

CORE
TEEN

Critical On-going Resource Family Education

Right Time Training: Transitions

CORE TEEN CURRICULUM

In Acknowledgement

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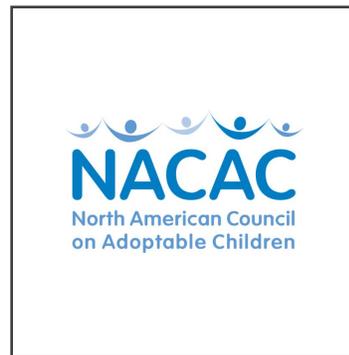


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CORE TEEN CURRICULUM: RIGHT TIME TRAINING

The CORE Teen Curriculum is comprised of three components: 1) Self-Assessment; 2) Classroom Training, and 3) Right Time Training. It was developed through a 3 year Foster/Adoptive Parent Preparation, Training and Development Initiative cooperative agreement with the Children’s Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under grant #90CO1132. Project partners included Spaulding for Children; the ChildTrauma Academy; The Center for Adoption Support and Education; the North American Council on Adoptable Children; and the University of Washington.

The intent of the project was to develop a state-of-the-art training program to equip resource parents to meet the needs of older youth who have moderate to serious emotional and behavior health challenges who require intensive and coordinated services and may be at risk for more restrictive congregative care.



TRANSITIONS OVERVIEW

A critical element of creating a safe, predictable environment is to ensure smooth transitions for youth. Transitions include moves such as being placed from the birth home into a foster home, moves from one foster home to another, being placed into a group home or treatment setting, moving into an adoptive home or returning to the birth home from foster care. The purpose of this portion of the training is to enhance your learning around transitions. This session focuses on how change impacts the youth, you, and your family. Strategies are introduced to help you prepare for and manage the emotional impact (stress, fear, uncertainty, pain, loneliness, anxiety and hopelessness) that are often a part of the transition process.

The learning objectives are to:

- ▶ Learn how to prepare for periods of transition
- ▶ Learn how transitions impact youth
- ▶ Identify ways to respond to youth through transitions
- ▶ Recognize how youth are coping with the transition
- ▶ Increase awareness about the impact of transitions on you and your family

Transitions should be carefully considered and treated as a matter of great importance because they often involve a disruption in both the youth's connection to a caregiver, as well as your connection to the youth. When the continuity and consistency of relationships change, all of those impacted can feel insecure and unsafe. Youth and their caregiving families need intensive support to help manage transitions and lessen the negative impacts that can result. When possible, every transition to a new placement should be carefully planned. Transitions that are made too quickly and with inadequate planning may result in the youth experiencing more problems adjusting to their new living arrangements, prompting another move and often delaying permanence. It may also impact your sense of well-being, believing you may have failed the youth or not done enough to prepare the youth or your family.

Whether because of a crisis or as part of a well thought out plan, moving to a new placement is a change. Whether you think a change is "good" or "bad", changes are often overwhelming and anxiety-provoking. In some cases, transitions are frightening and traumatizing experiences. When we have to make a change that we did not expect, or didn't want to make, it can be harder to cope.

There is often an imbalance of emotion when a youth is transitioning into a new home. You may be very happy and excited, but they may be scared and miss their birth family or previous caregivers. It is critical to meet the youth where they are and give them space as they transition into their new home. You will need to allow them to grieve and be prepared for them to act out their loss through misbehavior or depression. You may also need to grieve the loss of the youth being a part of your family when a transition involves a youth leaving your home.

Transitions involve changes for you and your family. Not only do you need to think about how to support the transition process for the youth, but you also need to consider what support you and your family members will need.

“

When we talk about kids who have been through trauma, what we have failed to see is that one of the most important pieces is that it has happened during transitions.

”

~Heather Forbes

PRE-VIDEO DISCUSSION

“

Make us comfortable. Help us know that we're valued somewhere.

”

~Jennifer Rhodes

The most challenging part of any change or transition has to do with the feeling of being unprepared and out of control. When we have limited or no information about what is happening, when we have little or no notice of the change, and when have not been prepared for the transition, it is much more difficult to manage the impact. This is true regardless of the significance of the change.

To help you gain perspective on the impact of transitions on youth, take a few minutes to think about some changes or transitions that you may have experienced.

Consider a change that might be considered “minor”. Imagine that you are in the middle of preparing dinner and you realize that you have forgotten an important ingredient. You have only enough time to make a quick trip to the grocery store to retrieve the missing item. If

you take too long, your dinner will be ruined. When you arrive at the store, you know exactly where to go to find the item, but instead, you find that it is not on the shelf where it has always been before. You can't leave without the item, since you are in the middle of preparing dinner—there is nothing that you can substitute for this ingredient. You quickly consider where in the store the item could have been moved to and go to that new location. When you don't see it there, you check in a third location. Still not finding the item, you return to the original spot, thinking maybe you overlooked it. You look over and over again, but you don't see it. You look for someone who works at the store, and after a few minutes you spot an employee and ask about the item. They offer to help, and walk with you to all of the places that you have already looked. After some time passes, they call someone else for help and eventually you find the missing item.

- ▶ Do you find yourself experiencing some frustration, anxiety or anger?
- ▶ How does having limited time impact how you manage this change?
- ▶ How do you feel when the store employee tries to help, but only does what you have already done with no different outcome?
- ▶ How does your behavior and/or attitude change throughout the process? Do you become abrupt in your conversation, losing patience?

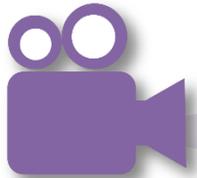
Now think about a change that we might think of as more “major”. Imagine that you have worked for the same company for several years. You enjoy your job and the people who you work with. There have been some people come and go over the years, but there is a core group of people who you work most closely with and who work well together and have become a great support network, both at work and outside of the office. The company has recently experienced a change in leadership, and you start hearing that there are major changes coming. You don't know what changes to expect, but as time passes, you notice that employees are moving from one department to another and some of your co-workers seem to disappear with much notice. You ask around, but the explanations that you get are not consistent and don't make sense. Your boss, who you trust, tells you she doesn't know what is happening next, but also tells you not to worry. You feel like you are missing something, but you are not sure what that is. You wonder if she knows something but is afraid to tell you. Eventually, you start to wonder if your job is secure. You don't want to leave the company, but you decide to work on a back-up plan and start looking for jobs elsewhere. You go on a few interviews and get an offer from another company.

- ▶ How would you anticipate your behavior changing throughout this process?
- ▶ What were the “root causes” of your feelings or change in behavior?
- ▶ What would have helped you cope better through this situation?

Now think about how these examples relate to the transitions that youth you are caring for are experiencing.

- ▶ What are some of the things to consider that might make the transition to your home more comfortable and welcoming for the youth?
- ▶ What will you need to consider when balancing the need to give the youth space with the need to develop a strong relationship with the youth?

Think of other questions you may have and write them on a piece of paper. Reflect on them while reviewing the video.



VIEW the Transitions Right Time Episode

25:03 MINUTES

POST VIDEO DISCUSSION

Support for You and Your Family During Transitions

As you heard in the video, transitions of youth into and out of your home will impact not only the youth, but also the people already in your family. Parent/child relationships in the family will change as foster parents work to balance the various needs of all of the children in the family. The relationships between children in the family can change, with some children getting along well, or others becoming more competitive with one another. Relationships between parenting partners can become stressed when there is less time to focus on each other and nurture the relationship. Relationships with extended family and friends can become strained and distanced if the youth's behaviors are misunderstood.

Transitions of youth in and out of your home can impact the children who are already in your family in the following ways:

- ▶ Children already in the family may be asked questions they are not prepared to answer about the youth placed in your home, such as, "Who is the new kid that lives in home?" or "Why does he have to live with you now?"
- ▶ Some children may not want to share their belongings
- ▶ They may not want to share your time and attention
- ▶ Children already in the family may see the youth placed in your home acting in verbally or even physically abusive ways
- ▶ It may be hard for them to say goodbye when a placement comes to an end, or they may feel relief when the youth leaves and then feel guilty that they were relieved

The video provided tips about how to prepare members of your household for a new person joining. One tip was to reassure children in the home that some things that are important to them can stay the same. More of these tips can be found in the Additional Activities section of this Right Time guide.

- ▶ What are the biggest concerns of your family members about a new person joining your family?
- ▶ What are some of the important routines that will need to stay the same in your home?
- ▶ When it comes to extended family members and friends who may not be supportive, how prepared are you to accept the changes in those relationships that are likely to result?
- ▶ What might it be like to not seeing certain people in your family as often as you do now?

Support for the Youth During Transitions

Frequent moves impact a youth's ability to develop healthy secure relationships and intensify the impact of being separated from birth parents. Multiple moves often lead to separation from siblings, increased feelings of distress, a sense of loss and not belonging. Every transition increases the risk of emotional trauma, compounds the youth's ability to form trusting relationships with caregivers, and creates greater probability of subsequent placements for youth. Frequent transitions often involve relocating to a new community, which can mean loss of friends and disrupted education (youth are estimated to lose four to six months of academic progress per move). In the Additional Activities portion of the Right Time guide you will find more information about some of the common transition areas for youth that you may need to support.



An important element to remember about transitions is that even in the best of circumstances, you will not be able to “fix” or “make it better” for the youth in the short term. This means that even when you are doing everything right, the youth is experiencing pain as a result of being separated from their family, and this pain will not likely be lessened or “go away” easily. When your efforts to comfort the youth don’t seem to work, you may feel like you are failing the youth. As has been described in the classroom content and referenced in other Right Time sessions, youth who have experienced trauma may not respond to your nurturing and support in the way that you expect. This may make you feel inadequate or incompetent. You may think, “Maybe I am not the best parent for this youth” or “Someone else could do this better than I can”. It is important during this phase of the transition that you remember that continuing to build a relationship with the youth is what “doing everything right” means. Think of your efforts as prevention—a way to lessen the long-term negative impacts of transitions.

-  What can you do when you are struggling to meet the youth’s needs?
-  How will you tap into your support networks during these times?

TRANSITIONS QUICK TIPS AND TOOLS

In many instances moves happen unexpectedly, such as when a caregiver is unable to meet the youth's needs or when the caregiver's support system breaks down. A move may be beneficial, but still full of difficulties when the youth's permanency goals require it, it is to a less restrictive environment, it reunites them with siblings or it places them in the home of a relative or pre-adoptive parent. The video highlighted several tools for your toolbox when managing transitions. Review the list of the tools that were discussed. As you review the items, consider which of these do you think will be easy to implement as well as those items that you might more support with.



- ▶ Prepare members of the household for a change.
- ▶ Reassure children in the home that some things that are important to them can stay the same.
- ▶ Educate extended family members and friends about taking care of youth in foster care and what that may mean for the changes in your family.
- ▶ Create a family book or electronic profile to familiarize the young person with your household.
- ▶ Take steps to get to know the young person who will be joining your family.
- ▶ Establish communication with the other adults in the young person's life.
- ▶ Share information with the young person about what is going to happen next.
- ▶ Encourage the young person to ask questions and express fears.
- ▶ Whenever possible arrange for visits with new caregivers.
- ▶ Communicate with former and future caregivers about the young person's preferences and routines.
- ▶ Reach out to other adults who know the child well (birth parents, former caregivers, residential staff, caseworkers, therapists).

MAKING TRANSITIONS TO PROMOTE BETTER OUTCOMES

Listed below are some specific tips related to the different types of transitions that youth frequently experience. Consider these suggestions as you prepare yourself to support the youth during these times.

Special Transitions: Reunification

A majority of children in our foster care system are returned to a parent, parents, guardian or custodian through the process of reunification. This is an important transition for the youth and their family. In the child welfare system, the youth and their family unit is the focus of support and the primary role of resource families is to strengthen the family's potential for reunification. Overall it is important to let youth know that it's okay to have feel a variety of ways about returning home. During the transition, you will need to be even more patient with yourself and the youth as they navigate the process of re-establishing yet another "new normal".

Transition Tips for Reunification

Preparing youth to return home should include the following:

- ▶ Ensuring that the youth understands why they were removed from their home. This should also include that youth learn about how decisions are made about them in the child welfare system and who makes them. This will help reduce self-blame and address their fears of being removed again.
- ▶ Understanding the changes their parents have made. If reunification is occurring, it is likely that the youth's parents have made changes that can impact how they interact with their child. For example, a parent who has worked to address a substance abuse issue may be thinking more clearly or be more involved and attentive than they were able to be in the past. While this is certainly a good change, it could take some getting used to. Help the youth answer questions like: What was normal? What was good about normal and what had to change? When it comes to reunification, the extent to which the youth has been connected to their parents can make all the difference in terms of a smooth transition back home.
- ▶ Preparation for the changes to the physical environment of their home. What will be different about the home? Some parents may have moved since their child was placed into foster care. This may mean that in addition to re-establishing their role within the family, they will also need to become familiar with a new home. Ideally the youth will have had visits in their home prior to reunification to help with this part of the transition.
- ▶ Helping youth consider the losses that may occur when they leave foster care to return to the birth home. When reunification occurs, the relationship the child has developed with you will change. They may struggle with differences between the foster home and their home, including rules, schedules, and routines to name a few. Youth may have developed new friendships that will change if a return home means a change in schools. They may be reconnected with peers who they knew previously, but these friendships may or may not be rekindled when they return home.
- ▶ Planning for maintaining connections with people important to the youth. Caregivers should work with the youth and the youth's parent to ensure youth learn ways they can stay in touch with other relatives and friends and what they should tell them. Youth who have become involved in community groups or activities such as sports teams should be supported to continue their participation as much as possible.
- ▶ Preparation about how to stay safe and who they can call if they experience problems. Even though reunification will likely mean that the reasons for the youth's removal have been remedied, it is still important for youth to be prepared to know and access resources to help keep themselves and their families strong. This may mean ensuring strong connections to both informal and formal sources of support.

Special Transitions: Residential Programs

Transitions from residential to foster care settings can be set up for success when communication pathways are established from the start, and when there is open, clear, and consistent communication among team members. Ideally, the family resource that will be available to the youth at the conclusion of their residential treatment stay should be identified soon after the treatment stay begins. This allows for the resource family to be closely involved and for the relationship between the youth and their caregivers to be developed and strengthened over time as the transition approaches. Identified caregivers should be included in meetings at the facility where treatment planning and service integration is being discussed. Caregivers should be provided with an overview of assessments conducted, information on identified needs and services, and have opportunities to review the youth's permanency plan. Throughout the youth's stay in the residential setting, permanency and transition should be discussed at every team meeting.

Transition Tips for Residential Placements

During transitions from residential care to foster care settings, caregivers should follow these basic steps:

- ▶ Develop a relationship with the staff and providers associated with the residential program where the youth is transitioning from. These individuals form the first line of support during the transition process.
- ▶ Develop partnerships with resources that will provide support services to the youth and your family once the transition occurs. It is important to establish this network *prior* to the youth's discharge from the residential program.
- ▶ Establish a relationship with the youth through regular visits, phone calls and other forms of communication. Develop a visitation plan, including the number and frequency of visits outside of the residential program, as well as to the resource home as the transition nears. Never restrict or withhold contact with the youth as a consequence.
- ▶ Develop a detailed and individualized plan for the child, that includes a clearly defined set of strategies for meeting the youth's needs. Identify the skills that both you and the youth need to practice for successful transition.
- ▶ Ensure your support network is well defined and available to you. You will need to anticipate some of the concrete needs that you will have throughout the transition and be willing to access help and assistance *before* you exhaust your stamina. Begin to determine what additional training and/or community supports and resources you will need.
- ▶ Allow your child's team to be actively engaged. This will allow the team to better monitor the youth and your family for signs of instability and ensure that your needs are being met through all stages of the transition. Identify the common issues that may arise and create a contingency plan to address these issues.

Special Transitions: When Foster Parents Adopt

The transition from foster care to adoption can sometimes be overlooked when foster parents become the adoptive parents of the youth. Even though the caregivers are not changing, the parent/child relationship will change from something viewed as temporary to something intended to be permanent as a result of the adoption. The agencies involved in supporting the youth and family will be less present, and the support resources available to the family are likely to change. Just like the relationship between the youth and parents will change, other relationships in the family are likely to be impacted by the adoption. Adoption can have an impact on the family's financial situation that may require adjustments.

Transition Tips for When Foster Parents Adopt

Consider these issues when preparing for transitions from foster care to adoption:

- ▶ When you have been the youth's foster parent prior to the adoption, an assumption can be made that you already know everything that is recorded by the agency. This may limit your ability to support the

youth down the road as they have questions about their foster care and adoption experience. Ask about the disclosure process and take advantage of this process prior to finalizing the adoption.

- ▶ Consider including a special activity as part of the adoption day. This might be going to favorite restaurant or participating in a special religious ceremony. Recognizing the adoption as a significant event is an important part of the transition process.
- ▶ Talk with the youth about how they want to handle issues related to changes in their name. Consider ways to preserve and honor all parts of the youth's identity as part of name changes. Help the youth prepare for how name changes might impact them at school, with their peers or in other similar areas of their life.
- ▶ Prepare for the reduction in access to supports like the youth's caseworker, therapist or other professional supports. While many states have post-adoption services available, the transition to these services is not always seamless and may mean working with new staff. Know what resources will be available post-adoption and be sure you know how to access them.

Special Transitions: Disrupted Placements

In some cases, despite the best efforts of all involved, a placement ends pre-maturely. Typically, these situations occur when a youth's needs are very high and complex and when these needs exceed the caregivers and support systems' capacities to meet these needs. Disruptions often happen as a last resort, and by the time that the decision is made for the youth to leave the home, family members often feel defeated, exhausted and devastated. Feelings of guilt and shame are also part of the experience, when parents recognize that they have not been able to fulfill the promise made to the youth. For obvious reasons, there is a great deal of attention given in these situations to the youth's experience of transition, and the feelings of the caregivers and their families are often less recognized and supported. Ensuring that your needs are met during this process will help you support the youth's transition.

Transition Tips for Disrupted Placements

If you find yourself in a situation where a youth is leaving your family pre-maturely, you will need to:

- ▶ Seek the support and guidance of your team to help you reach final a decision and plan for next steps
- ▶ Allow the youth's team to guide how explain the decision and next steps to the youth, in a manner that matches the youth's age and developmental level
- ▶ Begin the process of grieving
- ▶ Find an outlet for your experiences and feelings to be heard

After some time has passed, you will need to be open to reflecting on the circumstances that led to the disruption.

- ▶ In what areas did the youth's needs exceed your abilities?
- ▶ Are there characteristics or competencies that you can strengthen that related to those areas?
- ▶ What was the level of support that was available to you?
- ▶ Did you access supports or did family needs go unmet for too long? How does this inform what you will do differently next time?

THE PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSIONS OF MOVES—HOW TO HELP

Youth who are relocating from one placement to another have the physical task of packing up their belongings. Many may have had prior moves where they lost everything they had. For many youth, their possessions are all they had. Many have experienced forgetting items that they never got back. Many will remember that “packing their things” as the physical activity that marked their leaving a home and as the trigger for their feeling overwhelmed and frightened. Resource parents must recognize the importance that youth place on their possessions. For many, it is their only link to the past. This physical experience of loss and confusion can manifest itself in being very protective over their possessions.

- ▶ Set the expectation in your home that personal possessions are to be respected (do not require sharing, ask for permission before using someone else’s toys, return borrowed items promptly).
- ▶ Provide a safe place for the child to display and store personal items that have special significance.
- ▶ Ask permission before washing stuffed animals or blankets.

“
The life that you knew,
the everydayness, is
different. That’s loss.
”

~Darla L. Henry

All moves create feelings of uncertainty. This may be magnified by the lack of planning or information given to the youth at the time of the move. It is the not knowing “who, what, when, where, and why” which create high levels of distress. This distress causes the youth to be dysregulated, afraid and scared, resulting in an overall sense of not feeling physically safe. Small transitions throughout the day (moving from one activity to the next) can feel like small losses and moves into the unknown for youth who have experienced trauma. Youth who have a sensitized response (fear response) will struggle to stay self-regulated. Having routines that are predictable and consistent is important to helping reduce feelings of uncertainty and creating a sense of safety in the youth’s new environment.

- ▶ Help youth gain mastery over these feelings by staying parallel (walking or sitting alongside the youth).
- ▶ Instead of expecting the youth to move seamlessly from one activity to another, work with the youth as they transition from one activity to the next throughout the day.
- ▶ Help the youth understand and prepare themselves for the next transition by giving advance notice about what the youth can expect to happen. Post schedules in an area that is visible to all household members and a procedure for changes, such as writing down a change in the daily schedule on a message board, are useful strategies.
- ▶ Use count-downs to make transitions from one activity to another less overwhelming. This can be as simple as saying something like, “In 15 minutes we are going to start getting ready to leave for the store.” Some youth might benefit from even more frequent count-downs, or greater advance notice (60, 45, or 30 minutes prior). A related strategy is to narrate what is coming next. For example, you might say, “When we finish dinner, we are going to work together to clean up the kitchen and then we are going to watch the movie together in the living room”.

Moves often include the loss of relationships. Youth being removed from their families may be worried about their parents. Those preparing to return home to their biological families may be not only excited but also be fearful and or experience anxiety about what to expect. Connections to peers associated with the youth’s school and community activities are often impacted by moves, and youth may be saddened by the loss of friendships and other important people they have come to know.

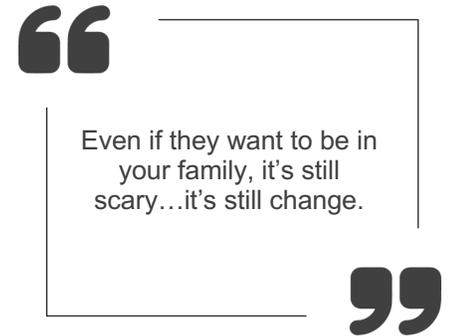
- ▶ Provide youth with opportunities to talk about their feelings.
- ▶ Show your interest in learning about the youth’s previous placements or homes.
- ▶ Share information in a truthful manner with the youth about their families.
- ▶ Work to help youth maintain relationships with people who are important to them.
- ▶ Allow the youth to display photos of family members or other important people.

QUESTIONS KIDS WANT ANSWERS FOR WHEN GOING INTO AND LIVING IN FOSTER CARE

Youth in foster care have many questions, both spoken and unspoken. Review the lists below. What other questions do you imagine youth having? How might you begin to answer these questions? What support and information will you need to best support the youth in your care?

During the first week:

- Why didn't my parents want me?
- Is it my fault?
- When will I go home?
- Can I still see my parent/s? When? Can I call them? When? How often?
- Can I see my brothers or sisters? When? Can I call them? When? How often?
- Can I see my grandparents? When? Can I call them? When? How often?
- Can I see my friends? When, how much?
- Can I go into the refrigerator without permission?
- Where are all my clothes and stuff? Can I get my things?



~Debbie Schugg

During the first month:

- What religious views does this new family have and can I still practice mine?
- Will these new people provide or let me do the things I like to do?
- Can I still drive?
- Can I keep my job?
- Could I live with my best friend?
- How am I going to keep up in school if I have to start all over in a new school? Will my credits transfer?
- If I get in trouble, do I get kicked out?
- What happens at court? Can I go? Should I go?
- Do I have any right to have a say so in what happens at court?
- Do I have the right to talk to the judge?
- If my social worker does not call me what should I do?
- If I don't get along with my foster parents who should I tell?
- Can I see some of the stuff that is written about me?
- If my worker does not call me back—what can I do? Who else can I call?
- What do all these works mean (Custody, Termination of Parental Rights, Adjudication Supervised Visitation)?

As the placement continues:

- Do I have any say where I live?
- How can I tell the judge what I am thinking?
- Can I just go live on my own? (older youth)
- What about going to college? (older youth)

USING WELCOME BOOKS

A Welcome Book is a collection of information and pictures about your home that help a youth who is moving in to learn more about you and your home environment before they arrive. A Welcome Book can be sent to the youth prior to their placement into your home and can help reduce some of the anxieties and unknowns prior to their transition.

How do I make a Welcome Book?

If possible, create your Welcome Book in an electronic format that can be emailed and printed out and given to the youth. You can be as creative (or not!) as you want. The goal is to share information to help the youth feel more prepared as they come to your home, so don't worry too much about making the book too elaborate.

What should I include in my Welcome Book?

- ▶ Begin with a picture of your family on the first page. Include the names and ages of all of your family members.
- ▶ Add a picture of the outside of your home. Include pictures of any areas outside your home that you spend time in, such as the yard, the basketball hoop in the driveway, the trampoline, etc.
- ▶ Take a picture of each room of the house. Label each one and include them in the book.
- ▶ Include several photos of the youth's bedroom.
- ▶ If you have pets, include pictures of them in your Welcome Book.
- ▶ Consider important places in the community to include, such as the local schools, parks and recreational areas. In the best case scenario, your home would be located in the same community where the youth is from, but when this is not the case, having photos of the community can be very helpful.

Tips for creating your Welcome Book

- ▶ As much as possible, stick to pictures and short descriptions to avoid overwhelming the youth.
- ▶ Remember to add anything you think the youth will find useful or interesting to see ahead of time. Familiarity can reduce the anxiety and fear of the unknown. The less anxiety a youth feels, the safer they may feel.
- ▶ Don't go overboard with trying to show the youth what a 'good life' they will have. The idea is to show the youth what a regular day in their new family will look like.
- ▶ Think about the other types of information that might be helpful to include. This might be things like your house rules, the kinds of things that your family likes to do for fun or pictures and descriptions of your favorite meals.
- ▶ Keep in mind that when the youth becomes a part of your family, you will need to incorporate their likes and dislikes to create a new version of "family favorites".

How do I get a copy of the Welcome Book to the youth?

Make sure that those who work most closely with you have a copy of the Welcome Book and that they know it is ok to share the book. Plan to allow the youth to keep their own copy of the Welcome Book.

References

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Iowa Foster & Adoptive Parents Association. IFAPA Welcome Pages. Retrieved from: <http://www.ifapa.org/publications/IFAPA-Welcome-pages.asp>

SUGGESTED PRE-PLACEMENT QUESTIONS

Below is a list of questions to ask before a youth is placed into your home. Gathering as much of this information as possible will help you decide if you should accept a particular placement. This information will also help you to be as prepared as possible to meet the youth and their family's needs.



Transition Related Issues

- Reason for being placed in foster care
- What is the child's understanding of why he/she is in foster care?
- Is this their first placement?
- If moving from another foster home, what is the reason?
- What are your expectations of me as a foster parent in caring for this child?
- Do you have any suggestions to help the child make a successful transition to our home?

Family and Other Relationship Issues

- Where are the birth parents living?
- What contact will be allowed with the parents?
- Does the child have siblings?
- Names of siblings and where they are living
- What is the visitation plan with siblings and parents?
- Who are the other relatives of the child and what are these relationships like?
- Are there other important people who have a relationship with the child?
- Can the youth maintain contact with former foster parents?
- Is there anyone the child should not have contact with? Why?

Permanency Planning Issues

- What services are involved with this child and family?
- What will be my role in these services?
- Will I be expected to provide transportation?
- If so, where to and how often?
- What is the child's legal status?
- Is this a concurrent placement (is our home being considered as a possible adoptive resource for this child)?
- How long do you anticipate the child will be with us?
- Who is the child's guardian ad-litem / attorney?
- When is the next court hearing?

School Issues

- Where does the child attend school? What grade?
- If the child will be changing schools, who is responsible for enrolling the child?
- Are there any school issues?

Religious Preferences

- Does the child have a religious affiliation?
- Does the child have a religious preference?
- What are the child's parents' expectation around participation in religious activities?

Medical/Health Related Issues

- Does the child have any medical concerns?
- Does the child have any allergies?
- Is the child on medication?
- If so, what medication and what was it prescribed for?
- Who is the child's doctor? Last exam?

- Who is the child's dentist? Last exam?
- Does the child have any upcoming medical/dental/therapy appointments?

Social/Emotional Issues

- Does the child see a mental health professional?
- If so, who and how often?
- Does the child have behavioral issues or other special needs?
- Has the child made an allegation of abuse against a previous caregiver?
- Has the child's parents made an allegation of abuse against a previous caregiver?
- Is the child sexually active?
- Are they are on birth control?
- Are they pregnant?
- Has the child been sexually abused by a parent, caregiver or other person?
- If yes, please give further information:

General Issues

- What are the child's strengths, interests and activities?
- What are the child's food preferences?

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN PREPARING FOR TRANSITIONS

In the video, you heard about the factors caregivers need to consider when preparing for transitions: the impact on the child or youth, the role of the receiving home, and the how the current caregivers can support the transition. Regardless of the reason for a transition, there are ways to reduce the harmful impacts they can have. Consider the factors in each category that can assist in making transitions in a planful way as well as in a way that helps to prevent future moves.

Caregiver Factors:

- ▶ Participation in resource family training and preparation that focuses on trauma-informed parenting approaches
- ▶ Experienced resource parents who can maintain self-regulation and who are attuned to the youth's needs
- ▶ Understanding of the typical behaviors that accompany grief, loss and trauma and ability to distinguish these behaviors from those that are intentionally oppositional
- ▶ Access to sufficient levels of supports and ability to practice self-care
- ▶ Ability to advocate for services and supports for themselves and the youth

Youth Factors

- ▶ Share power and control with older youth in planning and during transitions
- ▶ Ensuring continued connections to individuals and activities/in the community
- ▶ Preparing youth prior to moves and making sure they know why they have been placed/moved

System Factors

- ▶ Planning for the first placement to be the last placement (according to research, 70% of moves occur in the first 6 months of the youth's initial placement)
- ▶ Proactively (or as soon as possible) sharing information with youth and resource parents
- ▶ Ensure the information shared is truthful—most all information about transitions can be shared with youth in an age-appropriate manner
- ▶ Conducting planned pre-placement visits
- ▶ Frequent check-in's from staff for families who have high-need youth, to ensure they have the services and continued supports they need
- ▶ Consistent workers who are available to both youth and caregivers and who follow through on responding to youth's trauma, grief and loss issues
- ▶ Providing support for youth in school, including ensuring the educational environment is trauma-informed
- ▶ Developing and supporting birthparent interaction with foster parents

RESOURCES

These resources can provide some additional information you may want to consider.

▶ **Empowering Caregivers, Strengthening Families Video Series**

These videos are a part of the Empowering Caregivers, Strengthening Families Video Series produced by the Administration for Children and Families, Capacity Building Center for States.

Teresa's Story shares a foster mother's experiences collaborating with biological families toward positive outcomes for the children in her care.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=38&v=ppnRPu29xSc

Don's Story discusses the importance of communication and trust between caregivers and biological family members, along with agency training and resources, for successful reunification.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=h9Qkwf2jSsE

▶ **Resource Family Tip Sheet for Supporting Reunification**

Published by the American Bar Association, Center on Children and the Law, this tip sheet provides insights from foster families who were outstanding supporters of reunification.

https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/child_law/ParentRep/Reunification_Tip_Sheet.authcheckdam.pdf

▶ **Touchpoints: Preparing Children for Transitions**

Published by the Coalition for Children, Youth & Families in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, this guide is designed for people who are involved in key transition points for a child in out-of-home care: ongoing workers, foster parents, relative caregivers, adoption workers, CASA volunteers, therapists, and tribal workers. The guide can be used as a tool to talk with children and youth beginning with the transition to out-of-home care and continuing until a child reaches permanency. Each chapter identifies a key discussion time, and includes an activity, tools, and resource materials to help open the conversation and encourage the child or youth to express the questions they might be afraid to ask.

▶ **How Can We Help Kids With Transitions?**

An article published on the Child Mind Institute website by Katherine Martinelli, who is a journalist who has published internationally on a variety of topics including parenting, food, travel and education.

<https://childmind.org/article/how-can-we-help-kids-with-transitions/>

CREATING AN ACTION PLAN

Now, it is time to develop a plan to address those areas you would like to change. Consider the points / questions below, as well as your self-assessment and classroom material, when identifying a plan to improve your skills related to managing and supporting transitions.

- ❖ Identify / define the specific issue or concern you have related to transitions.
- ▶ If you completed the CORE Teen Self-Assessments, consider your results related to the characteristics that are essential to support transitions (commitment, patience/perseverance, resiliency and self-regulation/self-awareness).
- ❖ There is a lot to consider when thinking about how to support youth during transitions. Consider the following questions as you prepare to develop your action plan:
 - ▶ What can you do to support the child before, during or after a move/transition?
 - ▶ What can you do to prepare the youth for the move/transition?
 - ▶ What can you do to help the youth cope during the move/transition?
 - ▶ What can you do to help the youth process and adjust to the situation in a way that reduces re-traumatization?
 - ▶ How can you include the youth's supports into the process to reduce trauma and re-traumatization?
- ❖ Your day to day routines will also change, and managing these changes can be stressful. Review the list of likely changes and consider what you feel most prepared for. If there are areas that you had not considered, think about what you will do to be more prepared and add those to your action plan:
 - ▶ Managing challenging behaviors or behaviors that are just plain annoying
 - ▶ Having less time for children already in the family
 - ▶ Giving up peaceful evenings and weekends
 - ▶ Changes in family roles and interactions within the home
 - ▶ Fitting the youth's appointments into your schedule, often last minute
 - ▶ Spending more time supervising homework and participating in school-related meetings and events
 - ▶ Being ready for various workers and team members to walk-through your home during visits
 - ▶ Handling special outings with your family, including vacations, will need to be more planful as you may need permission from others
 - ▶ Keeping a consistent, predictable schedule
 - ▶ Managing the impact of rules about safety such as smoking in your home or car, or using recreational equipment such as trampolines—you may have to make changes to maintain compliance with state regulations
 - ▶ Adjusting to more noise, messes, and laundry
 - ▶ Taking more time for planning
- ❖ Consider your thoughts about the challenges of managing transitions as you have explored in the Right Time materials.
 - ▶ What are the areas where you predict you have strengths?
 - ▶ What are your most pressing concerns?
 - ▶ What questions do you still have?
- ▶ Consider the ways that you can prepare for the transitions that youth in your care may experience. Some of the most common times of transition include:
 - Entry into foster care
 - Moves between foster homes

- Placement into treatment facilities
- Changes in parent and/or sibling visitation
- Placement into an adoptive home
- Returning home from foster care
- Change in relationship when foster parents decide to adopt

Use the Action Plan grid to identify the transition areas that you would like to work on. List each area on the grid and answer the associated questions to develop your plan.

What do I plan to do to improve my ability to manage and support transitions?

Transition Point	What do I need to do to manage transitions in this area?	What help will I need?	Who can help me?
Entry of youth into my home	Prepare to introduce my family to the youth. Have an idea of the basic house rules and be willing to negotiate some rules to meet the youth's need. Prepare existing family members for the addition of someone new to the family. Determine how schedules will need to change and what will need to stay the same. Other (list): Other (list):		
Other (list):			