

# Adoption/Permanency Child Welfare System

*There are many paths  
to lifelong connections.*



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1

## What is Permanency?

Permanency is a family relationship that is intended to last a lifetime.

- The intent to endure indefinitely
- Commitment, continuity and assumption of a common future
- A sense of belonging and emotional security, and
- Legal and social family status that protects a child's or youth's legal rights and interests and transcends the societal stigma of foster care.



2

## The Process

Every child with poor prognosis in reunification is assigned an adoption social worker (SW) for concurrent planning.

### What is concurrent planning?

- Plan A: Reunification w/birth parents
- Plan B: Permanent placement plan (Guardianship/Adoption) with a relative/non-related extended family member
- Plan C: Adoption with a non-relative

3

## Concurrent Planning

Goal: What is the best permanent plan if the child doesn't reunify?

There will be ongoing conversations about permanency throughout the case

Adoption SW follows the case while in reunification

Mandate-least restrictive level of care: Relatives, NREFM, keeping kids w/family and community connections

4

## Different Types of Permanent Plans

Guardianship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kin-Gap funding may be available</li> </ul>
Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (AAPLA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP)</li> <li>• THP+ program</li> </ul>

5




## Transitions

- Relatives out of the area
  - Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) process
  - Visits with the child
    - Building the relationship
    - Help make it less “scary” for the child
      - Transition items
      - Photos
      - Back visits once placed



6

## Barriers to Transitions

-  **Parents' visitation** Court ordered visits until TPR  
Could be appeal issue
-  **ICPC Process** 90 days
-  **Court approval for out of out of county/state**

7

## Guardianship

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If the permanent plan of guardianship is identified, your social worker will work with you to complete a guardianship questionnaire for the home evaluation

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Need to be in placement with Resource Family Approval or Tribally Approved Home for 6 months

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Kin-GAP funds are available to relatives and fictive relatives

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Letters of guardianship must be completed before dependency is terminated

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After dependency is terminated, there will be an annual guardianship hearing until the youth's 18<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> birthdays

8

## Guardianship

Nonrelated guardians that move out of county will have to apply for funding in the new county Other states may not fund

Guardianship ordered after 16, fund until the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday

Guardianship funds can continue until the child graduates high school or if the child has a disability

Kin-GAP paid at the beginning of the month and nonrelatives paid the following month

Kin-GAP intake packet must be completed for eligibility for Kin-GAP funds

9

## Child's Adoptability

- Adoption Social Worker writes a report that tells the court whether the child is "adoptable" or not.
- Legal reasons in the Welfare and Institution Code (WIC) explain what children are legally considered adoptable or not.



10

## What are Some Things That Need to be Considered for Adoptability

### ICWA applies

- Tribe objects to adoption and has intervened in the case

### 12 years or older

- Child needs to consent to being adopted

### Caregiver is a relative and does not want to adopt

Other exceptions: sibling bond, parent bond, or child is in a residential treatment/group home

11

Every child is adoptable if there is someone willing to adopt them

- Generally adoptable
- Specifically adoptable

Hard to place child

- Large sibling group, difficult behaviors
- May need to look out of the area to find adoptive home

ADOPTION



12

## Adoption Approval Process

Goal: If this child gets adopted, is it likely that this family can make a forever commitment and keep the child safe?

Includes reference checks, employment verification, medical reports, interviews, etc.



13

## Tribal Customary Adoption (TCA)

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Same benefits as conventional adoption

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Recommendation must come from the Tribe, not the county/courts

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Parental Rights are modified - NOT TERMINATED

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Multiple people on birth certificate

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Tribe creates a Tribal Customary Adoption Order (TCAO) regarding visitation, inheritance, cultural events, and more

14

## RFA Adoption Process



### Process for adopting if RFA family

- RFA Unit assess and approve/deny applicant
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- Parent/Child Suitability Assessment conducted prior to the .26 hearing
    - Marriage/Divorce verification
    - Planning in the event the adoptive parent(s) are unable to care for the child (designated caregiver)

15

## Adoptive Placement

Converting foster care stipend to Adoption Assistance Program (AAP)

Need to be approved to adopt by the adoption social worker

Paperwork is in the child's new adoptive name

Family gets "full disclosure" documents and report

16



## Adoption Finalization

- Adoption SW writes a report recommending that the judge sign off on the adoption.

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- Child and adoptive parents go to courthouse for judge and parents to sign adoption decree
  - 12+ child must sign the decree



17

## Adoption Assistance Program

Goal: To help prospective adoptive families pursue adoption without having it be a financial hardship

Negotiated rate between the adoption social worker and adoptive parents

Paid at the beginning of the month

Level of Care increases if applicable

Wraparound/out of home treatment



18

## AAP eligibility

Only available to children considered “special needs”

- Children in foster care

Not typically available for step-parent or international adoptions



19

## AAP termination

- Ends when a child turns 18 or 21 years old with appropriate documentation
- Automatically goes until 21 if child is 16+
- Ends if the adoptive parent(s) are no longer legally responsible for the support of the child
- Ends if a single adoptive parent passes away or if both adoptive parents pass away. If children are re-adopted, AAP may possibly re-instate with new adoptive parent(s)
- AAP does not extend if the child has not graduated high school

20

## Post Adoption Services

PASP- Wayfinder Family Services

Medi-Cal/Partnership health insurance still available

- Counseling through County Mental Health or other MediCal providers (Remi Vista, Changing Tides)

Foster Care Kinship Education Program at College of the Redwoods

21

## Neiko's Adoption Story



- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bn0N3mb7tRc>

22

## How Children Understand Adoption at Different Ages



23

## Toddler/Preschool Children

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“Adoption” should be a household word

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Important that parents feel comfortable talking about it

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Develop positive association with adoption—may not yet understand meaning

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Goal: lays groundwork for positive self-esteem connected to the word adoption

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Tools: stories that celebrate adoption-books, movies, etc.

24

## School Aged Children



**Children start understanding that they are not with their birth parents and that an adoption plan was made**



**Important to use concrete examples**

Child may make-up reasons for why they were adopted (ex: cried too much, bad baby, etc.)

Important to tell the truth on why the child was adopted in an age-appropriate matter

25

## School Aged Children Continued

- Potential issues:
  - Grief-child starts to understand that they lost someone (birth parent, siblings, extended family)

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  - Permanency-child may question if their adoptive home is permanent



26

## How to Help School Aged Children

- Explain that there are different types of families**
  - Children don't want to be different, but normalize that there are different types of families
- Share with the children information about their birth family**
  - Important to tell the truth, even if the circumstances are unpleasant

27

## How to Help School Aged Children

- Respect that the child's Adoption Story is private**
  - Don't share information without the child's permission
  - If a child doesn't want to talk about it-be open to communication, but don't force the topic

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- Be sure to share everything you know about the birth family before the teen-age years**

28

## Teen-Age Years

Make sure that all known information is already shared

“Who am I” is a central question during the teen years-any info not already shared could be viewed as a betrayal  
Children begin separating from their

Child already experienced a loss, as a result growing up and facing another loss could be frightening

29

## Sharing Difficult Information

- Normal to struggle on how to share difficult information, however it is easier for a child to understand why they were adopted if their were problems in the birth parents' life.
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- Child will hopefully not view themselves as the problem, instead understand that their birth parent wasn't capable to parent them safely
  - If not given information about birth parents may blame themselves for being adopted.

30

## Trauma and It's Impacts

- Early childhood experiences greatly impact later functioning

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- Difficulty with mood regulation

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- Inconsistent caregiving

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- Parental figures unable to regulate

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- Lack of future planning

31

## Brain Development

### Pre-frontal cortex

- Reasoning ability
- Not fully developed until age 25
- Substance use could impact development



Early childhood experiences—Domestic violence, in-utero drug exposure, unavailable/unresponsive caregivers

32



## Warning Signs of a Mental Health Crisis

### Significant changes in behavior

- Inability to cope with daily tasks
- Rapid mood swings
- Increase in energy
- Increased agitation
- Displays abusive behavior
- Loses touch with reality (psychosis)
- Isolation from school, family, friends
- Unexplained physical symptoms



33

## What to do next!

### Safety first!

- Are they in danger of hurting themselves or others?
- Do you need emergency assistance?
- Do you need to contact support from a mental health professional or crisis team?
- Do you need law enforcement?

### Encourage self-help/professional help

### Give reassurance and information

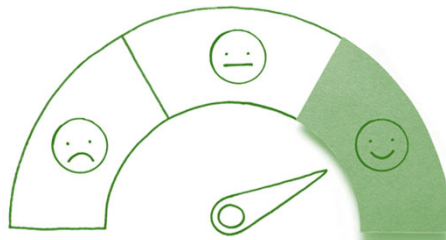
### Listen non-judgmentally

34

## Crisis Verbal De-escalation

In a crisis, reasoning is nearly impossible

- ✓ Empathize with individual's feelings
- ✓ Help de-escalate the crisis
- ✓ Assess the situation on if further assistance is needed- seek outside help



35

## De-escalation Techniques

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Keep your voice calm

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Keep stimulation level low

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Avoid overacting

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Move slowly

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Listen

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Offer options instead of trying to take control

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Don't argue or reason

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Be patient

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Express concern and support

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Gently announce actions before initiating them

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Ask how you can help

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Give them space

36

## Understanding Triggers

- Built in alarm system that signals when we are in danger

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- Brain labels something in environment as dangerous

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- Normative Danger Response

Brain recognizes danger, it prepares body to fight

- ✓ Fight
- ✓ Flight
- ✓ Freeze



37

## Understanding Triggers



### Overactive Response

Goes off often due to repeated danger in the past  
Perceive danger more quickly and may label non-threatening things as potentially dangerous



### What triggers alarm?

When we hear, see, or feel something that reminds us of a dangerous/frightening event  
Brain has learned to recognize them as dangerous due to past experiences

38

## Understanding Triggers

### Common Triggers for Traumatized Adolescents/Teens

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Unpredictability or sudden change

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Transitioning from activities

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Loss of control

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Feelings of vulnerability or rejection

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Confrontation, authority, or limit setting

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Loneliness

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Sensory overload

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Triggers may not always make sense or may difficult for the person to verbalize

39

## How to Help with Triggers

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Help achieve safety in the face of perceived danger

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Listen without judgement... empathize

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Encourage healthy coping strategies

- Breathing exercises, taking a walk, listening to music
- Mindfulness activities
- Phone Apps-CALM

40

## How to Help the Child's Mental Health Needs

### Realistic expectations



- Understanding of child's history and its impact the child's functioning
- Viewing behavior and growth in the context of the child's history
- Reframing negative behaviors
- Parenting Skills appropriate to the child's capacities and needs

41

## Expectations



### Capacity of parents to manage their own response


- Emotional maturity and self-awareness
- Depersonalize a child's negative responses—not intentional hostility
- Empathize with their child's feelings—even if not returned
- Find ways to meet their own needs for affection—until the child can trust

### Unconditional commitment to the child

- Strong sense of empathy and claiming
- Must not waiver with their love and commitment
- If two parents—must be a united front, support each other

42

# Childhood Trauma and the Brain




CHILDHOOD TRAUMA  
AND THE  
BRAIN

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xYBUYIkZpf8>

43

# Openness in Permanency



6 in 10 Americans are touched by  
**Adoption**  
in some way

44

## Why be Open?

- Children/young adults have better outcomes

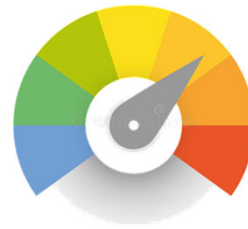
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- Child's life story
  - Child may fantasize
  - Feel disconnected



45

## How to be Open



### On a spectrum

- Best to have some boundaries but have some contact with birth relatives

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- Best to start closer to the closed end and work towards more open

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- Need to keep it in the child's best interest

46

## How to Engage Birth Parents

### Letters to birth parents

- ✓ Set up a PO Box or email
- ✓ Photo sharing
- ✓ Ask for family history/family tree
- ✓ Be inquisitive and empathetic of birth parents' situation



Remember that contact with birth relatives isn't a betrayal on the adoptive family-It is normal for a child to want to find birth family

“It's not a matter of if they are going to find their birth family, a matter of when!”

47

## Sibling Relationship

- Shared life story/history
- Continued contact
  - Social media
  - Letters-photo sharing
  - Email



48



## Seeking Support as a Caregiver

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Join the local foster parent association

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Facebook/online support groups

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Individual and family counseling

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Circles of Support

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Kinship circles/support groups

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Take a break! Have a plan

49

## Online resources

- [www.AdoptUSkids.org](http://www.AdoptUSkids.org)
- [www.ChildWelfare.gov](http://www.ChildWelfare.gov)
- [www.pactadopt.org](http://www.pactadopt.org)



50

## Movie-Closure Trailer (2.5 mins)



- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g\\_\\_N9YW78XU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g__N9YW78XU)

51

## Questions/Concerns?

- If you have a question about what permanent plan is best for your family, please contact your social worker

If you are interested in learning more about adoption, and the adoption process, please contact California Department of Social Services (CDSS)

Questions  
Comments  
Concerns?

52



## Foster & Kinship Care Education Program

**WE JUST WANT TO SAY...**  
**THANK YOU!**

**Website:** [www.redwoods.edu/foster](http://www.redwoods.edu/foster)

**Facebook:** Foster/Kinship Care Education Program-College of the Redwoods

**Phone:** (707) 476-4455

**Email:** [foster-kinship@redwoods.edu](mailto:foster-kinship@redwoods.edu)



53



A Partnership between Wayfinder & California Department of Social Services



Wayfinder’s Post Adoption Services Program celebrates, supports, and strengthens adoptive families through a variety of services. Adoptive families are given opportunities to connect with others, explore new ways of parenting and find the support they need to sustain their families for a lifetime. Our program strives to strengthen families and enhance the quality of adoptive family life.

**Services we provide include:**

- Information on adoption books and materials
- Referrals to community resources
- Advocacy to support IEPs and treatment needs
- Parental support during a crisis
- Family Success Coaching
- Opportunities to interact with other adoptive families
- Virtual workshops and trainings
- Virtual support groups
- Telehealth for adoption issues
- Toll free warmline (M-F) 855-576-4477
- PAS Facebook Group

**Please contact us for more information:**

Toll free 1-855-576-4477

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<https://www.wayfinderfamily.org/>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/1605696722781048>