



# TAPESTRY

## Be a Friend

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You're a friend. Someone who is trusted enough for a family to identify you as a support when they travel the journey of foster care or adoption. You want to help. You may have even considered fostering or adopting yourself, but any number of barriers has kept you from doing so. Nonetheless, you're excited about your friends starting down this path, and you really want to encourage them in any way you can! You just aren't exactly sure what you should or shouldn't say and what you should or shouldn't do.

Here's a quick reference guide for what to do and say with some warning signs intertwined so you can help your friends, and your friends can lean on you when they're in need.

**Be proactive.** Once a week, check-in to ask how you can help, and if a month goes by without any help being requested, cook a dinner you know their kids will eat and drop it on their front porch in disposable containers with a note of encouragement. When in doubt, impose a little help. Sometimes just not being alone is all that is needed.

**Be mindful.** Don't feel the need to go so far out of your way it seems burdensome to help, but if you're already at the grocery store, ask if there's anything you can pick up. If you're already mowing your lawn, what's one more lawn? If you're already planning to be home on a Friday or Saturday, offer to babysit so your friends can have a date or make it a double date! Little things make a huge impact.

**Be content.** You don't need to know why a child was removed, what their birth parents were doing or not doing, or any of the details of a child's case. If you're babysitting, you should ask, "Is there anything I need to know to make sure [the child] is safe and has fun?" If your friend offers more information about the child, keep it in confidence and respect the child's story.

**Be aware.** Children removed into foster care are wrestling with any number of traumatic experiences. They may be sensitive to being touched or hugged due to abuse or sensory processing issues, or they may be overly affectionate due to a lack of boundaries. Children may know expletives due to their environment or have language that is limited to just a few words due to neglect. Know that behavior is just what's on the surface. There's always a deeper cause. Avoid labels that describe them by their experience (i.e. foster kid). Give them personal space and expect the same in return. Remember every child is a developing child always learning and growing, and your words and actions can have an impact..

**Be normal.** Because these are your friends, you may be less likely to get tripped up in this area, but a lot of people who don't know a family like your friend's want to help. They tend to offer help in ways that are well-intentioned but may do more harm than good like throwing a birthday party or selecting things for a child that a child would normally pick out for himself. Birthday parties are great, but not when they're put on by strangers. Gifts are great, but not when they encourage entitlement or undermine dignity. Providing experiences is always better than giving stuff (i.e. museums/zoos vs. toys/clothes). You can help others find

normal ways to encourage your friends, too. Think about how you received and experienced things as a child or how your children experience life, and attempt to make this child's experience as much like that as you are able.

**Be alert.** If your friend's church attendance becomes rare, or if venting about a child or an inability to get on the same parenting page with a spouse become regular behaviors, realize these are warning signs that a season of additional support might be needed. Occasionally missing church is natural. Bunkering down at home most Sundays is not. Venting for 5-10 minutes is to be expected. Being unable to say anything positive about a child is not. Having disagreements with a spouse about parenting is normal. Complaining about how a spouse parents a child is not. Additional support may include bringing on some other friends to help for a time, increasing the amount of childcare help you offer, affirming your friend's decision to foster or adopt, or speaking truth compassionately amid an emotionally charged moment.

Again, you're a friend. Someone who was chosen to help. That means you've earned enough trust that they would want you to care for their children which is really the highest form of honor you can be granted, isn't it? This doesn't negate the fact that you can get busy with life too. You probably have work, kids, and obligations you have to tend to as well. Your friends get that. They just don't want to walk this path alone. So, whether you can remember all the details above or not... **be a friend.**