

FOSTER CARE

Helping Children Through Grief

What do you do when a foster child is returning home? If you've had a foster child in your home for any length of time, you know how easy it is for foster parents to get attached. However, since reunification is always the original goal of foster care, what can a foster parent do when a foster child is returning home? Exactly how does a foster parent get over the feeling of loss?

10 Things to Do When a Foster Child is Returning Home

BY PENELOPE <https://foster2forever.com/2014/06/foster-child-returning-home.html>

1. Grieve! You will miss your foster child and always wonder how they are doing. Sometimes it takes time for our hearts to heal. It's hard for a foster parent to keep emotions in check all the time.
2. When the birth family agrees, maintain some connection to your foster children after they leave your foster home . . . that can make a huge difference!
3. Cry! Watch a sad movie to give yourself an excuse to cry. Remind your children that it is okay to be sad sometimes.
4. Take a time-out from foster parenting. If you need to, put things away that reminds you of your foster child for a while and give yourself time to heal.
5. Indulge yourself in what makes you happy. That could mean taking a vacation or a weekend getaway. You might treat yourself to a pedicure or massage. Or simply enjoy an indulgent meal/dessert with your family.
6. Spend some quality time with your forever children. Devote to family bonding time. Cling to and love the family in your home.
7. Keep yourself busy. Work on projects and throw yourself into painting a room, rearranging rooms or some other project with your forever family.
8. Make a memento of your foster child's stay. Make a photo album of your foster child. Add your foster child's photo to your wall. Make a Christmas ornament for each of your foster children.
9. Pray for your foster children and their families!
10. Foster a child {again}! Get ready for the revolving door of your foster home to open for the next hurting foster child. There are so many children in foster care that need a loving home.



*"It's hard to be a foster parent,
but even harder to be in foster care".*

-LFS foster parent

Coping With Loss: How to Help Your Child

by Katie Hurley <https://www.everydayfamily.com/blog/coping-with-loss-helping-your-child/>

Losing a grandparent or other close family friend is often a child's first true experience with death. Sure, they might have lost a goldfish or two along the way, but facing the loss of a loved one can feel like an impossible task for a child.

While children process loss in different ways depending on age, there are ways to help them work through their grief and process these very confusing and overwhelming feelings.

Be honest but brief:

Parents often wonder what to tell kids following a loss. Do we share the details? Do we talk around it and hope they stop asking questions? How do we proceed? The truth is that kids know what's going on around them. They might not be able to connect all of the dots, but they tend to be fairly intuitive when it comes to the emotions floating around in the home.

Give a brief but honest description of what happened. Do not get into the details, as too many details can be scary and lead to anxious thoughts. Take some time to prepare a script in your mind and repeat as necessary. Kids will often ask the same questions repeatedly as they process the loss.

Reassure them:

Children tend to jump to conclusions when it comes to loss. When you give a generic description that tells them Grandpa was old, so he died your child might very well worry that you are old and you will die next. Reassure your child that this is something that happened to Grandpa, not you.

Create a send-off:

While funerals and other services can be a beautiful family experience, they are often boring to children. Also, it's very confusing and unsettling to watch a room full of grown ups cry. While sharing your own sadness can normalize feelings for your kids, you need to be careful not to project your feelings onto your child.

Consider a kid friendly send-off instead. Write notes to your loved one and tie them to a bouquet of balloons in his or her favorite color, and then send them off into the sky (not green-friendly, but very powerful imagery for children). Plant a tree or bush in your yard and place a garden bench nearby as a place to remember your loved one.

Expect regression:

Loss is anxiety producing and difficult to process. While some kids might seem to lack any reaction at all, others might express opposite emotions (laughter can be a sign of confused emotions and/or anxiety). And many will show regressed behavior.

Bedwetting, difficulty sleeping through the night, baby talk, hitting and biting, and difficulty eating are all common.

*You might be temporary in their lives.
They might be temporary in yours.
But there is nothing temporary about the love or the lesson.*

Talk about feelings:

Check in with your child often. Talk about how it feels to lose a loved one. Be honest about how difficult it can be to say goodbye. Allow your child to verbalize her feelings openly and often without judgment.

Feelings faces posters can be very helpful for younger children that struggle to find the words for their feelings.

Help your child create her own scrapbook to remember her loved one. Let her choose the pictures and memories that are important to her, and help her write down the stories to describe the picture. It can be tempting to jump in and create the scrapbook for our kids, but when we let them put the memories together, it holds more meaning for them.

Share stories:

Memories help us remain focused on the positive, instead of thinking about the end. Share your favorite stories. Tell them over and over again. Look through old photos together and watch any videos you might have. A walk down memory lane can soothe the soul.

Make a scrapbook:

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Additional Resources

Articles -

"What I Wish Others Knew About How Foster Parents Grieve" - <https://www.adoptioninstitute.org/news/what-i-wish-others-knew-about-how-foster-parents-grieve/>

"How Can I Cope When My Foster Child Leaves?" - <https://adoption.org/can-cope-foster-child-leaves>

Books -

Foster Parenting 101: When a Foster Child Leaves by Dr. John DeGarmo

Children's Books -

The Invisible String by Patrice Karst

The Kissing Hand by Audrey Penn

Sad Isn't Bad: A Good Grief Guidebook for Kids Dealing with Loss by Michaelene Mundy

Healing Activities for Children in Grief by Gay McWhorter

Watch -

Inside Out - <https://whatsyourgrief.com/inside-out-offers-important-lessons-for-grieving-children-and-adults/>

*Remember, you did a good job.
Saying goodbye does not necessarily signify the end.
A seed buried in the dirt has the greatest potential to bloom.*

Tear Soup (There is a book that can go with the movie as well. It is called Healing Grief and Loss Activities book.)

Play -
Healing Hearts: A Game for Children about the Journey through Grief <https://www.playtherapysupply.com/games/healing-hearts--a-game-for-children-about-the-journey-through-grief>

The Talking, Feeling, and Doing Grief Card Game

Grief Jenga

Arts and Crafts ideas That Can Help Children Express Grief -

Puzzle Memorial

Memory Book

Memory Rock

Memory Ball

