



Having a Heart for Foster Care

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With roughly 400,000 children and youth currently in the U.S. foster care system, “the least of these” need help and hope that’s often found only through a loving church and community. Following are some practical ways you can get involved in a caring ministry to the some of the most vulnerable youth in our society today.

Ideas to help foster care parents:

1. **First-night kits** — imagine how a traumatized child feels being placed in an unfamiliar home; the smells, noises, and general environment may seem strange and uncomfortable. First-night kits give foster families a tool to calm a child’s fears. These kits should be organized by age and gender, filled with items like a toothbrush & toothpaste, a comb or brush, underwear, a stuffed animal, a bedtime story book, etc.
2. **Provide meals as needed** — frozen meals are especially helpful since these families may encounter unexpected changes in their schedule.
3. **Provide clothing** — foster families may not get much warning before receiving a child into their care. They need extra sets of clothing organized by gender, size, and season of year to provide for these children. Or provide gift cards so foster parents can purchase what’s needed most.
4. **Resource list** — create a list of resources, counselors, therapists, and treatment centers for foster families in your church or community.
5. **Help recruit foster parents**
6. **Encourage local businesses to aid foster families** — by offering discounts or free services.
7. **Host or support appreciation events** — to celebrate the hard work and dedication of foster parents with special banquets, picnics, evenings out, etc.
8. **Provide reduced-cost day care** — or participate in “foster mom day out” events through your church.
9. **Become a respite family** — give foster families a much-needed break by providing temporary care for their foster kids, which may involve overnight care.



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10. **Celebrate *National Foster Care Month (May)*** — foster care children need someone to care for and nurture them because of the crisis their families are experiencing. Pray for these children, the families who are involved in respite and foster care, and for the social workers who give so much time and energy for these kids

Ideas to help foster care children:

11. **Collect toys for birthdays or Christmas** — many children are placed in foster homes without their toys. A simple, heartfelt gift can mean a lot to them. For older youth, provide gift cards so they can purchase their own presents.
12. **Provide care packages throughout the year** — kids in foster care need all sorts of things you or I take for granted — like clothing, school supplies, a backpack, sports equipment, luggage, etc.
13. **Volunteer to tutor** — offering help with basic math, reading, writing, etc.
14. **Provide after school child care** — give foster care kids (and their foster parents!) a break by taking them to the park, jumping on the trampoline, playing board games, etc.
15. **Host a fun outing for a foster care child or the whole foster family** — like swimming at the pool, bowling, miniature golf, batting cages, or an age-appropriate movie). Always seek foster parent approval beforehand, and understand that a child's situation or trauma history may limit such activities.
16. **Host a special occasion party** — every child needs to be celebrated, but sometimes foster care kids are overlooked on their birthday or Christmas, or at other times of the year. Foster families may not have the resources to splurge. A simple holiday-themed party can be very meaningful for these kids and for foster parents.
17. **Sponsor a foster child through performing arts** — provide them with free lessons in music, dance, etc.
18. **Sponsor a foster child to summer camp** — attending a Christian camp can be life-changing for any child, but few foster care kids have this opportunity.



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19. **Become a mentor to older foster youth** — spend time with them and invest in their lives. For example, you might offer them a job where they can learn new skills and prepare for life as an adult.
20. **Become a foster parent** — foster care kids need to experience stable, healthy family life. There's a big need for families who are willing to take sibling groups (rather than split them up) or teenagers.