

Discussion Questions for *Stranger Care*

1. One of the main themes of the book is the “ethical” (Sarah’s word) dilemma of rooting for the biological mother to fail but also for her to succeed. I put that in quotes because I’m not sure it’s really an ethical dilemma. Given the centrality of this theme and the difficulty of the balancing Sarah describes, why doesn’t she revisit this question when re-unification goes south? —**Judy Catterton**
2. Does the description of the joy of mothering an infant and the love felt for her get a bit too much after a while (repetitive)? Shouldn’t it be a bit more nuanced? Aren’t there any downsides to reflect on? —**Judy Catterton**
3. Sarah and her husband came off, at times, as unlikeable (at least to me). Early on, Eric seemed pretentious and dogmatic; and Sarah confessed that for all her wanting to make the world a better place, she didn’t want to help just any child in need (older, with problems, etc.) but only a very specific child (of a certain age). These qualities or instances where she lets the viewer see them in a less-than-flattering light, also felt very raw and honest. But did they make it more difficult to root for Sarah? I’ve also heard more than a few people comment, “*how could she be so smart/do all that research, yet be so naïve about fostering?*” Almost as if she asked for the heartache. It begs the question of how much we need to like a narrator to appreciate a book. Was/is Sarah’s likeability a factor for you and if it was a problem, is there something she could have done differently as a writer? —**Maribeth Fischer**
4. (*Perhaps related to the above*), did you believe the sincerity of Sarah’s rooting for Evelyn (*see #1*)? If not, would it have been easier to accept if Sarah elaborated about her studies at the seminary and her interest/education in ethics, philosophy, etc.? —**Judy Catterton**
5. As counterpoint to her journey toward motherhood, the author gives us many separate sections of research/musings about caring relationships in the natural world—plants (convincing one plant to take care of another, **p96**); elephants (no one could hear, **p117**); robins (kinship everywhere, **p134**); other cultures (many are the ways, **p167**). How do these and other similar sections relate to the author’s intense desire to foster/adopt a child? —**Sarah Barnett**
6. Or did they not relate? Some found the “research interruptions” (and perhaps calling them interruptions says it all) “jangly” and “jarring.” Where are you on this? Do these sections enhance or distract? Were there too many? Were they incorporated in the appropriate places? —**Susan Morse, Judy Catterton**