



## SUPPORT FAMILIES WHO PROVIDE PERMANENCE

**Child welfare systems should increase their ability  
to provide post-adoption and guardianship  
supports and services for children and families.**

Over the past decade, the number of children supported through federally funded adoption and guardianship subsidies has increased substantially. Given the number of children who live in adoptive and guardianship homes, it is important that we allocate resources to ensure the stability and well-being of the children. It is imperative that we continue to support these families not only as they transition to adoption or guardianship but also throughout their journey. **Given the body of scientific evidence regarding the long-term effects of trauma on child development, it is critical that child welfare systems ensure they are offering children and families a robust array of post-permanency supports and services.**



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## EMPOWER FAMILIES TO SEEK SUPPORT

Child welfare systems should send families a clear message that seeking assistance after the attainment of permanence is a normative part of the process.

For generations, the conventional wisdom was that once children obtained permanence through adoption or guardianship, any previous trauma a child may have experienced would be eliminated by joining a forever family. As a result, it was generally assumed that once a child achieved legal permanence, there would be no need for these families to seek services or supports from the child welfare system. Post-finalization contact by the child welfare system was even sometimes regarded as intrusive. However, research on the short- and long-term impact of trauma have revealed that families may need support long after permanence has been obtained as their children reach different milestones and transitions in their life. The professionals working closely with families should ensure there is a transparent conversation with families prior to and after permanence regarding challenges that may arise at any time which result in their need to seek services. **Normalizing this potential need and empowering families to seek assistance when needed can help families feel more comfortable in reaching out for supports and services throughout their journey.**



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## RESPOND EXPEDIENTLY TO FAMILIES' UNIQUE SERVICE NEEDS WITH EVIDENCE-BASED SERVICES AND SUPPORT

Child welfare and related systems must respond expediently to the need for support and assistance among adoptive and guardianship families, and offer an array of services and supports to meet the unique needs of these families.

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Child welfare and related systems need to provide permanency services and supports that meet the varied needs of the diverse population they serve. Engaging families in services early in the permanency process will help children and families feel supported, strengthen caregiver competency, mitigate caregivers' feelings of lack of preparedness and doubt, and create lasting social supports that can be leveraged long after permanency has been attained. No single response will meet the needs of every family. Some families will reach out when they experience difficulties, whereas others might be unaware that support services are available. Still others might try to manage challenges on their own, reaching out for support only when their family is in crisis. Regardless of when families request services, systems need to respond quickly and offer an array of services and supports to meet the unique needs of each family. **Specifically, post-permanency services and supports need to**

- **be available when needed, without any waiting times to obtain services;**
- **be responsive to the particular needs of each family versus the idea of "one size fits all";**
- **be supported by policy at federal, state, and local levels; and**
- **be delivered by staff with the expertise and training to adequately meet the unique needs of adoptive and guardianship families.**



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## ALLOCATE RESOURCES TO ENGAGE FAMILIES IN SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

**Child welfare systems should consider allocating resources to engage adoptive and guardianship families in supports and services that begin prior to finalization and continue post permanence.**

**It is important for child welfare systems to link families to services prior to the attainment of permanence and to continue to offer supports and services after permanence has been achieved.** Once permanence has been achieved, investment in low-cost outreach strategies can facilitate on-going support and connections with families. These strategies are designed to inform families of services and supports that can be accessed when a family identifies an immediate service need.



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**REMEMBER, NOT EVERY  
FAMILY WILL HAVE AN  
UNMET SERVICE NEED**

**Child welfare systems need to counter concerns  
that proactively discussing the need for and  
offering services to adoptive and guardianship  
families will lead to an overwhelming demand.**

As compared with *all* families formed through adoption and guardianship, research tells us that only a moderate proportion of adoptive and guardianship families will need to seek services from the child welfare system. Results from a survey of adoptive parents and guardians in Illinois found that 85% of these families said they were doing well with the supports and services they currently had and did not need additional supports or services (Fuller et al., 2006). **In Tennessee, post-adoption services are available to all adoptive families in the state who are receiving a subsidy. Between July 1, 2016 and June 30, 2017, of the approximately 5,500 adoptive families eligible for services, 353 (6%) utilized the services.** Data from several of the QIC-AG sites further supports that offering services to adoptive and guardianship families will not lead to an overwhelming demand. Parents and guardians with teenagers in New Jersey were offered a group-based intervention aimed at helping them respond effectively to their child's emotions. Of the 653 families offered the service, 11% have participated. In Illinois, the QIC-AG project offered families with teenagers living in one region a trauma-informed home-based intervention. Of the 353 families offered the service, 6% have participated.



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## ENSURE SUPPORTS ARE AVAILABLE TO FAMILIES WHO ADOPT CHILDREN PRIVATELY (DOMESTIC OR INTERCOUNTRY)

**Families who adopt children through intercountry and private domestic processes need supports and services similar to those provided to families who achieve permanence through the public child welfare system.**

While most adoptees are physically and emotionally healthy, adopted children are more likely than non-adopted children to have significant physical health problems as well as difficulties with emotions, concentration, and behavior. Most often, this increased risk is due to adoptees' exposure to adverse experiences before coming to their adoptive families. Children who are adopted through intercountry and private domestic processes are likely to have been exposed to many of the same adverse childhood experiences as children adopted through the public child welfare system. As a result, families who adopt through intercountry or private domestic arrangements are likely to have needs similar to those of families who adopt from the public child welfare system. **For families formed through intercountry or private domestic adoptions, the typical issues associated with adoption may be confounded by cultural differences, language barriers, and the negative effects of children being placed in institutional settings.** Unfortunately, some child welfare systems do not allow families formed through intercountry or private domestic adoptions to access post-permanency services, while other systems allow these families to access services but may charge a fee.



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Child welfare systems should consider allocating resources to engage adoptive and guardianship families in supports and services that begin prior to finalization and continue post permanence.



### **REMEMBER, NOT EVERY FAMILY WILL HAVE AN UNMET SERVICE NEED**

Child welfare systems need to counter concerns that proactively discussing the need for and offering services to adoptive and guardianship families will lead to an overwhelming demand.



### **ENSURE SUPPORTS ARE AVAILABLE TO FAMILIES WHO ADOPT CHILDREN PRIVATELY (DOMESTIC OR INTERCOUNTRY)**

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