



## Common Fears Children in Foster Care Have About Being Adopted

---

When youth in foster care are asked whether they want to be adopted, professionals should expect to hear “no.” These young people may have experienced many layers of trauma in their lives, and it is reasonable that they would be hesitant to trust another adult and an unknown future. They may have also already experienced a disrupted permanent placement.

Instead of halting recruitment efforts at an initial “no,” professionals working with the youth should assist them in unpacking their adoption fears. Most importantly, it is essential to explain what adoption is and what it could look like so that they can make an informed decision. Additionally, it is important to understand the youth’s specific concerns to see if they can be mitigated through a recruitment process that is tailored to them. These actions empower the youth in their future and provide a better chance of happiness and long-term stability.

Having these essential conversations is an important part of the child-focused recruitment model used by Wendy’s Wonderful Kids® (WWK) recruiters. Through the WWK program, the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption supports the hiring and training of professionals, known as recruiters, who are dedicated to finding permanent families for the longest-waiting children in foster care across the United States and Canada. Permanency may take the form of adoption, guardianship or family reunification when it is a safe option.

**Following are the seven most common fears about adoption that WWK recruiters hear, as well as strategies to work through a youth’s concerns in a manner that addresses these fears and affirms their voice in the recruitment process.**



Dave Thomas  
Foundation  
*for Adoption*®

Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

# 1 Leaving Community and Friends

Often, youth in foster care have lived in multiple homes throughout their lives, which creates a longing for stability. The thought of having to move again can be exhausting. WWK recruiters work to help these young people realize that location is not stability and explore ways they can stay in touch with connections from their past placements.

## STRATEGIES:

- Advocate for recruitment or placement with a permanent family within the youth's current school or community
- Collect the contact information of all important connections
- Ensure that the family is willing to embrace existing connections
- Encourage the family to attend events with the youth in their former and current communities
- Invite existing connections to the youth's new home or community
- Ask the youth what is important about their current school or community, and try to recreate this in their new school or community
- Familiarize the youth with their new school or community

# 2 Rejecting Family of Origin

Young people waiting in foster care may feel love and loss for their family of origin. Regardless of why a child was placed into care, many believe that accepting their place within an adoptive family means rejecting their family of origin completely.

## STRATEGIES:

- Advocate for the team to revisit the family of origin — including distant relatives and relatives who previously could not take placement, but may be in a different position now — to determine whether there is an appropriate placement
- Express the importance of the family of origin with the youth's adoptive family
- Help youth gain permission/ acceptance from the family of origin to move forward with adoption, if possible
- Explain that an adoptive family is not meant to replace their family of origin
- Explore ways for the youth to maintain a connection with their community, culture and family of origin, if safe and appropriate

# 3 Changing Last Name

Identity formation begins in childhood and moves to the forefront in the teenage years. Keeping in mind that the average age of the focus population served by WWK is 14 and that adoption-related identity issues start to increase at age 12, it is understandable why young people would not want to let go of this part of themselves. The youth's last name may be the only piece they have left of their family of origin.

## STRATEGIES:

- Hyphenate their last name
- Make their family of origin's last name their middle name
- Keep their last name as-is
- Advocate for recruitment or placement with a permanent family that supports the youth's input on choosing their name

# 4 Being Unwanted

It is no secret that youth in foster care have often moved from house to house, which leads to an overall sense of not feeling good enough and unwanted. This can contribute to low self-esteem and concerns about how they may be viewed by others.

## STRATEGIES:

- Understand that a youth may continue to feel unwanted even after a permanent family is identified and beyond
- Discuss with the youth why they hold this belief and explore their response
- Help the youth see their strengths and positive attributes by incorporating these strengths into the official court record in motions or during hearings
- Help to nurture relationships in which the youth feels valued and supported
- Understand that public posting and match events may be ineffective and exacerbate the youth's feelings of rejection

## 5 Fearing the Unknown

Fear of the unknown is a universal fear for youth and adults alike. Asking someone to be open to the idea of permanently becoming part of a family that has not yet been identified can be overwhelming. Often, youth do not feel they can truly answer this question until they know to whom they are saying “yes.”

### STRATEGIES:

- Validate that change is scary
- Assure the youth that their voice will be heard and they will be involved by explaining the child welfare process using age-appropriate language
- Ask the youth about a time they tried something new, and it worked out well
- If the youth is comfortable, help youth prepare a statement for their court hearings to read or submit to the judge
- Empower the youth to take an active role in decision making
- Discuss situations the youth is concerned about and how they could work through them if they happened
- Explore with the youth what aspects of a family and community are important to them to help inform their transition plan

## 6 Having New Rules and Expectations

Entering a new home with new rules can be scary. Not knowing the consequences of broken rules can be scarier, especially when youth have experienced trauma. Collaboration between the youth, family and child welfare professionals is important so that everyone’s concerns can be addressed.

### STRATEGIES:

- Understand which rules or expectations may feel worrisome to the youth
- Encourage the youth and family to establish rules together
- Urge the youth and family to determine consequences together for not following rules
- Assist the family in discussing expectations that are negotiable vs. non-negotiable

## 7 Protecting Safety and Wellbeing

Safety and wellbeing are always a priority. However, not everyone’s idea of feeling safe and happy is the same. Having a plan in place to nurture and protect the youth’s safety and wellbeing is a best practice to give them peace of mind.

### STRATEGIES:

- Explore what safety and wellbeing look like for the youth
- Make a list with the youth about what makes them feel safe and comfortable and share it with the family
- Ensure youth have contact information and the ability to connect with people who make them feel safe and comfortable



“

**I didn't feel like anybody would want me. I never really celebrated my birthday because instead of a celebration of getting older, it was I'm less likely to be adopted.**

”

**RHIANNA**  
ADOPTED AT 17

## CALL TO ACTION

Legal professionals should be equipped to have permanency conversations with youth, whether it is as a judge asking a youth if they want to be adopted in the courtroom, a guardian ad litem recommending whether adoption is in the youth's best interest, or a child's attorney counseling them on why permanency is a better outcome than aging out of foster care. No matter your role in a youth's case, following are some actions to consider in supporting their permanency journey.

- Assess frequently the youth's understanding of permanency, using language that is developmentally appropriate and meaningful to them
- Ask youth who is important to them and who they turn to for support, and have their recruitment team revisit these adults as permanent placement options or invite them to be members of the youth's recruitment team
- Reflect on how you are recognizing and honoring the youth's relationships, community and culture in the permanency process
- Order or refer youth to receive specialized recruitment services, like Wendy's Wonderful Kids, even when youth express hesitancy to being adopted. WWK recruiters have the time to work through adoption fears and find the right family for the youth
- Challenge efforts that halt recruitment or those that give the youth a case plan goal that keeps them in long-term foster care

### Watch Keith's Story

[davethomasfoundation.org/WhatAdoptionWouldHaveMeanttoKeith](https://davethomasfoundation.org/WhatAdoptionWouldHaveMeanttoKeith)



## THANK YOU

for sharing our belief that a permanent family is possible for every child waiting in foster care ...  
no matter their story.



Dave Thomas  
Foundation  
for Adoption®

Forever Families for Children in Foster Care

Learn more and access resources to support your work at:

[davethomasfoundation.org/ForProfessionals](https://davethomasfoundation.org/ForProfessionals)