



ADVANCING THE GOALS OF ACF'S *A HOME FOR EVERY CHILD* INITIATIVE THROUGH POST-PERMANENCY SUPPORTS

As states, Tribal Nations, and territories (site) move forward with joining the new ACF *A Home for Every Child* initiative, it is important that they consider how post-permanency supports can play a role.

The initiative, launched in November 2025, sets a goal of achieving a foster home-to-child ratio greater than 1:1 in every state. It focuses on both sides of the equation—increasing the availability of safe families through diligent recruitment, prioritizing kin, and improving retention of existing caregivers, while also reducing entries into foster care through effective prevention and faster pathways to permanency.



Post-permanency services can have an impact in two ways at reducing the number of children in foster care:

1. Research has shown that the availability of support after adoption encourages families to move forward with accepting a placement. This means that children are more likely to exit care to permanency, reducing the number of children in care.
2. Post-permanency services can also increase family stability and prevent foster care reentry for children in adoption and guardianship.

Post-finalization support encourages permanency

Supports for adoptive and guardianship families help the child welfare system achieve permanency for children in foster care, which reduces the number of children who need a foster family. In a 2018 bulletin, Child Welfare Information Gateway noted that providing post-adoption supports can increase the likelihood of parents moving forward with permanency: “By assuring prospective adoptive parents that they will have access to needed support and services, child welfare systems can help alleviate a concern that might otherwise prevent people from adopting children from foster care.” (p. 6)

“By assuring prospective adoptive parents that they will have access to needed support and services, child welfare systems can help alleviate a concern that might otherwise prevent people from adopting children from foster care.”

—Child Welfare Information Gateway from page 6 in a 2018 bulletin

Research has reinforced this idea. In a national study of barriers to adoption, McRoy and colleagues (2008) reported that both adoptive parents and professionals saw a lack of post-adoption services as a barrier to adoption from foster care. Forty-two percent of staff surveyed said that lack of post-adoption services was a major barrier in the adoption process. Of the families who experienced a disrupted adoption, 29% cited lack of services as one of the top barriers.

In interviews conducted as part of a Wendy’s Wonderful Kids evaluation, Ellis (2011) found that the most common reasons why prospective adopters decided not to adopt

included concern about their ability to meet the child’s needs, challenges integrating the child into the family, and worry about a lack of supportive services to help them meet the child’s needs.

Post-permanency support reduces reentry

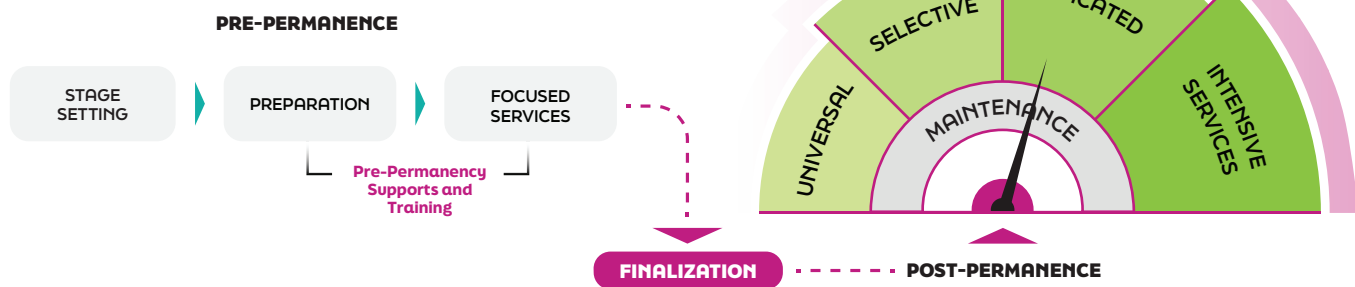
Post permanency supports can also keep children who exited to adoption and guardianship from reentering care. Research has found that robust, adoption-competent post-permanency services help increase child and family well-being and reduce placement instability and disruption. For example, in their study of adoptive parents who used adoption preservation services in Illinois, Zosky and colleagues (2005) reported that the services helped families:

- cope with the challenges of raising a child with disabilities and other challenges
- understand their child better
- diminish the child’s negative behaviors
- maintain the adoption

Ryan and colleagues (2009) also reported that post-adoption services resulted in fewer disruptions, as well as fewer adjustment problems, higher family functioning, and fewer child emotional and behavioral problems.

Preventing adopted children from reentering care has an even bigger impact on the number of children in care over time because these

POST-PERMANENCY CONTINUUM FRAMEWORK



children tend to stay in care longer and require higher level of placements. Smith (2014) noted that when adopted children reenter care, they are:

- **More likely to stay longer**—Previously adopted children are 3.5 times more likely to age out of care than other youth in care, meaning that children are in care for a longer period of time.
- **Less likely to reunify**—Only 36% of adopted children reunify, compared with 52% overall.

What child welfare systems can do

Sites should examine their existing services for adoptive and guardianship families to ensure there is a robust post-permanency service array in place. This will help to encourage recruitment and reduce re-entry into care. Based on this examination, sites can make any necessary enhancements. Key areas for consideration are outlined below.

A ROBUST SERVICE ARRAY

Adoptive and guardianship families' needs vary greatly based on their specific circumstances and individual families' needs often change over time. As a result, it is important that child welfare systems offer a comprehensive array of services that vary in intensity, frequency,

and type. As shown in the Post-Permanency Continuum Framework graphic above, sites must first prepare families and children and ensure that they know what to anticipate, recognizing that adoption and guardianship are lifelong processes that change the entire family system. During the pre-finalization time, sites should help families understand that they will likely need support in the future and can help them know where and how to access services.

After finalization, families benefit from services that include a mix of proactive services that prevent challenges from becoming overwhelming to families, along with services to address serious concerns and crises. Sites should offer post-finalization services in all of the intervals identified in the Post-Permanency Continuum Framework.

It is important for sites to offer services for adoptive and guardianship families who are currently struggling. These services, which fall in the indicated and intensive intervals, should include:

- Case management
- Comprehensive assessment
- Counseling
- 24-hour telephone support
- Crisis intervention
- Support groups
- Educational advocacy
- Respite care

Together, these services create a comprehensive, cohesive, and adoption-competent array of supports designed to work together. Providing effective, adoption-competent, community-responsive services ensures that families are not retraumatized by professionals and systems that do not understand the needs and dynamics of adoption and guardianship families.



Find a full description of these services in the Post-Adoption Center's Post-Permanency Model Program Manual.

[View the Program Manual »](#)

AN ADOPTION-COMPETENT WORKFORCE

One of the best ways to ensure that post-permanency services are as effective as possible is to have them provided by staff who are adoption competent. Access to adoption-competent and trauma responsive post-permanency services promotes stability, prevents crises, and reduces the likelihood of disruption.

The National Council for Adoption's [national survey of adult adoptees](#) found that many adoptees and their families wanted post-adoption supports but struggled to locate adoption-competent providers or clear access pathways. This finding highlights the importance of accessible, adoption-competent services that respond to the unique needs of post-permanency families (National Council for Adoption, 2024).

To ensure their post-permanency services are guided by a team of adoption-competent staff, states, tribal nations, and territories can provide training in trauma, attachment, and adoption competency. They can also strengthen workforce capacity by incorporating nationally recognized resources such as the National Adoption Competency Mental Health Training Initiative (NTI), Training for Adoption Competency (TAC), or other adoption competent curricula. In addition, leaders can offer ongoing professional development and support staff through reflective supervision and manageable caseloads. These investments improve service quality and help families receive consistent and informed support.

Using data to ensure the system is accomplishing its goals

A *Home for Every Child* initiative is data-driven, seeking to ensure that systems understand and invest in what works. The same focus on data can be brought to post-permanency services as well. Sites can look at their current foster care population and calculate how many of the children were previously adopted or in guardianship. Data on how long those children stay in foster care after reentry can provide valuable information about how a lack of supportive services may be increasing the number of children who need foster families.

Similarly, by ensuring the use of evaluation and [continuous quality improvement for their post-permanency supports](#), systems can concentrate on those services that are most effective. By reviewing the impact of the services provided, child welfare leaders can ensure the post-permanency program is successfully increasing family and child well-being and reducing disruptions and dissolutions that would increase the foster care population.

Tools such as the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE)'s [PostAdoption and Guardianship Instability \(PAGI\) toolkit](#) can further support jurisdictions in tracking how adoptive and guardianship families are faring after placement and finalization.

How the Post-Adoption Center can help

The Post-Adoption Center is available to support sites as they enhance their preparation of adoptive and guardianship families and their post-permanency service array. [Through an 18-month partnership](#), the Center works with sites to assess their current post-permanency services, identify an action plan for making changes, and then supports the site as they implement the action plan.

With this support, jurisdictions can help encourage permanency for children in care and help prevent children in adoption and guardianship from reentering care—helping child welfare leaders accomplish the goals of *A Home for Every Child*.

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



This project is supported by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) of the United States (U.S.) Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as part of a financial assistance award totaling \$4,000,000 with 100 percent funded by ACF/HHS. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by ACF/HHS, or the U.S. Government. For more information, please visit the ACF website, https://www.acf.hhs.gov/administrative-and-national-policy-requirements#book_content_7.

References:

- Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2018). Providing adoption support and preservation services. [cwig-prod-prod-drupal-s3fs-us-east-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/documents/f_postadoptbulletin.pdf](https://www.cwig-prod-prod-drupal-s3fs-us-east-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/documents/f_postadoptbulletin.pdf)
- Ellis, R. (2011). Achieving successful adoptions: Voices of prospective and current adoptive parents from the Wendy's Wonderful Kids evaluation. Child Trends. www.davethomasfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/wwk-research-achieving-successful-adoptions-parent-brief.pdf
- McRoy, R. G., & AdoptUSKids Research Team. (2008). A report to Congress on barriers and success factors in adoptions from foster care: Perspectives of families and staff. AdoptUSKids. [acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/report_congress_barriers_1.pdf](https://www.acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/report_congress_barriers_1.pdf)
- Ryan, S. D., Nelson, N., & Siebert, C. F. (2009). Examining the facilitators and barriers faced by adoptive professionals delivering post-placement services. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(5): 584–593. doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2008.11.003
- Smith, S. L. (2014) Keeping the promise: The case for adoption support and preservation. The Donaldson Adoption Institute. www.ncap-us.org/post/keeping-the-promise-the-case-for-adoption-support-and-preservation
- Zosky, D. L., Howard, J. A., Smith, S. L., Howard, A. M., & Shelvin, K. H. (2005). Investing in adoptive families: What adoptive families tell us regarding the benefits of adoption preservation services. *Adoption Quarterly*, 8(3): 1–23. doi.org/10.1300/J145v08n03_01