

Permanency Planning for Adolescents: Connections for a Lifetime



Presenter: **Dorothy I. Ansell, MSW**
dansell@ou.edu

National Resource Center for Youth Services



College of Continuing Education
The University of Oklahoma
4502 E. 41st. Street, Building 4 West
Tulsa, OK 74135
Phone: 918-660-3700
FAX: 918-660-3737
www.nrcys.ou.edu

Four Core Principles

In the continuing work of the Muskie School of Public Service, University of Southern Maine and National Resource Center for Youth Services, College of Continuing Education University of Oklahoma, four principles have emerged as essential in order for adolescent transitional living programs to be successful. With these principles in place, it is thinking of current experts in the field that programs are more likely to be successful regardless of the type of services provided. These principles are defined below and form the basis for the Promising Practices Personal Check Sheet on the pages that follow.

1. Youth Development

A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models which focus solely on youth problems. *(National Collaboration of Youth Members)*

2. Collaboration

The process by which several agencies or organizations make a formal, sustained commitment to work together to accomplish a common mission. *(The Community Collaboration Manual, National Assembly of National Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations.)*

3. Culture Competence

Culture is difference in race, ethnicity, nationality, religion/spirituality, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, physical ability, language, beliefs, values, behavior patterns, or customs among various groups within a community, organization, or nation. *(A Guide To Enhancing Cultural Competency of Runaway and Homeless Youth Programs, HHS, ACF, ACYF)*

Gaining cultural competence is a long-term process of expanding horizons, thinking critically about the issues of power and oppression, and acting appropriately.” Culturally competent individuals have a mixture of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills that help them establish trust and communicate with others. *(Advocates for Youth)*

4. Permanent Connections

Positive relationships that are intended to last a life-time. They may be either formal (e.g. adoption or reunification with family) or informal in nature (e.g., mentors or peer support groups). Very often they are identified by the youth. *(National Resource Center for Youth Services)*

Myths and Facts About Adolescent Permanency

Decide whether the following statements are myths or facts and circle our choice.

- Myth Fact Permanency planning for adolescents is a high priority for most states.
- Myth Fact When we talk about permanency planning we really mean adoption.
- Myth Fact Most adolescents and young adults are not interested in having a “forever” family.
- Myth Fact The primary purpose of permanency planning is to make sure that each child has a permanent living arrangement.
- Myth Fact If a young person is preparing for independent living, it is not necessary to promote permanent connections.
- Myth Fact Social workers can usually use traditional approaches to find adoptive homes for teens.
- Myth Fact Young people are not interested in remaining connected to their birth family.
- Myth Fact Most adolescents, who are adopted, are adopted by their foster parents.
- Myth Fact Youth over the age of 18 aren’t interested in achieving a permanency goal.
- Myth Fact We don’t need to be concerned about permanent connections for youth who are not in foster care and are receiving services from TLP programs.
- Myth Fact Most states have policies that prevent youth from leaving foster care without a permanent connection.

State Strategies to Promote Permanency for Adolescents

California – Assembly Bill 408

- Requires that social studies, reports, evaluations and assessments and case plans for permanent placement services include information regarding the child's relationships with individuals who are important to him/her and actions taken to maintain those relationships
- Requires that a notice of court hearing be sent to a child who is 10 years and older explaining his/her right to attend. Requires that the court inquire as the reason why a child is not present at his/her court hearing.
- Requires the state to develop approaches that would ensure that no child leaves foster care without a lifelong connection to a committed adult.
- States that every child is entitled to participate in age appropriate, extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities and that state regulations and policies may not prevent or create barriers to participation in those activities.

New York City – Revised Policy

Goal of Proposed Policy - Limit the use of Independent Living as a permanency planning goal and requiring family-based concurrent plans for youth with goals of IL

- No youth in foster care aged 15 or younger may be given the permanency planning goal of Independent Living without prior written approval of the ACS Deputy Commissioner. A written concurrent family-based plan for reunification, adoption, guardianship or custody must be included at the same time.
- No youth in foster care aged 16 or older may be given the permanency planning goal of Independent Living without prior written approval of an ACS case management borough or site director. A written concurrent family-based plan for reunification, adoption, guardianship or custody must be included at the same time.
- No youth in foster care may be asked to sign an across-the-board adoption waiver.

Washington – Proposed Changes in Contracts

Language will be added to contracts with group homes to ensure that permanent connections are identified or developed and supported for youth receiving residential services.

Adolescent Permanency Model Programs

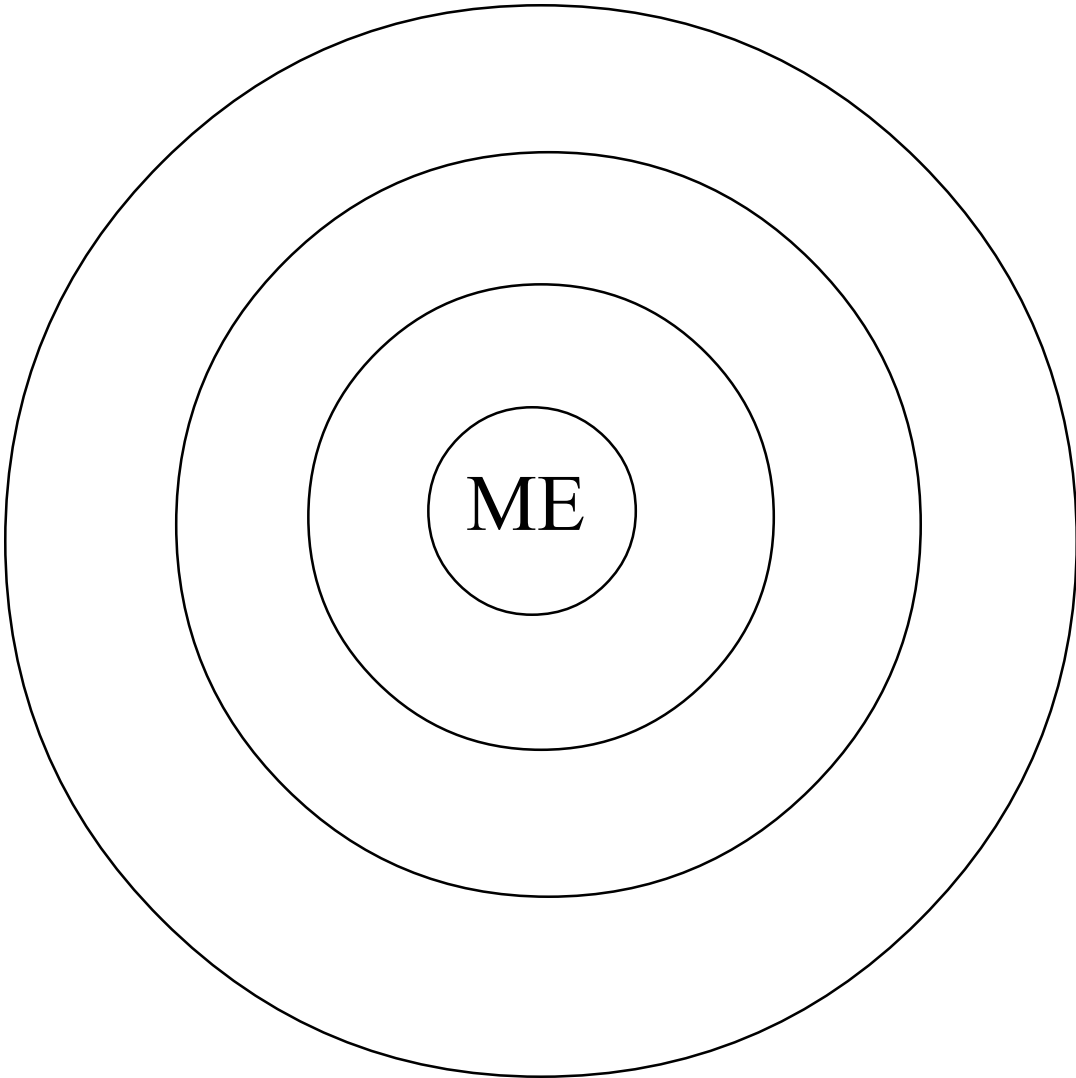
State	Colorado	Washington	Massachusetts
Project	Project Uplift- a state/county partnership	Connected and Cared For- a state/university partnership	Life Long Family Connections- a state/ private agency partnership
Number of Youth	56 youth		Pilot project involved 33 year
Duration	9 months	3 years	1 year; renewed under contract in 2003; expanded for 4 years
Funding	\$80,000 from an Adoption Opportunities Grant	Stuart Foundation Grant	\$450,000 Adoption Opportunity Grant
Approach	Intense work to find and reconnect youth with supportive and permanent relationships	Family group conferencing for high needs youth in group care addressing permanency needs	7 components 1. Family Consultation Team 2. Community of Care Review 3. Specialized recruitment 4. Family Bound training 5. PATH adult training 6. Speak-Out youth team 7. Post-connections Supports
Results	122 connections made for project youth; 47 had at least one connection; 8 had no connections 2 did not want any	Retrospective study of 28 conferences- 47% of youth placed with family; 93% of youth moved to a less restrictive setting	From the Pilot- 33 youth referred; 24 received services; 24 were matched with connections.

Louisell, M. 2004. *Model Programs for Youth Permanency*. Oakland, CA: California Permanency for Youth Project. (available for download at <http://www.cpy.org/>)

Professional Strategies

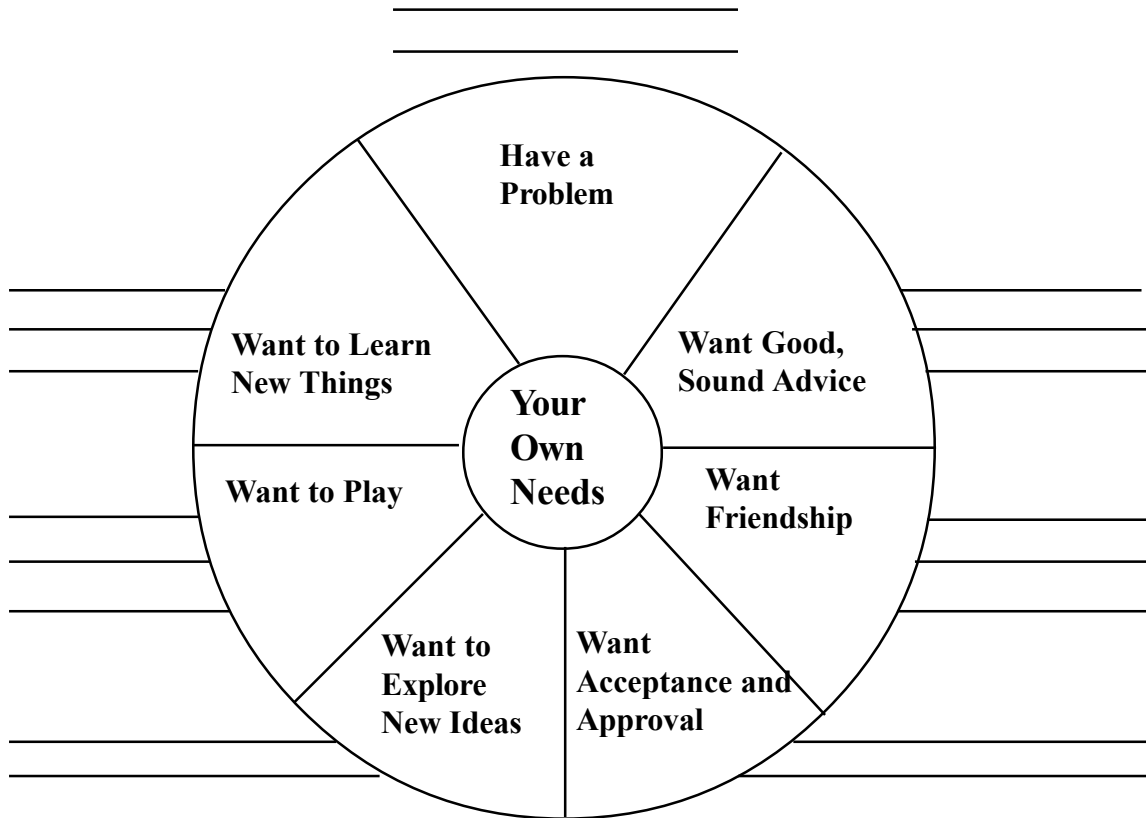
- Listen to young people talk about their hopes and their fears for family life.
- Ask youth to identify the important people in their lives.
- Find out whom the youth was close to in the past.
- Provide youth opportunities to maintain contact with their siblings and other family members.
- Facilitate communication between the youth and adults who might become permanent connections for the youth.
- Teach the interpersonal relationship skills required to develop and maintain a support system.
- Provide opportunities for youth to “make peace with the past.”
- Periodically, revisit all of the permanency goals.
- Empower young people to find their own permanent connections.
- Understand that youth may change their minds about return home or adoption.
- Provide youth with opportunities to talk with other youth and young adults who have been adopted.
- Provide youth with opportunities to develop relationships with mentors, either through formal mentoring programs or informal interactions.
- Encourage the youth’s involvement in positive community activities.
- Provide opportunities for the youth to remain connected and/or become connected with his home community, tribe and cultural group.
- Make sure that youth understand all of their permanency options.
- Make sure that youth are actively involved in planning for their futures.
- **Do not let your youth leave foster care without having a positive, caring adults of their choice in their lives!**

My Social World



Your Support System

Who do you go to when you...



What are Life Books?

Growing Home, a private organization that provides treatment foster care and family preservation services with a focus on identifying and building upon strengths, defines life books as “a combination of a journal, scrapbook, and a photo album.”¹ “Life books are more than just the album covers and pages, though” reminds The National Center for Resource Family Support. “They are a means to help children understand their histories, resolve loss and grief issues, improve self-esteem, separate reality and fantasy, and grow emotionally.”² In addition, life books must be seen as an on-going project, always expanding to include new people and events as they occur.

What is the purpose of a Life Book?

Life books were originally used to introduce prospective adoptive parents to the children waiting for adoption. Now, however, adolescent workers often use life books to help youth prepare for transition. The life book also becomes the storage place for such important items as birth certificates, medical records, social security cards, etc.

The life book is not only a good way that youth can track the history of their lives; it is also a therapeutic tool whereby a social worker can assist a youth in understanding the stories of their life. Some of the memories and mementos that youth collect for their life book might be painful for them. It is important that youth are encouraged to talk with someone they trust about these events while working on the life book.

What tools do I need to help youth create a Life Book?

Life books can be made with purchased materials, or they can be put together using hand-made pages. The National Center for Resource Family Support indicates, “The form they take is not as important as what they contain.”

To get started, a photo album or a three-ring binder is needed. Pens, markers, crayons, stickers, and other products that can be used to make the pages personal and appealing should be used in the creation of a life book. And, of course, the youth will want to collect photos of themselves and other significant people in their life. If the youth does not have a camera, disposable cameras are a good way to help youth obtain pictures of life events.

Where can I find resources to help youth create a Life Book?

Additional resources on creating life books can be found at the following websites:

- *Passages: A Journal for Growing Home* order on-line at: <http://www.nrcys.ou.edu/catalog.htm>
- Growing Home: http://www.growinghome.org/y_books.htm
- National Center for Resource Family Support: http://www.casey.org/cnc/support_retention/lifebooks_stories.htm

¹ Available at http://www.growinghome.org/y_books.htm
National Resource Center for Youth Development, 2004
http://www.casey.org/cnc/support_retention/lifebooks_stories.htm

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