

FAMILIES FOR TEENS: A TOOLKIT FOR FOCUSING, EDUCATING AND MOTIVATING STAFF

By Robert G. Lewis and Maureen S. Heffernan

Published first in 2006 and revised in 2008, this Toolkit is a curriculum for staff training on achieving permanence for older children in care.

To begin discussion of each topic, Lewis and Heffernan adapt an issue of Bob Lewis' popular newsletter for child welfare professionals, *What Do You Think?* They then present a case study and pose questions for more in depth consideration of the topic. The authors' goal is to move child welfare workers from understanding to "doing." Thus, in the case studies and questions, they emphasize practical action steps to achieve permanence. Each section concludes by asking participants to list their next action steps. The study of each of the 41 topics is designed to be completed within the time-frame of the one-hour staff meeting.

Chapter 1, *Families for Teens: An Introduction*, discusses these topics:

- The Challenge of Working for Permanence for Teens
- What Makes Permanency Work So Difficult?
- Getting Started?
- On-going Support for Staff
- Overview of *Families for Teens*

Chapter 2, *Key Concepts*, covers these topics:

- Keeping the Promise
- What are Families For, Anyway?
- What Does Permanence Look Like for Teens
- Dynamics of Adolescent-Family Involvement and Adoption
- Issues Teens Need to Address

Unit 1, *Believing that Teens Really Need and Can Have Families*, covers these topics:

- Imagine Permanence Being as Intuitive as Safety
- What Makes Adoption So Hard to Say?
- The Label "Unadoptable" Needs to be Lifted From All Our Children
- Belief is Transformative
- Do We Really Want "Aftercare"?
- Focusing on Permanence for Adolescents will Achieve It
- A Placement is Not Permanent
- Families Provide "Social Capital"
- Independent Living Starts with Family Connections

Unit 2, *Understanding the Process of Making Permanence*

Happen for Teens, covers these topics:

Interpreting the Adoption and Safe Families Act
Making Permanence What We Do
What Does It Take?
No Youth is a Family Connection Write-off
The Power of Our Secrets
When Our Judgments and Feelings Poison Adoption
The Three Steps in Adoption
Brothers and Sisters

Unit 3, *Working With Teens' Feelings*, covers these topics:

The Shame in Foster Care
Children Need Their Own Stories
We Can't Make Their Losses Go Away
Teens Have a Right to Their Anger
Finding Strengths in the Guise of Weakness
What About Belong for Youth Who are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender,
or Questioning?

Unit 4, *Exploring Shared Parenting*, covers these topics:

All Parenting is Shared
All Parents are Resources
The Challenge of Shared Parenting
Adoption is Shared Parenting
Rethinking Concurrent Planning
Re-valuing Foster Parenting

Unit 5, *Talking With Teens About Permanency*, covers these topics:

Does Permanency Mean Forcing Adoption on Every 18 Year Old?
Does Bringing up Adoption Set Teens Up for More Rejection?
Of Course They Say "No"
A Teen's "NO!" Means a Host of Things
Who do YOU Want at Your Next Employee Review?
Preparing Teens for Family (Re)Connections

Unit 6, *Finding Families for Teens*, covers these topics:

"Unparenting"
Working with Teens to Find Families
The Best Recruitment for Teens is Completely Child Specific
Permanency is More Mending than Making
Using Holidays and Boundaries to Advance Permanency
Kin Adoption

The volume concludes with a bibliography and list of online resources, as well as descriptions of Lewis' and Heffernan's other curricula, **Adolescents and Families for Life**, and the **Family Bound Program** (Lewis and Communities For People).