

Prepare for Adoption/Guardianship

Although preparation for adoption/guardianship begins by laying a strong foundation at entry into the child welfare system, specific areas require preparation and planning after a decision has been made to move toward one of these permanency outcomes. Foremost, child welfare systems must be able and willing to share with prospective adoptive parents/guardians information obtained about children throughout their time in care. This information ranges from history of trauma, pertinent issues with birth families, Genogram and Eco Map showing children's lineage and support systems, educational and medical records, information about daily living obtained from previous placements, placement history, and listing of extended family members who are willing to be involved at some level with the children. Prospective adoptive parents/guardians need help understanding this information and recognizing how it might impact the children and their families in the future.

Foster parents also need assistance navigating their involvement with birth families post permanency. The increasingly wide use of social media in our world today makes the prospect of children connecting with their birth families no longer a matter of *if* but *when*. Arrangements related to the level and type of involvement from birth families post permanency can be handled more easily when the child welfare system is involved and able to negotiate between the parties. Helping families to establish agreements regarding ongoing contact with birth families often helps to alleviate stress related to birth family involvement. When prospective adoptive parents or guardians are related to the children, additional family dynamics exist that need to be taken into consideration when moving to the permanency outcome.

The decision to adopt or to obtain guardianship is a milestone that will have a lifelong impact on families. Recognizing the significance of this decision is the essential first step for child welfare systems to prepare families adequately for this commitment. The planning involves not only immediate service provision but also the anticipation of situations that families need to be prepared to handle post permanency.