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National Resource Center for

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

of Foster and Adoptive Parents

at



Adopt US Kids

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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/>.

Preparing Children for ADOPTION AND RECRUITMENT

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Children need to be given information and support throughout the adoption process. It would be impossible to overstate how much courage it takes for a child to commit to a new family. How this preparation is done will depend on the age and maturity of the child and the circumstances of the adoption. As with the preparation and support of prospective adoptive parents, however, children and teens benefit from forming and sustaining relationships with their peers who are experiencing or have already experienced the adoption process.

As youngsters approach the adoption process, professionals must take an active role in assisting them to prepare emotionally and concretely for what the transition will mean. One framework for this type of work is *The 3-5-7 Model for Preparing Children for Permanency*, developed by Darla Henry, Ph. D. and described in the *Adoption Competency Curriculum* of the National Resource Center for Adoption. The model has at its core three key tasks necessary to help children grieve their losses and prepare to become part of a permanent family:

- **Clarification:** The task of assisting the child or youth in understanding what has happened in life.
- **Integration:** The process through which children or youth develop the ability to understand their membership in many families.
- **Actualization:** The ability of children or youth to begin visualizing their membership in one specific family.

Many tools and approaches can be used to help children prepare for permanence. The process should begin with a Life Book, a personal, therapeutic narrative that helps children understand their past, process feelings, and prepare for the future. While the child's primary case worker is the ideal person to guide the child through this process, others—such as mental health professionals, siblings, relatives, and foster parents—can also play an important role in the process of developing the child's Life Book.

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: adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/FindingAFit.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/acc/home/
- 3 The AdoptUSKids publication *Lasting Impressions: A Guide for Photolisting Children* (<http://adoptuskids.org/images/resourceCenter/photolisting.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.

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.

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More free resources at:

www.adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment

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