

# FOSTER/ADOPT PRIDE

*“The love of family is life’s great blessing.” —Unknown*



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### A family with a big heart

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## ABOUT US

PRIDE is developed and published by UALR/MidSOUTH.

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Feature story courtesy of Sarah Stokes, Foster Parent Trainer

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

### Nothing Temporary About Love

*“You might be temporary in their lives. They might be temporary in yours. But there is nothing temporary about the love or the lesson.”*

—Tonia Christle



*“If you can dream it, you can do it”*

—Walt Disney

Bryan and Kassie Atwood have been foster parents for two years. They have two birth children, Chandler and Kinley. When asked their reason behind fostering, Kassie replied, “I was a CASA volunteer before becoming a foster parent and felt I had the time, energy and compassion to give more. My husband has a big heart, also, and agreed so we started the journey to serve the children of our state.” They currently have two children placed in their home.

The family loves Jesus and lives their lives in ways to honor Him daily. They always listen to worship music on K-Love in their car. They had been fostering a two year old for the past eight months. They were in the car and he started singing a song that came on the radio. Kassie realized at that moment he was speaking the word of God over his life through this worship song.

Kassie stated, “This is something that will stick with him even when he is no longer with us, and it lets me know that our everyday actions and habit have a lasting impact on these children.” She realized they have the power to love these children no matter how long they are in their home. They loved with their hearts and believe the foster child was filled with love when he left the Atwood’s foster home. This is their goal with every child who enters their home. (cont’d on page 2)

Bryan stated, "I love the moment when you can see a breakthrough. When abuse makes a child withdraw into themselves and not make eye contact. The moment when your love clicks and they trust you. They smile when talked to and will look you in the eyes. Yes, that is an impactful moment that I will not trade."

Chandler said one memorable moment she had while doing foster care was taking the kids on vacation. "We have gone several places with our babies and I love getting to watch them experience things for the first time. Being a foster sister is amazing. It teaches me many things and shows me countless things about love and sacrifice. It shows me how to love kids and teach them what love is. Being a foster sister doesn't happen to everyone but I'm so glad it happens to me."

When asked what it's like being foster parents, the Atwoods replied, "Being a foster parent is the most rewarding and yet at the same time a very difficult hat to wear. We chose to foster because we wanted to see children's lives changed. When you are called you can't forget the calling when times get tough."

Kassie Atwood has a support group for foster parents in Jefferson County. Kassie pointed out they are willing to help any county. This support group is called Chosen The support group is where foster and adoptive families join together to serve children. The scripture that was selected for the group is Ephesians 1:11, "Because we are united in Christ, we have received an inheritance from God, for he chose us in advance and makes everything work out according to his plan."

Chosen provides breakfasts periodically and one continuing education credit will be given if you attend. They plan to help DCFS with different events that will benefit children waiting for forever families in Area VII. Some ideas they have are couple's night out, mom's night out, a banquet and any other ideas they come up with. If someone wants to contact Bryan and Kassie Atwood, they can call them at 870-489-3078, or email Kassie at katwood78@gmail.com for more information about Chosen.

In regards to advice that Bryan and Kassie would give to current or future foster parents, "If you don't have a support system, get one." Kassie stated, "Sometimes you get tired. If you don't have people surrounding you that can help, you will forget why you were called. You are not always going to agree with what happens in your cases and that's okay; but when your emotions are in play it can get messy. Step back and take some breaths. Proper and respectful communication with the parties involved can make this process so much easier."

Kassie's biggest advice, "Stay in your lane. Everyone has a job. Your job is to provide a safe and loving environment for children for the time said by the state. Don't try to do your caseworker's job or the judge's job or an attorney's job. It will only complicate things."

A final thought from Kassie, "My lane is awesome. My lane is a place my family loves to travel. I don't want to be in anybody else's lane because then I wouldn't get to tuck little ones into bed or read a book a thousand times or get to hear, 'Hey, guess what? I love you,' and him smile his million dollar smile. My lane is another place where the only thing that matters is the child. The day they come in, it is about the child. Court day is about the child, staffing days, therapy, doctors' appointments, supervised visits, and the countless other days we run around in circles are about the child. And of course, the day they leave, it is about the child. Serve them well because they will remember."



## 5 tips to get ready for the last days of school

The last days of school can stretch the family budget and stress the savviest parents. But with a little planning, you can relax and enjoy the season of school plays, class parties and graduations. **Research has shown that those who leave care without being linked to forever families have a higher likelihood than youth in the general population to experience homelessness, unemployment and incarceration as adults.**

The last weeks of the school year can stretch the stamina and budget of any parent.

You and your child will want to say thank you to the adults who have helped your child learn and grow this year, from the classroom teacher to the soccer coach and the bus driver. But the cost of all those individual gifts adds up fast.

You'll want to attend the class play and band recital, and figure out a way to get your child to all the rehearsals. You'll almost certainly be asked to bake cookies for the class party.

You and your child will probably also have questions about the coming school year: Will the teacher be a good match for your child? Will your child's best friend be in the same class?

Add a little anxiety about summer plans that are still coming together and you've got a recipe for stress.





# The Importance of a Foster Parent's Forgiveness - An Act of Love

One evening a few years ago, as we were getting ready to sit down for dinner, my wife and I took a phone call from our child welfare agency. At that time, we had a personal policy of only fostering children who were no older than our oldest child. This was the first time (of many later on!) that we broke this family rule. At that time, our oldest was ten years old, and the child in need was a thirteen year old boy, abandoned by his mother. After some prayer time together, I called the case worker back and told her that we would take the child, on the condition that he would have to leave our home if he were to cause any problems or be a negative influence upon our own children. Both my wife and I were a little hesitant about taking in a teen aged boy, and were concerned that it might not work out for the best for our family.

When the teenager arrived, I was taken aback at how scared and frightened he was. He looked like a deer in headlights, and was obviously terrified about his situation and his surroundings. My wife and I felt so very sad for him, and tried to comfort him as best as we could. Yet, perhaps the saddest thing about his situation was how he came into care. His mother had abandoned him under a highway overpass outside of a very busy Atlanta, Georgia. Apparently, his mother had pulled the car over to the side of the road, asked him to get out and get something out of the car's trunk, and then sped off, leaving him alone. When he arrived at our house the next evening, he was nervous, afraid, embarrassed, heartbroken, and anxious. He said very little to us, except to note

that his birthday was the next morning. As Kelly and I lay in our bed late that evening, we could hear him cry himself to sleep.

I felt anger towards his mother; outraged that she could abandon her own son on a busy highway; outraged that she did so just before his birthday. My stomach churned with anger, and the emotion clouded my outlook on everything else. It took my wife to remind me that I was not here to judge others, and that the mother had probably suffered from some sort of trauma in her own life. After some time in thought and prayer, I was able to forgive her, which helped me, as well.

Love and forgiveness are two actions that are intertwined, and cannot be separated. If we truly are to love these children who come into our homes, then we need to forgive their family, as well. Without forgiveness, there is no love. When I was angry towards our foster teen's mother, I was in no way sharing love. Instead, my stomach was in knots, and I was one tense parent. I was shackled by my own inability to forgive someone, a prisoner to a debilitating emotion. Yet, when I did forgive her, it felt like a weight was taken off my own shoulders. One of the amazing things about the act of forgiving others is that it allows us better use our energies, and our words, towards something that is more constructive, more positive. To be sure, our words have power, and our children need to us to use these words in positive and healing ways. Forgiveness frees us from the forces of stress, hate, and evil. When

we forgive the actions of our foster child's birth parents, not only are we showing love to them, and empowering ourselves, we are also honoring our foster children. Remember, these children, despite the many forms of abuse they have been subjected to, still love their mommies and their daddies.

As a foster parent, it is important to remember that our foster child's biological parents are people in need, and they deserve our kindness and sympathy, not our anger. By working with them, and by showing them kindness and compassion, you will not only help them, you will teach your foster child an important lesson in love and humanity, and help them in their own path in life.

-Dr. John

## About the Author

*Dr. John DeGarmo is a foster care consultant, author, speaker, and most importantly, a foster and adoptive father. He has been a foster parent for 14 years, with over 50 children coming through his home. He is the author of many books, including the book Faith and Foster Care: How We Impact God's Kingdom.*





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## Foster Care

Many of America's child welfare systems are badly broken — and children can suffer serious harm as a result. Some will be separated from their siblings. Others will be bounced from one foster care placement to another, never knowing when their lives will be uprooted next. Too many will be further abused in systems that are supposed to protect them. And instead of being safely reunified with their families — or moved quickly into adoptive homes — many will languish for years in foster homes or institutions.

- On any given day, there are nearly 428,000 children in foster care in the United States.
- In 2015, over 670,000 children spent time in U.S. foster care.
- On average, children remain in state care for nearly two years and six percent of children in foster care have languished there for five or more years.
- Despite the common perception that the majority of children in foster care are very young, the average age of kids in care is nearly 9.
- In 2015, more than half of children entering U.S. foster care were young people of color.
- While most children in foster care live in family settings, a substantial minority — 14 percent — live in institutions or group homes.
- In 2015, more than 62,000 children – whose mothers' and fathers' parental rights had been legally terminated – were waiting to be adopted.
- In 2015, more than 20,000 young people aged out of foster care without permanent families. Research has shown that those who leave care without being linked to forever families have a higher likelihood than youth in the general population to experience homelessness, unemployment and incarceration as adults.
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<http://www.childrensrights.org/newsroom/fact-sheets/foster-care/>

