



Common Fears Children in Foster Care Have About Being Adopted

When youth in foster care are asked whether they want to be adopted, professionals should expect to hear “no.” These young people have experienced many layers of trauma in their lives, and it is reasonable that they would be hesitant to trust another adult and an unknown future. They may also have already experienced a failed adoption.

Instead of halting recruitment efforts at an initial “no,” professionals working with the youth should assist them in unpacking their adoption fears. Most importantly, it is essential to explain what adoption is and what it could look like so that they can make an informed decision. Additionally, it is important to understand the youth’s specific concerns to see if they can be mitigated through a recruitment process that is tailored to them. These actions empower the youth in their future and provide a better chance of happiness and long-term stability.

Having these essential conversations with children waiting in foster care is an important part of the child-focused recruitment model used by Wendy’s Wonderful Kids® (WWK) adoption recruiters. Through the WWK program, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption supports the hiring of adoption professionals, known as recruiters, who are dedicated to finding permanent families for children in foster care in the United States and Canada who are most often overlooked.

Following are the seven most common fears about adoption that WWK recruiters hear, as well as strategies to work through youths’ concerns in a manner that addresses these fears and affirms their voice in the recruitment process.



Dave Thomas
Foundation
for Adoption®

Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

1 Leaving Community and Friends

Often, youth in foster care have lived in multiple homes throughout their lives, which creates a longing for stability. The thought of having to move again can be exhausting. WWK recruiters work to help children and youth realize that location is not stability and explore ways they can stay in touch with connections from their past placements.

STRATEGIES:

- Recruit a permanent family within the youth's current school or community
- Collect the contact information of all important connections
- Ensure that the new family is willing to embrace former connections
- Encourage the new family to attend events with the youth in their former and current communities
- Invite old connections to the youth's new home or community
- Ask the youth what is important about their current school or community, and try to recreate this in their new school or community
- Familiarize the youth with their new school or community

2 Rejecting Family of Origin

While youth may be grateful for their new family, they also may feel love and loss for their family of origin. Regardless of why a youth was placed into foster care, many feel that accepting their place within a new family means rejecting their family of origin completely.

STRATEGIES:

- Express the importance of the family of origin with the youth's new family
- Help youth gain permission/acceptance from the family of origin to move forward with adoption, if possible
- Explain that a new family is not meant to replace their family of origin
- Explore ways for the youth to maintain contact with their family of origin, if safe and appropriate
- Ask the team to revisit the family of origin – including distant relatives and relatives who previously could not take placement, but may be in a different position now – to determine whether there is an appropriate placement

3 Changing Identity

Identity formation begins in childhood and moves to the forefront in the teenage years. Keeping in mind that the average age of the focus population served by WWK is 14 and that adoption-related identity issues start to increase at age 12, it is understandable why a youth would not want to let go of this part of themselves. The youth's last name may be the only piece they have left of their family of origin.

STRATEGIES:

- Hyphenate their last name
- Make their family of origin's last name their middle name
- Keep their last name as-is
- Recruit a permanent family that supports the youth's input on choosing their name

4 Being Unwanted

It is no secret that youth in foster care have often moved from house to house, which leads to an overall sense of not feeling good enough and unwanted. This leads to low self-esteem and concerns about how they may be viewed by others.

STRATEGIES:

- Understand that feeling unwanted may continue to be an underlying concern until a permanent family is identified
- Discuss with the youth why they hold this belief, and explore their response
- Ask the youth what they like about themselves
- Help the youth to see their strengths and positive attributes
- Affirm that a family is waiting for the youth that just hasn't been found yet

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Fearing the Unknown

Fear of the unknown is a universal fear for youth and adults alike. Asking someone to be open to the idea of permanently becoming part of a family that has not yet been identified can be overwhelming. Often, youth do not feel they can truly answer this question until they know to whom they are saying “yes.”

STRATEGIES:

- Validate that change is scary
- Assure the youth that their voice will be heard and that they will be involved in the process
- Empower the youth to take an active role in decision making
- Ask the youth about a time they tried something new, and it worked out well
- Discuss situations the youth is concerned about and how they could work through them if they happened
- Help the youth become more familiar with the placement by sharing information about the new family and community in which they would live

6

Having New Rules and Expectations

Entering a new home with new rules can be scary. Not knowing the consequences of broken rules can be scarier, especially when youth have experienced trauma. Collaboration between the youth, family and child welfare professionals is important so that everyone’s concerns can be addressed.

STRATEGIES:

- Understand which rules or expectations may feel worrisome to the youth
- Encourage the youth and family to establish rules together
- Urge the youth and family to determine consequences together for not following rules
- Assist the family in discussing expectations that are negotiable vs. non-negotiable

7

Protecting Safety and Wellbeing

Safety and wellbeing are always a priority. However, not everyone’s idea of feeling safe and happy is the same. Having a plan in place to nurture and protect the youth’s safety and wellbeing is a best practice to give them peace of mind.

STRATEGIES:

- Explore what safety and wellbeing look like for the youth
- Make a list with the youth about what makes them feel safe and comfortable and share it with the new family
- Give the youth the contact information of people who make them feel safe and comfortable



“

I remember when I thought I was too old to be adopted and that nobody wanted me,” recalls Taye. **“I couldn’t really think of my future ... I just wanted to get through the day.**

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CALL TO ACTION

It is important that adoption professionals are equipped to have permanency conversations with youth, whether it's a custodial worker responsible for the youth's case management, a therapist providing therapeutic services, a legal representative recommending whether adoption is in the youth's best interest or an adoption recruiter charged with finding a safe, permanent family for the youth. **No matter your role in a youth's case, the following are some actions to consider:**

- Ask youth their thoughts on adoption on multiple occasions throughout their case, as their ideas about adoption may change
- Ask youth which adults are important to them and have their recruitment team revisit these adults as permanent placement options or invite them to be members of the child's recruitment team
- Refer youth to receive specialized recruitment services, like Wendy's Wonderful Kids, even when youth express hesitancy to being adopted. WWK recruiters have the time to work through adoption fears and find the right family for the youth
- Challenge efforts that halt recruitment or those that give the youth a case plan goal that keeps them in long-term foster care

Learn More

Watch *Youth Voices: Life After Foster Care* at:
davethomasfoundation.org/youthvoices



thank you

for helping to achieve the vision that every child will have a permanent home and a loving family.



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