

How Family Support Connects to Child and Family Services Reviews Outcomes

Providing support services to foster, adoptive, and kinship families helps child welfare systems meet the needs of children who have experienced abuse, neglect, and trauma. These services can include enhanced caseworker support, training, respite care, mental health services, peer support, youth services, and more.* In addition to providing lifelong benefits to children and families (such as improving stability of an adoption or helping youth reduce the effects of trauma), effective family support can help drive improvements in child safety, permanency, and well-being and can enhance how states perform on multiple outcomes and items assessed as part of the federal Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs).

This brief provides information and examples about how support services relate to several items that are part of the third round of the CFSRs.

Note: This publication does not constitute guidance, and using the ideas and examples in this publication does not guarantee any specific determination in a state's CFSR.

Permanency outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

CFSR item	How family support can help
<p>Item 4: Is the child in foster care in a stable placement and were any changes in the child's placement in the best interests of the child and consistent with achieving the child's permanency goal(s)?</p>	<p>Support services can help foster parents and kinship caregivers be better equipped to meet children's emotional, behavioral, and medical needs, making it possible for children to remain in a placement where they are safe and get their needs met. Such services have also been shown to help retain foster families, preventing an unnecessary move for any children in their care.</p>

* See the AdoptUSKids publication [Support Matters: Lessons from the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families \(2 MB PDF\)](#) for detailed descriptions and program profiles of support services.

<p>Item 6: Did the agency make concerted efforts to achieve reunification, guardianship, adoption, or other planned permanent living arrangement for the child?</p>	<p>Working toward reunification or other permanency plans requires an informed and supported caregiver. By preparing and continuing to help foster parents and kinship caregivers understand their role in supporting a child’s permanency plan—including their role in reunification or transitioning the child to guardianship or adoption in their family or another—child welfare systems can help families fulfill their roles in the child’s case plan. Families may need specific help to process their feelings of grief and loss as they support a child’s transition. They need training on working with birth families and contributing to the parenting success of birth parents. A supported, successful foster family or relative caregiver may also be more likely to serve as a permanency resource for a child—a child whose needs they have been trained and supported to meet.</p>
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Permanency outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

CFSR item	How family support can help
<p>Item 7: Did the agency make concerted efforts to ensure that siblings in foster care are placed together unless separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the siblings?</p>	<p>Preparation and support to families—such as financial assistance to buy additional beds, respite care services, and training on sibling dynamics and parenting strategies—can help make it possible for families to have siblings placed together in their home. When families have access to the assistance they need, they may be more likely to welcome more than one child into the family.</p>

<p>Item 8: Did the agency make concerted efforts to ensure that visitation between a child in foster care and his or her mother, father, and siblings was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote continuity in the child’s relationships with these close family members?</p> <p>Item 11: Did the agency make concerted efforts to promote, support, and/or maintain positive relationships between the child in foster care and his or her mother and father or other primary caregivers from whom the child had been removed through activities other than just arranging for visitation?</p>	<p>Preparing and supporting foster families to work with children and their birth families helps the child welfare agency facilitate successful visitation and ongoing relationships. These efforts to help foster families with their role can also help the agency retain effective foster families, which means the agency will have a more stable and experienced pool of foster families who support ongoing visitation, birth family connections, and efforts toward reunification. If foster families are informed about and supported in their role with birth families, they are more likely to maintain connections after adoption.</p>
<p>Item 9: Did the agency make concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections to his or her neighborhood, community, faith, extended family, tribe, school, and friends?</p>	<p>As part of an overall approach to supporting a child and their foster, adoptive, or kinship family, a thorough child assessment will identify the child’s important relationships and connections to individuals and communities. Services that support families’ efforts to help the child maintain those connections include transportation assistance to enable the child to attend important events; community mentoring for youth; and parent groups and training for parents to help them understand both why and how to support keeping the child involved in their faith community, extended family, or other important groups.</p>

<p>Item 10: Did the agency make concerted efforts to place the child with relatives when appropriate?</p>	<p>Relatives may not have considered being a placement resource or a permanent caregiver until being approached by the child welfare system, so services may be particularly needed to help them be able—financially, emotionally, and logistically—to care for a child. They may need financial assistance to bring their home into compliance for licensing or homestudy requirements (fire extinguishers, beds for children, etc.) as well as training on effects of trauma and loss and information and guidance from peers and professionals on how to navigate the relationship dynamics involved in caring for a relative.</p>
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Well-being outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs.

CFSR item	How family support can help
<p>Item 12: Did the agency make concerted efforts to assess the needs of and provide services to children, parents, and foster parents to identify the services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address the issues relevant to the agency’s involvement with the family?</p>	<p>A fundamental part of effectively supporting families is assessing the child’s and family’s strengths and needs. With the results of such an assessment, services can be tailored to help foster parents meet a child’s specific needs. For example, if the assessment indicates that birth parents need to strengthen their skills in managing their child’s behavior, the child welfare system can support foster parents in being able to understand and manage the child’s behavior while in their home and partner with the birth parents on understanding and responding to the child’s behaviors and needs.</p>

Well-being outcome 3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

CFSR item	How family support can help
<p>Item 17: Did the agency address the physical health needs of children, including dental health needs?</p>	<p>Foster, adoptive, and kinship families may need information and training to understand children’s medical and dental needs as well as referral and navigation services to access appropriate, trauma-informed services. Family support services can help caregivers deepen their understanding of a child’s medical needs, ways to help the child develop skills and strategies to manage those needs, and ways to find doctors and dentists who understand trauma.</p>
<p>Item 18: Did the agency address the mental/behavioral health needs of children?</p>	<p>Conducting a thorough, trauma-informed child assessment is a key service that helps a child welfare system identify a child’s strengths and needs and necessary services to address their mental and behavioral health. A wide continuum of support services may be needed to help meet each child’s mental and behavioral health needs, including trauma-informed, permanency-competent clinical services for the child and family; information and referral to specific services and providers; training on effective parenting approaches for parenting children who have experienced trauma; and peer support to connect with other parents with similar experiences and children with similar needs.</p>

Systemic Factors

Staff and provider training

CFSR item	How family support can help
<p>Item 28: How well is the staff and provider training system functioning to ensure that training is occurring state-wide for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities (that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E) that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?</p>	<p>Having a strategic, thorough approach to providing training to prospective and current foster and adoptive parents helps meet these parents’ and their children’s needs, while also helping the child welfare system ensure that it is meeting its requirement to have a well-functioning training system. Providing other support to foster, adoptive, and kinship families—such as parent groups, mentors, respite care opportunities, and needs assessments—also gives the child welfare system a source of information to learn about what changes to its training system may be needed to equip parents to meet children’s needs. Through these other services, agency staff can gather information about the challenges parents are facing and learn more about the specific needs of children.</p>

Service array and resource development

CFSR item	How family support can help
<p>Item 30: How well is the service array and resource development system functioning statewide to ensure that the services in item 29 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency?</p>	<p>Services that are truly designed to meet the needs of children and families will have built-in capacity to be individualized and be flexible enough to provide appropriate support rather than only offering a one-size-fits-all set of services. Effective support services should also engage children and families in meaningful ways so they can provide feedback to help providers identify ways they can tailor their services to meet families’ needs.</p>

Agency responsiveness to the community

CFSR item	How family support can help
<p>Item 17: How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that, in implementing the provisions of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and developing related Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSRs), the state engages in ongoing consultation with tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals, objectives, and annual updates of the CFSP?</p>	<p>Support services can help deepen families’ understanding of the child welfare system, the available community resources and key gaps in those resources, and ways to be effective advocates for children. Building these skills in families—including foster families—helps equip families to be active participants in providing feedback to the child welfare system. By partnering with support programs, the agency can also get feedback from the families and young people it serves.</p>

<p>Item 32: How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that the state’s services under the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population?</p>	<p>Through information, referral, and navigation programs for adoptive, foster, and kinship families, support services can make connections to other federally assisted programs. This helps families meet the needs of children they are parenting, while also helping the child welfare agency be aware of other programs serving the same population and where there are gaps in services the agency should address.</p>
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Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention

CFSR item	How family support can help
<p>Item 35: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed is occurring statewide?</p>	<p>Support for prospective foster, adoptive, and kinship families—including support from other parents going through the process and experienced parents—from first inquiry through the licensing process helps ensure that families are equipped to assess their own ability to meet children’s needs and, as appropriate, to make it through to licensure or approval. Having multiple types of services and the ability to support prospective parents with diverse needs and from diverse racial, ethnic, geographic, and faith communities can help the child welfare system recruit and retain a diverse pool of families. In addition, well-supported families are an excellent source to recruit and encourage other prospective resource families.</p>

<p>Item 36: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children is occurring statewide?</p>	<p>Providing reliable support services to families across the entire state helps ensure that foster and adoptive parents will be confident that they will be able to access services they—or a child placed with them—will need even if the child is placed across county or region lines. In addition, having services available statewide will help facilitate the placement of children from other states with families in the state, reassuring workers in the sending state that the child’s needs will be met even in another state.</p>
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Conclusion

In addition to the items mentioned above, CFSRs specifically assess child welfare systems on how well their overall service array and resource development system ensure services are accessible throughout the jurisdiction (item 29).^{*} Having a comprehensive approach to providing support services—including conducting needs assessments; providing services for both children and families; and having services for foster, adoptive, and kinship families—provides important benefits to individual children and families. It also helps the child welfare system meet multiple requirements, as described above, and ensure a service array that helps promote and support placement stability and permanency.

^{*} **Item 29:** How well is the service array and resource development system functioning to ensure that the following array of services is accessible in all political jurisdictions covered by the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)?

1. Services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs
2. Services that address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment
3. Services that enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable
4. Services that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency

If you want help developing your support services for adoptive, foster, and kinship families, we can help. Contact us at consultation@adoptuskids.org.



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