

Should You Be a Foster Parent?

- ✖ Don't let fear stop you; here are some myths that stop parents from taking in foster kids.

Even Christians who want to help children have reservations about foster care. In fact, Christian professionals say you should receive prayer, counsel and training first if you believe God is stirring you to consider becoming a foster parent. Common concerns about foster parenting that might be familiar to you include:

Bringing another child into our home will disrupt our family.

"Absolutely," says Dona Abbott, administrator for Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids, Michigan. "Any change in the family will cause disruption, but you have to work with it." She suggests giving each child a private place to keep his or her treasures. Pay attention to the personality and needs of your own family, and make decisions about needs based on how they might affect and complement your kids.

A troubled child might be a bad influence on our own kids.

Abbott advises: "If your own child has had healthy, solid parenting all his life, generally they don't mimic the behaviors of the child that's been abused and neglected. "Fostering is a "whole family" ministry. "A lot of [parents] do it because they've been successful in raising their own children, and they want to get their children involved in helping someone else," Abbott says. But it can backfire. She advises training for every member of the family and recommends *Making Room in Your Family*—a popular, child-friendly workshop and booklet by the National Foster Parent Association.

It's dangerous to mix unrelated boys and girls in the same home. Parents can make choices about the age and gender of the

children they bring into their home. Along with stable supervision, they must set firm, literal boundaries. For example, in many foster homes, boys and girls are not allowed in one another's bedrooms.

It would break my heart to see the foster children leave. That's the most common reaction, but is it a valid reason to decline the opportunity to show God's love to a child? "There will be pain, and when we attach, it should hurt to let go," Abbott says.

"It's not about me anymore," says seasoned foster mom Ellen Houston of Memphis, Tenn. Ellen and her husband, John, have cared for 19 foster children over the last nine years, and they still cry when the kids leave. "Everything we do is to help somebody else," she says, "and we get a great joy out of being with them."

We want to have our own children. Jeff and Annette Hoch of Holmen, Wisc., have a uniquely blended family of five girls. A girl adopted internationally and twins adopted from foster care are sandwiched between two birth children, ages 12 and 1. And along the way the Hochs have cared for 10 foster kids.

"God creates families all ways," Annette says. "To me, it doesn't matter how God brings the children. If He brings them, they're mine."

It's important not only to treat foster kids like your own, she says, but also to see them as yours in your heart or you may resent them for imposing on your family. "If you think of them as a guest in your home, you'll find more fault with them," she adds.

"You have to guard yourself and your own children," Annette advises, "but you have to go in with the mindset that you're going to love them no matter what."