



# Challenges Along the Way

Once a foster care ministry is launched, challenges inevitably arise. This article addresses common situations and possible solutions that may help you to navigate these issues.

## When a foster family declines a Care Community

Be sure you've given a clear explanation of how a Care Community works and ensure that the foster family fully understands the help they are declining. Let them know that you will be available in the future to form a Care Community for them if they change their minds.

## When foster families are slow to respond or late with contact information for their Care Community

Sometimes gathering this information can be challenging. Kindly remind them with periodic emails and phone calls. Once they have received a placement and may desire urgent help, gently let them know your ability to form a Care Community for them is dependent upon their timely responses.

## When there are not enough volunteers to cover a foster family in your church

If you are in relationship with other Fostering Family churches nearby, contact those Champions and see if anyone has "spare" volunteers. Sunday School classes, church "community groups" or Bible Study groups could serve a family together. Let them know the specifics of serving and the details of the local foster family. Also, contact existing volunteers who may know other contacts interested in serving a foster family.

## When a foster family or volunteer is unresponsive to the Team Leader

You, as the Champion, are the best person to intervene. A phone call, email or text from you may be rewarded with a response or shed light on new circumstances impacting their ability to respond. Reiterate that for a Care Community to function properly, regular communication is essential. Though not preferable, in the case of an extremely busy foster family, it is a possibility to reduce weekly calls to twice a month. On occasion you'll find it necessary to adapt to the needs and time constraints of the family you are serving. However, if a foster family remains unresponsive, you may have to withdraw the Care Community. The foster family may simply be too busy to provide enough details needed to organize support for them.

## When a foster family is in trouble due to a difficult placement

If you've exhausted the resources that JFS offers, look for extra respite possibilities and more frequent childcare assistance to allow the foster family a much-needed break. If the family is truly in over their heads, stand by them and support them through a disruption. Sometimes this is unavoidable, and they need someone who understands. The tutorial, *Walking A Foster Family Through A Disruption* can be found on the LTP Portal and is helpful for these situations.

## When a volunteer steps down

The most common reason volunteers leave? A lack of time. The second reason they step away is a feeling they are not making much of a difference. If this is the reason, you may be able to assign them to a different Care Community where they might be more involved with the foster family/children. Always try to find out why volunteers leave and always thank them even if they served for only a short amount of time.

## When a foster family is struggling with court decisions/JFS decisions

It is all too common that court decisions are hard to accept. Seemingly, children go home too early and sometimes when the birth family is not ready to properly accept them. In other cases, the court decisions continue to favor birth parents who are not making progress on their court-appointed plan. PRAYER is the best support we can offer for these foster families. Hold a prayer meeting before the court date. Set up a 12-24 hour prayer vigil around the court date; have everyone claim an hour to pray and get the entire church involved by encouraging 15-minute interval sign-ups. We often have no way to combat these hard decisions, but we can pray, pray, pray!

## When a foster family is grieving

Grief, on some level, is usually felt at the end of every placement. And, after a long or very trying placement, even more attention may be warranted. After the child(ren) leave, you can visit the foster family, pray with them, bring flowers, etc. Check in each week until you sense the family starting to move forward from their sadness. You may invite the foster mom out to lunch or for coffee, allowing her to share about the child(ren) and how much they are missed.

## When a foster family has financial needs

This is a hard area to address, as finances are generally considered a private matter. However, if a foster family is not able to financially carry the costs of their foster children until reimbursement, they may need to delay fostering until they are more financially secure. There are unforeseen circumstances that occur—illness, job loss, etc.—that may cause a family to become financially strapped. In these cases, lend a listening ear and consider involving the leaders at your church. Many churches have benevolence funds in place to help church families with unforeseen financial stress.