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no
more™**
BY FOCUS ON THE FAMILY



foster & adoptive families need your L.O.V.E.

HOW TO OFFER PRACTICAL SUPPORT

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welcome

I'm so encouraged that you've picked up this booklet. The fact that you're reading it tells me that you're wondering how you can help foster and adoptive families. Maybe you haven't been called personally to foster or adopt a child, but you're serious about God's command throughout Scripture to care for orphans. Rest assured that your compassionate involvement can make a significant impact.

In fact, your support of foster or adoptive parents may mean the difference between a united, healthy family and one that struggles in a variety of ways. As someone who has not only welcomed children into my home, but has also been in foster care myself, I know firsthand why these parents need help from caring people like you.

Children entering foster care are often in that situation because they've been abused or neglected—and children adopted from other countries may have experienced similar trauma. It takes a tremendous amount of time, energy, and patience to gain a hurt child's trust and help him or her heal from the past.

I ended up in the foster care system when I was only nine. I know how critical it is for scared kids and their new caregivers to form close bonds. Your support can give these families more time to focus on building those life-changing relationships.

In the pages that follow, you'll see how simple it is to come alongside a family and fulfill God's mandate to care for "the least of these" (Matthew 25:40) and practice religion that is "pure before God" (James 1:27).

There may be families in your church right now who could use a helping hand. Will you prayerfully consider what you can do to come alongside them on their journey?

To learn more about how you can make a difference, visit WaitNoMore.org.



Jim Daly

President, Focus on the Family





will you join us?

Imagine this:

Your friends are standing at the edge of a pier overlooking the glassy waters of the ocean as the sun begins to crest the horizon. They are ready to take the plunge for an exhilarating swim. You encourage them to leap while the waters are still calm. They hold hands, and off they jump. No sooner do they hit the water, however, than the clouds begin to gather, and the wind begins to howl. The fins of sharks begin to circle, and because of the stormy current, your friends cannot get back to shore.

What would you do? Your friends need help, and without you, they will likely perish.

This is the emotional scenario faced by many couples involved in adopting children or providing foster care. They are excited to jump into the beautiful adventure of helping a child in need. Surrounded by their friends and church, they take the leap. But suddenly, the challenges of helping a traumatized, lonely child become overwhelming. They anxiously wait for help from the friends who readily cheered them on, but they are nowhere to be found.

What they really need are spiritual and practical “lifeguards”—friends who will help them reach the shore safely through prayer, support, listening ears, and real-life help. You can be one of those lifeguards!

Sharen E. Ford

Dr. Sharen Ford

Director, Foster Care & Adoption

Focus on the Family





one family's story

Seven years ago, Kris and Paul Pelican answered God's call to adopt twin 2-year-old boys through the foster care system. After bringing the toddlers home to their four biological children (ages 10, 8, 6, and 4), Kris says, "We didn't really know what hit us."

The twins had never experienced structure or discipline and were developmentally delayed and nonverbal.

"They had never been talked to," Kris explains. "They had been contained and passed around and on the streets. Their tantrums looked like hitting, kicking, and biting—total fight—and my other kids were scared for me. Sometimes I would think: *How do we keep everyone safe?* There were times when I just needed another adult in the house."

Wisely, Kris and Paul had asked people for their support before they brought the boys home. "It takes a lot of humility, but you have to swallow your pride and say, 'I need ...,'" Kris says. "You need to be vulnerable."

The support rolled in during those first few weeks with the boys—a bag of clothes, a meal, or toddler toys would show up on the family's doorstep.

"I had people I could call, even a neighbor who wasn't a Christian. I could say, 'SOS! I need this from the store but I can't leave my house.' Or I could call a person and say, 'Can you pray right now?' I could call friends from church. They would just come over and do—they didn't judge. They didn't say, 'Why are you a hot mess?' They didn't say, 'Why is your kid acting like that?'"

Even though the family is more than busy with six children, they've provided support to other adoptive families, too.

Once Kris and Paul cared for two children so the adoptive parents could take a vacation together. During that week, Kris received a call from a foster mom. She had an emergency and needed help right away. So even though Kris had eight children in her home, she took in four more. "I called my husband, and I called a friend who was eating dinner out. She said, 'I'm coming now.'"

Kris and Paul continue to give other parents a weekend "just to breathe." One woman they helped told Kris, "You're saving my life."

"It felt that dramatic to her, just to be loved on," Kris says.

how to L.O.V.E.

How can you support foster and adoptive families who may be dealing with stressful situations? Here's an easy way to remember what to do:

L. O. V. E.

- L. Lighten the load
- O. Offer prayer
- V. Volunteer your time
- E. Encourage

Before considering practical ways to **L.O.V.E.**, it's important to know these facts:

- > Children who have experienced previous trauma may have a difficult time adjusting to the family, no matter how committed and loving the parents may be.
- > Children with scarred souls and hurt hearts do not heal overnight. Typical expressions of love alone will not "cure" a child. Time, understanding, unconditional commitment, and God's grace are essential to the child's healing process.
- > Simplistic answers from people who do not understand how trauma and adoption issues affect a child will only alienate the already struggling family. Parenting strategies that work for typical children may actually be harmful for a child with a trauma history. Be a humble servant, recognizing the parent as the expert.

First and foremost, L.O.V.E. a family by being compassionate and nonjudgemental.



L

lighten the load



When Mike and Leesa Worley were nearing the retirement stage of life, they answered God's call to adopt three children under the age of seven through the foster care system. The task wasn't easy.

"The people in our congregation surrounded us with love," Leesa says. "At our age, we couldn't have done this without it. Together, we were able to introduce Jesus in a way that these kids had never seen or experienced."

There's a key to lightening a family's load: offer help enthusiastically, in a spirit of love, and specifically designed to meet the needs of the family.

Another key is to make the offer as low-maintenance as possible for the foster or adoptive parents. However kindly intended, if the offer creates additional stress or work for the parents, it will be counterproductive. As you provide assistance, make sure your method hasn't created unintended consequences.

This list of ideas will get you started.

- › **MEALS.** Find a team of people to take meals the first few weeks the child is in the home. Selecting one person to coordinate and communicate with the family is important. Ask for the family's food preferences and what time they usually eat.
- › **ERRANDS AND SHOPPING.** Don't say, "Let me know if you need anything," because you'll likely never be asked. Instead, tell them you're going to the store that week and ask if they have time to give you a list. If they can't right away, be flexible. Or keep a running list of their regular items such as detergent and diapers. Ask for the brand names they use—this attention to detail communicates great love.
- › **LAUNDRY.** Pick up laundry, take it home or to a laundromat, and return it folded.
- › **YARD WORK.** If the family has several children, organize a yard cleanup party and supervise the children as they work. Pizza is a great reward.

> **CLEANING.** Housework can take away a good deal of the family's bonding time. Identify a time when the family will be out of the house and offer to vacuum, clean bathrooms, and wash floors. This may be difficult for a family to accept at first, so give them the opportunity to decline the offer without feeling pressured.

> **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.** Whether families are fostering or adopting, they will incur expenses: a bed, car seat, or other necessities. A monetary gift can be a huge blessing. The family will never forget your role in welcoming their new child.

> **GIFTS FOR THE HOMECOMING CELEBRATION.** Baby showers are a natural way to bless a family expanding by birth, but gifts are also appropriate when a family expands for a season or a lifetime. Gifts are a fun way to involve the church community and celebrate God's gift of fostering or adoption. For families fostering or adopting an older child, gift cards are a great way to support and bless that child.

When you serve a family, be sensitive to the amount of time you stay to visit. Typically, it isn't wise to stay too long, since the stress level will be high and a new child shouldn't be overwhelmed with too many new people. The new child needs calm and quiet time to adjust and bond with his or her new family.

take action

Adoptive mom Kris Pelican suggests making specific offers such as:

- > "I'm doing back-to-school shopping. What can I pick up for you?"
- > "I'm taking my kids to the park. I can take your biological kids so you have time alone with the others."
- > "I'm taking my kids to Awana. I can take your kids every Wednesday so you have the night off."
- > "I'm coming over so you can have a nap."
- > "I'm bringing over a pizza and salad. What kind of pizza do you like?"

Always remember to consider the family's needs first, but also think about any special skills you may have. Can you bless a family by helping them create a lifebook, handling car maintenance, or taking the dog to the vet? The options are limitless! Make an offer and give it a try.





offer prayer

The Bible says that the enemy comes to steal, kill, and destroy. For previously wounded children, the enemy stole their childhoods, killed their dreams of a loving family, and destroyed their futures. But that's not the end of their stories!

*Christ has come that these children may have life and have it abundantly.
(John 10:10)*

God wants to restore and redeem their beginnings.

So when a Christian family welcomes a child in Jesus' name (Luke 9:48); provides a loving home; and introduces her to the One who made, loves, heals, and delivers her, the enemy does not stand idly by. The spiritual warfare involved in rescuing children is very real and often overlooked. Foster and adoptive families need your prayers on their behalf.





parents and siblings

Pray for:

- › Strength and patience.
- › Grace and mercy.
- › God's truth to be revealed to the families amid the schemes and lies of the enemy.
- › Spiritual eyes to see the truth behind their struggle, and strength to exercise their faith and trust in their mighty God.
- › Ears attuned to the living God, who will walk them through their trials.
- › Biological children already in the home, that they would adjust to a new family dynamic without feeling pushed aside.



the child

Pray that:

- › God would heal wounds of rejection, abandonment, fear, and mistrust.
- › God's love, which never fails, will cover him in all he does.
- › The child would know and believe in Christ.
- › The child would trust in and receive her new family's love and desire to help her heal.

take action

- › Seek out a group of believers who will commit to pray regularly.
- › Communicate to the family that there is a prayer team that would count it a privilege to intercede on their behalf.
- › Know that your enthusiasm and initiative will help the family trust that they aren't "bothering you" with a seemingly endless list of struggles and will allow them to have confidence in your prayer partnership.
- › Ask the family for specific prayer requests, and assure them those requests will be held in the strictest confidence. It is crucial that the family is able to be transparent with their specific needs. Remember also that parents want to protect their new child's privacy; they can't share the child's difficult past and struggles with just anyone.
- › Pray fervently.
- › Let the family know you're praying for them. For the struggling foster or adoptive family, prayer will move them toward wholeness and healing in Christ.





V

volunteer your time

“We hear so many testimonies of marriages being saved ... so many testimonies of people finding renewed hope, just because they got away for a weekend.”*

—Michele Schneider, pastor of orphan care at Overlake Christian Church, Seattle, and cofounder of the Refresh conference for adoptive and foster parents

No matter how wonderful, committed, and loving parents are, they need a break from the demands of caring for their children. In the foster and adoption world, the formal term for this is *respite care*.

Respite care is crucial for the well-being of parents who struggle with a child's challenging behaviors.

Will you volunteer your time so parents can focus on their marriage, have a chance to regroup, and enjoy much-needed peace, quiet, and rest?

This is easy, you might think. Like babysitting, right? Well, not exactly. There are several unique aspects to respite care.

- › Respite should not begin until the child has been in the home for several months. Make a note on your calendar to begin to offer respite at or after the fourth month.
- › You must get to know the children beforehand and spend time with them along with Mom and Dad. Being a consistent presence in their lives communicates a genuine concern for them and their well-being.

- › The respite time must be significant enough to be worth the trouble of preparing for it. Changes in routine are often challenging to hurt children. They may act out with their parents before and after a time of respite, which is draining for Mom and Dad.
- › Respite shouldn't be a "vacation" for the children where they are free from rules of daily life. Effective respite should not induce a longing in the children to live with the respite providers. Children must still do chores and homework and follow their parents' general rules.
- › All decisions and communication from the respite provider should affirm the foster or adoptive parents to the child. Parents must clearly present boundaries and limits so respite providers can offer consistent care.
- › If possible, provide respite care in the children's home in order to maintain as much of the structure and schedule as possible. There are times, however, when parents and other siblings may need quiet time at home. If so, the respite can happen away from home.

take action

- › Take the time to get to know the children. Talk with them, and pay attention to their interests.
- › Ask the parents if you could have the privilege of partnering with them in ministering to their children by providing them a time of respite.
- › Suggest specific full days or weekends.
- › If a family is brave enough to ask for help, respond enthusiastically. If you can't provide respite when they ask, suggest a specific counter date so they know you are serious about your offer to help.



E

encourage

"I'll never forget an email my husband and I received that helped me keep going. It came at one of the most difficult times in my life, when our newly adopted 12-year-old son tried to make me angry each and every day. I knew this was Daniel's way of expressing his anger and grief because his birth mom had abandoned him, but it was hard on my emotions. On top of that, we were facing a lot of financial difficulties that had come out of the blue. And then I read this email:

"Why are you having these troubles and difficulties? Because the enemy sees you pressing into God! Don't let Satan get anything on you! Fight! Remember, you are doing something important for the kingdom!"

"That message helped me persevere. About a year after we adopted Daniel, his anger and grief subsided and his difficult behavior toward me disappeared. And God took care of our finances!"

—Julie Holmquist, author of A Call to Love: Preparing Your Heart and Soul for Adoption

Providing encouragement with God's Word through notes, calls, or emails can be a powerful source of comfort and strength for families. Hope-filled words combined with listening ears, understanding hearts, and acts of kindness will deeply resonate.

Here are just a few verses that can remind foster and adoptive families to keep their eyes on our strong and mighty God:

*Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is anything too hard for me?
(Jeremiah 32:27)*

*Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.
(Psalm 147:5)*

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea. ... The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. ... "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah (Psalm 46:1-2, 7, 10-11)

It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. (Deuteronomy 31:8)

Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer; you shall cry, and he will say: "Here am I." (Isaiah 58:9)





offer affirmation

Sending a message that affirms the calling of foster or adoptive parents is another way to give weary parents a lift and a renewed sense of purpose. Some couples may be shuttling their new child to multiple therapy and medical appointments as well as trying to gain a child's trust. Some may be exhausted from suddenly carrying around a 20-pound toddler every day and sleeping with a scared child night after night. Give them a pat on the back with a short message and verse such as these:

Thank you for following God's call! Keep up the good work!

I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. (Job 29:12)

Thank you for being like your Father in heaven, who does not leave us as orphans! You are doing important work!

I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. (John 14:18)

Thank you for caring for this child who once had no one! God is on your side!

You have been the helper of the fatherless. (Psalm 10:14)

God sees every little and big thing you do as you help this child!

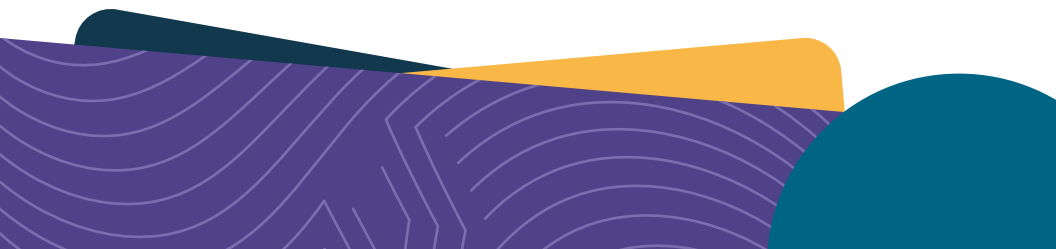
You are a God of seeing. (Genesis 16:13)

Your ministry to your new child is a ministry to the Lord! Be encouraged!

Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me. (Matthew 25:40)

Be creative as you seek to encourage a family. A mother of four remembers one such effort not long after the family adopted two older kids:

“One day a woman at church walked up to me with a big smile and gave our family an ice cream blizzard-making machine. It was such an encouraging surprise! It brought joy and fun into our home and was something we could all do together. I will never forget that act of kindness.”



take action

- › Buy a box of cards and periodically send a foster or adoptive family an encouraging note. Knowing they have your support and prayers is helpful to them.
- › Even writing out prayers for the family can be a huge blessing.





how will you L.O.V.E.?

While not every family is called to open their home to children in need, everyone can be involved in caring for them. Take time to explore how the Lord may be asking you to serve the foster and adoptive families in your community. Often it's the small gestures that mean the most.

To Learn More:

Find these and other resources at FocusOnTheFamily.com/store and WaitNoMore.org



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Focus on the Family provides a variety of resources to help parents and children overcome challenges and ultimately thrive in Christ.

WaitNoMore.org

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