

Uncertain Motherhood

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There are mothers who you may not pay much attention to as you walk down the street or stand behind them in the grocery store line. They look ordinary, like any other mother who cares for her children, but there's something different. These women have chosen to love, nurture, and care for children who came to them out of need. These are mothers who are able and willing to welcome children into their arms and homes, uncertain of how long they will stay or what their future will hold.

Stop and think about what it would be like to bring a child into your heart knowing well that you most likely will say good-bye one day before the child is fully grown. A foster mother understands this, and yet is willing to do what's needed for the benefit of a child she may not have in her care for long. Motherly love can be a healing force for children who have been mistreated or neglected or suffered trauma or loss.

Some foster moms become an adoptive parent, and can offer a child a "forever home," but many tolerate the temporary nature of their commitment knowing that children wish for a lasting and secure family. The road is never easy for the parents who work to provide the love and structure every child deserves, and for the child who is grieving the past and learning to trust that there is a place for them. Some children will go back to their families to reunite after a crisis is over and time has allowed the adults to regroup and rebuild their lives.

For all mothers there is uncertainty, from the challenges of feeding a young child, to picking the right childcare provider, to knowing when to say "no" even when a child is angry. Anyone who cares for children knows how easy it is to feel insecure when making day-to-day decisions. For most foster mothers uncertainty is accepted, and in spite of it, they learn to put a child's feelings first, and face the challenges as they come.

To understand the dedication of foster mothers we look to the dictionary. The definition of foster is:

To feed; to nourish; to support; to bring up; to cherish; to promote the growth of; to encourage; and to sustain.

These values remind us of the responsibilities all mothers and mother figures carry on their shoulders, and the clarity of what all children need.

And so the uncertain motherhood experience of caring for a foster child requires someone who is compassionate and able to offer support and a safe environment under stressful circumstances.

Think about what it would take for you to be a foster mother. If that's not an option for you, consider reaching out to a foster care agency in your community to thank the mothers who are uncertain of some aspects of their family life, yet are certain of their desire to be of service to children.

And to the foster fathers doing this heroic work, we also thank you!

For information about Healthy Foster Care America visit <http://www.aap.org/fostercare/>.

