



Post-Adoption Needs and Services

3 of 3

This brief series of publications, *Post-Adoption Needs and Services*, provides a summary of the service-related data collected by researchers through the California Adoption Study. This Study examined the experiences of families who adopted foster children through the California Department of Social Services. The initial mailed survey gathered information from 1,148 families of adopted children ages 19 and under. All families in the study had adopted special-needs foster children who met the criteria for Adoption Assistance funding (AAP). Participants were asked to identify the post-adoptive services that they had received, the services that were most helpful, and any additional services they felt would benefit their families.

What additional post-adoption services would help your family?

Forty-four percent of participating families did not respond to this question, suggesting either that they were not in need of post-adoptive services or that the services they received were adequate. An additional 13% of the participants specifically answered that they needed no additional services. One adoptive parent commented, “we got all the services we needed. We were able to find a highly qualified therapist in our community to treat our son. He is progressing well and we are very happy he is a member of our family.” Another shared, “We are very satisfied with everything regarding our adoption. We don’t think there is anything more they could have done.” An additional parent praised, “We were treated well and had help if we needed it.”

Forty-three percent of adoptive parents however believe that more services should be made available and/or existing services could be improved. Adoptive parents suggested increasing particular services as well as making them more accessible to families. The most common comments focus on an increase and/or improvement in the service areas of *respite care, support groups, and financial assistance*.

Respite Care

- “It would have been wonderful to have in-home respite. I have never sent my son away. I believe that would be too traumatic for him. But, there have been times when my husband and I really needed a break from caring for him and we could not just leave him with anyone. It would have been very helpful to have a trained worker to come in once a week and care for him – to deal with his violence and angry outbursts for a few hours. A normal babysitter could not handle him.”
- “Respite is a service I am not aware is available. Many adoptive families need help in this area especially in the beginning. These children are very needy and can wear down parents quickly if support is not in-place to provide respite.”

Support Groups

- “Another thing that would have been very helpful is a support group where we could be with other couples/families who adopted children with similar backgrounds/problems. Just have someone else in our boat to share things with occasionally, over coffee or in another informal setting.”
- “Adopted children [need] support groups so they will know they are not the only ones.”

Financial/Medical Coverage

- “It would have helped very much if they would have been able to continue the AAP and MediCal after she turned 18 in January 2004 until she graduated from high school in June 2004 as our expenses still continue – they don’t stop because she’s 18.”
- “Orthodontic care. We have to pay for all 4 of our grandchildren to have proper orthodontic care. All need braces.”
- “There has to be some relief with medical expenses. My son’s glasses cost \$300 and it is difficult to find a provider to bill MediCal. He needs a root canal - \$750 – which we are paying out-of-pocket. We want our son to have quality medical care.”

Implications: The fact that a majority of the sample did not indicate a need for additional services implies that the current level of services is adequate for most families. However, the 43% of families that did suggest service improvements might represent families who adopted children with higher levels of special needs. For these families, post adoption services could be the difference between adoption success and failure.

Respite care and support groups appear to be available to some families and not to others. This might be a factor of families’ geographic proximity to resources, or reflect a problem of service information dissemination.

Financial assistance for basic care and special needs is an essential service to adoptive families and the impact of termination of funding at age 18, without consideration of the child’s educational level, appears to create a hardship on families with children who are academically behind their peers.

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