

## TOPIC:

**Moving Children from Foster Care to Permanency**

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Alaska Center for Resource Families**INSTRUCTIONS FOR FOSTER PARENT TRAINING CREDIT:***\*Read through this self-study**\*Fill out the "CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING" Questionnaire**\*Return to ACRF for 1.0 hour of training credit.*

Do you remember the artwork on the wall of the last hotel you stayed in? The color of the carpet? The name of the person who checked you in? Probably not. Why would you? You are there for a bed and to get fed. Some hotels are nicer than others, but the thing they have in common is they are all temporary. For some youth in foster care, this might be their reality. They think, "why bother to unpack?"—sometimes physically, sometimes emotionally-- because sooner or later, they will have to move again. A foster family might feel like just another stop on the way to the next placement. It is difficult for youth to know when they will be settled, or *permanent*.



Transitions will always be a part of the child's journey through foster care. The good news is that there are many ways the system and the resource families can partner to make the transition gentler and healthier for everyone. A youth who is moving to a new family needs five things from their team. This team will include caseworkers, the sending and receiving parents, the guardian ad litem, therapists and tribal representatives. Each team member should support and advocate for the following.

**The five things youth need from their team during a transition are:**

- ***Voice, and some choice & control over the transition process.*** Talk to the youth about how fast the move should happen. Take the time to build into the schedule visits to the new family as well as opportunities to say goodbye to important friends and family members. Youth should never be expected to move in with strangers or abruptly "ripped from one family and dropped in another."
- ***Youth need to know that their team is dedicated to working through conflicts in a professional way and working toward a goal that is in the best interest of the youth.*** Managing team dynamics is hard. It is critical that conflicts be handled professionally with the best interest of the youth at the center of all decisions.
- ***Once a plan for permanency is made, youth need all team members to support the goal and work together to reach permanency in the best way possible.*** The youth looks to the team for safety and will be hyper sensitive to fear, or reluctance, both verbal and non- verbal on the part of any team member. The youth has a difficult enough road ahead in joining a new family. They need the team to put aside differences and work cooperatively.
- The youth need validation that though their relationship is changing with their foster provider, ***their desire to maintain some level of connection with them will be honored.*** Maintaining current positive connections with the youth will provide support and stability throughout the transition.
- Youth need to ***understand the reasons they entered foster care***, the reasons ***they have to move*** and have an ***opportunity to grieve their losses*** and voice their feelings. They need a team who is able to talk to them about these things.

# 10 Ways To Support Youth Moving From Your Home.

Information developed by the Alaska Southcentral Transitions Committee: November 2019

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If a child is moving from your foster home into a permanent placement or moving after a long placement in your home, use these guidelines to assist a youth in making a smooth transition and to minimize additional trauma.



1. **Reassure the youth you will always care for them**, and talk about how you can stay connected in the future. Example – “Wherever you live or who you live with, I will always care for you.” Develop a post-transition contact plan with the team and youth.
2. **Maintain a transition calendar** of events that provides a visual of important transition dates and activities. (Example: Mark the weekend of the first overnight stay. Post a day to take a family picture with the new family.)
3. **Listen and validate a youth’s feelings** of fear, excitement or anxiety. Avoid statements like “you can come back home if it doesn’t work” which sends the message you share the youth’s fears of the move. Instead, reassure the youth that you and the team will take care of him and he can always contact his team if issues that come up.
4. **Mark the transition with a ceremony or special activity**. Include the youth’s peers if they are changing schools. Send a scrapbook or shirt for classmates to sign and bring cupcakes to mark the goodbye. Do the same for other activities or groups the youth will be leaving.
5. If appropriate, remind the youth how they felt when they first moved into your home. **Assure them** that while it may take a while, they will settle in and feel safe over time, just like they did with you.
6. **Provide transitional objects**. Find comfort items to help in the move. Example: Send their have their favorite toy/stuffy/blanket. Take a final picture with the family. Share with the new family what makes the child feel safe. Move possessions into the new home gradually, so familiar items are waiting. Remember, the familiar is comforting.
7. **Be curious and excited**. Ask the youth to tell you about their new home and validate their excitement. Ask the new family for pictures of their home and family members, including pets to help calm the child’s fears. If youth express concerns/reservations, acknowledge their fears, and perhaps their grief about leaving your family.
8. **If you have concerns about the move, share them with the team** (OCS caseworker, GAL, therapist, licensing worker) and they can help support you through this process. Do not share concerns with the child. Do not make the child responsible for your own grief or anger. It may be tempting to try to get the child to agree with you and make it harder for success in the new home, but that it damaging to a child’s chance at permanency. Hold a space for your feelings and see our next guideline.
9. **Seek out support as you grieve the loss of the child leaving your home**. If you have grown fond of a youth in your home, transition can be bittersweet. You launch a child into permanency, but it is big leap of faith. You can guarantee their safety in your home, but you cannot control what happens in the next home. You may be feeling guilty or angry that you are not going to be their forever home. Your licensing worker and ACRF staff is here to support you and any difficult feeling you may have. Reach out to them.
10. **Welcome the new family into your home**. Visit the pre-adoptive family’s home if possible. This sends a powerful message of support to the youth and lessens his or her fear of the move. A visit allows a youth to show you their new room or introduce pets. Your actions speak loudly in comforting a youth at a difficult time.

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