

Simple Tips for Foster Parents

By Keily Orellana

When kids talk about their foster parents, they often criticize them. Many foster parents have bad reputations, and many kids think that they're just doing it for money and not for us. Caring for a child is a hard job, but in another way, the things we need are pretty simple. Here's my advice to foster parents about how to treat a child who is coming into their home.

1. Help us feel safe.

When a child is put in a foster home, it's so the child can be in a safer home. Ever since I was put in foster care, I've felt like my foster mom opened the doors to her house for me to have another family. That makes her home a place where I feel safe and secure.

2. Help us settle into our new life.

Introduce us to your home and neighborhood. We're often placed in a home far from where we used to live and it's hard to get around when we don't know where we are. Go out with us and show us where the stores, laundromats, transportation, and other important things are.

3. Speak to us and listen to us.

Foster parents should be open with us. They should be willing to speak about anything we might have concerns about, and they should listen and take us seriously. We don't always need advice or judgment; sometimes we just need to be heard.

4. Make us part of your family.

In my foster home we are all a family. When the food is ready we all eat together, we go out together, and sometimes my foster mom even takes us with her to different states to visit her family. She introduces us all as her grandchildren, and her daughters introduce us as their nieces or nephews.

Making us feel like we're part of your family and not just the "foster kids" helps us feel more comfortable and happy in your home. At the same time, we have another family, too, so be respectful of that and be supportive; we may be dealing with a lot of mixed emotions about our family that don't always come out in the best way.

5. Help us be independent.

I think after a certain age foster parents should let us be more independent. They should give us money to go shopping on our own. They should let us travel alone (when it's safe) so we don't have to depend on others when we are grown. They should also let us have our own beliefs. Some foster parents have religious beliefs different from ours, and I think that is OK. Foster parents should not try to change us; they should accept our different beliefs.