

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

SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

My wife and I started fostering a couple of years ago because we didn't think we were doing enough to give back. My wife presented me with the idea because she remembered, when she was little, her babysitter had foster kids, and she didn't think they were treated very well. She knew we could do better. Teresa has three boys (my stepsons), and we hoped they would also realize the needs of others before their own. We presented them with the idea, and they seemed both nervous and excited—the same feelings we were having. Teresa and I went through all the training and were certified within about 4 months. We were ready!



We live in Colorado, so we love the outdoors. We ski and mountain bike mostly, but we enjoy our mountains any way we can. Teresa and I try to pass that love down to our boys, and we weren't going to change that no matter how many kids we had with us. We have taught nine kids to ski (including our own), and we have introduced them all to biking as well. Teaching kids to challenge themselves by learning something new is an important life skill. Some of our happiest moments have been seeing these kids push past their fears, experience success, and ultimately build confidence in themselves. It's important to celebrate the small wins in life.

When we signed up for foster care, we thought we would just be helping kids. Our biggest realization, though, is that the biological parents of these kids needed our support, too. Trauma can be a cycle that affects families for generations, and we found that we can positively impact that by helping, supporting, and mentoring some of these parents. We have had families over for holidays and birthdays, and we have mentored parents and families even when we didn't have their kids in our care. Like all of us, sometimes they got overwhelmed and just needed someone to talk to. Being involved in the families' lives, not just the children's, has been an unexpected bonus in our adventure.

It hasn't always been easy. There have definitely been times where we wondered if we were helping. We have had times of struggle, and since we have three younger boys in our house, we have had to tell a few kids that they couldn't live with us anymore when they became unsafe. That is not easy. We tell the kids that they will always be part of our family even if they don't live with us anymore. So far, we have kept in touch with all of them and talk or message them on a regular basis. We still care about them and can show them support even if they don't live in our

house anymore. It is important that they know that and that we show them that. Sometimes the most difficult times in life can be the most rewarding in the end. They are the times that you definitely grow from the most.

Our advice to those on the fence about foster care is to go do it. It doesn't always have to be a long-term placement, and the need is there. We have had kids from one night to over a year. You may get attached to the kids, and that's ok. That means you are doing it right!



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