

Spotlight on Quality

Beth & Jeremy Howard Quality Foster & Adoptive Parents

The journey of adoption is not without its share of ups and downs. The bond between a parent and a child who wants and needs the love, stability and guidance of a forever family ultimately realizes itself. The ties that bind a family together take time and patience, but it's totally worth it, according to Beth Howard. This month, in honor of National Adoption Month, she tells us her firsthand account of adoption, which wasn't the first choice for her and her husband, Jeremy.

"All of our plans changed when we were made aware of a seven-year-old girl who needed an adoptive family," Beth said. "I will never forget the day that our daughter came home to us."

Here's Beth's story, in her own words.

When my husband and I became licensed foster parents we hoped to reunify families. Our intention was not to adopt although we were open to it. All of our plans changed when we were made aware of a seven-year-old girl who needed an adoptive family. I will never forget the day that our daughter came home to us. We made a welcome banner and cupcakes, blew up balloons and had a small celebration. I was so nervous, for all of us, but mostly for her and her little heart.

She made herself at right at home and told me, "You're my mom now!" My biological kids cringed at a perfect stranger calling me mom; I smiled and pretended it wasn't weird and my husband busied himself with our youngest child. She hated the cupcakes; picked a fight with her new sister and let me know I spelled her name wrong on the banner. All and all it was a perfect foreshadowing of the challenges to come.

We made many mistakes in the months that followed trying to blend our new family. We had raised our biological children according to our morals and values and encouraged them to be kind and loving. They didn't have a difficult time following our rules because they trusted us.

Our new daughter did not have a stable nurturing childhood. In her first family she learned how to survive and that she could only depend on herself. She knew instinctively how to manipulate to stay safe and to get what she needed.

When she came to live with us there were many lies and tremendous tantrums. I was shocked when I began to see my biological children act so mean to their new sister. They were unforgiving and didn't understand why she didn't have the same consequences as they did. We truly learned what compassion and empathy were as we had to live it every single day.

Despite our training we felt unprepared for our new normal. We were not used to case managers coming by unannounced, PSR/BST workers in our home, calls from the school because our child wasn't behaving, weekly therapy appointments, visitation, or living with trauma every day.

We had to grieve the loss of our old life, and embrace our new one. Every aspect of our life was turned upside down. Close friends couldn't understand why we decided to expose

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our biological children to such chaos, even our parents were disapproving of our new family.

The first year was difficult. We held on for dear life and sought help anywhere we could find it. We developed a strong support team of other foster parents who understood the struggle. We were so fortunate to have a wise therapist set up support sessions separately from my daughter, for my husband and myself.

We were so focused on her behavior that we didn't recognize that her behaviors were much of her processing her past trauma and grieving the loss of her first family. She was trying figure out how to accept her new family, her new rules, and her new normal.

We didn't expect her grief to last for so long. My husband and I tried unsuccessfully to change our daughter until we realized we were the ones who needed to change. We had to change our expectations. We had to become experts in NOT TAKING THINGS PERSONALLY.

I am happy to report my seven-year-old wild child is now sixteen. She has forgiven us for all the mistakes we made when she was younger. She and her older sister have an actual friendship. They share clothes and makeup and their disdain for our family's oppressive rules on dating!

My beautiful, kind, intelligent, strong, loving, and capable daughter has a job, plays sports and sings in the choir. She asks for our help when she needs it. She has accepted us as her mother and father. While her past will forever be a part of her life she now shares her present with us.

My husband and I have gone on to adopt more children. We understand now that it is not about us and our expectations. Every child deserves a family that will never give up on them; to be able to learn positive values and morals and how to be loving and kind. Adoption has made us stronger individually and brought us closer as a family.



Beth Howard, pictured here with husband Jeremy, is a mediation specialist for Clark County's Department of Family Services. Beth is a foster parent and a member of DFS's Foster Parent Champions.