

Episode 3 - Should i be a foster parent? Part 2 Transcript

Jack:

So should we talk about some of the positive rewarding things about having foster kids in your home.

Cat:

Yeah, absolutely.

Jack:

Can I start by saying, It is so fun.

Cat:

It is so much fun, and I'm not a foster parent myself because I work in the child welfare system, but I get to be around kids all the time, and foster kids are so much fun.

Jack:

You know what else is fun about foster kids a lot of them haven't experienced things some other kids have. So getting to experience that with them is so cool and like, it's like going to Disney World with them sometimes just bringing them to certain stores or, like, my girl's mom is maybe a little annoyed that I got them hooked on Starbucks because she is like "They're killing my wallet every time they come home they went to Starbucks"... but you know the first time I took them they were so excited.

Cat:

That is so funny. Well you know and and I have biological children and they have gotten more wonderful experiences out of being around foster kids things that I never could have given them like organically they've gotten, you know, they've gotten experience with infants and infant care and they've gotten experience with race relations that I never could have given them. I mean they are strong advocates for Black Lives Matter, and these are things I never could have given, given them as a Caucasian person who can just talk to them. They are fierce advocates for smaller people, you know, and, Oh my gosh, they love your children, and oh my gosh they love a baby, any baby.

And you, you've got success stories and you know I love this because, you know, all people, developmentally when they get to the end of their life, they're always looking back

thinking, What have I done. What have I done to help the world what have I done to help someone else can I look back and find anything, right, that I've done to make a difference. And you're gonna be able to look back and say I have done so much to make a difference in this world.

Jack:

I mean, I hope so, but like, you know, I think that the cool thing is you get so much out of it too, whatever we're doing, like, we get so much enjoyment out of it but like, like seeing success stories that is definitely one of the biggest positives about being a foster parent because they may be few and far between, but when people radically change their lives. And like change the whole course of like, you know, I'm not gonna do drugs anymore, I've been clean for this many years now, I, you know, I've changed the way I parent. Their kids are going to have kids that aren't going to experience the same thing because one of the things we see so much in the foster care system is the repetition of mistakes that their parents.

So, like, you know, most of my kids' parents were in foster care when they were little, and they were abused and their parents were abused and there's like this vicious cycle.

So when we actually see like a success story where people actually change - because sometimes kids get reunified and there aren't as many changes - but when you actually see the big changes yeah and you know that's like, that's like for years and generations to come, is gonna it's gonna make a difference that changes the entire trajectory.

Cat:

And you know when you see, like, I screw up all the time, all the time we all do, but if you can say, I screwed up. I don't, I hurt my child and I do, I do. I don't we all make mistakes, we all screw up our kids, my kids, my kids will grow up and they'll be like, Why does my mom do this to me or my mom did that or whatever.

Jack:

I can't believe my mom taught me to swim but throwing me in the deep end.

Cat:

Seriously. However, when a parent can say, I screwed up. My kids suffered because of what I did. I will never do that again and this is how I've changed my life to make sure I never do that again. I think we've all had these experiences where we're like, oh my gosh I can't believe I did X Y and Z. I don't ever want to hurt my child in that way again, sometimes on a small scale sometimes on a large scale but when you see someone do that and then make

the changes, it's incredible, amazing, and then to know that the trajectory of their life will be so different....

Jack:

And their kids life and their grandkids life and then it's like, that's huge. So being able to like, like you read about these stories about things that happen to kids in the news, but being actually part of helping the kids and sometimes even helping the parents, fix stuff is like the best hands down, absolute best part of foster care.

You know, I love that I have grown my family through foster care, like, my kids are my world, but seeing families change, is it just blows everything out of the water.

Cat:

I mean I've never done it but, like I absolutely love your kids, but I also absolutely love your kids that are being reunified to you, although we're going to be devastated when they go home. My daughter is. Those are some of her best friends in the whole world. Yeah, but we're so happy for them. Absolutely.

Jack:

So, you know, one of the other things is you get to help, which is kind of part of success stories you get to see the success story, but you also get to help with a success story. I think this is important too because there's no difference between myself and someone who is in that situation, except I didn't get caught, right, doing something that I feel like we all are make bad choices, like, okay, so a lot of people have tried drugs in their life, but some people, they try it once and they get addicted. Or, you know, just stuff like that, like, I'm so glad that I never got tempted or was around people that did certain drugs that I never got hooked on anything, and really never really did any

Cat:

Exactly like I had, you know, I have my own trauma, but I didn't have the addictive features that caused me to immediately become addicted to something right, that caused me to get my kids taken away.

Jack:

Right I am no different. It's really just like by circumstance or luck or genetics or whatever, that puts me in this position, and some somebodies mom right and the other position right. There's so many factors, we just, we were lucky.

Cat:

Yeah, absolutely. And so, and we had, you know, I personally think that, you know I had a lot of help, and a lot of assistance growing up and especially my early, and it's so nice to be able to help in return.

Jack:

So, you know, I think a big positive for being a foster parent is getting to help with those success stories. And, you know, sometimes you do get to adopt like sometimes. And you know what I always tell people when they're talking about adopting from foster care is that, you know, obviously it's not the goal of foster care is not to have these kids adopted it is to return on to their families. Once that can be done safely.

However, there are children who do end up needing to be adopted. And, at least in my case like when, when I met my first son that I adopted through foster care actually, when they put this baby in my hands, it was like, I knew right away he was my kid and I know you remember I would tell people all the time if they try and take this kid away, I'm gonna have to run to Canada.

He's my kid and I would die I wouldn't be able to breathe if I didn't have him.

Cat:

It was like a crisis, no it was it was a crisis until they finalized yeah and that took way too long, but it was ridiculous.

Jack:

I think that that was just like one of those situations where it was like it was meant to be and I knew he was my kid.

So, the goal was to reunify him with his family, but that clearly wasn't something that could happen safely anytime in the near future. So, we were able to adopt him and so him along with his brother and sister, you know, has brought us to a family of six permanently.

And so, that obviously is one of the hugest blessings for my family for being foster parents is like, you know, without being foster parents, I wouldn't have my little boy and my other little boy and my little girl, and I'm very thankful for that.

Cat:

And they are just like total delights. I mean, they're kind of amazing, they really are. Seeing the transformation is really rewarding watching kids grow. And yes, so rewarding.

Jack:

Yeah, I think when kids first come to your house, you know, obviously, you have that period where it's like they're just terrified, and you're not really seeing who they really are yet, but then when you see who they are. And, you know, a lot of them do have a lot of trauma and struggles and stuff like that. And then, because, you know, even outside of like medical intervention and therapy and stuff like that. Just being in a normal safe home with parents who are loving on them. That in and of itself makes huge changes in these kids. And so sometimes just like seeing how they are as human beings from when they come to you to when they leave and not that you're anything special, you're totally normal. Like, there's nothing special about me and my husband I mean, this sounds like something special about my husband but there's nothing special about me other than I've made a choice to do this with my life, right, to parent, other people's kids up to, there's nothing special about me, but just being a normal parent who you know has the advantage of, you know, living a certain life where I you know I don't have addiction problems or mental disorders or anything like that that I'm able to provide them with that data alone just like makes a big difference in who these people are and, you know when they start to feel safe and comforted and loved how they grow as humans is like.

Cat:

It's amazing, and it's great and it's our choices who make us who we are. So, I mean it is, it makes you guys very special, but I've worked with a number of kids who came into care, and they're there, they've never had a haircut. Their hair was really short, and their skin was transparent, and they were, you know, Maybe they had weight problems or maybe they didn't, but this kid's rapidly transformed with just, I'm not even saying correction nutrition, I'm just saying,

Well, you do see a difference though, it's when they start eating vegetables like home cooked meals versus McDonald's all the time. Like they physically like their skin becomes more like, it's just not as transparent,

Jack:

Think about the little guy I have right now. How, when he first came. Well, you know, it's so different.

Cat:

Yeah, he's so different. He's just really thriving right now he's doing really great. I'm really surprised at how well he is doing. Developmentally is really impressive so yeah he's doing great and that's just being normal a normal family for him, and, you know, making sure that he's getting the right nutrition and.

Jack:

So do you think that since we're talking about some of these positive parts of being a foster parent, we should talk about some of the things that the foster parents I talked to this week, said was the best part of being foster parents, I do. Okay, so one mom answered that the best part of fostering is getting to love our babies, it's like we won the lottery. Oh, yeah, this this parents had seen parents succeed. Watching reunification happen, and the love that they have for their kids, and the effort that they put in to get them back, is commendable. Being part of the support system is an honor and I would say like yeah because there's so much they have to do like watching this mom that's about to get her girls back that have been living in my house like, like she has to go to meetings all the time like she has to go to all these group meetings and individual meetings, she has to do all these therapies. You know, it's a lot of work, so I would definitely agree with that. So, this mom said the best part of fostering is seeing the restoration. The Restored hearts when a mom is able to conquer her addictions. When a child is able to move there their trauma, and a little bit of healing happens with each passing day. So seeing the restoration of lives and family, and trust when a child learns that they can trust us and feel safe with us, and the restoration of our own hearts when we feel a loss for each child that leaves. But she also she said the best part of fostering is the relationships we build with like minded people. So, I would agree that the relationships with other foster parents is a huge loving all of my littles watching kids grow and thrive.

Making a difference in a child's life and changing their trajectory, it's priceless. That some of the positives that the foster parents I talked to this week had to say.

Cat:

Yeah, do you want to talk about some of the cons of becoming a foster parent. I feel like we kind of did that at the beginning but let's review some of that stuff.

So people do have a lot of negative things to say about foster parenting, which really does not make doesn't make the problem go away, there's still just as many kids in foster care but we'll talk about them anyway, so people don't really understand foster care, and they have a lot of judgment. You know you get people who think that,

Jack:

Oh, if you're a foster parent, you're just doing it for money. And it's like, oh my gosh if you only knew like, you know, or that, or that like I'm I don't love them like my other kids are Don't, don't take care of them like my other kids are, you know, being a foster family generally you're larger, so when you go places you get a lot of looks. So I definitely think

you have to have tough enough skin to, You know handle people looking at you funny.

Cat:

I've had some foster parents who are people of color and they have white foster kids, and they've gotten some comments like, whose babies.

Jack:

Yeah, actually I saw something. This week on the board, where a black foster dad went to either drop off or pick up his white teenage foster daughter from school and had like a number of people come out and like question him like he was, you know, what was he doing here with this like little white girl and so yeah I definitely think you know you have to have tough enough skin to put up with some of that.

And, you know, if you're, if your focus is on the kids that after we adopted my oldest son, people would ask me sometimes like if we get looks and stuff like that because of the difference of our skin color. And I always say no I don't ever see any of that and then there were times where people were like you didn't see this person in a store looking at you guys, but I I'm just so like I always assumed it was because he's such a cute kid, or they're just like, you know, they're just looking at him because he's so yeah and I guess sometimes that wasn't always the case but my focus was so much on him that I wasn't really worried about what other people.

Cat:

And you know I could be wrong, but I do think it might happen more often and people of color because I work with a lot of different foster parents. And it's, I've only heard it from specific ones.

Jack:

Yeah, I definitely think that true.

Cat:

So also that dealing with the system is really difficult. I mean, my goodness, Yeah, I've worked with some situations where judges have made some calls that were really painful to follow through and if you don't follow through, then you're in contempt of court.

Jack:

Yeah, I definitely think, you know, you don't. Most people don't stop becoming foster parents because of the kids, most people stop being foster parents because they just get so annoyed at the system, frustrated with the decisions that are made for kids, the system's

not perfect, but it's what we have. So, you know, I, the way I look at it is, you know the system's gonna be the system whether I'm involved or not, but if I'm involved then maybe I can be helpful to the kids.

Cat:

The kids will always be there. Yeah, whether we're there or not. Kids will always be there. And people will have some bad stories to share that can be difficult to hear. Yeah.

Jack:

So, one of the things that we should consider when becoming a foster parent is that is a secondary trauma. So the kids coming into your home, they have trauma, and then you just being exposed to their trauma is going to give you trauma. So that's secondary trauma and that's why it's really important for foster parents to, you know, keep in check with their own emotional health, and make sure that you know when they're, when they're struggling with dealing with all that trauma because it's like, I mean I always think like, like think about a police officer, the stuff they see in their life. I can't imagine being a police officer, and having to have those pictures in your head all the time like, it's the hardest part of society that they're dealing with, so it's not quite that bad like we're not going into crime scenes and stuff like that, but having the children in your house that have experienced what they experienced, it's really hard sometimes on your heart I know, you know, in my experience, one of the hardest things that I've ever dealt with in my life was this little boy came to my house, and he might be the only one that I've had that had serious physical abuse, and the first day that he came to my house. I was giving him a bath, and he was covered head to toe and bruises, and I had been told that he had maybe been physically abused. But until you see it with your own eyes. I can't like... he had like finger marks around his neck where he had been choked and just head to toe, like this child like the first night he was there he dropped a cup, and he covered his face real quick like we were going to hit. And the minute I saw that I was like okay, and then, you know, later that that day I put them in for a bath, and, like, I will never get those images out of my head of seeing those bruises all over his body and his little neck. And, you know, that was traumatizing for me. I remember the first week he was with me, and I tried to be strong when he was around because I didn't want to upset him. But anytime he wasn't with me that week I was in tears, I was just so brokenhearted over what was done to that little boy.

Cat:

Yeah that's really hard and I'm not a foster parent, but about every three years or so I feel like I have a moment like that where I'm like, I can't do this. And then I just do

Jack:

I am glad you go back to it, because who else is going to, and we need trauma informed therapists so I'm glad that you don't go.

Cat:

So another negative about being a foster parent is when they leave, that can be hard.

Jack:

What I always try and do is just, like, focus on the positive like hey this family is getting reunified like hey, and one of the things that you know is to consider is that sometimes it's not as sad when they leave because some of these kids are really challenging. And as much as you're gonna miss them. I mean, to be perfectly honest, it might sound terrible but sometimes it's a little bit of a relief when they get reunified. Because, you know, it was difficult and challenging, and not that you don't love them and want the best for them but that, you know sometimes it's a little bit of a relief when they go home

Cat:

So yeah, not every child is for everybody, not everyone is a match, you know.

I want to help everybody and, and that there are some kids that are not my favorite kids and I do everything I can to help them but you know I can imagine that if they were in my home then. You know I would, I would do my best for them, but then there are some kids that I, that you know I absolutely could raise forever and love forever and so I would imagine that's probably the same for foster parents

Jack:

Yeah and I would say that this con can be avoided a little bit because if you create a relationship with their parents, then maybe when they leave, it's not like a goodbye, it's like, hey, I'll see you in a week, I know my girls that were reunified and had come back, you know, when they were reunified last time we saw them all the time, you know, we went to their birthday parties they came to ours.

You know, they would come over and stay for the weekend when their mom just needed like a little bit of a break, and we talked to them on the phone all the time so you know as long as you're creating good relationships with their parents, when that's possible, because obviously it's not always possible, then them leaving just means it's a different type of relationship.

Cat:

One of the other cons is that it costs money.

Jack:

So, you know, like we talked about that before, depending on where you live, some states like I hear what their stipend is and I'm like, holy cow like that kid could be spoiled rotten. Obviously I don't know what the costs are in that state but in Florida, you know, it will cost you some money to provide for those kids and make sure that they have everything that they deserve.

Cat:

And then, obviously the other negative is dealing with the behaviors that you're going to experience with some of these kids and, you know, some of them have been neglected and abused and around drugs and, you know, it may not even just be them acting out but just really just the exposure, like,

Jack:

Yeah, they know about things that they should have to know about

Cat:

So these things can be really frustrating such as you know kids stealing food from your pantry and eating them, eating the food you know like, something that you were planning to use for dinner the next day they might eat all of it and it can be something that you would never expect them to eat like cornmeal or apples...

Jack:

Or raw ramen.

Cat:

yes, or, you know, you can find lots and lots and lots of packages under their bed and you know you might think, oh that's not a big deal but you know it gets really old really fast, it can get really expensive too.

Jack:

Especially when you have kids who have eating issues and they'll eat what you had planned for like two or three different meals in the middle of the night while everybody's sleeping, and then you've got to like rebuy that stuff all the time.

Cat:

Yeah and I think Jack had a child who drank like an entire cup full of the Starbucks flavor syrup.

Jack:

She did.

Cat:

So, imagine how gross that must have tasted

Jack:

But like listen, that Starbucks syrup... it's expensive

Cat:

So expensive.

Jack:

You're supposed to just use a few pumps yeah yeah so gross.

Cat:

Yeah, definitely. They could, I mean they do that because they have had a lack of food, right, they've, you know they're and they're seeking control in their environment because that makes them feel safe, but it can be really difficult to deal with the moment.

And so that can be one of the cons just dealing with some of those behaviors. And these are kids who they, you know a lot of times they lie, sometimes they steal, they do those things because that's what they've learned to do.

Jack:

Yeah well so there's lots of pros and lots of cons for becoming foster parents and I feel like, you know, if we talked to like 10 More foster parents, we might have some additional ones but I think that that is the big stuff there. And we're gonna have, you know quite a few more episodes where we're going to talk about it more of this stuff in detail, so we hope that you join us for those.

So that's it for today but if you have any questions or you're thinking about becoming a foster parent but struggling with one aspect or another like shoot us an email, reach out and we look forward to the next episode.