

Handouts for the Webinar

Talking with Young People in Foster Care about Adoption

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Presenters

Mary Mackins
NC Division of Social Services

Diane Delafield and Brandon Nivens
Under One Sky Village Foundation

Bobbette Willis
Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services

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Preparing Children and Youth for Adoption or Other Family Permanency

Children leaving out-of-home care for adoption or other family permanency require preparation and support to help them understand the past events in their lives and to process feelings connected to their experiences of abuse and neglect, separation, loss, rejection, and abandonment. Child welfare, foster care, and adoption agencies often assume that permanent families will provide the healing environment for these children and youth, and these agencies spend considerable resources to recruit, train, and support foster and adoptive parents to provide legal permanency and well-being for these children. While a high percentage of these adoptions are successful—in that they are not legally

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1250 Maryland Avenue, SW
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dissolved—both children and families often struggle or suffer from stress that might have been mitigated by better preparation practices for all parties.

This bulletin discusses services for children and youth to address their readiness and preparation for permanent relationships. While adoption is not the first or preferred permanency goal for children and youth in foster care, this bulletin focuses on preparing those children whose goal is adoption; however, much of the information on preparation is also applicable to children and youth with other permanency goals. We look at what has previously been considered adequate preparation as well as current practices and those in development to more effectively ensure that children and youth are better prepared for permanent family relationships, including both legal and relational permanency (permanent relationships with caring adults).

REINSTATEMENT OF PARENTAL RIGHTS

Several States currently permit the reinstatement of parental rights after termination. These new laws were developed in response to the number of youth leaving foster care with no permanent family. To find out more, visit the webpage developed by the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections: http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/reinstatement-of-parental-rights.html

Evolution of Preparation for Permanency

From the time that children and youth are removed from family care, they face numerous emotional stressors as they adjust to their ever-changing status: for example, foster child, dependent child, former adopted person, delinquent, and various diagnostic labels, among others. They are challenged by new surroundings and must come to some level of understanding of what happened to them, as well as affirm their own identity and allow themselves to create new relationships and redefine existing ones without protective adult relationships to support and guide them.

Achieving permanency is not just an **outcome** for these children and youth; it is a **process**. Whatever their legal status may be, at all ages, they are most interested in the relational permanency that they can find, create, maintain, or develop in the safety of a parent-child relationship. Ensuring that children and youth are ready for relational and/or legal permanency, in what has proven to them to be a world that offers little stability, is a critical step.

Traditional Preparation Practices

No specific practice modality has been established across the child welfare delivery system to prepare children and youth for adoption. Rather, approaches to this work have been agency and individually based, with some similar components and services. Traditionally, services to prepare children and youth have focused on getting children ready for the adoptive family, helping them to understand the legal process, and obtaining their consent for such a move—although the specifics of what this entailed could

vary widely (Hanna, 2007). This remains the practice in many agencies. Assessment of children's readiness for a new permanent family generally focuses on their behavior in foster care, with input from social workers and mental health professionals. Decisions are based on the assumption that children will accept new homes and families once they understand that it is unsafe for them to live at home. Actual preparation activities may consist of several conversations with the child or youth to talk about the family who wants them and then to plan for the placement. The emphasis is on where the child is going, with limited mention of biological parents and possibly siblings.

Numerous States and private adoption and foster care programs use established curricula to provide content and materials to train and approve potential parents, generally in compliance with Federal and State policies.¹ In fact, much of the preparation work is done with the prospective family, who, after reviewing the background of the child, meeting him or her, and having preplacement visits, determines that they want the child and can manage the behaviors of the child. In cases where a child is already living with a foster family and becomes legally free for adoption by that family, the change in legal status often occurs with little preparation for either the family or the child regarding other aspects of permanency.

The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) brought about a number of changes in adoption:

- Elimination of long-term foster care as a permanency goal

¹ Examples of established adoptive parent training programs include MAPP, PRIDE, PATH, SAFE, and the Family Assessment and Preparation Curriculum from the National Resource Center on Adoption.

- A shorter timeframe to termination of parental rights
- Change in emphasis in public agencies to a focus on time-specific goals to permanency, specifically, risk and safety assurances
- Shift in caseworker roles to case management functions
- More specialized work with children and youth, based on assessments and mental health treatment services

While the goal since ASFA has remained permanency for children and youth, service delivery has shifted toward a behavioral health perspective for treating the behaviors of children and youth. These behaviors are often viewed from a perspective of pathologies related to the trauma of abuse and neglect or the trauma that may have resulted from long-term foster care, group care, and impermanence in relationships. Thus, caseworkers and other important adults in the lives of children and youth may rely on therapists or behavioral specialists to prepare children for permanency. The focus often is on correcting behavior—to the exclusion of helping the child heal past hurts, resolve issues with past relationships, and prepare for relational permanency with the birth family, relatives, or adoptive parents.

Only a few models of preparation of children and youth have been developed. Hanna (2005) outlined the evolution of these models in the following table (used with permission from M. D. Hanna's 2005 Ph.D. dissertation, *Preparing School Age Children for Special Needs Adoption: Perspectives of Successful Adoptive Parents and Caseworkers*, University of Texas at Austin):

Summary of Models of Child Preparation for Adoption	
Author	Model's Key Components
Chestang & Heymann (1976)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider child's relationship to biological parents • Help child to understand they are not in foster care because they were "bad" • Do not vilify biological parents • Relieve child of guilt for placement • Assure child of his or her right to caring and nurturing parents • Help child understand foster care is temporary and adoption is permanent • Worker should have consistent contact with the child – at least once a week • Worker should explore type of family the child wants and seriously consider the child's wishes • Child's participation may vary with age
Jones (1979)	<p>Four stage process –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Help child to understand legal termination of parental rights 2. Help child understand difference between foster care and adoption 3. Completion of the life story book 4. Preplacement visits with adoptive family
Kagan (1980)	<p>Strategic therapy approach to be used after adoptive placement prior to finalization. Assumes child is resistant to placement and has problem behaviors.</p> <p>Child has five tasks to resolve to successfully adjust to placement:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adjustment to current placement; learning the rules, expectations, roles, and norms 2. Grieving the loss of parents and other significant individuals 3. Expressing feelings of anger, fear, and sadness, preferably to new parents 4. Developing a positive identity and self-image separate from previous parental figures 5. Reattaching and forming primary bonds with the new adoptive parents
McInturf (1986)	<p>Five-stage process using the lifebook as the primary tool of preparation.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The facts 2. The whys 3. The feelings 4. The goodbyes 5. The plan for the future

Summary of Models of Child Preparation for Adoption	
Author	Model's Key Components
Fahlberg (1991)	<p>Identifies 14 tasks to be accomplished in transitioning child from foster care to adoption:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduce adoption to the child 2. Arrange first meetings 3. Provide "homework" for child and family 4. Share information 5. Get commitment to proceed 6. Plan subsequent preplacement visits 7. Discuss name changes 8. Initiate the grief process 9. Discuss the "worst of the worst" 10. Obtain permission for the child to go and do well 11. Facilitate goodbyes with foster family and other people important to the child 12. Provide ideas for welcoming ritual 13. Facilitate postplacement contacts 14. Arrange postplacement follow-up
Henry (2005)	<p>The 3-5-7 Model – Three-step model with focus on involving the child in the process.</p> <p>Step 1 – Help child integrate past and present</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clarification of past and life events 2. Integration of all family roles and memberships 3. Actualization of being a member of the new family <p>Step 2 – Help child answer five questions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What happened to me? 2. Who am I? 3. Where am I going? 4. How will I get there? 5. When will I know I belong? <p>Step 3 – Critical elements of involving the child in the adoption process</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage the child in the process 2. Listen to the child's words 3. When you speak, tell the truth 4. Validate the child and the child's life story 5. Create a safe space for the child as he/she does this work 6. It is never too late to go back in time 7. Pain is part of the process

Where the Field Is Going

There is a growing recognition of the need to develop better practice models that guide children and youth toward permanency in relationships and connections. In response, many public and private foster care and adoption agencies, residential treatment facilities, and therapeutic treatment agencies have begun to offer adoption and permanency services for children focused on issues related to the trauma caused by abuse and neglect. These services often provide excellent support for children but may be fragmented when it comes to addressing all of the relationships within the child's social network. Better preparation addresses all of the relationships—past and present—in children's lives, supports their grieving, and helps them identify new permanency sources. The type of support that children need for this work is not exclusive to therapists but can and should also be provided by other important adults in their lives. Agencies must develop and cultivate the skill and understanding needed by birth, foster, and prospective adoptive families to do this important work.

Promising Practices for Preparing Children and Youth for Permanency

Working with children and youth to guide them toward permanency in relationships should include both steps to address past traumas of loss and abuse and opportunities to give meaning to existing and future relationships.

Addressing Past Experiences in Preparation for Permanency

Those working with children and youth who have been in out-of-home care and are preparing for permanency need a basic understanding of the child's point of view, including these common experiences:

- **Loss and grief.** Children and youth who are placed in the child welfare system often have a long history of losses and unresolved grief. They may have losses directly related to the circumstances that brought them into care (abuse, neglect), and they may experience additional losses when they are removed from their family and caregivers. Each move can bring more losses of friends, siblings, supportive adults, classmates, pets, familiar surroundings, and more.
- **Confusion and anger.** Many children are left to wonder what really happened that brought them into care, why their families may not be able to continue caring for them, and who will be there to take care of them and protect them. A child may experience anger, sadness, and even depression. Many children struggle with their changed role within the family system or sibling status when they are removed from their birth family. Unresolved grief, effects of feeling unwanted and unloved, and confusion about who they are and where they will live have been shown to lead to behavioral issues, psychological confusion, emotional stress, and difficulty in forming new relationships.
- **Divided loyalties.** Many children, particularly adolescents, have conflicting feelings about being a permanent member of a new family. These children may have difficulty with their sense of identity, may lose connections to immediate and

extended family, and may have very little information about their own personal history.

Caseworkers who understand the child's experiences from the child's point of view will be better able to help the child or youth address past issues and explore the possibilities of new relationships.

Foundational Principles of Preparation

A number of foundational principles can help agencies shape an overall approach to support and guide children and youth as they identify and establish permanent relationships:

- All children and youth deserve relational permanency.
 - Just as adoptive parents and guardians need preparation for the new relationships they are entering, so do children and youth.
 - Readiness practices are needed regardless of the permanency goal or outcome.
 - Permanency is a *process* for a child, not just an outcome. It starts with birth family relationships and continues with reunification, adoption, or other permanent familial relationships. Establishing or maintaining connections to the birth family or important people from a child's past may help to mitigate loyalty issues, whatever the permanency outcome.
 - Permanency work with children requires time, consistency, and honesty from social workers.
 - Work with children and youth should not be considered only in the context of therapy. Although behavioral health services may be appropriate for any individual child, engaging the child in activities, tasks, and conversations to prepare him or her for permanency can be the work of caseworkers, caregivers, social workers, family members, court personnel, and others. In some cases, birth parents or other birth relatives may be able to help the permanency process by giving their children "permission" to move on to a new family.
- Work with children and youth is a process that begins before placement and can extend past final adoption. (Unfortunately, many efforts do not start until the child has been freed for adoption when termination of parental rights has occurred, and many agencies provide only limited supports and services after adoption finalization.)
 - Engaging children and youth in readiness activities must be developmentally appropriate. The cognitive and emotional abilities of the child or youth must determine the types of activities (e.g., lifebooks) and resources used in permanency preparation work.
 - Permanency planning (the legal process) is distinct from permanency preparation work (the relational process). Children and youth can be empowered by their participation in the planning process, including their involvement in recruitment and family finding activities. Although these activities may engage them in some of the emotional tasks of preparing for permanency, a more comprehensive preparation program may help them explore their feelings about life events and support their readiness for permanency.
 - The work of the child or youth is to grieve old relationships in order to move toward new ones. The work of the caseworker and other adults is to prepare and support the child through the entire process.

Agency policies and caseworker practices that take a holistic view of permanency preparation work, considering it from the perspective of the child and encompassing the resolution of past issues and readiness for new relationships, will be better able to help children and youth bring their own meaning to permanency.

Permanency Preparation Practices

Most models of child preparation follow three basic stages (Hanna, 2007), and these general steps provide a good organizational structure and sequence for agencies and caseworkers responsible for preparing children and youth.

1. Help the child to understand the facts of his or her removal.
2. Help the child explore feelings of loss, anger, and confusion.
3. Empower the child to be part of the plans for the future.

Henry's (2005) 3-5-7 Model[®] takes the three-step process even further by specifying three tasks, five questions, and seven skill elements. The model offers a guided approach for workers and other adults helping children and youth explore and understand permanency in relationships. It focuses on the tasks of (1) clarification of life events, (2) integration of the experiences and meanings of relationships in different families, and (3) actualization of memberships in their identified network of families. The child or youth works on these tasks by exploring five conceptual questions, each of which addresses a specific issue. A 2011 article (Henry & Manning) suggests activities to support the child's work with the three tasks and issues related to the five questions.

1. What happened to me? (issue: loss) (activity: create a loss line²)
2. Who am I? (issue: identity) (activity: make a life map or life path³)
3. Where am I going? (issue: attachment) (activity: review pictures and memories)
4. How will I get there? (issue: relationships) (activity: create a collage)
5. When will I know I belong? (issue: claiming/safety) (activity: take a family photo together)

Creating a lifebook is essential to this work. Lifebooks help children remember and maintain connections from their past as well as integrate their past experiences into their current lives. Permanency/adoption practice models agree that children and youth need to process loss and grieve the losses related to their removal from birth families to help them develop healthy attachments to new adoptive families and permanent connections. At least one State (North Carolina) requires foster parents to be trained in making lifebooks before they can be licensed (Lifebooks, 2013). A number of resources exist to help workers, biological family members, foster and adoptive parents, and other important adults work with children and youth on creating and maintaining this record of their lives (see, for example, <https://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/postplacement/lifebooks.cfm>).

The final component of Henry's 3-5-7 Model[®], the seven skill elements, may vary slightly

² A loss line is a timeline of losses that the child or youth can document. See, for example, p. 36 in AdoptUSKids' *Lasting Impressions: A Guide for Photolisting Children*, available at http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/lasting-impressions.pdf

³ This activity involves stepping stones (e.g., sticky notes) in a path that represent major life events for the child (see Fahlberg, 1991, p. 363).

according to the age of the child. The elements identify the necessary philosophies and skills of those working with children and youth. Henry and Manning (2011) note that the seven elements are just a few of the many skills that adults need as they support youth through their grieving and preparing for new relationships:

1. Use engagement activities that encourage expression of feelings and thoughts about life experiences.
2. Create a safe space for expressing feelings.
3. Recognize that behaviors are based in pain and trauma.
4. Respond briefly to the child or youth's comments in order to provide space to grieve.
5. Listen.
6. Affirm their stories.
7. Be present as they do the work of grieving.

While the guided approach outlined by the 3-5-7 Model[®] can be woven into other child welfare practices, the application of the concepts requires training, leadership, and effective communication skills. It also requires a time commitment by the caseworker so that the child or youth has continuity throughout the process. The worker and youth should meet at least once every 2 weeks, with interim phone calls (Henry & Manning, 2011).

In a recent guide to help agencies find families for older children, AdoptUSKids provides a number of strategies that workers can use with older youth who may present barriers to adoption (AdoptUSKids, 2012; see <http://adoptuskids.org/assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/going-beyond-recruitment-for-14-to-16-year-olds.pdf>). Youth's common concerns as listed in the guide include:

- Not understanding what adoption means
- Not believing that anyone would want to adopt them
- A worry that adoption would prevent them from ever having any contact with their birth family, including siblings
- Feelings of disloyalty to their birth family
- Worry about changing their name
- Worry about moving far away

The guide outlines a number of strategies to counter these concerns, most of which revolve around providing factual information in a candid and sensitive manner.

Youth engagement and empowerment is an important part of permanency preparation work, especially for older youth who may have experienced greater disappointments and have more reluctance to seek out a new family. In one study, the Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK) program interviewed 74 youth about strategies that workers had used to help the youth overcome their lack of hope and their distrust about achieving permanency (Ellis, 2011). Youth identified the following worker strategies as successful:

- Emphasize the advantages of adoption
- Seek relatives and other connections to adopt
- Be open and honest about the adoption process and possible outcomes
- Empower youth throughout the adoption process
- Address questions and concerns
- Build a relationship with the youth

Promising Programs

Many child welfare agencies recognize that children and youth in care need opportunities that will prepare them for permanency. The following list spotlights jurisdictions that have incorporated a significant preparation component for children—not just families—into their permanency efforts.

Description of Programs

- 1. The National Institute for Permanent Family Connectedness (NIPFC)** (<http://www.familyfinding.org/>), at Seneca Family of Agencies, Oakland, CA, provides comprehensive, collaborative partnerships with child welfare agencies throughout the nation to build capacity to find and engage families that can become permanency resources for youth living away from their birth families. Instruction is available to families to encourage their attention to loss and grief work with youth. Specialized training is provided on the Family Finding model, developed by Kevin Campbell. The technique of Mobility Mapping is used to identify connectedness of relationships, and information on families is collected through a discovery phase. These components are then coordinated for youth in a Blended Perspectives meeting with family members interested in building relationships with youth. Lifetime support networks are developed to secure permanency for youth. NIPFC provides training, coaching, and technical assistance to many State and regional programs, in addition to Federal grant programs. A Facilitator's Guide is available to deliver a curriculum for the implementation and integration of the process of Family Finding.
- 2. Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK)** (<http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/what-we-do/wendys-wonderful-kids>), at the Dave Thomas Foundation, has established an effective program for the recruitment of adoptive families wherein recruiters practice child-focused recruitment. Their strategy is to focus exhaustively on an individual child's history, experiences, and needs in order to find an appropriate adoptive family. Child preparation teams consist of child welfare caseworkers, adoption workers, and therapists. Elements for the preparation of children are identified and, generally, provided through individual workers who engage in monthly contact with children. Determinations of preparedness for adoption and whether the child has needs that should be addressed before moving toward the adoption process are the objective of these activities. An evaluation study of outcomes over 5 years at 21 grantee agencies showed that children served by WWK were 1.7 times more likely than children not receiving WWK services to be adopted (Child Trends, 2011). The program currently has more than 100 recruiters in all 50 States and Canada.
- 3. Extreme Recruitment** is a program of the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition of St. Louis, MO (<http://www.foster-adopt.org/carleen-goddard-mazur-training-institute/extreme-recruitment/>). Funded by the Children's Bureau, Extreme Recruitment is a 4-year trial that models the practice of diligent recruitment to reconnect youth (10 to 18 years) to kin through child-specific recruitment, intensive family-finding, and support services. The preparation

component involves examining the youth's life for factors that impact readiness for permanency and addressing mental behavioral and physical health needs, peer and adult relationships, and educational needs. Preparing resource parents for permanency is also included.

4. With a focus on the concurrent preparation of both children and their prospective adoptive families, **Family Focus Adoption Services** of Queens, NY, promotes a carefully paced transition phase in adoption placement (<http://familyfocusadoption.org/adoptionguides.html>). The agency believes that much of the preparation work is best done by the children themselves, at their own pace and to their own level of satisfaction. Adult protection is provided throughout the process and is intended to help build children's self-confidence. A trained and well-supervised adult guides each child from placement through the child's decision about adoption. Using a graduated visiting schedule and taking the child through a series of adoption levels that are marked by six cards collected by the child over 5 months, children can become more and more certain that being adopted by the particular family they are with is the right decision for them.
5. **Robert G. Lewis**, of Wooster, MA, trains and supports agencies and States in preparing youth for permanency in a program called Family Bound (<http://www.rglewis.com/RGLewis%20Site/index.html>). His curriculum, *Family Bound Program: A Toolkit for Preparing Teens for Permanent Family Connections*, provides the philosophy and activities to engage youth in this work. Youth attend group or individual sessions to discuss
9. nine topics (e.g., the Real Truth About Families, Loss Is a Part of Living, etc.). It is a therapeutic, educational process that teaches concrete skills and provides teens with the opportunity to open up avenues for personal growth through healing relationships. The lessons are reinforced by opportunities to practice on family weekend visits. Currently, he has created a video project for use with teens to tell their stories about their lives, hopes, and dreams to explore meanings of potential permanent relationships.
6. A number of jurisdictions use the **3-5-7 Model**[®] to support permanency work for children and youth, including California, Delaware, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin (Henry & Manning, 2011). As described above, the 3-5-7 Model[®] provides a guided approach to help children, youth, and families do their work of grieving losses and rebuilding relationships, working toward the goals of well-being, safety, and permanency. The model is a strengths-based approach that empowers children and youth to engage in grieving and integrating significant relationships. In several programs, the model is woven into family-finding activities and Family Group Decision Making conferences. Practice applications are made both at intake and throughout ongoing case management services, including protective and placement services that can also support kinship, foster, and adoptive family placements. The 3-5-7 Model[®] provides tools (e.g., lifebooks, loss history chart) to support work around issues of separation and loss, identity formation, attachment, and building relationships, and it also supports deeper therapeutic work around abuse, abandonment, and neglect experiences.

Tools and Resources

There are a number of tools that workers may find useful in their permanency work with children and youth.

- The Annie E. Casey Foundation developed a *Permanency Case Planning Tool* to help caseworkers and supervisors working on permanency cases understand the case factors that are potential barriers and/or facilitators to permanency teaming and outcomes. <http://www.aecf.org/KnowledgeCenter/Publications.aspx?pubguid={28123D47-0363-46B4-A592-974FCCB07FA7}>
- The Children’s Bureau’s National Resource Center on Adoption (NRCA) provides consultation and technical assistance to States to enhance their capacity to provide services to ensure that all children and youth have permanent families. The NRCA developed an *Adoption Competency Curriculum* that includes seven modules, one of which is *Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation*. The NRCA offers training to States on the curriculum; also, the handouts for the child/youth assessment and preparation include a number of tools, worksheets, and recommendations and are available online. <http://www.nrcadoption.org/wp-content/uploads/TG-Child-Assessment-Preparation-4-111.pdf>
- The Center for Adoption Support and Education offers a number of resources for children, teens, and adults, including book lists and other resources. The website offers information about the seven core issues in adoption that apply to all members of adoption circle: loss, rejection, guilt/shame, grief, identity, intimacy & relationships, and control/gains. <http://www.adoptionssupport.org/res/index.php>
- Wisconsin’s Coalition for Children, Youth & Families has produced *Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions* to help caseworkers prepare children. The guide breaks down key discussion times, points to discuss, and who should be involved and provides helpful materials to use for each step (books, videos, guides, and activities). <http://wiadopt.org/ToolsforWorkers/TouchpointsTool.aspx>
- The Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare at the University of Minnesota, in partnership with Anu Family Services, developed the Youth Connections Scale to help child welfare agencies better work with youth to strengthen and build relationships. The scale measures the strength of relationships between youth and adults: <http://www.cehd.umn.edu/ssw/cascw/attributes/PDF/YCS/YCSImplementation.pdf>

The Children’s Bureau has funded several grant clusters that focus, in whole or in part, on improving permanency outcomes:

- Diligent Recruitment of Families for Children in Foster Care: <http://www.adoptuskids.org/about-us/diligent-recruitment-grantees>
- Permanency Innovations Initiative: <https://cbexpress.acf.hhs.gov/index.cfm?event=website.viewArticles&issueid=123§ionid=19&articleid=3087>
- Family Connection Grants: <http://www.nrcpfc.org/grantees.html>
- Youth Permanency Cluster: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/resources/ypc/home/>

Conclusion

Helping children, youth, and families served within the child welfare system to prepare for permanent relationships offers greater opportunities for their improved well-being. Children and families often have both the strength and resilience to overcome hurtful life experiences and move toward resolution of past losses. Models of intervention that establish these practices are beginning to demonstrate a practical and viable method to support successful outcomes with families.

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The Essential Role of the CHILD ASSESSMENT

Child assessments (sometimes called “social histories” or “child profiles”) are critical to the process of making placement decisions in adoptions. A thorough child assessment makes clear the child’s strengths and needs and provides important information on which to base the consideration of prospective adoptive families for the child.

The child assessment is a primary tool in the matching process and is an essential resource for prospective adoptive parents. A quality child assessment provides a multifaceted picture of the child that can assist a family and the family’s caseworker to thoughtfully consider whether the family can meet the child’s needs. While there is no uniform format for a child assessment, there is general consensus about the following:

- Each child should be made fully aware of the contents of his or her assessment, and be involved in preparing it to the extent that his or her age and abilities permit. The assessment or portions of the assessment could be shared with the child so that he or she can check the contents for accuracy and add any additional material.
- Child assessments should be written in clear, plain language without social work jargon. They should also be written in a way that the child could read it and not feel embarrassment, shame, or discomfort.
- As many people as possible should be spoken to in developing the assessment, including foster parents, birth parents (if possible), teachers, counselors and, importantly, the child.
- The child assessment should make clear what information is known to be factual and what is uncertain or a matter of speculation.
- The child’s strengths should be highlighted and emphasized, along with information about the child’s challenges.
- All child assessments should contain the following basics: a chronological history beginning from birth, including both developmental history and placement history; birth family history including a genogram and medical information; child’s social, medical, and educational information; information about the child’s birth parents and siblings, including their current whereabouts and the nature of any recent or current contact; and current functioning (including a detailed account of the child’s daily and weekly routine) and readiness for adoption.

Why Focus on Waiting Children Who Are 9-12 Years Old?

Do pre-teens who are waiting for adoption really need a special focus to ensure that they will find families? When it comes to age, isn’t it only teenagers who require highly targeted recruitment efforts?

The truth is, the likelihood of adoption begins to decline by the time a waiting child is nine years old. In a 2009 article in *The Roundtable* newsletter of the National Resource Center for Adoption, researcher Penelope Maza explained that analysis of national adoption data has “consistently shown that **between the ages of 8 and 9, waiting children are more likely to continue to wait than to be adopted.**” This research evidence clearly makes the case—pre-teens need focused attention in order to achieve adoption. Like all children waiting to be adopted, they will be best served by careful attention to the basics of effective pre-adoption practice: preparation for permanency and the recruitment process, development of a quality child assessment profile to guide placement decisions, and thoughtfully targeted family identification and recruitment services.



Additional Resources

Some of the information in this tip sheet is excerpted from the AdoptUSKids publication *Finding a Fit that Will Last a Lifetime: A Guide to Connecting Adoptive Families with Waiting Children*. The full publication can be downloaded at: <http://adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/FindingAFit.pdf>.

To learn more about preparing child assessments, see the *Adoption Competency Curriculum* from the National Resource Center for Adoption, available online at: <http://www.nrcadoption.org/resources/acc/home/>.

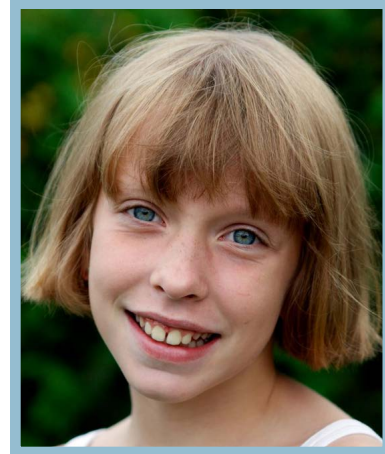
Recruitment Tips for Families

FOR PRETEENS

1 Engage the Child: Keep the child as updated on the process as possible, in keeping with their developmental and emotional ability. Listen to their words as well as to their unspoken feelings and follow up on their concerns and preferences. In jurisdictions where children are required to consent to adoption, encourage young people to keep an open mind about permanency while holding on to the option to say no to adoption by a particular family. Even if a child does not consent to being adopted by one family, keep talking with the child about the benefits of having a permanent, loving family and continue to seek options for achieving permanence for the child.

2 Start with Current Caregivers: Approximately 85 percent of the children adopted from foster care each year are adopted by their foster parents or relatives. Listen to concerns that the caregivers may have about adoption and work hard to address worries about the future and other challenges or barriers.

3 Explore the Child's Circle: Look into maternal and paternal relatives as well as other caring adults who might be “kin by choice” to the child. Check in again with relatives who might have been unable to offer a home or reluctant to become involved while reunification was a possibility. Reconnect with the child's former foster parents and other former caregivers as well. Circumstances can change and you may find that they are now willing and able to serve as a permanent family for the child.



4 Target Your Efforts: Think about the last 10 to 20 families who have successfully adopted children of similar age and needs from your agency. Where do those families live, shop, gather, work, worship, and play? Use these locations to target your recruitment efforts. Encourage current foster and adoptive families to refer their friends and relatives and offer a financial incentive for doing so.

5 Expand the Possibilities: Make use of state, regional, and national photolisting services, such as the AdoptUSKids' photolisting, to broaden the pool of prospective families you can consider for your waiting child. Don't forget military families who are often deeply resilient and well connected with many supportive resources.



Involving Children

IN THEIR OWN RECRUITMENT PLAN

When recruitment is needed to identify an adoptive family, pre-teen children can and should be involved in the process to the greatest degree possible. Being featured on a photolisting website or in other forms of recruitment can benefit a child by reaching prospective adoptive parents, but it can also cause considerable fear and discomfort if the child is not ready for the experience. To learn more about the type of support every child needs prior to adoption, see the *Adoption Competency Curriculum's* section on Child/Youth Assessment and Preparation (<http://www.nrcadoption.org/pdfs/acc/PH%20-%20Child%20Assessment%20&%20Preparation%203-10.pdf>).

To help children become active members of their own recruitment planning team, try these steps:

- **Explain the different types of recruitment** strategies, explaining how the process works for each strategy and the desired outcomes of each.
- **Show examples** of various recruitment strategies (e.g., the actual flyers, newspaper features, magazines, newsletters or internet sites). Use photolisting books or photolistings on the internet to help the child understand that he or she is not alone—that many other children also are waiting for adoptive families.
- **Explore which methods of recruitment are best** for the individual child. A child may be comfortable with some types of recruitment but not others.
- **Encourage children to participate** in the process. Involve them in developing their own recruitment narratives. Walk children through the steps that will happen when a family expresses interest in them, including how the child will be given information about the interested family and how the child will participate in the decision to move forward or not.
- **Explain to the child some of the possible results of recruitment efforts**, such as comments by friends or the absence of responses or appropriate families. Explore the child's feelings about these possibilities and help them develop a response they can use if they occur, so they won't be caught off-guard. Explain the next steps if families do not respond or if the right family is not identified.

- **Be prepared to respond to a child who says “no”** to being featured in recruitment materials. A child's discomfort should be a signal to the worker that more attention is needed to preparing the child for adoption, as well as preparing the child for the recruitment process. Clarify with the child whether he or she is saying “no” to adoption or “no” to recruitment publicity. Once you understand the child's concerns, work to address them. For instance, a child who is distressed by the concept of adoption may need additional assistance in grieving losses and preparing for what permanency may mean. When children are open to adoption but resistant to publicity, they may become more comfortable when they have a greater voice in determining the type, location, and content of specific recruitment strategies. Make a point to understand the child's concerns and address each one with sensitivity and flexibility.

Additional Resources

- 1 Check out the *Adoption Competency Curriculum* from the National Resource Center for Adoption for guidelines and methods for preparing children for adoption (available online at: www.nrcadoption.org/resources/acc/home/).
- 2 Download the AdoptUSKids publication, *Lasting Impressions: A Guide for Photolisting Children* (available online at: <http://adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/photolisting.pdf>) for helpful information about preparing children for their involvement in all types of recruitment efforts, including these resources:
 - *Worksheet #1: Preparing a Child for Photolisting*
This checklist will walk you through the steps to prepare children and engage them and their caregivers in the recruitment process.
 - *Worksheet #3: Child Interview Form*
This interview format provides a way for children to share information about themselves that can be used in developing recruitment plans, narratives, and materials.

NC KIDS ADOPTION AND FOSTER CARE NETWORK



Social workers with public and private child-placing agencies in North Carolina should know about NC Kids Adoption and Foster Care and Adoption and Foster Care Network (www.adoptnckids.org). This resource, a

part of a part of the NC Division of Social Services, is accessible, effective, and free. In short, it can enhance outcomes for children and families and make the lives and jobs of social workers easier and lighter.

Although NC Kids focuses on one goal; finding families for children in North Carolina, it is not a child-placing agency. It accomplishes its mission by supporting our state’s foster care and adoption social workers through the following services:

REGISTRIES

WAITING CHILDREN: NC Kids maintains a database of North Carolina children awaiting adoption, which makes it easy for prospective adoptive parents to learn about available children.

POTENTIAL FAMILIES: Families who have completed a pre-adoptive assessment can participate in this registry, which NC Kids utilizes to find families for children awaiting adoption.

PRELIMINARY MATCHING

At the request of child-placing agencies, NC Kids uses these registries to conduct preliminary screenings of adoption matches. For example, NC Kids Consultant will compare

a child’s characteristics against the traits of registered families and identify several possible matches. The information on potential matches is shared with the family’s social worker to solicit interest from the families.

Matching and referrals made possible through NC Kids registries open up boundaries, helping agencies learn about and consider families, even those who live in another state, so they can find loving homes for waiting children.

HOTLINE

NC Kids operates a hotline (877-NCKIDS-1) from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M., Monday through Friday.

Social workers can call this number to have a child placed on the adoption registry or to obtain community outreach or technical assistance. For example, to receive assistance with their Diligent Recruitment Plan.

Families who call the hotline speak to NC Kids staff members who can answer their questions about foster care and adoption and connect them with child-placing agencies. NC Kids also follows up with each caller to ensure no family is lost while navigating the system.

CONCLUSION

If foster care and adoption workers in North Carolina are not using NC Kids, they should give them a call. NC Kids is an able partner, eager to help you find families for children!

Let NC Kids Help You!	NC Kids Statistics, November 2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NC Kids is a partner, not a competitor. NC Kids is a state-sponsored organization that recruits foster and adoptive parents and supports child placing agencies. • Encourage prospective adoptive parents to register with NC Kids. By registering, these families may have a better change of adopting. • Plan an adoption promotion event. NC Kids provides consultation to help you plan and hold successful adoption promotion events. • Call the hotline. NC Kids’ knowledgeable, responsive staff are standing by to help you. • Tell them what you want! NC Kids strives to provide individualized support to every social worker when it comes to recruitment, matching, and referrals. • Reach out to the media. Do you have a good relationship with newspapers and TV stations in your area? Let NC Kids know and they will contact them to request periodic features on waiting children across the state. 	<p>Families with a completed pre-placement Assessment registered with NC Kids.....151</p> <p>NC children legally free for adoption.....1100</p> <p>NC children for whom NC Kids website is Actively recruiting for adoptive placement.....292</p> <p>NC children registered with NC Kids but on hold (awaiting approval of the selected prospective adoptive family).....69</p> <p>NC children classified as legal risk (have not met TPR on all parents, or TPR has been appealed).....47</p> <p>NC children classified as exempt (placement has been approved and awaiting final Decree of Adoption).....1000</p>

OVERCOMING ADOPTION AMBIVALENCE

Especially when working with older children and teens, there are misconceptions and fears that can hold people back from making a permanent commitment. As state and federal policies have urged agencies to more quickly achieve permanence for children, many child welfare workers have learned to move past common barriers brought up by youth and potential adoptive families in early conversations. As one adoption program manager stated, “When a child says ‘I don’t want to be adopted,’ it’s the beginning of casework,” not a change in the permanency plan (Boo, 2010).

The table below reflects some of what we learned from reviewing the literature and speaking with NC social workers about overcoming ambivalence on the path to permanency. For more details on preparing and involving youth in recruitment efforts, check out Chapter 10 of *Treat Them Like Gold*: <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/dss/publications/docs/Ch10.pdf>.

Underlying concern	What they might say	Strategies to Overcome
Youth-Related		
Losing/betraying birth family connections	"I don't want to lose contact with my family." "I don't want to betray my birth family." "Mom said she would come back." (Mallon, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit the idea later, as relationship and trust develop • Reassure and give examples of ways to maintain birth family connections after adoption • Facilitate connections with adopted peers • Consider open adoption
Worries about siblings	"I can't get adopted until/unless my siblings do."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruit for the sibling group (see http://tinyurl.com/3nk3cnt) • Reassure and give examples of ways to maintain sibling connections after adoption • Actions speak louder than words: ensure ongoing sibling contact in all placements to greatest possible extent
Fear of additional loss/abandonment	"No one will want me." "I'll just mess up again." "I don't want to risk losing anyone else." (Mallon, 2007)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide youth with therapy and/or an adoption-preparation specialist to explore fears • Facilitate connections with adopted peers • Empower youth to take an active role in recruitment plans and goals: "What would you look for in a family? What strengths and special traits would you bring to a family?"
Need for independence	"I want to make my own decisions." (Mallon, 2007) "I'm almost 18, I don't need a new family."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide a realistic picture of the day-to-day challenges of adult life and the ways that family can help. It's important to be both supportive and honest with youth about the experiences of those who age out without a strong support network • Use child-specific recruitment: teens know who they care about and who cares about them; focus efforts on those existing connections • Use child-directed recruitment: teens can be actively involved in their own recruitment plans and materials
Adoptive-Family Related		
Concern about adopting older child	"I don't think I could handle a teenager."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide lots of opportunities for teens to connect with prospective families: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Serving as training consultants – Working in the agency office – Attending events – Serving on panels (NRCA, n.d.) • Ask current foster parents of teens to help with training and informal mentoring around managing teen behaviors and the benefits of fostering teens • Partner with private agencies that specialize in hard-to-place adoptions
Financial concerns	"I can't afford to adopt."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review in detail the financial supports available for adoption
Kinship caregiver concerns about TPR	"I couldn't do that to my daughter/sister/cousin."	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisit the idea later, as relationship and trust develop • Reassure and give examples of ways to maintain birth parent connection/role • Facilitate connections with other kin caregivers • Consider open adoption
Reacting to youth's ambivalence	"She doesn't want to be adopted anyway." "His behavior is getting worse - maybe this is a mistake!"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage adults to take the lead in committing to permanency: "She needs to see you as the adult, taking the lead in being her permanent family" • Review your agency's post-adoption supports and consider private agency partnerships to help with pre- and post-adoption transitions • Normalize the stages of adjustment to adoption, including common but temporary increases in behavior problems

Thanks to Wake County Human Services' Jean Hagen-Johnson and Teryl Bowen, and to Children's Home Society's Rebecca Jentzer for their contributions to this article.

Improving RECRUITMENT OUTCOMES

11 Things a Practitioner Can Do

1 Be customer-friendly in your approach.

Foster and adoptive parents are the most important resource we have to provide for the children we serve. How you treat them will determine whether they stay in the process and, ultimately, become part of your team. Try to put yourself in their shoes at every stage of the process. How would you like to be treated?

2 Be informed about local, State, and national recruitment initiative and calendar.

This information will help you schedule your work so you can be prepared to respond quickly and effectively to the possibility of an influx of inquiries, as well as inform families you talk with at event, classes, in the course of work and people you meet in your community.

3 Look for ways to participate in your agency's community recruitment projects, regardless of what your job is.

From the agency director to the person who answers the telephone, recruitment is everybody's business! Successful agencies encourage all staff and resource parents to be mindful of the need for families wherever they go and help out with recruitment.

4 Know the characteristics and needs of the children in your area who needs foster and adoptive parents.

Speak optimistically and honestly about the children who need care and the role of the foster and adoptive parent. As prospective parents go through the process, continue to provide them with reliable information to make informed decisions about fostering and adopting, including full disclosure regarding the children, their needs and the service needs of the birth families. Respect the parents / Give them the opportunity to explore areas where they may have doubts. Trust their ability to make good decisions for themselves. This can be done at all stages of the process.

5 Be knowledgeable about all of the steps in the continuum from recruitment through to placement and post-placement support.

Prospective parents will have lots of questions. Be prepared to answer them whether you are answering the phone, providing training, or doing a home visit. Promise to get back with answers to questions you can't respond to on the spot, and then follow through with this promise!

6 Work to rule people in, not out of the process.

It is important that the practitioner realize that the most ordinary, and sometimes unusual, people have grown into amazing resource parents with training and support. Most of the time parents present themselves to the agency for an altruistic purpose. They have passion and emotion about this. Our challenge is to learn how to maintain that passion and turn it into informed and sustained commitment.

7 Utilize seasoned foster and adoptive parents whenever possible to help support new parents through the process.

Many agencies are partnering with their resource parents and/or parent groups to help in recruiting. Parents handle initial inquiries, participate in home visits, are part of the training team and provide support to new parents during the process. Agencies that do this are modeling the team process from day one.

8 Identify and collaborate with other community partners and organizations.

Networking with community groups and partnering on recruitment efforts can be satisfying, supportive and productive for the practitioner. Faith based and community-based organizations that endorse your efforts can bring new families to your door. These organizations can also provide space and resources to make your orientation and training meetings more accessible to parents. You are likely to get better attendance as a result.

9 Be a team player.

Everybody who has a hand in recruiting and preparing families to foster and adopt can be made to feel that they are part of a team in a very important endeavor. This is a complex process that involves handoffs from recruiter to trainer, to family assessment worker, to placement worker, etc. All involved should have the same value system and a sense of urgency about completing the work as soon as possible.

10 Be sensitive to the prospective foster and adoptive parents' sense of time.

The longer it takes to move from step to step, the less likely the family will stay in the process. However, if a parent is treated well and helped to feel part of the team early on, he/she is more likely to stay the course. It is important to be honest about the reasons for delays when they occur and to help the parent use this time in productive ways, e.g., involve them with other foster, adoptive or kinship parents, or enlist them to provide respite care.

11 Understand your role in and the importance of tracking and evaluation to improve recruitment outcomes.

Organizations that are customer-oriented are beginning to look at the quality of their interactions with resource families at every stage of the process. They need cooperation from people on the "front line" to get good data and feedback.



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More free resources at:

www.nrcdr.org



ADOPTION

Nicole Callahan, *editor*
Chuck Johnson, *editor*

ADVOCATE

NO.
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Preparing Older Children for Adoption

BY RHONDA JAREMA

I imagine that when an older child meets his parents for the first time in preparation for a foster-to-adoption or adoption placement, his feelings might be similar to that of an astronaut about to blast off into space. It will be an entirely new experience, full of excitement and wonder – and it can also be filled with trepidation or even terror for a child facing the unknown.

Just as prospective adoptive parents need education, training, and preparation for an adoption, it is also critically important for children to receive education and preparation for an upcoming adoptive placement. Whether the child is coming from a foster home or orphanage, the things that they have known will be lost to them; life in a permanent family will be different from everything they have experienced before. There are aspects of life in permanent families that are very different than the more temporary care of foster homes or orphanages. It is important to recognize and address the parents' and the child's expectations and set up a plan for transition, so that both the child and her new family are ready and well prepared.

For both adoptive parents and adopted children, their ideas about the adoption experience and transition often differ greatly from what will be their reality. Many adoptive families anticipate that their new child will be so eager to join their family and so thankful to leave the foster home or orphanage behind, and they allow themselves to buy into the mistaken belief that any and all challenging issues can be easily overcome with love. For a child coming from an orphanage in another country, there might be unrealistic images and dreams based on glamorous television shows or movies. He likely will not fully understand or anticipate the very real



National Council
For Adoption

225 N. Washington Street
Alexandria, VA 22314
(703) 299-6633
www.adoptioncouncil.org

feelings of grief and loss that can accompany an adoptee that must leave behind all that he has ever known. It is important to prepare the child as fully as possible for the *reality* of his upcoming adoption experience, while recognizing that he has no context for *fully* understanding exactly what adoption will mean for him.

Every member of the adoption triad is affected by the adoption. Although this article is focused on the older child adoptee, preparation and flexibility are the keys to success for all family members. We must do everything in our power to prepare a child before she is adopted – taking into account her chronological and emotional age, and how much she can understand – so that surprises are minimized and she can go into her adoption as well prepared as possible.

Children should be as well educated about their potential adoption experience as the families that will be adopting them. It is best if a trusted caregiver begins to talk with a child prior to a possible adoption, once it is recognized that the child is eligible for adoption.

“Adoption is forever”

A child to be adopted may not truly believe that the adoptive family is permanent, but it is important to tell her that her parents are making a lifelong commitment to her. With time, she will learn and experience and understand what a family is. At the beginning, she may be afraid, as children living outside family care are sometimes told horror stories about other children who were returned to foster or orphanage care due to poor behavior. Rather than giving the child hope about adoption, those stories can be terrifying.

Rather than beginning the relationship based on fear – such as the fear of being returned to the orphanage if he misbehaves – it is best to begin to build on a foundation of trust. That comes as the child learns about and gets to know his prospective parents. How a child is prepared for his adoption and how well the adoptive parents are able to build and encourage attachment can make the difference between a successful experience and a difficult one.

Many adopted children have expressed the fear that if they are “bad” they will “be sent back.” They must be reassured that this is not the case, or it will set up both the child and his new family for very stressful times. The child to be adopted needs to be helped to understand that once a family adopts him, that family’s home is now *his* home.

A child to be adopted may not truly believe that the adoptive family is permanent, but it is important to tell her that her parents are making a lifelong commitment to her. With time, she will learn and experience and understand what a family is.

Children certainly will test their new family and test their boundaries as learn the rules and expectations of their new parents – this behavior is common, and often unintentional on the child’s part. There are some children that, if told they will be sent back to the orphanage for inappropriate behavior, may see it as a return to a place of comfort and the only home they can remember; this may lead to more acting out in order to be sent back to that home. Or a child may decide not to work on adjusting to his new family and new lifestyle, as the familiar is far more comforting. It is, after all, very difficult trying to learn a new language and adapt to a different culture.

Regardless of an adopted child’s behavior, or any threats she may make to run away back “home” to the orphanage, her parents need to reassure her that this is her permanent home; they will always love her, and she is part of their family forever. A child often needs to hear this repeatedly before she comes to believe that her new adoptive home actually *is* her permanent home.

Introducing a child to adoption

Reading stories about adoption is a helpful way to introduce young children to the idea of adoption. Although many stories are geared towards preparing siblings for the adoption of a new brother or sister, some books can also provide a good starting point for the child being adopted.

My favorite book of this type is *A Mother for Chocó* by Keiko Kasza. It is about a little bird, Choco, who is looking for his mother. After a long search, he is welcomed into a family of many different types of animals. I think this book as well as others can help small children begin to understand the concept of adoption. Although it might be difficult to find similar books in other languages if the family is adopting internationally, the pictures in this book tell the story well, even if the words are not quite understood by the child when the adult first reads the book.

It is critical for an older child to be permitted to participate in the decision to be adopted. Older potential adoptees need to understand the consequences if they choose *not* to be adopted. They must not be forced or pushed into a decision that is not of their choosing. When children are told that they should or must accept a family’s proposal for adoption some may struggle for years, never accepting the new family as their own. It is crucial that the older child being adopted really does want a family, and want to be adopted.

It is also important to give the child time to prepare for the adoption. Once a child is aware that a family will be adopting her, it is not unusual

for her to experience some anxiety. After all, the child will be leaving everything that is familiar to her and moving away from her orphanage family of friends, caregivers, and teachers, as well as any involved biological family members (which can sometimes include older siblings, aunts, uncles, or grandparents).

Getting to know the prospective adoptive family

Pre-adoptive families complete a homestudy in preparation for their adoption. This often includes a summary biography, accompanied by photographs of the couple, their families, other children in the family, and their house and neighborhood. It is helpful if the child to be adopted is able to sit down with a trusted adult (e.g., caregiver, social worker, director of the program) to look at the pictures that have been sent and begin to become familiar with the prospective adoptive family. As the child looks at the photos, it helps her to engage with the images and see more of the reality of the family and home. When she finally meets her prospective parents/family in person, they are not complete strangers, as she is able to recognize them and has learned a bit about them from the photos.

Unfortunately, television and film representations have portrayed both foster care and orphanage care in a very negative light. Many popular movies also do not present healthy, well-adjusted families. So when a child from another country watches a movie about a family in the U.S., it will likely be very different from his actual adoptive family and their home, neighborhood, and community. Skype meetings between the prospective parent and child can help to expose the child to his new home and family in a realistic way. This also minimizes the expectation that he will be moving into the sort of home environment he might see on TV or in movies, as he will be able to see the adoptive home prior to placement.

It is helpful if the prospective parents can spend some time with the child prior to the home placement. Many countries now require a “bonding period” for parents and child. Although it can be challenging for prospective parents to take time off to visit the child prior to bringing him home, it is wonderful if they can, as it allows all of them to meet and learn about each other. Having the opportunity to visit with one another, playing simple interactive games, and talking about their likes and dislikes helps the prospective parents and child get to know one another. As they share these experiences together, it helps them build their relationship.

Sometimes, depending on the program and the country, prospective adoptive families will travel to the orphanage or foster home for the purpose of selecting a child from among those eligible for adoption.

Although it can be challenging for prospective parents to take time off to visit the child prior to bringing him home, it is wonderful if they can, as it allows all of them to meet and learn about each other.

Children who are instructed by orphanage staff to “just smile and look good so that a family will select you for adoption” are being set up for a depressing experience; for them, meeting prospective adoptive parents might be even more frightening. The child’s focus will then be placed on each person who looks at him, wondering: “Is this the family that will choose me?” It will be a far better experience for the child if he is instead helped to focus on the activities of day, whether playing in the playroom with his peers or going on a field trip with other families. If he is made to feel worried or pressured to check out his “potential” family, it becomes a stressful situation rather than an enjoyable one.

Further suggestions for prospective adoptive parents

Both parents and children should participate in language lessons.

Language lessons are important in intercountry adoptions. So often, early issues with an international adoption are due to or made worse by a miscommunication. Parents should learn to speak their child’s native language as well as they can. Being able to comfort a child in her own language can make an enormous difference, especially in the beginning. Older children being adopted from another country can also often benefit from learning some English phrases prior to meeting their prospective parents. They may not be able to hold a long conversation, but being able to express basic needs makes a huge difference when both parents and child are struggling to communicate in the beginning.

Keep a journal. Parents and older children often create a journal of their adoption journey. Families are encouraged to create a memory book or “lifebook” of their child’s adoption that includes photographs and written memories from all members of the family, orphanage workers, etc. These books are a wonderful way to help the child understand their adoption story, both at the time of adoption and years later. If there are photos available of the child with family or friends, these should be added to the photo album that she will bring to her new home.

Let the child keep a transitional object. It is also helpful for an adopted child, especially an older one, to keep some item that will help remind her of her life in the orphanage or foster home; for example, if she is attached to a particular toy, it is beneficial to allow her to take it with her. This transitional object will serve as an acknowledgement and reminder of her past, and can also help bring reassurance when she is anxious in her new home.

Help the child connect with another adopted child or adopted children.

Just as prospective families are often connected with “mentor” families

that have already adopted, the child to be adopted can also benefit from a similar relationship. If there is a child of like age who has been adopted into the community where the newly adopted child will be living, making that connection between the two children can help the new child feel more comfortable in his new home. Knowing that another child from similar circumstances was also adopted and is doing well can help alleviate anxiety on the part of the newly adopted child. The two children can share similar experiences, and know that there is another person nearby who understands. This connection can help the newly adopted child feel as though he is not alone in his experience.

Serve some of the child's favorite meals. While it may seem fairly innocuous, the change in diet can produce a great deal of anxiety and distress for a newly adopted child. People often associate certain foods with memories from our childhood. Preparing special foods that are meaningful and familiar to the child is a wonderful way to help her feel safe in her new home. Children that have experienced hunger may have eating patterns unfamiliar to the new family, and it may be necessary, in acknowledging this, to reassure them by always having special snacks available. Sensitivity to the child's past experiences can help her realize and know that her new family is aware of and responsive to her needs.

Consider the issue of renaming the child, and discuss with him or her if possible. One question that nearly always arises is whether or not to change an adopted child's name. It is important to discuss this with the older child, identifying all options and asking him what he thinks. Some children have very definite opinions about changing their name, or not, when first adopted. Some children may change their names willingly, to please their new parents; others might hold firm, preferring to keep the names they have always had. Adopted children generally want to take on the new identity of their family, and incorporate that into their own identities, but they also do not want to let go of who they have been. It is a fine line to walk, to acknowledge the past while beginning a new life together, and thus it is an issue that should be decided by parents and child together in the adoption of an older child.

Adopted children generally want to take on the new identity of their family, and incorporate that into their own identities, but they also do not want to let go of who they have been. It is a fine line to walk, to acknowledge the past while beginning a new life together.

Conclusion

Older adopted children have already faced many changes and challenges in their young lives. It is helpful to prepare for and minimize the changes wrought by adoption as much as possible. Significant changes should be made as gradually as possible.

An older child entering a new adoptive home cannot deny the past, nor should she be asked or expected to. That past is part of what has formed her identity and personality. Encouraging her to talk about the past helps her to share with and feel accepted by her new family. If the child sees that her new parents are able to listen and acknowledge her past, it helps her move with less fear into a new relationship with them. If parents are uncomfortable talking about the child's past, she might feel that it is something that is somehow unacceptable, and might even feel that her new family does not fully accept her.

Open communication, about the past, present, and future, helps an adopted child to build a foundation of trust with his new family. That foundation is critical, as it is the basis for a strong attachment between parent and child. For the adoption of an older child to be successful, the child must be able to trust his new parents.

An older child might well feel like an astronaut blasting off into space when first introduced to the concept of adoption, but with education and preparation, it is hoped that the child will eventually feel the same exultation as the astronaut upon completion of the mission. The adoption of a child can be a genuinely amazing, incredibly positive experience for all involved. However, it will be a major change for both parents and child, a change that requires parents to create a loving, accepting environment for the child to learn about the new family and begin to understand the commitment that has been made to her. The child and her new parents will both need preparation, ongoing support, and understanding in order for the child to achieve a successful transition from an orphanage or foster care setting into a permanent, loving family environment.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rhonda Jarema, MA has worked as a social worker, advocate, and educator in the fields of international adoption and mental health for close to thirty years. Rhonda has focused her attention on international adoption ever since she adopted four older children from Russia in 1995. She has been the Director of Family Support Services at Nightlight Christian Adoptions since 1998, and currently serves as the agency's Hague Coordinator. She has published several articles on internationally adopted children and has presented at numerous NCFA and JCICS conferences. Ms. Jarema volunteers for the Council on Accreditation as a Hague Lead Evaluator and Commissioner. She is married, and is the mother of four adult children and one middle school-aged child, all adopted internationally.



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Talking With Older Youth About Adoption



Introduction

Exploring permanency options for older youth in foster care requires a focus on two key components: (1) recruiting and preparing adoptive families who can meet the needs of older youth and (2) engaging and supporting older youth in conversations about their future and their openness to adoption.

This tip sheet provides child welfare professionals with a framework for how to talk with older youth about permanency and offers tangible tips and suggestions on ways to make these conversations more effective and meaningful.

Remember to ENGAGE

E Explain what permanency means—in general and what it can mean for youth

N Not a one-time conversation, but an ongoing discussion

G Give youth opportunities to explain their feelings about adoption

A Ask youth who they feel connected to

G Give youth choices so they can practice self-determination

E Explain their options and help them understand the pros and cons

Key Considerations

Begin preparing for permanency early (not just in the final few months before a youth will age out of foster care) through ongoing discussions about their future and by helping them cultivate supportive relationships.

Use words that youth will understand, not child welfare jargon that might be confusing.
Explain the meaning of permanency and adoption. For example, permanency is a family relationship and bond that is intended to last a lifetime. Adoption makes the family permanence legal.

Assess and be aware of your own thoughts and attitudes—including possible biases or resistance—about adoption for older youth. If you have doubts about the possibility of finding families for older youth, you may reflect that doubt in your work.

Keep in mind that the word “adoption” may carry negative or confusing connotations for youth, especially if they think it means replacing their biological family or other important relationships. Understanding each youth’s perspectives and experiences is key to helping them talk through their own concerns and questions.

Support youth in understanding their different options as you talk about adoption; help them build skills of self-determination and using their voice.

Consider engaging a youth’s independent living worker as a messenger and partner for helping youth explore the possibility of adoption and the importance of permanency.

Involve youth in their own recruitment, such as being part of writing their profile for photolistings, arranging for a professional-quality photo or video to accompany their profile, identifying characteristics of potential parents for them, and sharing their ideas about recruitment messages.

Involve older youth – whether they have been adopted or not – in mentoring their peers in foster care. Read stories and watch videos together highlighting foster care alumni and discuss the stories with the youth. See stories and videos on the [AdoptUSKids website](#).

Consider whether everyone involved with the youth has done everything they can to support the youth’s permanency options through reunification or guardianship with relatives. As you discuss adoption, the youth may have questions about whether there were other options for having a permanent family.



Suggestions for Starting a Conversation

Helping youth think about adoption and the importance of having lifelong supportive relationships requires ongoing conversations and a willingness to listen closely and carefully to what youth are telling you—directly and indirectly—about their goals, concerns, questions, and dreams. Conversations with youth should be authentic—not scripted—and responsive to how each youth wants to engage. There are many effective ways to prompt these discussions and help youth explore the idea of adoption. The questions below may be used as a starting place or as topics to incorporate into your conversations with older youth.

Possible Questions

- What do you want for your future? What dreams do you have for yourself?
- What does permanency mean to you? What have you heard or do you believe about adoption? Do you have concerns or questions about either?
- Do you know anyone who has been adopted? If so, what do you think about their experience? What questions does their experience raise for you?
- What benefits do you think there would be to having more adults who love and care about you as you become an adult and throughout your life?
- Are there ways I can help you find out more about adoption and what permanency could look like for you? Are there people you'd like to talk with about adoption?
- Who in your life – past or present – do you see as a support to you? Who do you call to ask for advice? Who believes in you and loves you? Who would you call at 2:00 AM if you were in trouble?



Possible Topics to Discuss

- Adoption doesn't mean giving up, replacing, or rejecting any of the other important people in your life, including your birth family.
- Even as you're becoming more independent, having an adoptive family can guide and support you in following your dreams and help you to be the best version of yourself.
- Adoption doesn't mean changing your identity or who you are, or even your name if you don't want to. What it does mean is adding to the number of people who care about you and support you throughout your life.
- Homelessness and unemployment are very real risks for youth who age out of foster care. Having an adoptive family can be a safety net as you transition to adulthood – you can go to school and you will have a place to go home to when you need it.
- Let's talk through your options and write out the pros and cons of each. Help us identify caring, committed adults in your life who can be there for you no matter what.



"When we're together, we hear stories from other kids in similar situations and we get to know that we're not alone." —Quentin, age 16

A Mentoring Community of Youth in Foster Care and Supportive Adults

Since 1996, *Under One Sky* programs have served more than 400 youth in foster care from nearly 50 public and private agencies in North Carolina. Our mission is to connect youth in foster care with a mentoring community of supportive adults and peers.

My Life, My Choices

Encouraging youth in foster care to make wise choices for their lives is the heart of *Under One Sky Village Foundation's* mission. The Foundation, a nonprofit organization, provides youth in foster care with a continuum of services that promotes emotional, social and spiritual growth and helps prepare them for the next phase of their lives. Through participation in camp-based programs, youth establish enduring connections to a mentoring community of supportive adults and peers.

Our Programs

ADOPTION SUPPORT GROUP. *Journey Club* is an adoption support group that engages young people who are involved in the adoption process. This small support group meets regularly throughout the year. Topics and discussions aim at real life core issues, and questions and fears about being adopted.

SECOND WIND. *Second Wind* is a leadership mentoring program for people ages 16 to 26 who have lived in, or are living in, foster care. With support from adult mentors, the youth provide workshops in which they share their unique perspective with social workers, foster and adoptive parents, and other childcare professionals. They also meet to support and mentor one another and to inspire each other to achieve success whether that's college, career, or their own unique path.

JR. JOURNEY CAMP & JOURNEY CAMP. *Under One sky Jr. Journey Camp* invites children living in foster care, ages 7 to 11 and *Under One Sky Journey Camp* ages 11 to 17, into a mentoring community of caring adults and peers to help prepare them for the next phase of their lives, including adoption, new or continued foster placement, aging out of foster care, or reunification with birth family. These strength-based overnight camp programs meet 2-3 times throughout the year in an outdoor setting with the same campers and staff. Self-discovery workshops and small group discussions provide opportunity for participants to grow socially and emotionally and connect to other youth in foster care.

TOTAL LIFE CAMP (TLC CAMP). *TLC Camp* focuses on older youth in foster care who may leave foster care at age 18 without a family or strong community of support. Two weekend camps and day-long programs focus on real life issues facing these young people including housing, career and college exploration, and budgeting. Practical life skills and social skills help prepare youth for successful transition to career, college, or the next step toward adulthood and independent living.



Journey Club

Support for children going through the adoption process

Adoption Support Group

Journey Club is an adoption support group that engages children who are involved in the adoption process. This small support group will meet several times over the next six months. Each three hour session includes a fun activity and a meal in addition to the support group. Our experience has shown that children are more responsive and engaged once they have eaten and shared time together having fun.

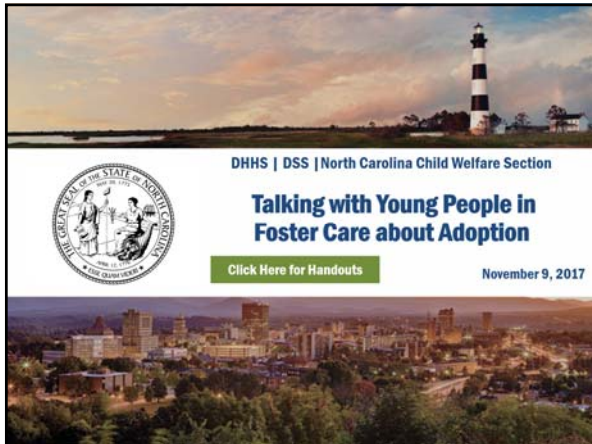
Components

- Group size from 8-10 children between the ages of 11-17 depending on maturity level
- Meet at interesting places in the local community that include a fun activity and food prior to the support group
- Meetings convene from 4:30-7:30 mid-week
- Social workers receive a summary after each meeting
- Children receive materials relevant for each meeting
- Food is included at each meeting
- Facilitators work with social workers/guardians for intake
- Social workers transport children to each meeting

Topics of Discussion


1. Introductions: Getting to know one another, overview of program, hearing from a youth who participated in a previous group, what Journey Club is and what it's not, reviewing agreements, opportunities to begin sharing individual stories and/or where we are right now in our lives
2. Myths/Facts: Airing out misconceptions and fears about adoption such as: what adoption means regarding birth parents/siblings, why did this have to happen, and understanding that it's not your fault.
3. Stories from Real Life Adoptions: an adoptive parent and older youth share adoption stories and discuss topics such as: how do you know if it's the right family? Realities of being in a Family: There are no perfect families, expectations, and different families have different rules.
4. Moving Forward or Letting Go: Ways to look at having an adoptive family while maintaining birth family connections and consideration of the long-term benefits of having a permanent family.
5. Planning for the Unknown: Hopelessness, rejection, insecurities, how to bond, using your voice and getting support.
6. If appropriate, preparing for Adoption Recruitment Event or meeting with potential adoptive parents.






About this webinar

This webinar was developed through funding from the North Carolina Division of Social Services by the Family and Children’s Resource Program, part of the Jordan Institute for Families at the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work.

 NC Division of Social Services


 UNC SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

In the future a recording of this webinar will be available on ncswLearn.org.

Goals for this Webinar

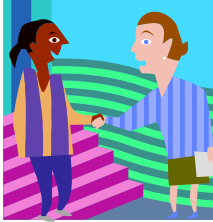
By the end of this webinar, we hope you learn:

- Child-focused adoption preparation activities being used in North Carolina
- Strategies for working with kids who say they don’t want to be adopted
- Resources for learning more




A Special Note About Questions

- We will monitor questions via the chat box and answer them as possible throughout the webinar.
- There will also be a **follow-up document** that answers questions asked during this webinar; this document will be e-mailed to all registered participants and posted with the webinar recording.
- The webinar recording will be on ncswLearn.org and on the Family and Children's Resource Program webpage (<http://fcrp.unc.edu/webinars.asp>).

Panelists Brandon Nivens Mary Mackins Diane Delafield Bobbette Willis	
Moderator Rick Zechman	Tech Support Phillip Armfield John McMahon


Agenda

- I. Why adoption preparation matters
- II. Agency successes & strategies
- III. Individual worker strategies
- IV. Resources
- V. Q & A



Alumni Perspective

Why Preparation Matters




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Afraid of Letting Go

(Why youth say no to adoption)


- I entered foster care at 12;
I was adopted at 16.
- Attachment to their birth family
- Hopes of reunification
- Don't fully understand what adoption means
- Fear of rejection and the unknown
- "Get out of the system" mentality means adoption may be viewed as just another placement (but permanent)



8

How I Found Under One Sky


- My social worker contacted Under One Sky to help
- With Under One Sky, I was able to be fully involved with the adoption process
- My mom had attended an Under One Sky event and learned about me, my likes, and dislikes



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Excerpts from My 'Zine

Designed by me in August 2005 at Under One Sky Passages Camp



All About Me

My name is
Brandon Brown

I am *14* years old

My favorite subject in school is
Math and Music

Some of my favorite things to do are
Play baseball, swim, and sing.

When I am older I want to
be a teacher


I think my best qualities are
that I am easy to get along with.

My friends would describe me as
funny and outgoing.

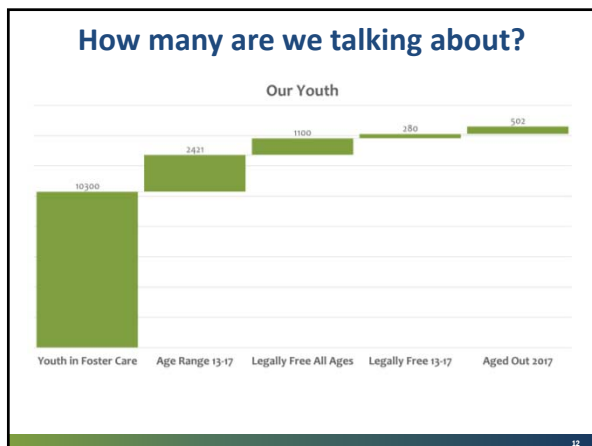
If I had one wish it would be
to live with my grandmother.

NC Division of Social Services Perspective

Why Preparation Matters



NC Kids
Adoption & Foster Care Network




We Sometimes Hear

This youth...

- Isn't ready to be adopted

OR

- Is "unadoptable"
 - Processing adoption
 - PRTF
- Refuses to be adopted
 - Taking comments at face value
 - Birth family connections
 - Validating youth feelings



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What We Hear....

This youth...

- Is "too old" to be adopted
 - Permanency
 - Support
 - Lifelong connections
- And/or caseworker has vision of "the ideal" family
 - Demographics
 - Composition
- Refuses to consider families out of area or state


~ We Can Do Better at Overcoming Barriers! ~



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Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services

Successful Strategies



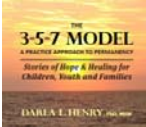
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Mecklenburg Co. Youth & Family Services

JAM (Just About Me)



Adoption readiness program for ages 12-17

- Exercises from 3-5-7 Model help youth explore feelings and emotions about adoption
- Youth and adoption SW complete individual exercises together monthly
- Social workers facilitate quarterly group session and activity



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JAM Activity from 3-5-7 Model



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Mecklenburg Co. Youth & Family Services

Annual Youth Adoption Conference


- Nationally-recognized speakers, panel of past foster care youth/adoptees, and adoption professionals all share their adoption experience or expertise
- Open to **all NC youth in foster care ages 10-17** with the primary or secondary goal of adoption
- FREE registration: includes breakfast, lunch, workshops, conference bag, and prizes

NEXT CONFERENCE
June 20, 2018
Charlotte, NC

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Mecklenburg Co. Youth & Family Services

Weekend Miracles



Modeled on KIDSAVE in Los Angeles; Mecklenburg offers it in collaboration with Congregations for Kids (CFK)

- **Goal:** lasting adult connections for older youth in care
- **For:** any youth age 9-17 with a goal other than reunification
- **Weekend host/mentors:** youth matched with adult who spends 2+ days a month for at least a year with the youth; becomes member of youth's team
- **Agency does:** background checks, trainings, and home assessment (Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard)

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Mecklenburg Co. Youth & Family Services

Weekend Miracles


Activities: One structured monthly activity for youth and mentors sponsored by CFK; youths and mentors can do additional activities on their own once they've been matched and received clearances



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Under One Sky Perspective

Successful Strategies



UNDER ONE SKY VILLAGE FOUNDATION
Renewing the Human Spirit

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Under One Sky Overview

- Mentoring community of peers and adults for youth in care
- Based in Asheville; serving all NC counties since 2004
- Camp-based programs for youth ages 7-18
 - The Journey Experience (ages 11-17)
 - The Jr. Journey Experience (ages 7-11)
 - Total Life Conferences (ages 15-18)
- Second Wind
 - Leadership/mentoring group for youth ages 16-26
 - Provide training/workshops for agencies facilitated by youth in foster care
- Year-round support services between camp programs

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Journey Club


- Adoption peer support group for youth ages 11-17 going through the adoption recruitment process
- Groups of 6-8 youth meet monthly for six, 3-hour sessions
- Group sessions include an activity, food, and group discussion
- Topics addressed help youth work through barriers and issues holding them back from saying "Yes"
- Facilitators include an adoptive parent and a young adult who has been adopted



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Agency Strategies You Can Do Recruitment

- Involve youth in their own adoption recruitment process
- Keep youth updated and share what's REALLY going on
- Explain the process and help prepare youth for all potential outcomes
- Youth don't need to be present at recruitment events
- Prepare strength-based profiles that are current



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Alumni & Agency Perspective

What Workers Can Do

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Support I Needed


- Communicate: keep youth updated and in the loop with how things are going
- Show an interest in youth's success and well-being
- Youth deserve to be decision makers!



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Supporting Workers

- Give resources and tools they need to be successful
- Give social workers time to support youth so they can address questions as they arise
- Train how to address issues and barriers that may hold youth back from saying "Yes" to adoption




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Resources and Handouts

- NC Kids Snapshot
- Overcoming Adoption Ambivalence
- Talking with Older Youth About Adoption
- Preparing Older Youth for Adoption
- Child Assessment/Adoption and Recruitment
- Preparing Children and Youth for Adoption or Other Family Permanency
- Improving Recruitment Outcomes

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Questions



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Resources


<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/>


<http://bit.ly/2yT2Xvg>


<https://www2.ncdhhs.gov/dss/adopt/index.htm>


<http://fosteringperspectives.org/>


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Impact on you and your agency


Type into chat.....


One thing you will do in response to what you have learned today....

Contact Information

 **Diane Delafield**
Diane@under1sky.org

 **Mary Mackins**
Mary.Mackins@dhhs.nc.gov

 **Brandon Nivens**
bhnivens@yahoo.com

 **Bobbette Willis**
Bobbette.Willis@mecklenburgcountync.gov

Final Steps for DSS Staff

1. Please take a brief survey
 - We will provide link for those logged on
 - Can also access thru ncswlearn.org
2. To receive training credit, you must "Complete Course" WITHIN ONE WEEK
 - ✓ Log in to www.ncswlearn.org
 - ✓ Select "PLP"
 - ✓ Select "Webinars"
 - ✓ Click "Enter"
 - ✓ Click "Complete Course" button

Follow-Up Document for the Webinar

Talking with Young People in Foster Care about Adoption

Presenters

Mary Mackins
NC Division of Social Services

Diane Delafield and Brandon Nivens
Under One Sky Village Foundation

Bobbette Willis
Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services

Produced by
Family and Children's Resource Program, part of the
Jordan Institute for Families
UNC-Chapel Hill School of Social Work

Sponsored by
NC Division of Social Services

Webinar handouts: https://ncswlearn.org/ncsts/webinar/handouts/52_webinar_handouts_11_9_17.pdf

Recording: if you missed the webinar or want to view it again, go to: <http://fcrp.unc.edu/webinars.asp>

Answers to Questions Asked During the Webinar

Responses in this document are from the NC Division of Social Services Child Welfare Services Section.

I. Questions for Brandon Nivens

Brandon, what do you wish your workers had done differently or better for you?

I think it mostly boils down to communication. Don't beat around the bush. [*Brandon supported this by relating his experience of being 15 years old and in what he had been told was an adoptive placement, only to find out later on his own that the family had concluded long ago that they could not adopt him.*] I was 15, mentally stable, and able to communicate well. That's why I took offense that no one told me. Children in care need to have relationships with adults they trust, and those adults need to keep them informed.

How do you suggest I talk to a young person in a similar situation, but who not be able to handle such disappointing news?

Brandon: You do have to take into account the specifics. Each child is unique, and you need to know what their issues are. Always have their feelings in mind. But don't keep them in the dark. Make it clear you are there for them and provide constant support. All your conversations with them should be strength-based: make it clear that you know who they are and what they are good at, and reassure them they have people to support them, no matter what.

Diane: If you know children well ahead of time, you can ask them in advance: "How much do you want to know?" Set up a game plan for communication with these young people. This should be a communication plan they help develop. Trust is such a key issue.

Brandon: Also, it is more than OK to work with a therapist, mentor, or another trusted adult. It doesn't have to always be the social worker who has this conversation with the young person. Sometimes it is more appropriate for someone else to talk with them about this. Someone they are closer to that they see more often can sometimes be better.

2. Mecklenburg Co. Adoption Programming

Bobbette, would you tell us more about Mecklenburg's annual conference?

Every year Mecklenburg County hosts a Youth Adoption Conference. All NC foster care youth ages 10-17 with the primary or secondary goal of adoption are eligible to attend. Registration is free and includes breakfast, lunch, workshops, conference bag, and prizes.

Last year 100 youth attended. Approximately 70 of these were from Mecklenburg and the rest were from other counties. We would very much like to see an increase in attendance from other counties at our 2018 event, which is designed to serve 250 youth.

Please mark your calendars! Next year the conference will be held on **June 20, 2018** on the campus of Central Piedmont Community College-Harris Campus in Charlotte, NC. (This is the same location as the Charlotte child welfare training center.)

In January 2018 information about registration for the 2018 event will be posted on <https://www.mecknc.gov/dss/adopt/events/AdoptionConference/Pages/Adoption%20Conference.aspx>. Mecklenburg adoption staff will also market this event to all counties. Thank you, and we hope to see your young people at the conference in June!

Where can I learn more about Darla Henry's 3-5-7 training, including how much it costs?

The best way would be to approach Ms. Henry directly. You can find her contact info at <http://darlahenry.org/>.

3. Under One Sky

Is Under One Sky a faith-based program?

A: No. There is spiritual component that is evident during our camp programs, and we have supported many young people who felt they wanted to be connected to something bigger than themselves. But we are not religious or affiliated with any religious group.

What is a 'zine?

A 'zine is a custom-made magazine—a mini-magazine. They can be on any topic, but are sometimes used in child-specific, child-driven recruitment to showcase the youth's interests, hopes and dreams. Brandon's zine, which he shared some of during the webinar, was developed at an Under One Sky camp. These zines were 8-page booklets. Youths control each development stage. After pictures are taken, youth choose which shots to use. After the interview is transcribed, youth select excerpts to appear in the 'zine. They also do the final layout. The result gives prospective adoptive parents a vivid impression of the child's interests and spirit.

What counties does Under One Sky work with currently?

We will work with any North Carolina county. though the primary ones we have partnered with are in Western NC and the Piedmont. We are currently working with Lee, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Catawba, Union, Rutherford, McDowell, Buncombe, Henderson, and Gaston Counties.

What if we are in another part of the state?

We would be glad to come to you to help you start a journey club program in your county. If you are interested, contact Diane Delafield at diane@under1sky.org.

How much do Under One Sky programs cost?

They range from \$1800 per year per youth to \$3,300 per year per youth. The cost includes a series of camp-based programs throughout the year, youth services between camp programs and depending on the individual needs of the youth, could include adoption preparation support or involvement in Second Wind, our mentoring/leadership program for youth ages 16-26.

Diane, at what age would we start talking with a child about adoption? I often hear that workers aren't talking with kids about adoption because they think they are too young to understand.

It depends more on the emotional stability of the child, rather than their chronological age. The word "adoption" can be so loaded. It can scare kids; there are a lot of misconceptions. Rather than starting off discussing adoption, I would instead start talking about hopes and dreams as early as you think they can comprehend. Some are very capable of understanding permanency and the idea of a forever family at age 8, 9, or 10. But it is individual.

4. Miscellaneous

How do county agencies pay for the kinds of adoption promotion and support activities described in this webinar?

Some counties use adoption promotion and LINKS monies to fund these services for young people.

Mary, can you say again how many of those 1,100 legally free young people are teens?

In North Carolina today there are 280 teens who are legally free for adoption. Keep in mind, this number does not take into account those counties that are the pilot counties for NC Fast.

Does anyone have suggestions for how their agency has helped foster care workers who don't feel comfortable talking about adoption (case transfers after TPR to an adoption worker) even when it's a primary or secondary plan because they figure "that's the adoption worker's job," even though that's not the agency expectation?

In some agencies, adoption workers and foster care workers talk together with the child about adoption.

Bobbette: In Mecklenburg, our county arranged for foster care workers to attend the 3-5-7 training so they could become more comfortable and skilled at speaking with youth about adoption. It is understandable that some people find this difficult, since with concurrent planning there is another goal as well, and that can be confusing.

Can an undocumented immigrant adopt a child if the child prefers that the person adopt him/her?

Mary: Yes, undocumented immigrants can adopt. However, since North Carolina is a state-supervised, county-administered child welfare system, each county would make their own decision regarding such practice. Some agencies may allow this, while others would not. Workers would need to review strategies put into place by their agency on how to best approach these situations, case by case. Also, workers must keep in mind, undocumented immigrants would have to be fingerprinted. What type of situation would they be walking into if they are being fingerprinted in a sheriff's office? Would the sheriff's office allow this, or would this become a "situation" for the prospective adoptive parent?

Participant responses to the question:

What is one thing you will do in response to what you have learned today?

- Look into Under1Sky for one of my children on my case load
- More resources out there that we can tap into
- Using groups and activities to talk to youth about adoption
- Learned about the many resources that are available to children regarding adoption
- Communicate more with youth about their adoption situation
- The adoption readiness camp
- I loved the quote 'not the perfect family but the RIGHT family'
- The camps that are offered may really be useful for some of the kids I work with
- Under One Sky is a great option for our children
- Look at mentoring; Let the youth lead their process for adoption.
- Options for the older youth/teens and the Youth Adoption Conf.
- Small groups are better to prepare children for adoption
- Have a small group for legally free teens for adoption readiness
- Under One Sky
- More resources than I was aware of!!
- That there are programs out there to support our children heading towards adoption!
- look into camp
- Not only having the youth be involved in their adoption process, but have that child specifically decide how MUCH they want to be in the loop and "driving the car"
- Using groups to address adoption with older youth
- Be more open and honest with my older children about the process and what we will be doing regarding recruitment efforts
- Make sure the youth are kept in the loop about their adoption.
- Be more open with communication with children about what is going on with their adoption
- Communication and more resources
- Resources and Adoption Readiness Camp
- Sign up a couple of my kids for the Adoption Conference
- Wake County kids Attending Meck's Youth Conference
- The need to communicate directly with the youth regarding their adoption plan.
- The idea of matching events with a group representing the child
- Do video profiles for youth
- Adoption readiness camp, it is important for youth to be able to participate in a group to discuss fears/concerns.
- Push youth-driven recruitment
- Learning about Weekend Miracles
- starting a group for our youth who are free for adoption
- The adoption conference, camps, options for older youth, and getting youth more involved with their adoption process
- The juvenile is never too young to talk to about adoption.
- utilize resources to involve youth
- Brandon's first hand experience validates how important it is to listen to youth and let them be a part of their adoption process
- Attending the Adoption Conference and camps
- Working more in partnership with my older youth with adoption as their plan
- Look into the Youth Adoption Conference and other resources in helping children with adoption.
- Available resources
- Continue open communication with youth so that they feel apart of the process.
- A child's voice is very powerful. LISTEN to them
- Adoption conference, honest communication with youth
- Planning to send youth from Durham County to next adoption conference.
- Youth input and conference
- Need a Journey Club in Wake Co.
- Contact a few of the resources
- Give our kids more opportunity to participate in the process