

The privilege of becoming a mother



5 mins

Tania Bright reflects on her own family's journey through fostering to adoption, and the wider mission of Home for Good

As another Mother's Day approaches, I am once again prompted to reflect on motherhood as I parent my two boys. Most days, there is little room for deep reflection as we juggle school, work, church and continual assessments to gauge their social, behavioural and educational needs – as well as outdoor activities galore! In this past year of such upheaval, some days have simply been a challenge of survival, navigating huge uncertainties and very big feelings (theirs and mine). As a solo mum, this has been compounded by social-distancing and isolation. Thankfully we are all still standing and feeling hopeful.

My boys and I became a family firstly through fostering, and then through adoption. My precious children were two of the 40,000 children and young people who come into the UK care system each year.

The experiences of children in care

Many children are cared for in short-term foster care, where families offer them safe, stable and loving homes for as long as they need. Some children are able to return to their birth parents, others may need to stay in long-term foster care or with extended family (known as kinship care), and some may go on to be adopted.

While each child's experiences are unique, children in care are among the most vulnerable people in our communities. Each one has experienced trauma, loss and separation and many have suffered neglect or abuse. Understandably, this will have a significant effect throughout their lives. Some may struggle with trust, confidence or building appropriate relationships. Some may have health issues, developmental delays, learning difficulties or complex additional needs. Some may not be able to process change or emotion, and this may outwork in their behaviour.

Each child carries with them the legacy of their early experiences, and my boys are no exception. Being a mum to them is wonderful, exhausting, joyous and demanding all at once.

It has challenged me in every single possible way, and yet filled my heart with more love than I could have ever imagined. Regardless of whatever else I may achieve or go on to do, being their mum will always be the greatest privilege of my life.

Changing the way we think about adoption

Far too often, adoption is framed the wrong way around. Children are labelled as 'lucky' to be placed in families, or a heartbroken individual or couple journeying with childlessness might be told to 'just adopt' to 'solve' the ache they're experiencing. Actually, adoption is a chapter of an ever-evolving, increasingly complex story, often punctuated with pain and loss for both the child and the adopter.

A significant part of my role is to navigate this complex story with my boys. It's difficult to know what to share with them, how and when. Now they're a bit older we don't shy away from the difficult chapters and we plan together how we might write the chapters to come. My boys look to me for support, I can be their safe space, I am the one they run to when they need comfort or reassurance. If anyone's lucky, it's me.

Each one playing their part

At Home for Good, the fostering and adoption charity I lead, we have a mission to find a home for every child who needs one. It is estimated that more than 8,000 new foster families are needed across the UK to ensure that every child has the right home where their needs can be met. In addition, there are almost 3,000 children waiting for an adoptive family to be found. Sadly, too many children have to move around or wait a long time before they are able to settle for the long-term. The helplessness and anxiety that so many of us have felt this past year is a tiny echo of how some children spend their childhood.

Home for Good wants to ensure that every child in care has a safe and loving family offering the nurture and stability they need. This can be achieved through both fostering and adoption. We seek to equip the UK Church to be the family that vulnerable children need. As children of God, welcomed through adoption into Abba Father's loving family, called to extend the radical hospitality we have received to others, this is an unmistakable facet of our calling to live out God's kingdom values in the world.

For some of us this will mean personally exploring fostering or adoption and perhaps welcoming a vulnerable child into our home. For others it will be about intentionally offering support to foster, adoptive and kinship caring families in our churches and communities. The boys and I would not be where we are today without the outrageous love and fierce commitment of families in our church and beyond.

I encourage you all to reflect this Mother's Day. It may not be an easy day for you – for many it is a reminder of loss or loneliness, hopes unfulfilled or expectations unmet. This year we may yet again not be with loved ones on a special day. May we find real, tangible peace and comfort in our Abba Father. But as we reflect, perhaps we might consider how we can each play our part for vulnerable children, being the family and welcome they need, recognising it as the true privilege it is to be invited into their story and to navigate it with them.

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Tania Bright is a seasoned public speaker, author and executive coach with 20 years of experience in leading organisations, church ministry and a professional background of working in FTSE100 companies. Tania is also CEO of the national fostering and adoption charity, Home for Good. This Mother's Day, the charity has developed a suite of resources for you to use in your church, which you can access at homeforgood.org.uk/mothersday



Fostering and adoption explained

Here are some answers to common questions:

What is fostering and adoption? Fostering gives vulnerable children and young people a safe and loving home while their own family is unable to look after them. There are many different types of fostering, from emergency carers who care for children at short notice, to short-term carers who look after children for up to two years while decisions are made for their permanence, to long-term carers who welcome children into their family throughout their childhood – and beyond. Adoption is a permanent and legal process to welcome a child into a family that they will belong to for the rest of their lives.

Which children need fostering or adoption?

Children are in care for many reasons, but often come from desperate, traumatic or chaotic circumstances. They need families who will offer stability and understanding. There is often a particular need for families who can welcome groups of siblings, older children and teenagers, children of Black and minority ethnic heritage, and children with additional needs.

Could I foster or adopt? Single people or couples can apply, those who already have children or who don't, those who own their own home and those who rent. Those applying go through an assessment process with social workers to consider their suitability. If you feel you have the capacity and commitment to offer a stable and nurturing environment to a vulnerable child, it is definitely worth exploring!

What should I do now? Do get in touch with the Home for Good team on 0300 001 0995 or at homeforgood.org.uk for more information and to ask any further questions you may have. We love to journey with individuals and couples as they explore fostering or adoption.