

TYPS

Texas Youth Permanency Study



TYPS Sheet for Adoptive Parents

November 2018

The formation of a family through adoption is a lifelong journey that is beautifully rewarding but also complex. Although not yet well-documented by researchers, we know families formed by adoption from foster care face unique challenges as youth enter young adulthood. Our research team is interested in understanding these challenges in order to find ways to best support families formed by adoption from foster care.

In 2017, we interviewed **30 young adults** formerly in Texas foster care for the **Texas Youth Permanency Study (TYPS)**.



One of the most powerful messages youth have expressed is that nurturing, supportive and committed relationships are essential to their success.

Recommendations from the TYPS Research Team:

Our primary finding is that no matter how youth leave foster care, relationships matter. Youth need relational permanence (sustained relationships), regardless of achieving legal permanence (such as adoption). Based on what youth have shared with us so far, we have come up with three ways you can help youth achieve better outcomes and support their wellbeing as they enter adulthood.

- 1** Focus on having an authentic relationship.
- 2** Support your adopted child's desire to reconnect with their birth family.
- 3** Take care of yourself.



1

Focus on having an authentic relationship.

- Build a secure and healthy attachment with your child
- Connect as often as you can with your child in an authentic and real way
- Youth want to feel that you will always be there for them, no matter their age

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She really treated me with just basic decency and respect. She wanted to get to know me. She just cared about my day.

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Youth of all ages need a healthy attachment to adults. Unfortunately, foster youth experience a tremendous amount of instability in relationships, which is exacerbated by frequent placement changes and a history of trauma. The more you can create a positive and nurturing relationship with your child, the more likely they are to feel prepared and supported as they enter adulthood. Part of creating this secure and safe attachment is building a strong connection with your child that feels real and heartfelt.

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There are many ways to do this, such as regularly engaging in shared one-on-one activities or hobbies, showing a real interest in who they are, and allowing them to make mistakes while emphasizing you will always love and be there for them. It also means trying to create a sense of normalcy for your child. Some youth in our study expressed not feeling like part of the family due to being treated differently, even after being adopted. Be aware of how this might play out in your own home and try to proactively counter such messages.

Many youth in our study revealed that after turning 18, they lost the support of their adoptive family. Unfortunately some foster youth leave adoptive homes in the same way they left foster care - without support, security and relationships. This is detrimental on many levels and is associated with poor adult outcomes for youth. Adopted youth need to feel the security of a permanent adult relationship. As an adoptive parent, it is important for you to support your child as she enters adulthood and beyond. Youth need to feel they can always go home, and that they will always have your support and guidance.



2

Support your adopted child's desire to reconnect with their birth family.

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I think every year [my adoptive mom] would do two things. She would ask me 'would you like us to continue trying to find your mom or any information on your family?' I'd be like, 'yeah, sure.' Then each year she would have us write a letter to our mom to, I guess, release those emotions or just put it on paper. [my adoptive parents] were always really open, which I actually think was beneficial for us because I didn't realize how important that was until I was older.

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- Support your child's desire to find and connect with birth family members
- Understand that this is a normal and healthy process for adoptive youth
- Know that even if this process brings disappointment, it can also be healing

Most of the youth in our study who had been adopted were provided information about and opportunities to communicate with their birth families. For most youth, these were positive experiences that strengthened their understanding of themselves and their connections with the adoptive family. However, some adopted youth stated their adoptive family prohibited discussing their biological family. Two of these youth also experienced failed adoptions.

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It was my adopted family. She didn't want us to have any connections to our real, biological family. I just had to respect it.

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The reality is that youth often seek out family members after turning 18, so it could be quite beneficial for you to help your child through this process. It is a very normal for adopted youth to want to discover things about their biological family, which may include contact. Adolescents, in particular, are going through the developmental task of identity development. For youth to successfully work through this stage they may seek to know where they came from and their family's history. Sometimes this can be accomplished through gathering information, but sometimes youth will want to try to contact family members.

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Take care of yourself.



They asked me why would I want to do that for [learn more about biological family] and then – and then there wasn't any other conversation after that. I knew just not to bring it up again.



- Find support for processing your own feelings and experiences
- Understand that connections with birth families do not negate your relationship with your child
- Talk to other adoptive parents



As the adage goes “you can’t pour from an empty cup.” Being an adoptive parent can be incredibly rewarding, but it can also be demanding and

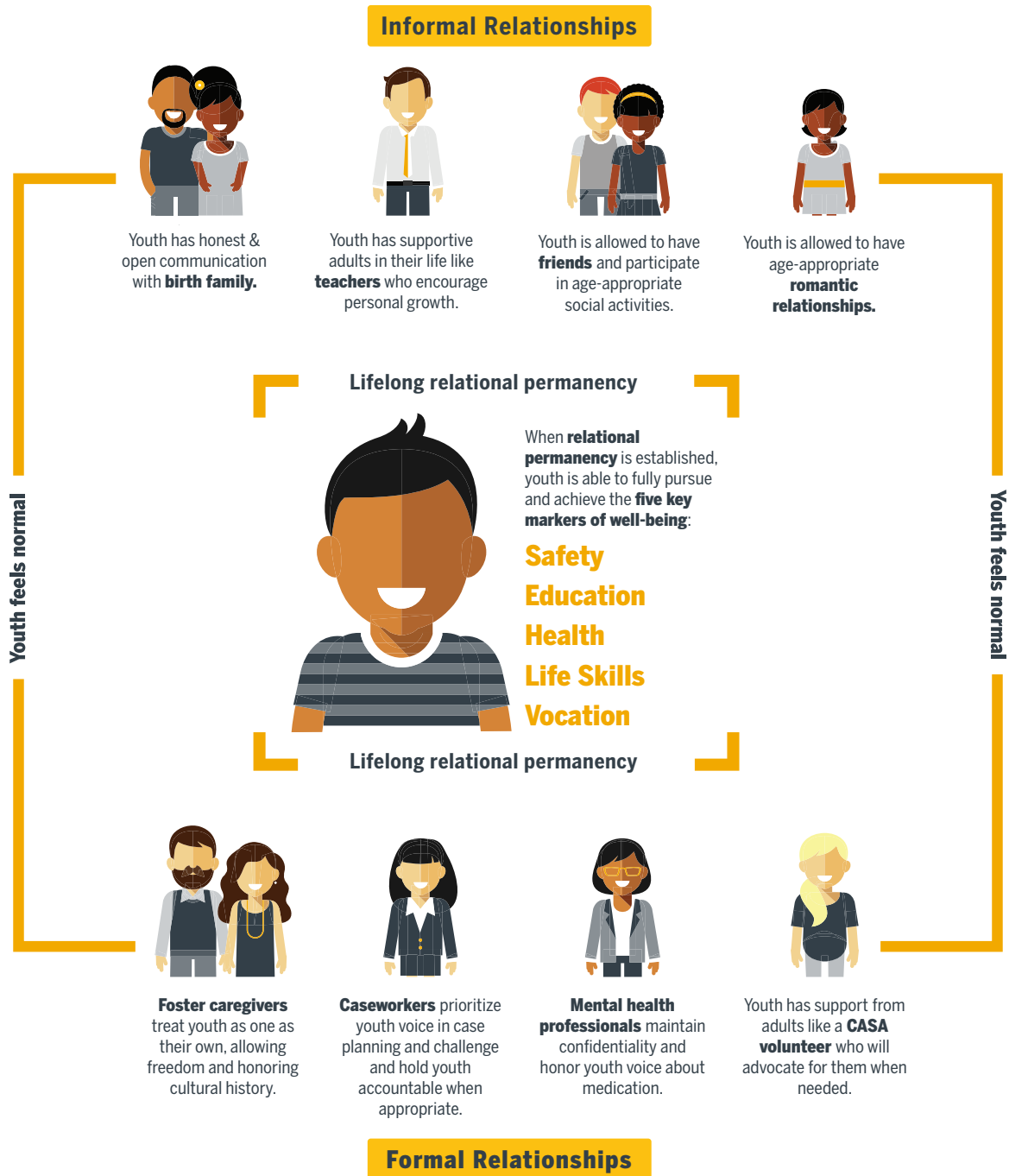
stressful. So it’s important for your physical and emotional health to practice self-care. This starts with allowing yourself the time and space to feel and process the variety of emotions and reactions that come up for you during this journey. If you are able to “fill your cup” on a regular basis, it will be easier for you to then support your child.

It is natural for you to have hesitations or even anxiety around your adopted child reconnecting with their birth family. It’s important to know that your child’s wish to reconnect with their family of origin is not a reflection on you as a parent and it doesn’t negate the relationship you have with your child. It is a natural desire of an adopted child. Finding other parents who have been through this journey could be a great way take care of yourself and help you understand and process all of your emotions.



Authentic Relationships Matter Most

Based on the 2017 TYPS pilot study, we believe through **informal** and **formal** relationships youth can begin to feel normal which creates **relational permanency**.



About TYPS

The Texas Youth Permanency Study builds evidence to better understand the realities of former foster youth entering young adulthood. In doing so, we are finding new ways of understanding permanency that will create foundations for youth to thrive in young adulthood regardless of how they leave foster care. In our pilot study, we interviewed 30 former foster youth in 2017 and released the pilot study report in March 2018. The purpose of this pilot study was to: 1) gather preliminary information around our conceptualizations of legal, relational and physical permanence; and 2) test our survey and interview protocols. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, The University of Texas at Austin (protocol #2016-10-0140). Sponsored by the Reissa Foundation and The Simmons Foundation.