

Adoption STAR

Transition Planning: Foster Care to Adoptive Home

The Agency will place a legally free child in the identified adoptive home following a transition plan agreed upon by all parties involved.

Adoption STAR will do its best to follow the outline for best transition practices found below, however the Agency may be unable to make the same plan for each child. The situation will be on a case-by-case basis and be determined by some of the following factors: the age of the child; the physical, cognitive, medical and emotional needs of the child; the geographic location of the child and the adoptive family; and the entity responsible for the pre-placement planning of the child.

The following recommendations and guidelines were taken into careful consideration and have been classified as best practice and taken from literature and research prepared by several professionals including *Rose Marie Wentz, Visitation-The Key to Children's Safety, Permanency and Well-Being; D.L. Henry, 27 Children and Youth Services Review; and Rachel Ewald, Healthy Children: Healthy Adults Transition Guidelines.*

By incorporating *The 3-5-7 Model: Preparing Children for Permanency*, workers and families conduct the preparation work, assist the child in grieving losses, formulate self-identity, establish trust and security through attachments, and build relationships and openness to join families on a permanent basis.

The 3-5-7 Model for the preparation of children for permanency is based on 3 tasks, 5 questions and 7 critical skills:

- (1) The completion of three tasks:
 1. Clarification of life events.
 2. Integration of all family memberships.
 3. Actualization in belonging to a new family.

- (2) The answering of five conceptual questions relevant to each child living in placement:
 1. Who am I?
 2. What happened to me?
 3. Where am I going?
 4. How will I get there?
 5. When will I know I belong?

- (3) The use of critical skill elements in the preparation work:
 1. Engaging the child.
 2. Listening to the child's words.
 3. Speaking the truth.
 4. Validating the child's life story.
 5. Creating a safe space.

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6. Going back in time.
7. Recognizing pain as part of the process.

With a feeling of closure done in a proper transition, the child will feel secure in their new surroundings, which will give them the ability to make decisions and operate freely and with confidence.

Six Step Process:

STEP 1: Preparation

Start on notification of an impending move. When preparing a child for a new placement or home, it is good to start weeks before the move. An effective plan includes purpose, frequency, length, location, activities, supervision, who attends, responsibilities, what to have at the visits. Visits occur at a consistent date, time and place, whenever possible.

Infants

How often: 2 to 5 visits per week; each 60 minutes minimum.

Where: Home or homelike environment.

What: Parent meets child's needs.

Who visits: Parents and siblings separate or together, and other key people with emotional attachment.

Infants 6 or 8 months old should sufficiently establish a comfort zone with touch, smell and sight. 8 months to 15 months should get to know their new caretakers and not get the stranger anxiety from a move to someone they do not know. Visits should be held no more than one to two days apart.

Toddlers

How often: 2 to 4 visits per week; each 60 to 90 minutes.

Where: Home or homelike environment; doctor appointments.

What: Parent meets child's needs.

Who visits: Parents and siblings separate or together and other key people with emotional attachment. Listen for who child asks to see.

Nearing 2 years and older, children can usually grasp that a change is about to occur. Explaining to the child that they are about to have a new home is important in preparing to accept that a move is about to occur. Attachments form at a young age. One to five year olds should take approximately 3 to 6 weeks. The idea is for the child to avoid attachment disorders due to feelings of abandonment and rejection or fear of such. Forcing a quick move will not force the child into bonding, but could cause them not to bond at all.

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Preschool

How often: 2 to 4 visits per week; each 60 to 90 minutes.

Where: Home or homelike environment. Community setting: parks, playgrounds, childcare, doctor appointments.

What: Child chooses what to do during visit; which book to read, what toys, what game. Ask child about their life. Provide discipline.

Who visits: Ask child who they want to visit. Parents and siblings together or separate, and other key people with emotional attachment.

Elementary School

How often: 1 to 2 visits per week; each 1 to 3 hours.

Where: Child helps to choose home or homelike environment, or where child already is; school, sports, park, restaurant, therapist, doctor.

What: Child helps to choose: What child likes to do; sports, games. What child must do; homework, chores.

Who visits: Ask child who they want to visit. Parents and siblings together or separate, and other key people with emotional attachment.

Teens

How often: At least once a week. 1 to 3 hours.

Where: Teen helps to choose; where teen already is; school, sports, park, restaurant, mall, therapist, home of parent or caregiver, doctor.

What: Teen helps to choose. What child likes to do; sports, games, shopping. What child must do; homework, chores. Ask child about their life. Discipline.

Who: Ask teen who they want to visit. Parents and siblings together or separate, and other key people with emotional attachment.

STEP TWO: *First Meeting*

2 to 3 hours with the foster parent, adoptive family and child/children preferably in the foster home. The adoptive couple is to meet at a familiar place of the child's (the foster home is usually the best place to start.) The child will be comfortable if they know that it is fine to have this stranger in their own territory. The foster and adoptive parents should interact together with the child to make them comfortable. The foster parents should allow the adoptive parents' time to speak and interact with the child. (See their bedroom; ask about their favorite toys or games. Talk about what they like to eat and play with.) If more visits at the foster parent's home are available, it is in the best interest to have at least 2 more.

STEP THREE: *Additional Meetings*

Several 2 to 4 hour visits outside the foster home within 1 to 3 days of each other. Plan a meeting at a fast food restaurant or park to meet the child and spend time with them.

STEP FOUR: *Visiting the New Home*

A minimum of two to three daytime visits at the new home for a period of 2 to 6 hours each within a one-week period with the first of these introduced by the foster

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parent. The foster parent should bring the child to their new home for them. The foster parent should stay no more than 15 minutes unless the child is in distress. Make sure that discussions between the foster parents and the foster child occurred and that they understand that the home they are about to visit will eventually become their new home. This allows the child to feel that they have permission from their foster parents to be comfortable in someone else's home. Remember that the child doesn't always really know the concept of 'foster parent' or 'temporary parent' until much older as in 5 or 6 yrs. Repeat the day visits at least twice more but let the adoptive couple pick the child up from the foster home after the first visit at the new home. This will get the child used to going with the new parents and still be assured that they will be back home and with whom they have been for so long. It will relieve tension about the uncertainty of leaving foster mom and foster dad if they have lived there for some time.

STEP FIVE: *Overnights to New Home*

After the child has had at least two to three day visits with the new family, plan an overnight on a day when the adoptive parents will be home the next day to spend time with the child. Continue overnight visits until there have been at least 4 to 6 overnights in the new home alternating with overnights at the foster home. Eventually, the child will spend all of the nights at the new home and only days at the old home. The amount of time will depend on the comfort of the child. At this time, depending on the child's comfort, a three to four day stay is recommended. As the visits progress, the time spent at the foster home will decrease until the child is more at the new home than the old. There may be a time when the child will probably not want to go with the new parents and want to stay at the foster home. This is normal as the child has an attachment to the foster home and senses some loss and is not yet as comfortable in their new setting. This does not mean the placement will not be successful.

STEP SIX: *Placement Day*

This day should not come as a surprise to the child but rather a day they are looking forward to, of course with typical trepidation. While many people may want to make the day celebratory, it is recommended that the day be like the others but acknowledging how special it is.