



Practice Bulletin: Permanency for Children - Achieving and Maintaining Adoptions February 2009

To me adoption means having a second chance at life, a second chance to be successful, loved, have a good life, to be raised the right way, and happiness. Being adopted has been a blessing to me; it means that someone has seen something special in you, something beyond your first impressions. Being adopted changes your life and it opens your eyes to see the world isn't all bad.
Emmanuel, age 17 (adopted at age 15)
AdoptUsKids

Adoption doesn't change who I am as a person. Adoption provides a better future for a child.
Edwin, age 7 - AdoptUsKids

The goal of adoption may be made concurrently with reunification at the beginning of a child's placement, or at any time during the course of a child's placement. It may also be made when reunification is no longer an option and termination of parental rights is likely to occur. An individual assessment of strengths and needs must be made to determine if adoption is the appropriate goal for a child. See "Permanency for Children: Concurrent Planning Practice Bulletin" July 2008 for more information.
http://www.dhs.iowa.gov/docs/July_ConcurrentPlanning.pdf

In State Fiscal Year 2008, 954 children had their parents rights terminated, and 1,055 children were adopted through DHS.

Expectations: The CFSR addresses adoption in Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situation.

- ❑ Item 7: An appropriate permanency goal is established for child in a timely manner, and
- ❑ Item 9: Concerted efforts were made or are being made to achieve a finalized adoption in a timely manner

The expectation is that:

- ❑ The right permanency goal is selected for a child within 60 days of placement or when it is the best option for a child during the life of the case; and
- ❑ A child whose rights are terminated will be adopted within 24 months of removal.

Once TPR has been ordered, the case must be transferred to an adoption worker within 45 days. The transfer should include all required documents (TPR order, Background Report Part 1, current Child



"There are no unwanted children, just unfound families." - The National Adoption Center

Introduction: This practice bulletin is the sixth of a series promoting practices that support key permanency issues for children: achieving and maintaining adoptions for children. When a family adopts a child, it makes the child legally a part of the family as if they were born into it. This makes adoption second only to reunification with a parent as the most permanent option for children in out of home placement.



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Behavioral Assessment, Current Case Permanency Plan, current medical, educational and provider reports, etc.). While this is the expectation at transfer, it is best practice to involve adoption staff as early in a child's placement as possible. If the child has a concurrent goal of reunification and adoption, involving adoption staff early can provide a valuable resource to the family and the child.

When parental rights have been terminated, and the child is not in an adoptive placement at the time of termination, it is an expectation under CFSR that concerted efforts are being made to find an adoptive home. Concerted efforts include relative searches, registration of the child on the Iowa Adoption Exchange and on the National Adoption Exchange through Iowa KidsNet, and targeted recruitment. The court also expects to receive reports from DHS every 45 days describing the efforts being made to find a home for a child and to finalize the child's adoption.

After two years in foster care, Amy and her younger brother were adopted by Julie and David. "It was hard work, but we're a real family now." Casey Family Services

Research shows: The prevalence of research regarding adoption has been in the area of dissolutions (subsequent termination of the adoptive parents' rights), and placement stability. The vast majority of adoptive placements from foster care remain stable and intact over time. The most stable are foster parent adoptions, followed by relative adoptions, and then matched adoptive families.

AFCARS data from FFY 2000-2007 show less than 1% of the children adopted nationally had a subsequent termination of parental rights from the adoptive parents.

The research also identifies factors that increase stability:

- The age of the child at adoption - children adopted at a young age are less likely to need out of home placement as they get older;
- Children who do not have aggressive or have sexualized behaviors;
- The family's expectations of the child, and how realistic their expectations are;
- The family's ability to identify issues when they present and then receive timely interventions;
- Social support to the family;
- A family's flexibility in decision making;
- Information sharing between the agency, child and family.

Any disrupted adoption is traumatic for the child and for the family. Children suffer another loss of family, which compounds their feelings of abandonment and hopelessness. IFAPA and Iowa KidsNet provide support services to adoptive families to help maintain the family stability.

When he first met his adoptive parents, they were his seventh foster parents. Chris was seven years old. "I never thought I would have a forever family." Casey Family Services

Iowa KidsNet is contracted by DHS to provide post adoption support to families receiving Iowa adoption subsidy. You may direct families who receive subsidy to call the Iowa KidsNet toll free number and request post adoption support: 1-800-243-0756. They will be assigned a local Iowa KidsNet Support Specialist. An Iowa KidsNet Support Specialist can also help families understand and manage their adoptive child's individual behaviors and needs, enhance their behavior management skills, help locate respite, and provide emotional support or crisis intervention. Think of Iowa KidsNet as the in-home help and on-call crisis resource. Adoptive families may also find support information on the Iowa KidsNet website: www.iowakidsnet.com. Another resource is the Post Adoption Support Services brochure which can be accessed through the following link:



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http://www.iowakidsnet.com/userfiles/File/IKN_Post-Adoption_Support_Services_brochure.pdf

Families in need may also use available community resources such as community mental health centers, or area education agencies to assist them in meeting their children's needs. Adoption Subsidy support is also available to families who adopt special needs children to help families meet those needs.

Research has consistently shown that full disclosure of a child's behaviors, needs and strengths, and thorough assessment of a family's strengths, needs, and expectations increases adoption stability.

Families need and want more information than they receive in making the transition from foster care to adoption. While adoption staff believe they do give true and accurate information, families state they did not receive true and accurate information. The need for clear, consistent, and repeated communication is critical to a successful adoption. (Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute: What's Working for Children: A Policy Study of Adoption Stability and Termination. November 2004. Prepared by: The Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute)

Sometimes I used to feel like I would never have a family. Now I have a family I love and that loves me. Be confident that someday you'll have a family and you'll be all right. Tawnee, age 11 AdoptUsKids

Practice Tips for Social Work Case Managers:

- When a child has a concurrent goal of reunification and adoption, engage adoption staff early in the case. Adoption staff are a valuable resource for families and children regarding the adoption process and supports that are available to adoptive families and children. Using concurrent goals also promote achieving permanency at the earliest possible date.

- Involve adoption staff as soon as possible in the transition between foster care and adoption, even if the child is in a family that will adopt.
- Provide the adoption worker with all information related to the child and family. Give the adoption worker all documentation regarding the child, including provider reports, evaluations, school reports, medical reports, and psychological or mental health reports. This information is critical when adoption staff negotiate adoption subsidy.

PLEASE! Word needs to get out about adopting teens. They need forever homes, too. This has given me HOPE and other teens need that too. Cristin, age 17 AdoptUSKids (Cristin was adopted by a single woman in Des Moines and is now active in *elevate*™. Her story is featured on the AdoptUsKids web site.)

Practice Tips for Adoption Staff:

- Talk to families about the difference between foster care and adoption. They may think they understand, but be clear on the differences legally, emotionally, and financially.
- Clearly communicate with family what the child's strengths and needs are, even if the child has been placed with the family for a period of time. Families will need to hear information repeatedly.
- Help families identify what needs they may have in the future in light of the child's current strengths and needs. Help the family identify resources available to them and how to access those resources.
- Encourage families to use Iowa KidsNet (800.243.0756) and IFAPA (800.277.8145) as resources for support, guidance and information. Both agencies also provide a wide variety of online resources: www.iowakidsnet.com and www.ifapa.org.
 - Iowa KidsNet provides in-home and on-call support services through a Support Specialist assigned to a family, upon the



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family's request. Iowa KidsNet support staff will assist families with issues ranging from crisis intervention to linking families with additional resources.

- IFAPA provides group training and regional peer support personnel.
- Allow families to express their concerns and frustrations openly and honestly.
- Remember to talk to the child about permanency with age appropriate language. Talk to them about what adoption is legally and emotionally so they understand what adoption means.
- Keep talking to older youth about adoption as a permanency option. Don't just accept "no" without clearly knowing the youth has thoroughly thought through their permanency options. Youth will often rule out adoption to avoid rejection or because they are afraid to attach to a family. Connect older youth to Elevate or to another adopted youth so they can have a peer perspective on adoption.

Every child needs an adult in their lives that could love and care for them, and who could also provide a safe environment. Enrique, age 23 AdoptUsKids

- For older youth or children with challenging needs, never give up looking for a permanent home. Place the child on the Iowa Adoption Exchange and the National Adoption Exchange through Iowa KidsNet, and use target recruitment strategies. There are families out there who will adopt older children or children with significant special needs. What is most important is that the child is placed in a loving home so be open to any qualified family that may meet the needs of the child.
- Encourage families to reach out for assistance early to prevent or reduce problems, or before problems become unmanageable. Help them find resources to assist them in working on family problems to avoid disruptions.