

Engaging Children and Caregivers in Developing Strengths-Based Profiles

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Angie Williams

Program Manager, AdoptUSKids Capacity-Building and Engagement Team



About AdoptUSKids

Our mission:

- Raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system
- Assist states, territories, and tribes to recruit, engage, develop, and support foster and adoptive families

Agenda

- Engaging children, youth, and caregivers to support strengths-based photolisting and recruitment
- Information needed to develop narratives that emphasize the child's personality and positive traits
- Responsibilities around information sharing

Youth engagement

“ . . . encouraging young people to be active participants in planning their own lives supports development of leadership skills, improves self-esteem, and helps form critical social connections.”

ACYF-CB-IM-19-03

2019-Aug-1

Youth engagement

“ . . . meaningful involvement and engagement should be ongoing and embedded in all aspects of our work ”

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Panel introductions

Beth Capron, Manager, Adoption and Permanency Services, Adoption Rhode Island

Shannon Doherty, Coordinator, Adoption and Permanency Services, Adoption Rhode Island

Heather Simmons, Associate Director of Adoption, Project Family at Lund, Vermont

The philosophy

- Strengths-based, positive, and descriptive approach
- Highest priority is safety, privacy, and dignity; next is to encourage prospective parents
- Goal is to share information at different stages in the process

Walk in youth's shoes

- Public narratives are easily accessible to the youth, their peers, birth family members, predators—to anyone.
- What do we want shared publicly about ourselves?
- How do we control what's public and what's shared with a smaller network?
- Shouldn't we do the same for children in care?

Continuum of disclosure

PEOPLE GENERALLY INTERESTED IN ADOPTION (THE PUBLIC)

What's shared: Positive, strengths-based information such as children's talents, dreams, hobbies, and interests

What's NOT shared: Challenges or disabilities; private or personal information

How: Photolisting websites, Heart Galleries, flyers, TV/radio, newspapers, social media

Goal: Interest families and help them feel a connection to the child, so they move forward in learning more about adoption

PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS WHO HAVE AN APPROVED HOME STUDY AND HAVE BEEN THROUGH TRAINING

What's shared: A child's level of functioning in various areas (physical, cognitive, emotional, etc.), general and factual information about disabilities, behaviors, educational and intellectual functioning

What's NOT shared: Details on disabilities or challenges; placement or abuse history; birth family information

How: Private profiles on photolisting websites, email or printed documents available only to trained/home-studied families who have signed confidentiality agreements

Goal: Allow families to begin to consider if their family might be a good fit for this child, so they submit a home study

PROSPECTIVE ADOPTERS WHO ARE MOVING TOWARD PLACEMENT OF A CHILD AND WHOM WORKERS THINK ARE A GOOD MATCH FOR A CHILD

What's shared: All diagnosis and treatment information, details about ongoing care needs; birth family, placement, and abuse history

How: Conversations between child's worker and family's worker, then conversations between the professionals and the prospective adopters

Goal: Enable prospective adopters and professionals to determine if the family is able to meet the child's needs and can move forward with adoption

What is included in a public profile

- Preferred first name
- Positive personality traits
- Strengths
- Hobbies, interests, and pastimes
- What they like about school
- What makes them laugh
- Things that are important to them

What not to include

- Identifying information
- Information about abuse, neglect, maltreatment
- Placement information
- Medical information
- Behavioral challenges
- Potentially painful or embarrassing information
- Fears or anxieties
- Things that limit potential families
- Intellectual ability or education challenges
- Sexual orientation or gender identity
- Status as legally free (or not legally free)

Compelling narratives

- Include details, quotes, and stories
- Use positive adjectives
- Vary templates and sentence structure

Project Family at Lund, Vermont

Heather Simmons, Associate Director of
Adoption, Project Family at Lund, Vermont

Adoption Rhode Island

Beth Capron, Manager, Adoption and Permanency Services, Adoption Rhode Island

Shannon Doherty, Coordinator, Adoption and Permanency Services, Adoption Rhode Island

Questions to ask a child or teen

- What's your favorite thing to do outdoors?
- What do you like to do in your free time?
- What activities do you participate in (choirs, plays, clubs)?
What activities would you like to try in the future?
- Do you have a favorite author or book? What types of books do you like best?
- What type of movies do you like? Is there a TV show you watch regularly?
- What games (board, card, video, etc.) do you like to play?

Questions to ask a child or teen

- What are you really good at? What would you like to become really good at?
- What are you most proud of? What is one thing you work very hard to do?
- What do you like learning about (in school or out of school)?
- What would you like to do or be when you grow up? Do you know anyone who has this job already?
- What are some things you think you might to do with an adoptive family?
- What is your dream day like?

Ways to engage children and teens

- Be clear that it is a choice. Children and youth should be given the opportunity to help develop their profile but never forced to do so.
- Transparency is critical. Be very clear about how and where the materials will be used.
- Compelling profiles use video and audio files in addition to photos and narratives.

Ways to engage children and teens

- Include the child or teen's art, writing, or photography.
- Engage in conversation while doing a fun activity of the child's choosing to help conversation flow more easily and naturally.
- Have them review their narrative and give feedback.

Ways to engage children and teens

- Include quotes from the child or teen.
- Let them know that their profile can be updated when they have new information they want to include.

Additional ways to gather information

- Engage caregivers or former foster parents.
- Observe the child to learn about what they enjoy and what matters to them.

Photos

Photos should:

- Be positive and of good quality
- Be updated regularly
- Not feature weapons, revealing clothing, etc.

Photo and video safety

- Make sure there are no hints to location (school clothing, street signs, landmarks).
- Be cautious about clothing and actions that could be suggestive.
- Consider tracking if the photo is used elsewhere.
- Remove photos and videos when they are no longer needed.

Questions and discussion

Resources

- *Creating Effective Narratives for Children Waiting to Be Adopted*
https://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/Publications/AUSK_CreatingEffectiveNarratives_Booklet_final-web-508.pdf
- Sample interview questions
<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/narrative-writing-tips-and-sample-questions/>
- AdoptUSKids hub for professionals
<https://professionals.adoptuskids.org/>

Resources

- *Talking with Older Youth About Adoption*
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/talking.pdf>
- *Belonging Matters – Helping Youth Explore Permanency*
<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/bulletins-belongingmatters/>
- Administration for Children and Families, Information Memorandum (ACYF-CB-IM-19-03), August 1, 2019
<https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/im1903>

Contact information

Angie Williams

AdoptUSKids, Program Manager, Capacity
Building and Engagement

awilliams@adoptex.org

consultation@adoptuskids.org



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