

Foster Care as a Support to Families, Not a Substitute for Parents

LOVING AND LETTING GO

As foster parents, we hear the phrase “love and let go,” but do we really understand what exactly that means? I know I didn’t.

It was easy for my family to love our foster children so deeply and create caring and compassionate relationships with their biological families, even in the times that we didn’t agree or understand some of the decisions they had made. Yes, it was extremely frustrating at times, but everyone is unique, and sometimes our own decisions are difficult for others to understand even



when they make perfect sense to us. We have always believed that, as a foster family, we needed to do everything we could to try to have a good relationship with the biological families. This was the first family the children had known. Our foster children will always need them as a part of their lives. We were never meant to replace the biological families—only to help them.

I don’t think I could have ever prepared myself for the "letting go" part, though. A year and a half ago we took in a beautiful 4-month-old little boy, and I really didn’t expect to have him very long. You could tell that his biological family loved him very much and were hurting. Pretty soon, a few months went by. We were blessed to have the chance to teach him to crawl, watch his first steps, and hear his first words. We were so proud of him as he turned into such a unique, adorable little “doodle bug”—our doodle bug. Even though he was our doodle bug, he was never our Michael to keep forever. He has a family that loves him very much and wanted him back.

Then, the call came. The courts were going to place him with a family member. I thought, "Oh, no! Please don't take our doodle bug!" What if he thinks we abandoned him? What if he thinks that everyone he loves just leaves?

This pain was absolutely nothing we could have ever imagined or prepared for. For days, the tears just kept flowing, and I didn’t know how to stop them. I felt as if my feet were caught in cement. I couldn’t imagine life without him. I didn’t need to “keep” him. I just wanted some shred of hope that I would see him again and continue to be a part of his life.

I realized how truly important it was that we had kept a good relationship with his biological family. At this point, it was our only chance of seeing him again. I now understood the intense pain they must have felt after they had lost him a year and a half ago. I now understood what it

is like to lose a child and not know if you will ever see his smiling face again or hear his blessed laughter. How do you move forward? Fortunately, the family caregiver told us that he thought it was important for us to be a part of Michael's life.

We tell ourselves that "it's not about us, it's for the children" and that we want to help as many children as we can. We want to have a purpose for our lives beyond just for our own biological families and to teach our own children about sacrifice and caring deeply for others no matter what circumstances they are dealt. We all make mistakes, but we all have the power to overcome them and be forgiven. These are the lessons I want my children—foster and biological—to carry with them as they go through their lives.

I hope sharing what my family went through and the valuable lessons we learned may help other foster families. Do everything you can to strengthen your relationship with the biological families, especially for the child's sake. You will probably have to say good-bye to the child one day, but it doesn't always have to be forever.



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