



HOW TO REACH ADOPTIVE AND GUARDIANSHIP FAMILIES BEFORE THEY EXPERIENCE CRISES

Too often, adoptive and guardianship families do not seek support until they are in crisis. By this time, problems often are harder to solve; some families may have given up psychologically by then.

Post-permanency programs can be more effective when families address challenges as soon as they arise, making life easier for these families. Child welfare leaders can improve their ability to connect with families long before problems reach the crisis stage, by taking these actions:

- Conduct outreach early and often to ensure that families are aware of post-permanency supports available to them.
- Encourage families to seek support; reassure them that needing support is normal and expected.
- Offer services and programs that attract families at various stages of their adoption and guardianship journeys.

Conduct outreach early and often.

States are using a variety of outreach efforts to share information about post-permanency services with adoptive and guardianship families. These include efforts undertaken around the time of finalization as well as long afterward. Some states have more extensive outreach for families who may be at heightened risk of placement instability. (Learn more about planning outreach in the article “[Staying Connected: Proactive Outreach to Adoptive and Guardianship Families](#)” by The National Center for Enhanced Post-Adoption Support.)



PERFORM GENERAL OUTREACH.

- **Iowa's** child welfare agency's comprehensive outreach plan includes:
 - » a warm handoff to the post-permanency provider that is under contract with the state;
 - » outreach to community service providers and crisis counseling program staff to let them know they can refer any adoptive and guardianship families whom they are serving; and
 - » distribution of a flyer about support after adoption to each family after finalization, along with the child's new birth certificate.

To facilitate outreach, the agency shares a monthly list of new families with its post-permanency provider. The agency ensures that new families and those previously listed receive a monthly e-newsletter and outreach correspondence via postal mail every four to six months. The agency also reaches out to families as their children reach different ages of development.

- **Oklahoma** Human Services has a Post Adoption Services (PAS) Outreach Team of five full-time staff members. When a family finalizes an adoption or a supported guardianship, an outreach worker calls to inform the family about post-permanency services. The family receives an email including a welcome letter; the *Adoptive Parent Handbook* attachment; and hyperlinks to the PAS website, YouTube® channel and most recent e-newsletter. The email message provides the contact information of the family's assigned PAS subsidy specialist. Monthly general outreach includes announcements of webinars and meetings around the state. The PAS Outreach Team strives to reach out to rural families more often because finding services in rural counties is more difficult than in urban ones.

- The **North Dakota** Post Adopt Network, the state contracted post-permanency program, has implemented a schedule of individual check-ins with adoptive and guardianship families. Post-adoption staff members reach out to families within one month after finalization, then again at six months post finalization, then every six months through the two-year mark. During the two-year contact, a staff member asks if the family is open to receiving future follow-up calls. Staff then will continue to do outreach if desired. The Network also sends monthly newsletters to notify families about local events, trainings, and support groups throughout the state.
- In **Nebraska**, the state's child welfare agency gives Families Forever, its post-permanency provider under contract, a monthly list of families who have newly finalized adoptions or guardianships. Program staff at Families Forever reaches out to each family at least three times by phone to share information about available services. If phone contact is not possible, the agency mails a packet of information to the family.
- **Virginia's** child welfare agency has its regional, post-adoption contractors conduct outreach. In each of the central, eastern, and northern regions, a dedicated outreach liaison reaches out to local Department of Social Services (LDSS) offices, community

entities and families that have adopted. In the western region, case managers conduct the outreach. Some of the Virginia agency's outreach methods include:

- » distributing flyers at community locations,
- » visiting LDSS offices regularly to inform their new staff members about post-adoption services available and about the referral process,
- » hosting presentations at schools and for community groups to promote services, and
- » maintaining email lists to inform families and others about upcoming post-adoption events.



USE MORE FOCUSED OUTREACH FOR FAMILIES AT HIGHER RISK OF INSTABILITY.

- In January 2025, **Oregon's** child welfare agency began a concentrated effort to reach adoptive and guardianship families six months before their children reach age 8 and again before the children turn age 12. The agency and its post-permanency provider under contract chose ages 8 and 12 because those are critical in terms of brain changes and developmental shifts that can lead to increased risk of instability. The outreach goes to all families rearing children adopted or placed in guardianship from Oregon, even if the families now live out of state. The Oregon Post Adoption Resource Center (ORPARC), one of the state contracted providers, receives additional funding from the state's child welfare agency to conduct this expanded outreach effort. The outreach process includes these actions:
 - » Mail an eye-catching card that notifies families that ORPARC staff will be calling them and explains why. The mailing gives families the option to complete a well-being survey online.
 - » Email the same message to families for whom the agency has email addresses.



- » Call families to share information about post-permanency services available to them and urge each family to complete a well-being self-assessment. More experienced staff members reach out to families assessed to be at higher risk of instability (based on the child's age at placement and previous assessments or known challenges).

For Spanish-speaking families, outreach materials are available in Spanish; staff members who speak Spanish are assigned to call these families.

The well-being survey prompts parents to respond to the following five statements, which were adapted from [Contact After Adoption or Guardianship: Child Welfare Agency and Family Interactions](#):

1. I feel confident in my ability to meet my child's mental health needs.
2. I feel confident in my ability to meet my child's physical needs.
3. I have a good understanding of my child's needs.
4. I believe I can solve problems with my child when they happen.
5. When I need help dealing with problems in my family, I am able to ask for help from others.

To encourage completion of surveys, families who respond are entered into a raffle for prizes.

- In **Vermont**, child welfare staff members track the risk factors and protective factors of each family in their agency's system, gathering information as they work with the families. The post-permanency support team plans more frequent outreach to families with high combined risk scores to remind these families about the supports available. Agency staff members hope this outreach will encourage families to seek help before they experience crisis. (Learn more in "[How Using Risk and Protective Factors Improves Outcomes for Children](#).")

Encourage families to seek support.

For various reasons, adoptive and guardianship families tend not to reach out for support when they are beginning to experience problems. They may think that their early concerns are not worth addressing. They may worry about how the child welfare agency will respond. They may not know where or how to access support. They might feel shame about their inability to meet their children's needs without assistance. Effective communication about the availability of post-permanency services—and that needing and receiving those services is normal and expected—can help to reduce these barriers. (Learn more in "[Normalizing the Need for Support After Guardianship and Adoption Has Been Finalized](#).")

OFFER PRE-SERVICE TRAINING SPECIFICALLY FOR ADOPTIVE AND GUARDIANSHIP PARENTS.

State child welfare agencies that offer training specifically for adoptive and guardianship families transitioning from foster care to adoption have a great opportunity to share messages about how and why these families typically need support after permanency.



- In **Tennessee**, each family that states the verbal intent to adopt or to obtain permanent guardianship of a child must go through the eight-hour Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Training (AGPT) of the Department of Children's Services before finalization. AGPT is also available to families served by the state contracted post-permanency provider. Facilitated virtually by clinicians with master's degrees who work for this provider, the training covers the impact of adoption and guardianship on families now and in the future. Topics include common motives, expectations vs. realities of adoption and guardianship, transparency, honesty, and disclosure. Normalizing the need to access post-permanency services is stressed as well. AGPT also provides families with an introduction to the post-permanency services offered in Tennessee. ([The AGPT curriculum](#) is available free of charge for other child welfare agencies and post-permanency providers to use and to adapt.)
- **Utah's** child welfare agency requires all prospective parents planning adoption to attend an eight-hour, Trust-Based Relational Intervention® (TBRI®) training in which they learn how to be effective caregivers for a child who has experienced trauma and loss. During the training, parents are connected to Raise the Future, the state contracted post-permanency provider. This provider offers in-home, parental coaching based on TBRI®.

INTRODUCE PARENTS TO POST-PERMANENCY STAFF EARLY IN THEIR ADOPTION AND GUARDIANSHIP JOURNEYS.

One way that state child welfare agencies are helping parents to understand that the need for post-permanency services is routine, is to connect them with service providers during pre-service training or before finalization.

- Each family adopting through **Alabama** Pre/Post Adoption Connections (APAC) is connected with an assigned post-permanency counselor at least twice before finalization. Counselors jointly facilitate the APAC Therapeutic Parenting Training for prospective adoptive parents and attend the pre-service Panel Night training session to discuss the availability of post-permanency support.
- Staff members from the **Alaska** Center for Resource Families, the post-permanency contracted provider, jointly lead orientations for prospective adoptive parents and facilitate the Adoption Learning Path training series. This allows the post-permanency staff to connect with families early in the families' adoption journeys.
- Following the approval of the adoption or guardianship home assessment and before finalization in **North Dakota**, pre-adoption staff do a warm handoff to connect each family to the state's post-permanency

support program. Family members get to meet their regional, post-permanency support worker and to learn about available services during the last child-family team meeting before finalization. If that isn't possible, the assigned support worker makes contact during an in-home visit or an in-person meeting in the community. The goal is to normalize the need for support so that families will feel more comfortable reaching out later when they need help. If a child already is experiencing challenges at the time of handoff, the child's family and the post-permanency program staff can choose to complete an assessment and to develop a case management plan so that services can begin before finalization.

- Families in **Iowa** who wish to adopt or who have subsidized guardianship agreements meet in person with the post-permanency staff of Four Oaks Family and Children's Services. Staff members explain the range of support services available until finalization and beyond. The Four Oaks staff work together with each family to decide which supports may be needed. These may include support groups, training and referrals to other services.

SHARE MESSAGES THAT NEEDING SUPPORT POST PERMANENCY IS NORMAL AND EXPECTED.

Through their outreach materials, state child welfare agencies are striving to ensure that adoptive and guardianship families understand that needing support is the norm. They are encouraging families to come forward for help when they need it.

- The **Illinois** child welfare agency provides all new adoptive and guardianship families with the [*Post Adoption and Guardianship Services*](#) handbook. This publication makes clear that these families may experience difficulties and that coming forward for help early is critical. The handbook states, "Families formed by adoption and guardianship may experience some unique challenges. It is normal to need help for small or bigger concerns that your family may face as your child grows and develops. Your family now makes the important decisions for the children in your home. You, not a case worker, are responsible for finding information and programs. It is important to reach out early and often before smaller concerns escalate into crisis."
- The **Oklahoma** child welfare agency's [*Adoptive Parent Handbook*](#) shares information about post-adoption services, including the idea that needing support is to be expected. The handbook's introduction states, "This *Adoptive Parent Handbook* is designed to offer you an overview of the services available to meet your child's ongoing needs. A Post-Adoption Services worker will be assigned to assist your family. We are here to help!" The handbook lays out specific challenges that children may face at different ages because of the trauma and loss they have experienced. Oklahoma Human Services also provides a flyer about post-adoption services to families as they finalize their adoptions. The flyer outlines a few specific times when families may expect challenges:
 - » one to two months after an adoption is finalized
 - » when other relationships are lost
 - » holidays
 - » changes of seasons

PROVIDE INFORMATION ONLINE ABOUT THE NEED FOR SUPPORT.

A simple way to help families understand that many adoptive and guardianship families need support after permanency is to share hyperlinks to support services in the same online location where the agency shares information for prospective adoptive and guardianship families.

- The primary *Adoption in Wisconsin* [web page](#) explains, “All members of the adoption triad can receive support before or after adoption finalization—even many years after. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the Wisconsin Family Connections Center (WiFCC) offer a variety of resources for all those impacted by adoption in Wisconsin.” The *Adoption in Wisconsin* web page offers a list of topic options from which users can choose. “I have already adopted a child” is the first option listed; it leads to more information about post-permanency supports.
- The Adopt **Florida** [website](#) outlines steps in the process of adopting. These include “Interested in Adoption”; “Match, Learn and Meet”; and “Let’s Make It Official!” The final section states, “Remember, adoption is a lifelong commitment, and our Post-Adoption Support Services are here to assist you and your family during and after the adoption process at no cost until your child turns 18. This support ensures a smooth and successful transition for everyone involved.”
- The **Massachusetts** Department of Children and Families [web page](#) about adopting from foster care features two sections: “What would you like to do?” and “What you need to know.” The first section has a hyperlink to apply to adopt; the second offers a hyperlink to a list of resources for parents who have adopted, including financial support, health insurance coverage and post-permanency services.

- The **Michigan** [Adoption Resource Exchange](#) website includes hyperlinks to various resources, including post-adoption services.

Offer services and programs that attract families at various stages of their adoption and guardianship journeys.

Many state child welfare agencies begin offering services before finalization or offer universal support services designed to engage families who may not have any serious needs yet. Such services can help families to learn firsthand about the value of support and to get to know their post-permanency service providers. Coming to a family event or a peer support group meeting often is less intimidating to families than reaching out for therapeutic or other more intensive services. In some cases, services such as in-depth training or peer support may prevent the need for more intensive services. Having a comprehensive array of services can help families to come forward for assistance before their situations become dire.

- **Alabama** Pre/Post Adoption Connections (APAC), the state contracted provider, offers support to families before and after permanency. Once a child has been identified for a family, APAC’s adoption navigators provide placement support and help the family to understand more about

the child. APAC staff share information about the child's history to ensure that the family is equipped to meet the child's needs. APAC staff also can provide counseling to the family before placement to address fears and expectations and to discuss how the family will fulfill the child's needs. After placement, counseling can help family members to adjust to their adopted child and to address any issues that may arise.

- In **Minnesota**, a Post-Permanency Navigator Program (PPN) connects with each family that finalizes an adoption or guardianship from the state's foster care. Post-permanency program staff access the state's database and send the family an initial packet of information as soon as a placement is finalized. Staff follow up with an email a few weeks later, inviting the family to sign up for one year of specialized support from the Navigator program. Families can reach out for help later if they don't sign up at that time. Staff navigators can assist families in many ways:
 - » accessing vital documents,
 - » ensuring a family's access to medical assistance,
 - » navigating birth family connections,
 - » providing educational resources,
 - » learning more about and connecting with post-permanency resources available throughout the state, and
 - » accessing other supportive services and benefits.

Each family also receives a county-specific resource guide containing information about post-permanency services available, including crisis support and children's mental health services. During the first year after finalization, the family's navigator checks in periodically to offer support. The program staff also sends a monthly newsletter highlighting resources and amplifying the voices of adopted children, offers free access to many trainings, provides



free tickets to fun children's events and sends additional resource guides addressing specific topics. When families indicate a need for more intensive support, their navigators can connect them seamlessly with the agency's HELP Program. This program helps to identify additional, in-depth, adoption-competent services, including therapeutic services.

- In **Illinois**, Adoption Support and Preservation (ASAP) agencies under contract with the state offer a less intensive support program, often for families who are early in their adoption or guardianship journeys. It is called START 24/7 (which stands for Start Early, Trauma-informed, Attachment-focused, Resiliency-building, Therapeutic services). This short-term, preventive program is customizable and flexible to address each family's specific needs. START services, provided by either a caseworker with a bachelor's degree or a therapist with a master's degree, are family focused. They provide interactive and meaningful activities for children and caregivers, and they link families with experienced clinicians.
- State contracted post-permanency providers in **Colorado** and **Nevada** offer parental coaching to families. Once a family has

completed an agency's TBRI® training series, the parents in the family become eligible to receive short-term, personalized, in-home, or virtual coaching. This parental coaching gives hands-on guidance to help family caregivers effectively implement TBRI® strategies at home.

- Many states use support groups to reach adoptive and guardianship families early, including before finalization. Providing peer supports such as groups with lived expertise and mentoring programs can help families understand the value of accessing more intensive supports as they see how these services have helped other families. In **Delaware**, the contracted post-permanency provider offers monthly parental support groups. These groups provide time for adoptive and guardianship parents to share their experiences, challenges, and joys with peers. A monthly teen support group lets teenagers connect with their peers while playing games and discussing struggles that they have experienced. Adoption Journeys—the **Massachusetts** post-permanency program—offers 10 to 15 ongoing, in-person and virtual, parental support groups. Each month, the program also offers parental groups that meet for a set number of sessions. The latter groups are psychoeducational; they usually focus on a specific topic such as adolescence or certain behavioral issues. Adoption Journeys offers support groups for children and adolescents as well. Groups for adolescents typically are activity-oriented; they focus on developing social skills and making friends with other adopted teens.
- Mentoring programs for parents are another means of support for families, especially newly formed adoptive and guardianship families. These programs help families to learn more about the value of support services. In **Iowa**, adoptive and guardianship families may request a seasoned family mentor for one-on-one support. Mentor families, who are trained and receive a



stipend, are identified by caseworkers and approved by the state's child welfare agency. The **Kansas** Post Adoption Resource Center (K-PARC) identifies and trains a pool of experienced parent volunteers and matches them with other parents who need support across the state.

- Many state child welfare agencies offer ongoing training for adoptive parents and guardians. In **Illinois**, for example, some of the state contracted adoption support and preservation (ASAP) agencies provide TBRI® training for foster and adoptive families in their areas. This can encourage their clients to access post-permanency services. The **Georgia** Center for Resources and Support (GACRS) offers classes live and on demand on a wide variety of adoption-related topics. In addition, the state agency sponsors an annual seminar to support and to strengthen families who have adopted. Called TIES (which stands for "Together, Inspiring, Engagement and Support"), this event is for parents who have adopted and those planning to adopt children placed in their homes. The seminar gives them an opportunity to increase their knowledge and skills concerning adoption-related issues, services for adoptive families and adoptive parenting.
- Many state child welfare agencies offer recreational and social events designed to engage adoptive and guardianship families and to connect them with their peers.

These events can be great ways to share information with families about post-permanency services and to acquaint them with local providers. In **Tennessee**, the state's post-permanency program—Adoption Support and Preservation|Guardianship Support and Preservation (ASAP|GSAP)—hosts social events across the state. These are staffed by professionals who have lived experience as adoptive parents. ASAP|GSAP also offers family camps and day camps for children and teens; these include therapeutic and recreational activities. Once a month, the **North Dakota** Post Adopt Network offers a family gathering, a parents' night out or a kids' night out. The Network hosts monthly activities in each region of the state. Each year, it also hosts two family-weekend camps and a parents-only camp.

Research and experience show that a significant percentage of adoptive and guardianship families will face serious challenges, including challenges that threaten

family stability and well-being. Child welfare leaders in states, territories and tribal nations can glean ideas from the examples described in this article to reach and to support these families before their challenges become crises.

Learn more.

- The Post-Adoption Center's [Post-Permanency Profiles](#) offer information about most states' outreach efforts and services for adoptive and guardianship families.
- The Post-Adoption Center's [Post-Permanency Model Program Manual](#) helps agency staff in states, tribal nations and territories to understand the Center's post-permanency model, to compare it with their own child welfare systems and to identify potential enhancements. This manual also offers suggestions for agencies looking to address fundamentals or to modify program components.

To delve further into this topic, check out the Post-Adoption Center Resource Library:
www.postadoptioncenter.org/resource-library



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