9 Things Foster Parents Want You To Know About The Foster Care System

The highs, lows and things they wish they knew before they started.  By: Jolie A. Dogett

There are currently over 400,000 children in the U.S. foster care system and that number is only increasing. Yet, in some states there are fewer than 10,000 beds available for children in need of a safe, stable home. African-American children and children over the age of 13 have an especially hard time being placed in foster homes and permanent care. Once a child is placed in the care of a foster parent, they may still face a host of issues like difficulty adjusting and recovering from their trauma, and in some unfortunate cases, continued abuse in their foster home.

As May is National Foster Care Month, HuffPost asked foster parents in our Facebook community and other child welfare experts to share what you can expect when beginning the foster parent journey.

Foster care is temporary

The first thing potential foster parents must understand is that fostering is not a permanent solution. “The role as a foster parent is temporarily caring for that child while their birth parents are doing what they need to do to help show that they can help that child stay safe,” said Jim Hatch, a board member of the National Foster Parents Association and the Council of State Affiliates chairman for the NFPA, who himself has been a foster parent of over 10 kids (and an adoptive parent of two) in Maine for over 20 years. “Even if I loved that child and did everything I would do for my own children, I kept it in my mind that that child was not going to stay with me forever unless I heard otherwise.”

Love them as if they were your own children

Hatch emphasized the need to treat foster children as if they are your birth children, adding, “Benefits, vacations, any way they can.” “Don’t hold back. They desperately need to be yours, even if it’s for a short time. Know that it will break your heart, but do it anyway,” Lisa from Ohio, who’s been a foster parent turned adoptive parent for 13 years, told HuffPost via our Facebook community. “Good foster families can make all the difference.

Be patient with the kids

As former foster parent Scott Gowans from Ohio told HuffPost, “Children spell love T-I-M-E.” So give your foster children as much time as they may need to adjust. Moving from their birth home where there may have been past trauma can be very difficult and it’s important for foster parents to allow time for their foster children to adjust. “Trauma looks like a lot of other things and looking at behaviors, emotions and responses through a trauma informed lens is your best bet,” Staci Blalock, a Michigan-based foster parent for over five years, told HuffPost via our Facebook community. “Learn as much about trauma as you possibly can and don’t stop seeking out resources about trauma.”

“Give them as much of a routine as possible, they have so much instability that it causes anxiety,” Jaci DeRouen, who was a foster parent for four years in Louisiana, told HuffPost. “Ask them about their routines from home and try to do some things like their parents did.” Brittany Gatheright, a foster parent from Florida, added these encouraging words: “There may be bad times, but remember they are not bad kids. If you put yourself in their shoes and consider what they’ve been through, you’ll understand.”

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MY CHILD DOESN’T REMEMBER THE NEGLECT AS AN INFANT, BUT HIS BODY DOES

By Penelope (Foster2Forever)

My son doesn’t remember being hungry but his brain does! The trauma from infant neglect can cause lasting impressions in the memory bank of a baby.

The signs of infant neglect may not be apparent for many years.

My son was just 8 months old when he came to live with us. Even in those short months, he had experienced serious neglect that unknown to anyone had a lasting impact on his life. He spent the majority of his infancy in a car seat, as his parents partied and fought in another room. Just how often did he get fed? His cries for a bottle went unheard. How often did he get changed? His cries of discomfort from dirty diapers weren’t heard. When he came to live with us, he had a rash in the shape of a diaper on his entire front and bottom.

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DON’T MISS USING YOUR ADOPTION RESPITE DAYS

Each adopted child who receives a subsidy from Iowa is eligible to receive five days of respite care per fiscal year at $20 per day. The current fiscal year for the Adoption Respite Program runs from July 1, 2018 to June 30, 2019. All respite days must be used during these dates and the form must be submitted no later than July 7th. The Western Service Area will use the LSI Adoption Respite Form, but all other service areas will use the Four Oaks Form;

VIEW FOUR OAKS’ RESPITE FORM
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RAD SABOTAGE

By John M. Simmons

In spending the last ten years parenting several children with Reactive Attachment Disorder, I see five basic reasons for why they engage in RAD sabotage.

Oh, What I’d Give for a Birthday Party Without a Meltdown. It’s not just birthday parties. My children who suffer from Reactive Attachment Disorder sabotage everything. Sometimes the detail they put into a planned destruction could rival army demolition engineers’ carefully calculated placements of explosives on a railway bridge. I call it RAD sabotage.

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