



## First placement and what to expect

This month the navigators wanted to provide you with some tips, tricks, and expectations when it comes to your first placement coming into your home. This is meant to be a guide and because of the individuality of the child and their own trauma some of these things may or may not work or be relevant. We always suggest connecting with the child's workers' to support the child in the best way possible.

So, the time has come. You got your license and a few days later received your first call from the agency, and they are asking you to take in a child. It is important that you get as much information as possible to make sure your family and this child would be a good fit. What should you ask when the phone rings?

- What is the child or children's ages and sex of the child? *-This will help you plan sleeping situations and make sure this child would be a good fit for your family situation.*
- Why are they coming into care? *-Understanding why a child has entered care gives information into why they may exhibit some behaviors or give a heads up as to some*

*behaviors you may look for and prepare yourself for. This also creates empathy towards the child and their situation.*

- *Do they have siblings who are also entering care? -This gives an idea as to how parenting times might look and the importance of helping the child maintain those sibling relationships.*
- *Will they be changing school districts if placed with me? This gives an idea of time commitment since it can take a couple days to get kids fully enrolled in school.*
- *Does the child receive any therapy or counseling? -This is important to ask because as a foster parent you will most likely need to transport the child to and from these appointments.*
- *Do they have allergies? -This is important especially if you have a pet that the child is allergic to. If that is the case your family may not be the best home for this child.*
- *Do they have medical needs? -This is important as high medical needs require much more attention and time. You will want to make sure this is something your family would be able to take on if you were to say yes to.*
- *What is their parenting time schedule? -This is important to ask especially if you are working full time. Sometimes agencies ask the foster parents to transport for parenting times. This would be something you would want to be upfront with if you are not able to do on a regular basis.*
- *Do you know any of the child's favorite foods, toys, games? What do they like and dislike? What seems to comfort them? -This is good to know as it can help ease the transition into your home for the child. Many foster parents will try to have some of the child's favorite food or drinks on hand. You also want to know what can be of comfort to them to help if the child seems anxious or scared the first few days or first week with you.*
- *What is the caseworkers cell phone number and their supervisors? -If you decide to take a placement you will want to have these numbers stored in your phone.*

**Understand that often these types of calls involve very little information. The worker may have just the basics and not much more. It still does not hurt to ask!**

**Have an older child or teen coming into your home? Here are some tips more specific to that age group:**

<https://blog.adoptuskids.org/how-to-help-an-older-child-or-teen-adjust-to-your-home/>

You have said “yes” to the call and will be welcoming your first placement in the next few hours or maybe by the end of the week. How can you make the child feel comfortable? **Check out this link below that offers ways to help your foster child feel more at home.**

<http://foster-adoptive-kinship-family-services-nj.org/making-your-foster-child-feel-at-home/>

**A blog on some expectations for yourself and the child. What to expect the first week of a new placement:**

<http://www.fosterthefamilyblog.com/foster-the-family-blog-1/what-to-expect-the-first-week-of-new-placement>

**Tips to help you be as prepared as possible to welcome a placement:**

<https://stackingcents.com/tips-for-first-time-foster-parents/>



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### **Some final thoughts:**

You don't have to know it all. In fact, that is impossible. Every single foster parent will tell you much of what they know they had to learn through the journey. What is most important is that these kids feel loved and safe. If you have questions or need support, ask!

### **Let it go**

Let go of control and your made-up reality of how this will go. Be realistic. One piece of advice I think many foster parents could offer is fostering has basically forced them to give up control and the picture of how they think and want things to go. Throw it all out of the window. The only known you can really count on with foster care is the unknown. Things are always changing, the case plan, parenting times, child's behavior, unfortunately case workers, it is always changing. The sooner you can allow yourself to take it day by day and be flexible the more enjoyable this fostering journey will be and the better a relationship you will develop with the child.

### **Expect the unexpected**

Children thrive on structure and it is important, but we also have to acknowledge that routines and structure most likely are completely foreign to children in care. When trying to enforce routines and structure they may come with some push back and the child may have more anxiety with these things in place at first. Try to be patient with this. Keep enforcing expectations and routines. With time the child will slowly adapt, and the routines and structure will help them feel safe, important, and loved.

Expect to have some hard nights and days. Especially that first week, even months possibly longer. The child is being removed from all they have ever known even if it was not safe for them. They are literally losing everything. They still love their family. They will need space, grace, consistency, and love to help.

Expect to see some behaviors. Even just entering foster care is traumatic and each child will process in their own way and display some behaviors because of this. Workers' often do not know a whole lot or all the trauma the child has faced when they first come to you. You typically will learn more the longer the child is with you whether they disclose things to you, or it comes out through therapy or a trauma assessment.

Expect yourself to go through some emotions and feelings. You will probably experience some feelings of excitement but also being a bit nervous about a new child entering your home. Some days you are going to feel overwhelmed, some days you are going to be filled with joy and happiness and love and other days are just going to be hard and sad. You may find yourself almost taking on the child's trauma and grieving their losses with them. You are going to find yourself frustrated some days as well with the child, a case worker, bio parents, or maybe a teacher. Those feelings are all normal and ok. Allow yourself to feel however you need to feel, name the emotion, and reflect on things. Find someone, maybe another foster parent, that you can talk to about the complexity of emotions that come with fostering. Here are some links that another foster mama describes ALL.THE. FEELS. of fostering. Check it out!

[http://crazyquiltmama.com/2017/03/06/emotions\\_positive/](http://crazyquiltmama.com/2017/03/06/emotions_positive/)

<http://crazyquiltmama.com/2017/03/11/emotions-negative/>

<http://crazyquiltmama.com/2017/03/19/emotions-foster-parent-conflicting-part-3-6/>

<http://crazyquiltmama.com/2017/05/26/emotions-foster-parent-rollercoaster-part-6-of-6/>

Your FCN also suggests attending a support group to meet other foster parents and hear ways they are processing through things, tips on how they are supporting the children in their home, and just a way to connect with other foster parents. If you need help with locating a support group, your navigator would be happy to assist you!

### **Keep learning**

Another thing you can do to try to ease the transition with a first placement is to learn all you can about trauma and parenting strategies that work! Parenting children in care can look different than how we parent our biological children. Have some ideas and practices in place even before children enter your home. Below are some video links along with some resources that can help. Keep trying these strategies and with time you will see a difference.

TBRI An overview: Putting the Pieces Together

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T43zJDgTNPA>

Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/child-trauma.pdf>

We really, really want to encourage you to connect with your navigator when you first receive a placement. We have walked that road before and want to be a place of support, encouragement, and connection. We can help get you connected to resources and just be a listening ear. Like we've mentioned before, no one knows a foster parent like another foster parent.

"Courage doesn't always roar.  
Sometimes courage is the little voice at  
the end of the day that says I'll try  
again tomorrow."  
— Mary Anne Radmacher

If you don't currently have a navigator and are interested in services please call 1-855-MICKIDS(642-4543)

