

# Woman Refusing to Give Sister Her 7-Year-Old Kid Back Praised: 'Not Ready'

BY [SOO KIM](#) ON 4/26/23 AT 6:53 AM EDT

A post about a woman unwilling to give up custody of her niece and return the child to her mom has been backed by users on Reddit, the online forum. In a post shared on Reddit's Am I The A\*\*\*\*\* (AITA) subforum under the username Unknown\_stepdoor7, the 30-year-old woman said she's had full custody of her 7-year-old niece for the past five years after her 32-year-old sister "abandoned" her child at the poster's doorstep and "disappeared."

The poster explained that her sister had been "going through a difficult time with her mental health, and she was unable to provide a stable environment for her daughter."

Her sister has since reached out saying she's doing better and wants her child back, but the poster said she's "not ready" to give up custody.

"My sister is threatening legal action, but I'm prepared to fight for my niece's best interests," the poster said.

Does the poster stand a chance in retaining custody in court?

Dr. Carole Lieberman, a forensic psychiatrist and expert witness who has testified in various custody cases, told Newsweek that the most important question for both the poster and a judge in court would be "what is in the best interests of the child?"

Lieberman said: "The fact that she disappeared and left the poster with no way to contact her is a telltale sign that she does not have the best interests of her child at heart."

Jaclyn Roberson, a senior partner at Roberson Duran Law in Texas, told Newsweek, "Even if you've had custody of a child for five years, you're going up against the child's parents. You would need to be able to prove that the

mother is not fit to raise her child. If you go in front of a judge who believes in second chances and redemption, you may have a hard time."

According to the nonprofit Mental Health America of Licking County in Ohio, custody loss rates for parents with mental illness can be as high as 70 to 80 percent said around 17 to 28 percent of families worldwide involve a parent with mental health symptoms.

The study said research has "consistently demonstrated" that the children of parents with a mental illness have "an increased risk for mental health symptoms."

The woman in the latest Reddit post said that when her sister left her daughter with her, she was "left with no choice but to take full custody" because "we had no way of reaching her [the child's mom]."

Her sister didn't leave any contact information and "we searched for her, but we couldn't find any leads."

In the past five years, the poster said she has provided her niece with "a stable and secure environment" and "been there for her during all the milestones."

While she's happy that her sister is doing better, the poster said she's "not ready" to give up custody of her niece.

My niece has become a big part of my life, and I love her like my own child" and "I feel like I'm the only mother figure she has known for the past 5 years," the poster said.

## Sister's Mental Health Is Most Important Factor

Lieberman said the most important factor in the case is what mental health issues the sister was having. "She would need to be examined by a psychiatric expert witness to determine this."

It would take time for the sister to be able to "prove to the court that she has taken care of her mental health sufficiently, and that the risk of recurrence is very small," the psychiatrist said.

Though the biological parent often has priority, in the latest case it "does seem like keeping custody" with the poster "would be in the child's best interest," she said.

## A Court Will Prioritize Child's Safety and Stability

Celebrity divorce lawyer Chris Melcher, a partner at the [Walzer Melcher & Yoda top family law firm in California](#), told Newsweek: "Being a parent involves more than biology. It is the one who provides stability, security, and care that counts most in a child's life."

He said: "The law protects the child's relationship with the non-parent, because breaking that bond would be detrimental to the child's best interests."

## The Mom Is 'A Stranger' to Her Child

Several users on Reddit sided with the original poster.

In a comment that got over 12,000 upvotes, user bluebook2000 said: "You are the only mother she has ever known. Fight this with every ounce of strength and every penny you have. Well done and Good luck. NTA [not the a\*\*\*\*\*]."

User DgShwgrl wrote: "If your sister really wants to come back in and build a relationship, she has got to understand she is a stranger to this little girl...NTA [not the a\*\*\*\*\*] and in fact you're amazing for stepping up as a parent," in a comment that got over 4,000 upvotes.

In a comment that received 3,900 upvotes, SenioritaStuffnStuff noted: "The fact she bounced back out of nowhere and dropped a lawsuit threat without trying to even say hi to "her" child tells you everything. NTA."

Newsweek has contacted the original poster for comment via the Reddit messaging system.