

20 WAYS TO SUPPORT FOSTER FAMILIES

1:1 project



20 ways to support foster families

1

Normalize – Often, when foster families are celebrated as “saints,” “amazing,” or even a tad criticized for taking on a role others don’t understand, it can be difficult for them to ask for help when they are struggling. Foster parents sometimes feel the weight of “choosing this,” but they need support caring for children in our communities. For churches, making foster care a part of who you are as a church can be the greatest encouragement to a foster family.

2

Pray – By committing to intentional rhythms of prayer advocating for foster families, you become aware, engaged, and an active participant in making a difference for families and the children in their care. (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 and ask how you can help. Recognize that the children's situations may be private and cannot be shared. Look for fun ways to support the foster family, such as having them fill out a “favorites survey” (e.g., favorite candy, drink, snack). Then plan to drop off their favorite candy or a Sonic drink next time you drive by.

5

Encourage – Send a handwritten note or scripture you’re praying over them.

6

Acknowledge – Text, call, etc. to let them know you haven’t forgotten them, and you aren’t avoiding them. Don’t expect a response right away. Foster care requires coordination and communication with many different people, including multiple caseworkers, medical providers, educators, bio parents, etc. In reaching out, you assure them that you are there for them, and that can be significant.

7

CarePortal – This is a great place to begin supporting foster families you don’t already know! Needs of foster families, both kinship and traditional, are often posted on CarePortal.

8

Church-entered need on CarePortal –Use CarePortal to support foster families in your church. Consider having your church submit a Church Request on CarePortal so you can advocate more specifically within your congregation. If it is not met by your church first, the 111Project staff can assist in sending it to the community.

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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.

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Meals / Snacks – This is a no-brainer. People need to eat. Many children in foster care have very sensitive stomachs, so it is always good to ask about dietary restrictions. Freezer meals are also very helpful.

11

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 are difficult. Consider setting aside some funds to help with the cost associated with a family taking on placements.

12

Cover the 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 or you automatically reduce or cover the costs of camps or activities, so families don't even have to apply for a scholarship?

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Intentionally cover a financial housing need – Bringing additional children into your home can increase the wear-and-tear costs of maintaining a home. Look for a need you can meet, like lawn care, utilities, or a home repair. Check in with the foster parent about how you can help 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 a previous conversation)?" Also consider the gift of a limited cell phone plan that the foster family can use for communicating with bio family members.

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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 they want, to work on a project. Many activities you deem normal are sometimes experiences that foster children have never encountered.

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Church activities – Existing church activities are great ways to involve and invite children of foster families. Keep in mind that some children may need extra tender loving care. Consider providing a one-on-one adult or youth buddy so that the child and, ultimately, the foster family are assured that the child has a great experience. Visit the family privately to become aware of sensory, relational, or behavioral challenges you can accommodate, and be consistent with the family in how you handle them. If your church offers photo booths for events, consider printing and framing photos for foster families to be able to immediately display in their home, which gives the child a sense of belonging.

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Intentionally connect – Offering direct relational support to a foster family by organizing, decorating, playing, tutoring, making phone calls on their behalf, offering rides, being available on court days, or even when new children arrive can be helpful ways to intentionally support a foster family.

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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, often fall on foster parents. This additional relational work is sometimes more than a foster family can handle. Partnering with a foster parent to minister to and coach 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 and their best permanent placement.

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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 caregiver. Newborns are among the most difficult placements because paid childcare is not available until 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 that a foster parent can 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-term service.

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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 judgment or fear. Sometimes, a foster family may be concerned about their children's behavior in a new environment, so grace and hospitality are welcome! A good meal, time to play, and the ability to go back home without cleaning up are sometimes the connections 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 whom 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 to obtain some form of formal certification through a local licensed agency. Respite is a great ministry for foster families not connected to your church, and also a great entry-level experience for families considering foster care.