

10 Meaningful Ways to Support a Foster Family Without Becoming a Foster Parent

***A simple guide for friends, churches, schools, neighbors,
and communities who want to help but unsure how***

Not everyone is called to become a foster parent, but everyone can play a role in supporting children and families experiencing foster care.

Foster care is not just a family issue. It is a community issue. When a child enters foster care, the foster family often steps into a season filled with uncertainty, appointments, emotions, transitions, paperwork, visits, new routines, and unexpected needs.

Support does not have to be complicated. Often, the most meaningful help comes through small, consistent acts of care.

This guide offers simple, practical ways you can come alongside foster families with compassion, dignity, and connection.

1. Bring a Meal

One of the easiest ways to support a foster family is to bring dinner. When a new placement arrives, the home often shifts overnight. Foster parents may be managing emotions, new schedules, medical appointments, school enrollment, visits, and paperwork, all while helping a child feel safe. A meal says, “You do not have to think about this tonight.”

Ways to help:

- Drop off a homemade meal
- Send a restaurant gift card
- Arrange a meal train
- Bring breakfast items or snacks
- Deliver freezer meals for later

Tip: Ask about allergies, food preferences, and whether there are any foods that may be comforting or familiar to the child.

2. Offer Practical Help

Foster families often have full plates, and practical help can make a big difference.

Instead of saying, “Let me know if you need anything,” offer something specific.

Try saying:

- “Can I pick up groceries for you this week?”
- “Can I mow the lawn this weekend?”
- “Can I help with laundry?”
- “Can I drop off diapers, wipes, or school supplies?”
- “Can I run an errand for you?”

Specific offers are easier to accept and can relieve pressure during an overwhelming season.

3. Provide Gift Cards

Gift cards are one of the most flexible and helpful ways to support a foster family.

Children can arrive with very little notice and may need clothing, shoes, toiletries, school supplies, gas for appointments, groceries, or comfort items.

Helpful gift cards include:

- Grocery stores
- Gas stations
- Target or Walmart
- Restaurants
- Clothing stores
- Coffee shops
- Amazon
- Local family-friendly activities

Even a small gift card can help meet an immediate need.

4. Support the Whole Family

When people think about foster care, they often focus only on the child entering the home. But the entire family experiences the transition.

Foster parents may be emotionally and physically exhausted. Biological, adopted, or other children in the home may be adjusting too. Everyone is learning new rhythms.

Ways to support the whole family:

- Check in on the foster parents
- Encourage the children already in the home
- Invite the entire family to inclusive activities
- Avoid making one child feel singled out
- Offer support without judgment
- Celebrate small wins

A supported family is better able to provide steady care.

5. Be a Safe and Steady Friend

Foster care can feel isolating. Many foster parents carry stories they cannot fully share because of privacy and confidentiality.

You do not need to know every detail to be supportive.

You can say:

- “I’m here for you.”
- “I don’t need details to care.”
- “I know this is a lot, and I’m not going anywhere.”
- “How can I support you this week?”

Consistency matters. Keep checking in after the first few days. Many families receive support at the beginning, but the need continues long after the initial transition.

6. Learn About Trauma

Children in foster care have often experienced loss, separation, uncertainty, and other difficult life circumstances. Their behavior may communicate fear, grief, overwhelm, or unmet needs.

Learning about trauma helps communities respond with more compassion and less judgment.

A trauma-informed response asks:

“What happened to you?”

instead of

“What is wrong with you?”

You can support foster families by learning about:

- Trauma-informed care
- Attachment
- Grief and loss
- Emotional regulation
- Sensory needs
- The impact of transitions
- The importance of safe, stable relationships

The more informed the community becomes, the more supported children and families can be.

7. Respect Privacy

Children and families experiencing foster care deserve dignity and privacy. Even when people are curious, foster parents may not be able to share details about a child’s story, case, biological family, visits, or future permanency plan.

Helpful things to remember:

- Do not ask personal questions in front of the child
- Do not share a child’s story with others
- Do not post photos or identifying information without permission
- Do not make assumptions about biological parents
- Do not ask, “Are you going to adopt them?”
- Do not treat reunification as a failure

Respecting privacy protects the child and honors the complexity of their story.

8. Include the Family

Foster families may feel left out of normal invitations because people are unsure what to say or do.

Keep inviting them.

Invite them to:

- Birthday parties
- Church gatherings
- Playdates
- Family dinners
- School events
- Community activities
- Holiday celebrations

Ask what would make the event easier for them. They may need flexibility, a quiet space, clear expectations, or the freedom to leave early.

Inclusion helps children and families feel less alone.

9. Encourage Without Trying to Fix

Foster care can be beautiful, heartbreaking, complicated, and exhausting, sometimes all at once.

Your role is not to fix every problem. Often, the most powerful thing you can do is listen, encourage, and remain present.

Try saying:

- “You are doing important work.”
- “This child is lucky to have someone showing up right now.”
- “I know this is hard. I’m with you.”
- “You don’t have to carry this alone.”
- “How can I pray for you or support you this week?”

Encouragement can help foster parents keep going when the work feels heavy.

10. Stay Involved Long Term

Foster families do not just need help during the first week of a placement. They need community during court dates, visits, school transitions, hard behaviors, uncertain outcomes, celebrations, grief, and change.

Long-term support may look like:

- Monthly check-ins
- Ongoing meals
- Regular gift cards
- Helping with transportation
- Remembering important dates
- Offering encouragement after hard days
- Supporting reunification when appropriate
- Continuing to care after a child leaves the home

Consistency builds trust. And trust is one of the greatest gifts you can offer.

Remember...

You Can Make a Difference

You do not have to become a foster parent to support foster care.

You can bring a meal.

You can offer a ride.

You can learn.

You can listen.

You can give.

You can encourage.

You can show up again and again.

When families are supported, children are better supported.

That is the heart of Fostering the Connection.

We believe connection changes everything, and every person has a role to play.

Want to keep learning?

Fostering the Connection provides education, training, speaking, consulting, and resources to help families, professionals, churches, schools, nonprofits, and communities better understand foster care, trauma, and the power of connection.

Visit fosteringtheconnection.com to learn more, explore resources, or bring Fostering the Connection to your organization.