

Make a Difference Through Foster Care, Adoption

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All children who enter foster care have a goal of permanency. The nature of foster care is to provide a temporary place for a child to reside, before

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returning home to their birth family. But what happens, when, in many cases, a child may not be able to return home? When the legal rights of their birth families have been terminated in a court of law? If those foster children are very lucky, they are residing with foster parents who have made the decision to give that child a “forever home.”

I have served as the home finding supervisor for Astor Services for Children & Families’ Therapeutic Foster Boarding Program in the Hudson Valley and Bronx, New York since 1995. In June of 2017, I became a foster parent and we adopted in 2019. Because I had worked in foster care for so long, I was very aware of the need for foster parents. It is something I had longed to do for many years. At the time my husband and I became foster parents, we had a 10-year-old son. We talked about what foster care would mean for all of us, as a family. As someone who has such extensive experience working in foster care, I knew how essential it would be to have the whole family committed to taking on the task of fostering—often times, without this complete family commitment, foster care placements disrupt. With everyone onboard, we decided to open our hearts and home to a child in need.

Fostering and subsequently adopting has changed our lives. My son had been an only child until the age of 10; having a sibling and another child changed the dynamic of our family. It added another element of adventure, laughter and, most of all, love.

One misconception many have is that only newborns and toddlers are adoptable. However, to a foster family, who has had a child living in their home, it is a natural progression to add this youth legally to their family. There will not be any baby showers or furnishing of nurseries—yet there will still be an anticipation and excitement for the transition, which is sometimes only marked by a court date on the calendar.

When we adopted, having a support network was very important. My co-workers, family and friends all came together to not only offer their congratulations, but also to “shower” my new child and my family. It was also comforting when extended friends and family made themselves available, to lend an ear, or just to listen to my fears and anxieties about making a lifelong commitment. One such person, who had also adopted, gave me the

greatest advice: When adopting an older child, keep in mind, you are not replacing that child's parents; rather, you are providing a long-term substitution and are acting in every way a parent should.



Some other good advice for parents adopting: Do not request or demand that the child call you mom or dad once the adoption has been finalized. Many times, (as in my case) the child has already had a long-standing relationship with the birth parents. There are already people in their lives who they refer to as mom and dad. Be supportive of an adopted child's right to see their birth siblings. Often times, when siblings are not adopted together, it will be wholly up to the adopted parents to arrange and facilitate visitation. Children may not verbalize the importance of maintaining a relationship with their birth-brothers and sisters, but it is a lifetime gift you are providing them.

Lastly, many people ask me how has Covid changed the way the foster care system operates. The truth is, while we do use video conferencing and will continue to make virtual meetings a possibility for families that are more comfortable with that, we never stopped doing in-person visits and have remained in the community throughout the pandemic, using proper precautions. The pandemic has also underscored how important the foster system is. Many children in the system have already experienced trauma and hardship, leaving them more vulnerable to pandemic-related changes. People should consider fostering and adopting because the need for structured and loving homes does not get put on hold, even during a pandemic.

Giving any child a "forever home" is such an extraordinary experience. To give a child a second chance at life – one who may no longer be a baby, but still, in every way needs a family – is something that should be celebrated!

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