

FOSTER FAMILY


RESOURCE GUIDE

A resource developed by Fostering Family with additional content from Legacy685.

To learn more about Fostering Family visit FosteringFamily.org.



Legacy685

The background is a vibrant orange with various abstract shapes and patterns. There are large, overlapping circles in different shades of orange. A cluster of small yellow dots is arranged in a circular pattern at the top center. Another cluster of small yellow dots is arranged in a grid pattern at the bottom right. A vertical line of small yellow triangles points downwards on the left side. There are also several thin yellow circles scattered throughout the design.

“A father to the fatherless, a defender of
widows, is God in His holy dwelling.
God sets the lonely in families...”

Psalm 68:5-6a

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Foster Care is less about your family getting a child and more about a child getting your family

INTRODUCTION TO FOSTER CARE

When the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) finds evidence of child abuse and/or neglect, Child Protective Services (CPS) works to place the child/children in foster care. Foster care is a temporary arrangement whereby state-certified adults provide homes for children who have been separated from their birth parents. CPS may place such children with relatives, foster families, or group facilities.

The goal for foster children is typically reunification with birthparents, but placement with extended family members (kinship) or adoption with an outside family (unrelated adoption) are possible outcomes in certain cases.

In the Houston area (Region 6), the need is overwhelming. There are currently more children in need of families than there are families available and willing to care for them. Many of these children are 6+ years old and/or members of sibling groups. This presents both a challenge and an opportunity for conscientious Houstonians.

As you consider the possibility of providing a loving home for children in need, it's important to keep a few things in mind:

- 1) Foster Care is less about your family getting a child and more about a child getting your family, whether temporarily or permanently. Before asking, "What do we want?" begin by asking, "What is the need?"
- 2) Every child in the foster care system has experienced trauma. Many of their biological families have, too. They need families who are willing to help bring healing through love, and their birth parents need communities who are willing to support, guide, and mentor them toward restoration and reunification with their children.
- 3) There is always a degree of uncertainty in foster care. Foster parents take on this uncertainty so that children don't have to carry it alone. If you are hoping to eventually adopt a child, remember that "unrelated adoption" is the State's last resort, and no case is clear cut. Each carries its own uniqueness, complexity and ultimate outcome. Embrace the uncertainty as the heart of foster care.

Doctrine of Adoption

One of the most prominent pieces of imagery running throughout scripture depicting the character of God and His work on our behalf is the picture of family. Specifically, the illustration is rooted in the relationship between God as our Father and us as His dearly loved children.

*“See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!
And that we are!” John 1:12-13*

The hinge upon which this entire new relationship with God has been formed is beautifully illustrated in scripture through the continuous use of the word “adoption.”

“He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...” Ephesians 1:5

“You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry ‘Abba! Father!’” Romans 8:15

We were once outside the family of God but now, through the work of Christ on our behalf, have been adopted as dearly loved sons and daughters. We experience the rights and privileges of being known and loved as His! A new identity born out of a new way of how we relate to God—as our Father—and how He relates to us—as His children.

If our adoption into God’s family is at the core of the gospel, then the gospel is certainly at the core of our calling to care for kids who need loving, safe and permanent families to call their own.

The theology of our adoption helps form the basis of our “why.” Why would we care for orphaned and vulnerable children by bringing them into our family? Because that’s what Christ has done for us.

But it doesn’t end there.

The truth is we’re not all called to adopt—or bring children into our homes through other avenues like foster care. So how does this doctrine of adoption into the family of God practically translate into a message that might not include adoption as an application?

This is where a distinct, yet intricately intertwined understanding of the doctrine of “incarnation” can be incredibly helpful to press into as we form the theological motivations and articulations of our “why”. It acts as a theological blanket, if you will, that can be laid out over us all under which implications and applications for everyone can be identified.

Doctrine of Incarnation

The word “incarnation” literally means to assume human form. The doctrine of Christ’s incarnation speaks to God stepping into humanity, wrapping himself in flesh, and living completely and fully as both God and man. It’s most notably recognized at Christmas with the celebration of the birth of Jesus, yet its implications are far more pervasive than just on December 25th of every year.

“All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call Him Immanuel (which means God with us.)” Matthew 1:22-23

At Christmas God effectively said, "I see you where you are and I'm coming after you!" He stepped out of His glory and into the fullness of our mess and brokenness as humanity. The incarnation reveals much about who God is and what God does. It tells us He is the kind of God who sees hard places and broken people and moves towards them, not away. He is "with us" in our failures, struggles, fears, and anxieties. He doesn't just get us through the mess and the pain of life—He walks with us in it. Jesus immersed Himself in our brokenness, carried our brokenness to the Cross, and was literally broken by our brokenness so that we don't have to be broken anymore. God saw our plight and moved toward us, not away from us. That is the good news of the Gospel!

The Apostle Paul reiterates the incarnation of Christ and beautifully ties it into God's redemptive pursuit of humanity to make us His children, when he writes...

"When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." Galatians 4:4-5

Jesus was "born of a woman" (incarnation) in order "that we might receive adoption" into his family. If the incarnation of Jesus is at the core of the Gospel, then our stepping towards the hard and the broken is certainly at the core of our calling to care for the vulnerable.

The theology of Christ's incarnation helps form the basis of our "why." Why would we immerse—or incarnate—ourselves into hard and broken places? Because that is what Christ has done for us.

The implications of the doctrine of incarnation are broad. The opportunities for each individual person to "incarnate" themselves into hard and broken places are endless and full of creativity.

Frankly, this moves the conversation beyond just foster care, adoption, and orphan care in some capacity—although these are clear and vivid outlets to respond (see James 1:27). Incarnation, however, speaks to a renewed posture and perspective towards the world around us in all matters of justice, mercy and sacrifice.

The world says we should avoid hard and broken things, insulate ourselves from them and isolate our families from them. The Gospel, however, suggests an entirely different posture and perspective. It compels us to "incarnate"—to step toward and wrap ourselves up in them. It invites us to not just "do" these things but instead to become the kind of people who lean into towards and get involved with hard places and broken people around us—not step back, isolate, and insulate.

The gospel also changes the kinds of questions we ask ourselves. As we increasingly become more aware of what Jesus has done for us our questions begin to subtly and yet profoundly shift from things like, "Why would we do this?" to "In light of what Jesus has done for us, why would we not?" An entirely different question coming from an entirely different place.

The opportunities to incarnate ourselves into hard and broken places are endless and full of diversity. The application of incarnation in foster care and adoption efforts is clear and undeniable—they are beautifully powerful opportunities for us to see kids and families in hard places and say to them, "I see you where you are and I'm coming after you."

So, when friends and family members and co-workers and strangers at the grocery store look at you like you're crazy for doing this and wonder why you would go against the "script" of life (to pursue comfort and convenience at all costs by isolating and insulating whenever possible), you have a pretty compelling "why" to answer them with. And in those moments when you're left with nothing but your own thoughts and doubts and fears and concerns—wondering why you would consider doing something like this—you have a pretty compelling "why" to remind yourself of as well.

Why would you immerse yourself into hard and broken places?
Because that is exactly what Christ has done for you!

(Taken from "Everyone Can Do Something" by Jason Johnson)

Implications and Motivations

This theological framework acts as a grid through which our perspectives on foster care and motivations for getting involved are confronted, refined, and properly established. A few examples of how the gospel influences our thoughts and perspectives going into foster care include:

- The gospel crucifies our hero complex in the most helpful ways possible. It reminds us that we are not the heroes in these stories—and it frees us from the burden of trying to be. We don't strut into these children's lives with a cape on our shoulders; we crawl into them with the cross on our backs. (Matthew 16:24 — "Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be My disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.)
- The gospel is first about giving, not receiving. A gospel-centered approach to foster care recognizes that our goal is not first to get a child for our family, but rather to give our family for a child. This is an entirely different posture with significantly different implications.
- The gospel does not operate in a vacuum but rather works to restore all things—not only that which we are directly involved in but also the systemic issues that caused the problems we're now trying to address. Foster care is not just about children who need safe homes; it's also about the families and communities these children come from which are likely plagued by generational cycles that are in need of healing and redemption.
- The gospel then requires we hold a loving, hopeful and helpful posture towards the biological families these children come from. We can be against what they have done, or what's been done to them—but in light of what Jesus has done for us, we can absolutely and unequivocally be for them as people in need of healing and grace not unlike ourselves.

“When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

Galatians 4:4-5

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The path to becoming foster parents can be daunting, and many families have lingering questions as they begin their journey. The answers to those questions may vary slightly depending upon the child placing agency (CPAs), but we have provided general answers to the questions we most commonly hear from families.

If you have a question that we have not included in this list, please reach out to us at Legacy685@HoustonsFirst.org We'd love to help you find an answer.

What are the requirements for becoming a foster/adoptive parent?

Requirements differ depending on the agency (CPA), but generally include the following:

- At least 21 years old
- Financially stable
- 1 bed and 40 sq. ft. per child in the home
- No more than 6 children in the home, including biological, adoptive, foster, and children for whom you provide childcare (exceptions may apply)
- Vaccinated pets
- Agency application: references, home study, fire safety inspections, CPR/First
- Aid certification, TB testing, background checks and fingerprinting for household members 14 years+
- Annual training hours
- Non-physical discipline agreement (no spanking)

How long does it take to become a licensed foster home?

The process could take a few months or up to an entire year, depending upon how quickly you move through the trainings and documentation. However, some trainings are required annually, so it makes sense to try and complete the entire process within one year.

What is a Child Placing Agency (CPA)?

If the court deems it necessary, children are removed from their homes and placed under the care of the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS or CPS), which then works alongside private child placing agencies (CPAs) to find temporary foster/kinship homes. CPAs contract with DFPS to provide safe, nurturing foster homes. There is no cost to getting trained and licensed through a CPA.

Why are children placed in foster care?

Children are placed in foster care in response to allegations of severe neglect, physical/emotional abuse, and/or sexual abuse. Children may be placed with relatives (kinship) or emergency placements while an investigation is pending. Others are placed in foster homes. Unfortunately, due to a shortage of licensed foster homes, older children may temporarily stay at CPS offices or get admitted to residential treatment centers (RTCs) or group homes in the area.

What is the legal process for children in foster care?

Having placed a child in foster care, DFPS will continue to assess what is in the best interest of the child. Children may be reunited with their biological families (usually following a "service plan," whereby the biological parents demonstrate the ability to provide safe and nurturing care). Alternatively, an extended family member or close friend may be willing to assume responsibility for the child (kinship care). Otherwise, the child will remain in foster care, becoming adoptable if/when the court terminates biological parental rights. Typically, a child's case will last 15-18 months, but any number of factors may prolong or abbreviate the process.

*“See what great love the Father
has lavished on us, that we
should be called children of
God! And that we are!”*

John 1:12-13

Do I have any control over which children are placed within my home?

During the licensing process, prospective foster parents are permitted to submit preferences with regard to age, gender, ethnicity, and level of care (basic, moderate, or specialized). Once licensed, your agency will match children based on your preferences. And ultimately, the foster home makes the final decision before each and every placement.

Do I have to be married or a stay-at-home parent to foster?

No. There is no requirement that a foster parent be married or stay-at-home. However, as with any other parenting circumstance, arrangements must be made for taking children to daycare, school, medical/dental appointments, etc.

Do I have to own a home to become a foster/adoptive parent?

No. There is no requirement that foster parents own a home. However, moving to a new home while fostering requires an update to your home study. Foster children must have adequate living space as required by the DFPS Minimum Standards.

How much does it cost to foster?

Aside from miscellaneous costs during the licensing process (background checks, fingerprinting, TB testing, fire inspection, CPR certification, etc), foster care is inexpensive. Licensed foster families are given a [monthly stipend](#) to assist with costs of caring for the child. This stipend is based on their foster child's level of care. Children are also provided with medical and dental insurance through Medicaid and qualify for nutritional assistance through [WIC](#). Additional resources may be available depending upon the needs of the foster family (i.e. day care, transportation, etc).

How much does it cost to adopt through foster care?

The cost to adopt through foster care is minimal. In many (but not all) cases, the adoptive family will qualify for [State Subsidy](#), which covers all legal fees, grants health care coverage, and offers an ongoing monthly stipend.

What is the likelihood that I will be able to adopt through the foster care system?

The primary goal for children in foster care is family preservation and reunification. When reuniting with biological family is no longer an option, there may be an opportunity to adopt a child through the foster care system. If you are considering foster care as a means of growing your family through adoption, we gently recommend examining your motivations (see "Self-Assessment: Motivations and Expectations" at the end of this guide).

Children in foster care need loving families who will support them and put their needs first, even if it means reunification with biological family. In other words, foster families are called upon to assume a degree of unpredictability, and there is no guarantee that you will be able to adopt your foster child.

That said, at any given moment, there are hundreds of children in Houston's foster system who are awaiting adoption.

What are the responsibilities of a foster parent?

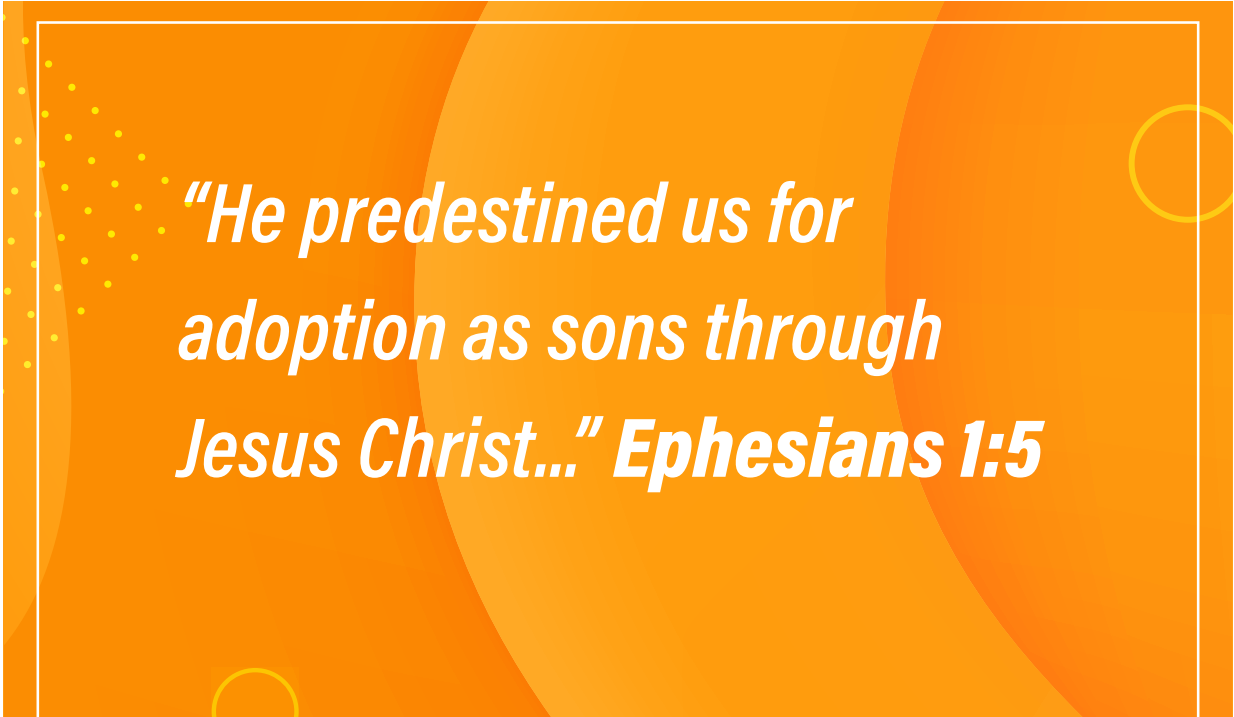
Foster parents are expected to provide daily care, nurture, and support to children in your home. This includes advocating for children in their schools and communities, acting as a positive role model, and helping children to learn the life skills necessary to thrive in adulthood.

Foster parents are required to keep up-to-date documentation for the children placed in their home, informing caseworkers of progress, adjustments, and any problems that may arise, including illnesses, accidents, or the need for some sort of therapy.

In addition, we encourage foster parents to pursue relationship with biological family members (if/when wise and appropriate) and work with caseworkers to see families preserved and children reunited with their biological parents.

What ongoing support or training is available for foster/adoptive parents?

Legacy 685 provides a full and comprehensive network of support for foster families including mentoring, counseling, support groups, retreats, trainings and much more. We also work in partnership with other churches, agencies and organizations in our city that are providing services for families. Our belief is that you should not walk this journey alone and our goal at Legacy 685 is to ensure you never have to. Please reaching out to us at Legacy685@HoustonsFirst.org with any questions. We'd be happy to answer them.



“He predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ...” Ephesians 1:5

STEPS TO BECOMING A FOSTER PARENT

The licensing process can be confusing, and there is a lot to consider. Please review our recommended next steps below.

1. Assess your motives.

There are a variety of reasons to foster and/or adopt, and to be honest, some reasons are better than others. Maybe you have always wanted to foster and/or adopt. Maybe you first considered it after having struggled with infertility. Maybe you have a particular burden to care for vulnerable children. Or maybe, having had a number of biological children, you're looking to continue growing your family.

As you begin to ask whether fostering/adopting is for you, you may identify with several of these motivations. It's important to recognize, consider, explore, and discuss your expectations and motivations, because foster care is challenging. Children who have experienced significant loss need loving adults who are willing to shoulder heavy burdens. They don't need perfect families, but they do need families who have counted the cost and opened their homes for the right reasons. The Self-Assessment: Motivations and Expectations" at the end of this guide will help you to process some of these things.

2. Read the FAQ for prospective parents.

You already did this (page 9).

3. Connect with other foster/adoptive parents.

We highly encourage you to discuss foster care and/or adoption with wise and humble people who are further along in their foster care/adoption journeys. Ask questions, gain insight, and learn from their experiences. Good mentors can help you to manage your expectations, provide ongoing support, and answer the multitude of questions not addressed in the FAQ below. We can help connect you with seasoned mentors through Legacy 685. Just let us know you'd like to!

4. Select a placing agency.

The city of Houston is home to a number of certified placing agencies (CPAs). All CPAs contract with the State of Texas and adhere to the State's Minimum Standards, but they may differ in their approach to licensing, training, and support. CPAs who partner with Fostering Family's Babysitting Collaborative have taken an important step toward ensuring that foster/adoptive parents have the support they need.

There's no such thing as a perfect agency, but it's important to do some research and find the best fit for your family. Contact us for referrals to agencies in the city we have trusted relationships with, and please review our list of recommended questions to ask an agency later on in this guide.

5. Begin the training and application process.

Once you have narrowed down your list of CPAs, register to attend an orientation class (or several). This class should give you a feel for the organization and help to answer your lingering questions.

Your agency will provide you with a list of trainings and documentation that will need to be completed during the licensing process. Be patient, take your time, and keep copies of all documentation!

6. Grow a support system.

Foster/adoptive families do not thrive in isolation. As you begin your journey, it's important to identify and enlist friends, family, and/or neighbors who can provide ongoing support for your family.

7. Prepare your home and heart.

After you submit your application and complete your trainings, you will be scheduled for a home study. Your agency will have further instructions on how to prepare.

In addition, begin preparing your heart to show love and compassion no matter what comes your way. And if you have children in your home, begin having conversations about love, patience, selflessness, and hospitality. Your entire family will be called upon to make room, both physically and emotionally.

8. Wait for a call.

As you wait for your first placement, we encourage you to continue learning and preparing. If you pray, it's never too early to start praying for your foster/adoptive child(ren) and their biological family. They are somewhere in the city, and they need your love even now.

Understand that the "waiting" period can vary significantly. You might wait days for your first call or even weeks. While we know you are eager to care for love children be prepared for the fact that things often don't happen quickly. Patience, trust and maintaining proper perspectives and motivations are important.

“You did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry ‘Abba! Father!’” Romans 8:15

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING AN AGENCY

Foster care and adoption agencies (also called Child Placing Agencies or CPAs) work in partnership with the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to train parents and find homes for children. While all CPAs must adhere to the State's minimum standards for operation, their specific policies and procedures may differ substantially. Some agencies in our city are "faith-based", meaning along with the state minimum standards of training they incorporate biblical and spiritual elements into their training process.

We encourage prospective foster/adoptive families to do their research before choosing an agency. To help you find the agency that fits best with your family, we have compiled the following list of questions:

General

- 1) Where are the agency's offices located? How far will you have to drive for trainings?
- 2) What is the agency's general reputation in the community? What do other foster/adoptive families have to say about them?
- 3) What is the size and scope of the organization? (Typically, larger organizations have more flexible training options, but smaller organizations may be more attentive to your individual needs.)

Licensing

- 1) What are the agency's requirements for licensing?
- 2) What is the anticipated timeline for becoming a licensed foster/adoptive home?
- 3) How many families are currently licensed with the agency?
- 4) How many foster children are currently placed through the agency?
- 5) Does the agency currently have any constraints in the licensing process (i.e. longer than normal review process, staff shortage, approval committee)?
- 6) Does the agency have an electronic system for documentation and/or submission of licensing requirements?
- 7) Are there any costs related to the licensing process?

Training

- 1) How much of the agency's training curriculum is Trauma-Informed?
- 2) Is childcare offered during annual training classes?
- 3) How much assistance does the agency provide with regard to annual training requirements?
- 4) Are any of the trainings available via livestream or online access?
- 5) Are they faith-based in their training and support?

Support

- 1) Is the agency staff trained in Trauma-Informed Care?
- 2) Are they willing to come to your home to offer assistance with severe behavioral challenges, if necessary?
- 3) How often do agency representatives attend court hearings, mediations, and/or permanency conferences?
- 4) Is the Placement Coordinator a full-time employee? Are they able to take phone calls directly from a potential foster family?
- 5) How often does the agency conduct unannounced home visits?
- 6) Do they offer support groups or other types of support for families?
- 7) Do they offer post-adoption support?
- 8) What are the agency's requirements for babysitters and respite care providers? Will it be reasonably easy for you to get the childcare support you need?

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Books

- *The Connected Child* by Karyn Purvis
- *The Connected Parent* by Karyn Purvis
- *ReFraming Foster Care* by Jason Johnson
- *The Whole Brain Child* by Daniel J. Siegel, M.D. and Tina Payne Bryson
- *Integrative Parenting: Strategies for Raising Children Affected by Attachment Trauma* by Debra Wesselmann, Cathy Schweitzer, & Stefanie Armstrong
- *Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew* by Sherrie Eldridge
- *Dear Birthmother* by Kathleen Silber
- *In Their Own Voices* by Rita J. Simon and Rhonda M Roorda
- *Black Baby White Hands: A View From The Crib* by Jaiya John

Websites/Online Resources

EmpoweredToConnect.org
JasonJohnsonBlog.com
Resources.cafo.org
Special-Needs.Adoption.com
[Foster the Family Blog](#)

Podcasts

- The Empowered Parent Podcast
- The Forgotten Podcast
- Foster Movement Podcast
- Creating a Family: Talk about Infertility, Adoption, & Foster Care
- The Real Mom Podcast by Foster the Family
- Archibald Project Podcast

Legacy685

Legacy685 exists to connect, equip and sustain you along your foster care journey. We believe you not only shouldn't do this alone, but that none of us can. We need one another along this journey. There's never a question we're not willing to help you find the answer to or a conversation we're not willing to have with you. Always feel free to reach out to us if there's any way we can serve or support you, no matter where you are on your journey. Contact us at Legacy685@HoustonsFirst.org.

SELF-ASSESSMENT: MOTIVATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

Before you begin your foster/adoptive journey, it's wise to honestly assess of your motives and expectations. This document will guide you through that process. If you're unsure how to answer a question, we recommend asking a mentor or someone who knows you well. Please don't be intimidated; you do not need to answer "yes" to every question. Just keep these questions in mind as you move forward.

- Are you prepared to love a child faithfully for months, even years, knowing that the child may one day be reunified with biological family?
- As a foster/adoptive parent, you will be called upon to shoulder your child's trauma, and you may never know their full story. Are you prepared to embrace every aspect of your child's history?
- Frankly, your child's story is not your story to tell. Are you willing to respect and protect your child by sharing only what is necessary to advocate for his/her needs?
- Are you prepared to parent with compassion, patiently bearing with your child in order to cultivate connection and promote healing at great cost to yourself?
- Are you prepared to lay aside leisure, preferences, desires, expectations, and convenience in order to cultivate a loving bond that can promote healing?
- Are you prepared to love and serve your child for months, even years, before they truly begin to "feel" like your child?
- Are you willing learn new parenting strategies in light of your child's trauma and unique history? Are you prepared to exercise these new parenting strategies in the presence of family and friends who may not know your child's story?
- As a parent, you cannot control everything, but you do have a great deal of influence over how your child attaches, connects, heals, and matures. Are you prepared to assess and reassess your motives, strategies, personal growth, and effectiveness?
- Foster/adoptive families are often transracial, and their children may have behavioral issues or learning disorders. This means that some people may misunderstand foster care and adoption. Are you prepared for criticism from family members? The awkward states at the park? Questions at the grocery store?
- Are you prepared for the thankless and unseen daily task of loving your child sacrificially?
- Somewhere in Houston, there may be biological parents mourning the loss of the child placed in your home. Can you sympathize with them? Are you willing to advocate for them and serve them (perhaps anonymously) by loving their child? Are you prepared to speak well of them to your child?
- Foster/adoptive children often require medical help, therapy, and/or counseling. Are you prepared to meet your child's needs holistically?
- Are you prepared to be overwhelmed? Are you prepared to feel inadequate? When faced with unique challenges, are you ready and willing to ask for help from others?
- Do you know other foster/adoptive families? Do you have a strong support system?

Set aside some time to intentionally reflect on following questions—both personally and with a significant other. If you're married, maybe arrange a date night to walk through these questions with your spouse. If single, gather those around you who know you best and invite them into this conversation. Lean on them to ask you these questions and create honest dialogue (BTW, what a gift you are offering them by inviting them into this journey!)

While this list is certainly not exhaustive, let it be a clarifying guide for you as you continue to consider and pursue taking your next best steps together.

What's Our Motivation?

Foster care is less about getting a child for your family and more about giving your family for a child. A slightly different statement with significantly different implications. That's not to say that a family can't grow through foster care—it sometimes does—or that a family doesn't receive endless amounts of blessings and joy through foster care—they no doubt can. It is to say, however, that our first call is to give, not receive. Why is this important? Several reasons, but most notably is simply wanting to “get” a child cuts off your capacity to hope for that child's family to be restored so they can go home. As well, what happens when process is especially difficult? Do you stick with it because it's worth it, or step out because you're not getting what you want? Check your intentions.

Are We On the Same Page?

While the sentiment behind the question is good, perhaps the better question to ask is: “Are you at least reading the same book?” Because sometimes we might be a few pages ahead of or behind our spouse (or closest friends in community), but as long as we're reading the same book—i.e. sharing the same convictions and vision and taking steps forward together in the same direction—that's what's most important. Needing to be on the “same page” sometimes makes people feel like until they are both absolutely and equally comfortable, confident and clear than they can't do anything. I don't necessarily agree. Maybe it starts small and simple; one step at a time. Attending an informational meeting or orientation class; going to dinner with a family that is fostering; reading a good book; etc. Don't let being on page 17 while your spouse is on page 29 paralyze you. As long as you're reading the same book, meet each other in the middle and go from there!

Do We Have a Support System?

You can't do this alone. Nor should you try. You need a collective diversity of people around you to sustain you through this journey. Don't have a built in circle or support? Start building one. Go out of your way to ingrain yourself into a local church ministry, an agency's support systems or some other kind of community resource opportunities...even if the best you can do right now in your area is an online Facebook group! Don't go at it alone! When you don't ask for help, or when you refuse to lean into systems of support being offered to you, you deprive others the opportunity to serve. It's that important—not just for you, but for them as well. These kids deserve for you to be connected and supported. Everybody wins when you are; everybody loses when you're not. Don't go at it alone. Read more [here](#).

Have We Counted the Costs?

Have you removed the rose-colored lenses yet? If not, let's do that real quick. It. Will. Cost. You. Maybe some money, certainly some time, definitely some energy, and absolutely some emotion, convenience, comfort and normalcy. No one ever said, “I want to foster so that my life will be the same.” No. Everything changes. It's hard, and it's important to be aware of the costs; to not go into this wearing rose colored lenses. But here's the point—we accept the costs to us as worth it for the gain a child may receive. That's why we do this. And when it's all said and done, don't just count the costs you will incur if you do it without considering what it will cost these kids if you don't. Perhaps the question you need to be asking is not “Can we afford to do this?” but rather “Can we really afford not to do this?” A slightly different question with significantly different implications. Read more [here](#).

How Do We Know if We're Ready?

Prepare and get ready, but be ready to not be fully ready. I've never met a foster parent that *felt* completely capable or ready; but everyone of them have been available and willing. That's what it took. Many who ARE capable don't always FEEL it. Fear lies and paralyzes. It keeps a lot of good people away from a lot of great kids. So, how do you know if you're “called” or “ready”? When you know just enough to be afraid of it but too much to let fear have the final say about it. This means you don't wait for fear or worry to subside before you act; you simply choose to fight forward so that fear loses and kids and families win. What if you started to assume the answer was “yes” until you heard a “no”, rather than “no” until you heard a “yes”? A lot would change. It might just change what you do next. Read more [here](#).

How Will It Effect Kids We Already Have in Our Home?

Foster care can give your kids a gift you as mom and dad would likely never be able to give them on your own. They will grow up in a different world—a world they can't pretend doesn't exist. There are certainly legitimate boundaries you have to set for the safety

of your kids. You might have to say no to certain things, but you might also say yes to things you never dreamed you would. It will change and impact your kids in deep and profound ways—perhaps for the better. While it's certainly not prescriptive – it's not guaranteed that your kids will be involved with foster care as adults – no doubt the impact of growing up in a home that's oriented around that cause is immeasurable in terms of how it may potentially express itself in the values and rhythms of their lives in the future. What a gift. Read more [here](#).

How Will We Prioritize Our Marriage?

(Alternative question for singles – How Will I Prioritize My Closest Relationships?)

We don't just bring foster children into our homes; we bring them into our marriages and our closest communities of friends. The weight of caring for kids from hard places can either break your relationships or better them. You want to be more connected throughout—but that doesn't just happen. It must be intentionally pursued, cultivated and fought for. That's why the best thing you can do for your marriage (and closest relationships) in foster care is not allow your marriage/relationships to become all about foster care. In the midst of mounds of paperwork, training hours, court hearings and appointments, it's easy for the activity of foster care to replace the intimacy of marriage/relationships. Be prepared to proactively work against that. Date each other. Pray for each other. Give each other breaks. Who knows, the beauty and brokenness of this journey might just reveal a version of you as husband and wife (and friends) to one another you have yet to fully see in your marriage. A stronger, braver and more intimate one. Read more [here](#).

When is the Right Time?

There's never really a perfect time to foster; just a lot of opportunities to say yes despite the many reasons you may have to say no. It's possible that the perfect season of life you are waiting on before fostering will never come. Have you considered that the parameters you have set to define when you're "ready" may be too narrow? What if they leave no space for you to actually ever feel "ready"? What if you're more ready now than you realize? This is not to disregard the very legitimate things you need to consider before fostering—like health, your marriage, your community of friends, your kids, your finances, etc. However, for most people it's an issue of time, busyness and of margin. Sometimes this is valid, but sometimes it's a smokescreen. Only you, through an honest examination of your own heart, can really determine that. Take the time to consider that in the grand scheme of things, the perfect time will never arrive. So what are you waiting on? Read more [here](#).

What are We Expecting?

God is more pleased by your willingness to be faithful along the journey of foster care than He is concerned about your ability to achieve a certain outcome through it. Be free from the expectation to fix or control everything in the process. The good news is that He does not call you to control everything in foster care. Some days will be filled with victorious breakthroughs, and other crippled under the weight of confusion and heartache. Your "success" in this is not dependent upon the momentary ups and downs; it is determined the moment you first say yes to this; everything that follows will be the mercy of God. Your job is not to save these kids; it's simply to love them – fully, freely and faithfully – and to trust Him with the rest. That's your hope and assurance—that what's completely out of your capacity and control is absolutely in His. Expect it to be hard, and expect it to be beautiful. Most importantly, expect it to be worth it. Read more [here](#).

So, Now What?

Don't be so afraid of what's to come along the journey that you never actually end up starting it. Just focus on what's next. It could be registering for the next orientation class—no strings attached—just going to listen, learn and feel. Maybe it's grabbing coffee with another person or couple that has fostered or adopted just to hear and learn from their story. Or perhaps it's finally giving into what you've known has been true for quite some time—you just need to say yes and do it. Stop praying about it (yep, I said that), stop reading about it, stop doing studies about it, stop talking about the "what ifs" or the "maybe one days"—and just do it. Don't worry right now about the many, many other steps that will come after that. Just take your next best step. That's all you can do.



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