

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Miriam Adler of the Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

Q. Dear Miriam

Our daughter and son-in-law have two children. They have recently taken a foster child into their home. While we feel this is a mitzvah, we are having difficulty knowing how to act toward the child. He is 3 years old and came from a difficult home situation.

On one hand, we would like to be grandparents to this child, but on the other hand we know he might not stay and getting close to him would be painful if he left.

Also, on some level, we feel that we are being unfaithful to our two grandchildren.

We don't feel comfortable bringing up these concerns with my daughter and her husband because we are afraid they might misunderstand our feelings.

Do you have some ideas about how we can handle this situation?

In A Dilemma

A. Dear In A Dilemma,

You should not feel guilty or uncomfortable about your feelings. I am sure your children did not become foster parents without considering some of the same issues.

I think it would be helpful to ask your children for some guidance about how you should connect to this child.

You do have a different relationship to this child than to your grandchildren, but that does not stop you from caring about him to the greatest extent possible. Don't forget that he is probably coming into your children's home with his own loyalties to his family even if they didn't or weren't able to care for him properly. Foster parenting is not about expecting a child to join your family as if he was always there. It is about offering a safe and caring environment for as long as necessary.

What this child will learn is that there are parents and grandparents who respect all members of the family and treat them fairly. Your grandchildren are being given an opportunity to learn what it is like to help another person. They will see your caring and attention to that child as a model for their own behavior.

• • • •

Q. Dear Miriam,

My husband and I have been talking about sharing our home with foster children. I am really excited about this prospect, but my husband is not so enthusiastic. He said that he would do it if I really wanted to.

I was wondering, if in your experience, have you found that if a couple has foster children that the less receptive partner becomes more involved and enthusiastic as she mentors the children?

Potential Foster Parents

A. Dear Potential Foster Parents,

The decision to apply to become foster parents is a serious one. Children in need of foster care have already been through some tough times. It should not be used to meet one's own needs.

The process itself can be rigorous so that it screens out inappropriate candidates.

You should be able to find an orientation in your community conducted by the Department of Social Services. You and your husband might go to an orientation to find out more about the program. Perhaps it will help your husband identify what he is reluctant about, and to understand that he has to be as involved and committed as you are.

However, it is not wise to proceed unless both of you are independently ready to start the process.

• • • •

Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsnny.org or call 518-482-8856.

ask Miriam-051806-mm...p.1
93p