



NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER FOR  
**DILIGENT RECRUITMENT**  
*at AdoptUSKids*

*Increasing Your Agency's Capacity to*  
**RESPOND TO PROSPECTIVE PARENTS AND  
PREPARE OLDER YOUTH FOR ADOPTION**

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*Going Beyond Recruitment for 11- to 17-year-olds*



# INTRODUCTION

As your agency seeks to recruit adoptive parents for 11- to 17-year-olds<sup>1</sup> in foster care, you can increase your likelihood of achieving permanency by building your agency's capacity to prepare these youth for adoption and to respond to, retain, and prepare prospective adoptive parents as they consider adopting older youth. Prospective parents for older youth may need assistance from your agency to explore the special considerations involved in adopting older youth and to identify information and resources to help meet the youth's needs. Additionally, while being part of recruitment efforts on their behalf, older youth in foster care may need your help being open to the idea of adoption and addressing their normal developmental needs.

Like all children waiting to be adopted, 11- to 17-year-olds are best served by having professionals pay careful attention to the basics of effective pre-adoption practices, including:

- Thoughtfully targeted family identification and recruitment
- Preparation for permanency of both the child and prospective parents
- Development of a quality assessment profile for the child to guide placement decisions

The materials in this packet are intended to help support your agency in leveraging the Children's Bureau's National Adoption Recruitment Campaign that focuses on recruiting adoptive parents for 11- to 17-year-olds in foster care. This packet gives you and your staff useful tools that can both inform your work and be shared with prospective adoptive parents who are considering adopting older youth.



## Additional Resources

In addition to the information and tools in this packet, your agency may find these other resources useful as you recruit, retain, and prepare prospective adoptive parents for older youth.

- ***Finding a Fit that Will Last a Lifetime: A Guide to Connecting Adoptive Families with Waiting Children*** (PDF – 402 KB): An AdoptUSKids publication that provides helpful information about conducting youth assessments and profiles.<sup>2</sup>
- ***Adoption Competency Curriculum***: A comprehensive curriculum from the National Resource Center for Adoption that gives more information about conducting youth assessments.<sup>3</sup>
- The National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections has an extensive list of youth permanency resources.<sup>4</sup>
- Child Welfare Information Gateway has multiple resources that can support your efforts to find adoptive families for older youth, including:
  - ***Enhancing Permanency for Older Youth in Out-of-Home Care*** (PDF – 258 KB): This bulletin addresses the specific challenges of permanency planning with older youth and highlights successful models and activities.<sup>5</sup>
  - ***Building Trauma-Informed Systems and Policy Issues***: A list of resources to help administrators and managers implement changes in policies and procedures and to work collaboratively with other service providers to make systems more trauma-informed.<sup>6</sup>
- The North American Council on Adoptable Children has two resources available specifically on how to achieve adoption for older youth:
  - ***“Successful Older Child Adoption: Lessons from the Field”***: An article from the summer 2010 issue of the council's Adoptalk newsletter that highlights examples from multiple States about how they have found adoptive families for older youth.<sup>7</sup>
  - ***It's Time to Make Older Child Adoption a Reality: Because Every Child and Youth Deserves a Family*** (PDF – 1 MB): A publication that highlights existing policies and programs for helping more older children find permanency through adoption.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In this publication, we use “11 to 17 year olds” and “older youth” interchangeably. This publication was developed to support the Children's Bureau's National Adoption Recruitment Campaign, which focuses on recruiting adoptive families for youth in foster care who are ages 11 to 17, but the principles, practices, and resources included in this publication can also be useful in work with and on behalf of all teens in foster care who are waiting for permanent families and the families who express interest in them.

<sup>2</sup> [http://adoptuskids.org/\\_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-a-fit-that-will-last-a-lifetime.pdf](http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-a-fit-that-will-last-a-lifetime.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.nrcadoption.org/resources/curriculums/home/about-acc>

<sup>4</sup> [www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info\\_services/youth-permanency.html](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/youth-permanency.html)

<sup>5</sup> [www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/enhancing.pdf](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/focus/enhancing/enhancing.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [www.childwelfare.gov/responding/building.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/responding/building.cfm)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/OlderChAdoptions.html>

<sup>8</sup> [www.nacac.org/adoptalk/MakeOlderChildAdoptionReality.pdf](http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/MakeOlderChildAdoptionReality.pdf)

## *Working Within and Across Systems to*

# PROMOTE PERMANENCY FOR OLDER YOUTH

Many older youth in foster care are served by multiple agencies and systems, including local or state mental health systems, educational systems, juvenile courts, health care systems, and congregate care providers. Child welfare systems<sup>9</sup> working to achieve permanency for older youth face an important task in ensuring that the services provided by multiple agencies are well-coordinated and delivered in a way that supports each youth's permanency goal.

Child welfare administrators have crucial roles in establishing and supporting interagency and intersystem coordination at the agency level with other partners in the child welfare system so child welfare staff can support coordination at the case level for individual youth. One way that some States already promote and support this intersystem coordination is by creating interagency councils, workgroups, and agreements aimed at improving the coordination on behalf of youth who are served by multiple agencies. The following strategies may be helpful for child welfare agencies that are either expanding these coordination efforts with other agencies or are just beginning to address the need for a unified approach to serving the needs of older youth.



- Each partner organization in a child welfare system can develop clear and consistent messaging that foster care is temporary and all youth deserve a permanent family by creating mission and vision statements, recruitment campaigns, and other messaging that reflect this belief. Child welfare agencies can support this message by implementing a practice model based on best practices in working with youth, families, and agency partners to improve permanency outcomes for youth.
- Agencies can provide training for child welfare professionals, foster and adoptive parents, partner agencies, and others who provide support for youth about the unique needs of older youth in the foster care system and strategies for coordinating services and service plans across multiple systems. Agencies can also increase their ability to meet the needs of older youth by including youth in developing materials and delivering training to educate and inform support providers.

Developing cross training with other agencies and systems can provide great opportunities for shared learning and networking between child welfare agency staff and agency partners.

- Child welfare agencies can explore pursuing joint funding with partner organizations and other child- and youth-serving agencies to improve service delivery, minimize duplication of efforts, and enhance collaboration and coordination in serving older youth. Interagency collaboration and coordination can take many forms, including working in shared office space, sharing agency data to the extent allowable by law and policy, and seeking opportunities to apply for federal grants or other funding that encourages cross-system collaboration, such as the “Child Welfare - Education System Collaborations to Increase Educational Stability” grants from the Children’s Bureau issued in 2012.
- Agencies can collaborate with other policymakers to develop policy—and to the extent possible, suggest legislative changes—to improve the ways that systems meet the unique needs of older youth. Many older youth in foster care report experiencing challenges in accessing services and supports simply by being in the foster care system. Legislation and agency policies can empower systems and agencies to assist youth in accessing direct services such as financial and medical assistance, available both while a youth is in foster care and during and after transitioning out of foster care. Examples of these services include crisis intervention, counseling, residential treatment, educational services, and support networks.

<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this publication, we use the term “child welfare system” to represent the multiple agencies and entities that, along with the child welfare agency, work on behalf of children in foster care, including courts, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Citizen Review Boards, and others.

## *Exploring Family Characteristics that Contribute to*

# **SUCCESSFUL OLDER YOUTH ADOPTION**

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Child welfare professionals responsible for recruiting, assessing, and preparing prospective adoptive families for older youth should consider and explore with interested families the unique skills and characteristics they will need to support a successful transition in adopting an older youth. Your agency can work with adopting families to identify the skills and characteristics that they possess—both as individuals and as a family—that will help them parent older youth.

It can be challenging to parent any youth during the teenage years since adolescence is a time when youth may struggle to develop a sense of identity, responsibility, self-respect, and adequate communication skills to support them in becoming a happy and productive adult. For the adolescent who has experienced loss, grief, and trauma, these challenges may be even more difficult and complex. The way an adoptive family perceives and responds to the adolescent's behaviors during this time can have an impact on the success of an older youth placement.

The following list highlights some family characteristics that can help contribute to the successful adoption of older youth and can serve as helpful discussion topics as your agency assesses, trains, and prepares prospective adoptive families. As always, agencies should assess families on a case-by-case basis for their strengths and readiness to parent older youth; this list of characteristics is not comprehensive or definitive for identifying families that can meet the needs of older youth. Many adopting families who succeed in parenting older youth from foster care:

- Know the strengths and needs of their family as a whole and of each individual family member so they can identify how they will impact an older youth coming into the home
- Communicate openly and effectively through clear messages, being good listeners, and using a tone of voice that is respectful
- Recognize and build on the strengths and needs of others and focus on the positives
- Are self-assured and not easily embarrassed, angered, or threatened
- Are able to work in partnership with the youth, birth families, the agency, the youth's educational, medical, and social service providers, and the community to help identify and create solutions
- Have had experience as adults with older youth in various settings
- Have an understanding of the effects of trauma from being abused, neglected, abandoned, or emotionally maltreated
- Understand loss and attachment issues older youth may have experienced and possess skills that will help manage the behaviors of older youth in dealing with these issues
- Have a network of social support they can turn to for recreation, guidance, emotional support or other assistance as needed
- Are agreeable to helping older youth maintain and develop relationships that keep them connected to their pasts.
- Believe in building self-esteem by encouraging a positive self-concept and a positive family, cultural, and racial identity
- Have realistic expectations of older youth adopted from the foster care system
- Seek out resources, information, and training when they need help



## Helping Prospective Parents

# CONSIDER AND PREPARE FOR ADOPTING OLDER YOUTH



Child welfare professionals have a critical role in assessing the strengths of potential adoptive families who may be interested in adopting older youth. As with any child-specific preparation of families, professionals can help prospective parents understand and explore the specific considerations that may be involved when adopting an older youth. Child welfare agencies should explore the following topics with prospective parents to help both the agency and family determine whether it is a good fit for the family to adopt an older youth.

### Important Discussion Topics

- Parents' understanding of brain development, what is normal for pre-teen and adolescent behavior, and what may be the response to past trauma the youth has experienced**—It will be important that prospective parents have a strong understanding of the developmental stages of children and youth and the effects that trauma, grief, and loss can have on those developmental stages. Your agency can provide prospective parents with information about available training and reading materials that will help them learn more about how to respond appropriately to the behaviors that a youth might present, recognizing that youth's developmental needs may not match their chronological age.
- The family's expectations for an older youth and the importance of setting realistic expectations based on a clear understanding of the youth's abilities**—Working with the family to develop a list of initial expectations that are non-negotiable will be helpful in matching a youth to the home. Many families may believe that if they have raised birth children they know what to expect from an older youth based on normal developmental stages. They may base their expectations on the chronological age of the child and not consider where the youth is in emotional development. Many older youth have physically matured, but because of life experiences may be delayed in emotional maturity. This will make it difficult for them to meet the normal expectations for their chronological age, especially when experiencing stress or fear. The parents should be supported to recognize when physical maturity and emotional maturity are in conflict.
- The likelihood of older youth having been in congregate care and the effects of living in a group setting**—Older youth are more likely than younger youth to have been in group or congregate care placements; those youth who are transitioning from congregate care to a family placement may need special help making all of the adjustments required for the transition. These youth may struggle with the adjustment to being in a family setting, including being uncertain about, or resistant to, developing emotional connections. Youth who are transitioning from congregate care may also need additional help navigating normal family rules, dynamics, expectations, responsibilities, and consequences. For example, these youth may be accustomed to receiving payments or other rewards for performing tasks in a group home (e.g., cleaning their room, helping prepare meals, etc.) and may expect similar rewards for those tasks, even if the family expects youth to do these tasks as a regular part of being in the family. Additionally, families adopting youth who have been in congregate care may need to develop specific strategies for enforcing consequences for youth while ensuring that youth understand that receiving consequences does not mean that they will lose their family.
- The importance of talking with their biological children (and other children) who are living in the home about their feelings and acceptance in adopting an older youth and how adoption will affect the family's functioning**—Birth children living in the home may experience a change in their birth order within their family, attention received from parents, living space, and the manner in which behaviors are addressed once an older child enters the home. Preparing for and exploring birth children's feelings can help minimize sibling conflicts and the frustrations the family's birth children may feel with a new family member.
- The importance of connections and how the family can develop ways to help older youth maintain those connections**—It will be important that the youth's social summary and assessment contain information about the specific connections the youth may have such as family, friends, pets, recreation activities, clothing, pillows, videos, pictures, etc. that will remain important to the youth and serve to support the youth's transition.
- Opportunities and creative ways to get to know a youth**—Transitioning an older youth into an adoptive family may require special ways for a youth and prospective parents to become familiar and comfortable with each other prior to placement. To gain a greater understanding and appreciation of a youth's existing connections, your agency can encourage families to participate in a youth's life and activities in addition to involvement in a youth's community.



## *Using Preparation of Prospective Parents to* **ADDRESS OLDER YOUTH ADOPTION TOPICS**

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As child welfare agencies seek to recruit adoptive parents for older youth in foster care, they should examine each part of their response, training, and parent-preparation systems to ensure that these systems include appropriate information specific to parenting older youth. Although there are many topics that your agency should address with all prospective parents—regardless of the age of the youth they are considering adopting—your agency can help prospective parents for teens explore the specific topics and issues that are involved in adopting older youth.

Families who are considering or are already approved to care for older youth in the foster care system can benefit from specific training on topics that will help them understand and address the unique needs of adolescents who have experienced abuse and neglect. Your agency can use your parent training activities to provide valuable opportunities to prepare families prior to placement, helping prospective parents to deepen their understanding of special issues involved in parenting older youth and to develop skills and techniques for managing any –challenges they may encounter.

Your agency may want to consider covering the following training topics specific to understanding and caring for older youth:

- Adolescent brain development
- Normal adolescent behavior versus behavior resulting from past trauma
- Techniques for communicating with adolescents
- Identity and sexuality
- Signs of substance abuse or gang-related activity
- Understanding teen decision-making
- Preparing a youth for college and employment
- Helping a youth develop healthy relationships
- Depression in youth
- Building self-esteem in older youth

Your agency may also find it helpful to seek feedback from adoptive families and older youth in foster care about additional topics and issues that would be valuable to cover in parent preparation sessions.

## *Providing Valuable Tools and Information to*

# EMPOWER FAMILIES ADOPTING OLDER YOUTH

Child welfare agencies and individual workers are often the first point of contact for prospective parents who are considering the specific issues and questions that may arise when adopting older youth. Prospective parents of older youth often have questions about logistics and resources specifically relevant for parenting youth who are in high school, wanting to obtain their driver's license, and preparing to apply for college admission. The following topics and brief information about resources may be helpful as your agency compiles information to share with prospective parents to help prepare and support them as they address special considerations involved in parenting older youth.

### *Individualized Education Program (IEP)*

Caseworkers are often asked to participate on an IEP team for students in foster care or those who are entering adoptive placements. The IEP is a plan created to provide appropriate services and education to the student. Caseworkers can refer youth for an IEP review if they think the youth needs additional services. The U.S. Department of Education provides *A Guide to the Individualized Education Program* to assist educators, parents, and state and local agencies regarding IEPs.<sup>10</sup>

Contact for additional information: The Child Find program, a component of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that requires States to identify, locate, and evaluate all children with disabilities, aged birth to 21, who are in need of early intervention or special education services.<sup>11</sup>

### *Obtaining School Records*

Caseworkers might need to provide support in obtaining and transferring school records when helping youth transition out of their current placement and into an adoptive family. This process is governed by the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).<sup>12</sup>

**Contact for additional information:** The school district's director of special education can assist in requesting records from the school the student previously attended.

### *Obtaining Health Records*

Youth in the child welfare system will likely have a file containing their medical and health records that is accessible to their caseworker. When youth are transitioning out of foster care into an adoptive family (or when they turn 18), caseworkers can advise them about their rights regarding access to their records under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA).<sup>13</sup>



**Contact for additional information:** Caseworkers can play an important role in transitioning youth by explaining how to contact health care providers for additional records.

### *Driver's License*

Laws regarding obtaining a driver's license vary by each State's Department of Motor Vehicles. Many States provide youth in foster care or an adoptive placement with financial assistance for driver's education classes and to obtain a driver's license. Some States also allow a caseworker, mentor, foster parent, or advocate to act as a youth's guardian for the purpose of obtaining a driver's license.

Contact for additional information: Your State's Department of Motor Vehicles, which can be found using DMV.org's interactive map.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> [www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html)

<sup>11</sup> [www.childfindidea.org/](http://www.childfindidea.org/)

<sup>12</sup> Find more information on these laws here: [www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html) and at <http://idea.ed.gov/>

<sup>13</sup> [www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/](http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/)

<sup>14</sup> [www.dmv.org/teen-drivers.php](http://www.dmv.org/teen-drivers.php)

## The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

Caseworkers can help transitioning youth who are interested in attending college understand their designation as an “independent student” when filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid that must be completed by or for every student entering college. Foster parents and legal guardians are not considered “parents” for the purpose of this application. However, students in foster care who are emancipated minors or under legal guardianship are legally defined as “independent” and do not need to provide information about parents.

Contact for additional information: For further assistance with a financial aid application, a caseworker and student can contact the financial aid office of the school a student wishes to attend. In addition, Voice for Adoption has a fact sheet on **Expanded Access to College Financial Aid for Former Foster Youth** (PDF – 258 KB) about how children adopted from foster care any time after their 13<sup>th</sup> birthday can apply for federal financial aid without having to list their parents’ income.<sup>16</sup>

## Scholarships

Families who are adopting teens as they approach their college years might contact their caseworker for information on financial resources specific to youth who are adopted or have been in the foster care system. Caseworkers can direct families to join organizations, such as the National Foster Parent Association, that offer scholarships to member families.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, large organizations such as the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption provide lists of national scholarship resources.<sup>18</sup>

**Contact for additional information:** The financial aid office at a youth’s high school or a college they wish to attend might have further information on scholarships.

## Federal Adoption Tax Credit

A request for the federal adoption tax credit is filed with the adoptive parents’ taxes and is governed by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Because the eligibility requirements and credit amount change every year, caseworkers can be a support to parents by providing accurate and current information about this financial resource, especially if a family’s tax preparer is not knowledgeable about this credit.

**Contact for additional information:** The IRS provides information about the adoption credit and adoption assistance programs.<sup>19</sup> You can also find information about grants, loans, and the adoption tax credit through Child Welfare Information Gateway.<sup>20</sup>

## State Statutes on Older Youth Consenting to Adopt

The majority of States and U.S. Territories require that older youth consent to their adoption. Caseworkers should be aware of their State’s statutes when transitioning older youth, especially if a youth is expressing hesitancy about being adopted.

**Contact for additional information:** Child Welfare Information Gateway provides links to each State’s adoption consent statute.<sup>21</sup>

## Assets, Savings, Support, and Education (ASSET) Initiative

The ASSET Initiative is a collaborative effort within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services’ Administration for Children and Families seeks to provide financial education and information about building and managing financial assets. This initiative can offer valuable information for youth who have been in foster care and those currently in foster care who are transitioning out. The staff in each Administration for Children and Families regional offices can provide additional information about the resources available through the ASSET Initiative.<sup>22</sup>

**Contact for additional information:** The Assets for Independence Resource Center has more details about the ASSET Initiative.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>15</sup> [www.fafsa.ed.gov/](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/)

<sup>16</sup> [http://voice-for-adoption.org/sites/default/files/FAFSA%20factsheet\\_up\\_dated2010.pdf](http://voice-for-adoption.org/sites/default/files/FAFSA%20factsheet_up_dated2010.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nfpainc.org/Default.aspx?pageId=1116723>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.davethomasfoundation.org/about-foster-care-adoption/faqs/are-scholarships-available-for-adopted-children/>

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.irs.gov/taxtopics/tc607.html>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/grants\\_loans.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/adoptive/grants_loans.cfm)

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws\\_policies/statutes/consent.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/systemwide/laws_policies/statutes/consent.cfm)

<sup>22</sup> [www.acf.hhs.gov/about/offices](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/about/offices)

<sup>23</sup> [www.idaresources.org/page?pageid=a04700000DgGSy](http://www.idaresources.org/page?pageid=a04700000DgGSy)

# PREPARING OLDER YOUTH FOR ADOPTION

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Agencies can tap into a valuable resource by engaging older youth in foster care to advocate for permanency both within their community and as part of their own adoption planning. Agencies can promote the value of permanency for older youth by involving the youth themselves in raising awareness through public outreach and recruitment efforts, but also by involving them in their own child-specific recruitment.

Preparing both prospective parents and older youth for the transitions involved in adoption is a crucial element for achieving permanency. Transitioning from temporary out-of-home care to a permanent adoptive family can be more difficult for older youth who have started going through important stages in establishing their identity and understanding social norms outside of a permanent family setting. Child welfare professionals can promote successful placements by creating and implementing programs and agency initiatives that not only address the unique considerations of transitioning youth, but also enlist the participation of youth in decision-making on multiple levels.

## Engaging Youth in Your Recruitment Efforts

When recruiting potential adoptive parents for older youth in foster care, agencies can develop strategies to help the general public— who are all potential permanency resources for youth—know and understand who the older youth in foster care are and what their needs are. Involving youth themselves in recruitment efforts, providing outreach, and raising awareness is an important strategy that is sometimes underused. Bringing awareness to the dynamic personalities, talents, and skills of youth while creating opportunities for them to be visible and have a voice will help demonstrate that older youth in foster care are and can be successful.

The following strategies provide ways for your agency to help raise awareness and increase understanding of the needs and strengths of older youth in foster care, including by engaging youth in some of your events and activities.

- Develop a panel of young adult foster care alumni from various backgrounds who have been successful in achieving permanency. Create opportunities for them to speak at various forums such as child welfare conferences and educational settings such as in-service meetings, civic organizations, etc.
- Invite youth currently in foster care to participate at foster and adoptive parent preparation sessions and child welfare conferences, education summits, and judicial forums by helping with registration, handouts, monitors, etc. This provides the opportunity for them to interact with advocates and prospective families that might be a good match for them.
- Create and use video stories of youth who wish to be adopted or who were adopted as a way to introduce their voice in various meetings and other forums. For examples, see the Digital Stories from the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections.<sup>24</sup>
- Develop recruitment brochures, pamphlets, and posters that show older youth involved in realistic, everyday activities. Consider including quotes from parents who have adopted older youth, or quotes from older youth themselves, describing what it means to have a permanent family.
- Establish policies that distinguish between the needs of younger children and older youth. This helps ensure that policies address the unique needs of older youth, such as visitation and living arrangements with family or other permanent connections, clothing and spending allowances, or their ability to participate in and have access to activities that support normal adolescent experiences.
- Have older youth help with dinner meetings and trainings for approved and potential foster and adoptive parents hosted at local community centers and other community gathering places. Older youth can participate by helping with preparing and serving the meal, which allows time for social interactions. Recruit in youth-friendly environments where youth advocates are present such as educational settings (e.g., teacher in-services, college campuses, vocational programs, etc.), parks and recreation centers (e.g., YMCA's, after care programs, camps, athletic associations, etc.), and faith community events (e.g., Sunday school classes, church or synagogue services, retreats, etc.).
- Explore opportunities with your local television and radio stations for a special interest segment featuring older youth in foster care to highlight their strengths, personalities, and needs.
- Have older youth in foster care participate in developing and reviewing policies on permanency. Involving them in these processes helps ensure your agency's policies are responsive to their needs and perspective.

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.nrcpfc.org/digital\\_stories/\\_youth/index.htm](http://www.nrcpfc.org/digital_stories/_youth/index.htm)



In addition to promoting older youth permanency by increasing public awareness, agencies can also engage older youth in more specific recruitment efforts. As your agency recruits prospective adoptive parents for older youth, consider using the following strategies to engage youth in their own child-specific recruitment:

- Conduct intensive case-file mining for youth whom you haven't identified a permanent family. As part of this effort, talk with older youth to explore past connections and important relationships with supportive adults who might be able to provide permanency now, even if they weren't able to in the past.
- Use FosterClub's Permanency Pact tool developed to formally establish lifelong, kin-like relationships with caring adults.<sup>25</sup> A permanency pact is a pledge created between a youth and a caring adult to provide specific supports to the young person in foster care who is preparing to transition to adulthood without a permanent family. You can also use this tool as a helpful resource for discussions with youth regarding the value of identifying and developing permanent connections, and with prospective adoptive families because it provides a comprehensive list of the kinds of supports their adopted youth will need from them.
- Feature youth on photolisting services such as AdoptUSKids that approved foster and adoptive parents can use to learn about—and inquire about—youth on your caseload.<sup>26</sup> Have youth develop a profile that they would like to use for the photolisting.
- Work with youth to create presentations using technology such as PowerPoint and iMovie that can bring their personalities and stories to life in their own words, pictures, and graphics. Your agency could use these presentations at recruitment events and on your website.
- Help youth who are interested prepare for ways to share their thoughts and personal experiences in public speaking settings. Provide opportunities for these youth to speak at recruitment events, conferences, and other appropriate gatherings about the needs of older youth in foster care.

## Additional Resources

1. 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***, available online at: [http://adoptuskids.org/\\_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-a-fit-that-will-last-a-lifetime.pdf](http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-a-fit-that-will-last-a-lifetime.pdf).
2. To learn more about how to prepare children and youth for adoption and other forms of permanency, see the ***Adoption Competency Curriculum*** from the National Resource Center for Adoption, available online at: [www.nrcadoption.org/resources/curriculums/home/about-acc/](http://www.nrcadoption.org/resources/curriculums/home/about-acc/)
3. The AdoptUSKids publication ***Lasting Impressions: A Guide for Photolisting Children*** ([http://adoptuskids.org/\\_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/lasting-impressions.pdf](http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/lasting-impressions.pdf)) contains some tools that can be used in preparing children for adoption, including:
  - **Worksheet #2-A: A Child's Eco-Map**  
This tool helps children to consider the important connections they have to people, systems and other resources.
  - **Worksheet #2-B: The Loss-Line, An Example**  
The lifeline can be used to assist children in identifying and processing their losses and other traumatic events.

<sup>25</sup> [www.fosterclub.com/\\_transition/article/permanency-pact](http://www.fosterclub.com/_transition/article/permanency-pact)

<sup>26</sup> [www.adoptuskids.org/for-professionals/register-with-adoptuskids](http://www.adoptuskids.org/for-professionals/register-with-adoptuskids)

# Strategies to HELP OLDER YOUTH CONSIDER ADOPTION

As your agency recruits prospective adoptive parents for older youth, you should also explore your strategies for working with older youth in foster care to help them understand what adoption is and explore any concerns or questions that they may have about being adopted. In some cases, older youth will say that they don't want to be adopted, so you may need to be prepared to talk with them about why they're saying "no" to adoption. The chart below shows some common concerns or perspectives older youth may have that drive them to say that they don't want to be adopted; the chart also lists some possible strategies for you to use to help them consider being adopted.



## Youth's Perspective

**They may not understand what adoption means.**

**They may not believe anyone would want to adopt them and lack hope in being adopted because of their age, history of behavioral issues, or being part of a sibling group.**

**They may feel there is a chance they can return home and that saying "yes" would prevent them from ever being able to think about or contact their biological family.**

## Strategies to Help Youth Be Open to Adoption

- Spend time talking candidly about what adoption means for a youth in terms that they can understand. Many youth hear the word adoption and think that means they will be placed with an adoptive family and will have to forget about their biological family.
- Train and provide tools to foster parents to use in having ongoing conversations with youth about what adoption means.
- Provide opportunities for youth in foster care to speak with other youth who have been adopted about what happens during and after the adoption process.
- Share case examples about youth who have been adopted in the area and who are of the same age.
- Provide opportunities for youth to talk with prospective adoptive parents who are interested in adopting older youth.
- Share statistical information about youth who have been adopted in terms the youth can understand and that explain the numbers and characteristics of older youth who have been adopted.
- Provide youth with accurate and ongoing information on their birth families while also acknowledging and respecting the loyalty they may feel towards birth families.
- Concurrent with other recruitment efforts, discuss with youth whether they have any extended family members who might be able to provide permanency.
- Explain that in some situations youth are able to maintain contact with their birth family after being adopted.

**They may feel disloyal to their birth family by considering adoption and calling someone else “mom” or “dad.”**

- Coach the birth family and foster family on how to help a youth understand that they have permission and support to consider adoption.
- Explore with youth how the agency can help them maintain their loyalty in various ways. This can include helping the youth to maintain connections with relatives when possible, and talking openly with adoptive parents about their birth family and desire to honor those relationships.
- Explain that youth may choose to refer to their new adoptive parents as something other than “mom” or “dad.”

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**They may worry about changing their last name.**

- Help youth understand that in some adoptions they are able to keep their last name.

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**They may fear being separated or losing contact with siblings.**

- Explain that in many adoptions, siblings are placed together or are able to stay connected even if they aren't placed together.
- Explore and discuss with youth ways they can safely maintain connections with their siblings, such as through planned visitation, celebrating special occasions, and communication through cards, email, phone calls, and texting.
- Provide examples of how other sibling groups have stayed connected and opportunities to talk with youth and adoptive parents who have been able to maintain connections with a youth's siblings.

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**They may be concerned about leaving everything that is familiar to them by being placed in another town or State.**

- Provide details about the recruitment process and involve youth in the recruitment of a family by having them identify potential permanent connections from people they already know.
  - Share with youth detailed information about specific prospective adoptive families, including where the families live, what the families' interests are, and how the families could be a good match for them (e.g., through shared interests and activities, having pets that they would like, etc.).
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# The Essential Role of YOUTH ASSESSMENT

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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.



## 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/\\_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-a-fit-that-will-last-a-lifetime.pdf](http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/finding-a-fit-that-will-last-a-lifetime.pdf).

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



More free resources at:  
.....  
[www.nrcdr.org](http://www.nrcdr.org)

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