

COMMUNITY EDUCATION ON ADOPTION INFORMATION SHEET

General Adoption Information

- In Delaware, the majority of children who are adopted, are adopted from foster care.
- In FY 14, 92 children were adopted from foster care in Delaware and another 71 were placed with guardians. Thus 163 children became eligible for post adoption services in FY 14.
- There are 190 adoption cases open as of October 2014. 959 children in Delaware are receiving an adoption subsidy and are eligible for post adoption services.
- The Evan P. Donaldson Adoption Institute estimates 100 million Americans (1 in 3 people) are touched in some way by adoption.

Mental Health and Adoption

‘Our children are dealing with trauma.’

- Adopted individuals and their families are more likely to utilize mental health services than the general population. However, mental health professionals typically do not receive adoption-related training. They often do not fully understand why such training is necessary, or they believe the knowledge they already have is sufficient.
- In a recent study of young adults who had emancipated from foster care, researchers from Casey Family Programs and Harvard University Medical School found that more than 50% have at least one mental health disorder, including 25% with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). These young adults experience a post-traumatic stress rate that is six times the stress rate for adults of the same age, and even higher than war veterans’ levels. Children adopted from foster care – especially at an older age – have similar statistics.

Abuse, Neglect, Fetal Alcohol Exposure, etc. and Adoption

- Children and youth in foster care have been found to have disproportionately higher rates of physical, developmental, and mental health issues. Many have experienced abuse, neglect, in-utero exposure to drugs and alcohol, as well as multiple placements. Research has shown all have damaging effects on children and youth.
- These children and youth are at a greater risk of dropping out of high school, becoming pregnant, or becoming homeless or incarcerated.
- Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD's) have long-term implications for children. This is a major concern for children adopted from foster care. It impacts education, decision making, and behavior, to the extent that many will be unable to live independently as adults.

Family Therapy

- Family therapy is crucial when working with adoptive and foster families. What gets hurt in a relationship with caregivers need to heal in a relationship with caregivers.
- Families asking for help are not asking to help their child leave/disrupt (our children are good at leaving); instead, they are asking for help in order to have their child stay in the family.

- Adoptive parents are provided with a great deal of information regarding their child's past experiences as well as a medical/mental health history of the birth family. However, many times families do not have enough information to help them understand their child's behaviors.
- For the most part, behavioral strategies do not work well with our children; it is not about changing the child's behavior but about ***finding out what is driving the child's behavior.***

"The challenge of trauma treatment is not only dealing with the past but, even more, enhancing the quality of day-to-day experiences. One reason that traumatic memories become dominant in PTSD is that it's so difficult to feel truly alive right now. When you can't be fully here, you go to the places where you did feel alive – even if those places are filled with horror and misery." *Taken from The Body Keeps the Score by Bessel Van Der Kolk, M.D.*

Some Behaviors Children from Adoption May Present

Our children are often able to "keep it together" for a time. However, the experiences of their lives make it almost impossible for them not to have major meltdowns from time to time. When this happens, it is often at very inconvenient times and involves disturbing behaviors. Some of those behaviors include:

- Extreme aggression
- Destruction of property
- False abuse allegations
- Running away
- Cutting and hurting themselves
- Tantrums that can last for hours

Our children test the commitment of their adoptive and foster parents due to having been abandoned and rejected. They can really push families to see if they plan to stay with them for the long term. Often mental health and law enforcement professionals are contacted when the child has escalated and the parents need support.

Other behaviors that our children exhibit are:

- Replicating traumatic lifestyle in new home
- Food hoarding
- Feces smearing/hiding urine and feces
- Sleeplessness
- Hyperactivity
- Sexual acting out
- Lying and stealing

What You Can Do

Children living in foster care and adopted from foster care are wounded. They are living in fear each day. They need the unconditional love, support, and structure that a permanent family provides. However, that family can only do so much alone. We must work together to provide a system of care that meets the needs of our children not only from the time they enter foster care, but also until they are able to function in an emotionally healthy way.

Thank you for helping us provide this support to families! We want our kids to have the permanency they deserve!