

# How to Keep Prospective Foster and Adoptive Parents Engaged Before Placement

As you know, it's important to support prospective adoptive, foster, and kinship parents between the time when they become licensed and when they have a child placed with them. These individuals have responded to what they understand is an urgent need. They are often anxious to have a child placed with them, and the system may not move at the speed they are expecting. Your goal is to ensure they don't lose patience and drop out during this waiting period.

By supporting prospects while they wait for a placement, you can keep them engaged while helping them learn and build skills. You can also help them see that you truly value them, which will make it more likely that they speak positively about foster or adoptive parenting to others in their community—ultimately helping support your recruitment efforts and helping even more children who need a family.

So how do you do it? Here are eight ideas to get you started.

## While-you-wait support groups

Support groups—whether in-person or online—are an opportunity for you to provide tailored information and training that helps prospective parents deepen their knowledge, expand on what they learned during their pre-service training, and develop parenting skills and lasting connections with their peers.

## Mentoring from buddy families

Matching prospects with successful, experienced “buddy families” gives inexperienced parents opportunities to ask questions that they may not feel comfortable asking their worker, get additional support, develop realistic expectations of parenting, and see effective parenting strategies at work.

## Let these prospective parents support current families

Giving prospective parents opportunities to provide respite, child care at group events, or otherwise support adoptive, foster, and kinship families helps current families while giving

those who wait the chance to get a deeper understanding of children who are, or have been, in foster care and expand their network of families who can support them in the future.

## **Check in regularly with prospective parents by phone or email**

Providing updates by phone or email is a great way to encourage prospects, keep them connected to your agency, and update them on upcoming trainings and other events. It also gives them an opportunity to ask any questions they might have.

## **Organize social events**

Offering events where waiting parents can connect with each other or with current resource parents gives hope to prospective parents and helps them make connections with people who are already on the journey.

## **Provide additional, targeted trainings**

Providing in-person and online workshops that will help prospective parents get ready to care for the specific children they have been licensed to foster or adopt (such as teens or children with fetal alcohol spectrum disorders), as well as on general topics such as the impact of trauma, will help prepare them to succeed when they get a placement.

## **Share suggested resources—reading lists, videos, webinars, etc.**

Help prospective parents continue building their knowledge about parenting children who have experienced trauma, specific special needs, and other relevant topics by regularly sharing resources with them. If you have an online format for supporting families (such as a Facebook support group), consider organizing an online event like a virtual book club discussion.

## **Encourage prospective parents to develop their support network**

Help prospects identify helpful services and groups to connect with in their community and information for them to discuss with their family and friends. Work with them to find people in their lives who can provide support, such as respite, child care, and transportation to appointments.

Implementing the strategies above will help you support families while they are waiting to have a child placed with them, but families need support throughout their whole journey—from initial inquiry and throughout their placement. As you provide while-you-wait support

for families, be sure to connect your efforts to other forms of support for families throughout the continuum. For more information about supporting families throughout their journey, see our tip sheet, *Integrating Family Support from Inquiry Throughout Placement*, on [adoptuskids.org/professionals](https://adoptuskids.org/professionals).

If you want help developing your support services for adoptive, foster, and kinship families, we can help. Contact us at [consultation@adoptuskids.org](mailto:consultation@adoptuskids.org).



*AdoptUSKids is operated by the Adoption Exchange Association and is made possible by grant number 90CO113 from the Children's Bureau. The contents of this resource are solely the responsibility of the Adoption Exchange Association and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau, ACYF, ACF, or HHS.*

