

Develop Foster/Adoptive Parents

Expectations and roles of foster/adoptive parents have changed over the years. Foster parents have historically been viewed as caregivers of children until permanent homes could be identified. Now, child welfare systems recognize their importance not only as a vital part of the team but also the large role they play in helping children heal. Furthermore, foster parents are more frequently becoming permanent resources for children placed in their homes. According to the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS Report No. 20), 56% of children adopted from foster care during FY 2012 were adopted by their foster parents. This does not include foster parents who obtained guardianship of children in their homes. Because of the high percentage of children achieving a form of permanency with their existing foster families, it is critical that these families be adequately prepared to care for children in their homes. This preparation has to start immediately upon placement and continue throughout the duration of their caregiving roles.

New research on trauma and brain development has provided a wealth of information that foster/adoptive parents need to know so that they are prepared adequately to handle behaviors exhibited by children in their homes. Fully apprising foster/adoptive parents of their responsibilities and the critical role they play on the child welfare team is essential. Because these responsibilities are dynamic and likely to change over time, critical conversations need to continue after children are placed with their foster parents. The conversations should include discussions on permanency, the need for ongoing involvement with biological families, and the development of circles of support.

Foster/adoptive parents are among the most critical assets of child welfare systems. As a result, child welfare systems need to assess the resources and supports in place to prepare foster/adoptive parents adequately. If this is done well, they can become permanent, nurturing resources for children unable to return home.