

### MOVING FROM FOSTER CARE TO AN ADOPTIVE HOME

#### **The 3–5–7 Model: Preparing Children for Permanency**

“[The 3-5-7 Model for the preparation of children for permanency] is based on three components: (1) the completion of three tasks—clarification of life events, integration of all family memberships, and actualization in belonging to a new family; (2) the answering of five conceptual questions relevant to each child living in placement, Who am I? What happened to me? Where am I going? How will I get there?, and When will I know I belong?; and (3) the use of critical skill elements in the preparation work: engaging the child, listening to the child’s words, speaking the truth, validating the child’s life story, creating a safe space, going back in time, and recognizing pain as part of the process. By incorporating this model, workers and families conducting the preparation work, assist the child in grieving losses, formulating self-identity, establishing trust and security through attachments, and building relationships and openness to join families on a permanent basis.”

Henry, (2005) 27 Children and Youth Services Review, 197,  
<<http://humanservices.ucdavis.edu/academy/pdf/The357model.pdf>> [as of December 28, 2011].

#### **Transition Guidelines: Foster Home to Adoptive Home**

“With a feeling of closure done in a proper transition, the child will feel secure in his or her new surroundings which will give him the ability to make decisions and operate freely and with confidence; unlike the uncertainty of a quick unregulated move that turns his visible world upside down or in most foster children’s cases, invisible...”

##### **STEP ONE: PREPARATION – Start on notification of an impending move**

“When preparing a child for a new placement or home, it is good to start weeks before the move. Infants two to 6 or 8 months old should sufficiently establish a comfort zone with touch, smell and sight with 4 to 6 visits of 1 to 2 hours each. 8 months to 15 months should have twice that many visits to get to know their new caretakers and not get the stranger anxiety from a move to someone they do not know. They should be held no more than one to two days apart. However, nearing 2 years and older, children can usually grasp that a change is about to occur. Explaining to the child that he is about to have a new home is important in preparing to accept that a move is about to occur...Attachments form at a young age. One to five year olds should take approximately 3 to 6 weeks. The idea is for the child to avoid attachment disorders due to feelings of abandonment and rejection or fear of such...Forcing a quick move will not force the child into bonding with you, but could cause him/her not to bond at all.”

##### **STEP TWO: FIRST MEETING, 2 to 3 hours with the foster parent, adoptive family and child/children preferably in the foster home**

“The adoptive couple is to meet at a familiar place of the child’s (the foster home is usually the best place to start.) The child will be comfortable if he knows that it is ok to have this stranger in his own territory. The foster and adoptive parents should interact together with the child to make him comfortable. The foster parents should allow the adoptive parents’ time to speak and interact with the child. (See his bedroom; ask about his favorite toys or games. Talk about what he or she likes to eat and play with.) If more visits at the foster parent’s home are available, it is in the best interest to have at least 2 more.”

**STEP THREE: 2 or 3 three to four hour visits outside the foster home within 1 to 3 days of each other**

“Plan a meeting at a fast food restaurant or park to meet the child and spend time with him/her. 2 to 3 hours will be sufficient to introduce the adoptive parent in another setting.”

**STEP FOUR: Visiting the new home: A minimum of three day visits at the new home for a period of 4 to 6 hours each within a one week period with the first of these introduced by the foster parent**

“The foster parent should bring the child to their new home for them to stay from 4 to 6 hours. The foster parent should stay no more than 15 minutes unless the child is in distress. Make sure that you discuss with the foster child that the home he is about to visit will eventually become his new home. This allows the child to feel that he/she has permission from their foster parents to be comfortable in someone else’s home...Remember that the child doesn’t really know the concept of ‘foster parent’ or ‘temporary parent’ until much older as in 5 or 6 yrs. Repeat the day visits at least twice more but let the adoptive couple pick the child up from the foster home after the first visit at the new home. This will get the child used to going with the new parents and still be assured that he will be back home and with whom he has been for so long. It will relieve tension about the uncertainty of leaving foster mom and foster dad if he/she has lived there for a time...If the new family only sees the child once or twice per week, it will take him/her longer to get to know you. Multiple visits in a shorter time is better than the same number of visits spread over a longer period; for example, 4 visits each week for two weeks is better than 4 visits over a four week period.”

**STEP FIVE: 4 to 6 overnights in a period of two weeks**

“After the child has had at least 2 to 3 day visits with the new family, plan an overnight on a day when the adoptive parents will be home the next day to spend time with the child. Continue overnight visits until there have been at least 4 to 6 overnights in the new home alternating with overnights at the foster home. Eventually, the child will spend all of the nights at the new home and only days at the old home. The amount of time will depend on the comfort of the child. At this time, depending on the child's comfort, a three to four day stay is recommended...As the visits progress, the time spent at the foster home will decrease until the child is more at the new home than the old. There may be a time when the child will probably not want to go with the new parents and want to stay at the foster home. This is normal; because the child has an attachment to the foster home and senses some loss and is not yet as comfortable in his new setting.”

Ewald, *Healthy Children: Healthy Adults Transition Guidelines*, (2004) *Fostering Families Today Magazine*, 1-3, Foster Care Support Foundation, Inc. <<http://www.fostercare.org/Default.aspx?tabid=83>> [as of December 28, 2011].

## **FROM FOSTER CHILD TO ADOPTED CHILD**

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### **Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child**

For foster families who choose to adopt the child or children in their care, there are a number of ways to help these children make the emotional transition for being “a ward of the State or the Court” to being “a son or daughter” of specific parents. While parents may appreciate the difference in the child’s role within their family, children may not clearly comprehend the difference between being a foster child versus being an adopted child when they continue to live in the same family. There are specific things families can say and do to help children understand these differences. This factsheet, available from the United States Department of Health and Human Services, describes:

- Talking with children about the changes
- Activities to help children understand their own history and background
- Helping children adjust to losses
- Helping children transfer attachments

US Dept H & HS Child Welfare Information Gateway, [Helping Your Foster Child Transition to Your Adopted Child](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_transition.cfm) (2005). <[www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f\\_transition.cfm](http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_transition.cfm)> [as of 12/28/2011].