



Talking to Kids About Adding a Foster or Adopted Sibling to the Family

Ease in.

Start by talking in general terms about another child joining the family. Next share the many ways children join a family, including foster care and adoption. Then, share that your family may be adding a new sibling. When possible, allow your child to set the pace for sharing information and discussion.

Be honest.

Share age-appropriate information as soon as possible. Children often have built-in radar to a parent's emotions such as excitement and fear. Knowing the truth is better (and more accurate) than guessing.

Offer kid-friendly time frames.

Instead of saying the process will take two years, share that two birthdays will pass by. Or, instead of six months, say after you start kindergarten. When (and if) arrival dates are firm, use a big calendar and mark off days and weeks as a family.

Be the parent.

Make it clear that parents are responsible for making big decisions about foster care and adoption and caring for new siblings. Likewise, make it clear that you value your child's input and know they will, as a sibling, be VIPs in this new brother or sister's life.

Listen more than you talk.

Offer ongoing opportunities for your child to ask questions, give input and share feelings. As needed, engage their input with open-ended questions like-

- I'll need to wake up earlier and help three children get ready for school when our new brother arrives. How will having a new brother be different for you?
- Some days I'm excited about meeting our new foster sister and some days I'm a little scared. What about you?
- I'm dreaming about what it will be like to have two children. When you think about having a sibling, what do you imagine?

Include your child.

Together, read books about foster care and adoption. Take teens and older children to Orientation so they learn about the process first-hand. Encourage children to help prepare the house for a new sibling.

Network.

Get acquainted with other foster and adoptive families. Consider visiting a foster/adoptive support group or ask your case manager to make an introduction to a nearby family.

Reassure.

Remind your child that love grows to surround new family members. Share the story of how your love grew when he joined the family. Frequently remind your child of your love for him.

