

**Fostering for adoption; our story and the story of others
[book review]**

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Fostering for Adoption; Our story and the story of others

Alice Hill

St Albans, Critical Publishing Ltd, 2021, pp xviii + 221, ISBN 978 1 914171 23 9(pbk), £14.99

Fostering for Adoption, an approach to early permanence planning for children in England, involves placing a child with temporarily approved and registered foster carers who have also been approved as potential adoptive parents for the child. At the time of placement, the family court will not have made a final decision about the child's future, although the social workers and local authority will have completed their assessments and concluded that the child's best interests will be served by adoption. Fostering for Adoption therefore differs from other early permanency models such as Concurrent Planning where a plan for family reunification runs alongside a plan for adoption whilst assessments are undertaken. With Fostering for Adoption, assessments have been completed and the Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on local authorities to consider dually approved carers whilst leave to adopt is secured through the courts.

As such Fostering for Adoption can be seen as built upon a contradiction given fostering, the process by which a child is given a safe place to live when they cannot live with their family, can be short or long term but usually has an aim of family reunification. Adoption is the permanent placement of the child with a new family. Foster for Adoption carers must invest in both these roles. They are required to promote the short and long term needs of the usually very young child or baby, undertaking the role of foster carers including facilitating birth family contact, whilst managing the uncertainty of not knowing whether the child will either return to their birth parents or be adopted pending the final court decision. The advantages for the child include a reduction in the potential for a series of temporary foster carer moves and attendant issues of loss; allows early attachment and bonding; and optimum conditions for physical and neurological growth. The advantages for the carer are the opportunity to adopt and care for a baby. This book tells the story of one couple's negotiation of these contradictions and tensions in their two year journey to adopt a child by fostering to adopt.

The book begins with a useful terminology, helpfully demystifying the acronyms and language that can confuse prospective carers and non specialist professionals alike. This is followed by an overview and background to Fostering for Adoption and an introduction to the sixteen other family voices that are interspersed throughout the book telling their experiences and involvement in early permanence. The bulk of the book, however, is written as a diary, primarily through the author's eyes, with each chapter focussing on one stage of the adoption journey from initial contemplation and decision to begin the adoption process, through assessment, matching, placement, and adoption order before ending with final reflections from both the author and other families who contributed their experiences.

This is not an academic book. The reader will not discover research findings or international comparisons and there is little of the birth parent's voice. Rather it is based on contemporaneous notes made during one family's journey through the adoption process, augmented with voice diary recordings. At times the language can jar a little, there are perhaps too many 'lovely' cafes, meals, and cakes, and the emotion can be raw, but the narrative resonates with authenticity. There is an immediacy to the reflections and expression of feelings which would be lacking in a retrospective account of emotion recollected in tranquillity after the event. This is the story of a self-described high achieving professional couple, and there is nothing about the financial considerations which many carers face in moving from fostering to adoption. Nor does the book choose to explore issues of disability or ethnicity in any depth.

What the book does provide is an insight into the hopes, motivation and experiences of a couple wishing to adopt and prepared to accept the risk and anxieties of Fostering for Adoption. As such it is an excellent handbook for other potential adopters, bringing a reality and insight to augment training and likely to engender feelings that they are not alone in experiencing the roller coast of emotion that accompanies adoption. There are also numerous insights for social workers that could improve practice, not least in how they are seen by others and reflections on the power they hold. The anxiety experienced by this professional family before and after a social work visit is palpable. Social workers engaged in Fostering and Adoption have an importance in the lives of all stakeholders in the process that is not always overtly recognised, an omission this book goes some way to redress.

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