

TOP 20

FOSTER FAMILY SUPPORT IDEAS FOR YOUR CHURCH OR SMALL GROUP



ADVOCATE ACTIVELY:

- 1 Normalize** – Help foster parents feel like normal people. Often, when they are celebrated as “saints” or “amazing” or even a tad bit “crazy,” it can make it difficult for them to admit when they are struggling and need help. Foster parents sometimes feel the weight of “choosing this” but they need support caring for children in our communities. Making foster care a part of who you are as a church versus what your church does can be the greatest encouragement to a foster family.
- 2 Pray** - Satan will attack foster families in many ways. Pray for protection, perseverance, health, etc. (see 111project.org/pray)
- 3 Listen** – The situations that foster families sometimes face can’t be “fixed.” Sometimes families need someone to listen and recognize the challenges and sacrifices that they are making as a family.
- 4 Ask Questions** – Be curious about the foster family, asking questions about how you can help. Recognize the situations of the children may be private and can’t be shared. Look for fun ways to bless the foster family like having them fill out a “favorites survey” (i.e. favorite candy, drink, snack, etc.) Then plan a drop off of their favorite candy or sonic drink next time you drive by.
- 5 Acknowledge** - Let them know you haven’t forgotten them, and you aren’t avoiding them. Text, call, etc. Don’t expect a response right away. Foster care requires coordination and communication with so many additional different people including multiple case workers, medical providers, educators, bio parents etc... In reaching out, you are assuring them that you are there for them and that can be significant.
- 6 Encourage** – Send a handwritten note/scripture that you’re praying over them.
- 7 Sign up for CarePortal** – This is a great way to learn about the needs of your community as requested by case workers serving local families. (see 111project.org/enroll)
- 8 Advocate** – Does a family have a need that you know about? Get their permission and look for ways to advocate in your network for the need or challenge that they are facing.

GIVE GRACIOUSLY:

- 9 **Meals / Snacks** – This is a no brainer. People need to eat. MANY foster children have very sensitive stomachs, so it is always good to ask about dietary restrictions. Freezer meals are also very helpful.
- 10 **Items for New Children** – The expense of bringing in a new placement or a sibling set can be very high. The cost and clutter of storing every possible thing is difficult. Consider setting aside some funds to help with the cost associated with a family taking on placements.
- 11 **Cover cost of activities** – Traditional foster parents do receive a stipend after taking placement. Kinship families often do not receive any assistance until they complete foster family certification. The stipends received do not cover the cost of extracurricular activities beneficial to the child and provide a break for the family. Could your church automatically cover the cost of camps or activities, so families don't even have to apply for a scholarship?
- 12 **Meet a need for a foster family on CarePortal** – In this instance, a family worker has already visited with the family to present their most pressing need on CarePortal. You can find out what is needed quickly by browsing. [Click Here](#)
- 13 **Intentionally cover a financial housing need** – Bringing in additional children into your home can add to the wear and tear cost of maintaining a home. Look for a financial need you can intentionally meet like lawn care, utilities, or a home repair. Check in with the foster parent about helping them. Instead of asking, "How can I help," identify a need and ask them specifically, "Can we help with (the specific need you identified through previous conversation)."

RELATIONALLY RESPOND:

- 14 **What are you already doing?** – Inviting a foster family, a foster child, and even biological children along to what you are already doing can be some of the easiest ways to relationally engage. If you have a relationship with a foster family, in most states, you can involve their foster child in activities if the foster family feels comfortable with you without foster certification. Invite them to play, to go wherever, to work on a project. Many activities you deem normal are sometimes experiences that foster children have never encountered.
- 15 **Church Activities** – Existing church activities are great ways to involve and invite children of foster families. Keep in mind that some of the children that are involved in foster care may need some extra tender loving care. Consider providing a one-on-one adult or youth buddy so that the foster child and ultimately foster family is assured that the child has a great experience. Visit the foster family about the children privately to become aware of sensory, relational, or behavioral challenges you can accommodate and be consistent with the foster family on how you handle.

- 16 Intentionally Connect** – Offer direct relational support to a foster family through organizing, decorating, playing, tutoring, making phone calls on behalf of, offering rides, being available on court days, or even when new children arrive can be helpful times to intentionally support a foster family.
- 17 Supporting Biological Family** – The goal of foster care is reunification. The challenges of caring for foster children alone but also caring for a child's parents falls often on foster parents. This additional relational work is sometimes more than a foster family has capacity to handle. Partnering with a foster parent around ministering and coaching their child's biological parent can be one of the greatest partnerships. Helping with visits, rides, appointments, job applications, and ultimately mentorship when welcomed can be the greatest gift to family strengthening. Even when you can't specifically support a foster family's biological connections, promoting CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) is a great relational role that advocates for the child but also their best permanent placement.

HOST HOSPITABLY:

- 18 Babysit a lot!** - In most states, individuals can watch foster children on an informal basis if the foster family approves and has a relationship with the care giver. Newborns are some of the most difficult placements because paid childcare is not available up to a certain age. Familiarity and consistency are important for children in care to help build healthy attachment, so consider ways to be around the child(ren) with their primary caregiver before you step in independently. Also, how can you help even when the child is sick or struggling with certain difficult behaviors so a foster parent may maintain work. Children in care sometimes have weakened immunity or are prone to sickness due to past trauma. Your willingness to step in even in difficult or regular intervals can support foster parents' long-time service.
- 19 Invite Everyone Over!** - One of the best things you can offer a foster family at times is a place to connect as a family. Without judgement, or fear (sometimes a foster family can be concerned about the behaviors of their children in a new environment, so grace and hospitality is welcomed!). A good meal, time to play, and the ability to go back home without cleaning up is sometimes the connection a foster family needs together.
- 20 Provide Respite** - In most states, the prudent parenting act allows foster children to stay overnight for a certain number of days with friends and family that a foster family would trust with their biological children. This gives a great opportunity for normalcy for the children to have interactions and experiences with grandparents and friends. This informal care is highly welcomed by most foster families. In certain situations, formalized respite due to agency or system restrictions is needed. Formal respite care requires a family to be fully certified as a foster family or requires some type of formal certification through a local licensed agency. Respite is a great ministry to foster families not connected to your church and is also a great entry level experience for families considering foster care.