Providing Adoption Support and Preservation Services

Adoptive families and adoption professionals have long recognized the important role of high-quality postadoption services in ensuring ongoing stability, permanency, and well-being for children who have been adopted and for adoptive families as a whole. These services help address the effects that separation, loss, and trauma can have on children and youth who have been adopted, help children and their families address special needs, and help family members strengthen their relationships and deepen their attachment and bonding. For many years, postadoption services have been commonly viewed as services that are provided only after the legal finalization of the adoption—and in some cases only for short periods of time. However, adoption professionals and families have recognized that a comprehensive continuum of multiple forms of support that vary in level of intensity is necessary to ensure well-being, long-term stability, and true permanency for children who have been adopted and their families.

Child Welfare Information Gateway

Children's Bureau/ACYF/ACF/HHS
800.394.3366 | Email: info@childwelfare.gov | https://www.childwelfare.gov

Children's Bureau

This bulletin draws from available literature and practice knowledge to summarize key issues related to providing effective services to support the stability and permanency of adoptions. It is intended to support adoption professionals in addressing adoptive parents' and children's needs for services, recognizing key considerations in providing services, addressing emerging issues, and meeting common challenges in delivery.

Postadoption Services as Part of a Continuum of Support

To provide a comprehensive approach, it is helpful to incorporate adoption services and support into multiple areas of practice, including early assessment of children and youth; gathering thorough background information on each child to share with the family; and early engagement, preparation, development, and support of parents who are adopting. This work involves both (1) preparing families thoroughly for adoption and (2) providing families with information about available support before they finalize an adoption. Taking this approach will help ensure that adoptive families experience a comprehensive array of support that both helps prepare them to meet their children's needs and continues to support the children and families long after the adoption is finalized (National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation [QIC-AG], 2015a). Research shows that preparation along with support services before and after an adoption is finalized are important factors in maintaining permanency in an adoption (Coakley & Berrick, 2007).

National Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation

In 2014, the Children's Bureau emphasized the importance of effective approaches to promote and support permanency and stability for children waiting for adoptive and guardianship homes as well as for children and families whose adoption or guardianship has been finalized. By funding the QIC-AG, the Children's Bureau invested in continuing to build the evidence base on effective support and preservation services. As stated by the QIC-AG (2015b), "Critical time points occur in the life of a child when information is obtained, decisions are made, and actions take place that will have an impact on the trajectory and, ultimately, the permanency outcome for the child. These critical times begin the moment a child enters foster care."

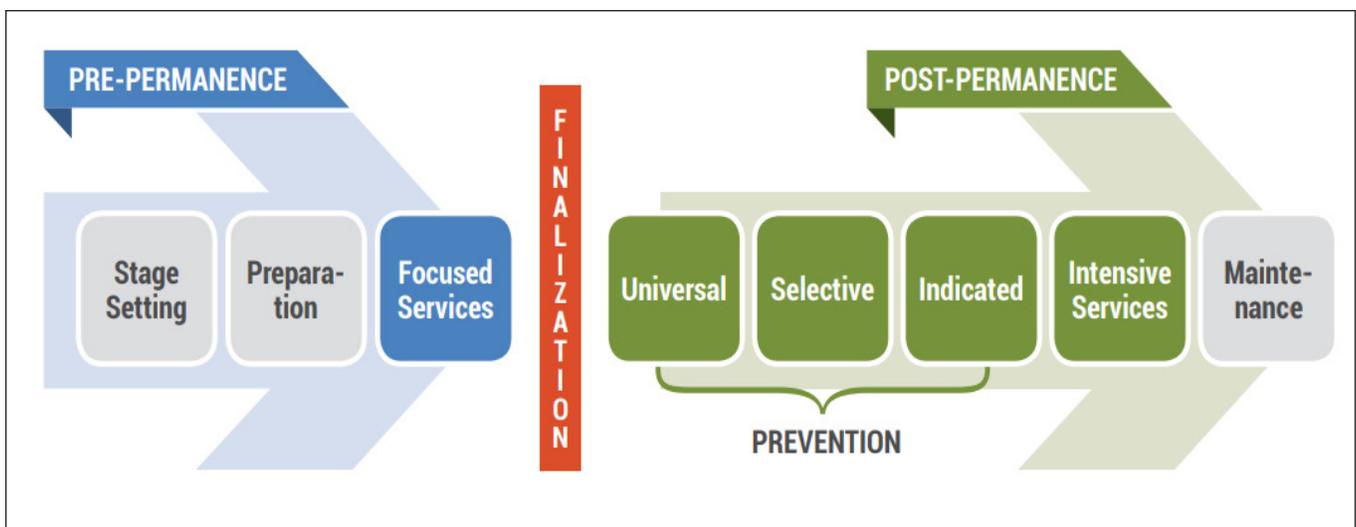The QIC-AG has several tools and resources available on its website, including the following web sections:

- Intervention and Program Catalog (http://qic-ag.org/introduction-qic-ag-intervention-and-program-catalog/)
- Implementation Tools (http://qic-ag.org/imt/)

As part of the growing recognition of the need for a thorough continuum of services and supports to help make adoptions stable and permanent, there have been some changes in the terminology that both families and professionals use to refer to these services. Rather than using the term "postadoption services," which focuses on the timeframe when services are provided, there is a growing trend to use the term "adoption support and preservation services" to reflect the intended outcome of the services. By providing services early in the process of working with children and prospective adoptive parents, professionals can prepare and assess both children and adoptive parents in ways that will help them be better positioned for successful, stable adoptions.

Adoption support and preservation services encompass an array of programs and supports—including education and information services, counseling, and peer support networks—provided to adopted children and youth, adoptive families, and, at times, birth families to help address the lifelong impact of adoption. While birth families can benefit from services, this bulletin focuses primarily on services for children who have been adopted and their adoptive families. For more information and resources for birth parents, visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway web section For Expectant Parents Considering Adoption and Birth Parents at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/birthfor/.

The QIC-AG developed a Permanency Continuum Framework built on the premise that children in adoptive or guardianship families do better when their families are fully prepared and supported to address needs or issues as they arise. The framework emphasizes prevention and preparation because, when services and supports are not offered until families are on the brink of disruption and dissolution, those services are often provided too late and do not serve the best interests of children and families. The QIC-AG's Permanency Continuum Framework is separated into eight intervals (see figure 1), although there can certainly be overlap across the intervals. Two key concepts from this continuum are (1) prepermanency services are important for supporting the stability of an adoption and (2) postpermanency services can include both preventative services (e.g., preventing instability or disruption) as well as intensive services that help maintain the stability of an adoption.

Figure 1
QIC-AG Permanency Continuum Framework

This publication is available online at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-postadoptbulletin/.

The Need for Adoption Support and Preservation Services

With more than 50,000 children and youth being adopted from foster care each year and additional adoptions occurring through private and intercountry paths, there are hundreds of thousands of families across the country experiencing and addressing the lifelong dynamics involved in adoption (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [HHS], Administration for Children and Families [ACF], Children's Bureau, 2016). These families need access to service providers who are familiar with the dynamics involved in adoption and who will help them continue to meet their children's needs—which can change over time—and address new issues as they emerge. (Note: This familiarity with adoption dynamics and skill in working effectively with adoptive families is often referred to as "adoption competence.")

Although research on the long-term outcomes of adoptive families is somewhat limited, recent studies show that at least 40 percent of parents adopting children from foster care will likely require some therapeutic counseling services to help them understand and address their children's emotional and behavioral needs (Smith, Maza, Magruder, Sciamanna, & Howard, 2014b). Some research has explored the needs of adoptive families over multiple years from the time of adoption finalization and found that families identify similar needs for support and services over time, regardless of the length of time since the adoption (Anderson, 2005). Indeed, the need for support and services emerges—and may grow—over time, supporting the idea that families require access to adoption support and preservation services long after finalizing an adoption (Hartinger-Saunders & Trouteaud, 2015).

For many years, there have consistently been more than 100,000 children and youth in foster care waiting to be adopted, and the number of children waiting to be adopted has increased in the past 4 years (HHS, ACF, Children's Bureau, 2016). Therefore, the availability of high-quality adoption support and preservation services is increasingly important as child welfare systems seek to recruit adoptive families and provide assurances that families will have access to support when they need it.

Tribal Adoption and Permanency Support and Preservation Services

Many tribes incorporate culturally specific traditions, languages, and practices into their support services, including adapting support program models that incorporate specific cultural roles, values, and ceremonies and that address the impact of both recent and historical trauma. As a part of its project with the QIC-AG, the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska used family group decision-making with specific cultural adaptations. For more information, refer to the project summary at http://qic-ag.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/QICAG-Winnebago.pdf.

The information throughout this publication may be helpful for tribes and for tribes and states partnering together to provide culturally appropriate support services.

Deeper Understanding of Issues Affecting Adoptive Families

Services for adoptive families continue to evolve to reflect and address the emerging knowledge base in this area. For example, as the child welfare field has developed a deeper understanding of brain science and the impact of trauma, adoption services have increasingly become more trauma informed. The following are additional topics that are gaining recognition, and learning about them can help strengthen professionals' and adoptive families' ability to meet children's needs:

- **Unregulated custody transfer.** The unregulated custody transfer of adopted children is sometimes referred to as "rehoming." Strong adoption support and preservation services before a family finalizes an adoption can help ensure that families are thinking about challenges they may face in the future and are aware of how to access support when they need it, including years after the adoption. For more information, see *Responding to Rehoming: Protecting Children & Strengthening Adoptive Families* at http://www.cwla.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Joint-Statement_Responding-to-Rehoming_June2015.pdf and *Unregulated Custody Transfer/Re-Homing of Adopted Children* at https://go.usa.gov/xRhvM.

- **Youth's sexual orientation and gender identity and expression.** It is important to ensure that adoptive families are prepared to support their children as they identify and disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. Effective preparation and support of both adoptive parents and youth being adopted can help ensure that families will provide safe, affirming environments for youth to self-identify. Adoption support and preservation services can also play a key role in helping parents learn how to best support their children regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression and how to help keep their children safe if they experience bullying or threats. Information Gateway provides several resources for supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/diverse-populations/lgbtq/lgbt-families/.

- **Cultural connections for American Indian/Alaska Native youth.** It is imperative that American Indian/Alaska Native children who are adopted by non-Native families can remain connected to their culture, especially for children to whom the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) applies.[1] The Children's Bureau's Capacity Building Center (CBC) for Courts offers a comprehensive online curriculum covering ICWA's substantive provisions and historical context. To view the curriculum, create a free account at https://learn.childwelfare.gov/. The CBC for Tribes collaborates with American Indian/Alaska Native nations to help strengthen tribal child and family systems and services in order to nurture the safety, permanency, and well-being of children, youth, and families. For more information, visit its website at https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/tribes/.

- **Adopting children from another country.** For families who have adopted children from outside the United States, there are potential implications from any changes in U.S. policy and practices related to immigration as well as to documentation of their children's legal status. For example, families may need assistance ensuring they have their children's U.S. citizenship status established and that they have all the documentation needed to ensure it will not be at risk in the future. For more information about adopting children from outside the United States, visit Information Gateway at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/choices/other-country/.

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[1]   For Native American children to whom ICWA applies, there are also required steps for ensuring that the tribe's placement preferences are followed and that all other ICWA protections are applied. For additional information, see the Bureau of Indian Affairs at https://www.indianaffairs.gov/bia/ois/dhs/icwa and Information Gateway at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/diverse-populations/americanindian/icwa/.

- **Adoption by relatives.** Due to the increased emphasis on relatives adopting family members and the unique dynamics that can arise in cases of relative adoptions (e.g., navigating new relationship roles as a grandparent becomes the child's legal parent, managing contact arrangements with the child's birth parents), there is a need for adoption support and preservation services that are appropriate for the specific issues involved in supporting people adopting relatives. Adoption support and preservation services can help promote stability in multiple ways, such as assisting relative caregivers in developing effective strategies for addressing their new roles and providing counseling services to stabilize relationships between the adoptive parent and the child's birth parent. For more information, see Information Gateway's *Working With Kinship Caregivers* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/kinship/.

- **Implications of sex trafficking.** Some children in foster care have been victims of sex trafficking. This experience can affect how youth learn to trust new people, require special considerations for keeping them safe, and involve other unique dynamics. In these situations, adoptive parents may need additional prepermanency preparation to help them understand their child's previous experiences and how those experiences may affect the child's behaviors, risk factors, and approaches to building relationships. Several resources and curricula related to human trafficking are available at https://learn.childwelfare.gov/.

Research About Effective Services and Supports

There is a growing evidence base about the effectiveness of various adoption support and preservation services—including the evaluation of specific interventions and program models—that professionals can use to both identify the necessary services and forms of support and help make the case for funding and implementation (AdoptUSKids, 2015; QIC-AG, 2015a; Smith et al., 2014b). While the existing research and evaluation findings provide a strong foundation for adoption support and preservation work, there is also a continuing need for additional research and evaluation of interventions and program models. In particular, there is a need for research on the effectiveness and cost-benefit for specific populations (e.g., families adopting children from foster care, youth adopted at older ages, children and youth with specific needs and conditions, and children adopted from another country).

Supporting and Promoting Permanency in Various Ways

The presence of these supports and services can help agencies and professionals both recruit prospective permanent families and prevent disruptions or dissolutions. Adoption support and preservation services can benefit adoptees and adoptive families in many ways, particularly by helping them address emotional, behavioral, and developmental issues and achieve healthy family relationships. The positive outcomes for children and families, in turn, can promote permanency outcomes more broadly by contributing to the recruitment of more families.

There is some evidence that the availability of services, subsidies, and supports following adoption plays a role in the decision to adopt from foster care among prospective adoptive parents (Freundlich & Wright, 2003; Hansen, 2007; AdoptUSKids, 2016). By assuring prospective adoptive parents that they will have access to needed support and services, child welfare systems can help alleviate a concern that might otherwise prevent people from adopting children from foster care. For additional information on how to connect recruitment and support efforts, see *Using Integrated Recruitment and Support to Build a Strong Pool of Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Families* by the National Resource Center for Diligent Recruitment at AdoptUSKids at http://adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/using-integrated-recruitment-and-support-102215.pdf.

While the vast majority of adoptions do not disrupt or dissolve[2], those that do create the possibility that a child will enter or reenter foster care (Information Gateway, 2012; Smith, Dunbar, Stevens, Deoudes, DeLany, & Howard, 2014; Rolock, 2015a). Leaving a child's trauma symptoms and behavioral problems unaddressed, for example, may overwhelm a family's coping abilities and may jeopardize permanence. In some extreme cases, when issues intensify and services are not otherwise available, adoptive parents may find that they have few alternatives other than relinquishing custody to obtain needed services for the child, such as residential treatment. In a study of barriers and success factors for adoptions from foster care, both parents and professionals cited a lack of services as a key reason that adoptions were not successful (HHS, ACF, Children's Bureau, 2007). In the same study, parents noted that agencies helped contribute to adoption success by providing ongoing emotional support, postadoption resources and services, and training and information.

Needs That Services Address

The following section describes many of the common issues and needs that adoptive families face and the roles adoption support and preservation services play in addressing these issues.

Separation and Loss

Children who have been adopted have experienced some level of separation and loss from their birth families, possibly including ambiguous loss (i.e., the loss of someone who is or may be alive). This can create challenges throughout childhood and far into the adult years, including with self-esteem and identity (Brodzinsky, 2013; Smith et al., 2014b). Even children and youth adopted as infants may experience a range of emotions related to loss, such as grief, identity confusion, fear of rejection, and low self-esteem. Separation and loss issues often appear or reappear during special events (e.g., holidays, birthdays, adoption anniversaries) and at various developmental stages, particularly adolescence. Crisis events—such as divorce, a death in the family, or military deployment of a family member—can also bring about powerful feelings and fears of separation and abandonment.

Role of Adoption Support and Preservation Services—Services—including adoption-competent therapy, counseling, other therapeutic assistance, and peer support groups—can help children and youth deal with their emotions, mourn previous losses, and come to terms with their experiences and present circumstances (Brodzinsky, 2013; Smith et al. 2014b). The same kind of services can also support adoptive parents in understanding and addressing issues related to their child's loss, separation, trauma, attachment, and identity.

The Effects of Trauma

Many children and youth who are adopted have experienced early trauma as a result of abuse, early deprivation and neglect, or institutionalization. Children and youth who have been removed from their birth families and placed in foster care, particularly those who have had multiple placements, often have experienced chronic or complex trauma. Even for children and youth whose early life experiences may not seem to have included significant traumatic events, being removed from their families of origin can be traumatic. A national study found that more than 70 percent of children in the child welfare system have experienced repeated or chronic trauma (Spinazzola et al., 2013). The effects of trauma on development vary from child to child and may not always be evident until later years.

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[2]   The term "disruption" is used to describe an adoptive process that ends after the child is placed in an adoptive home but before the adoption is legally finalized. It results in the child's return to (or entry into) foster care or a placement with new adoptive parents. The term "dissolution" is used to describe an adoption process that ends after the adoption is legally finalized, resulting in the child's return to (or entry into) foster care or a placement with new adoptive parents. For more information on disruption and dissolution, see *Adoption Disruption and Dissolution* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/s-disrup/. There is also some consideration in the child welfare field of using other terminology to describe situations in which children no longer live with their adoptive family before becoming adults, including some researchers suggesting the term "post-placement discontinuity" (Rolock, 2015).

Role of Adoption Support and Preservation Services—Trauma-informed services can help children learn new ways of thinking and responding when facing stress and perceived threats. Services can also help adoptive parents understand their children's behavior in the context of trauma, build parents' capacity to cope with challenges, and identify appropriate strategies to meet their children's needs and allow healing to occur.

Trauma Resources

For more information on childhood trauma, see the following resources:

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
  http://www.nctsnet.org/
- Trauma-Informed Practice (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/responding/trauma/
- *Developing a Trauma-Informed Child Welfare System* (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/trauma-informed/

Children's Challenges and Needs

Adopted children and youth have elevated risks for emotional, developmental, physical, intellectual, and behavioral issues. While the majority of adopted children function within normal ranges, research shows that a significant percentage (40–45 percent) of children adopted from foster care have ongoing emotional or behavioral challenges (Smith et al., 2014b). Children in foster care are at increased risk of mental health challenges (Lewis, Beckwith, Fortin, & Goldberg, 2011; Kerker & Dore, 2006), which may not go away after adoption. In one study that explored why families seek postadoption services, an overwhelming majority of families (96 percent) noted problematic child behavior (Lenerz, Gibbs, & Barth, 2006). Research also shows adoptive families use mental health services more frequently than other families (Howard, Smith, & Ryan, 2004; Vandivere, Malm, & Radel, 2009), which seems to reflect both greater need and a greater willingness to use services (Smith, 2010).

Role of Adoption Support and Preservation Services—Adopted children and youth and their families may benefit from individual or family therapy or counseling as well as respite care. Parents often need information and guidance on how best to respond to their children's needs and behaviors, and they may benefit from services that strengthen their coping skills. Services such as respite care can provide valuable breaks for parents from child-rearing demands as well as give children a break. Several programs that examined the outcomes of postadoption services reported improvements in child behavior, parents' understanding of the effects of adoption on a child's behavior, children's mental health, parental confidence in managing child behavior, and family functioning (AdoptUSKids, 2015; James Bell Associates, 2011; Lenerz et al., 2006; Smith, 2006; Zosky, Howard, Smith, Howard, & Shelvin, 2005).

Information, Training, and Ongoing Development of Parents

Parents who have adopted a child may face challenges in several areas, including preparing to parent their child, understanding and accepting the child's challenges and strengths, reaching out and seeking resources and support, adapting their parenting approaches and strategies to fit the child, and learning how to advocate for their child and family (Home, 2015). Additionally, parenting a child who has experienced trauma can place additional demands on parents as they face challenges and experiences that are different from parenting a child who has not experienced trauma. Adoptive parents should be equipped with relevant preparation, training, and information before they adopt and continue to develop their knowledge and skills so they have the capacity to meet their children's requirements across developmental stages. Adoptive parent preparation helps reduce placement disruption, improves parenting skills, and supports realistic expectations (Smith, 2013). Some parents seek educational resources specific to their family type (e.g., single parents) or by type of adoption (e.g., open, special needs, and intercountry). Additionally, adoptive parents should receive accurate, thorough information about their children, including each child's medical and social history, so they can be better informed about each child's strengths, needs, and past experiences and relationships. Although there may be wide variation in the amount and kind of background information available about each child, especially for children adopted from another country, professionals can still provide information that helps adoptive parents be better prepared to meet their child's needs. For more information on the importance of giving adoptive parents information about children and how providing that information contributes to the success of an adoption, see *Providing Background Information to Adoptive Parents* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-backgroundbulletin/.

Adoptive families also need to have ongoing access to information and referrals so they can continue learning about adoption-related topics, special needs, and services available in their community. For resources to share with parents, see *Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Trauma* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/child-trauma/, *Parenting a Child Who Has Experienced Abuse or Neglect* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/parenting-CAN/, and *Parenting a Child Who Has Been Sexually Abused: A Guide for Foster and Adoptive Parents* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-abused/.

Role of Adoption Support and Preservation Services—Providing a comprehensive continuum of information, referral, preadoption and postadoption training, and other opportunities for the ongoing development of knowledge and skills helps adoptive parents build and maintain their competency in various areas related to adoption and special needs. As children's needs change over time—including across developmental stages—and as adoptive parents identify emerging questions and challenges, professionals can support families' ongoing stability by connecting families to the information, training, mentoring, and other services they need. Information Gateway offers a series of factsheets that helps adoptive parents understand their child's developmental needs and experiences at various stages: *Parenting Your Adopted Preschooler* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/preschool/, *Parenting Your Adopted School-Age Child* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/parent-school-age/, and *Parenting Your Adopted Teenager* at www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/parent-teenager/.

Preparation and Background Information for Parents Adopting From Another Country

As professionals seek to provide background information to adoptive parents about a child they are adopting through intercountry adoption, it is helpful to share information such as trends and patterns typically seen in children adopted from the same country or from similar situations. Professionals can connect parents with services that help them learn more about their child's needs and earlier life experiences, even in the absence of detailed medical and social histories. For example, there are several clinics around the country that have expertise in medical and developmental issues in children adopted from other countries and that can conduct assessments to help adoptive families be more aware of their children's developmental progress. Professionals can search online to find international adoption clinics near the families they support.

Family Dynamics and Adoption Adjustment

Adoption introduces a range of issues that affect individuals and families in different ways. For example, adoptive parents may experience their own feelings of loss and grief, sometimes stemming from infertility issues. Some family members struggle with unrealistic expectations of the adoption experience and may have a sense of loss for the family experience they thought they would have. Adopted children and youth at times struggle with coming to terms with the circumstances of their adoptions and feeling different from their peers. Some adoptive families, particularly those in which children and youth have complex needs, report feeling isolated in dealing with challenges (Hudson et al., 2006).

Role of Adoption Support and Preservation Services—Support services, particularly peer support groups and community-building activities, can provide opportunities for adopted children and youth and their family members to explore and address adoption-related issues with others in similar situations. Informal support, such as peer support networks, is reported to improve adoptive families' satisfaction with their adoption, especially in cases in which families who have adopted through intercountry adoption connect with other families who have adopted from another country (O'Dell, McCall, & Groark, 2015). Research indicates that families value group services for emotional support and for needed information (Bryan, Flaherty, & Saunders, 2010). One study demonstrated a significant relationship between the use of postadoption services and positive family outcomes (Reilly & Platz, 2004). In particular, parents with children with special needs who received informal support services (e.g., support groups) and financial support reported higher satisfaction with parenting than those families who did not receive those services and supports. Information Gateway's National Foster Care and Adoption Directory (NFCAD) offers information on adoption and foster care resources and services by state. It can be found at https://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/ and is also available as a mobile app.

Openness, Search, and Connection

Many adoptions involve varying degrees of openness to maintain some level of contact between birth and adoptive families. Even in closed adoptions, though, many adopted people may eventually seek information about their birth family or try to reconnect with birth relatives. Technology, such as social media, has a considerable impact on the search process and may contribute to unplanned contact with birth family members. While social media can be a powerful tool to those involved in a birth relative search, it also introduces new complexities related to the faster pace of contact and privacy considerations.

Role of Adoption Support and Preservation Services—In addition to needing guidance on search processes, adoptees who choose to reunite with birth relatives may need support in preparing emotionally, pacing contact or reunions appropriately, managing boundaries, and building relationships. Adoptive parents also may require assistance in responding to their child's questions about their birth parents, dealing with their own emotions about openness and contact, and keeping their children safe while using social media.

Financial and Material Needs

Adoptive families often require additional services, equipment, and home and vehicle modifications based on the physical, emotional, or behavioral needs of their children, all of which may create additional expenses.

Role of Adoption Support and Preservation Services—Adoption assistance—whether federally or state funded—and other forms of financial and material support play important roles in meeting adoptive families' needs. For families adopting from the child welfare system, financial assistance is the most commonly received service and often rated the most essential (Barth, Gibbs, & Siebenaler, 2001; Howard & Smith, 2003).

Types of Services

Adoptive families have a wide range of needs for services and support, which vary in frequency from occasional support to intensive interventions. The services commonly requested by families can be grouped in the following categories:

- Educational and informational services
- Clinical services
- Material assistance
- Support networks

The following table summarizes information related to the delivery of key services, including resources for additional information.

Core Adoption Support and Preservation Services

Note: Each of these categories of services can span the full continuum from prepermanence to postpermanence

Educational and Information Services

Service Type	Delivery Aspects	Resources for More Information
Information and referral (I&R)	I&R services can be provided through one-on-one meetings, workshops, websites, resource directories, and telephone hotlines or warmlines.*	Adoption Assistance by State (Question 7) (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-assistance/
Parenting education	Parenting information can be made available through in-person training (e.g., lectures, workshops, seminars), publications (e.g., pamphlets, books, newsletters), or online services (e.g., websites, blogs, online trainings, webinars).	Postadoption Training (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/training/curricula/foster/postadoptive/

* While hotlines generally provide 24-hour assistance for urgent issues, warmlines offer nonurgent support, frequently from peers, during business hours (Monday–Friday, 9 a.m. – 5 p.m.).

Service Type	Delivery Aspects	Resources for More Information
Marriage and relationship education	Programs may use varied instructional formats that range from weekly workshops to day-long programs or weekend retreats. Formal instruction may be supplemented with support groups and other support services.	National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families https://www.healthymarriageandfamilies.org/ Healthy Marriage Initiative (HHS, ACF) http://www.acf.hhs.gov/healthymarriage
Background information on the child	Most states have laws and agency policies that guide disclosure of background information, including children's medical, genetic, and social histories.	*Providing Background Information to Adoptive Parents* (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-backgroundbulletin/
Openness, search, and reunion support	In accordance with state laws, agencies can provide access to adoption information and registries to certain individuals. Some agencies provide additional services to facilitate and prepare triad members for reunions.	Openness/Maintaining Connections (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/birthfor/connections/ *Searching for Birth Relatives* (Information Gateway) http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f_search.pdf NFCAD (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/ Openness in Adoption (Donaldson Adoption Institute) http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/pubs_cat/openness-in-adoption/

Clinical Services

Service Type	Delivery Aspects	Resources for More Information
Therapeutic interventions for children and families	Therapeutic interventions include individual and family counseling and adoption preservation services. A continuum of options—from home- and community-based services to intensive residential treatment programs—serve varying needs. Some programs have specialized services for crisis intervention.	Addressing Child and Family Challenges Through Residential and Community-Based Treatment (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/postplacement/stability/addressing-child-and-family-challenges-through-residential-and-community-based-treatment/ Selecting and Working With a Therapist Skilled in Adoption (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-therapist/ Adoption Assistance by State (Question 8) (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-assistance/ Post-Adoption Services: Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Children Adopted From Foster Care (North American Council on Adoptable Children [NACAC]) https://www.nacac.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/mental-health-postadopt.pdf
Wraparound services	Wraparound is an intensive, holistic method of engaging with individuals with complex needs (typically children, youth, and their families) so they can live in their homes and communities. Some approaches to wraparound services are targeted for adoption and permanency issues.	Wraparound Services (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/reform/soc/build/socservices/#ws Wraparound Services Model (QIC-AG) http://qic-ag.org/logs/wraparound-services-model/
Adoption-competent community services	In response to the need for service providers who understand the unique dynamics of adoption, there are national efforts to provide adoption-competency trainings. In addition, some agencies are partnering with schools of social work and private agencies to develop adoption-competent programs for service providers. These initiatives range from brief training sessions to comprehensive certificate programs.	Adoption Competency Initiatives (Center for Adoption Support and Education) http://adoptionsupport.org/adoption-competency-initiatives/ A Guide to Developing an Adoption Certificate Program for Mental Health Practitioners (National Child Welfare Resource Center for Adoption) http://spaulding.org/ncra-archive-backup/ ACT – An Adoption and Permanency Curriculum for Child Welfare and Mental Health Professionals (Kinship Center) http://www.kinshipcenter.org/education-institute/classes/professional-classes.html Examples of Postgraduate Adoption Certificate Programs (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/postplacement/training/examples/ Working With Kinship Caregivers (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/kinship/

Material Support

Service Type	Delivery Aspects	Resources for More Information
Financial assistance	The guidelines for financial assistance, including dollar amounts, eligibility requirements, and what can be covered, vary widely depending on a variety of factors. Financial assistance policies can change over time in response to state budgets and other factors. Regardless of policy changes, existing adoption assistance agreements remain legally binding at the agreed-upon subsidy and service levels. Federal and state adoption tax credits also provide some financial assistance to families, depending on their eligibility.	Financial Assistance for Families (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/postplacement/finassistance/ *Adoption Assistance for Children Adopted From Foster Care* (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/f-subsid/ Adoption Assistance by State (Questions 1–6) (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-assistance/ Grants/Loans/Tax Credit for Adoption (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adoptive/expenses/grants-loans/
Medical assistance	Eligibility requirements for medical assistance and what can be covered vary across state programs.	Title IV-E Adoption Assistance (Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance) http://aaicama.org/cms/index.php/medical-assistance/title-iv-e Adoption Assistance by State (Question 9) (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-assistance/

Support Networks

Service Type	Delivery Aspects	Resources for More Information
Peer support services for adoptive parents	Support networks may be professionally facilitated or led by parents. In addition to support group meetings, some agencies offer group outings, special events, and informal gatherings to provide opportunities for peer connections. Mentor or buddy programs pair adoptive parents with more experienced adoptive parents or others in similar circumstances. Web-based chat groups can provide ongoing opportunities to link families.	NFCAD (Information Gateway https://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/ About Postadoption Services and Support (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-parenting/services/postadoption/ *Support Matters: Lessons From the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families* (AdoptUSKids) http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/support-matters/support-matters-resource-guide.pdf
Peer support services for children	In addition to support group meetings, some agencies offer camps or other specialized activities specifically for children and youth who have been adopted and sometimes for specific family types (LGBTQ, single parent, or transracial). Websites and online forums can provide ongoing support that supplement in-person activities.	Developing a Parent-to-Parent Support Network (NACAC https://www.nacac.org/resource/developing-a-parent-to-parent-support-network/
Support for transracial/ transcultural adoptions	Services may include seminars, educational resources, support groups, cultural events, special outings, heritage camps, and heritage tours to home countries. Some programs tailor services for specific groups, such as repatriation and healing programs for tribal adopted persons and their families.	Supporting Transracial and Transcultural Adoptive Families (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/postplacement/transsupport/ Pact http://www.pactadopt.org
Respite care	Respite care may be offered to parents in their home on an individual basis or in group settings through weekend outings or summer camps. Support group members sometimes provide informal respite for each other's children.	*Respite as a Support Service for Adoptive Families* (ARCH National Respite Network and Resource Center) http://archrespite.org/images/docs/Factsheets/fs_33-adoptive_families.pdf *Taking a Break: Creating Foster, Adoptive, and Kinship Respite Care in your Community* (AdoptUSKids) http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCRRFAP/resources/taking-a-break-respite-guide.pdf *Creating and Sustaining Effective Respite Services: Lessons From the Field* (AdoptUSKids) http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/respite-program/creating-and-sustaining-effective-respite-services.pdf

Cross-Cutting

Service Type	Delivery Aspects	Resources for More Information
Advocacy	Professionals may need to intervene directly on a family's behalf to help them navigate other systems (e.g., schools, medical providers) and to help empower them to advocate for their children and their family. Service providers or experienced parents also may model advocacy skills to parents to enable them to advocate for their children on their own.	Post-Adoption Advocacy (NACAC) https://www.nacac.org/help/post-adoption-advocacy/
Case management	A single coordinator can help families access services across agencies and systems or organize and facilitate a team meeting to assist a family.	Postplacement Adoption Casework Practice (Information Gateway) https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/postplacement/ Adoption Assistance by State https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-assistance/

Common Barriers to Using Services

Even as professionals and families deepen their understanding of the value of adoption support and preservation services, there continue to be several barriers to agencies' ability to provide effective services and to families being able to access those services. Research on postadoption needs and services has examined the perspectives of adoptive families and professionals and identified the following barriers to accessing services (HHS, ACF, Children's Bureau, 2007; Festinger, 2006; Ryan, Nelson, & Siebert, 2009; Smith, 2010; Hartinger-Saunders & Trouteaud, 2015):

▪ Insufficient availability of postadoption services

▪ Scarcity of adoption-competent providers

▪ Families' limited knowledge of service availability or effectiveness

▪ Reluctance among parents that sometimes stems from unrealistic expectations and/or not wanting to appear as "inadequate"

▪ Children or youth not cooperating with obtaining services

▪ Affordability

▪ Limited accessibility due to location or hours

One study found that nearly 60 percent of the adoptive families studied were underserved, meaning that they had a need for at least one postadoption service but did not access it (Hartinger-Saunders & Trouteaud, 2015). Many of those underserved families were unable to access multiple needed services. The most common barriers to accessing needed services that underserved families identified were being unaware of where to find services (27 percent), being unaware of what services to look for (29 percent), and perceiving past services as not being helpful (29 percent). A 2014 study found that although there has been progress in states offering adoption services, there were at least 13 states that had almost no specialized adoption support and preservation program (Smith et al., 2014a). Additionally, even in states that had a more extensive service array, those services only served a segment of the population with significant needs.

Funding and Delivery of Services

Adoption agencies and child welfare systems vary greatly in terms of the adoption support and preservation services they provide. Ideally, an adoption support and preservation program would reflect a continuum of services from the prepermanency education and preparation of parents through postpermanency crisis intervention. Several state agencies offer or provide referrals to multiple services. Few, however, are able to provide a full range of services to all families who need them (Smith, 2010; Smith et al., 2014b). In addition, services offered commonly change over time, reflecting shifts in budgets, policies, and priorities.

Currently, there is no single evidence-based adoption support and preservation service model (Smith, 2010). Rather, agencies draw from diverse service and support approaches. Agencies tend to tailor adoption services to reflect family needs, existing service delivery systems, and available resources. For more detailed information on models of adoption support and preservation programs and services, see *Support Matters: Lessons From the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families* by AdoptUSKids at http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/support-matters/support-matters-resource-guide.pdf and *Keeping the Promise: The Critical Need for Post-Adoption Services to Enable Children and Families to Succeed* from the Donaldson Adoption Institute at http://www.adoptioninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/2010_10_20_KeepingThePromise.pdf.

Funding

Funding for adoption support and preservation services comes from a variety of sources, and each state funds these services somewhat differently. Many states blend an array of federal and state funding sources to help pay for adoption services (Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2010; Casey Family Services, 2003; Smith, 2010). Federal funding streams for child welfare services that potentially can be used for adoption support and preservation services include the following:

- Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (Title IV-B, part 2)
- Child Welfare Services (Title IV-B, part 1)
- Adoption Assistance, Administration, and Training (Title IV-E)
- Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments
- Adoption Opportunities (discretionary grant program)
- Medicaid (Title XIX)
- Social Services Block Grant (Title XX)
- Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)

For additional information on financing options for adoption support and preservation services, see the Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Funding Permanency Services: A Guide to Leveraging Federal, State, and Local Dollars* at http://www.aecf.org/resources/funding-permanency-services/.

In addition to the child welfare funding sources listed above, child welfare agencies may be able to collaborate with other state agencies or private service providers to access other federal funding sources. For example, they may be able to support certain services through funding from the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, the Community Mental Health Services Block Grant, the Comprehensive Community Mental Health Services for Children and Their Families Program, and others. Several states also tap into a range of state and local funding sources to pay for adoption support and preservation programs. Tribes that provide adoption services may be able to access funding from the Bureau of Indian Affairs as well as the other federal funding sources previously listed, when applicable.

Providers and Service Models

Adoption support and preservation services can be delivered through several different service models, including the following:

- **Adoption agencies:** Public and private adoption agencies may deliver adoption support and preservation services directly. Services may be provided by an adoption worker, who may already have worked with the family during the adoption process, or through a specialized unit that focuses specifically on adoption needs.

- **Contracts or grants with private organizations:** Many public agencies contract with private organizations to provide adoption services throughout the state or county or in a specific region.

- **Multiagency collaboration:** It is not necessary, or even practical in some cases, for all adoption support and preservation services to be provided by state or county programs. A collaborative approach uses existing public and private service providers to deliver adoption services and to train personnel to improve the level of the community response to adoptive families and their children. Services may be made available through existing health, mental health, and social services systems as well as through nonprofit or faith-based organizations. Systems-of-care initiatives are one example of a collaborative approach that brings multidisciplinary public agencies and community organizations together to provide comprehensive, community-based services to children and families. For resources related to building systems of care in child welfare, see https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/reform/soc/communicate/initiative/ntaec/.

Based on a survey of state adoption program managers, the vast majority (86 percent) of states provide adoption support and preservation services through a combination of public and private agencies (National Resource Center for Adoption, 2014).

Growing Use of Technology to Deliver Services and Support

Across the various models for providing adoption support and preservation services, the use of technology—such as social media and video conferencing—is making it possible to overcome some key barriers to connecting adoptive families with services and peer support. For families in rural areas, including some tribal families, the option of connecting with peers as well as professionals through video conferencing, online chats, and other formats can help reduce their isolation and make services and supports more accessible. For example, in some states and tribes, professionals or family support groups facilitate private Facebook groups for adoptive parents. These private groups allow parents to connect with information and support at whatever time of day works for them rather than being restricted to specific support group meeting times. As child welfare systems explore increasing the use of the Internet to provide services to adoptive families, they may also need to provide additional training to staff on best practices. A survey of child welfare professionals revealed that only 34 percent of respondents' agencies provided training on the Internet and social media as part of adoption practice, and only 17 percent of those who received such training reported that it was comprehensive (Whitesel & Howard, 2013).

Important Components of Effective Adoption Support and Preservation Services

Lessons learned across research and practice emphasize the following as essential components of effective adoption support and preservation programs:

- **A preventive approach.** Several adoption experts suggest that programs adopt a prevention perspective as one model for services (Smith, 2010; Freundlich, Avery, Gerstenzang, & Munson, 2006; Smith, 2014a; Smith, 2014b; QIC-AG, 2015a; QIC-AG, 2015b.) Too often, services are not available until a crisis occurs and conditions and stresses have become unmanageable (Casey, 2003). Adoption support and preservation services can play a key role in strengthening families before a crisis by establishing an early foundation for services, helping parents understand what to expect over the course of their child's development, building their knowledge and skills for dealing with challenges, promoting protective factors, and reversing negative patterns before they become entrenched.

- **Trauma-informed services that are specific to the needs of adoptive children and their families.** While all families face challenges, adoptive families face complex issues that are different from those of families formed biologically. Adoption support and preservation services must address the effects of early trauma, separation, and loss as well as identity issues (Smith, 2010; Freundlich, 2006). Child welfare agencies can work together with service providers to build adoption competence and trauma-informed practices. (For more information, visit the National Child Traumatic Stress Network at http://www.nctsnet.org.) Agencies also can work with adoptive parents to advocate for adoption-competent services in the community.

- **Flexible programming with a continuum of services.** Adopted children and youth and their families have diverse needs and concerns that frequently require a multidisciplinary approach and a mix of formal and informal supports (QIC-AG, 2015b; Freundlich, 2006; Zosky et al., 2005; Atkinson & Gonet, 2007).

- **A family-systems perspective.** Adoption support and preservation services should focus on the family system as a whole rather than focusing on "fixing" the problems of the adopted child (Freundlich, 2006; National Resource Center for Adoption, 2011). While families may identify a child's behavior or emotions as the primary reason for seeking services, there are often more complex dynamics within the family and environment that need to be addressed (Freundlich, 2006; Smith, 2006). Research findings underscore the importance of engaging families through extensive outreach and nonthreatening, empathetic approaches (QIC-AG, 2015b; Information Gateway, 2005; Zosky et al., 2005).

- **Culturally competent practices.** Adoption support and preservation service providers need to be sensitive to the role of culture, ethnicity, and race in adoptive family dynamics (National Resource Center for Adoption, 2011). Cultural competence is an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures while being aware of one's own cultural worldview. Culturally competent practice involves respect for people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, sexual orientations, and other diversity factors.

- **Ongoing services.** Adoption is a lifelong process, and its challenges can be unpredictable. Some needs are evident in the immediate postadoption and adjustment phase. Other needs may emerge as an adopted child grows, enters school, reaches adolescence, or transitions to adulthood. Adoption support and preservation services should be available beyond the initial postadoption period (Freundlich, 2006; Freundlich et al., 2006; Lenerz et al., 2006).

Protective Factors as a Way to Promote Stability and Permanency

Protective factors are conditions that can help increase the well-being of children and families and mediate or buffer the negative impact of stressful and traumatic experiences. Although much of the research on protective factors does not focus specifically on children and youth in adoptive families, it can be helpful to consider how protective factors and their inclusion in service delivery to adoptive families can play a role in promoting positive outcomes, including adoption stability and child well-being. For additional information, see the Information Gateway publication *Protective Factors Approaches in Child Welfare* at https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue-briefs/protective-factors/ and *Risk & Protective Factors for Discontinuity in Public Adoption and Guardianship: A Literature Review* from the QIC-AG at http://qic-ag.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/FinalLitReview_2-15-17.pdf.

Key Steps in Program Development and Implementation

Developing and implementing an adoption support and preservation program requires agencies to consider a variety of factors, including the needs of adoptive families, available staff and resources, relevant policies, and existing program infrastructure. The following eight key steps (which may overlap in timing) can help agencies strengthen the development process while also helping to overcome barriers to service use.

1. **Assess needs.** Developing or expanding adoption support and preservation programs should start with a tailored and comprehensive assessment of family needs, existing resources, gaps in services, and collaborative opportunities. For more details on how to approach assessing needs, see the AdoptUSKids publication *Assessing Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families' Needs for Support* at http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/NRCDR-org/assessing-families-needs.pdf.

2. **Engage adoptive parents and adopted persons in the planning and development process.** Obtaining input from consumers of services—through advisory boards, surveys, and focus groups—will help agencies develop client-driven services that better meet needs and promote family engagement.

3. **Learn from others.** While there is still a fairly small set of established evidence-based practice models for adoption support and preservation services, there is a gradually growing base of information on existing programs and experiences to learn from. Visit Information Gateway at http://www.childwelfare.gov/adoption/postplacement/ for information on how other states and localities are addressing adoption support and preservation services. In addition, see *Support Matters: Lessons From the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families* at http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/support-matters/support-matters-resource-guide.pdf for profiles of support programs from states and tribes across the country, including information on evaluation findings and funding approaches for each program.

Adoption Assistance Directory and Mobile App

To learn more about adoption assistance and support services available in each state, search Information Gateway's Adoption Assistance by State webpage at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/adopt-assistance or use the NFCAD mobile app, which is available at https://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad/app.

4. **Secure funding.** There are a variety of federal, state, private, and other funding sources that can be used for adoption support and preservation services. Agencies must decide which mix of funding streams works best for them and the families they serve. It is helpful to establish a well-considered adoption support and preservation service plan before funding becomes available so you are prepared to make effective use of the funding once available. While individual agencies or adoption professionals may not be able to access many federal funding streams directly, they may work with their state adoption program manager to develop a comprehensive adoption services plan. To find your state's adoption program manager, access the NFCAD at http://www.childwelfare.gov/nfcad.

5. **Collaborate.** No single agency can address the wide range of issues and needs of adopted children and youth and their families. The multifaceted nature of family needs requires collaboration across multiple systems (e.g., child welfare, family support, mental health, education). Collaboration can help create a continuum of appropriate services for adoptive families while also leveraging available resources. It can also help ensure services are culturally relevant and accessible to the specific population of families being served.

6. **Cultivate qualified personnel.** Adoption support and preservation programs should recruit and retain staff with expertise in adoption issues. Specialized training (within and across agencies) may be necessary to build a solid understanding of relevant adoption issues, adoption competency, and cultural competence to address the needs of diverse families. To access information on postadoption training, including postgraduate adoption certificate programs developed by states and universities, visit Information Gateway at https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/adoption/postplacement/training/examples/.

Adoption Competency Curriculum

The National Resource Center for Adoption, a Children's Bureau-funded project that ended in 2014, developed a training curriculum on common issues and challenges in adoption practice, including one module on postadoption services. The curriculum is available at http://spaulding.org/academy/nrca-archive/curricula/.

7. **Implement and promote services.** After taking time to plan and develop programs that fit family needs, it is important to focus on implementation and getting the word out to families. Some agencies send adoption service announcements to recipients of adoption subsidies, while others rely on word of mouth, particularly through support groups. Programs need to remain flexible to adapt over time to shifting needs, resources, and feedback from families.

8. **Evaluate services.** Evaluating the outcomes of adoption support and preservation services is critical for identifying areas for improvement and implementing changes. Evaluation can help build the field's knowledge on which adoption support and preservation services work best and for which families. Moreover, evaluations can be a valuable asset in building the case for future funding to support sustainability.

The AdoptUSKids publication, *Support Matters: Lessons From the Field on Services for Adoptive, Foster, and Kinship Care Families,* provides tips and details for creating, implementing, and sustaining services, including profiles of support programs from states and tribes across the country and evaluation findings and funding approaches for each program. It is available at http://www.adoptuskids.org/_assets/files/AUSK/support-matters/support-matters-resource-guide.pdf.

Conclusion

Adoption support and preservation services can benefit children who have been adopted and their families in many ways—dealing with emotional, behavioral, and developmental issues; addressing the impact of trauma; and achieving healthy family relationships. The long-term outcomes of these services include strengthening adoption stability and permanency as well as enhancing family functioning and family and child well-being. By providing a continuum of adoption support and preservation services to adoptive families, professionals can help ensure permanency for the families they serve and promote permanency for other children who are waiting to be adopted.

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