Practice Tips for Child Welfare Workers

Instructional Guide (Chapter VI)

A review of the literature (Chapter III), interviews with foster children (Chapter IV), and focus groups with adolescent foster youth (Chapter V) informed the development of practice tips for child welfare workers. These practice tips are designed to help child welfare workers improve the quality of care provided to children and their caregivers. Practice tips are presented, as well as children’s verbatim responses to open-ended questions asked during in-person interviews.

For additional guidance, the reader may also want to consult clinical resources and materials generated by advocacy groups (cited in the Bibliography).

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This chapter can be used to foster the following competencies for public child welfare work: 1.1, 1.5, 1.13, 2.6, 2.9, 2.10, 2.12, 2.14, 2.15, 2.17, 3.1, 3.6, 3.13, 3.19, 3.24, 4.1, 4.5, 5.1, 5.3, 5.6, 5.7, and 5.9.
Prior to developing a relationship with a child, develop an independent relationship with the child’s caregiver(s).

- Prior to your initial visit with a caregiver, clearly communicate the purpose and expected length of your visit.
- Expect that caregivers who are unfamiliar with the child welfare system -- many of whom may be kinship caregivers -- are likely to need additional time during your initial visit to the home.
- Arrive on time.
- Remember that you are a guest in the caregiver’s home.
- Take time to build rapport with caregivers before “getting down to business.”
- Spend one-on-one time together.
- Make sure that discussions of sensitive issues occur in private spaces (i.e. spaces that are beyond children’s earshot).
- Clarify your professional role(s) and responsibilities.
- Let caregivers know what they can expect from you in terms of communication.
- Carefully explain policies and practices involving confidentiality.
- Consistently communicate positive regard and expectations.
- Provide lists of community resources (e.g. numbers for emergencies, respite care, support groups/associations, parenting classes, day care centers, educational programs, mentoring programs, recreational programs, and summer camps).
- Offer other concrete forms of support (e.g. detailed explanations of how caregivers can access community resources, periodic assistance with completion of paperwork pertaining to the children in their care, and periodic assistance with daily tasks).
- Return phone calls in a timely manner.
- Don’t make promises that cannot be kept.
- Follow through with promised services.
- Regularly express appreciation to caregivers for their efforts and specific accomplishments.
Model appropriate, positive interactions with children.

- Get down to children’s physical level before you talk with them.
- Spend one-on-one time together; take at least a few minutes to play, eat snacks, talk, assist with homework, or go on outings before discussing more serious matters.
- Encourage children to take responsibility for their behaviors.
- Positively reinforce desired behaviors.
- Regularly compliment children.

During your initial visit with children, clarify your professional role(s) and responsibilities.

- Challenge yourself to identify your most important professional role(s) and responsibilities in a developmentally appropriate manner. Complete organizationally sanctioned tasks, but simultaneously maintain attention to individual children’s needs.
- Give children your full name and tell them your professional title – social worker.
- Clearly distinguish your responsibilities from those assigned to police, judges, lawyers, and mental health therapists.
- Assist children so they may develop an adequate understanding of why you play the multiple roles that they inevitably perceive -- police person to assure children’s safety, enabler for reunification and/or movement to a permanent placement, special friend to children, special friend to caregivers, and agent of the court.
- Clearly communicate the limits of your role (and power).
- Make sure children know that you are available to help during times of difficulty. Even children in kinship care -- many of whom may not know they are part of the child welfare system -- should be aware of their social worker’s role as a helper during times of need.

Spend one-on-one time with children as a way of conveying genuine interest and beginning the process of building mutual trust.

- Advocate for reduced caseloads, thus allowing you to develop long-term relationships with children during their tenure in the system.
- Know that it may take more time to build trust with older children, children whose racial/ethnic background is different from yours, children who have experienced ineffective and/or multiple social workers, and children who are generally struggling with their ability to establish positive relationships with adults.
- If time is limited, phone calls, letters, cards, and postcards may serve as valuable substitutes for in-person meetings.
Let children know what they can expect from you in terms of communication.

- Give children realistic information about the frequency of your visits.
- Let children know that they have the right to call you.
- Give children your business card so they know how to contact you.
- Provide examples of situations when children should call you.
- Describe instances when you will respond immediately, as well as instances when you are likely to respond more slowly.
- Encourage children to leave messages if you are unavailable.

Terminate relationships with care and skill.

- Give children and their caregivers sufficient notice.
- Be clear that you will not be involved with the family any longer.
- Answer all questions as accurately as possible and respond sensitively to affect.
- Reflect on shared experiences and lessons learned.
- In most cases, your final good-byes should be in person.
- If another social worker will be taking your place, personally introduce the new social worker to the family as a way of easing the transition. Alternatively, give the family some information about the new social worker and his/her business card.

Thirteen-year-old Jessica had lived with her aunt for eight years and experienced five different workers. She considered Shirley, the social worker with whom she worked for the longest period of time, as her best since they could “talk about anything.” During their last visit, Shirley told Jessica that she would be leaving and brought the new worker, Helen. Jessica reported feeling sad when she said “good bye” to Shirley, but since Shirley reported liking Helen, Jessica felt confident that she would, too.

Ms. Johnson told us about Bernice, the social worker with whom she worked since her granddaughter was a baby. When Bernice retired, she sent Ms. Johnson and Maya a note informing them of her retirement. She also sent them their new social worker’s business card.

Roger said that he doesn’t know who his social worker is anymore. He said that he has had many social workers who never stick around long enough so he no longer bothers to get to know them. He relies on his aunt to keep track of their appointments, and when his social worker leaves his home, he doesn’t say goodbye because he doesn’t care.
IN WHAT WAYS HAS YOUR SOCIAL WORKER BEEN HELPFUL TO YOU?

Every Monday she takes me to the library, she takes me shopping, and she came to my graduation (age 13, kin).

She takes me places like Marine World and gives me things for my birthday (age 8, non-kin).

She talked to me and asks me how things are for me (age 8, non-kin).

She helped me because she came to my school and talked to my teacher (age 7, kin).

Makes me stay out of trouble. They help me with problems (age 11, non-kin).

She takes me places. She makes sure I get to see my mom, I have what I need, that I’m happy. She’s very nice (age 10, non-kin).

One social worker would let you call, and when you did, she would come out the next day. The rest of them would take a long time to get back (age 14, non-kin).

She helps my mommy learn to take care of us better (age 8, non-kin).

She let me go camping to a place called Opportunity Camp for a week (age 11, kin).

She gave me a number to call her and answers my questions (age 9, non-kin).

Telling my mom not to whip me with no belt (age 10, non-kin).

My social worker helps me cool down when I get really angry (age 9, kin).

She helps me solve my problems, talks to me, give me stickers, gives me money, plays video games with me, talks to my grandma a lot (age 10, kin).

She takes care of things when I have a problem. She plays with me and always answers my questions (age 10, kin).

They ask questions. He said if I need help, I could call (age 14, kin).

Social workers took us places like the zoo. They came over and talked about things often (age 13, kin).

She’s concerned about my schoolwork, my report card, and what’s happening in my household (age 12, kin).

She tells me to tell the truth and to stop writing on the walls (age 6, kin).

She explained to me why I don’t live with my mommy (age 13, non-kin).
IN WHAT WAYS HAS YOUR SOCIAL WORKER NOT BEEN HELPFUL TO YOU?

She took me to my mean old auntie’s house where I used to live in the garage (age 8, non-kin).

When you really need them and call them and leave messages for them, and they still don’t call you back (age 14, non-kin).

She asks me questions when I don’t want to answer (age 8, non-kin).

One doesn’t really talk to me (age 13, kin).

Sometimes she is boring (age 9, non-kin).

He brought his own kids once to our house. He is also always late, and he makes promises he doesn’t keep (age 14, non-kin).

She asks me questions I don’t like (age 10, kin).

They told me what to say (age 11, non-kin).

Seems like my social worker now doesn’t really care (age 13, kin).

Never gave me a letter to help me go see my dad in jail (age 13, kin).

She should help me more in finding my real sisters and father (age 13, non-kin).

Not calling or keeping in touch (age 13, kin).
PRACTICE TIPS FOR PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM HARM

Develop a relationship built on trust so children will disclose situations that make them feel unsafe at home, during birth parent visits, at school, and in their neighborhoods. One way to do this is to clearly explain policies and practices involving confidentiality.

- Give children a clear understanding of what the right to confidentiality means and why it exists in your relationship.
- Be clear that confidentiality is one-way; social workers must respect the confidentiality of conversations, while children are free to talk to whomever they want about any matter.
- Carefully describe instances when confidentiality must be broken.
- If you need to break confidentiality, remind the child that you had previously discussed exceptions to the rule and that these exceptions are necessary to assure the child’s safety.
- Honor confidentiality without hindering collaboration with other involved professionals.
- When in doubt about situations involving confidentiality, consult with colleagues and/or a supervisor without disclosing the child’s name.

Maintain awareness that children in out-of-home care are frequently questioned about sensitive matters. It is not uncommon for children to perceive questioning as confusing, frightening, invasive, insensitive, and/or mean-spirited.

Voice of “Angel” in Orphans of the Living, p. 176, responding to the author’s question, “The people who asked you the questions – did you feel like they were there to help you?”

I think that they is nosy. I think they perverts, and they get off listening to it… I didn’t like it at all. I thought they were nasty people who wanted to hear it over and over so they could criticize me like a judge… When I think about it now, I think it’s not what happened that messes you up. It’s just all the time you’re questioned. First you’re questioned by your parents, then you’re questioned by police, then you’re questioned by the judge, then you’re questioned by the doctors and the judge. That’s what makes kids angry.

Respect children’s privacy.

- If possible, allow a relationship of mutual trust to develop prior to asking sensitive questions.
- Don’t ask sensitive questions that aren’t necessary for your work together.
- Challenge yourself to be clear about the reasons for your questions.

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• Communicate those reasons to the child who you are questioning.

• Check in with children to determine their level of comfort during the beginning, middle, and end of your questioning.

• Whenever possible, give children choices about the content of your discussions as a way of promoting children’s feelings of control. Most important, communicate their “right to pass” on questions.

• Reflect back feelings with care and accuracy.

• Answer questions thoroughly and with sufficient detail.

Provide extra support to families living in chronically violent neighborhoods.

• Acknowledge some of the extra difficulties that caregivers often experience when trying to provide positive care for the children in their homes.

• Coach caregivers on ways to supervise the children in their care more closely.

• Encourage caregivers to identify “safe homes” in the neighborhood where children can go if their caregivers are unavailable.

• Help children and caregivers identify safe recreational spaces – both in and outside their immediate neighborhood.

Advocate for systemic changes:

• Increased recruitment, screening, training, and supervision of caregivers.

• Increased social worker training on recognizing signs of abuse.

• Increased social services.

• Physical maintenance of neighborhoods.

• Safe recreational spaces in neighborhoods.

• Active, responsible police forces.

• Gun control laws.

• School- and/or community-based efforts to curb interpersonal violence.
IF YOU WERE IN CHARGE, WHAT IS ONE THING
YOU WOULD CHANGE AROUND HERE TO KEEP KIDS SAFE?

Don’t open the door to strangers. I’m in charge sometimes, and I tell my cousins to come get me if they need anything (age 10, kin).

Have better schools so kids don’t use drugs (age 11, kin).

Do not go out on the street. Stay away from kids who want to get into fights (age 11, kin).

Make a park for kids to go to (age 13, kin).

I would say “no more fighting” (age 9, non-kin).

Don’t go out of the house without a grownup’s permission (age 7, kin).

Don’t go outside. One hour of TV and then bed. They watch violence on TV (age 13, kin).

Lock the doors and windows. Lock everything. Put the dog in the house. Also keep the phone next to me (age 10, kin).

I’d have a big house where everyone could fit and have lots of police guard them (age 11, kin).

Don’t go into the street without anyone (age 7, kin).

Keep them out of this bad neighborhood. Keep kids away from drugs and guns (age 14, kin).

If someone tries to kill me, I’ll kill them back. I will try and protect kids and not let them climb over the fence (age 7, kin).

The kids wouldn’t be able to go outside. Put all three locks on the door (age 11, kin).

I would make a lot of rules. Stay close to the house. Go to the park, but nowhere else far (age 10, kin).

Put an alarm on the door or the window so no one breaks in (age 10, kin).

Get the boys off the corner cuz all they do is sell drugs (age 13, kin).

Give kids a decent time to be in. Make them use a helmet when riding bikes (age 12, kin).

Add rules. Everyone would have to listen to everything I say (age 11, kin).
PRACTICE TIPS FOR FOSTERING CHILDREN’S WELL-BEING

Consider children’s removal from their parents’ homes as a severe crisis bearing heavily on children’s short- and long-term well-being. Attend to children’s individual needs to the greatest extent possible.

- When interviewing children, particularly in relatively public settings such as schools, strive to protect children’s privacy and make the event as non-stigmatizing as possible.
- When escorting children in a police car from their home, a relative’s home, school, or community center, do so as discretely as possible.
- Quickly identify children’s understandings of why they were removed from their birth parent’s home. If needed, provide more thorough and/or accurate explanations.
- Make sure that children do not blame themselves for the event.
- Make sure that children do not have unrealistic ideas about the degree to which they can influence future reunification.
- Consult clinical resources for specific guidance on communicating with children about the circumstances surrounding their removal.

Consider potentially difficult events as critical opportunities for workers to promote healthy coping strategies and overall adjustment. Make efforts to prepare children for occasions when they may feel particularly vulnerable:

- Transitions to new homes, schools, communities, and cities.
- Visits with birth parents, siblings, relatives, or former foster family members.
- Traditional celebratory times that may evoke memories of life with birth parents (e.g. birthdays, Mother’s Day, Father’s Day, and other major holidays).
- Anniversaries of events associated with children’s removal from their birth parents’ homes (e.g. the actual removal day, the day when they learned that their parents’ rights had been terminated, and the day when they moved into a pre-adoptive home).
- Anniversaries of significant losses -- deaths, in particular.

Help caregivers attend to children’s overall well-being in a timely manner.

- Facilitate timely foster care payments to ensure children’s needs are being met without jeopardizing the family’s financial resources.
• Assist caregivers in quickly assessing children’s physical, cognitive, and social-emotional development. Identify children’s individual strengths and specific needs.

• Assist caregivers in identifying school- and/or community-based resources that might assist them in meeting children’s needs. Locate programs providing medical, psychological, educational, extracurricular, and/or recreational services.

• Assist caregivers in accessing affordable services (e.g. acquiring relevant phone numbers, completing necessary paperwork, and identifying transportation options).

Consult with children, caregivers, teachers, school administrators, and social service personnel on ways to facilitate foster children’s educational achievement.

• Advocate for continuous school placements (when appropriate).

• When a child moves to a different school and/or district, facilitate rapid transfer of paperwork – including cumulative files and, in some cases, special education files.

• Advise schools to maintain regular contact with caregivers, even though the child’s tenure in a particular school may be unknown.

• Assist caregivers in quickly identifying children’s educational needs, providing sensitive educational support at home, acquiring phone numbers for school personnel, collaborating with teachers, and advocating for necessary educational services.

• Assist children in coping with the social awkwardness that sometimes accompanies foster care placement and possible stigmatization; help children assert their privacy and/or develop a short public explanation that they can provide for why they do not live with their birth family.

Promote continuity in relationships.

• Identify at least one adult who has provided positive emotional support for a particular child. Make considerable efforts to help the child stay regularly engaged with that adult.

• When appropriate, encourage caregivers to facilitate contact between children and individuals that children miss from previous homes, schools, and/or communities.

• Encourage caregivers to honor the personal possessions that children bring into their new homes, particularly items that were given to them by persons who are significant to them.

Assist caregivers in nurturing positive future expectations for the children in their care.

Eleven-year-old Janelle said that she wants to attend Morehouse College and then become a doctor. Her grandmother appears to have helped shape Janelle’s future expectations: “My mama told me that I’ll be good at whatever I decide to do. I can do whatever I put my mind to.” Later, Janelle’s grandmother brought out Janelle’s certificates and report cards. She also showed us an article written for a local paper about grandmothers as foster parents.
IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE THAT YOU THINK I SHOULD KNOW ABOUT WHAT IT’S LIKE FOR CHILDREN WHO LIVE SEPARATE FROM THEIR BIRTH MOTHER?

It’s sad. It’s not fun. You cry sometimes. You miss them a lot. You want to be with them everyday (age 11, kin).

It is sometimes difficult to be around someone you don’t know (age 8, non-kin).

They will feel sad. They will be thinking about them. They can keep calling the social worker until they can visit their parents (age 12, non-kin).

It’s scary, and you don’t know what’s gonna happen (age 10, non-kin).

They’re hurting inside (age 8, non-kin).

Stay positive. Listen to your foster parents and be thankful for them because your real parents couldn’t do it (age 10, non-kin).

Sometimes it can be sad, but sometimes it can be not sad (age 13, kin).

My mom and dad still come and see me (age 10, kin).

They feel sad, feel bad, and want to go back with their real parents (age 10, kin).

It’s hard because people ask questions like why you don’t live with your mom. I feel embarrassed about telling them (age 13, kin).

They should know how they feel, like sad or happy sometimes like me (age 8, non-kin).

It’s kinda good and kinda bad. I like it here, but I miss my mom sometimes (age 10, non-kin).

It’s hard. You can’t tell a kid what to do or to ask too many questions too soon. Let kids know what is going on. Be honest with kids. Take time to get to know them (age 14, non-kin).

It can be just like living with your parents. They can help you and listen to you (age 13, kin).
PRACTICE TIPS FOR BOLSTERING FAMILY CONTINUITY

Assist children in acquiring information about their birth families.

- Let children know the names and whereabouts of their birth parents, biological siblings, and other relatives.
- Inform children about their biological siblings’ case plans and pending placement changes, particularly adoption proceedings.
- Consult clinical resources for strategies to preserve children’s histories (e.g. personal life books and family genograms).

Promote continuity with biological siblings.

- Advocate for family placements that can accommodate large sibling groups.
- Advocate for joint placement of siblings in nearly all instances, except those involving abusive sibling relationships.
- Facilitate contact between non-coresiding siblings, even when wide age discrepancies exist.

Consider child-parent visits as an opportunity that is simultaneously invaluable and risky.

- In determining whether and/or when visits should occur, consider agency/court mandates, the purpose of visits, the age of the child, the nature and chronicity of family problems, previous intervention efforts, parental motivations, child and parent reactions to visits, the level of risk to the child, and the degree of supervision required.
- Include children in decision-making about whether, when, where, and with whom birth parent visits are conducted.

When child-parent visits are appropriate, employ strategies to increase the frequency and probability that these visits will be successful.

- Make sure caregivers have a clear understanding of visitation orders.
- Assist caregivers in developing a positive stance toward birth parents and child-parent visits.
- Assume that visits with birth parents and other relatives will be stressful to children.
- Assist children and their caregivers in preparing for visits.
- Assist children and their caregivers in readjusting following visits.
• Prepare children and their caregivers for subsequent visits, particularly after cancelled and/or unsuccessful visits.

• Consider visits as an important opportunity to directly observe child-parent interactions and ultimately inform case planning.

• If and when conflicts arise between caregivers and birth parents, be prepared to intervene and maintain the relationship on the best terms possible.
WHAT KIND OF PERSON MAKES A GOOD CAREGIVER?

Takes care of you. Feeds you. Gives you a roof over your head. Takes you places, plays games, is nice, and you have fun with them (age 11, kin).

Someone who is happy to take good care of their kids (age 11, kin).

A person who knows how to take care of kids. Feed them, give them good clothes and shelter. Hire a housekeeper if you need to (age 8, non-kin).

Play with you. Don’t get into trouble. Help you get educated (age 11, non-kin).

Make sure kids are healthy and have good vegetables to eat. Someone to make sure kids are clean, good in school, stay off drugs, and don’t stay on the streets (age 10, non-kin).

Nice, sweet person who takes care of you, but someone who is strict who wants you to be the best you can be (age 14, non-kin).

Someone who plays right with their kids (age 9, non-kin).

A person who has respect for children. A person who can help give love, food, clothes, and a roof over your head (age 12, kin).

Someone that loves you (age 13, kin).

Being nice. Making sure your children stay safe (age 11, kin).

They are there for their kids when they need them (age 7, kin).

Someone who looks out for me like my mom. Someone who gives me clean clothes to wear (age 10, kin).

A person who is there for you and interested in what you say and think. Someone who cares about your opinions (age 13, kin).

Someone who treats you fairly. Someone who can discipline and reward you for doing good things (age 11, non-kin).
WHAT KIND OF PERSON MAKES A NOT-SO-GOOD CAREGIVER?

Someone who touches their kid and is mean to them *(age 10, non-kin)*.

Someone who does drugs and doesn’t have a house *(age 8, non-kin)*.

A person who is too strict, hits you, curses at you for no reason *(age 9, kin)*.

Doesn’t feed their baby, makes their kids wear dirty clothes and have sloppy hair, have a bad house, and don’t have no money *(age 10, non-kin)*.

Someone who lets you do whatever you want. Someone who lets you stay at home and skip school *(age 11, non-kin)*.

Not letting them see their brothers and sisters *(age 12, non-kin)*.

A person who does drugs, who throws things at you and fights in front of you *(age 9, kin)*.

Foster homes. Sometimes they might not let you go outside. Sometimes they will. You never know when you can or can’t *(age 7, non-kin)*.

When they run away and leave their kids *(age 7, kin)*.

Real mean, every time you say something, they say no and hit you all the time *(age 10, kin)*.

A person who drinks, uses drugs, beats kids, doesn’t show love. A person who doesn’t do anything for themselves *(age 12, kin)*.

Always fussing over you and gives you whoopings, don’t listen to you *(age 13, kin)*.

Someone who does not care if you go to school or not, care for you, and who does not care if you are out or not *(age 13, kin)*.

A person who is not fair, a person who gives a whipping for no reason *(age 8, kin)*.

A parent that is too busy to talk with their kids or do things with them *(age 10, non-kin)*.
Support caregivers in developing positive relationships with the children in their care.

- Children’s private experience of family may be difficult for them to translate publicly, particularly among peers. Child welfare workers should be keenly aware of this social awkwardness that sometimes accompanies foster care placement and possible stigmatization. Help children and caregivers identify brief explanations that children could disclose publicly, if needed, for why children do not live with their birth families.

- Assume that it will take children a while to identify names for their caregivers that feel comfortable. Children’s self-selected names for calling their new caregivers should be respected.

- Assume that children’s problematic behaviors serve important psychological functions (usually associated with their past experiences).

- Encourage caregivers to take a child-centered view on children’s behavior.

- Consider yourself as a consultant to caregivers who may benefit from opportunities to acquire greater knowledge, skills, objectivity, and/or confidence in working with particular children.

Support caregivers in developing family-like home environments.

- Assist caregivers in developing home environments that are safe, supportive, inclusive, friendly, and open to discussion about children’s concerns.

- Assist caregivers in developing meaningful home routines.

- Assist caregivers in developing rules that are clearly stated, well understood, reasonable, and enforceable on a consistent basis.

- If caregivers have biological children, assist them in treating all children in their home fairly.

- If conflicts arise between children in the home, assist caregivers in addressing these conflicts.

Offer caregivers specific strategies to promote children’s sense of belonging in their homes.

When Daniel first moved into his new home, he and his foster father painted his bedroom and built a sleeping loft together.

Mrs. Evans posts chores on the refrigerator door as visual reminders that children are required to clean their rooms, pick up their toys, help with dishes, and take out the trash.

After the interviewer left the Burnetts’ residence, she noted that the entire household was involved in an outdoor yard project and seemed to be having fun.
Every Sunday evening, Latrice watches a video and eats popcorn with her foster family.

Mrs. Wallace reported that all birthdays are celebrated in her home.

Help children adjust to their new home environments.

- Encourage reflection and discussion about how children’s new “families” are different from previous “families” that they may have had (in terms of race/ethnicity, class, religion, parenting practices, and other potentially salient differences).

- Assist children in understanding their new home’s routines and rules.

- Encourage and possibly role-play ways in which children can communicate directly with their caregivers.

- Encourage and possibly role-play ways in which children can communicate directly with other children in their home.

- Encourage children to take responsibility for their behaviors.
WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT LIVING HERE?

It’s fun because we’re a big happy family (age 13, kin).

Grandma always brings us a lot of new clothes from Target, helps us with our homework, lets us play, watch movies, go to Chuck E. Cheese (age 11, kin).

I’m safe. I don’t have to live in other foster care, and this is the only one I like (age 8, non-kin).

They are taking care of me. They treat us right. They do not beat us (age 12, non-kin).

She is really respectful and lets you invite friends over (age 14, non-kin).

I have friends. I love my sisters (age 8, non-kin).

Being with my grandma and knowing that she loves me (age 12, kin).

All of my achievements hanging on the wall (age 7, kin).

I get to be with my grandma and see my relatives. Everybody knows my grandma (age 14, kin).

It has lots of toys and food, and my mom cooks good, too (age 9, non-kin).

Holidays. Everyone is together. Grandma makes good pies and stuff (age 13, kin).

You get to eat, play games. I’m happy. I feel good (age 11, kin).

I like it good. We eat chicken everyday. Good house. Clothes on my back (age 13, kin).

I have friends. I can go play outside in the backyard, or I can go to the store down the street and play video games (age 9, kin).

I’m glad because I live near the store. I got a roof over my head. I got friends (age 9, kin).

On Fridays and Saturdays I get to stay up until 10 O’clock (age 8, non-kin).

My foster mom is the best. She treats me well. When she puts me in the corner I know why. And I like it here a lot (age 8, non-kin).

We are really close (age 13, kin).

Lots of people live in the house, and I never get lonely (age 10, non-kin).

I get a lot of stuff I never had before. I get to go places (age 13, kin).

I feel how it is to have a family that loves you (age 13, non-kin).
WHAT IS THE WORST THING ABOUT LIVING HERE?

Sharing the bed with my brother. When we try to sleep at night, people play loud music and talk all night long (age 7, kin).

When I get into fights (age 8, non-kin).

The graffitti. The gangs on the corner selling drugs. Fights (age 11, kin).

The kids like to have their way, and if they don’t, they start arguing (age 14, non-kin).

When the other kids here do something bad and blame it on me. When the kids always have to argue (age 9, non-kin).

Bees and mosquitos in the backyard (age 9, kin).

Punishments and spankings (age 11, kin).

I wish my brother would be quiet (age 13, kin).

My sister curses too much (age 9, non-kin).

Punishments like no TV and lots of cleaning (age 13, kin).

If one person loses something, we all have to look for it (age 9, non-kin).

I don’t get to do what I want to do (age 10, non-kin).

I don’t get along with my nine-year-old brother (age 13, kin).

I don’t have any girls to play with around here (age 10, non-kin).

I’m away from my mom (age 9, non-kin).

I miss my mom (age 13, kin).
PRACTICE TIPS FOR PROMOTING PERMANENCE

Involve children of all ages in case planning.

- Children in foster care often feel powerless when birth parents, caregivers, social workers, and judges are making decisions on their behalf. Child welfare workers should be aware of children’s experiences of powerlessness and develop strategies to give children empowering experiences in aspects of their lives over which they have more control.

- Don’t assume that the legally defined hierarchy of preferred placement outcomes is consistent with the distinct ways in which children and their caregivers experience particular placements as “permanent.”

- In developing permanency plans, explore children’s satisfaction in placement and possibly their placement preferences – including their justifications and degree of attachment to particular preferences. Pay particular attention to children’s self-reported experiences of safety, support, belonging, and stability in placement. Regularly assess the quality of their relationships with their caregiver and other children in the household.

- While a large percentage of children want to live with their caregiver, some children may not benefit from frank discussions about permanency. Child welfare workers should impress upon caregivers the need to talk about this subject sensitively with children.

- Help children understand how their behavior does and/or does not affect their case plan; help them distinguish between reality- and fantasy-based beliefs.

- Provide written information to children, birth family members, and out-of-home caregivers on all aspects of the court process and the child welfare system.

- Educate older children about the importance of attending their court hearings.

- Encourage lawyers to meet with children prior to and following court hearings.

- Let children know that birth parent visits are part of their reunification plan.

- Make sure children know that their birth parents have a certain amount of time to comply with their reunification plan.

- Whenever possible, provide children with specific information on their current placement status and projected plans.

- If placement changes occur, make sure children know the reasons for these changes.

- Don’t tell children that they are unadoptable.

- Always include children in adoption decisions.
DO YOU WANT THIS TO BE YOUR PERMANENT HOME?

“YES” RESPONSES:

Because my brothers and cousins are here, but I miss my dad a lot (age 10, kin).

I love my grandmother. She takes care of me, sends me to camp, and we have fun (age 11, kin).

It’s better here. I can do more stuff over here. I have a lot of friends over here. Dolores cares about me a lot (age 14, non-kin).

They are nice and loving, and I do not want to be with my mom yet. She lies, my mom, sometimes, and is sick (age 8, non-kin).

I want both homes. Me and my mom can live upstairs. Hazel can live downstairs (age 7, kin).

I want to live with both Ms. Hentz and my mama. I want to live with my mama and spend some nights with Ms. Hentz (age 9, non-kin).

I like living here. They’re family (age 13, kin).

I’ve been here a long time already (age 8, non-kin).

Because it’s nice. I get treats. Because they love me, and I love them (age 8, non-kin).

I like it here. I can talk to my grandma when I need to. It feels like home (age 12, kin).

I like it here. I got used to it already (age 8, non-kin).

There’s no where else to go (age 14, non-kin).

Because I never used to have a place I could call home. Now I do (age 13, non-kin).

“NO” RESPONSES:

I like it here, but I want to live with my mom again someday (age 8, non-kin).

I want to see my daddy. I want to live with my daddy (age 7, non-kin).

If I had a choice, I’d stay with my mom (age 14, kin).

Because my mommy will get a house, and I want to live with her (age 7, kin).

I want to spend some time with my mom and see how it is to live with her (age 13, kin).

I’d rather be with my mom, although I don’t know who to choose (age 9, kin).

I want to live with my mom (age 13, kin).
IF YOU MET A PERSON ABOUT YOUR AGE WHO COULD NOT LIVE AT HOME WITH [HIS/HER] BIRTH PARENTS, YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO GIVE HIM OR HER SOME ADVICE. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE?

Go. It will be better (age 13, kin).

Living in foster care is difficult when you first get there, but you get used to it (age 8, non-kin).

Everything is gonna be ok. They can be happy in another home. She can always talk to her social worker (age 10, non-kin).

Your parents won’t always be there, but someone else might be able to help (age 14, non-kin).

Don’t ask to go home because your mom or dad might not be ready for you. You should always be good (age 8, non-kin).

Don’t worry. Everything will get better soon (age 8, non-kin).

Ask them about their needs. Help them if they need to go to the hospital or doctor (age 7, kin).

Go back to your house and apologize to your parents and ask if you can come back and live with them (age 11, kin).

Tell them to make sure that you do the right thing (age 9, non-kin).

Don’t be bad. Stay in school. Don’t run away. Be good (age 9, non-kin).

You might feel better in a new house, and maybe you will have more fun (age 10, kin).

I would take them to their mom (age 7, kin).

Show manners at the table. Listen to your new parents. Pray before you eat. Do not act up (age 7, non-kin).

You can try and work it out because foster homes aren’t that bad (age 13, kin).

You should stay with your mommy until you grow up, or else you might cry and get mad (age 8, non-kin).

She will be loved in another household (age 12, kin).

Stay in touch with your own family and respect the people you live with (age 11, non-kin).