

A Family For Every Child Matching Assistance



*"We should not be asking who this child belongs to,
but who belongs to this child."*

Helping Your Child Transition

After you are matched with a child it is normal to want your child to move in as soon as possible. It is likely you have waited months, if not years, for this day, so this reaction is understandable. However, it is so important that your child make a smooth transition from their foster family into your family. A proper transition allows the child to have closure with their "old" family, and to begin to feel comfortable with their "new" family (you). Transitions also have an impact on the child's behavior and their relationships: good transitions help predict better outcomes later when it comes to their behaviors and their relationships. It may be tempting to want your child to move in to your home right away, but remember that you have your whole life to spend with your child. Take the time necessary to make sure your child adjusts and feels comfortable with the changes that are taking place. It's not about you, but it's about the child and what is best for them.



The First Meeting

Before you meet with your child, talk to your adoption worker, the child's caseworker, and their foster parent(s) if possible to create a transition schedule. This schedule will outline the transition timeline: when visits will occur, how long each visit will be, where the visits will take place, and who will be present. Make the transition plan with the child's needs in mind. This will ensure that everyone is on the same page, and make for a smoother transition.

Ideally, the first visit will take place in the foster parent's home. This is likely where the child will feel the most comfortable, and it will give you an opportunity to see how they are in a home environment. Ask the child to show you their room, play area, toys, etc. If you cannot meet in the foster parent's home for whatever reason, pick a location that the child is familiar with so they will be comfortable. Including the foster parents can help the child feel more comfortable with you, because his/her foster parents are comfortable. During this visit take the time to talk to the foster parent about the child. Learn about their behaviors, effective discipline and re-direction strategies, what soothes the child when they're upset, what triggers certain behaviors, how they get along with others, what are their likes/dislikes/interests/hobbies, etc. If possible, arrange for 2 more visits in the foster home. The number of visits will depend on the child's needs, and also where you, the adoptive

parent, live in relation to the child.

After you have completed a couple visits in the child's current foster home, set up the next meeting for a place outside the foster home that is relaxed, and where the child will feel comfortable. For example, meet at a favorite park or restaurant. Ideally, you will have a couple more visits in an out-of-home environment to get to know the child better. Again, the number of visits will depend on the child's needs and your proximity to their home.



New Home Visit

If the child lives nearby, aim for 3 one-day visits at your home for 4-6 hours within a one week period. For the first visit, have the foster parent stay for about 15 minutes before they leave. The amount of time the foster parent stays can be adjusted depending on how the child is doing; if they are in distress have the foster parent stay longer. During these first 3 visits, have the foster parent bring the child and pick them up. Try and repeat these one-day visits at least two more times, only this time you (the adoptive parent) will pick the child up from their foster home and bring them back at the end of the visit. Again, the number of visits may vary depending on the child's needs and how they are coping with the transition.



Overnight Visits

The first overnight visit should happen **only after** the has completed the one-day visits in your home. You want the child to be comfortable in your home for a few hours at a time before jumping into an overnight visit. The first overnight visit should happen when you will be home the next day. For example, the first overnight visit should be on a Friday night. Eventually, the child should stay for several days in a row before returning to his/her foster home. The duration of this phase should all depend on the child's comfort level, and also your proximity to the child. If the child is visiting from out of state or across the state, their first overnight visit may be several days long.

It's important to keep in mind during the entire transition phase that while your child may seem like they are adjusting well, they may be in the "honeymoon" phase. You may be tempted to rush the transition along thinking they are completely adjusted, but this is likely not the case.



Out-of-State Placements

If you are adopting a child from another state, the transition phase may look a little different for your family. However, it is still very important that the transition timeline is in the **best interest of the child**. Keep in mind that the smoother the transition and the more comfortable your child is, the better they will adjust. Once your child is told that you will be adopting him/her, send their caseworker a family video to share with the child. A family

video can help ease some of the anxiety a child may be feeling. Unlike pictures in a Welcome Book, a video allows the child to hear your voice, witness your personality, and get to know you and their new home on a more personal level. Make sure that only the people living in the home are in the video; a child may be overwhelmed if the video is full of relatives and friends. Before and after visits, be sure to have as many phone calls or video chats with the child as possible. Talking with your child over Skype or FaceTime can take some of the awkwardness and anxiety out of the conversation. With out of state placements you have to wait even longer before the child can come visit or move into your home, but this is an excellent opportunity to get to know your child and for them to get to know you.



Things to Consider

Common Reactions:

Remember that "abnormal" is actually normal. Your child may act out, withdraw, seek out inappropriate or negative attention, act angry towards everyone, or keep their feelings and emotions to themselves. You may see behaviors that the foster parent has never seen due to the child's emotions surrounding the transition. Your child may struggle with their feelings and may feel "mixed up". Assure them that these feelings are completely normal, and that it is possible and acceptable to love more than one person at a time. Give examples from your own life - how you love your partner, family members, your child(ren), etc. all at once.

Transition Timeline:

A transition requires time and patience. Rushing a child's transition or severing ties with a supportive foster family too soon can harm the child and impact their ability to form relationships with you and others later in life.

Changing a Child's Name:

The most important thing to remember when it comes to changing a child's name is that they **must** be involved in that decision. Their name is part of their identity. If your child is adamant that they don't want to change their name, respect their decision. If they are open to changing their name, consider making their name a middle name. This way they still get to keep that part of their identity. If the child is open to changing their name entirely and do not want to keep their old name, add their new name to their old name for awhile to help them adjust. For example, if their name is Jonathan and you both decide that he will be called Christopher, call him Jonathan-Christopher for a little while to help him get used to his new name.



Post-Placement

From the second your child walks in the door, you will want to treat them as though they are

part of the family. It may be tempting to treat them as a "guest" at first while they adjust, but this will only create problems later on. Instead, teach them the rules, talk about what chores you expect them to do, give them their own place at the table, their own drawer in the bathroom, etc. Some of these can be over the course of a few days; you don't have to sit them down right away with a long list of house rules and pile on chores. But make your expectations of them clear from the beginning.

After your child is placed permanently in your home and is not returning to their foster home, seek out joint therapy for you and your child. This will show them that you are committed to helping them heal and that you care for them.

You may also want to consider letting your child keep in touch with their former foster family if they are struggling with the transition, especially if their foster family has been supportive. Keep in touch with your child's foster family for as long as possible. If your child's foster parent is unwilling or unable to remain in contact with the child, be sure to help your child understand that he/she was not abandoned, their foster parent still loves them, and that he/she did nothing wrong.

Finally, do not try and erase your child's past. If your child has pictures of their biological parents or family, let them display them in their room. Allow your child to keep their "old" belongings, even if they have new clothes, toys, and blankets. These objects may be part of their identity, and they should be able to choose if and when they let them go.



Resources

Adoptive Families - [The Truth About Older Child Adoption](#)

Adopt Us Kids - [Receiving an Adoptive Placement](#)

Child Welfare Information Gateway - [Helping Your Foster Child Transition Into Your Adopted Child](#)

EMK Press - [Adoption Lifebooks: Do's and Don'ts](#)

GACRS - [Transition Guidelines Webinar](#) (free!)

IFAPA - [Free Lifebook Pages](#)

[I Miss My Foster Parents](#) by Stefan Herbert

OCWTP - [Normal Phases of the Pre-Finalization Phase](#)

[Real Parents, Real Children](#) by Holly van Gulden and Lisa M. Bartels-Rabb

[Telling the Truth to Your Foster or Adopted Child](#) by Betsy Keefer and Jayne E. Schooler

[When Love is Not Enough](#) by Nancy Thomas

