Create a Continuum of Response Strategies

All families experience challenges; however, families formed through adoption are likely to encounter some challenges that are unique to the adoption experience. Some of these hurdles have the potential to impact the stability of the placement and the well-being of the family unit. For decades, funding and services designed to address post-permanency needs have focused on crisis intervention, while limited resources have been allocated for prevention and early intervention.

This tip sheet describes a continuum of strategies to address the range of needs of families, post permanency. The strategies are based on prevention and early intervention models developed and used in public health settings. The strategies are divided into primary, targeted, secondary, and tertiary responses to need, as well as preservation and maintenance. The strategies, highlighted in the table below, provide a framework for service delivery that allow interventions to be tailored to meet a wide variance of needs ranging from providing targeted information to crisis intervention services:

Strategic Response: Primary Prevention

The goal of this strategic response is to enhance/improve awareness, education, transitions, and engagement. This strategy primarily includes proactive outreach and educational information that anticipates and mitigates risks, maximizes well-being, and strengthens relations between adoptive families and the child welfare system. Interventions can include: (1) access to information through on-going educational opportunities, mailings and lending libraries; (2) access to peer-support services including family mentoring; (3) support in handling relations with birth families, post permanency; and (4) preparation for adoption which includes connections to post-permanency services, prior to finalization.

Communication is critical to primary prevention and begins with the development of a sustainable model of outreach to all post-adoption families. This outreach may be provided through phone, email, or paper processes conducted by volunteer-community navigators, post-permanency paraprofessionals, warm lines or foster parent associations. Outreach should be conducted at pre-determined times (i.e. legal finalization, onset of adolescence, close to the time of termination of the subsidy) that have been identified as transition periods in the adoption journey. The proactive outreach will assist in maintaining relationships with families so that they have a better idea of where and how to access services, if and when needed. Primary prevention services should be considered prior to the finalization of an adoption.

Response Strategies	Purpose	Targeted Population
Primary Prevention	Improve engagement, awareness, education and preparation before problems arise.	Universal - whole adoption population
Targeted Prevention	Increased supports to selected groups with potential risk factors.	Subpopulation identified with elevated risk
Secondary Prevention	Early detection and intervention to reduce tensions and promote stability.	Families experiencing initial problems
Tertiary Intervention	Responding to crisis, diminishing impact, and stabilizing and strengthening families.	Families in crisis
Preservation and Maintenance	Follow up and maintenance to consolidate gains and prevent re-escalation.	Families that experienced crisis and received secondary and tertiary interventions

Consistent with primary prevention models, it is critical to develop family-specific adoption-transition plans that reduce stressors involved with transitioning from one family to another or from one role to another (foster to adopt). These plans should, at a minimum, include information on the possible issues families may encounter, the development of pre-finalization informal- and formal-support plans, and connections with service providers that may be helpful in the future. A strong transition plan requires a community-support system, multiple-cross system partners (school and health service), and openness among all parties.

Strategic Response: Targeted Prevention

These interventions target sub-populations within the adoption community that are considered to be at greater risk. Using data to predict children and families who are more likely to need supports and post-permanency services, child welfare systems can develop and implement targeted interventions. Systems could do this through the collection of basic demographic data on families who call back for assistance/referrals, children who re-enter the child welfare system, and/or answers to questions on the recertification. This data could be used to make forecasts and proactive plans that anticipate characteristics of children and/or families that might require more services/supports post permanency, identify emerging issues, and identify stages in the life cycle of adoptive/guardianship families that present particular challenges. Analysis of this data can help systems develop proactive outreach and interventions for at risk populations including:

- Phone support and scheduled check-ins.
- In-home pre-adoption counseling services to families adopting children determined to be at higher risk.
- Targeted training that focuses on specific risk factors and responses.
- Connections to other adoptive families and professionals who can assist with coping strategies as well as managing expectations.
- Access to planned respite.
- Scheduled meetings with families to discuss subsides and service provision.

Strategic Response: Secondary Prevention

These interventions are focused on preventing the transition from "a difficult situation" to discontinuity for the children, attempting to prevent the escalation of issues into full-blown crisis situations. Interventions and services are focused on families who are identified during outreach or who self-report to be experiencing some initial difficulties/barriers and need some type of response to meet their needs. For example, an adoptive parent who calls the post-adoption hotline concerned about the child's behaviors in the home and expressing a need for assistance would be targeted to receive a higher level of service than just a referral. This assistance could include phone or in-person meetings with a case manager that can assess the needs and connect the family to the appropriate services. Secondary prevention requires that the child welfare system has a process to screen cases to determine level and type of need, as well as a service array that can be quickly implemented to prevent any further crisis. The goals for this type of intervention are to stabilize, reduce the possibility of a recurrence, and assess the need for further assistance. This may include supportive interventions when families have experienced increased difficulties not connected to the adoptive relationship (death, divorce, or major health issues). Types of secondary interventions include:

- Timely psychiatric and/or psychological evaluation.
- Rapid assessment and response treatment teams that can provide therapy aimed at interrupting problem behaviors.
- Stabilization/support services to transition to a new home following the death/incapacitation of an adoptive parent/guardian.
- Community services that are adoption competent and provide immediate responses.
- In-home placement stabilization services.
- Targeted training to increase families' abilities to identify and respond to the triggers and factors associated with these situations.

Strategic Response: Tertiary Intervention

Tertiary interventions are focused on helping families manage complicated-crisis events that drastically increase family stress, decrease relationship satisfaction, and fragment family life. It is essential that interventions in this strategic response are offered immediately and include a strong assessment component. These high-end interventions are utilized only when the intensity of the situation at hand merits this level of service provision. Tertiary interventions are more financially and time intensive. The goals for these interventions are to decrease discomfort of families, stabilize behaviors, maintain and strengthen familial relationships, and increase families' abilities o implement response strategies that improve quality of life. Types of tertiary interventions include:

- Well-trained crisis respite care.
- Intensive in-home treatment and case management.
- 24-hour crisis lines and call center support.
- Time limited crisis stabilization in residential care for complicated mental health needs.

- Time limited day treatment and partial hospitalization program.
- Intensive in-person outpatient sessions (multiple sessions in one week).
- Emergency assessments for safety and referral to the appropriate level of services.
- Short-term inpatient psychiatric services for "acute" crisis situations.

Strategic Response: Preservation and Maintenance

This strategic response is focused on follow-up care designed to prevent relapse and maintain the gains attained through service provision provided through secondary and tertiary interventions. Many professions have developed follow-up mechanisms to increase customer service and satisfaction, as well as preserve and maintain costly gains that have been achieved. One example would be a call from the dentist a day after a major dental procedure to head off the risk of additional complications and create the opportunity for a strengthened relationship. The development of a sustainable model of post-permanency services and interventions must include preservation and maintenance services that help to avoid setbacks and identify cases where stability is tenuous. The frequency and type of follow-up will vary based on the needs of the families and the likelihood of recurrence. Types of preservation and maintenance interventions include:

- Visits and/or calls at defined intervals that provide follow-up on behavioral contracts, referrals and success of intervention strategies.
- Continuation of psychoeducational opportunities
- On-going connection to peer support services and
- Outpatient/in home booster sessions to maintain gains.

Conclusion

Developing a full continuum of post-adoption services will require new partners, modification to existing services (including an increase in adoption competent services), and increased awareness of the needs of families and the services available to address these needs. It is critical that permanency support and preservation services are developed to match the varied needs of post-adoption families. The more proactive we respond to the needs of these families, the more likely our interventions will safeguard the continuity of their adoptions.