

# ENGAGING, DEVELOPING, AND SUPPORTING PROSPECTIVE FAMILIES

## *for Siblings Groups*

As your child welfare system recruits families to adopt sibling groups, you will likely consider the starting point in the process to be when the family first contacts you. From the family's perspective, however, they have almost certainly been thinking about building their family through adoption for a long time before they make their initial inquiry. As your system responds to families inquiring about adopting sibling groups, it is crucial that you provide a welcoming, engaging approach to helping the family explore the possibility of adopting. Your system's response to prospective families sets the tone for how engaged and supported families feel as they work with you. The information you share with families from the beginning can help them in developing their understanding of the needs of children and youth who are waiting to be adopted, assessing their capacity as a family, and identifying what skills they will need to develop in order to meet those needs.

When prospective families begin orientation and training, your agency can support families who are interested in adopting siblings by helping them develop their understanding of the importance of sibling relationships and the effects that trauma and separation resulting from abuse and neglect can have on the relationships and behavior of children adopted from the foster care system.

By partnering with prospective families to help them assess their ability to parent sibling groups and helping them develop skills, strategies, and support systems for parenting sibling groups, you can build a pool of families who will be able to meet the unique needs of sibling groups waiting to be adopted. In the process, you will build a relationship with the families, demonstrating to them that your agency will be an active partner with them to help them continue to develop and strengthen their ability to meet the needs of children.

## Tips for Engaging and Developing Prospective Families for Sibling Groups Beginning at Their First Inquiry

- Make families' interaction with your agency supportive and engaging starting at their first point of contact by implementing an agency-wide customer service approach. Demonstrate that families are a valuable partner with the agency in meeting the needs of children and youth who are waiting to be adopted. See our resources and publications on how to improve family development and support through customer service.
- Ensure that staff who are responding to inquiries from prospective parents are skilled and knowledgeable about the needs of children and youth in sibling groups who are waiting to be adopted. Provide these staff with clear information, talking points, and answers to common questions from prospective parents. This information should cover the effects of trauma on children in foster care; the skills and qualities that families find most helpful in parenting sibling groups adopted from foster care; and the support structures and services available to families who adopt sibling groups.
- Share information about the number and characteristics (e.g., sizes of sibling groups, age ranges of children in sibling groups, etc.) of sibling groups waiting to be adopted in your area to help prospective families become more familiar with the sibling groups who are waiting to be adopted.

- Build in approaches in your early contact with prospective families to help families self-assess their own capacity to parent a sibling group so that they can make an informed decision about whether to move forward in the licensing or approval process.
- Tell families about resources where they can learn more about specific sibling groups available for adoption both locally and nationally, such as state and regional adoption exchanges and the AdoptUSKids national photolisting.
- Connect prospective families with a parent liaison or mentor who can help them navigate the process of becoming a foster or adoptive parent, including both completing the procedural steps and addressing their concerns and questions.
- Provide pre-service training that contains specific information on the importance of sibling relationships and the impact of sibling separation. Help families explore special considerations involved in adopting sibling groups, including: the likelihood of siblings having been separated in foster care; the possibility of older siblings having taken on parental roles with their younger siblings; the effects of siblings living apart and potential challenges as they learn to live together again; and the possibility of children having a sibling connection with children who may not fall under the child welfare system's definition of "sibling."
- Connect families with educational resources providing information about important topics such as: trauma, grief and loss; attachment issues; and older siblings taking on parental roles with younger siblings. Understanding these issues will enable prospective parents to assess their skills and capacity to parent sibling groups.
- Help families assess their own individual and family strengths and concerns and how those strengths and concerns will affect their ability to meet the needs of a sibling group. This will help them to be better prepared, have realistic expectations, and know when and how to seek assistance with parenting siblings placed in their home. Work with families to identify specific strategies for developing their strengths and skills based on each family's self-assessment.
- Develop a pool of spokesfamilies from approved foster or adoptive families who have parented siblings from the foster care system and can share their real life experiences with prospective families to help to them understand what might be experienced by newly adopting families.
- Help families explore their network of social support that they can turn to for recreation, guidance, emotional support, or other assistance as they prepare to adopt a sibling group.
- Connect families to opportunities to become involved with or to support siblings waiting to be adopted while they wait to be matched with a sibling group. These opportunities can help families deepen their understanding of the importance of keeping siblings connected and identify skills they have or need to strengthen in order to meet the needs of sibling groups.
- Give families a list of community resources that can provide helpful support (e.g., camps, family support groups, resources for getting larger vehicles, etc.). Families who have adopted sibling groups can be a valuable source of suggestions for this resource list, based on their own experience identifying their needs and accessing support.
- Create a "buddy" network for the family made up of foster and adoptive parents who have or are currently parenting sibling groups as a means of support and ongoing learning and development and who may be able to provide respite care.
- Provide ongoing training and learning opportunities to families on helpful topics identified by other families who have parented sibling groups.



*More free resources at:*

[www.nrcdr.org](http://www.nrcdr.org)

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