

Lasting Impressions

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A GUIDE FOR PHOTOLISTING CHILDREN



Adopt US Kids

Together we hold their future





Together we hold their future

Lasting Impressions:

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**A GUIDE FOR PHOTOLISTING
CHILDREN**

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Other *AdoptUSKids* publications:

- **Recruitment Work Plan Guide for Adoption and Foster Care Managers**
- **Practitioners' Guide: Getting More Parents for Children From Your Recruitment Efforts**
- **Family Pocket Guide** (for families entering the adoption process)

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Dear Colleagues:

AdoptUSKids is pleased to provide you with this updated edition of *Lasting Impressions*. As are all of our publications, *Lasting Impressions* is designed to help adoption and foster care professionals such as yourself in the important work you do to assure the safety, permanency, and well-being each day for the children you serve.



Since its original publication in 2006 as the fourth book of what was known as our *Answering the Call* series, *Lasting Impressions* has literally helped thousands of professionals develop and use the child-centered practice of preparing photos and narratives about children in the U.S. foster care system who are waiting to be adopted, and then posting them on state, regional, and national photolisting websites, including *AdoptUSKids*. More than 30,000 children have been photolisted on *AdoptUSKids* since 2002. That fact that more than half of these children have been adopted attests to the high quality of work to which *Lasting Impressions* has contributed.

As the public, including prospective foster and adoptive families, has moved increasingly toward reliance on electronic means of getting information, the quality of child narratives, photos, and videos is even more important today than it was a few years ago. This makes the updating and continued dissemination of *Lasting Impressions* especially important. In addition, with the debut of a totally redesigned, more user-friendly *AdoptUSKids* website this fall, assuring the continued high quality of child-specific information and images, the reissuing of *Lasting Impressions* is especially timely.

As a service of the U.S. Children's Bureau, *AdoptUSKids* works to raise awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the U.S. foster care system and to support the States, Territories, Tribes, and Courts to make comprehensive systemic changes in the areas of recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive families. *Lasting Impressions* is one of many tools that support these efforts and underscore *AdoptUSKids*' tagline that encompasses all of the work that we partner with you to accomplish: **"Together we hold their future."**

In addition to tools such as *Lasting Impressions*, *AdoptUSKids* provides capacity-building technical assistance that includes how to get the most out of these tools. Contact us at info@adoptuskids.org to find out more about free technical assistance specifically about photolisting. Get more information on all of the technical assistance offered by the National Resource Center for Recruitment and Retention of Foster and Adoptive Families at *AdoptUSKids* (NRCRRFAP) at adoptuskids.org/nrc-recruitment.

AdoptUSKids is proud of the work that you do to improve outcomes for children and families and to support and partner with you in the important work to recruit and retain families and to connect them with children.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kathleen J. Jalesma". The signature is fluid and cursive.

National Project Director
AdoptUSKids

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Lasting Impressions:

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Introduction

Consider the following comment from a prospective adoptive parent:

“We never considered the private (adoption) thing because we wanted a child who needed help as opposed to just buying a baby. Our first image of what we would do is go help some poor baby in China because we heard all of the stories about daughters being abandoned, but once we got serious about it, we realized there were plenty of kids right here in our own backyard.”



Many thousands of children in the United States in foster care need adoptive families—children who cannot return safely to their birth parents, who do not have extended family members who can care for them, whose foster parents are unable to adopt them, or who live in group and residential care settings. Finding families for so many children can seem overwhelming. We know, however, that there are families for these children. The question is: how do we find them? This guide focuses on one very effective way to recruit families—using books, newspapers, magazines, newsletters, and the Internet to photolist children in foster care who are waiting for adoptive families.

Photolisting is an important type of “child-specific recruitment”—that is, recruitment that focuses on finding an adoptive family for a particular child. For almost 50 years, child-specific recruitment has been used in the United States to find adoptive families for waiting children in foster care. The children served through child-specific recruitment often have been older children, children of color, children with physical or emotional disabilities, and children whose brothers and sisters should be adopted with them.

Child-specific recruitment has changed over time. Although it began with books that featured photographs and descriptions of children, child-specific recruitment now may involve newspapers, magazines, and newsletters that feature waiting children; videotapes of children; and television and radio programs that introduce waiting children to the general public. Most recently, computer bulletin boards, databases, on-line services, and the Internet have been used to alert prospective adoptive families to waiting children.



This guide focuses on photolistings of children to be used in print—whether in a book, newspaper, magazine, or newsletter—or on the Internet. It is designed to provide you with everything you need to know to prepare children for the photolisting experience and to prepare others who are important in children’s lives for this exciting but potentially stressful opportunity. It will help you develop your skills in writing descriptions of children and taking photographs or

arranging for children’s photographs to be taken—descriptions and photographs that will be seen by the general public. Its focus is on “best practices” as we think about sharing information about children that will be viewed through channels that virtually anyone can access.



This guide does not describe “best practices” for photolistings used only by agencies and by prospective adoptive families who already have been approved to adopt. More in-depth information regarding a child typically is posted in photolistings that limit who may access the information, and practice, as a result, is significantly different than what is described in this guide.

A Short History of Photolistings

It is helpful to look at how photolistings have evolved over time. Photolistings first appeared in 1957 when the Massachusetts Adoption Resources Exchange (MARE) was created as a collaborative, voluntary pilot project of public and private agencies to find families for children considered “hard to place” for adoption (today these children most often are referred to as “waiting” children). Among MARE’s many innovations was the first photolisting book, featuring a photograph and description of each child.

The photolisting book was truly revolutionary as for the first time, prospective adoptive families were involved in selecting the children whom they hoped to adopt. Previously, social workers controlled the match of child to family—either determining the characteristics of the ideal adoptive couple for a particular child and restricting the search to such a couple or selecting the “right” children for prospective adoptive families. The photolisting books changed this practice by providing families with information on children and giving them the opportunity to express interest in and pursue the chance to adopt specific children. The photolisting book also expanded the perception of which children were “adoptable” because it engaged families at the beginning rather than at the end of the matching process and exposed families to children whom they otherwise may not have considered adopting.

The MARE model quickly caught on, and collaborating groups across the country implemented adoption exchanges—information and referral services for prospective adoptive parents interested in adopting waiting children and for adoption caseworkers seeking families for these children. By 1961, adoption exchanges were operating in 22 states. In 1967, photolistings went nationwide when the Child Welfare League of America expanded its existing exchange services into a program featuring waiting children from across the U.S. and Canada. In 1971, the Adoption Listing Service in Illinois was established as the first photolisting service to inform agencies about the children waiting for adoption, and the families approved for the adoption of children with special needs. It was established in conjunction with the Adoption Coordination Project, to coordinate the work of public and private adoption agencies in Illinois, and

in so doing, increase the number and quality of placements of waiting children. Children Awaiting Parents enhanced photolistings in 1972 by providing prospective adoptive parents with the name of each child's adoption caseworker, making it possible for prospective adoptive parents to contact a child's caseworker directly. Since the 1970's, both photolisting services and adoption exchanges have continued to grow and evolve.

On October 7, 1981, child specific recruitment expanded yet again with the airing of the first "Wednesday's Child," a television program in which waiting children were featured (with a sibling group when appropriate). Since 1981, a number of local television programs have developed programs that feature children and provide viewers with information about pursuing adoption of the featured child or other waiting children in foster care.

By 1994, photolistings had come to the Internet. That year, the National Adoption Center and Children Awaiting Parents received a federal grant to develop "Faces of Adoption," an Internet-based photolisting of waiting children from across the United States. The program further expanded in October 2002 when the Adoption Exchange Association entered into a cooperative agreement with the Children's Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services to implement a major federal initiative, *AdoptUSKids*. A key component of that initiative is a national web site (www.AdoptUSKids.org) featuring photographs and descriptions of waiting children.

Photolisting practice continues to evolve. At the cutting edge of child-specific recruitment in the early 2000s is video streaming, a technology that presents a child on a video that plays for a few minutes. This new practice is in its very early stages, and best practice has not as yet been clearly defined.

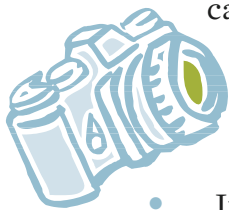
Why Adoption is So Essential for Many Children in Foster Care

As we know from both statistics and our own professional experiences, many children in foster care will not be reunited with their birth families. We also know from the research that children are poorly served by long-term foster care—a recognition that led Congress, at the urging of child welfare professionals, to eliminate long-term foster care as an acceptable permanency option when it enacted the Adoption and Safe Families Act in 1997. Studies have shown repeatedly that children in long-term foster care often experience serious psychological, behavioral and social problems while in care and that youth who age out of foster care without families to care for and support them are at serious risk of very negative outcomes. Research tells us that youth who age out of foster care to live "independently:"¹

- Often have serious health problems but cannot obtain health care because they rarely have health insurance.

¹ Courtney, M., Terao, S., and Bost, N. (2004). *Midwest Evaluation of the Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth: Conditions of Youth Preparing to Leave State Care*. Chapin Hall Center for Children: University Of Chicago.

- Frequently do not finish high school nor develop vocational skills. It is not surprising that many youth who age out of foster care are unemployed or, at best, working in extremely low-paying jobs.
- Often face homelessness and live in shelters at various times in their lives.
- Often, because of economic factors or peer pressure, engage in illegal activities that result in incarceration.
- Often do not have adults whom they can rely upon for support and guidance. They are essentially “on their own.”



The short- and long-term risks to children and youth in long-term foster care can be attributed in large part to their many moves while in care. A 1993 study by Westat dramatically demonstrated that children who remain in foster care and move from one placement to another are at greatly elevated risks of poor outcomes. The study found:²

- If a child moved once while in foster care, the probability that she would become pregnant was 19% but the percentage rose to 60% if a child moved 10 times.
- If a child in foster care moved once, there was a 24% chance of illegal drug use compared to 82% if the child moved 10 times.
- If a child moved once, the likelihood of incarceration or welfare dependency after discharge was 25% compared to 75% if the child moved 10 times.
- If a child moved once, the probability of high school completion was 78% but was only 38% if the child moved 10 times.

These data make clear that we seriously fail children when, having determined that they cannot safely return home, we allow them to grow up in foster care without the benefit of new families. We know that adoption, in contrast to long-term foster care, provides children with love, nurturance and stability, promoting children’s well-being and their opportunities to become healthy, productive adults. One study after another has shown the many positive benefits for children when they are adopted.

At the same time, adoption saves government and taxpayers’ money. Foster care requires a significant investment of resources, the majority of which is not spent directly on the child. Foster care expenditures include:

- Payments to foster parents, group homes, and residential centers
- The administrative costs associated with on-going supervision and training of case-workers, foster parents, and institutional staff

² Sedlak, Andrea J., and D.D. Broadhurst (1993). *Study of Adoption Assistance Impact and Outcomes: Final Report*. Rockville, MD: Westat Corporation.

“We adopted Chrissy from the state of Oregon in 1996, at which time she was 10 years old. During the process of adoption, Oregon gave us information about her history. The history stated that she was borderline retarded, her mother is retarded and a drug addict, and her father, grandfather and uncle physically and sexually abused her. She was pulled in and out of 14 different foster homes until her parents family gave up their rights. We knew that Chrissy would need a lot of love and attention.

When Chrissy came to Maryland, we found out just how much attention she needed. She was 10 years old and could barely read or count by one’s from one to twenty. We worked very hard with her over the next few years. Since 5th grade, Chrissy has made honor role every quarter except one. At the end of 6th grade, she received a certificate signed by at that time President Bill Clinton for Outstanding Educational Improvement. ... Currently, Chrissy’s class rank is 58 out of a graduation class of 473 with a GPA of 3.304. Chrissy is currently enrolled in the Center of Applied Technologies North taking a class to become a Medical Assistant, which she will pursue when she enters college. We are very proud of our daughter and we want for her to pursue her dreams when she graduates.”

- Court costs
- Case management expenses
- Treatment and supportive services for the child

When children are adopted, the government realizes substantial savings because administrative, case management, and court costs are no longer incurred. Money is saved even when adoption subsidies are provided at the same rate as payments to foster parents.

It is clear from research that most children who have been adopted thrive. More importantly, it is clear from parents who have adopted waiting children that adoption is the path to the love, stability, and nurturing that children need. Consider this letter from an adoptive parent:

“200-KIDS, they have the little advertisements in the paper. You know I had that taped to my pantry door for over a year. I know because it turned yellow. Because that’s how long you’re thinking about this. And then when [my husband] told me about his friend Mike [who encouraged them to adopt through the county social services] and I’m saying, duh, I’ve had this thing taped to the pantry for a year. But, I guess God works in mysterious ways.” —From a Prospective Adoptive Parent

The Role of Photolisting in Recruiting Adoptive Families

“We need to work on photolistings as if our lives depended on it because children’s lives do.”

“Been thinking about it for a couple years. I didn’t know there was program like this. I always thought to adopt, you had to be rich. This is what I was always told. I thought you had to have \$30,000 in the bank to adopt. But, finally we just started talking about it and I said, ‘You know what, I’m going to do it.’” —From a Prospective Adoptive Parent

Photolisting is a powerful child-specific recruitment strategy because it is based on a commitment that the child who is featured will be adopted by a family. When done well, photolistings personalize the child through an engaging picture, an individualized description, and information on “next steps” for potential adoptive families interested in learning more about the child and the adoption process. Because photolistings reach the general public, they may generate the interest of several families in a featured child, providing the opportunity to introduce families to other waiting children if the featured child is placed with another family.

Photolistings also fulfill a secondary goal: to educate the general public about children in foster care who are waiting for adoptive families. Experience has shown that prospective adoptive families often need multiple exposures to adoption before they are ready to make a first inquiry about a waiting child. Families frequently go through both a pre-exploratory phase (looking at pictures, reading, and thinking) and an exploratory phase (preliminary conversations with adoption professionals and other families who have adopted) before they are ready to take a definitive step toward adoption. Photolistings serve an on-going public education function, keeping information about the needs of waiting children readily available to families and communities.

“I have on average for any month a pool of 300 children who have no family identified and who are getting older while waiting for families to come forward. For these children, our best efforts to find families have been through the Internet and adoption exchanges.”—From a Caseworker

The Internet has further enhanced the roles that photolistings play in finding adoptive families for children and educating the public about the needs of waiting children in foster care. Unlike photolisting books or even newspapers, the Internet has the capacity to reach millions of people, educating and interesting families who otherwise never would have been aware of children in foster care who need adoptive families. Photolistings on the Internet benefit from that medium’s ability to provide ready access to information in a cost efficient manner. The Internet also provides families with a high level of privacy, allowing them to learn more about adoption and waiting children when they are not yet ready to contact a social service agency.

Photolistings, however, have been the subject of concern for some caseworkers. Caseworkers may worry that photolistings will cause them to be inundated by requests for information from prospective adoptive parents who have little knowledge or unrealistic expectations about children who are waiting. These concerns are legitimate, and it is clear that agencies must put resources in place to ensure that staff can respond to the interest generated by photolistings. Other caseworkers and some members of the public may worry that photolisting children exploits them and unduly invades their privacy. These fears are understandable. Photolistings, however, are too effective at finding families for children who desperately need families to dismiss. The real question is how can we use this recruitment technique in a sensitive manner that respects the privacy of children but also meets their needs for adoptive families. As the following story reveals³, photolistings play an invaluable role in finding families for children who may otherwise have continued to wait in foster care.

³ This story is a composite of conversations with families, caseworkers, and other child welfare professionals.

A Photolisting Success Story: “Joe” Finds a Home

Michael: I have been living in California for 9 years. I realize I am not necessarily the “traditional” vision of an adoptive family, but I saw Joe’s picture on the Internet and really felt as if I could provide him with the home he wanted. I have always wanted children and at this point, I am not sure that I will find a person to marry. I have spent a lot of time considering adoption and looking at different children’s pictures on the [AdoptUSkids](#) website. From the time I saw his picture, it felt like our relationship had begun. I think I could be a good Dad to Joe.

Caseworker: Joe was very hesitant about being photolisted on the Internet. My impression was that he didn’t want to face the disappointment of not being adopted. I didn’t want him to have to go through that either. I was elated when families started to inquire about Joe, but honestly I was a little disappointed when only one person really followed through with the paperwork—Michael wasn’t what I expected in terms of a family for Joe. It’s not that I have a problem with single people, I just thought Joe needed a more traditional family. Honestly, I also wasn’t particularly comfortable with the idea of him going so far away either. I would rather find him a family closer to the area he is used to.



Michael: I began by conversing with Joe’s caseworker. At times, I wondered if she really wanted Joe to be adopted, or if the caseworker was going to adopt Joe herself. I didn’t feel like she was making the process particularly easy for me, but I didn’t want Joe to suffer just because I didn’t always see eye-to-eye with the caseworker. A friend of ours suggested that I travel to the agency for a face-to-face meeting with the caseworker. I felt if we could just see each other and show that we are just people who all want to do the best for a young man, things might go a lot better.

Caseworker: Michael eventually came in for a meeting and things really changed after that. I really appreciated the way he interacted with Joe, and after some long conversations with my supervisor, I got over some of my personal apprehension about Joe going so far away. Joe’s adoption is finalized and about a month ago, when I was visiting a family who lives near Joe’s new home, I went to his eighth grade “graduation” party. It was really gratifying to see him with a permanent family.

Best Practices: Preparing Children, Caregivers, and Others for Photolistings

“Tell me where you want to go and I’ll tell you how to get there.”

Underlying photolisting practice are two key principles:

1. The privacy of the child and others in her life must be respected.
2. Information must be honestly disclosed.

These principles set the framework for best practices in:

- Selecting children for photolisting;
- Preparing children for photolisting; and
- Preparing children’s caregivers and support systems for the photolisting experience.

Key Principles

Principle #1. The privacy of the child and others in her life must be respected.

The confidentiality of featured children, their birth families, their foster families, and prospective adoptive families must be honored, and as each step in the adoption process is taken, attention must be given to the privacy of all concerned. It is because of considerations regarding a child’s privacy, for example, that *a child’s last name, the name of his foster family, or the name of the group or residential placement facility where he is living should never be disclosed* in a photolisting description.

State and federal laws require that certain information be treated as confidential. As an example, the law prohibits the sharing of a child’s HIV status in a photolisting description. In some instances, however, the extent to which the law prohibits the sharing of information is not entirely clear. Such is the case with regard to limitations on the sharing of medical information posed by the federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). Among other requirements, HIPAA mandates that “individually identifiable health information” be protected from “unauthorized disclosures.” There has been no federal guidance on the application of these HIPAA provisions to the photolisting of waiting children, and states have taken different positions. Some states have determined that HIPAA precludes the inclusion of children’s health information in photolisting descriptions, and other states have determined that HIPAA protections do not apply to photolisting practice. Because this issue has not been

clarified and the focus of this guide is on “best practices,” we describe best practices in developing photolisting descriptions without reference to HIPAA mandates.

Principle #2. Information must be honestly disclosed.

Two guidelines can help you implement the principle of honest disclosure:

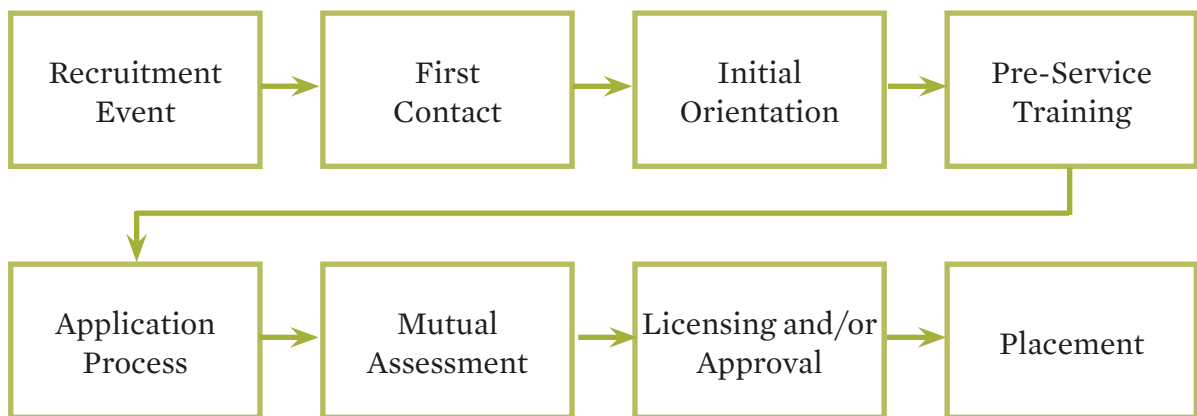
- Be honest, but not brutal!
- Always keep in mind that information-sharing is a process that occurs over time.

These two guidelines work in tandem. Information that is shared in a photolisting should never be less than honest. To describe a child in a way that does not accurately portray the child does not benefit the child and is unfair and misleading to prospective adoptive parents.

It is also important, however, to recognize that photolistings are the very beginning of the information-sharing continuum. The goal of a photolisting is to introduce the child, not tell the child’s entire story. As the following diagram⁴ illustrates, there are many

“We are sort of trying to figure out how to recruit for the kids—being more honest, still protecting the kids, but also not getting the families hopes up as they are going through this 1000 page book that has kids’ pictures in it.”—From a Caseworker

“We want it clearly stated that photos and descriptions do not show the complexity of the child and all he or she has experienced, loves, and wants from life and family.”—From a Youth Group



⁴ From *Getting More Parents for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts: Practitioners’ Guide*, [AdoptUSKids](#).

steps in the process of recruiting, preparing, and assessing families and matching families with children: A photolisting on the Internet or in a book, newspaper, magazine, or newsletter is a “recruitment event”—the very first step in the process. Once a family has seen a photolisting, contacted an agency, and expressed an interest in a specific child, the agency can begin to provide the family with more extensive information about the child. More detailed information about the child’s background and behavior should be shared as the

process moves forward so the family can decide whether to continue exploring the adoption of that child. *If the family continues the process to adoption, all known information about the child must be shared with the family.* At each phase in this process, information must be shared honestly with an appreciation for the complexity of the child’s life and experiences—in other words, “brutal honesty” should be avoided in favor of a balanced approach that fully conveys the child as an individual.

“I heard the same things about the severe abuse that children have suffered. But as you talk to the agency workers, they explain the definition of abuse and what kinds of abuse children suffer. At first, I think I was intimidated by it, but I think it’s something that I can live with now.”—From a Prospective Adoptive Parent

The concept of gradual information-sharing can be illustrated in another context. Imagine the following:

“I’d heard so many things about the severity of the older kids’ problems. Now I’m kind of thinking, I know these children have severe problems but I’m thinking whether I’ve heard the worst-case scenarios [and] that now my thinking about it is skewed. People will say, these kids lie and steal and I’m thinking I know kids who aren’t adopted who lie and steal and have learning disabilities. And so, it’s a hard thing to say, I guess. You certainly want them to let people know how bad the problems can be, but, on the other hand, I wonder if they don’t give an unbalanced picture because I haven’t worked with kids from the system.”—From a Prospective Adoptive Parent

You are at a dinner party with friends and you have brought your partner with you. Your partner does not know anyone at the party and you make a point of introducing her. What is appropriate at this introductory stage? How should the information about your partner be presented so that it is not misleading but does not “overdisclose” in a public way? Do you begin by introducing your partner as a somewhat temperamental person who was recently diagnosed with depression? That is not likely. Instead, you would be more likely to introduce your partner to the other guests at the party

as a woman who is a teacher and has three dogs that she rescued from the animal shelter. The party guests eventually might see her temperamental side if they have

opportunities to spend time with her. It may be well into the future as your partner and a guest got to know one another well that she may share her struggle with depression. Although there may be differences between this scenario and photolisting descriptions (adult participants and relatively low level of commitment to one another), the principle of increasing disclosure as connectedness grows remains the same.

Practice Issues in Preparing Children and Others for Photolistings

The child's caseworker is the key person in the photolisting process. The caseworker makes it possible for the child's photograph and description to appear in a book, newspaper, magazine, or newsletter or on the Internet. It is essential that the caseworker be fully aware of his or her feelings about the child and the adoption plan and fulfill her responsibilities effectively.

Prior to developing a photolisting description and taking or arranging for a photograph to be taken of a child, the caseworker has three key responsibilities:

- Selecting the child
- Preparing the child
- Preparing the child's caregivers and support systems

“We had very lively discussion about the way workers influence the process unintentionally and often with little awareness of what lifelong implications this has for us as youth in the foster care system.”—From a Youth Group

Selecting children for photolistings

When selecting children for a photolisting, keep two key ideas in mind:

- All children who have adoption as their plan but who do not have identified adoptive parents can be photolisted.
- Any child who needs a family can be photolisted—the child does not have to be “representative” of children waiting for adoption to be photolisted.

Sometimes, caseworkers do not photolist children because they do not believe that certain types of children are adoptable. As discussed earlier, this view of children fails to recognize the widespread success of professionals who find adoptive families for children simply because these professionals believed that they could. In other cases, caseworkers do not photolist a particular child because they are not comfortable with the idea

of that child's adoption. In yet other cases, they may photolist a child but fail to follow up with families who come forward, creating, in effect, the same outcome for the child as would be the case if he were never photolisted. There are many reasons that caseworkers may make these choices. In some cases, the caseworker consciously or subconsciously sees herself as an adoptive resource for the child. Michael, in the story

PRACTICE TIP:

Always obtain written consent from the appropriate party prior to photolisting a child.

presented earlier, wondered whether the caseworker's reluctance to consider him sprang from her own interest in adopting Joe. In their professional capacity, caseworkers are not adoptive resources for the waiting children whom they serve and must always be aware of any feelings that may affect their decisions about children. To help caseworkers avoid such conflicts, some agencies require caseworkers to sign a statement that a photolisted child must be placed with a family if an appropriate family is found or to clarify in writing why an identified family was not an appropriate match for the child.

In some cases, caseworkers photolist children with identified adoptive families because they are mandated to use photolistings to qualify a child for adoption assistance. In other cases, however, a caseworker photolists a child with an identified family resource because she is half-hearted about the family and wants to "look" for a possibly "better" family for the child. "Searching" for a family when a family is already available for a child is an unacceptable practice. It utilizes precious resources that could be mobilized on behalf of another child for whom no family has been identified, and it injects uncertainty and delays into the adoption process for the child for whom a family already has been identified.

As a general rule, the child's legal guardian must approve the photolisting of a child in writing. In many instances, the agency will have the authority to consent to the photolisting. Some states, however, photolist children who have not been freed for adoption but who are likely to be freed once an adoptive family has been found (these children are often referred to as being in a "legal risk" category). When children are not legally freed, policies typically require the signature of birth parents or the judge with jurisdiction over the child's case.

PRACTICE TIP:

Do not photolist children for whom adoptive families—such as foster parents or relatives—have already been located.

Preparing children for photolistings

“If a family comes forward and a child is not prepared whether she is 5 or 10 or 15 years old, you are doing a disservice to everyone.”

The next key responsibility of the caseworker is to prepare the child for a photolisting.

WORKSHEET #1, on page 33, **Preparing a Child for Photolisting**, is a step-by-step guide, which covers all steps in the process.

PRACTICE TIP:

If you are new to photolisting practice, “buddy up” with caseworkers who have experience in photolisting children and placing them with adoptive families.

“Children should be actively involved in the process based on their ability to be involved, and when appropriate, the youth should be the one who decides on the adoptive resource that will be used.”—From a Youth Group

Before a child is featured in a photolisting, either alone or with his sibling group, be certain to:

1. Ensure that the child fully understands that adoption is the plan and that he is being photolisted to find a family for him and, possibly, for other waiting children. **WORKSHEET #2**, on page 35, provides two tools (the Eco-Map and the LossLine) that can be used to discuss adoption with children and how it fits with other events in their lives.
2. Prepare the child’s foster parents, residential child care worker, or adoption worker to help the child cope with the photolisting experience and any problems that may arise in connection with it.

Being featured in a photolisting book or on a website can be an exciting experience for the child, but it also can cause considerable apprehension if the child is not prepared. To help prepare a child for a photolisting:

1. Show her where she will be featured (the actual book, newspaper, magazine, newsletter or Internet site) and explain how the process works. Use photolisting books or photolistings on the Internet to help the child understand that she is not

PRACTICE TOOL:

One agency enables teens to make powerpoint presentations about themselves which are then put up on a website. The presentations may include photos and clip art. Not only are these presentations unique, but the process to create them becomes an adoption preparation tool. Caseworkers often work with teens for up to 3 to 4 months to complete them.

alone – that many other children also are waiting for adoptive families.

2. Explain why a photolisting is used and the desired outcomes.
3. Explain to the child some of the possible results of a photolisting, such as comments by friends or the absence of responses or appropriate families. Explore the child's feelings about these possibilities. Explain the next steps if families do not respond or if the right family is not identified.
4. Explore which medium is best for the individual child. A child may be comfortable with some types of photolisting but not others.
5. Allow older children to participate in the process. Involve them in developing their own photolisting description (discussed later in this guide). Tell them that when a family expresses interest in them, they will be given information about the interested family and the child will participate in the decision to move forward or not.
6. Be prepared to respond to a child who says “no” to being featured in a photolisting. Clarify with the child whether she is saying “no” to adoption or “no” to being photolisted and what she means by “no.” If a child is saying “no” to being photolisted, she may fear that a photolisting will expose her to being found and hurt by someone in her past. She may worry that no one will be interested in her or that

Hello, my name is Sherrie. I was put with a foster family when I was 9 and it took 7 years to find a family to adopt me. I'm really glad my caseworker, Denise, put me on their website and didn't give up on me just because I said I didn't want to be adopted.

At first when Denise said she wanted to take my picture for the website, I didn't want her to do it. I thought that if no families wanted me after 6 years, there was no point in trying any more. It was so hard always being let down in the end. But Denise said that lots of kids were finding families this way and she would let me decide what would go with my picture. I didn't have to write anything I didn't want other people to see, I just talked about what I wanted and what I liked doing in my free time. Denise also put in some stuff about school and how I like singing, but I said that was ok too.

In just a few months Denise called me to her office and said that there were three families that were interested in meeting me. At first, I thought she had me confused with some other kid. But it was true! It turned out one of the families was really far away, but I ended up meeting two of them and now I am living with the one I picked and we are waiting for the adoption to be final.

Sometimes I'm sad that I had to wait so long to find a family, but my new mom says, "It's better late than never!"

⁵ This story is a composite of conversations with families, caseworkers, and other child welfare professionals.



she will have to move away from her community. Some children may continue to struggle with the concept of adoption, fearing that they will have to change their names or will lose all contact with birth family members. They may feel guilty about being with a family other than their birth family, or they may feel disloyal to a sibling who will not be adopted. All of these concerns need to be addressed with the child. A child's desire to keep her name, for example, should be acknowledged and this information later discussed with prospective adoptive families. Openness to an adoptive family may take a great deal of courage for a child, especially an older child who has experienced many rejections, and the child may need considerable support to take this step.

The letter on the previous page well illustrates these issues through the perspective of one child:⁵

To help children who are reluctant to be photolisted, you might consider the following:

- Share successful adoption stories.
- Talk about how photolistings help all children. Tell the child that when adults see children's pictures, they learn about children who need families.
- If the child is uncomfortable with his name being used, suggest that the child use a pseudonym.
- If the child is uncomfortable describing himself, consider using a different approach. Buddy the child up with another child and ask each child to write about their buddy's best traits. Alternatively, ask the child how a friend or favorite teacher might describe him. Yet another approach is to focus on the positives in the child's life. Ask "what do you like best about yourself?" and "what are you good at?" Sample questions are included in **WORKSHEET #3**, on page 37, the Child Interview Form.
- Ask the child to select the photograph that will be used for the photolisting.

"Youth will be torn between wanting to be part of the family and letting go of the only families they know—biological and foster families. Foster families will also feel torn between wanting the best possible thing for the child and keeping the child with them even when they are unable or willing to adopt."—From a Youth Group

- Talk with children individually or in groups about the possible traits of the adoptive families that they would like to have, such as a family with pets, one or two parents, or a home in the city or country.
- Invite the child to imagine what it would be like to have his or her own family. Use this fantasy to correct misperceptions, answer questions, ease fears, and reinforce positive risk-taking. Acknowledge fears through such feedback as “It’s a little scary to talk about, isn’t it?” Discuss the child’s fears with her.
- Demonstrate confidence in the process and your commitment to see the process through. You might say, “Let’s try. I want the best for you.”

PRACTICE TIP:

Have foster parents or caregivers sign a “permanency commitment form” which indicates that they cannot adopt the child and asks them to help with the process to find a family for the child. See **WORKSHEET #5** on page 45 for an example of this form.

The key is never to stop recruiting families for children because their fear of rejection causes them to say they do not want to be adopted or because the caseworker is trying to “protect” the child from hurt. There is little that hurts a child more than not having a family!

Preparing the child’s caregivers and support systems

Prior to photolisting a child, it is essential that the children’s caregivers and support systems—particularly the school system—be prepared for the child’s photolisting and the steps that will follow. Ask older children to share with you the names of the people they want to be included as supports. Talk with these individuals about:



- The child’s need for an adoptive parent. If the issue has not been fully explored, ask the foster parents or other caregivers about their own ability to adopt the child and whether the availability of adoption assistance would make adoption possible. If the foster parent or current caregiver is not able to adopt, discuss the child’s need for another family and engage the caregivers’ support in finding an adoptive family for the child. Ask the foster family or caregiver whether there is someone who has already taken an interest in the child and who might consider adoption.
- Other people who are involved with the child (such as teachers) who should be informed of the child’s need for an adoptive family and the efforts that will be made to find an adoptive family for the child.
- The photolisting process, including the steps involved and the time period typically

required. Provide caregivers with a copy of this information in writing.

In addition, interview foster parents and other people closely involved in the child's life such as teachers and school social workers to obtain a better understanding of the child's personality, interests, and hobbies – information that can be extremely helpful in developing the child's photolisting description. After writing the photolisting description, provide all people who contributed to its development with a written copy of the description.

Writing a Description of a Child

Photolisting descriptions vary considerably—from limited statements such as, “girl, 14 years old” to documents taking up several pages and delving into every detail of a child's personal history. Here, we discuss how to write a photolisting description that conveys the uniqueness of a child while honestly introducing the child to prospective adoptive families. Below are two photolisting descriptions of 10-year-old girls waiting for adoption.

Susan

When Susan grows up, she hopes to be an author. Susan's social worker says she spends lots of time writing poetry in her journal. Susan needs lots of warmth, consistency, and limit setting. She enjoys physical affection and wants her own share of attention. All families will be considered and should be warm and patient. Please call us today if you are the family who can give Susan lots of love and understanding.

Joanne

Joanne is a child who does not understand cause and effect and will need structure and behavior modification. She has a history of running away, lying and stealing, and will try your patience with extreme acting out. She has exhibited inappropriate sexual overtures to previous caretaker personnel. Sexual abuse is a possibility and her new family should consider this as a part of her history. Joanne has difficulty tolerating her siblings receiving any attention and displays behavior patterns of temper tantrums and property destruction when siblings receive individual attention. Joanne wants and needs a home. Please call us today if you are the family who can give Joanne lots of love and understanding.

“The most effective photolistings are those written by people who really know and like a child.”—From an Agency Director

As you may have guessed, families who contacted the agency were interested in Susan,

not Joanne. Prospective adoptive parents were eager to offer their warmth, patience, and physical affection. They were willing to be firm but patient and to consistently set reasonable limits. Families saw Susan as a child who could respond to their love and parenting, but they saw Joanne as an unmanageable child who would be difficult to integrate into their families. The twist is that Susan and Joanne are the same child, only described quite differently. As Susan, the child's problems seem surmountable, but as Joanne, her needs appear overwhelming.

Four simple rules of thumb should guide decisions regarding the information to share in a photolisting description – all of which appeal to common sense. (Also see: **WORKSHEET #4**, on page 41, **What to Include in a Child's Photolisting Description**).

Rule #1:

Do not write anything that might be hurtful to the child should he or she read it now, or later as an adult.

Rule #2:

Do not write anything that you would not write about your own child.

Rule #3:

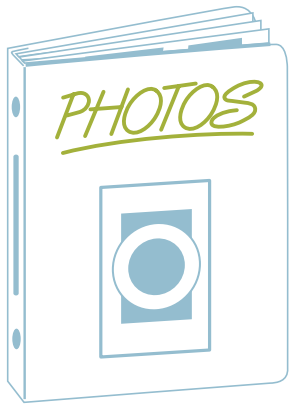
Aim for balance.

Rule #4:

Check your "facts"!

Looking more closely at **Rule #1**, there are many examples of photolistings that contain information that could be hurtful to a child should he or she be old enough to read the description at the time of its posting or read the description later in life. For example:

- "Joey" often throws temper tantrums and at times can be immature for his age.
- "Ali" is beginning to deal with his sexual abuse history and an adoptive parent must be willing to take him to ongoing therapy appointments.
- "Lillian" is a hard worker, but at times she can be easily distracted by others around her, resulting in unfinished assignments, especially when she is in the regular classroom.



Although it is important to convey information about a child, ask yourself whether specific information that could be shared should be publicly posted in a book, a newspaper, magazine, newsletter, or on an Internet site. How would a child with access to his photolisting description react to information being made public about his sexual orientation, sexual abuse, immature behavior, or difficulties getting along with others? Is it possible that the child's friends could read the information and subject the child to ridicule or shame? In the previous example of Susan and Joanne, imagine how hurtful it would be for "Joanne" to read that description of herself.

In applying **Rule #2**, imagine that the child is your own child when setting out to write a description of a waiting child. If the child were your own, would you begin by saying that he attends therapy on a bi-weekly basis? Or that he was a victim of physical abuse? Most likely, you would do neither. A guiding rule is that if you would not disclose information if the child were your own, you should not post such information about a child for whom you are the caseworker.

Rule #3—Aim for balance—focus on achieving a healthy balance between “the rosy” and “the warts.” As discussed earlier, a photolisting should never be misleading. The information, however, should present the child in the best possible way. Making a good first impression does not mean writing a glowing description that does not accurately represent the child. It means achieving a balance between the child's positive characteristics and the child's challenges. If a description is unrealistically positive, it misrepresents the child to prospective adoptive parents by implying that the child has no challenges whatsoever (an unrealistic picture of any child). An example of an overly positive description is the following: “Herlone is a clean cut child with good manners, good personal hygiene, and an appreciation of what has been done for him.” This type of language, which highlights the child's cleanliness and etiquette, gives the impression that Herlone is a commodity, not a child. On the other hand, there are descriptions

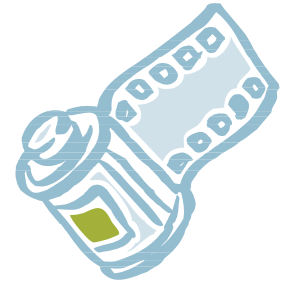
PRACTICE TIP:

No one person should independently write a description of a child. A review process should be used that includes a supervisor's verification of the source and accuracy of information that has been provided on a child.

“Children who are at least 10 years of age and older and according to ability should be allowed to help write their own descriptions for publishing and choose the photos to be used.”—From a Youth Group

(such as that of “Joanne”) that contain so many negative observations about the child that she would appear impossible to love or parent. Photolistings filled with numerous diagnostic labels for emotional and behavioral problems fall into the overly negative category.

Diagnostic labels are inappropriate in photolistings for other reasons. Children with the same mental health diagnosis may present very different behaviors and their conditions may range from mild to very serious – nuances that simply using a diagnostic label in a photolisting description cannot convey to prospective adoptive families. As a result, information about a child’s mental health problems should not be included in a photolisting description.



They should be shared later in the process when there is an opportunity to also discuss with prospective adoptive parents how and when the diagnosis was reached, what the diagnosis means, and the relevance of the diagnosis given the child’s current or future circumstances.

“I’ve had families get hooked into kids just based on what the kids say about themselves that’s the real stuff.”—From an Agency Director

It is possible to balance prospective adoptive parents’ need to have information regarding the child and the child’s right to privacy. The following wording can be used as an introduction to photolistings:

“All waiting children have experienced some degree of abuse, neglect, and loss. These experiences can impact their health, development, and daily functioning to varying degrees. This site (book, newsletter, or magazine) respects the privacy of all children and does not list their medical or mental health issues. Nor does it capture fully the children’s strengths! Photolistings are merely introductions to children. To have a full understanding of a child, follow up with the child’s caseworker.”

Rule #4—Check your “facts!”—focus on ensuring the accuracy of the information that is provided before including it in a photolisting description. Information, such as the child’s age and grade level, should be verified.

An excellent way to write descriptions of a child is to go to the child herself. What would the child like to have said about herself? Two approaches can be used: talk to the child and use her direct quotes, or ask the child to write the description herself. In

“When the photo-listing entry is completed and ready for submission for public access, the youth should be able to review it and approve it before it is released. We believe that this would support and balance the youth’s anxiety, as they would have control over their information.”—From a Youth Group

either case, the description of the child is more likely to bring the child to life, conveying her personality, interests, and characteristics more clearly than is likely when a caseworker attempts to capture the child in more objective wording.

PRACTICE TIP:

Update photolistings annually! Outdated information is misleading and can contribute to the notion that the child is unwanted.

Even after interviewing the child and individuals closest to the child, you might continue to find it difficult to write a description that truly reflects the child. Should this situation occur, consider the following:

- Focus on one or two pieces of information about the child that will make him stand out. For example, “If Rashon could have three wishes, he would use them for a Jeep, a Jaguar, and a Lincoln Town Car.”
- Draw on your own knowledge of child development based on the child’s interest. For example, “Steven loves kicking a ball around with the neighborhood kids and like many boys and girls his age, probably would really like to play on a soccer team.”

WORKSHEET #6, on page 47, provides examples of photolisting descriptions that were developed using these guidelines.

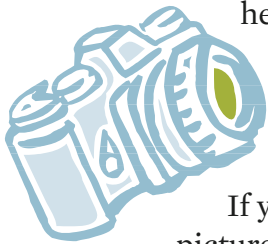
Taking the Child's Photograph

“A picture is worth a thousand words.”

*“The book kept opening to his picture.
Our relationship started with that picture”*

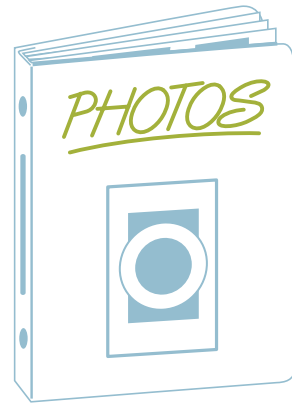
Photographs in print or on a web page typically are what first catch a family's attention. Quality photographs convey something about a child that goes beyond physical appearance. It may be a special twinkle in an eye, a shy smile, a grimace of confusion, or a far away stare that allows a family to peer deeper into the child, well beyond the color of her hair, the braces on his teeth, or the sun reflected off a wheelchair.

If you are uncertain of your ability to take flattering, high-quality pictures of a child, consider seeking the assistance of a professional. Inquire at a local high school or college about a photography student who might be willing to donate his or her time. It is not out of the question to make the same request of a nearby portrait studio. See if there is a Photographers' Association in your state. Contact them and engage their willingness to photograph your kids for no or reduced cost. This is happening in some areas already.



If you do not have access to a professional photographer, you can take good pictures if you keep a few tips in mind. Remember, the photographs you take should clearly present the child and be flattering!

1. Take photographs at a time that is convenient for the child. Don't take her out of her favorite class or stop him just as he is going to basketball practice.
2. Focus on the location for the child's photograph. The easiest and best pictures frequently are outdoors, because there is plenty of light and the child is free to pose in a play area.
3. Let the child pick a favorite outfit and background for the photo. Be sure the child's hair is clean and cared for and the child looks well-groomed.
4. Consider taking pictures of the child doing a preferred activity or with a special toy. Keep in mind, however, that the child should be clearly visible in the photo. For example, if a child loves soccer, rather than taking a picture of her playing soccer, take a picture of her in her soccer uniform or holding a soccer ball. Make it fun!
5. Individualize the photographs for each child. Vary the locations so that all photographs do not use the same background. A standard background for all photographs can create the impression that the children are being "painted with the same brush" or were photographed in a depersonalized line-up.
6. Consider the child's skin tone when picking the background.
7. Use color film.
8. Take close-up photographs of the child (or children if a sibling group) that are face forward, and of the waist or shoulders up.
9. Set aside enough time so that you won't feel rushed. Plan to spend at least an hour at the photo session.
10. Shoot an entire roll of film at the session – at least 24 shots. This number of photos generally guarantees that three or four photos will be acceptable. Develop the film immediately! (The extras can go into the child's Life Book.)
11. Have a familiar person, such as a social worker or foster parent, present during the photo session to put the child at ease.
12. Photograph siblings together in the same picture. Children who are photolisted together are more likely to be adopted as a sibling group. When prospective adoptive parents see children together in a photograph, they are better able to understand the importance of the children remaining together.
13. Have the child help pick the "best" photo.



How Agencies Can Maximize the Effectiveness of Photolistings

Agencies can do a great deal to support caseworkers' active involvement in recruiting adoptive families and maximizing the effectiveness of photolistings. Agencies should:



- Respond to prospective adoptive families with respect and excitement! Arrange for people to respond to prospective adoptive families' calls—do not use answering machines! Ensure that every inquiry receives a prompt response. For complete information on this topic please refer to *AdoptUSKids' Answering the Call: Getting More Parents for Children from Your Recruitment Efforts: Practitioners' Guide*.
- Provide caseworkers with appropriate training and supervision. Enable them to speak knowledgeably and honestly to families who call about specific children.
- Embrace the concept of families choosing their own children rather than simply being assigned children.
- Develop objective criteria regarding who is a “good enough” adoptive family and a process that evaluates the families fairly. See the *AdoptUSKids'* publication on matching children and families.
- Remove children from websites and other photolistings once they have been matched with a family. Interested prospective parents are more likely to visit a website or regularly read newsletters or magazines when the information is current.
- Develop objective processes regarding interjurisdictional placements of children with families in other counties and states and possibly other countries. For complete information on this topic, please refer to the *AdoptUSKids'* publication on this subject.

“We hope that the instructions for using the photolistings would include sample questions that interested families should ask when making contact to know more about the child. We recommend that the contact person have the information to answer these questions before the process goes any further.”—From a Youth Group

Conclusion

Children need families, and your job is to find them! This guide is designed to help you with this very important work. It provides you with information and practice tips on preparing a child for a photolisting, preparing the child's caregivers and others who are important in the child's life, writing a photolisting description, and taking the child's photograph. By implementing these "best practices," you will be well prepared to do the best possible job you can on behalf of waiting children!

Who We Are

One final note of interest before I get going:

I refused to write this book unless the author changed the subtitle. He wasn't happy about the idea. "It will be confusing to people," he moaned. "What's wrong with Reflections from an Abused Kid?"

"You know what's wrong with it," I told him. "I suffered abuse, but I'm not an 'abused kid.' That's not how I choose to be defined. I'm a kid who: Loves anchovies on pizza; flunked home economics last semester but got an 'A' in advanced calculus; develops web pages at school; has an outrageous yet perverse sense of humor; has won 43 games of chess in a row; hides an outie belly button; possesses a mad crush on Mary Egan; and loves horror movies and Bare Naked Ladies (the group, as well). This is who I am brother.

"Sure, I'm also a kid who was abused: A kid who has trouble fallin' asleep at night and is afraid of the dark; a kid who doesn't have many friends; a kid who suffers frequent nightmares about bad men doing bad things to him; a kid who suffers painful pangs of hopelessness; a kid who has cut himself; and a dude with a lot of rage inside.

"But don't label me an abused kid. It implies my life is all about being abused and that, Chuck, is not right. Labels like that suck!"

As you can see from the cover, my point was well taken.


Excerpt from The Gus Chronicles II: Reflections from a Kid Who Has Been Abused, Introduction, pages 2-3 (Appelstein, 2002):


WORKSHEET #1: Preparing a Child for Photolisting


- ___ 1. Select the child, ensuring that all needed consents are obtained.
- ___ 2. Prepare the child. Discuss adoption and photolisting process.
(See: **WORKSHEET #2**—Child’s Eco-Map and the Loss Line)
Prepare for the interview:
 - Review the assessment materials on the child from the case file.
 - Approach the interview with a clear understanding of the child’s developmental level.
 - Have your interview questions ready.
 - Find an appropriate place to interview the child. Select a quiet area with few distractions—some place where he or she is comfortable.
 - Make sure the child knows who you are and the purpose of the interview.
 - Do not use social work jargon. Communicate at the child’s level.
Conduct the interview. Date: _____
 - Discuss** the purpose of photolisting children—whether on the Internet or in a photolisting book, newspaper, magazine, or newsletter.
 - Show** the child examples of other children’s photographs and descriptions (either in a book or on the Internet).
 - Talk** about what a child likes and dislikes about these different forms of photolistings and what he wants to include or exclude in his own description. Fill out the interview form (see **WORKSHEET #3**).
 - Once the child is comfortable with being photolisted, discuss taking a photograph.
- ___ 3. Prepare the child’s caregivers, friends, and supports.
Name and relationship to child:_____ Date of contact:_____
- Name and relationship to child:_____ Date of contact:_____
- Name and relationship to child:_____ Date of contact:_____
- Name and relationship to child:_____ Date of contact:_____
- ___ 4. Schedule a photoshoot to take flattering pictures of the child.
Date:_____ Time:_____
- ___ 5. If age appropriate, have the child review the photolisting and pick the photo!


WORKSHEET #2a: Child's Eco-Map

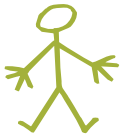
1. Me
 by _____
 today is _____
 I am _____ years old


5 


3  Social Worker
Why?


4  Court House


6 


2  Why am I here?


7  Brothers and Sisters


14  Friends


12  Things I like to do

11  I worry about

13  Dreams

8  I feel _____

9  Things that bug me

SCHOOL 

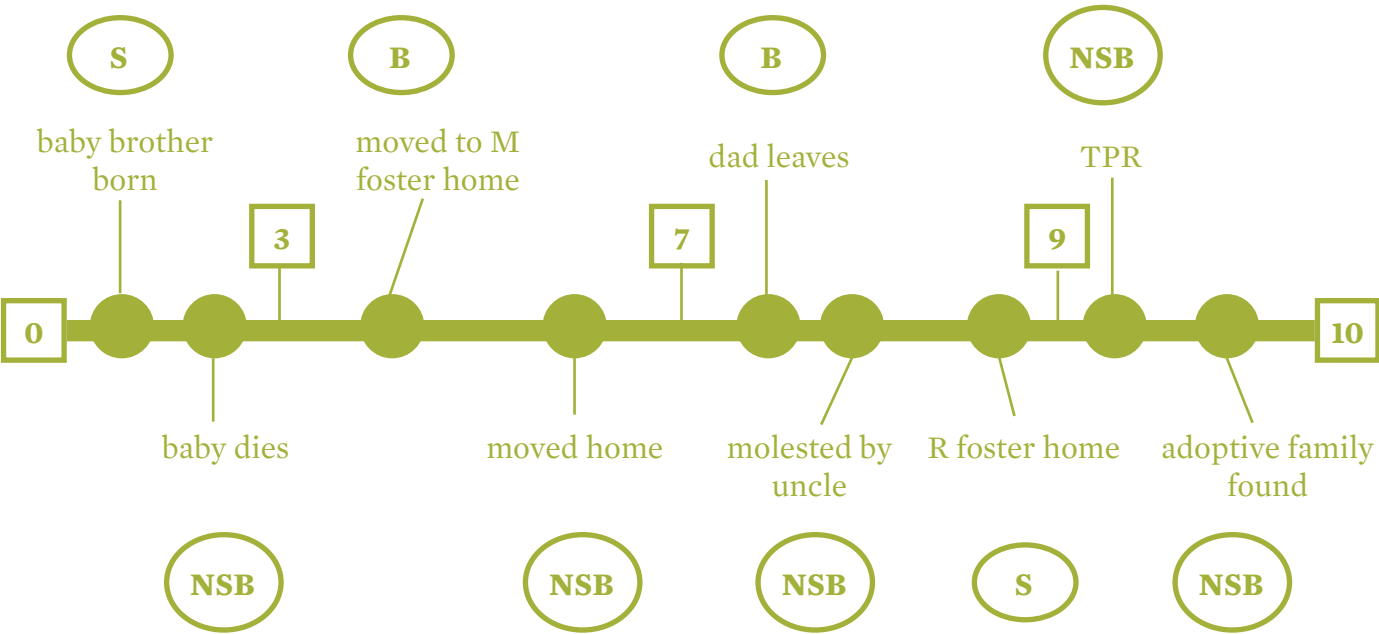
Favorite color _____
feels good

Least favorite color _____
doesn't feel good

Taken from: *Helping Children When They Must Move* by Vera Fahler, M.D.

WORKSHEET #2b: The Loss Line, An Example

Key:
S = small loss
NSB = not such a big loss
B = big loss



Adapted from: *Help for the Hard Times* by Earl Hipp, New View Consultants, Inc.

WORKSHEET #3: Child Interview Form

Date:_____

Name of Interviewer:_____

Location of Interview:_____

The following information should be obtained prior to the interview from the child's file:

Name of Child:_____ Month and Year of Birth:_____

Child's Educational Status:_____

Adoption Subsidy Available: Yes / No (circle one) Level or Amount:_____

Siblings:

Name:_____ Month/Year of Birth:_____ To be placed with child: Yes/ No

Name:_____ Month/Year of Birth:_____ To be placed with child: Yes/ No

Name:_____ Month/Year of Birth:_____ To be placed with child: Yes/ No

Name:_____ Month/Year of Birth:_____ To be placed with child: Yes/ No

Please select from the following possible interview questions (if the child is non-verbal, the foster parent may be able to answer some of the questions).

1. If you had three wishes, what would they be?
2. What is your favorite food? Or color?
3. What makes you laugh?
4. What do you do when you are with your friends?
5. If you could visit any place on earth, where would you go? Why?
6. What is your favorite class at school? Why?

WORKSHEET #3: Child Interview Form (continued)

7. What activities do you participate in at school (choirs, plays, clubs)?
8. What sports do you enjoy?
9. What chores do you help with around the house?
10. What's your favorite thing to do outdoors?
11. What do you do during vacations from school?
12. What school trips or vacations have you gone on and especially enjoyed?
13. What holidays do you like to celebrate? What do you do for them?
14. What are you most proud of? What is one thing you work very hard to do? (For example, a cartwheel? Not fighting with your sister?)
15. Who helps you when you have a problem?
16. What could a person learn about you by looking at your room?
17. What would you like people to know about you?
18. What is your favorite part about where you are living right now? What is your least favorite part?
19. What are some things you think you might want in a family? (For example, would they have pets? Would they have other children? What would they do for fun?)

WORKSHEET #4: What to Include in a Child's Photolisting Description

1. Include in all photolistings:

- **Picture of the child**
- **Child's first name or pseudonym**
- **Birth month and year:** Instead of posting the child's age, post the child's birth month and year. This ensures that the information is always up-to-date. Exclude the actual day of birth, as the full birthdate may communicate information that specifically identifies the child.
- **Ethnicity:** Note whether the child is African-American, Hispanic, Caucasian, Asian, Native American, Pacific Islander, or is of more than one race or ethnicity, specifying these. Although this information is important, young adults counsel that it should not be over-emphasized.
- **Personality, interests, and hobbies:** Ask the child directly! Personality characteristics and personal interests bring the child to life for prospective adoptive families! The child becomes an individual, not simply a child without a home. If this information is not readily at hand, spend time observing the child or talk to individuals (such as foster parents) who know him best.
- **Educational status:** Note if the child is on grade level. Do not mention the actual grade as it can quickly outdate the photolisting. Decide on a case-by-case basis whether to state that the child is not on grade level or receives special education services.
- **Sibling placement or ongoing sibling contact:** If the child has a sibling or siblings and the intention is to place them together, note this information. The accompanying photograph should always be of the children as a group. If the child has a sibling and the children will not be adopted together, post information about the need for ongoing contact, if appropriate.

“We appreciate that the ethnicity would be noted but stress that it should be noted in the same manner that the name and age are listed. We wanted it to be given as little reference as possible. We want to be considered for all of who we are and not define ourselves by our ethnicity.”—From a Youth Group

WORKSHEET #4: What to Include in a Child's Photolisting Description (continued)

- **Whether or not the child is legally free for adoption:** In some states, a child is not considered legally freed for adoption until an adoptive family is identified. Prospective parents should be made aware of this special circumstance.
- **Major allergies** (such as to food, pets, or smoking).
- **Permanent, diagnosed medical conditions which do not stigmatize the child or can be included because the child's condition renders the child unable to read and understand the description:** These conditions include autism, moderate to severe mental retardation, deafness, blindness, muteness, Down Syndrome and cerebral palsy.
- **Language dominance** if the child is not primarily an English speaker.
- **Religion** of the birth or foster family (if it is important to the child).
- **Child's desires** with regard to a family (i.e., someone to bake cookies with or someone who lives in a house with a swing set in the back yard).

2. Include in some photolistings, based on a case-by-case decision:

- The child's receipt of special education services.
- Exceptional physical challenges the child faces: When such information is included, the photolisting should include "contact _____, to learn more about this child's physical care needs."
- The child's connectedness with friends or family that should be maintained.

3. Never include in photolistings:

- Restrictions on types of adoptive families (such as: only single parents or families who live in the suburbs, or restrictions based on sexual orientation).
- Code words for aspects of the child's history or the child's condition. One example of the use of "code" words is "needs to be the youngest in the family" as indicating a history of sexual abuse. Code words are problematic because people may interpret the meaning of "code words" differently and appropriate families may screen themselves out based on a misunderstanding of the "code."
- Descriptions of the child's physical being (i.e., notations about the child's skin tone or descriptors such as short, tall, heavy, and "small for his age").
- Psychiatric diagnosis.
- Misleading information.

WORKSHEET #4: What to Include in a Child's Photolisting Description (continued)

- Outdated information.
- Opinions of others about the child.
- Subsidy information. General information about adoption assistance should be shared in photolisting books and on Internet sites, but information about the individual child's eligibility for subsidy should not be included in the child's photolisting.

Proofread all photolistings for spelling and grammatical errors!

4. Save to share later in the adoption process:

- Number of years the child has been in foster care
- Number of times the child has moved while in foster care
- Sexual or physical abuse history
- Why the child is in foster care
- Birth parents' medical and social history
- Detailed information on the child's ethnicity
- The child's HIV status
- Hepatitis C status
- Basic health problems (such as asthma)
- Enuresis or encopresis
- Obesity or history of malnutrition
- Learning challenges
- Attachment problems
- Symptoms of (or a diagnosis of) fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol effects
- In-depth information regarding the child's strengths and interests
- Any information that appears to be important but is not factually based (such as guesses or speculations based on knowledge of the child, the child's history, and the child's current status)

WORKSHEET #5: Permanency Commitment Form

I am aware that _____ is free for adoption.

I have considered adoption and the agency has discussed with me the services and supports that would be available if I adopted this child.

I am unable to adopt _____.

I would like to help with this child’s adoption in the following ways:

___ I can provide this child with help and support while an adoptive family is being sought for him/her.

___ I recommend that the following people be contacted as possible adoptive families for him/her.

___ I would like to maintain contact with this child after he/she is adopted.

Parent Signature

Date

Print Name

Parent Signature

Date

Print Name

Caseworker Signature

Date

Print Name

WORKSHEET #6: Sample Photolisting Descriptions

Photolisting Description #1

Name: Sam

Birth Month & Year: October 1990

Sam is a boy who especially likes science this year. He says, “We are studying chemistry. I like how it is logic and math combined. I also like the teacher because he is really funny.” Sam hopes some day to be a movie director. He thinks that this would be a good fit since he loves technology, has always enjoyed making things, and likes being in charge!

Sam is hoping to find a big family—one with lots of cousins, aunts and uncles. He thinks Alaska would be a great place to live since he loves the snow and cold weather. He would be especially pleased to find a family with a team of sled dogs!

Photolisting Description #2*

Name: James

Birth Month & Year: April 1993

The smell of burning rubber and the sound of screeching tires brings a smile to James’ face. James is a boy with a love for stock car racing. Some of James’ racing heroes include Jeff Gordon and Ricky Craven. When asked about his favorite outdoor activities he answers, “Oh, four wheeling, mud riding and dune buggy riding—oh, and fishing.”

James does well with hands-on projects and would like a parent who can teach him building and craft skills. James is energetic and likes to be engaged in an activity most of the time. In his down time, James likes to watch television and listen to Eminem music. James appreciates that Eminem “sings about his life and feelings.” His favorite food is a Subway sandwich—salami, roast beef, pepperoni, pickles and mayo on white bread. He adds, “Oh, and steak.”

When asked what kind of a family James would like to have, he answers, “I wanna live where there are a lot of moose around. I don’t care if it’s an apartment, trailer, hotel or a mansion, but that would be cool living in a mansion.” He wants a mom, a dad, or a mom and a dad. James explains, “I don’t care if they are old. Well, maybe if they are 100 that would be bad—I guess I want young ones.”

*From: *Fostering Families Today*, January/February 2004.

Photolisting Description #3

Name: Emily

Birth Month & Year: May 1990

Emily loves playing outdoor games with her friends. Her favorite sport is soccer and her dream is to someday play on Brazil's soccer team. Emily says she always wanted a family that lived in a house with a yard because she knows she needs to practice very hard to make the team. She hopes that someone in her potential adoptive family would be willing to help her practice!

When she is not kicking around the soccer ball, Emily works very hard on her reading homework, as she says she sometimes finds it very challenging! Her favorite subject is math and her current teacher says that Emily has improved tremendously since she arrived in the beginning of the year.

Emily is legally free for adoption and is excited to meet families who want to get to know her. Please contact us if you have a lot of energy and love to give Emily!

Emily says, "P.S. I will try to eat my vegetables at dinner, but please don't make me eat green beans!"



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