child:
 - What prompted the child's entry into the foster care system originally?
 - How many placements has the child been in before this?
 - Why did the child's last placement end?
 - What is the child's medical history?
 - What are the child's special needs?
(Includes medications, allergies, ongoing therapy/treatment, etc.)
 - Does the child have any behavioral, mental, emotional, and/or academic problems or delays?
Which ones? How are they being dealt with?
 - What are the child's interests and strengths?
 - What activities is the child involved in, either in or outside of school?
- Check with the assigned social worker to see if you can contact significant adults who know the foster child. If this is possible, seek their input on the strengths and challenges of the child.
- Attend placement meetings with the child's welfare team. This may include Child and Family Team meetings or Permanency Planning meetings. These meetings promote good communication and cooperation between the team members.

- Seek information regarding the foster youth's potential visits with his or her birth family and clarify your role in the process.
- Identify differences in the life experiences of the foster youth as compared to the life experiences of your own children.
- Proactively identify any risks that the placement may present to your own children. Involve your social worker in this discussion and, prior to the placement, identify safe boundary rules. Written contracts on risks can be helpful. (See the "Safety Boundaries in the Foster Home" handout for this course.)
- Negotiate, prior to the placement, what supports you may need during the placement. (See the "Self-Care Support for Foster Families" handout for this course.)
- Review training materials from previous foster parent training courses in order to prepare for an upcoming placement.
- Directly preceding a placement, talk to the children already in your home about the new foster child. Go over things like the foster child's name, age, interests, and any other appropriate information to share.
- Establish when contact will take place with the assigned social worker and the foster youth's child welfare team.
- Anticipate, as much as possible, your children's reactions to the new foster child as a new sibling. Caring for the needs of a foster child may take up a lot of your time, and rivalries might flare up between your children as they compete for your attention.
- Reflect on your own feelings about the upcoming placement and share any concerns you have with your family and social worker.
- If you are not already receiving one, ask your social worker for a Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA). This assessment can help identify strengths and weaknesses in your family structure prior to placement. For more information on CFA and other assessments, please visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway at http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/assessment/family_assess/.

The information in this handout was adapted in part from: the Children's Research Triangle (http://www.childstudy.org/foster_care.php) and the Professional Services Group and Community Impact Program Foster Care Training (<http://www.psgcip.com/FosterCare/Training/MakingYourFosterCarePlacementSuccessful.php>).

Safety Boundaries in the Foster Home

Foster families may consider developing a written agreement with all of the individuals living in the foster home that identifies safe boundaries. After explaining the boundaries and incorporating relevant input, have all of the individuals sign the contract. Identify how the contract will be followed up. For example, you could schedule weekly check-ins with each individual.

Contracted boundary issues should include:

- Clothing expectations
- No touching without permission
- Only safe and/or necessary touching
- Rules on being alone in the home
- Privacy rules regarding who can be in each other's bedrooms
- Property rules
- Language expectations

Parents should assure that younger children receive the same inclusion as older children in discussions and contracting on safety boundaries. Adaptations for younger children might include:

- Scheduling individual check-ins that are more frequent and specific
- Writing contracts that are "child friendly" in format and language
- Tailoring the time you communicate around the child's attention span
- Minimizing distractions in surroundings when you talk
- Displaying a non-threatening body posture when talking
- Talking on a physical level equal to the child
- Using words the child will understand, especially when discussing body parts or functions

If any children in the home display changes in their behavior or emotional responses, view this as a cue that they might be experiencing stress over the placement. Look for the following changes:

- A change in activity level
- Increased isolation
- A change in school interest and/or performance
- Changes in sleeping habits
- Increased health concerns

- Acting out in areas such as aggressiveness, chemical abuse, or sexual acting out

Beware that if a child of a foster parent is experiencing abuse by a foster youth, or a foster youth is experiencing abuse, the child could be pressured or threatened not to disclose the abuse. A continuous, defensive refusal by a child to discuss a change in behavior should be viewed as significant.

Check with your social worker before putting any written safety contracts into place.

Self-Care Support for Foster Families

Identify self-care activities you need to preserve.

Study what activities are helpful in your own stress management. Look for ways in which you can continue these activities while you are involved with a placement. Your scheduling of these activities might look different, but don't sacrifice everything in the course of a placement. You need your own time to unwind in order to be an effective foster parent.

Utilize respite care.

Respite care can be an effective break for the foster family and the foster youth. If possible, schedule respite ahead of time so that everyone has the ability to recognize when a break is coming. Use respite care in peaceful times as well as stressful ones to maximize the benefits to family unity.

Feel comfortable saying no.

Often, foster parents are asked to take placements as a result of not having enough foster homes for children. However, by not being able to say no, foster parents can overload themselves, which can have negative consequences on themselves, their own children, and the foster youth.

Review previous training materials.

If you are experiencing challenges in a placement, review previous trainings that may have covered topics that could be helpful when specific problems arise.

Seek additional training.

If you note an area you need more information on, seek input from your social worker on training options that might be available. Fortunately, training can be provided in a number of formats, such as reading materials, online courses, training DVDs or other foster parents that have expertise in certain areas. FosterParentCollege.com® is a great resource for additional training courses on a variety of topics.

Prepare for your social worker's visits.

When your social worker visits, make certain that the issues you would like to discuss with the social worker get discussed. Prepare what you want to bring up and know as many details about the situation as possible to give the social worker the best picture of what's going on. Social workers can also help you brainstorm ideas on how to handle certain situations. Having a plan in place for how to respond to challenges can be very helpful.

Become involved in a foster parent support group.

Input from other foster parents can be a very effective way to receive valuable input and also to receive support on the numerous, tough issues that come up during a placement. Some organizations will offer support groups for children of foster parents as well. If there are no local foster parent support groups, research foster parent support networks on the Internet.

Join a local, state or national foster parent association.

Being a foster parent is a highly skilled role. Many foster parents receive significant support by becoming active with a foster parent organization that advances the recognition and roles of foster parents and the youth that they serve. These organizations often lead to relationships with other foster parents that are both valuable and supportive.

Seek family therapy if necessary.

If there are family concerns that surface while a family is providing foster care, seek out family therapy services. Always remember to pick therapists wisely, meaning make certain that the therapist you select has an understanding of child welfare dynamics.