Educators

Making a Difference for Students

Adoption, Foster Care and
Kinship Care in the School Setting

a resource for families

ifapa

Iowa Foster & Adoptive Parents Association

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Introduction

In the schools of the 21st century, educators encounter a diverse population of students. Students come from different ethnic, racial, and cultural backgrounds and varied family situations, including foster, adoptive and kinship families. Regardless of the type of family situation they live in, children who do not live with their birth parents deal with unique issues. These issues may affect a student's school performance.

This booklet was developed to provide educators with information about issues that impact children and youth in out-of-home care and the effect those issues might have on classroom learning. Information and suggestions on how educators can assist and advocate for these students are also included.

A Brief History of Adoption, Foster Care and Kinship Care

Adoption has existed in some form since earliest recorded history. When parents died or for other reasons were unable to parent their offspring, children were often raised by friends or relatives without intervention from the legal system. Formal adoptions, consisting of the legal transfer of parental rights from biological to adoptive parents and the rights of inheritance conferred upon the children, have been documented as far back as Babylonian times.

Adoption has also been common since the earliest days of U.S. history. Children who were adopted helped meet the need for labor on farms and plantations in the 1700s. Adoption was also an option to find homes for children orphaned or otherwise left homeless during the Industrial Revolution. The famed "orphan trains" of the late 19th and early 20th centuries transported needy youngsters from eastern cities to adoptive homes in rural areas of the Midwest.

Early religious texts described a version of foster care for children who could not be cared for by their biological parents. The first record of foster care in what is now the United States occurred in 1636. In the mid-1850s, the Children's Aid Society of New York began making foster care arrangements for the scores of immigrant children who were living on the streets. In some cases these placements resulted in situations that were much like indenture. Concern for the welfare for children in these circumstances resulted in the beginning of the current foster care system. Social service agencies and state governments began to be involved in placement decisions. Foster homes were inspected and supervised, records kept, and the individual needs of children were considered when placements were made. In recent decades services are provided to the biological parents to facilitate the children returning home and foster parents are viewed as part of the professional team providing services to help reunite families.

Throughout history, families have often stepped up to provide care for children to whom they are related when circumstances warranted it. In recent years these kinship placements have become more common within the child welfare system. When children are removed from the care of their birth parents, child welfare agencies often turn to grandparents, aunts and uncles, or other relatives as a placement resource, lessening the trauma that can occur when children are removed and placed with foster parents who are strangers to them. Statistics indicate that 41,240 children under age 18 live in a home where the householders are grandparents or other relatives (2010 U.S. census). Some of these children are formally placed through the court system. Many additional children are being cared for by relatives in informal arrangements without any oversight by the Department of Human Services or Juvenile or District Court.
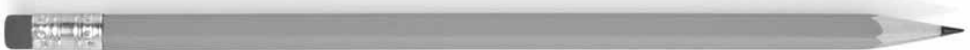
Research & Child Welfare Today

Our society has recognized the importance of protecting children and providing permanence to them in a timely manner. In the past, some children remained in foster care for many years. In the late 1990s federal legislation mandated that children who cannot be returned to their biological homes within a certain time frame must be legally freed for adoption. This has been the catalyst for increased numbers of adoptions from foster care. Many of the children currently being placed for adoption through the Iowa Department of Human Services are older or are part of a sibling group. Many have experienced abuse and/or neglect and have faced other adverse childhood experiences.

Research has brought new understanding of the impact early childhood trauma can have on individuals, particularly on brain development. Trauma that occurs prenatally or in the early years of childhood can affect a child neurologically, physiologically, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

In addition to the trauma children may have experienced in the home, their removal from their birth family is emotionally traumatizing. Not only is the child or youth being removed from his or her parents, but possibly from his or her community, school, day care, and sometimes from siblings. These traumatic experiences can lead to the ongoing elevation of stress hormones in children and youth and can result in attachment issues, impulsivity, hyperactivity, attention problems, and other challenges.

It is important for people who come in contact with these children to have realistic expectations. Children who have been abused or neglected or who have experienced other forms of trauma may not be functioning at their chronological age and they may display unusual or challenging coping behaviors. Having a basic understanding about the neurobiology that may underlie a child's challenging behaviors can help adults choose effective responses to those behaviors.

Children who experienced trauma in their home of origin bring new challenges, not only to their foster or adoptive parents, but also to others who have contact with them on a regular basis. School-aged children typically spend more time interacting with school personnel than anyone other than the immediate family. As more children enter the classroom, bringing with them specific issues and challenges related to foster care or adoption and to their personal history of trauma prior to removal from their home of origin, educators may find it helpful to become informed about trauma-related issues and challenges in order to help each child perform to his or her maximum potential.

Those issues and challenges will be unique to each child based upon their past social and genetic history; however, some of these issues impact nearly all children who are or have been involved with the child welfare system.
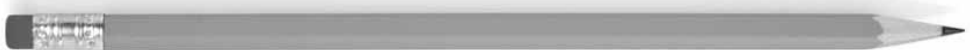
How Educators Can Help

There are a number of strategies educators can utilize to help children deal with the unique issues of adoption, foster care or kinship care and to help all students understand these are all normal and acceptable living situations for children and youth.

- **Educators are encouraged to become trauma-informed.**
  The *Additional Resources* section of this booklet has resources that provide more information on how early childhood trauma affects the developing brain and strategies to assist children and youth to cope with and heal from the trauma.

- **It's important that educators understand and use appropriate, positive language when referring to adoption, kinship care or foster care and related topics.** This publication includes both a glossary of common terminology and a listing of appropriate positive language. Using correct terminology and positive language is an important first step in educating students about adoption, foster care, and kinship care.

- **Opportunities often arise in daily lessons when adoption and foster care can be discussed in a positive, matter-of-fact way, reinforcing the idea there are many ways to form a family.** Adoption, foster, and kinship care can be discussed during lessons about multi-cultural, blended, or other types of families, during discussions of genetics or inherited characteristics, or when literature has adoption or foster care as part of the story.

- **Special instructional opportunities focusing on adoption or foster care can be developed within the classroom.** For example, during May which is National Foster Care Month, or November, which is National Adoption Month, basic lessons about foster care or adoption could be taught featuring successful adults who were in foster care or were adopted. A foster or adoptive parent or an adult who was in foster care or adopted could be invited to talk to the class. Discuss adoption and foster care in general rather than referring to personal situations.

- **It is possible that the topic of adoption or foster care may arise unexpectedly in the classroom.** If it does, the educator need not be afraid to address it. If the educator does not know the answer to a specific question, they can tell the students they will find the answer and get back to them. Educators may refer students to the many books and resources about adoption and foster care. *(See Additional Resources at the end of this publication.)*

- **Educators can be a valuable source of assistance and advocacy for all children in the classroom.** Occasions may arise when a child is asked a personal question about his or her family situation that he or she cannot answer or chooses not to discuss. It is possible that a child may be teased or taunted about his or her family situation. If this happens, educators are encouraged to step in and assist the child just as they would if they heard inappropriate questions or teasing about issues such as race, culture, or divorce. Even emotionally strong children might need assistance in these situations. Educators may seek input from the child's parents or caregivers on how best to handle individual situations.

Challenging Assignments
and Suggested Alternatives

The focus of such assignments is on a child's background, personal information, genetics, or other topics, which can set the child apart and make her or him feel different from classmates. A number of typical assignments that can be difficult for children are listed below, along with suggestions for educators to broaden the assignments to allow alternatives for all students.

Educators are encouraged to consider the goals of each assignment and determine if there are different routes students might be able to take to achieve those goals. Educators might also consider alerting a child's caregivers if an assignment is given which could be emotionally challenging for a child.

Autobiographies

Requiring a child to write an autobiography can be difficult and emotionally troubling for many children. They may have uncomfortable or traumatic events in their past, which could include removal from their birth home. They may have been abused or neglected, witnessed domestic violence, or drug or alcohol abuse. All of these situations are very personal and difficult to share. In addition, some children may not have information about their early years, or there may be gaps in the information they do have.

Alternative Assignment:
Instead of writing a complete autobiography, a the educator might allow students to choose a few special events in their lives, their life in the past year, or a specific time span of three or four years of their own choosing. Or they might allow students to write a biography of someone they know or of a historical figure.

Baby Pictures

Many children who were adopted or are in out-of-home placements do not have baby pictures. Consequently, assignments or activities asking them to provide a baby picture can be impossible for them to complete.

Alternative Assignment:

Consider allowing students to bring any picture of when they were younger, or to bring or draw a picture of what they think they looked like as a baby. If the intention is to have students attempt to match each classmate's name with the correct baby picture, educators should be aware the game might not be much fun for a child who is of an ethnic or racial background different than most of the class, as their picture will be immediately identifiable.

Birthdays

A student's birthday is usually a happy occasion of celebration. However, for children in out-of-home care, their birthday can often trigger feelings about birth family members and questions about specific facts such as "What time of day was I born?" or "How much did I weigh?" or "Who was there when I was born?" These may be questions the child cannot answer and might result in the child having mixed emotions about the day.
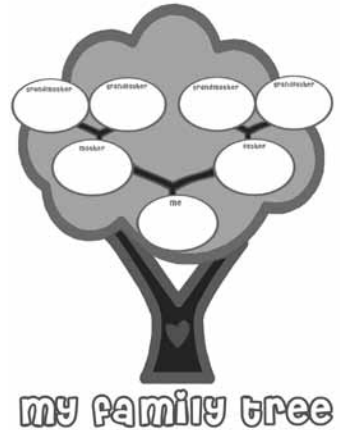
Alternative Assignment:

Consider asking the student's parents or caregivers how they would like to celebrate or acknowledge the child's special day.
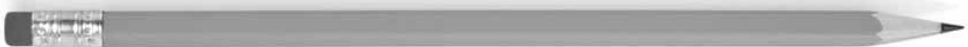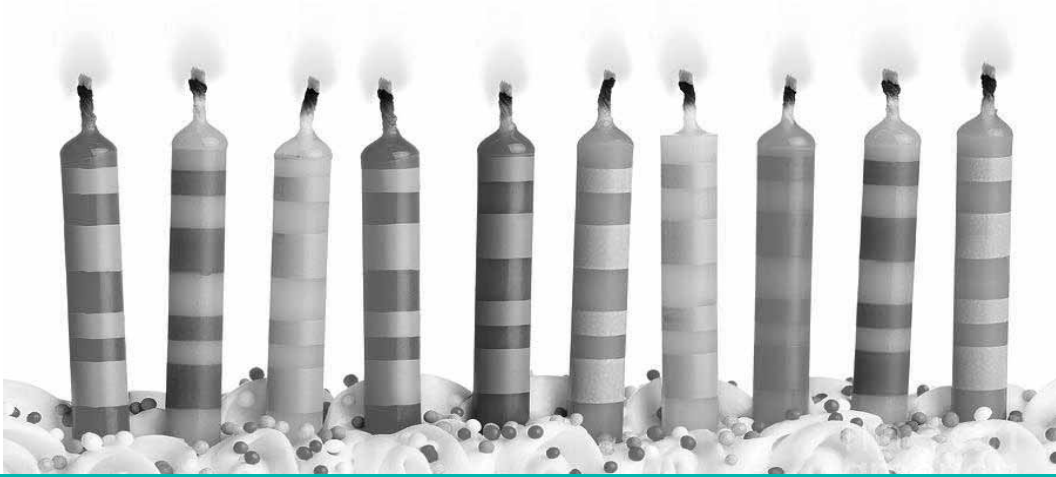
Family Trees

The typical family tree assignment can be difficult for many students. It allows room for only one family, forcing the child to choose between the different families with whom they might have resided. It is also important to realize that some students may have little or no information about their birth families. Even if the student wanted to complete a genetically correct family tree, he or she may be unable to do so.

my family tree

Alternative Assignment:

There are many alternatives to overcome these dilemmas which still allow the student to complete the assignment. Children who have information about their birth and adoptive families might use rooted trees, diagramming their birth family on the rooted part and the adoptive family on the branches. Rather than using a family tree, a child can be in the center of a "family circle" with the birth family on one side, and the foster, adoptive, or kinship family on the other side. An older student might want to complete a genogram, which is a diagramming tool for visualizing family relationships. Symbols are used for different genders, and straight lines connect parents to each other and their children. There are various symbols indicating death, divorce, adoption, and other significant circumstances. Households are diagrammed with an elliptical circle surrounding those living in a family unit. Other suggestions are "family houses" rather than trees or "caring trees" where the child places her or his name on the tree trunk and the names of those who have cared about her or him on the branches. Opportunities to be creative are endless.

Mother's Day/Father's Day &
Father/Son or Mother/Daughter Events

Special days or events focusing on mothers or fathers often give rise to uncomfortable feelings in children who do not reside with their birth parents.

HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY!

Alternative Assignment:

Educators should be aware that some children may have contact with birth parents, and even if they do not, they may want to remember and acknowledge multiple caregivers for their importance in the student's life.

Student of the Day or Week

Honoring one student for a day or week and highlighting information about them and their family is usually intended to be a self-esteem builder. However, it can be uncomfortable for children who may have limited access to pictures and information about their infancy and childhood or for children who have very painful memories of their early childhood.

Alternative Assignment:
It would be helpful if educators would offer all students a list of many alternatives for the information they may share, including choices such as hobbies, pets, interests, or sports that are less emotion-laden.

Study of Genetics, Ethnicity or Medical Histories

Students may lack even basic family medical information. Questions like "Where did you get your eye color?" or "Who do you most look like in your family?" are personal and may be difficult or impossible for a student to answer. It may be painful for the student to admit that he or she lives in a family where no one else shares his or her genetic heritage or ethnicity and cannot complete an assignment that includes medical information.

Alternative Assignment:
Instead of focusing on their own genetic or medical history, students might be allowed to choose any biologically related group—friends, other family members, or neighbors—and investigate their inherited characteristics or medical history.
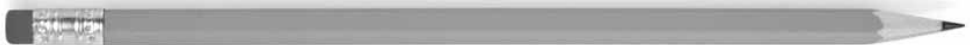
When Questions Arise about Foster Care, Kinship Care or Adoption

Concerns about social, behavioral, or academic difficulties should be shared with the child's parents or caregivers. They might be able to provide information about the child's background that could help explain the underlying issues and prompt a solution or an intervention that might benefit the child. Be aware that foster parents or kinship caregivers might be limited in what information they can share due to confidentiality rules. *(See the Confidentiality in School handout in the Additional Resources section.)*

The Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association (IFAPA) employs Resource Information Specialists and Peer Liaisons, who are available to answer questions and provide information about topics related to foster care, adoption, and kinship placements. To obtain contact information for these staff call IFAPA toll-free at 800-277-8145 or visit the website at www.ifapa.org.

There are a variety of excellent resources available on the topics of adoption, foster care, and kinship care. Some of the best and most comprehensive resources can be found at the website of the Child Welfare Information Gateway at www.childwelfare.gov.

In the *Additional Resources* section of this booklet you will find a list of various materials on adoption and foster care that are suitable for different ages and appropriate for school libraries or for use in the classroom. This section is an overview of some of the many excellent materials available.

Positive and Affirming Language

The language we choose can be very powerful; words can either hurt or heal. When speaking about emotion-laden topics such as adoption or foster care, it is important to use terms that are respectful and non-judgmental. In the past, the words commonly used to refer to persons or topics involved with adoption or foster care sometimes had negative connotations. Listed below are some of the current terms that attempt to convey dignity and respect to the persons involved in adoption and foster care and the decisions they make.

Avoid Using:	Because:	Instead Say:	For Example:
Real, natural parent or brother/sister	*Implies that adoptive relationships are artificial, tentative*	**Birth or biological parent or brother/sister**	*"The four boys are brothers; two have the same birth parents and are biological siblings." Not: "Only two are real brothers."*
Own child, real or natural	*Suggests that adoptive relationships are less important than biological relationships*	**Birth child, child by birth**	*"She has one child by birth and two by adoption" Not: "One of three is her own, the others are adopted."*
Taken away, given up	*Denotes that children are stolen or forgotten rather than adopted legally and with forethought*	**Termination of parental rights**	*"Following the termination of his birth parents' parental rights, he was adopted by his foster parents."*
Surrendered, relinquished, gave away, put up	*Children are not possessions and birth parents always "keep" feelings for their children*	**To parent**	*"She chose to parent her baby." Not: "She chose to keep her baby."*
Foster son, daughter	*The stigma associated with being a child in the foster care system*	**Youth in out of home care**	*"She is placed in out of home care." Not: "She is a foster child."*
Adopted son, daughter	*Qualifiers are not needed; adoption creates a full, permanent relationship*	**Son, daughter**	*"This is my son." Not: "This is my adopted son."*
Hard to place, special needs child	*Labels the child and unfairly places blame on him or her for needing an adoptive family*	**Child who has special needs, waiting child**	*"She has special needs and is waiting for the right family." Not: "She is hard to place because she is a special needs child."*
Foreign adoption	*While more acceptable in the past, today "foreign" has negative connotations*	**International adoption**	*"The parents are completing an international adoption in China."*
The child hasn't found a family	*Children are not responsible for their own recruitment efforts nor their moves through placement*	**The agency, caseworker, recruitment efforts**	*"The caseworker's recruitment efforts have not yet located the appropriate family."*
Available, unwanted	*Waiting children are wanted – the right family just has not been found – and they are not available to whomever is interested*	**In need of a family, waiting**	*"He is waiting for a forever family." Not: "He is available for adoption." or "He is an unwanted child."*
Is adopted	*Adoption is a one-time event, not a definition of a person*	**Was adopted**	*"She was adopted at age six." Not: "She is adopted."*
Closed adoption	*Implies that the experience of adoption – rather than just contact between parents – is over*	**Traditional, confidential adoption**	*"The adoptive and biological parents wanted a confidential adoption; they did not meet or correspond with one another."*

Glossary
of Adoption and Foster Care Terminology

The following glossary contains many of the terms commonly used in adoption and foster care and may be helpful to you in communicating effectively when discussing those topics.

Adoptee
A person who joins a family through adoption.

Adoption
A permanent, legally binding arrangement whereby a person or persons other than the birth parents become the parent(s) of a child.

Adoption Plan
The individual plan a particular set of birth parents makes for the adoption of their child.

Adoptive Parent(s)
A person or persons who become the permanent parent(s) of a child. They have the same legal rights and responsibilities incumbent upon any parent.

Birth Parent
The biological parent of a child.

Children with Special Needs
This includes children who have specific physical, medical, mental or emotional conditions. The Iowa Department of Human Services also defines special needs as an older child or siblings who are placed together.

Closed or Traditional Adoption
An adoption where there is no contact between the birth parents and the adoptive parents.

Disruption
The situation that occurs when a child leaves the adoptive home prior to the finalization of the adoption. This can occur when (1) the birth parents revoke their consent to the adoption; (2) the adoptive parents choose not to finalize the adoption for reasons of their own; or (3) the agency disrupts the adoption if the adoptive parents are not complying with post-placement requirements or are endangering the child in any way.

Dissolution
A disruption that occurs after the adoption has been finalized. Birth parents cannot dissolve an adoption, but adoptive parents or the court can.

Fictive Kin
A term used to refer to individuals unrelated by either birth or marriage, who have an emotionally significant relationship with another individual that would take on the characteristics of a family relationship.

Foster Care
A temporary arrangement in which persons other than the birth parents care for a child for a period of time. Foster parents are supervised and licensed by the State of Iowa. Foster parents do not have the legal rights of birth or adoptive parents.

Foster to Adopt
Some foster parents are willing to adopt a child who becomes legally free for adoption while in their care. The goal of foster care is to reunite the child with the family of origin. When that isn't possible, the child's foster parents may be approved to adopt the child when the child is legally free for adoption.

International Adoption
Any adoption occurring when the child and the adoptive parents are from two different countries.

Kinship Adoption
A form of adoption where the adoptive parents are biologically related to the child to be adopted, such as grandparents, aunts and uncles, or other relatives.
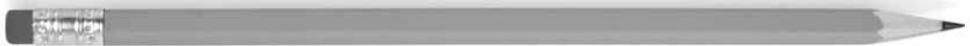
Kinship Care
Caring for a child or youth who is biologically related to the child. Some kinship caregivers may have completed the process to be licensed foster parents or adoptive parents.

Open Adoption
An adoption which allows some form of association between the birth parents, adoptees, and adoptive parents. This can range from picture and letter sharing, to phone calls, to contact through an intermediary, to open contact between all parties.

Termination of Parental Rights
A process involving a court hearing whereby a judge enters a decree permanently ending all legal parental rights of a birth parent to a child. This must occur before a child is considered legally free for adoption. Termination of parental rights may be voluntary (the birth parents choose to relinquish their rights and make an adoption plan for their child) or involuntary (the legal rights of birth parents are terminated by the court without their signed consent).

Additional Resources

This section contains a number of additional printed resources as well as suggestions of downloadable resources that might be helpful to school personnel as they work with children or youth in foster care or kinship care or those who were adopted.
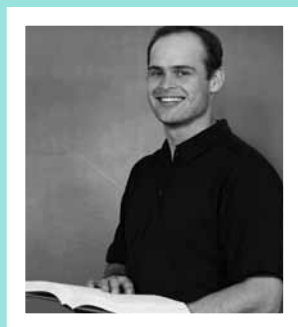
Understanding Child Traumatic Stress
The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (www.NCTSN.org)

Children of Trauma: What Educators Need to Know
National Council for Adoption (www.adoptioncouncil.org)

Trauma-Informed Practice with Young People in Foster Care
Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative (www.jimcaseyyouth.org)

Understanding the Effects of Maltreatment on Brain Development
Child Welfare Information Gateway (www.childwelfare.gov)

Resources from Adoptive Families Magazine

Find the following articles on www.adoptivefamilies.com.

Adoption in the Classroom
This article includes advice from parents and adoption experts on how to address adoption and family issues with children and youth. It also includes a section from an educator titled, *Educating My Fellow Teachers*. There are easy to print handouts to share with educators which are summarized below.

Helping Classmates Understand Adoption
This handout has some possible answers to questions that may arise when children learn about a peer's adoption. It also includes a short list of positive adoption language, recommended reading and more.

Tackling Tricky Assignments
This handout includes information on potentially difficult assignments and some easy alternatives to help all children learn.

Adoption in the Classroom
This handout has easy ideas for educators to include adoption in discussions in the classroom.

Facts About Youth in Foster or Out-of-Home Care

What We Know:

Poor educational outcomes often lead to poor employment outcomes for youth transitioning from foster care.

- Nationally, each year 29,000 young people transition from foster care to self-sufficiency when they turn 18. Of those:
  - 25% do not have a high school diploma or GED
  - 6% will finish a 2 or 4 year college but 70% have the desire to attend college
  - Only 17% will be completely self-supporting

- In Iowa, there were 1,062 youth age 16 and older in out of home care in 2013.

What We Can Do:

Improve educational outcomes for children in care:
- More than 1/3 of 17-18 year olds experience five or more school changes related to foster care
- The 2008-2009 graduation rate for students that were in foster care over 90 days was 29% below the rate of youth who were not in out of home care
- School age children in foster care average 3.38 placements, which often include a change of school and lost school credits

Understand the unique needs of youth in foster or out-of-home care:
- Youth often have a history of mental health issues
- Youth often exhibit high rates of absenteeism, tardiness, and discipline problems
- Youth are more likely to drop out of high school and less likely to later earn a high school diploma or GED
- Youth are less likely to enroll in college preparatory classes
- Youth are significantly underrepresented in post-secondary programs
- Youth are more likely to have been disciplined or suspended from school and are more likely to be involved in the criminal justice system

Work together to build success:
- Youth, caregivers and educators should work together to plan the youth's future
- Youth should have a voice in crafting their goals
- Youth should have the opportunity to seek additional support and services
- All adults involved with the youth should build bridges to help the youth reach their goals

Confidentiality in School
with Youth in Foster Care

A child deserves to know adults at school respect their feelings and support their right to privacy.

Please keep the following information in mind:

• When it comes to out-of-home children in the classroom, the family caring for the child is bound by confidentiality rules set by the Iowa Department of Human Services and the Iowa Code (237.9). Information regarding children in care, which is obtained from DHS, is confidential.

• Foster parents do not have the authority to sign consent forms.

• Foster parents cannot identify the child as a child in care and are not allowed to release or share information regarding the child.

• For the school to receive specific information on the child they must contact the child's Iowa Department of Human Services social worker or birth parent who have the authority and responsibility to disseminate information on the child.

• A foster parent may discuss information they have gained from their interactions with the child including school performance, grades or discipline as well as homework or assignments.

• The staff at a school may assume a child is in foster care if they know the family the child is placed with. Teachers and other school personnel have a responsibility to keep this and any other information they know about the child private.

Confidentiality...
Keeping Personal Things Private

Grief and Loss Issues for Youth in Foster Care:

Seven Core Issues

Significant emotional issues may affect children in care in varying degrees and intensities. Many children do not have the words to explain their feelings. Educators may see the grief and loss issues of children expressed in disruptive or withdrawn behaviors. These behaviors can be difficult to manage in a classroom full of children.

There are seven core issues for children in care as they adjust to a new family placement and school:

- **LOSS:** Has an impact on all aspects of life, including learning. Children in care may feel, "I've lost my dog. I've lost my house. I've lost so many important things."

- **REJECTION:** Children often feel they are not good enough. They may ask, "What is wrong with me? Why am I not with my birth family?"

- **GUILT AND SHAME:** Children can feel guilt and shame. "I'm bad. I deserve what happened to me. I caused this abuse and neglect."

- **GRIEF:** A child's sadness is often unacknowledged or unrecognized. It is frequently acted out with unsafe and unacceptable behavior. A child may ask, "Where is my mom? I miss her."

- **IDENTITY:** A child may wonder where they fit in. They may feel worthless and unwanted. "To which family do I belong? Who is like me?"

- **CONTROL:** A child may be very controlling to overcompensate for the lack of control they have had in their lives. "I won't be left again. I will be in charge. I will reject people before they reject me."

- **INTIMACY:** A child may struggle with forming trusting relationships. They may not know how to make friends or treat others respectfully. They may have a lack of trust for people they come in contact with, especially adults. "I won't get close to anyone because I will be hurt again."

Action List for Educators:
Working with Youth in Care in the Classroom

- **Obtain background information on the youth.** Youth in care often make frequent school changes, resulting in misplaced and incomplete records. The classroom teacher or other school personnel should actively advocate for obtaining as much information as possible on the child, within the limits of confidentiality.

- **Establish a positive working relationship with the youth's family and social worker.** Establish immediate and consistent communication with caregivers and build a positive relationship before a problem occurs with the youth. When the youth enters school, exchange contact information (phone and/or email) with the birth parents, foster parents and social workers. Maintain regular contact regarding homework, academic and behavioral progress. Encourage the birth parents, foster parents and social worker to attend conferences, IEP meetings and any other school meetings related to the student.

- **Promote a youth's sense of mastery and competence.** Most youth in care have little sense of control over their own lives, and many feel powerless to shape their own futures. Providing them with choices, teaching them self-advocacy and decision-making strategies, and helping them set goals will promote a sense of mastery and competence.

- **Advocate for the youth's needs, remembering they may have lacked consistent advocates in their lives.** Because of frequent changes in homes and schools, combined with the child welfare system's focus on child protection issues, the educational needs of youth in care are often neglected. You may become aware of needs that have gone unnoticed. It is important to identify any special needs and advocate for interventions to address them. Discuss the benefits of a referral to special education, remedial programs, school counselors or school social workers.

- **Be sensitive to situations that might be painful for the youth due to their trauma history.** Trauma is defined as any experience that gets in the way of a person's ability to feel healthy and safe. All youth in care have experienced some type of trauma that may impact their ability to be successful in a school setting. Avoid assignments that require sharing family history or background. These assignments may make the student uncomfortable and may be difficult for the student to complete. Be sensitive to sex education curricula which could be traumatic for students with a history of sexual abuse. Consult the school nurse or psychologist for advice in these cases.

- **Be aware that youth in care may have educational gaps and delays.** Educational gaps and delays may be present in acquisition of language, motor skills, basic academic skills, and general knowledge. Environmental deprivation in the birth home, frequent home and school changes, as well as emotional interference with learning may delay development and skill acquisition. It is important to be sensitive to any learning gaps that may occur and focus on the acquisition of strong math and literacy skills.

- **Work hard at building a relationship with the youth.** It is important to remember that trust will not come easily. Identify things the youth likes to discuss and provide consistent and positive praise for a job well done.

- **Anticipate situations in which a youth's difficulty with peer relationships may hinder success and help them with these relationships.** Some youth in care have not had the opportunity to develop or practice social skills. Although they want good peer relationships, some may isolate themselves and push others away while others may not recognize appropriate social boundaries.

- **Stress structure and predictability in your classroom management and instruction.** This will help to counteract the internal and external chaos these children may have experienced and will provide them with a sense of security and control. Post the classroom schedule for all the students to see and stick to it as much as possible. If there is going to be a change in the schedule, make sure all students are aware of the change as soon as possible.

- **Understand students may have difficulty maintaining focus in the classroom.** Previous trauma and ongoing uncertainty in their lives can interfere with the ability of youth in care to focus in the classroom. In many instances, a student's mental energy may be focused on personal issues rather than on math, reading, or other assignments.

Educators Can Assist Youth with the Transition to Adulthood

Youth who have been in foster care and are turning 18 face some unique challenges. Some of these challenges include:

- Lack of support of an intact family
- Stable housing
- Lack of financial support
- Supervision and guidance
- Family and relationship stressors
- Medical and mental health issues
- Lack of employment skills
- Lack of consistent educational guidance
- A strong feeling of freedom to make their own decisions even though they may still need guidance

6 Ways Educators Can Help Right Now?

Make a special effort to link youth to counselors for individualized course planning and guidance in post-secondary planning - starting in 8th grade. Youth in foster or out-of-home care frequently lack consistent adults in their lives who can guide their course planning and monitor their progress toward graduation and post-secondary employment or education. These youth need guidance in course selection, development of post-secondary plans, and, when appropriate, assistance with the college application and scholarship process.

Mentor the youth in self-advocacy. At age 18, many youth in foster or out-of-home care will need to rely on themselves to negotiate the world of work, school and social services. Teaching youth self-advocacy, either through established self-advocacy curricula or less formally through modeling and example, will be invaluable to them as they enter the adult world.

**Ensure that youth have access to the educational courses and services that will give them the skills they will need to function in the adult world.** Youth in foster or out-of-home care frequently lack the academic skills they will need for self-sufficiency. It is essential to ensure they take the necessary course work and are enrolled in specialized programs that will give them the reading, math, and technological skills they will need for the work place and/or post-secondary education. Many will need the guidance of a teacher or counselor to ensure they are enrolled in these courses and programs.

Alert youth to work experience programs for which they might be eligible. Consider assisting them with filling out applications, making contacts with employers and preparing for interviews.

Where appropriate, connect youth with high quality mentoring programs. Research has clearly shown the importance of adult mentors to youth in foster or out-of-home care. Work to build a team around the youth and help them to connect with the supports they need to be successful.

Introduce youth to community programs and services that will be helpful in transitioning to adult life. These include community-based transition programs for youth, independent living programs, work force training centers, scholarship programs, vocational-rehabilitation programs for youth with disabilities, community colleges, technical schools and health and mental health programs.
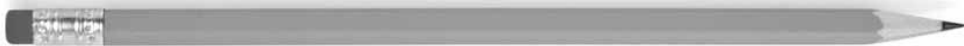
Adoption and Foster Care Related Books

For Preschool to Early Elementary Aged Children

Keep in mind the age category is a suggestion, and many books appropriate for preschool children could be beneficial to other children as well.

- **A Child is a Child:** Brigitte Weninger
- **A Mother for Choco:** Keiko Kasza
- **Adopted Like Me:** Jeffrey LaCure
- **Adoption:** Fred Rogers
- **Adoption Stories for Young Children:** Randall B. Hicks
- **All About Me:** Lynn Burwash and Cie McMullin
- **Beginnings: How Families Come to Be:** Virginia Kroll
- **Families Change:** A Book for Children Experiencing Termination of Parental Rights: Julie Nelson
- **Foster Parents:** Rebecca Rissman
- **Happy Adoption Day:** John McCutcheon
- **I Am Adopted:** Norma Jean Sass
- **I Don't Have Your Eyes:** Carrie Kitze
- **I Love You Like Crazy Cakes:** Rose A. Lewis
- **I Wished For You:** Marianne Richmond
- **It's Okay to be Different:** Todd Parr
- **Kids Need to be Safe: A Book for Children in Foster Care:** Julie Nelson
- **Little Miss Spider:** David Kirk
- **Lucy's Family Tree:** Karen Schreck
- **Maybe Days:** Jennifer Wilgocki and Marcia Kahn Wright
- **Mishka: An Adoption Tale:** Adrienne Ehlert Bashista
- **Murphy's Three Homes:** Jan Levinson Gilman
- **My Adopted Child, There's No One Like You:** Dr. Kevin Leman
- **My Family is Forever:** Nancy Carlson
- **My Foster Care Journey: A Foster/Adoption Lifebook:** Beth O'Malley
- **My Real Family:** Emily Arnold McCully
- **Oliver: A Story About Adoption:** Lois Wickstrom
- **Our Twitchy:** Kes Gray & Mary McQuillan
- **Over The Moon:** Karen Katz
- **Rosie's Family: An Adoption Story:** Lori Rosove
- **Seeds of Love: For Brothers and Sisters of International Adoption:** M. E. Petertyl & J. Chambers
- **Shaoey and Dot: Bug Meets Bundle:** Mary Beth Chapman and Steven Curtis Chapman
- **Story of Adoption: Why Do I Look Different:** Darla Lowe
- **Tell Me Again About the Night I Was Born:** Jamie Lee Curtis
- **The Best for You:** Kelsey Stewart
- **The Coffee Can Kid:** Jan Czech
- **The Family Book:** Todd Parr
- **The Star:** Cynthia Miller Lovell
- **Twice Upon Adoption: Born and Adopted:** Eleanor Patterson
- **We Belong Together: A Book about Adoption and Families:** Todd Parr
- **Welcome Home, Forever Child:** Christine Mitchell

Adoption and Foster Care Related Books:

For Elementary Aged Children

Keep in mind the age category is a suggestion, and many books appropriate for elementary students could be beneficial to other children as well.

- **A Forever Family:** Roslyn Banish
- **A New Barker in the House:** Tomie DePaola
- **Adoption:** Judith Greenberg
- **Adoption is for Always:** Linda Walvwood Girard
- **Angry Octopus: An Anger Management Story Introducing Active Progressive Muscular Relaxation and Deep Breathing:** Lori Lite
- **Aunt Minnie McGranahan:** Mary Skillings Prigger
- **Becoming Naomi Leon:** Pam Munoz Ryan
- **Being Adopted:** Maxine B. Rosenberg
- **Brown Like Me:** Noelle Lamperti
- **Carolyn's Story: A Book About an Adopted Girl:** Perry Schwartz
- **Did My First Mother Love Me?:** Kathryn Ann Miller
- **Emma's Yucky Brother:** Jean Little
- **Families are Different:** Nina Pellegrini
- **Forever Fingerprints:** Sherrie Eldridge
- **How Babies and Families are Made:** Patricia Schaffer
- **How I Was Adopted:** Joanna Cole
- **Is That Your Sister? A True Story of Adoption:** Catherine Bunin, Sherry Bunin and Sheila Kay Welch
- **Kimchi and Calamari:** Rose Kent
- **Mario's Big Question: Where Do I Belong?:** Carolyn Nystrom

- **Megan's Birthday Tree:** Laurie Lears
- **Other Kids Like Me in China:** Brian Boyd, Ying Ying Fry and Terry Fry
- **Our Gracie Aunt:** Jacqueline Woodson
- **Pinky and Rex and the New Baby:** James Howe
- **Real Sisters:** Susan Wright
- **Red in the Flower Bed:** Andrea Nepa
- **Star of the Week:** Darlene Friedman
- **Sweet Moon Baby:** Karen Henry Clark
- **The Mulberry Bird: A Story of Adoption:** Ann Braff Brodinsky
- **Three Names of Me:** Mary Cummings
- **W.I.S.E Up! Powerbook:** Marilyn S. Schoettle
- **We Are Family:** Sandra D. Lawrence
- **We Wanted You:** Liz Rosenberg
- **Zachary's New Home: A Story for Foster and Adopted Children:** Geraldine and Paul Blomquist

Adoption and Foster Care Related Books:

For Junior High Aged Children

Keep in mind the age category is a suggestion, and many books appropriate for junior high students could be beneficial to other children as well.

- **An-Ya and Her Diary:** Diane Rene Christian
- **At Home in This World:** Jean MacLeod
- **Baby:** Patricia MacLachlan
- **Be My Baby:** Gail Kinn
- **Chasing China:** Kay Bratt
- **Find a Stranger, Say Goodbye:** Lois Lowry
- **Grover G. Graham and Me:** Mary Quattlebaum
- **Growing Up Adopted:** Maxine B. Rosenberg
- **Heaven:** Angela Johnson
- **I See the Moon:** C.B. Christiansen
- **If It Hadn't Been for Yoon Jun:** Marie G. Lee
- **Molly By Any Other Name:** Jean Davies Okimoto
- **Most Wanted:** Jordon Cray
- **Parents Wanted:** George Harrar
- **Peace Locomotion:** Jacqueline Woodson
- **Pictures of Hollis Woods:** Patricia Reilly Giff
- **Saffy's Angel:** Hillary McKay
- **Slant:** Laura E Williams
- **The Great Gilly Hopkins:** Kathryn Patterson
- **The Long Journey Home:** Richard Delaney
- **The Rainbow People:** Laurence Yep
- **W.I.S.E Up! Powerbook:** Marilyn S. Schoettle
- **We Don't Look Like Our Parents:** Harriet Langsam Sobol
- **What My Sister Remembered:** Marilyn Sachs
- **Who Am I? And Other Questions of Adopted Kids:** Charles Giannetti
- **Who is David-A Story of an Adopted Adolescent and His Friends:** Evelyn Nerlove
- **Why Me?:** Deborah Kent

Adoption and Foster Care Related Books:

For High School Aged Children

Keep in mind the age category is a suggestion, and many books appropriate for high school children could be beneficial to other children as well.

- **A Brief Chapter in My Impossible Life:** Dana Reinhardt
- **Adopted Teens Only: A Survival Guide to Adolescence:** Dania Gorbett
- **Adoption: The Facts, Feelings and Issues of a Double Heritage:** Jeanne Duprau
- **American Born Chinese:** Gene Luen Yang
- **Be My Baby:** Gail Kinn
- **Coping with Being Adopted:** Shari Cohen
- **Filling in the Blanks: A Guided Look at Growing up Adopted:** Susan Bagel
- **Finding Miracles:** Julia Alvarez
- **How it Feels to be Adopted:** Jill Krementz
- **I Will Never Give Up:** Derek W. Clark
- **Perspectives on a Grafted Tree:** Thoughts for Those Touched by Adoption: Patricia Irwin Johnson
- **The Adoption Reader:** Susan Wadia-Ells, Ed.
- **The Secret of Me:** Meg Kearney
- **Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew:** Sherrie Eldridge
- **W.I.S.E Up! Powerbook:** Marilyn S. Schoettle
- **Whale Talk:** Chris Cutcher
- **Why She Didn't Keep Me? Answers to the Questions Every Adopted Child Asks:** Barbara Burlington-Brown
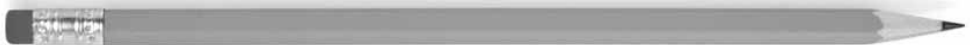
Adoption and Foster Care Related Books:

For Parents and Professionals

- **1-2-3 Magic: Effective Discipline for Children 2-12:** Thomas W Phelan Ph.D.
- **10 Steps to Successful International Adoption: A Guided Workbook for Prospective Parents:** B. Uekert
- **A Child's Journey Through Placement:** Vera I Fahlberg
- **Adopting and Advocating for the Special Needs Child: A Guide for Parents and Professionals:** L. Anne Babb and Rita Laws
- **Adopting in America:** Randall Hicks
- **Adopting On Your Own: The Complete Guide to Adoption for Single Parents:** Lee Varon
- **Adopting the Hurt Child: Hope for Families with Special Needs Kids:** G. Keck & R. Kupecky
- **Adopting the Older Child:** Claudia Jewett Jarret
- **Adoption by Lesbians and Gay Men: A New Dimension in Family Diversity:** David Brodzinsky
- **Adoption Is a Family Affair: What Relatives and Friends Must Know:** Patricia Irwin Johnston
- **Adoption Nation: How the Adoption Revolution is Transforming Our Families- and America:** Adam Perman
- **Becoming Attached:** Robert Karen
- **Being Adopted: The Lifelong Search for Self:** David Brodzinsky
- **Beneath the Mask: Understanding Adopted Teens:** Debbie Riley
- **Beyond Consequences, Logic, and Control: A Love-Based Approach to Helping Attachment-Challenged Children With Severe Behaviors:** Heather Forbes and Bryan Post
- **Beyond Good Intentions: A Mother Reflects On Raising Internationally Adopted Children:** C. Register
- **Born for Love: Why Empathy Is Essential--and Endangered:** Bruce D. Perry and Maia Szalavitz
- **Children on Consignment: A Handbook for Parenting Foster Children and Their Special Needs:** Philip Michael Stahl
- **Children in Danger: Coping with the Consequences of Community Violence:** James Garbarino, et al.
- **Creating Ceremonies: Innovative Ways to Meet Adoption Challenges:** C. Lieberman & R. Bufferd
- **From Fear to Love: Parenting Difficult Adopted Children:** Bryan Post
- **Help for the Hopeless Child: A Guide for Families:** Dr. Ronald S. Federici
- *Helping Children Cope with Separation and Loss:* Claudia Jewett Jarratt
- **High Risk: Children Without a Conscience:** Ken Magrid

Adoption and Foster Care Related Books

For Parents and Professionals

- **I Beat the Odds: From Homelessness, to the Blind Side, and Beyond:** Michael Oher
- **I Hate You—Don't Leave Me:** Jerold Kreisman and Hal Straus
- **I Will Never Give Up:** Derek W. Clark
- **Inside Interracial Adoption:** Gail Steinberg & Beth Hall
- **Kidstress: What It Is, How It Feels, How to Help:** Dr. Georgia Witkin
- **Lifebooks: Creating a Treasure for the Adopted Child:** Beth O'Malley
- **Making Room in Our Hearts: Keeping Family Ties through Open Adoption:** Micky Duxbury
- **Nurturing Adoptions: Creating Resilience After Neglect and Trauma:** Deborah D. Gray
- **Our Own: Adopting and Parenting and Older Child:** Trish Maskew
- **Parenting Someone Else's Child: The Foster Parents' How-To Manual:** Anne Stressman
- **Parenting the Hurt Child: Helping Adoptive Families Heal and Grow:** G. Keck and R. Kupecky
- **Parenting with Love and Logic:** Foster Cline and Jim Fay
- **Practical Tools for Foster Parents:** Lana Temple-Plotz and Michael Sterba
- **Raising Adopted Children: A Manual for Parents:** Lois Melina
- **Raising Cain: Caring for Troubled Youngsters/Repairing Our Troubled System:** Robert Delaney
- **Raising Children Who Refused to be Raised:** Dave Ziegler
- **Raising Your Spirited Child:** Mary Sheedy Kurcinka
- **Reaching Out: The Guide to Writing a Terrific Dear Birthmother Letter:** Nelson Handel
- **Real Parents, Real Children: Parenting an Adopted Child:** Holly van Gulden and Lisa Bartels-Rabb
- **Secret Thoughts of an Adoptive Mother:** Jana Wolff
- **Silent Embrace: Perspectives on Birth and Adoption:** Ann Angel & Amanda Angel
- **Talking with Young Children About Adoption:** Mary Watkins and Susan Fisher
- **Telling the Truth to Your Adopted or Foster Child: Making Sense of the Past:** B. Keefer & J. Schooler
- **The Adoption Life Cycle: The Children and Their Families Through The Years:** Elinor Rosenberg
- **The Adoption Resource Book:** Lois Gilman
- **The Complete Idiot's Guide to Adoption:** Christine Adamec

Adoption and Foster Care Related Books:

For Parents and Professionals

- **The Connected Child: Bring Hope and Healing to Your Adoptive Family:** Karyn Purvis, David Cross & Wendy Sunshine
- **The Difficult Child:** Stanley Turecki and Leslie Tonner
- **The Foster Parenting Toolbox:** Kim Phagan-Hansel
- **The Sexualized Child in Foster Care: A Guide for Foster Parents and Other Professionals:** Sally Hoyle
- **Transracial Adoption and Foster Care: Practice Issues for Professionals:** Joseph Crumbley
- **Thinking in Pictures and Other Reports from My Life with Autism:** Temple Grandin
- **Traumatic Experience and the Brain: Updated and Expanded 2nd Edition:** Dave Ziegler PH.D
- **Troubled Transplants: Unconventional Strategies for Helping Disturbed Foster and Adopted Children:** Robert Delaney and Frank Kunstal
- **Turning Stones: My Days and Nights with Children at Risk: A Caseworker's Story:** Marc Parent
- **Twenty Things Adopted Kids Wish Their Adoptive Parents Knew:** Sherrie Eldridge
- **Understanding Abusive Families: An Ecological Approach to Theory and Practice:** James Garbarino and John Eckenrode
- **What Parents Need to Know About Sibling Abuse: Breaking the Cycle of Violence:** Vernon Wiehe
- **What Works in Foster Care?:** Pecora, Kessler, Williams, Downs, English, White, O'Brien

Ages and Stages for Children

A Child's Understanding of Adoption

Ages 5 to 6			
Research Information	**Adoption Awareness**	**Transracial Awareness**	**Significantly Traumatized**
Children usually feel good about adoption but may have some confusion; most children don't know what adoption is May talk openly at school Comfortable with others knowing about adoption	Interested in birth story and adoption story Should know they are adopted and in general what this means; stay relaxed and factual Begin to know other children are not adopted	May have become conscious of racial difference as early as four May desire to be the same race as parents Can identify racial differences and respond to racial stereotypes	Regressive behavior common Trauma and loss combine into mixed feelings Detective work by parents often needed to understand and respond appropriately

Ages 7 to 11			
Research Information	**Adoption Awareness**	**Transracial Awareness**	**Significantly Traumatized**
Cognitive readiness for cultural, educational, and social school experience Stage set for recognition of loss, life circumstances More problems identified in this group of children	Recognizes the difference between adoptive and other families Wants to fit in with peers Begins to identify losses and to grieve Needs full birth story and information from parents; be honest and encouraging Help kids deflect intrusive questions	Wants to feel comfortable asking questions about race, ethnicity, and adoption Needs specific information about race, ethnicity, and culture Needs to know there are many kinds of families, including transracial and adoptive families	Subject to regression when traumas and losses are triggered Unresolved issues affect academic progress Developmental delays and organic learning issues manifest Without help, all losses compound Huge struggles to experience self as okay

Ages and Stages for Children

A Child's Understanding of Adoption

Ages 12 to 18 (outside intervention is often indicated when problems arise for this age group)			
Research Information	**Adoption Awareness**	**Transracial Awareness**	**Significantly Traumatized**
Teens who are adopted have few problems

Those with problems can be extreme and noticeable

Are more strongly affected by the facts of their adoption | Sorting out identity is complicated by adoption issues

May begin search process for birth family

Some teens may be exceptional in social awareness and balance | May challenge parents' racial identity

Consolidation of racial identity

Identity is often based on positive or negative cultural experiences | Extreme behaviors possible including substance abuse, victim/victimizer and promiscuity

Planning for adulthood may need to be based on current emotional and academic capabilities |

For additional information about foster care, adoption and kinship care, please visit the IFAPA website: www.ifapa.org.

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Published: February 2014

a resource for families

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