

Equipped to Love

Supporting Adoptive and
Foster Families in the Church

Facilitator's Guide

MODULE 1

“WHY” AND “HOW”

MODULE 1

Why children need adoptive families or a temporary home through foster care

- Reasons why children need adoptive families
- Reasons a child may need a temporary home through foster care

How to support and encourage adoptive and foster families

- What you can do to help

MODULE 2

Why interactions with these children need to look different

- What defines a child from a “hard place?”
- What are some potential effects of experiencing these hardships?

How to interact with children who have been adopted and children in care

- “Do’s and don’ts” in interacting with a child who has been adopted or a child in care—The “DON’TS”
- “Do’s and don’ts” in interacting with a child who has been adopted or a child in care—The “DO’S”

MODULE 3

Why these children act differently

- Understanding attachment (attachment cycle)
- Delays and differences

MODULE 4

How to meet the unique needs of the children

- Defining and responding to needs

MODULE 5

Why there is a need for overall sensitivity

- Sensitivity to emotional needs of adoptive and foster parents
- Sensitivity toward children

How to show sensitivity toward parents and children

- Language sensitivity
- Respecting boundaries

MODULE 6

Why there is a need for parenting differently

- Understanding differences
- Attachment Parenting vs. Traditional Parenting

How to help families in Attachment Parenting

MODULE 1

WHY CHILDREN NEED ADOPTIVE FAMILIES OR A TEMPORARY HOME THROUGH FOSTER CARE

CONNECT

Facilitator:

Welcome the group. Allow for introductions among group members, if necessary.

Prior to beginning this session, play the “Introduction” video.

Say: *Throughout the Scriptures, God commands His people to love and care for vulnerable children. This study is intended to help us as the Church to think intentionally about how we are caring for children from hard places within the life and work of our local churches. Before we dig into the “hows” of meeting these children’s needs, let’s take a look at the circumstances surrounding “why” these children are in need of care.*

VIDEO: Numbers

Ask: *“What are your observations after seeing the video? (allow for response)*

*“What are some of the things that “one” person can do to change the life of a child?”
(write the list of ideas on a whiteboard).*

Say: *“God has been up to something through His church. While the needs of orphans and vulnerable children around the world are vast, Christians are stepping up to confront the crisis in unprecedented numbers. Armed with an understanding that God has called His people out to care for orphans and vulnerable children as a picture of the gospel.*

The Church is also awakening to the reality that caring for orphans and vulnerable children is not just something for a select few within the church to do. Everyone has a role that they can play in putting the gospel on display by caring for children from hard places.

As more of the Church adopts and fosters children with loss and trauma in their pasts, it is increasingly evident that the needs of these children and their families can be complex and confusing. One significant way that the Church as a whole can make a difference and reflect God’s heart for the vulnerable is through understanding and adapting to the unique needs of children coming from hard places. Each of us can be that ONE Bible study leader or ministry volunteer that comes alongside these children and their families to support and love them as we lead these precious children to know and follow Jesus.

In reality, many of the things we can do to help require minor but intentional changes to how we act and react as we disciple these children. Throughout this training series, we will mention countless things you can do to meet the many needs of children, foster parents, and adoptive parents. These lists may seem overwhelming at times, but remember not to underestimate the power of even one small act or word. Do your best to implement what you learn, but do not expect yourself to do it all. Give yourself a break, do your best, and work to change one thing at a time.”

EXPLORE

Facilitator:

Ask: *“Why do children need adoptive families or a temporary home through adoption or foster care?” Give the group a couple of minutes to brainstorm answers. Lead a discussion through each of the following points for why children need adoptive families or a temporary home through foster care. Add any from this list that have not already been covered in the group’s responses.*

Reasons why children need adoptive or foster families

- **We live in a broken world in desperate need of a Savior.** This side of eternity is and will continue to be wrought with sin and struggle. The good news for the believer in Jesus Christ is that this is temporary. One day, our High King will return and will make everything right!
- **The most significant difference is that usually foster care placements are involuntary and are made at the discretion of a judge.** The judge must determine that there is no available relative to care for the child and/or the child cannot remain safely in the home of his parent(s). The child welfare department (Child Protective Services) helps every family and child in care set goals toward reunification and/or permanency for the child.
- **Birth parents that choose adoption are usually not prepared (emotionally, physically, financially, spiritually, and/or circumstantially, etc.) to fulfill the roles of a parent.**
- **Adoption is one way of meeting a child’s need to be parented and to have permanency within a family.** Foster care is a temporary placement of a child in a process that ideally leads to permanence. Foster parents do more than keep a child. “Parenting” a child is different from simply “keeping” a child. Almost anyone can “keep” a child, but parenting requires a lot more than meeting a child’s need for shelter!
- **There are countless reasons why children may come to need adoptive families.** These reasons are all rooted in the birth parent’s inability to care for or to parent the child. This inability could stem from various causes, or even a combination of multiple causes. These causes include but are not limited to: poverty, addiction, imprisonment, hospitalization, etc.
 - This inability to care for or parent the child could...
 - Lead to a birth parent choosing adoption.

- Result in abandonment. This does not whatsoever automatically mean that the birth parent did not love or care about the child. This could be an act of utter desperation or a strategic effort by the birth parent to put the child in a position where he will be found by someone who could meet the child’s needs better than the birth parent feels like he/she can.
- Be determined by the court system. Sometimes, foster care does not work the way it is intended to (goal is reunification with birth family) and the birth parent’s rights are involuntarily terminated by the court, thereby resulting in the adoption of a child who was previously in foster care.
- Result from the death of the birth parent. This is especially common in international adoption.

Say: *We can see that the reasons that bring children to need to be adopted or placed in foster care are difficult and complicated. Adoptive and foster families know how hard it is to live in the difficulty, but they do it willingly to serve Christ and to love these children no matter how hard it is. God has given us the gift of community in His Church to support us not just in the hard times but in all times. So as a community, how can we support and encourage adoptive and foster families well? Let’s watch this video and see.*

Distribute copies of the Listening Guide (Module 1, Handout 1) and play the video entitled: “How to Support and Encourage Adoptive and Foster Families”.

APPLY

Once you have completed watching the video, ask questions to the entire group and allow some time for responses from the group.

- How does knowing about the “hard places” many adopted children and children in foster care come from change how we think about ministering to them in the church? How does it change how we minister to their families?
- How would you imagine that we could change our environment to better care for these kids and their families?
- What type of skills and abilities are present in our church that could meet needs for these kids/families?

Next, divide the group into smaller groups of 2 or 3. Pass out notecards to the groups with the following three questions.

- What ministries already exist in our church to meet these needs? How could those ministries be adapted to better care for adoptive and foster families?

- What resources does our church family have that are not already being used to address one of the needs we have just identified? How can we mobilize those resources to help?
- What are the next steps for accomplishing a ministry to adoptive and foster families in our church?

Give each group time to discuss all three questions and then allow each group to share one ministry that they could adapt or one resource that they could use to help adoptive and foster families. Challenge the entire group to form a plan to put their ideas into action.

PRAY

- Pray for children who are in difficult circumstances right now, those who do not yet have a home through adoption or do not have a temporary safe place through foster care. Pray that the Lord would guard and protect their hearts and lives.
- Pray for adoptive and foster families to feel supported and encouraged by their church family.
- Pray for those receiving this information – that they would be mobilized to show support and offer encouragement. Pray the Lord would reveal creative, consistent ways to do so.

MODULE 1

Facilitator Listening Guide

How to Support and Encourage Adoptive and Foster Families

1. Encourage.
 - a. Encourage with your words.
 - b. Encourage with your actions.

2. Connect.

3. Assist with household tasks.
 - a. Cooking
 - b. Cleaning
 - c. Running errands
 - d. Shopping
 - e. Laundry
 - f. Yard work
 - g. Bringing meals

4. Provide financial and material needs.
 - a. Clothes
 - b. Diapers
 - c. Shoes
 - d. Car seats
 - e. Cribs
 - f. Baby gates
 - g. Outlet covers

5. Provide care for their children.
 - a. Run school carpool
 - b. Take or pick up from activities
 - c. Spend focused and special time
 - d. Provide tutoring or mentoring

6. Ask questions.
 - a. Ask how parents are feeling and adjusting.
 - b. Ask how attachment is progressing and how you can help at that time.
 - c. Ask what may help them feel more supported.
 - d. Ask what THEY want to talk about and then be available and full present to listen.

7. Look to parents for guidance.

8. Read and educate yourself.
 - a. Read books and articles.
 - b. Attend conferences.

9. Celebrate small and large victories.

10. Pray.
 - a. Pray the children will experience healing.
 - b. Pray for the children to know and trust that Christ is their hope and salvation.
 - c. Pray that the parents are able to continually look to God as their source and their sufficiency.
 - d. Pray for supernatural strength when these parents are weary.
 - e. Pray for wisdom when they feel overwhelmed and do not know the best way to respond to their child.
 - f. Pray for encouragement and perseverance when they feel discouraged.
 - g. Pray for yourself.

MODULE 1

Participant Listening Guide

How to Support and Encourage Adoptive and Foster Families

1. _____.
 - a. Encourage with your _____.
 - b. Encourage with your _____.

2. _____.

3. Assist with _____ .
 - a. Cooking
 - b. Cleaning
 - c. Running errands
 - d. Shopping
 - e. Laundry
 - f. Yard work
 - g. Bringing meals

4. Provide _____ and _____ needs.
 - a. Clothes
 - b. Diapers
 - c. Shoes
 - d. Car seats
 - e. Cribs
 - f. Baby gates
 - g. Outlet covers

5. Provide _____ for their _____ .
 - a. Run school carpool
 - b. Take or pick up from activities
 - c. Spend focused and special time
 - d. Provide tutoring or mentoring

6. _____.
 - a. Ask how parents are feeling and adjusting.
 - b. Ask how attachment is progressing and how you can help at that time.
 - c. Ask what may help them feel more supported.
 - d. Ask what THEY want to talk about and then be available and full present to listen.

7. Look to parents for _____.

8. _____ and _____ yourself.
 - a. Read books and articles.
 - b. Attend conferences.

9. _____ small and large _____.

10. _____.
 - a. Pray the children will experience healing.
 - b. Pray for the children to know and trust that Christ is their hope and salvation.
 - c. Pray that the parents are able to continually look to God as their source and their sufficiency.
 - d. Pray for supernatural strength when these parents are weary.
 - e. Pray for wisdom when they feel overwhelmed and do not know the best way to respond to their child.
 - f. Pray for encouragement and perseverance when they feel discouraged.
 - g. Pray for yourself.