



Touchpoints

Preparing Children for Transitions



Touchpoints

Touchpoints For Children

Honesty throughout the permanency process can be difficult because the truth is often painful, and a child or youth may respond with anger, tears or withdrawal. But honesty helps children and youth understand each step of what they are going through. Listening to their expression of their needs is the primary goal of your conversations.

This guide is designed for people who are involved in key transition points for a child in out-of-home care: ongoing workers, foster parents, relative caregivers, adoption workers, CASA volunteers, therapists, tribal workers.

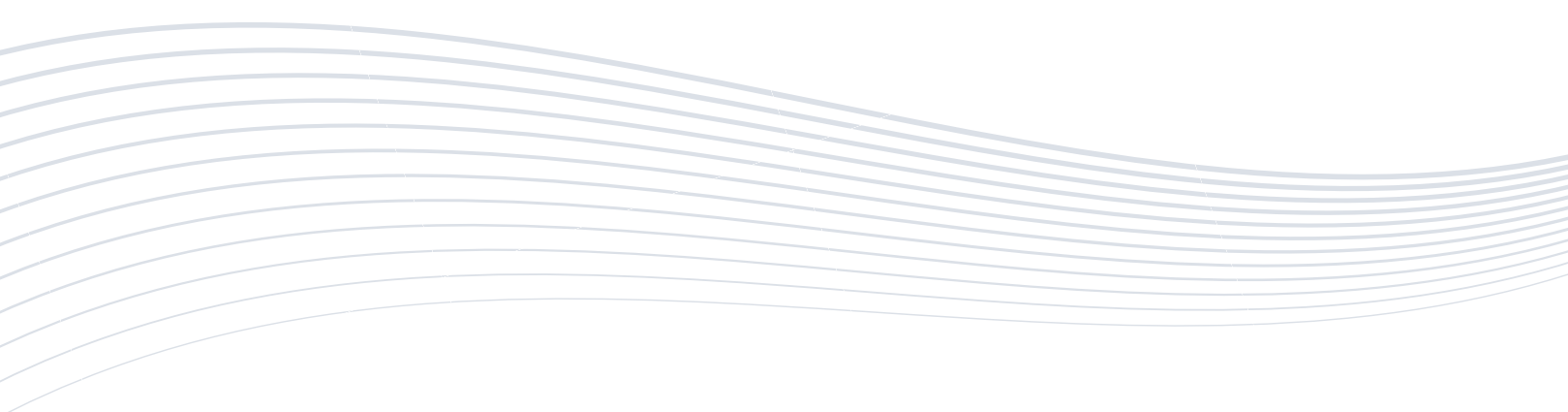
We hope you use this as a tool to talk with children and youth beginning with the transition to out-of-home care and continuing until a child reaches permanency.

Each chapter identifies a key discussion time, and includes an activity, tools, and resource materials to help open the conversation and encourage the child or youth to express the questions they might be afraid to ask.

Please contact us at the Coalition any time you have questions. We can be reached by email at info@coalitionforcyf.org or by phone at 414-475-1246.

Call us, we're here to help.

Coalition for Children, Youth & Families
6737 W. Washington Street, Suite 2353
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What will it be like in foster care?

“I don’t want to go!”

Most kids are scared and confused when they are removed from the home they know. It’s important to open the door to let the child express their fears and feelings. Helping a child come up with the words to explain what’s happening, the child’s “public story,” will make the transition a little easier.

Common Questions

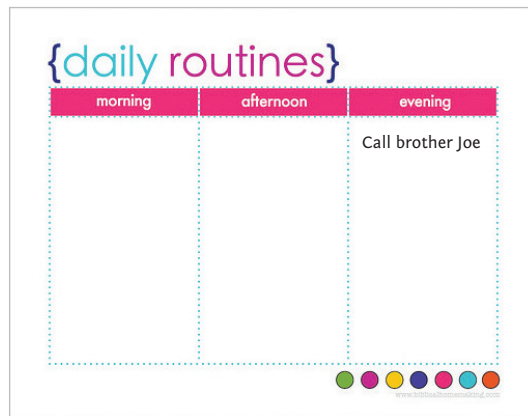
- Why did this happen?
- Why do I have to leave home?
- Will my Mom and Dad be OK?
- Where are you taking me?
- Will I be safe?
- When can I go home?
- What happens if they don’t accept my sexual orientation/gender identity?
- Can they kick me out? Do I have to pretend to be someone I’m not?

Who Should Be Involved?

- CPS/Social Worker
- Birth parents
- Relatives
- Foster parents
- Police
- Grandparents
- Other relatives
- Other significant people in the child’s life

Activity

Talk about what a typical day will look like in the foster home. This can help the child who usually does all the caretaking to see that there is time for play. And it helps the child who has come from a chaotic home to see that there will be consistency. Use pictures for younger children. Include the time(s) the child can be in touch with siblings and parents if this has been decided.



Begin a life book for a child or youth in care.

Tools

- Backpack
- Stuffed animal/favorite blanket/other comfort items
- Photo album from foster family (keep at agency)
- Doll House
- List of child's foods, sleep routine, favorite games, books, DVDs
- Life book (see also FCARC life book tip sheet "Life Books: A Life Long Priceless Treasure" for links to life book resources)
- Journal
- Photos of birth family
- Anything else the child or youth identifies as significant that could go with them

Books and Other Resources

- Zachary's New Home (ages 4-8)*
- Why Me? (ages 3-5)*
- My Foster Family (ages 3-5)*
- Maybe Days (ages 4-8)*
- The Star (ages 3-8)*
- Kids Need to be Safe: A Book for Children in Foster Care*
- All Kinds of Separation (ages 3-8)*
- The Kissing Hand (ages 4-8)*
- A Terrible Thing Happened*
- Adrian (ages 6-10)*
- The Whole Me*
- My Lifebook Journal: A workbook that helps kids adjust to foster care*
- Keeping It Secret: Teens Write about Foster Care Stigma*

Will I be able to visit my parents?

Children need to be included in discussions about seeing their birth parents. Help the child or youth define what they want in terms of the content of visits.

One of the biggest hurdles may be for the child to feel it's OK to connect to the foster family. Help the birth parent(s) give the child permission to emotionally connect to the foster parents.

Common Questions

- How long can I see them?
- Where will I see them?
- How often can I see them?
- Can we talk on the phone?
- Can I text or email them?
- Why does someone else have to be there when we have visits?

Who Should Be Involved?

- Ongoing caseworker
- Birth parents
- Foster parents
- Other relatives
- Therapists
- Parent Resource Worker
- CASA volunteer

Activity

On a blank calendar, write in the dates that the child and birth parents will be visiting. Add any other important dates if you know them. If the child is old enough, let the child do the writing.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY

Ask the child or youth how they spent time with their parents and try to arrange to have that video game, DVD, book, etc. available to take on the visit.

Tools

Calendar to write visitation dates/important dates; include any planned contact (e.g., “Wed 6:00-6:30 video chat”)

Camera (digital, phone, iPad, etc.) to take a picture at the first visit after out-of-home care placement so that the child has a picture of him/herself with the birth parents

Video games, board games, books, DVDs that the child or youth enjoys

Books and Other Resources

My Foster Family (ages 3-5)

A Place in My Heart (ages 3-8)

Adrian (ages 6-10)

Finding the Right Spot (ages 11-14)

When Do I Go Home? Intervention Strategies for Foster Parents and Helping Professionals

Visiting Day (ages 4-8)

Let's Talk about When Your Parent Is in Jail (ages 6-11)

My Daddy Is in Jail (ages 5-10)

Loving through Bars – Children with Parents in Prison

A Visit with Daddy

A Visit with Mommy

Can I visit my brothers and sisters?

A child may feel responsible for the other children in the family.

“Sibling relationships can provide a significant source of continuity throughout a child’s life and are likely to be one of the longest relationships that most people experience. One of the most important contributions that child welfare professionals can provide for children who enter foster care is to preserve their connections with their brothers and sisters.” (from www.childwelfare.gov)

Common Questions

How long can I see them?

Where will I see them?

How often can I see them?

Can we talk on the phone or email/text/video chat?

Why can’t we live together?

Why do I have to see them?

Will my brothers/sisters be OK?

But no one else knows how to take care of them.

Who Should Be Involved?

Ongoing caseworker

Birth parents

Foster parents

Other relatives

Therapists

Other professionals who may be involved in visits

“I hated being taken from my Mom no matter what she did. Another horrible part for me was being separated from my brother Matthew. Sometimes I wouldn’t see him for months.”

— Marc on www.adoptuskids.org

Activity

Sibling Memories: Help the child go back and recall memories of brothers and sisters. Record these in the life book. You could also help the child make a collage of things the children like to do together, or things the sibling likes, or even things that just remind the child of a sibling. Take photos during visitations and add these to the life book.



Tools

Poster board, magazines, glue, etc. for collage

Phone cards

Birthday cards

Camera (digital, phone, iPad, etc.)

Calendar with important dates noted

Sibling photos

Video games, DVDs, movies that the child/youth has enjoyed with siblings in the past and would like to do again

Books and Other Resources

See the website www.camptobelong.org for information on a camp that reunites siblings

See the website www.childwelfare.gov for information and resources

FCARC Fostering Across Wisconsin Newsletter, Winter 2011, Family Connections

For teens, see the website www.fyi3.com from Foster Club; search "siblings"

Can somebody explain what court is all about?

“Am I in trouble?”

“You’re not in trouble. Court is an adult event. Here’s what will happen...” If the child or youth is old enough, you can ask, “Is there anything you want me to tell the judge?” The same questions, and feelings of grief or loss, may come up in each court event, including reviews, termination of parental rights and appeals.

Common Questions

What will happen when we get to court?

Who will be there?

Will I have to say anything?

Can I talk to my Mom and Dad?
What if I don’t want to talk to them?

What could happen afterwards?

How should I dress?

Who Will Be Invited to Court?

Ongoing caseworker

Foster Care Coordinator

Therapists

Tribal representatives

Foster parents

Birth parents

CASA volunteer

Family Support worker

County attorney

Guardian ad litem and/or child’s attorney

What if I don’t understand all this legal stuff going on?

Don’t worry. It’s confusing to most people. Lawyers go to school for many years after college just to figure it all out.

You are not expected to understand all the details of what is happening legally in your life. But it is important to ask questions if there is anything you do wish to understand. If you don’t get it the first time it is explained, don’t be afraid to ask again until you have it figured out.

(from www.fosterclub.org)

Activity

More judges are requesting older children to take part in the court process. Role play the kinds of questions the judge may ask such as “How is school going?” “How do you like living with [names of foster parents]?” “Where do you want to live?” “How are the visits with your Mom and Dad?” Visit the courtroom if possible.



Tools

Calendar with court dates

A list of who will be there and the roles they play

Books and Other Resources

Zachary's New Home (ages 4-8)

Adrian (ages 6-10)

What's Happening in Court?

Fostering Across Wisconsin Newsletter, Spring 2013 "The Importance of Going to Court"

What if I have to move again?

“As when I was a child, I have moved often as an adult. It seems like part of being a foster survivor is never being able to settle down, and not necessarily even knowing how to.” Rose Garland on www.nacac.org.

When there is a placement change, the biggest question a child or youth may have is “Why?” Especially if they thought they were doing well, staying out of trouble, and getting along with everyone. Be sure to describe any problems honestly, discuss unmet needs the child may have and how those might be met in the new family.

Common Questions

- Why am I moving?
- How do my foster parents feel about me leaving?
- Are the other children staying here?
- Whose decision was this?
- Who will help me move?
- Will I be able to see my “other families”?
- What’s going to happen to all my stuff?
- Is this about my sexual orientation/ gender identity?

Who Should Be Involved?

- Ongoing case worker
- Current family
- Birth parents
- Therapists
- Extended family members close to the child/youth
- Other significant adults such as a mentor, coach, troop leader, etc.
- CASA volunteer
- Family Support worker
- County attorney
- Guardian ad litem and/or child’s attorney

Activity

Create a ceremony around moving. Be sure the child or youth has a duffel bag or suitcase (no garbage bags). Ask the current foster family for a meaningful item to pack that will be a reminder of the child's stay in their home. Even if the child is leaving under troubling circumstances, there will be something positive the child can focus on. Update the life book before the move. Involve the new foster parents or staff from the residential treatment center. Have a "safe" person the child knows help with transportation and to stay awhile at the new home, perhaps stay for dinner, help them unpack, watch them play, etc.



Tools

Photo album

Address book

Life book

Doll house

Camera (digital, phone, iPad, etc.): Be sure the child leaves with a photo of the house and the family to add to the life book

Ecomap: visual diagram to help children see the connection between themselves and others; a circle in the middle with the child's name and lines to go from the child's circle to other circles representing the court, foster families, siblings, schools, or "things I like to do"

Books and Other Resources

Maybe Days (ages 4-8)

My Foster Family (ages 3-10)

My Foster Care Journey

Little Heroes: Foster Care and Adoption

Murphy's Three Homes: A Story for Children in Foster Care

Robbie's Trail Through Foster Care

Brave Bart: A Story for Traumatized and Grieving Children

Soul Moon Soup (poetry—older children)

In the System and In the Life (LGBT teens)

What will it be like if I go home?

Going home to a birth family can create anxiety for children of all ages.

Children may wonder if anything has changed. What is different now that makes it safe to be there when it wasn't safe before? They may be apprehensive about returning home, especially if they have felt safe in the foster home.

Common Questions

Will I live in my old house?

Does my mother still live with X (boyfriend)?

Are my brothers/sisters going home too?

How do Mom and Dad feel about me coming home?

How do my foster parents feel about me leaving? Can I still see them?

Who do I talk to if things are going well or things are going wrong? Then what happens?

What is the safety plan?

Who can I talk to if my family still doesn't accept me or tries to make me change who I am?

Who Should Be Involved?

Ongoing case worker

Judge

Guardian ad litem and/or child's attorney

Birth parents

Therapist

Current family

CASA volunteer

Other significant people in the child's life

Activity

Update the life book with photos of the foster home, the foster family (including foster brothers and sisters). Help the child or youth write the names of people who were important during this time. This is a good chance to encourage questions.

MESSAGES FROM IMPORTANT PEOPLE IN MY LIFE

FROM _____

FROM _____

From Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parent Association free lifebook pages:
http://www.ifapa.org/publications/IFAPA_Lifebook_Pages.asp

Tools

Address book

Camera (take a picture on the day of return to add to the life book)

Life book (ideally parents were involved in putting together pre-placement information and family pictures)

Autograph doll/book for school friends

Safety Plan

Books and Other Resources

Adrian (ages 6-10)

The Invisible String (ages 3 and up)

Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center Tip Sheets for Youth: "Life Books: A Creative and Fun Way to Express Yourself"

Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center Tip Sheets for Parents: "Life Books: A Life Long Priceless Treasure"

Born this Way: Real Stories of Growing up Gay

What can I expect to happen if adoption is the plan?

Even if adoption has been talked about before, and maybe longed for by the child, it still can be a confusing and perhaps distressing thought for some children.

Divided loyalties play a big role any time a child moves to permanency with an adoptive family. The child is often unsure how to feel about the birth family, the new adoptive family and the foster family. Is it OK to care about them all?

Common Questions

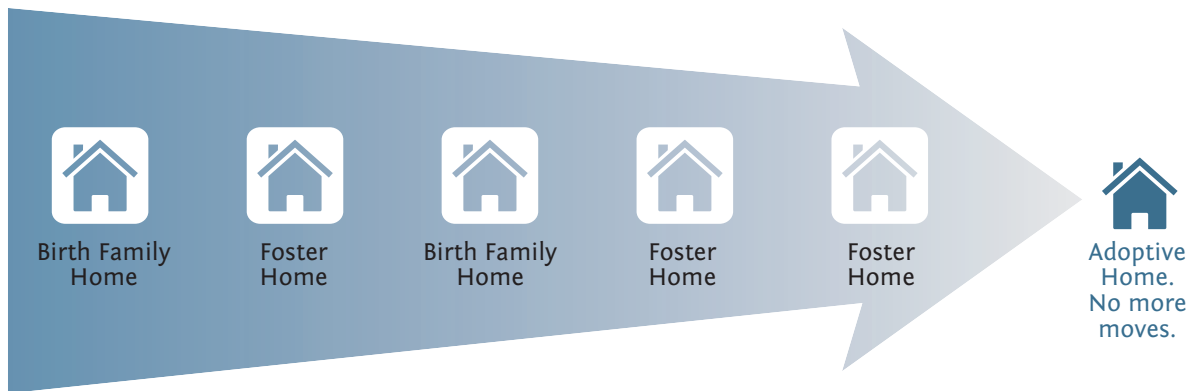
- Why can't I just go home?
- Where will I live?
- What does it mean to be adopted?
- How long is adoption for?
- Will the other foster kids come too?
- Will I live with all my brothers/sisters?
- Is it OK to still love my other Mom and Dad?
- When should/can I “come out”?

Who Should Be Involved?

- Ongoing case worker
- Judge
- Guardian ad litem
- Child's attorney
- Therapist
- Current family
- Other significant people in the child's life

Activity

Create a Life Path diagram to illustrate where the child or youth has been and that the path ends at the adoptive home.



Include the child's age at each placement and the name of the foster and adoptive parents

Tools

Paper and markers to create a life path diagram (example above)

Photo album/video of family

Foster care and adoption support group for teens

Lifemaps: visual diagrams to help children understand the paths their lives have taken; these may include milestones or stepping stones to show the child's age and a note about where and with whom they lived at that age

Safety Plan

Books and Other Resources

www.fosterclub.com for stories written by foster youth about adoption

Is Adoption Right for Me: Teens explore the Adoption Option

Families Change: A Book for Children Experiencing Termination of Parental Rights

Call the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families for help and for additional resources: 1-800-762-8063

Born this Way: Real Stories of Growing up Gay

Do I have a say in choosing my family?

Children in out-of-home care have often have had many critical decisions made for them. Getting their input about what they'd like in a family will help them see that they're part of the adoption process and can ease transition to adoption.

Talk about the difference between foster care and adoption, what permanency means, and how you select a family. Ask the child, "What would you like your family to be like?" If a relative has been identified as the adoptive family, you can ask "Is this what you want? Do you want to live here?" If recruiting a family, ask the child, "What would you like people to know about you?"

Common Questions

Will my name change?

If they were my foster family before, what will be different if they adopt me?

What will be different if my Grandma and Grandpa (or Aunt and Uncle) are now my Mom and Dad?

What do I call my Grandma/Grandpa/Aunt/Uncle if they adopt me?

Who Should Be Involved?

Ongoing case worker

Recruitment worker

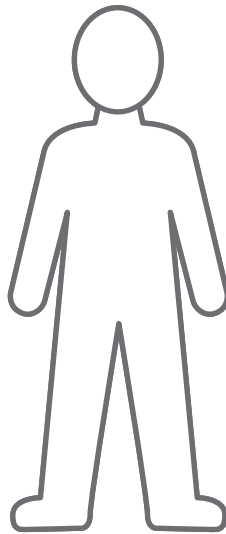
Therapist

Current family

Other significant people in the child's life

Activity

Cut open two or three large paper bags and tape them together to be as big as the child. Draw around the child so you have an outline. Help the child find pictures in magazines that show things the child likes, or wants to do or pictures that show families. Paste the magazine pictures on the body outline. Let the child draw a face, and draw or write the words for anything else that the child would like a family to know.



Tools

- Body Collage (see example above)
- “Changing Hats” curriculum for foster parents becoming adoptive parents
- Life Path diagram (see activity in Chapter 7) or a timeline of the child’s life
- Ecomap (see “Tools” in Chapter 5 and include “things about me,” or “things I like to do” as separate circles)
- Journal
- Play telephone for younger children to ask questions of the new family
- Life book

Books and Other Resources

- Maybe Days (ages 4-8)*
- Kinship Adoption: Mike and Sadie’s Story*
- For teens, www.fosterclub.com*

What should I do to get ready to meet my new family?

Children wonder what to expect when meeting their adoptive family. Their anxiety may be heightened if they've had multiple placements.

Much of the discussion you'll have with children getting ready for adoption will be asking for the child's input. Questions like the following can be part of the conversation: What would you like to say to the family? What would you like them to tell you? What would you like to do on your first visit? Are you comfortable staying overnight?

Common Questions

What's wrong with me that my birth family doesn't want me?

If nothing is wrong with me, is something wrong with them? Will that same thing be wrong with me?

Will I be good enough? What happens if I'm bad?

Do I move in right away?

Will I ever see my other family again? My siblings?

Will they accept me for who I am/how I identify?

Who Should Be Involved?

Ongoing case worker

Recruitment worker

Therapist

Current family

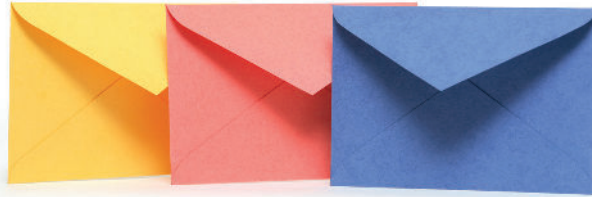
Other significant people in the child's life

Why do I have to be adopted?

"I was adopted at the age of 14 by my foster mother," says FosterClub member Dan, age 26, of New York. "My birth mother surrendered her rights. I used to think it was because she didn't want me. I used to think it was because she didn't love me. Now I've realized that she gave me up so that I could live a better life, a life that she couldn't provide. Giving something up you love is the greatest kind of love because it is self-less." www.fosterclub.org

Activity

Create a “Moving Calendar” similar to an Advent Calendar. One easy way to do this is to use leftover envelopes you’ve accumulated. Paste them on a sheet of poster board. Inside each envelope, put a note about what will happen that day, for example “Adoptive parents will pick you up at 2:00 for a visit” or “Goodbye party at your foster home.” If nothing special is happening that day, write something general like “Seven days until Moving Day” or “Get autographs from everyone in your foster home for your life book.”



Tools

Envelopes, poster board for moving calendar

“Can You Tell Me What They Think” doll or puppet activity from the “Changing Hats” curriculum

Come Live in Our Home (the Adoption Song) by Lori Malvey

Books and Other Resources

Welcome Home, Forever Child by Christine Mitchell (ages 2-8 and up)

The Whole Me by Ellen K. Barron

It Happened to Me—Adopted: The Ultimate Teen Guide by Suzanne Buckingham Slade

What happens to me if the plans change?

Children may grieve the loss of a permanent family, even if they have not bonded with that family.

When the adoption plan doesn't work out, the child may feel deserving of the rejection. The sense of loss, feelings of rejection, guilt, and shame may get in the way of future relationships.

Common Questions

Why did this happen?

Is it my fault?

Where will I live?

What happens now?

Who Should Be Involved?

Ongoing case worker

Recruitment worker

Therapist

Current family

Other significant people in the child's life

"I just felt so numb...I just want a stable home."

— anonymous comment on fosterclub.com

Activity

Have the child sit down and write a letter to anyone he would like to address: prospective adoptive parents, birth parents, you as the caseworker, therapist, siblings. If the child is hesitant to write, you can write the letter as the child tells you what to say. Tell the child this isn't a letter that needs to be sent, but it can be used to say some of the things he'd like to tell the person the letter is addressed to. After the letter is written, have the child put it in a sealed envelope and help the child decide what should happen to the letter next.

Children who are unable to write can create a picture story and seal it in an envelope just as you would do with a letter.

*Dear Emma and Martin,
I really wanted you to be my parents. I know I wasn't the best kid all the time. Sometimes I didn't know how to act. It was hard because the other kids didn't like me. Thanks for making good spaghetti.*

Carlos

Tools

Paper and envelope for activity

Feelings chart

Life book

Books and Other Resources

The Boy Who Wanted a Family

Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center tip sheet: Helping Children in Care Build Trusting Relationships

It Happened to Me—Adopted: The Ultimate Teen Guide by Suzanne Buckingham Slade

Can I visit my new family while I'm getting ready to be adopted?

Pre-placement visits are more successful with the involvement of both the foster and adoptive parents

Encourage considerable contact between foster and adoptive parents in the week or two before the move. Ideally, the foster parents will let the child know it is OK to like, to take from, and to get close to the adoptive parents. After some initial visits, ask the child: Is it easy or hard to do things with the dad/mom? Easy or hard to follow the rules? How about giving and receiving affection, how will that be? Give the child permission to talk about birth parents and foster parents. Recognize that the child is getting ready for one more loss.

Common Questions

Why did this happen?

Is it my fault?

Where will I live?

What happens now?

Who Should Be Involved?

Case worker

Recruitment worker

Therapist

Current family

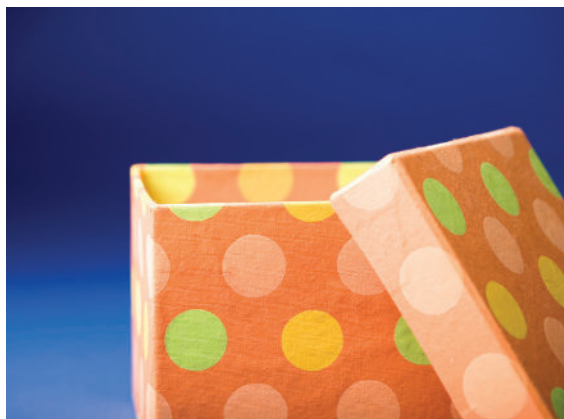
Other significant people in the child's life

"I have never been adopted, but I would love to, I just don't want to hurt my family's feelings."

— www.fosterclub.com

Activity

Create a “loss box.” Decorate a box into which the youth can put items that represent things from their past. Debbie Riley, a therapist and author who works with adopted teens says that by creating a loss box, youth participate in a ritual that acknowledges what they have lost.



Tools

Calendar to write dates of pre-placement visits

Family book—photo album

Life book—include information on foster family and pictures of every foster family; include pictures of school, important social workers, CASA

Books and Other Resources

I Miss My Foster Parents (ages 3-5)

Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center tip sheet: Advocating for LGBTQ Youth

Foster Care and Adoption Resource Center tip sheet: Twenty Ideas for Keeping Connections to Racial and Cultural Identity

What can I expect when I move in with my adoptive family?

The move date is an exciting day for everyone involved. But emotions can be overwhelming and confusing.

Both sets of parents should help pack and load the car. It's the foster parents' role to physically hand over the child. Give the adoptive parents ideas for a celebration: have cake and ice cream, go out to dinner, have a family photo taken, participate in a religious ceremony. Perhaps the celebration could be repeated on the anniversary of the move-in date. Keep in mind that leaving the foster family is one more loss for the child or youth.

Common Questions

Can I go back to my foster family? To my birth family?

Can I bring my things?

What if I'm feeling scared or angry instead of happy?

Will my birth family know who my adoptive family is? Can they come and get me?

Will I ever see my birth family?

Who Should Be Involved?

Foster parents

Adoptive parents

Therapist

Other significant people in the child's life

Birth parents, if they will play a supportive role

Activity

Take a family photo. Have this printed and present it to the child or youth on the first post-placement visit.



Tools

Luggage

Address book

Life book

Camera

Books and Other Resources

I Miss My Foster Parents (ages 3-5)

How Micah Helped Build a Family: A Story for Foster and Adopted Children

Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child, from Child Information Gateway
www.childwelfare.gov (also helpful in earlier stages of the transition)

What is “finalization?” What is an adoption ceremony?

When the finalization date arrives, the child or youth may need to hear again what it means, and what will happen on finalization day.

The most important conversation today will be about how the child or youth feels. Processing feelings about being adopted will be an ongoing discussion in the family, but today you can help facilitate that discussion and model for the parents how such a discussion can be handled. Today is also another opportunity for a celebration, but remember that the child or youth may have conflicting feelings and may feel confused or guilty about expressing happiness over being legally disconnected from their birth family.

Common Questions

What happens in court?

Do I have to change my name? What if I don't want to?

What's an adoption ceremony?
Why do we have to have one?

Will I need to move out when I'm 18?

Will my birth certificate be changed?

Who Should Be Involved?

Adoptive parents

Judge

Caseworker

Therapist

Other important people in the child's life

Activity

The child selects various colors of sand to represent them and each member of their family—present and past. Each color of sand represents each member of the old and new family. Blend one color at a time, then repeat until the jar is full and place the lid on. This can be a keepsake for the child to represent the blending/coming together of their old and new family; two families becoming one.



Tools

Clear plastic or glass jar with lid and colored sand, available at craft or hobby stores (often in the wedding section) for the activity above

“Candle Ceremony” from *Creating Ceremonies* by Cheryl Lieberman and Rhea Bufferd

List of adoption-friendly books for parents: www.ifapa.org/pdf_docs/FCAdoptionBooks.pdf

Books and Other Resources

Real for Sure Sister

Two Birthdays for Beth (ages 4-8)

A Place in My Heart (ages 3-8)

Welcome Home, Forever Child

Rosie’s Family An Adoption Story

Over the Moon: An Adoption Tale (ages 4-8)

The Family Book

FCARC tip sheets: Planning Ahead: Working Together for Successful Interactions and Shared Parenting: Putting the Needs of Children First



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