

Checklist for Reviewing Children’s Narratives

As a peer reviewer, your role is to help ensure the narratives encourage prospective foster and adoptive parents and protect the child’s safety, privacy, and dignity.

As you read a child’s narrative, consider whether this is a public narrative (e.g., for a recruitment flyer, Heart Gallery, or photolisting) or a private narrative (e.g., one intended for licensed/home studied parents or workers). Both types should be respectful and strengths-based, but you can include more information, such as challenges or diagnoses, in private narratives.

As you review narratives—whether public or private—your ultimate goal is to consider if the description is doing all that it can to help ensure this child has a family. Is the narrative helping prospective parents make a connection with the child? Will it encourage them to take the next step to learn more and decide if they can meet the child’s unique needs? If it’s a private narrative, where you can share more about challenges, does it still emphasize the positive and talk about supports or services that may be helping address difficulties?

Bottom line, consider this: Is this narrative one you would be happy to share if it was written about a child you love?

Be sure the public narrative does include this information

- Preferred first name
- Positive personality traits
- Strengths
- Hobbies, interests, and favorite pastimes
- What they like about school and school successes
- Things that are important to them
- Answers to questions such as: What makes them laugh? What is their dream day like?
- What makes them proud?
- Ways they are connected to the community
- Information about cultural connections or languages they speak or use
- Dreams for the future
- Quotes from the child

- Positive quotes or input from others in their life
- Interesting photos or videos
- Important family connections
- In profiles of siblings, how they relate to one another
- Birth year
- How a family might be a part of their life
- Appeals to families

Read more about what to include—and why—in the article, “[Information to include when writing children’s narratives](#),” on professionals.adoptuskids.org.

Be sure that a public narrative does not include any of the following information

Some (but not all) of these items may be OK to include in a private narrative. We’ve described those in the next section.

Identifying information

- Last name
- Date of birth
- Name of school, school district, neighborhood, or local geographic markers

Abuse, neglect, maltreatment

- Information related to sexual abuse or sexual acting out, or references to the child or youth as a potential perpetrator or victim, including code talk that might relate to sexual abuse (such as describing the child as overly affectionate with males, talking about the need to teach safe touch, or noting that the child should be the youngest in the family)
- Information that suggests the possibility of child as victim, such as stating that they have no boundaries or have no sense of danger
- Birth family history of abuse, neglect, physical or mental illness, domestic violence, criminal history, immigrations status, or substance abuse, including even brief references or allusions to a parent’s drug use or the child’s exposure to drugs or alcohol in utero
- Reasons for the child’s entry into care
- The child’s trauma history

Placement information

- Current placement type (such as residential treatment, group home, or juvenile justice setting)
- Placement history, including number of placements in foster care or re-entry into care or other information taken directly from the case file regarding their placement history
- How long they have been in foster care or how long they have been waiting for an adoptive family
- Information about why a foster family or relative is not interested in or able to be the permanent placement
- References to adoption interruption, disruption, or dissolution

Medical information

- Medical or mental health diagnoses, medication, and treatment, including whether the child has or is attending therapy or counseling
- Statements that a youth is pregnant or has recently given birth
- Levels of, or statements about, physical impairments
- Reports or statements from doctors, mental health providers, other health care professionals, or caregivers about medical information
- Clinical information from their case file

Behavioral challenges

- Aggressive behaviors, including anger, fighting, or oppositional acting out
- Sexual behaviors, including current, past, or potential victim or perpetrator role
- Information about delinquency or juvenile justice involvement
- Negative behaviors, such as lying, running away, or stealing
- References to a child acting younger than or being more mature than their same-age peers
- Impairment levels related to their behaviors
- Potentially painful or embarrassing information
- Mention of bodily functions (including incontinence and bedwetting) or hygiene challenges
- Any descriptions of body type, including short, heavy, stocky, slender, or skinny
- The child's height or weight
- Negative descriptions of the youth's appearance
- References to fears or sources of anxiety

- Anything else they could be embarrassed by if their peers saw it, such as if the child has been bullied, has trouble making friends, is clumsy or awkward, is messy or sloppy, cries easily or often, or doesn't do well at sports or in school

Things that limit potential families

- Discussion about their reluctance about adoption or emphasis on a unique need for preparation for adoption
- Statements that suggest the writer may not believe adoption is an option for the child
- Limits on the type of family who will be considered, including marital status, race or ethnic background, number or age of other children in the family, religion, or other fixed characteristics

Intellectual ability or education challenges

- Intellectual or educational challenges, including allusions to challenges and being nonverbal
- References to special education status or an individualized education or Section 504 plan
- Specific IQ score or range
- References to specific disabilities that relate to school, education, or intellectual ability
- Statements about educational impairment level
- References about learning more slowly than or performing at a different grade level than their same-age peers
- References to actual grades or scores on assessments

Sexual orientation or gender identity

- Anything that would convey they are transgender, including mixing pronouns, a name and gender identity that don't match, or switching names
- A statement about or allusions to the fact that they are LGBTQ unless it is for an older youth who wants the listing to include their sexual orientation, and they have had thoughtful conversations with caring adults about the potential positive and negative consequences, and the youth has been involved in crafting and approving the narrative

Other

- Anything negative
- Information about the young person's being a parent unless the young person wants the information in the narrative, has discussed the pros and cons, and has approved the description

- Specific information or details the child asked to have excluded from the narrative
- Language that promotes stereotypes based on gender, race, ethnicity, or other characteristics
Things the child isn't, doesn't do, or doesn't like
- Adoption assistance eligibility

Status as legally free or not legally free

- Disclosure of sensitive or potentially identifying information about any birth family members or siblings not in foster care, including criminal history, mental health or medical details, geographic locations, immigration status, etc.
- Links or references to a young person's personal YouTube channel, web pages, or social media pages
- Outdated information
- Spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors and poorly composed writing

Read more about what not to include—and why—in the article, “[Information NOT to include when writing children's narratives](#),” on professionals.adoptuskids.org.

Consider including this information in a private narrative

Some—but not all—information that you would not include in a public narrative may be appropriate to include in a private narrative. The most serious and challenging details about a child should only be shared in a confidential narrative or a conversation with the family or family's worker once the family is seriously considering placement. For example, you should still not include identifying information, negative information or statements about the child, or details about abuse history or birth family history.

If the following information is included in a private narrative, be sure that it is presented in a way that emphasizes how behaviors may be the result of trauma and loss the child has experienced, talks about progress the child has made, and describes supports available to help the child and family thrive. Your goal is to ensure information is presented in a strengths-based way.

- Medical information. Include general information about confirmed diagnosis by medical professionals and treatment and general descriptions of physical impairment, but save details for later in the placement process.
- Behavioral challenges. Be sure to present the information factually and without judgement. Emphasize progress and supports or strategies that help.

- Other difficulties. Can include factual statements about issues related to bodily functions, hygiene challenges, fears, and anxieties.
- Abuse, neglect, maltreatment information if it relates to safety considerations.
- Placement information if it will help the parent understand the child’s needs.
- Things that limit potential families. Only include if these are real considerations that ensure the protection of the child or other children in the home. Be factual, and do not go into a lot of detail.
- Intellectual ability or educational challenges. Can include, but do not provide details such as IQ scores or assessment scores at this stage. Include supports that are helping and progress made.
- Sexual orientation or gender identity. For LGBTQ children and youth, be sure you are only sharing private narratives with families who are welcoming to LGBTQ youth.
- Pregnancy. Include if the youth has recently given birth and whether the baby will be placed with the youth.
- Adoption eligibility. Include information about adoption assistance eligibility and status as legally free or not legally free.
- Dislikes. Include information about things the child isn’t, doesn’t do, or doesn’t like only if it is important to protect the child.

Read more about what to include—and why—in the article, “[What to include in a private narrative](#),” on professionals.adoptuskids.org.



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