



# Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Training for Alaska's Resource Families

## Self-Study Workbook

(6.0 hours of Training Credit)

**Written by Deborah Hayes, M. Ed.**

*Developed by the Alaska Center for Resource Families for the State of Alaska DHSS Office of Children's Services in 2005 and updated in 2011.*



**[www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org)**

**1-800-478-7307**

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# Self-Study Course

## Adoption and Guardianship Preparation for Alaska's Resource Families

February 2005 (update 2011)

### **INTRODUCTION**

This self study course will help to prepare you for and teach you about basic processes of adoption and guardianship of children who are in the custody of the State of Alaska, due to child abuse and neglect. Because some children in the child welfare system cannot return home, the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services seeks permanent outcomes for them, including adoption and guardianship.

Since this is an introductory course, we encourage you to also learn about other special needs issues children of adopted children. The Alaska Center for Resource Families offers a greater array of materials regarding special issues; such as, grief and loss, and attachment disorders which are also essential in understanding a child's journey through placement.

To earn 6.0 hours for foster parent training credit or to receive certification of complete as an adoptive or guardian parent, for Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Training, please fill out the questionnaires at the back of each section in this course. Then detach the questionnaires and return it to:

**Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second Avenue, Suite 101  
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701**

*Or you may fax it to (907) 479-9666*

### **A SPECIAL NOTE:**

This course is designed to provide you with a basic overview of the adoption and guardianship processes. Because many terms and phrases are used that have specific meanings to child welfare practices, we strongly recommend that you complete the ACRF onsite training: *Core Training for Alaska Resource Families* before completing this course. Core is required for all foster and adoptive families caring for children in child protective custody. Core is available on-site in a classroom setting regularly in Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks, and Juneau. ACRF staff also travel to rural hubs to teach Core.

To reach all of you, we have a self-study version of Core, called the *Core Training for Resource Families Workbook*. If you live in an area where Core is not available on-site, you may order a Core self-study workbook. To order the Core workbook, you can e-mail us at [acrf@nwresource.org](mailto:acrf@nwresource.org) or phone 1 800-478-7307. If you have questions please do not hesitate to contact us!

## **COMPETENCIES:**

The resource family has a general understanding of the processes of adopting a child through the State of Alaska and knows the special characteristics needed by the adoptive or guardian family.

- The resource family is familiar with the reasons of why children may be available for adoption or guardianship through the State of Alaska, child protective system.
- The resource family understands how adoption or guardianship fit into the larger child welfare picture.
- The resource family understands the home study process and the contents of a home study.
- The resource family understands the implications of the term “special needs children”, as it relates to adoption or guardianship subsidies.
- The resource family understands the difference between a legal risk adoptive placement (also called Foster-Adoptive) or an adoptive placement, and the resource family’s roles, rights and responsibilities.
- The resource family understands the basic components of adoption and the seven shared core issues for the triad members, including, grief, loss, trust, shame, identity, control and intimacy.
- The resource family understands the implications of the Indian Child Welfare Act and how this act may impact adoption or guardianship of Native Children.
- The resource family understands the value in keeping children connected to their culture and families in identity formation and the characteristics of open or closed adoption and what is best for the adopted child and your family.
- The resource family is familiar with adoption and guardianship resources.

## **LEARNING OBJECTIVES:**

- The resource family will learn about the general aspects about the adoption and guardianship process or who to ask if they have questions.
- The resource family will learn the general process of adoption and guardianship through the State of Alaska child protection system, including who the children are waiting for permanent homes.
- The resource family will become familiar and be able to identify the definitions of the terms, adoption, guardianship home study, subsidy, legal risk placement, open and closed adoption, ICWA placement preferences for Native children, and finalization.
- The resource family will learn about the seven shared core issues for the triad members in adoption and begin a self-assessment process of his or her readiness to adopt.

# **Adoption and Guardianship Preparation for Alaska's Resource Families**

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- Section One: The State of Alaska Child Protection System and Permanency through Adoption and Guardianship**
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- Section Three: Special Needs Children and Legal Risk Placement: Open Or Closed Adoptions**
- Section Four: Core Issues In Adoption**
- Section Five: Maintaining Connections to Culture and Family**
- Section Six: State of Alaska Adoption or Guardianship Subsidy Program**
- Attachments: Self-Study Course Questionnaires are included after each section for Training Credit of 1.0 hour.**

# REFERENCES

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## Section One:

# The State of Alaska Child Protection System and Permanency through Adoption and Guardianship

In this section the resource family (foster, adoptive, or relative caretakers) will learn about the child welfare system, and basic laws that regulate adoption through child protection system.

The term **RESOURCE FAMILY** is used universally in this course to describe foster, adoptive or relative caregivers.

### Learning Objectives

- The resource family will be familiar with the reasons why children may be available for adoption or guardianship through the State of Alaska, child protective system.
- The resource family understands how adoption or guardianship fits into the larger child welfare picture
- The resource family has a general understanding of the differences between adoption and guardianship.

The State of Alaska, Office of Children's Services (OCS) child protective services program is mandated (AS 47.05.010) to provide services that promote the safety and welfare of children and protect them from child abuse and neglect. Child protective laws were formally initiated in 1974 as part of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. And since that time, Alaska has had an evolving child welfare system which has been designed to ensure the wellbeing and safety of children from maltreatment or child abuse, and to provide permanency through reunification with birth parents or other permanent plan such as adoption or guardianship.



The children who are available for adoption or guardianship through the State of Alaska child protection system (often called 'OCS') have been placed in foster care or with a relative caretaker, due to child abuse and/or neglect. However, the initial placement is considered temporary and within the first twelve months a decision regarding permanency needs to be made. If reunification with the parent(s) does not seem likely the child's plan may be adoption or guardianship. Children should not stay in foster care or other temporary situation indefinitely and studies show children do best when they have permanency in their lives.

*The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (ASFA) and Alaska's House Bill 375*, defined time limits for children who are placed in foster care. The basis for the timelines is grounded in the concept that children need permanent families and foster care is temporary. Aging practices have demonstrated that long-term foster placement and multiple foster care placements may be harmful to a child's identity formation and also impact a child's emotional, social and educational development. In the past, many children lingered in foster care while their parents were given an unlimited amount of time to complete services aimed at helping the parents (such as substance abuse treatment). This was known as "foster care drift"- children never knowing if or when they were going to go home.

The Federal government, in implementation of ASFA, has taken a strong stance that children should not wait indefinitely in foster care while their parents do not engage in services aimed toward reunification. Therefore, placement of children in foster care is *time limited*. The federal government has outlined the time frames for children to be placed in foster care. These time frames say that children should not linger in foster care for longer than 15 out of 22 months. And if a child is in foster care for a continuous 12 months, a permanency hearing must be held for the child. This hearing outlines the child's permanency goals.



The first permanency goal of child welfare is always reunification; however, when reunification with the parent's is not possible, the permanency goal can be adoption or guardianship. Usually, parents are offered services that will help them reduce the problems that brought the child in to custody. These services are outlined in the parent's case plan with time frames for completing specified services. After approximately nine months, the parent's progress discussed in a meeting called a Permanency Planning Conference, which is usually facilitated by the OCS adoption specialist.

If the parents have made little progress in the services outlined in their case plan and reunification does not seem likely, the child's permanency goal may be changed to adoption. This goal is presented to the court for approval in what is called a Permanency Report to the Court. A permanency hearing takes place after the child has been out of the parent's home for approximately twelve months; the court will then determine what the child's goal should be. The determination is based on a number of factors including whether services have been offered to remedy the problems that brought the child into foster care and whether the parent's have taken advantage of, and made progress in, those services. The child's resource family should be notified by the social worker if the child's goal has been changed.

***Only children with the goal of adoption or guardianship have the potential to become legally available for adoption or guardianship.*** Social workers, who are assigned to cases where children cannot return home, look for permanent homes for the children who have the goal of adoption or guardianship. The State of Alaska, Regional Adoption Specialist (RAS) helps the social workers to locate adoptive and guardianship homes for children. There are four RAS in the State of Alaska, one located in each region, including Anchorage, Mat-Su (South Central region); Juneau (South East region) and Fairbanks for the Northern region of the State.



Children who have the goal of adoption or guardianship should be placed in homes that can potentially meet this goal very early in the case, as early as possible. Often the child is placed with a relative or with a foster parent. If a child is not already in a potentially permanent home, the RAS will work with the current resource family and the social worker to match children and adoptive/guardian families.

### **How Does Adoption Or Guardianship Fit Into The Larger Child Welfare Picture?**



Adoption or guardianship for children is achieved through a process called ***permanency planning***. Permanency planning is a set of activities and tasks that social workers do and that are directed toward achieving the child's permanent goal. Plans for permanency can include: reunification with parents; relative placement or kinship care; adoption by foster parent, adoption by relative, guardianship, long term family for foster placement (most often for older children who are working towards independent living) or independent living for older children in foster care.

While child protective services works toward supporting and helping families and protecting children, it also must ensure that children's needs for permanency are supported through connecting children to permanent families when they cannot safely return home. Both adoption and guardianship are considered permanent options for children. Adoption or guardianship are appropriate permanency options for children who are involved in the child welfare system, and cannot safely return home. Once an adoption or guardianship is finalized, the social worker may close the child protection case and allow the new family to function independently.

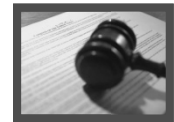
***Let's look at the differences between them.***

## **What is Adoption?**

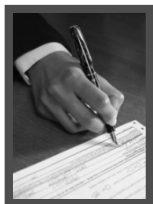
**Adoption** is a legal process that results in a lifelong relationship and commitment to a child. In order for a child to be adopted the child must be legally free for adoption or the parents must consent to the adoption. For a child to be legally free for adoption, the parent's legal rights must either be relinquished voluntarily by the parents, or the parent's legal rights are terminated by the Alaska Courts.

Sometimes, parents voluntarily relinquish their rights for the purposes of adoption by a relative or by a person the parents have learned to know and trust to raise their child. Often when parents relinquish their legal rights, they can preserve the right to "reasonable contact" with their child, which guarantees some kind of visitation and on-going relationship with the child. Reasonable contact can range from receiving or sending cards and letters, to yearly visits, to frequent, open contact. Every case is different and unique, but all contact should be focused on what is in the best interest of the child.

**Termination of parental rights** is an involuntary process, where the State of Alaska Office of Children's Services, through their attorney, files a petition to the court, based on solid legal grounds supporting the termination of parental rights and presents evidence to the court which supports termination. If the court finds that there is evidence to support termination of parental rights, and the child's well-being and best interests are served by termination, the order may then be granted, allowing the child to become "legally free for adoption."



A new and legally binding relationship between child or children and a parent or parents, occurs through a court adoption proceeding. This means that the adoptive family, either represents themselves or retains an attorney who files a motion before the court for the adoption to occur. At the Court Proceeding the adoptive family asks the court to finalize the adoption.



Once the adoption is finalized and an order is issued, the adoptive parents obtain a new birth certificate for the child which names the adoptive parents as the child's parents. Adoptive parents have the same, full, legal rights and responsibilities as birth parents. Adoptive parents have the authority to consent to any medical or psychiatric treatment, educational plans, travel plans, marriage, and so on. Adoptive parents may claim the adoptive child as a dependent for income tax purposes and the child can inherit from their estate. Adoption offers the greatest amount of legal and emotional security for children – more than any other permanency option, including guardianship. Furthermore, adoptive parents should understand that they are making a long-term, life lasting commitment to the child. Adoption is the best option for all children, especially young children.

In order to adopt a child or be considered as an adoptive placement, the family must have a completed, approved (by the Regional Adoption Specialist) adoption home study. In order to be

adopted, a child must be legally free for adoption. This is accomplished by parents relinquishing their parental rights or by the parent's legal rights being terminated by the Alaska courts.

If OCS has been granted custody and control of the child through a court ordered termination of parental rights, OCS must also provide written consent for the adoption to occur. The Consent for Adoption is requested by a social worker through the Adoption Specialist and is signed by the Director. Parents whose rights have not been terminated also have the right to consent to an adoption, which sometimes happens, especially when the placement is with a relative or a family that the adoptive parent has formed a relationship with. The adoption cannot be granted without the consent for adoption and the completed approved adoption home study.

## What is Guardianship?

**Legal Guardianship** is another permanency option for children but has a different legal status than adoption. Guardianship is a legally binding supervisory relationship between an adult(s) and a child that lasts through the child's eighteenth birthday (unless the child has severe developmental or physical limitations and the guardianship is necessary for a longer period of time).



A guardian may or may not be a relative, and the parent's legal rights generally are not terminated, unless the case has special circumstances. Generally stated, by granting the order for Guardianship, the court is "suspending" the legal rights of the parents, and allowing another adult to make decisions and care for the child.

In order for a guardianship to occur, the family must complete a guardianship home study. Parental rights don't necessarily need to be terminated because the birth family can agree to the guardianship. If parental rights have been terminated by the courts, then the State of Alaska must consent to the guardianship. After a guardianship petition is filed in the courts, a hearing is generally held (always held for Alaskan Native or Native American children).

If the court approves the guardianship, the guardianship order that is issued by the Superior Court specifies the guardian's rights and responsibilities which include responsibility for the physical care and control of the child, determination of where and with whom the child will live, the right and duty to protect, train, and discipline the child, and the responsibility for providing the child with food, clothing, education, medical care and shelter. Sometimes the orders may also include continuing contact with birth parents. Guardians do not possess the authority to consent to a minor's marriage or to enter the military service prior to the age of 18. Parents, whose legal rights have not been terminated, generally retain some legal rights including the right to visitation, consent to adoption, consent to marriage, consent to military enlistment, consent to major medical care, and the responsibility for support.

Visitation between the child and the birth parents may occur, depending on the agreement between all parties. In guardianships where the birth parent's rights have not been terminated, the Guardian ad Litem, social worker, guardian or birth parents can petition the court to modify the guardianship order and ask for the child to be returned to parental care. This can occur throughout the lifetime of the guardianship. Therefore, a guardianship always has the possibility of disruption.



Because guardianship does not offer the same permanency and security as adoption, most experts agree that guardianship may not be the best permanency solution for younger children. The State of Alaska Policy and Procedures say that guardianship for children under 10 does not reflect the best practice for placement of young children. For children under the age of 10, the social worker must justify why they feel guardianship is the best plan and document efforts toward adoption.

Generally, guardianship is most appropriate for children who are older and who have a

connection to their birth parents. Remember that the State of Alaska – through the Office of Children’s Services and the courts - will determine the child’s permanency goal.

## **Summary**

The Office of Children’s Services is mandated to protect children from child abuse. In serious cases of child maltreatment, children are removed from their parents and placed with other resource families (foster, relative or tribal families, etc.). OCS will offer services to the family in the form of a case plan. The first goal for the child is always reunification; however, parents must reduce the risk of harm to the child for reunification to occur. If the risk of harm to the child cannot be reduced and children cannot be safely reunified, in this case, children will need another permanency option. ASFA and HB 375 established timelines for parents to reduce the risk of harm and for reunification to occur. Permanency planning is a set of activities directed toward achieving permanency for children and their families.

Permanency options for children include adoption and guardianship. Guardianship is usually granted to children over the age of 14, but adoption is always preferable because it is a lifelong relationship. OCS employs Regional Adoption Specialists who work with social workers and resource families to find permanent homes for children. If you are a foster parent, or other resource family, and do not want to adopt a child who has been in your home for over one year, you need to tell your social worker in order for the child to be transitioned into a potentially permanent home.

Adoption is a legal process that results in a legally binding life long relationship between the child and the adoptive parents. A child of any age can be adopted and the parents can agree or consent, voluntarily relinquish or have their parental rights terminated so that a child will become legally free for adoption. Guardianship is a legally binding supervisory relationship where parental rights are “suspended”. Resource families must complete an adoption home study and be approved for adoption or guardianship before an adoption can occur.

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**Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Self Study Workbook Section 1 1.0 Hour**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

*Street or Post Office**City/State**Zip*

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

 **Yes! I would like to receive ACRF's upcoming training and the quarterly newsletter by email.**Are you a foster parent?  YES  NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_If NO, please check one:  Pending Foster Parent  OCS  Birth Parent  Adoptive Parent  Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_)  Agency: \_\_\_\_\_ Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING****COURSE: "SECTION ONE: THE STATE OF ALASKA CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM AND PERMANENCY THROUGH ADOPTION OR GUARDIANSHIP"**

*Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. Try filling out the questionnaire first from what you remember from the course. Then review if necessary. These questions address information specifically stated in this course.*

1. The first goal for a child who has been removed from their parent's care is always:

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Independent Living
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Foster Care
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Adoption
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. Reunification
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. Guardianship

2. How many months can children remain in out-of-home care before the State of Alaska must file a petition for termination of parental rights, unless there are compelling reasons not to file?

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. 2 of 6 months
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. 9 of 12 months
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. 15 of 22 months
- \_\_\_\_\_ d. 18 of 24 months
- \_\_\_\_\_ e. 24 of 48 months

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 2 - "SECTION ONE: THE STATE OF ALASKA CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM AND PERMANENCY THROUGH ADOPTION AND GUARDIANSHIP"

3. The permanency hearing takes place after the child has been out of the parent's homes for how many months?
- a. 6 months
  - b. 12 months
  - c. 15 months
  - d. 22 months
4. Permanency options for children in the State of Alaska custody include:
- a. Reunification with birth parents
  - b. Relative placement or kinship care
  - c. Adoption and guardianship
  - d. All of the above
5. Why is adoption for children under the age of 10 preferable? (CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)
- a. Adoption is a lifelong relationship and more stable for a child.
  - b. Adoption is the easiest form of permanency to finalize for the social worker.
  - c. Children under 10 won't remember their birth parents if adopted.
  - d. Once finalized, an adoption can't be disrupted by a birth parent.
  - e. All of the above
6. What is the role of the Regional Adoption Specialist?
- a. Are located in each of Alaska's four regions
  - b. Help social workers find permanent placements for children
  - c. Work with foster parents and relatives when they agree to adopt a child in their home
  - d. All of the above
7. Which of the following best describes "a legally binding supervisory relationship between and adult and a child that last through the child's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday"?
- a. Independent Living
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CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 3 - "SECTION ONE: THE STATE OF ALASKA CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM AND PERMANENCY THROUGH ADOPTION AND GUARDIANSHIP"

- 8 Which of the following best describes "a legal process that results in a lifelong relationship and where a family is granted in court the full legal rights and responsibilities as birth parents"?
- a. Independent Living
  - b. Foster Care
  - c. Adoption
  - d. Reunification
  - e. Guardianship
9. In order for a child to be legally free for adoption, the parent's legal rights must be relinquished voluntarily by the parent or terminated by the Alaska Courts.
- a. True
  - b. False
10. ESSAY QUESTION: Describe the main differences between adoption and guardianship.

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**FOR SCORING AND CREDIT OF 1.0 TRAINING HOUR, MAIL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE AND THE QUESTIONNAIRES FROM THE OTHER SECTIONS TO:**

**Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second AVE STE 101  
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## Section Two: The Home Study Process

In this section the resource family will understand what an adoption home study is and the basic components of a home study.

### Introduction:

Single and two-parent families who wish to be considered as adoptive or guardian families must complete a process called a home study. The home study process involves education and preparation; as well as, gathering of information about the prospective parents by a person called a home study writer. Ideally, the home study process helps to build knowledge, and create a partnership between the family and social workers.

If you are interested in adoption of special needs children, through the State of Alaska, your home study will be assigned for completion by your Regional Adoption Specialist. Currently (FY 2011) the State of Alaska contracts with Catholic Social Services (Southcentral Region) and Fairbanks Counseling and Adoption (Northern Region) and the Alaska Center for Resource Families (Southeastern Region) to complete all adoption and guardianship home studies for legal risk and legally free adoptive families.



Adoption preparation training is available on-site through the Alaska Center for Resource Families in Anchorage, Mat-Su, Fairbanks and Juneau. Attending on-site training is strongly recommended because it gives the adoptive family an opportunity to meet the Regional Adoption Specialist and the ACRF Family Support Specialist, other adoptive families and to interact and ask questions. Otherwise, reading and completing this self-study course helps to fulfill the educational component of the adoption home study process.

Adoptive and guardian families should also be asking questions of their OCS social worker, the home study writer, the Regional Adoption Specialist and the ACRF Family Support Specialist, because it is very important to be as educated as possible prior to making a lifelong commitment to a child.

### The Basics of an Adoption Home Study

The home study itself is a written report that contains information about a family and recommendations of the home study writer, who has met with the applicants on several occasions, both individually and together for a two-parent family. The home study writer is usually a person who has at least a bachelor degree in Social Work and additional training in permanency planning and adoption. These meetings usually occur in the applicant's home, and include any other children residing with the family and others who may also live there.

The home study writer should be able to tell you an approximate date for completion of the written document. In general, the adoption or guardianship home study covers the following components:

- ✓ Personal and family background-including sibling relationships, key events and what you learned from them
- ✓ Marriage and family relationships

- ✓ Motivation for adoption-including any aspects of infertility
- ✓ If child specific-what are the child's special needs and how family meets the needs of this child
- ✓ If a Native Alaskan child is being considered, how the family meets the placement preferences outlined in the Indian Child Welfare Act
- ✓ Parenting and integration of the child into the family
- ✓ The family environment and the community setting
- ✓ Physical health, and mental health history of applicants
- ✓ Education, employment and finances-including insurance coverage and child care plans if needed
- ✓ At least three references and criminal background checks, using fingerprint cards
- ✓ Summary and recommendations for adoption or guardianship

**Autobiographical information: Personal and family background-including sibling relationships, key events and what you learned from them; marriage and family relationships, parenting and integration of the child into your family, motivations, your family environment, and community.**

The Autobiographical information contains all of the elements listed above and is essentially key elements about your life. Your home study writer often provides you with a form to complete and will also gather this information through the interview process. You may be asked to talk about how you were raised and by whom, the style of parenting you received, your siblings (if any), and any other events that impact your ability to parent or your perspectives on adoption.

The statements that you make may answer many questions necessary for the home study document. The home study writer will ask you to talk about your relationship with your parents and siblings and what support systems you currently have. The writer will want to know what kinds of parenting techniques you use and the different aspects of your current children, if any. Be prepared to talk about your current educational level, any further aspirations, your job, your employment history and any plans to change employment.

If you are married the writer will ask you questions about your marriage. These may cover how you met the other parent, how long you dated, what attracted you to the other parent, how you resolve your differences, what you see as the other parent's strength's and weaknesses. If you are not married, the writer will want to know about your social life and how you anticipate integrating a child into it; as well as, any plans for a relationship or about dating habits. If you have been married previously, there will be questions about that marriage.



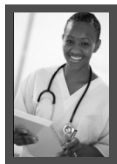
The interview will also contain questions about your ordinary routines such as a description of your typical work day and/or weekend, your interests, and your activities. The home study writer may also ask you questions about your experiences with other's children and the support systems you may have in place, including some "what if" questions which add insight into how you may handle particular situations.

There may also be a section on specific adoption related topics and issues, which may include questions about your motivation to adopt and/or your interest in adopting a specific child. If your home study is not focused on a specific child, you will be asked about the characteristics, age, special needs and so on of the child you are interested in adopting. And you will be asked about any other religious or cultural practices, your level of practice, and if you were raised with these beliefs or cultural systems.

The home study process is also designed to assist in bringing to light aspects that perhaps you have not thought about. You may not know all of the answers to some questions-and that is okay! The home study writer should also offer you other resources, experiences, and places to find answers.

## Health Statements

The State of Alaska requires all adoptive families to complete a statement of their physical and mental health. Health issues may or may not prevent a person from adopting-it depends on the nature, duration, life expectancy, and if the health problem interferes with parenting. Primarily, the home study writer needs to verify that the adoptive applicant is generally healthy, has a normal life expectancy, and is physically and emotionally capable of handling the care of a child. If you have a medical condition, but are under a doctor's care, and that condition is under control (for instance if you have high diabetes that is controlled by medication) you can probably still be approved as an adoptive family. A serious health problem that impacts life expectancy may prevent approval as an adoptive parent.



Treatment for mental health issues does not preclude someone from becoming an adoptive parent. The nature of the illness, the treatment history of the illness and impact on their life and potential impact on a child are all issues the home study writer will want to examine. You may be asked to provide statements from physicians and mental health professionals attesting to your current condition, treatment and future expectations.

## Income statement

The home study writer will want you to verify your employment by providing a statement (this is a form) from your employer. You will also be asked about other resources, savings, retirement, assets and any other financial factor that weighs into financial stability. You will need to show how much it costs you to live, such as rent or mortgage costs, fuel, food, car payment, insurance and so on. Adoption of children does not require that the applicant be well-off, however, it is important to show that you can manage your finances responsibly and that you have sufficient financial resources to care for a child.

## Child Abuse and Criminal Clearances



The State of Alaska requires that all adoptive or guardian applicants complete child abuse and criminal background clearances. You will be provided with a set of fingerprint cards and instructions on how to proceed, by either your social worker or the home study writer, for every person in your home over the age of 16. In most places, public safety offices can "roll" your finger prints. *If you are already licensed as a foster parent, this process has already been completed. Unless you are asked otherwise, you will not need to repeat this step. OCS will provide the home study writer with verification that your fingerprint results are on file.*

When you submit the application for adoption, the social worker will also complete a child abuse history check on all members of your household. The social worker will also provide the home study writer with verification that this process has been completed and any significant information required for the report.

Misdemeanor offences committed long ago for which there is a believable explanation (for example, "I was young and dumb, and did what everyone else seemed to be doing") usually are not held against you for adoptive purposes; however, a felony conviction or any charge involving children or illegal substances would most likely not be tolerated. Some other criminal history will prevent you from being an adoptive parent. If you have been convicted of physical or sexual

abuse of a child or an adult, you will not be able to adopt children. If you have a substantiated report of child sexual abuse, you will not be able to adopt children.

## References

The State of Alaska requires at least three references, which includes names, addresses and phone numbers of individuals you select. Choose references who know you well; such as close family friends, church members or co-workers. If possible, they should be people who have known you for several years. You should not list family members such as siblings, aunts and uncles or grandparents. In some cases a relative may be acceptable particularly in small, remote communities. A relative's opinion is often considered biased under most circumstances. If you have children, another parent makes a good reference. The home study writer will either send your references a questionnaire or talk directly with them, asking questions about you. These questions may address aspects such as your experience with children, the stability of your relationship, and any known motivations for adoption.

References are used to obtain a more complete picture of the adoptive applicant. References are generally quite supportive of the applicant; and negative statements are rare, but do occur. Sometimes references may disclose domestic violence or a substance abuse problem which requires further follow-up on behalf of the home study writer.

## Interviews

The home study writer will likely schedule several visits with you and your family members (if applicable). The purpose of the home visit is to create a visual picture of you and your environment for the home study document. You will be asked questions about information you provided in your autobiographical statement (if you wrote one or filled out a form). In the case of couples, some interviews will be scheduled jointly and some separately, depending on the style of the writer.

It is very important for you to understand that the home study writer is not visiting your home to see if it is clean, or tidy. The writer simply needs to verify that the environment they may be approving for an adoptive child is safe and healthy and that the family has thought ahead about how they will accommodate a new member to the family. The writer will want to walk through your home to see sleeping areas and accommodations for a new family member (if any).

If the child is already placed in your home, the writer will be observing all family member interactions with the child to determine the level of attachment, freedom of movement, comfort and response to child's needs (to name a few of the observations).

It is natural to be very nervous about the home visit-but try to relax! Most often, the home study writer will talk with you and your family for an extended period of time and will put you at ease. It is important to be honest with the home study writer, he/she does not expect perfection! These writers are very experienced and know that all people are a combination of strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, it would not be wise to present your family or situation in a deceptive or dishonest manner because if discovered, this would betray any trust that the social worker had and could prevent you from being an adoptive placement.

## Children in Your Home



If you already have children, either by birth, fostering or through adoption, they will be included in the home study process. Older children will be interviewed and may even be invited to attend training sessions. The home study writer will assess the impact that adding another child to the family will have on the

children in the home. The children may be asked about their feelings and preferences for adoptive children.

The home study writer may ask the children how they do in school, what their interests and hobbies are, what their friends are like, and how they get rewarded or disciplined for good for not-so-good behavior. However, the overall emphasis will be on how the child sees a new person fitting into the family and whether they are prepared to share you with the new potential sibling.

## **Other Considerations**

Flexibility and a sense of humor are vital characteristics when raising children and they are useful when going through the home study process. As an example, if you can demonstrate flexibility in your work place by taking off an hour early to meet the home study writer to be sure things go smoothly, this will transfer into the potential accommodations that you will need to make for your future adoptive child. Using laughter and humor when aspects do not go smoothly will also carry adoptive parents more easily through their journey.

For families wishing to adopt “special needs children” through the State of Alaska, the majority of the costs are covered by the State. The training, support and preparation services are provided free of charge for foster, adoptive and guardian families seeking children through the State of Alaska. Private adoption agencies will charge a fee of \$1000.00 to \$2000.00 for an adoption home study, and other fees may be as great as \$25,000.00. Through the State of Alaska adoptions, a nominal fee may be charged for adoption home studies and this cost is reimbursed to the family as part of the non-reoccurring costs provision provided for subsidized adoptions. If you have more questions or need information about the cost for your home study (if any), and the reimbursement of the cost, talk to your Regional Adoption Specialist.

## **What is an Adoption Home Study:**

### **“Who is this Person with the White Gloves in my House?”**

*Written by Elaine Cordova, MS., Family Support Specialist, ACRF Adoption Support Services Program, 2005.*

Many years ago when I was a new adoption worker one of my first assignments was the task of interviewing prospective adoptive parents and writing their adoption home studies. 23-years old with a newly acquired degree, unmarried, childless, I was sent out into the world. My first home study interview saw me sitting at a family’s dining room table, trying to be focused and professional, while at the same time ignoring the family pet parakeet as it flew around my shoulders trying to get my attention. It finally perched itself on the rim of my coffee cup and left a “welcoming gift.” Unsure of what the social work etiquette book would say, I smiled and continued the interview process. The second home study was conducted in rural Alaska where I was dropped off at a forlorn looking landing strip by the Cessna 180. As it faded into the sky the sound of the airplane’s engine was soon replaced by the hum of a snow machine. With a combination of apprehension, and devil-may care, I flung a leg over the back of the snow machine and clung to the newly introduced driver with one arm and my brief case with the other. We made our way to yet another dining room table to talk about the family’s reason for pursuing adoption.

These experiences and many more in the years between then and now have taught me much about adoption and about families, but perhaps the most important thing I’ve learned is how many emotions families can have when they find themselves faced with “getting an adoption home study.” Little did I know that those early families were probably more nervous and unsure of themselves than I was. For some people filling out paperwork, gathering documentation, obtaining background checks, and then inviting a stranger into their home to ask personal and

sometimes uncomfortable questions can be pretty invasive. There is often a sense that someone will be running the white glove test not only on their home, but on their lives, poking and prodding in ‘their business.’ Being put under the microscope is not a particularly comfortable experience for anyone, but it is even more acute for those who have a desire to become parents through adoption – and feel they must pass a test where the rules are unclear. Feelings of apprehension and anger can accompany the home study experience. One adoptive parent described the feeling as being similar to getting on a bus blindfolded, with an unknown driver, traveling toward an unknown route, sometimes going faster than comfortable – or standing still even when the traffic light has turned green. Often times people’s discomfort comes from not knowing what an adoption home study is, but anticipating it to be a hoop to be jumped, a scrutiny, a test, and evaluation of their parenting and their lives.

So, if it is not those things, *what is an adoption home study?* The adoption home study is a legal requirement prior to adoption. Eventually, after being read by the contract agency, if there is one, by the child’s social worker, the Regional Adoption Specialist and the Juneau office, it will be included as part of the petition to the court for the finalization of the adoption.

From a home study writer’s point of view the adoption home study is, at its best, a self learning tool where, families are able to discover their own strengths and also better understand where they may have specific challenges in parenting. Ideally, the interview will help the family explore their own values and expectations around family life and their motivation for adoption, I have heard many families say that they actually *liked* the home study process - that it gave an opportunity for reflection and they ended up learning a lot about themselves and their mates.

But, another question: *Who is a home study writer and what is his or her role?* An adoption home study writer is an individual contractor, generally trained by a child placement agency such as Catholic Social Services in Anchorage, or Fairbanks Counseling and Adoption in Fairbanks, for the purpose of interviewing, educating, and assessing the strengths of a family pursuing adoption or guardianship. She/he is most often a Masters level professional with adoption experience who can facilitate the learning process of a family, answer questions on such topics as the effects of grief and loss for a child, the importance of maintaining cultural connections, or instruct about the effects of prenatal drugs and alcohol on a child. But, more than that she/he is a tour guide for your adoption ‘bus ride’ and can guide the way through the unfamiliar territory of the Office of Children’s Services or the legal court process.

This attitude is a far cry from the image of a family waiting in trepidation for a white gloved social worker to scrutinize you and look for dust bunnies under the beds. The question then becomes; how do I take off the blind fold, chart my own adoption course, and get behind the driver’s seat of the bus? Here are some take-charge thoughts:

If in doubt, ask questions about what will happen during the home study process. Clarify the steps so you know what to expect. Ask specifically what you will be responsible for. Take notes. Be sure to understand timelines.

Remember the quip: *Nothing about me, without me...*” Read the draft of the home study – you have that right and responsibility to know what is being written about you – and, if you feel it necessary, to give feedback.

And, lastly: Tidy the house, but forget about the dust bunnies. You have more important things to think about. If your home study writer arrives for that first interview wearing white gloves ask to take her coat *and her gloves!*

**Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Self Study Workbook Section 2 1.0 Hour**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

*Street or Post Office**City/State**Zip*

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

 **Yes! I would like to receive ACRF's upcoming training and the quarterly newsletter by email.**Are you a foster parent?  YES  NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_If NO, please check one:  Pending Foster Parent  OCS  Birth Parent  Adoptive Parent  Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_)  Agency: \_\_\_\_\_ Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING****COURSE: "SECTION TWO: THE HOME STUDY PROCESS"**

*Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. Try filling out the questionnaire first from what you remember from the course. Then review if necessary. These questions address information specifically stated in this course.*

1. In the State of Alaska, an adoption or guardianship home study is an opportunity to:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. Explore the resource family's commitment to permanency of a child not born to them.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. An opportunity to ask questions related to the adoption process.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. Share concern and talk about ambivalent feelings.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. Look at how permanency of a child will impact other family members.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ e. All of the above.
  
2. Adoption homes studies are not legally required in Alaska before an adoption but they are still a good idea for the families to request one.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. True
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. False
  
3. People who have been convicted of physical abuse or sexual abuse of a child will not be approved for adoption in the State of Alaska
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. True
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. False

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 2 - "SECTION TWO: THE HOME STUDY PROCESS"

4. Give three examples of autobiographical information that the adoption home study writer may from you to include in the home study.
- a.
  - b.
  - c.
5. Families undergoing a home study will be asked to show income statements or employment records because all applicants have to be wealthy and well off in order to be considered for adoption.
- a. True
  - b. False
6. A home study writer may ask you to provide statements from your doctor or mental health professionals if you have been treated for a serious health condition or received mental health counseling.
- a. True
  - b. False
7. The State of Alaska requires how many references as part of the home study process?
- a. 3
  - b. 4
  - c. 5
  - d. 6
8. Which of the following statements are true about the visits the home study writer makes to your home? (CHOOSE ALL THAT ARE TRUE) The home study writer will:
- a. Visit your home primarily to see if it is clean or tidy.
  - b. Verify that your family has thought about how you accommodate a new child in their home.
  - c. Observe your interactions with the child if the child is already in your home.
  - d. Take your fingerprints during one of these visits.
  - e. Verify that the environment they may be approving is safe and healthy.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 3 - "SECTION TWO: THE HOME STUDY PROCESS"

9. It is important to include your birth children in the decision to adopt or become legal guardians of a child because:
- a. The addition of another child will impact everyone in the family
  - b. The birth child's sense of place in the family may be disrupted
  - c. Birth children also need to explore their feelings about adoption or guardianship
  - d. All of the above
10. What is one way listed in Elaine Cordova's article on "What is an Adoption Home Study?: Who is this Person with the White Gloves in My House?" you can "take-charge" to help chart your own adoption course?

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**FOR SCORING AND CREDIT OF 1.0 TRAINING HOUR, MAIL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

**Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second AVE STE 101  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Or fax to: 907-479-9666**

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ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
Street or Post Office City/State Zip

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

**Yes! I would like to receive ACRF's upcoming training and the quarterly newsletter by email.**

Are you a foster parent?  YES  NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_

If NO, please check one:  Pending Foster Parent  OCS  Birth Parent  Adoptive Parent  Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_)  Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

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815 Second AVE STE 101  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Or fax to: 907-479-9666**

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## **Section Three: Special Needs Children and Legal Risk Placement: Open Or Closed Adoptions**

In this section the resource family will learn:

- ☑ An understanding of the term “special needs” children
- ☑ An overview of “legal risk” placement and concurrent planning
- ☑ The differences between open and closed adoption

### **Special Needs:**

As previously stated, children in foster care are victims of abuse or neglect, range in many different ages from birth to late teens, may come in sibling groups, and are frequently multi-cultural or bi-racial. Abuse can occur in many different forms including physical, and/or sexual abuse and neglect. Some of the children available for adoption or guardianship may have pre-natal exposure to drugs or alcohol with some severely handicapped while others are mildly impacted. Children who have been abused often have special behaviors or physiological problems which require special parenting skills.



Due to the abuse some children have suffered, they are considered “special needs children”. Special needs occur in a wide range of behaviors, including medical, emotional, educational and social issues. These range from very mild to severe and every child is different. As a resource family, it is vital that you participate in case conferences (meetings) with the social worker to be appropriately prepared (or educated) and have full disclosure regarding a child you are considering as a permanent member of your home.

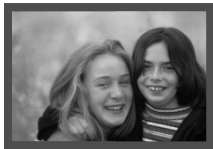
Clearly, while each child in the foster care system is different, and a unique set of special needs, these experiences are common to foster care children. As an adoptive or guardian parent, it is very important that you gain specific information about the child you are considering. You should be given information about the child’s medical, developmental, educational, psychological and family history in order to make an informed decision and determine if you are able to parent a child with mild or severe special needs. Your family will also need to decide if you are willing to adopt older children, sibling groups or younger children. The adoption home study is a process that also helps you to make a decision about what type of child and situation fits best with your family, unless your family has already been identified for a specific child.

### **Legal Risk Placement**

A *legal risk* placement is one where the child is placed with a foster/adopt family before parental rights have been terminated. The case plan has identified the concurrent goal of adoption (and at the same time the state is making efforts toward reunification with the parent) and at times, the termination process has begun. The case should have received a critical review by a team whose responsibility it is to determine what the goal should be and if the child should be placed with a family that is potentially permanent. Placement of a child, with a concurrent goal of adoption or primary goal of adoption, with a family who is potentially permanent (and has an approved home study) is called a “legal risk” adoptive placement.

A foster/adopt family is selected for the child so that the child will not have to move again if the court does proceed to terminate the birth parents' legal rights. The foster/adopt family has been licensed for foster care and should have a completed approved adoptive home study.

*Foster/adopt families* (or legal risk adoptive families) are families who are primarily interested in becoming adoptive parents and are willing to become licensed for foster care in order to take a child who is not yet legally free but for whom termination of parental rights has been started or is planned. In these cases, OCS is working on two concurrent plans: reunification with the birth parents while also pursuing permanent placement should reunification efforts fail. Because parental rights have not yet been terminated, these placements carry with them some legal and emotional risk for the foster/adopt family. The court may decide not to grant OCS's petition to terminate parental rights and order the return of the child to the birth parent(s) and/or give the birth parents additional time to correct deficiencies.



Different cases involve different degrees of legal risk. The prospective foster/adopt family should always ask the child's worker to carefully explain the circumstances of the child's legal situation to them. Foster/adopt families may also be called upon to have some degree of contact with the child's birth parents or extended family. Some children may still be involved in visits with their birth parent(s). ***It is imperative that resource families are encouraging and supportive of visitation with the birth family.*** If you are a legal risk adoptive family and you feel that you cannot tolerate contact with a birth family, you should explore with your home study writer, ACRF Family Support Specialist, or your social worker to determine if legal risk is the right thing for you and your family. You can learn more about the importance of visitation and working with birth families by attending the ACRF onsite training: *Core Training for Alaska Resource Families*.

*Foster Parent Adoption.* Sometimes a family may begin as a resource family without any intention or desire to adopt a child. But if a child's plan for reunification fails and appropriate relatives are not found, the resource family may be asked to adopt a child in its care. This decision is totally up to the family and may require the consent of the child if he or she is over 10 years of age. In making your decision, please take into account how attached the child is to your family, how attached you are to the child, impact as a whole on your family and the stability your home may provide for this child if another move is not required.

Establishing permanence for a child can be a challenging process. A child's permanency should give them a sense of stability, predictability and identity. In establishing identity both connections and continuity are important. Connections refer to long-term and ongoing relationships with people who have a lifetime commitment to the child. Connections give children the sense of belonging to a family and stability in knowing that a family is there for them. Continuity refers to the child's ability to understand and make connections between the past, present and the future. Continuity means knowing where one comes from, where one has been and gives the child a sense of where they may be going. Parents also need to understand the importance of their own cultures and thus understand the importance of keeping the child connected to their culture. This may mean relative or parental contact; connections with cultural and religious practices unlike yours; and with Alaskan Native families and relatives, if the child is a Native Alaskan child.

Sometimes children in foster care have had several moves and cannot tell you where or with whom they have lived. Perhaps no one has kept pictures for them in a photo album or *life book* which illustrates who their family members are or how the child has grown and changed. As an adoptive parent, it is important to assist the child in keeping connected to their past. When an adoptive parent commits to the plan of adoption for the child they are becoming a part of the

child's plan that defines relationships and encompasses goals for the future. The child and the adoptive parent need to have a plan for where they are going in life and who will help them get there.

Considering whether or not an adoption is "open or closed" is part of the future planning for adoption. Let's look at the differences between these kinds of relationships.

**What are the differences between "open" or "closed" adoption and what is best for the adopted child and your family?**

## **Open and Closed Adoptions**

Some adoptions are called "*open*" and some adoptions are termed "*closed*". Open adoptions can take many forms. "Open" usually means that the child maintains some form of contact with the biological parents and/or their birth relatives. Open adoptions may allow the adoptive parents, and often the adopted child, to interact directly with birth parents. However, there is often a continuum of openness; openness can be varied with each case being different. It is important in any open adoptive relationship for family members to interact in ways that are appropriate, culturally relevant and account for any safety aspects regarding a specific case. It is vital that the adoptive family have as much information about the benefits of open adoption as possible. For many children open adoption can be a mechanism for dealing with past removal issues, such as grief and loss of a birth parent, and assist them to move on toward a productive life. Open adoption facilitates identity formation and can provide a positive sense of self for adopted children, especially as they move into and out of adolescence.

In closed or confidential adoptions there is no identifying information exchanged and/or the birth parent, through the termination processes, may lose any right to receive continued information about their child, or have contact after the termination of parental rights has occurred.

### **Let's Explore Open and Closed Adoptions Further:**

In open adoptions, communication may include letters, e-mails, telephone calls or visits. The frequency of contact ranges from weekly to perhaps once yearly. Sometimes adopted children actually visit and spend time in their birth parent's home; sometimes they receive only cards, pictures and letters. The frequency of contact ranges depending on the situation, but is always focused on a few goals.

The goals of open adoption are:

- To minimize the child's loss of relationships and assist them in understanding their own identity
- To maintain and celebrate the adopted child's connections with all of the important people in his or her life, including birth parents.
- To allow children to resolve losses with the truth regarding their birth family rather than fantasy about what life or a parent was like.

During the last several decades, there have been movements toward openness in adoption because research has shown that children (and families) do best when they know the truth and have questions answered about where they come from, why they were "given away", and what their birth family is like. Today, birth parents are empowered to have more choices and there stigma associated with single parenting. Also, the societal movement toward less secrecy and

the honoring of diversity, including a variety of family structures, has allowed for greater acceptance in open adoption.



In Alaska, adopted people can contact the State of Alaska, Division of Vital Statistics to receive copies of original birth records when the adoptee reaches his/her eighteenth birthday. Birth parents, who choose to do so, may provide vital statistics with information to be given to the child if the child ever contacts that agency for information.

Open adoption continues to be a source of discussion which is often based on philosophical differences and fear rather than empirical research. Existing research (Minnesota Texas Research Project <http://fsos.che.umn.edu/mtarp/default.html>) indicates the following points:

### **Many Fears Regarding Open Adoption Are Based On Myths:**

- Parties in open adoption are NOT confused about their parenting rights and responsibilities.
- Children in open (fully disclosed) adoptions are NOT confused about who their parents are. They do understand the different roles of adoptive and birth parents in their lives.
- Birth mothers do NOT attempt to “reclaim” their children.
- Differences in adolescent adoptive identity or degree of preoccupation with adoption are NOT related to the level of openness in the adoption.
- Adoptive openness does NOT appear to influence an adoptee's self esteem in a negative way.
- Adoptive parents in open adoptions do NOT feel less in control and have a greater sense of permanency in their relationship with their child.
- Open adoption does NOT interfere with adoptive parent's sense of entitlement or sense that they have the right to parent their adopted child.
- Birth mothers in open and ongoing mediated adoptions do NOT have more problems with grief resolution. They show better grief resolution than those mothers in closed adoptions.

The level of openness in any adoption should be decided on a case by case basis. There is no one level of adoption openness that fits all families and situations. Each adoption has its own strengths, challenges and rewards.

Often, parents who voluntarily relinquish their legal rights do so because they are able to make arrangements “or stipulations” for continued contact (open adoption) after an adoption takes place. As an adoptive parent, you must understand the “stipulations” are actually conditions of a relinquishment and think about how those conditions could impact your family. If these conditions are not met by the adoptive family it would be possible for the birth parent to challenge the validity of the relinquishment later in court.

There are other factors that need to be considered in any open or closed adoption agreement.

**Proximity to Birth Parents:** For visitation to be a part of any open adoption agreement the birth and adoptive parents need to live in proximity to one another; or they need to have a plan in place for how continued visits can occur over time and distances. The more detailed this plan is the less likely it will be to have conflict later about the specifics of any agreement.

Major differences in life situations, interests and values also need to be considered in any open adoption agreement and how these differences may impact an open adoption agreement after the professionals are gone.

Relatives or friends who discourage contact or engage in behaviors that disparage the birth or adoptive parents need to be considered. Adoptive parents need to ask themselves if relatives and friends are a supportive resource or if they will interfere at a level that impedes the process. Any influences which are disparaging to the birth parents ultimately negatively impact the adopted child.

Adoptive parents need to think about how a change in the birth mother's situation, such as marriage or the birth of another child, will impact the adoptive child and family. Try to think about all of the pros and cons of this situation and actively brainstorm possible scenarios when thinking about how open an adoption should be.

The comfort zone for the adoptive parents is also very important. Inability to negotiate a mutually agreed upon comfort zone, where safety of the child is considered, is one reason for decreased openness.

### **When To Consider Closed Adoption:**

Any open adoption agreement should always be focused on the best interest of the child. If contact with birth family is stressful for the child and causes psychological trauma, then a less open or closed adoption should be considered. In some cases, especially those where parental rights have been terminated, maintaining a relationship with a birth parent may not be in the child's best interest. This is especially true if:

- A birth parent is unable to maintain appropriate relationship boundaries with a child due to severe mental health or emotional illness.
- There has been so much child abuse, neglect, or violence directed toward the child that any contact with the parent would result in the risk of further abuse or more traumas to the child.
- The adoptive family is at risk of danger due to threats or violence imposed by the birth parent.

Ultimately adoptive families should be working with their social worker or the adoption professional assigned to their family to determine how open or closed their specific adoption should be. The staff at the Alaska Center for Resource Families encourages you to research this aspect of your specific adoption and to consult with your social worker; the ACRF Family Support Specialist regionally located in your area may be able to give assistance; and for legal advice, your adoption attorney (if you have one) regarding areas concerning legal matters for your adoption.



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**Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Self Study Workbook Section 3 1.0 Hour**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

*Street or Post Office**City/State**Zip*

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

 **Yes! I would like to receive ACRF's upcoming training and the quarterly newsletter by email.**Are you a foster parent?  YES  NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_If NO, please check one:  Pending Foster Parent  OCS  Birth Parent  Adoptive Parent  Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_)  Agency: \_\_\_\_\_ Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING****Section Three: Special Needs Children and Legal Risk Placement:  
Open or Closed Adoptions**

*Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. Try filling out the questionnaire first from what you remember from the course. Then review if necessary. These questions address information specifically stated in this course.*

1. "Special needs children" is a term to describe children. Which of the following describes what is meant by children with special needs in the child protective system?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. Children who have suffered from child abuse and neglect
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. Children with a wide range of behaviors, medical, emotional, or educational issues
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. Children with special needs may require special parenting skills
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. All of the above.
  
2. A \_\_\_\_\_ placement is one where the child is placed with a foster/adopt family before parental rights have been terminated and the long term goal seems to be permanency.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. Adoptive
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. Guardianship
  - \_\_\_\_\_ c. Reunification
  - \_\_\_\_\_ d. Legal Risk
  - \_\_\_\_\_ e. All of the Above
  
3. Resource families are expected to be encouraging and supportive of visitation with the birth family.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ a. True
  - \_\_\_\_\_ b. False

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 2 - "SECTION THREE: SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN AND LEGAL RISK PLACEMENT: OPEN OR CLOSED ADOPTIONS"

4. Think about the things you learned in this chapter. If you are a foster family and you are asked to become an adoptive home for a child in your care, what are some things you should do or consider before agreeing to adopt? (Give at least two suggestions.)

a.

b.

5. Which of the following phrases best defines a legal risk adoptive family?

a. A foster placement that is long term

b. A relative placement willing to take legal risks

c. A family who is a potentially permanent home for a child who also has a completed approved home study

d. A family that is in trouble with the law

6. \_\_\_\_\_ adoption usually means that the child maintains some form of contact with the birth parents and/ or birth relatives. \_\_\_\_\_ adoption means that there is no identifying information exchanges or no contact after termination of parental rights. (FILL IN THE BLANKS)

7. Openness in adoptions can take many different forms from cards or letters to overnight visits with birth parents.

a. True

b. False

8. Any open adoption agreement should always be focused on \_\_\_\_\_.

(COMPLETE THIS SENTENCE.)

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 3 - "SECTION THREE: SPECIAL NEEDS CHILDREN AND LEGAL RISK  
PLACEMENT: OPEN OR CLOSED ADOPTIONS"

9. One of the disadvantages of open adoptions is that birth mothers have a highly likelihood of attempt to "reclaim" their children and try to get them back from the adoptive parents.
- \_\_\_\_\_a. True  
\_\_\_\_\_b. False
10. When should closed adoptions be considered?
- \_\_\_\_\_a. A birth parent is unable to maintain appropriate boundaries with a child due to severe mental health or emotional illness.  
\_\_\_\_\_b. There has been so much child abuse, neglect, or violence directed toward the child that any contact with the parent would result in the risk of further abuse or more traumas to the child.  
\_\_\_\_\_c. The adoptive family is a risk of danger due to threats or violence imposed by the birth parent.  
\_\_\_\_\_d. All of the above.

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**FOR SCORING AND CREDIT OF 1.0 TRAINING HOUR, MAIL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

**Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second AVE STE 101  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Or fax to: 907-479-9666**

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## **Section Four: Core Issues in Adoption**

In this section, the resource family will learn:

- About the members of the triad: the birth parent, the adoptive parent and the child.
- The core issues of adoption: Loss, Rejection, Guilt and Shame, Grief, Identity, Intimacy and Control.
- About the power of language and how some language is negative toward adoption

### **READINESS TO ADOPT**

Knowledge is a very important powerful tool. It is essential that adoptive families learn and know as much about adoption and themselves as possible before they make the commitment to adopt. Educated families who (1) understand the risks, and accept the lack of any “guarantees”, and who (2) view the agency or social worker as an ally instead of an adversary, are more likely to be satisfied with the foster and/or adoption experience, than those who are ill informed or who feel alienated from the systems.

Like preparing for a baby, adoptive parents need to prepare for the child who is coming into their lives. The following is a list put together by the International Adoption Services Center as guidelines for prospective adoptive parents to consider when assessing their own readiness. How many of these can you say yes to? (NOTE: If you are single, read the comments with “I” instead of “We.”). As you read through this list think about each one slowly and ask yourself questions like, “Have I thought about this?”

- We have grieved for the biological child we may not have, if applicable.
- Both spouses are ready to explore the adoption process.
- We see adoption as an alternative, not “second best.”
- We would not feel ashamed to tell our child he or she was adopted.
- We are ready to commit ourselves to parenting and forming a family with a child born to others.
- We understand the risks involved in considering “legal risk adoption” and feel capable of handling it.
- We realize that adoptive and birth parenting is not the same, that there are losses for everyone and gains for everyone, and we are prepared to accept the extra challenges involved in this role.
- We will be appropriate role models for a child.
- We have support systems in place.
- We want to make time in our lives for a child. Our lifestyle accommodates children.
- We have talked to families who have been through the adoption process.

- We realize that our parenting roles will last a lifetime.

By completing this self-study training regarding adoption, you are taking a first step in becoming fully informed and educated about the adoption process. Be sure that you spend time also exploring adoption by meeting others who have already adopted, attending adoption support groups. If you have identified a child you wish to bring into your home, it is very important that you talk to the child's social worker about any special needs or potential problems a specific child might face. Once you've gathered all of the information you can, talk to your spouse (if applicable) and to close friends about your decision. Most of all, know thy self!

## The Adoption Triad



When we think about adoption we need to look at the three relationships involved in any adoption. This "triad" consists of the child, the adoptive parent(s) and the birth mother or birth parents. All three members of the adoption triad experience core issues as apart of the process. Adoption issues span not only the adoption itself, but transcend time and space over generations, as well. ***It is important that we explore these issues and look at how they impact each member of the triad.***

## Core Issue #1: LOSS

Few realize that adoption is created through loss. The birthmother (or birth parents) loses the child either by choice or through the judicial process. The child loses the experience of the birth family and the adoptive parents may have experienced all kinds of losses associated with infertility. All birth parents, adoptees and adoptive parents have experienced at least one major loss before becoming involved in adoption. These losses and the way they are resolved significantly shape the lives of those involved in adoption.



Loss is part of the human experience. Everyone experiences loss at sometime in their life How we deal with loss and learn from loss creates who we are and builds new experiences and resiliency for all of us. We experience loss when we move from one home to another, change jobs or watch our birth children grow to independent adults. Loss is necessary in gaining new relationships and allowing others to find their place in the world. While losses are painful they contribute to who we are as humans and ultimately loss has the potential to enrich our lives.

It is important as you think about becoming an adoptive parent that you think about the losses in your specific adoptive experience. Are you able to identify your thoughts and feelings about your loss, the adopted child's loss or the birth parent's loss? Before losses can enrich our lives we must identify what they are and allow ourselves to mourn them. Mourning loss involves the grief process.

Children adopted through the involuntary child welfare system bring to adoption their own unique history which involves the loss of a birth parent. Some children are infants and some are older. Some have had visitations over a long period of time and are connected to their birth parents, regardless of the abuse they have suffered. Every child will deal with their grief and loss differently.

Children moving from one culture to another grieve the loss of their familiar culture, food, and language. They grieve the loss of growing up uninterrupted within their culture. Children who are ethnically dissimilar to their parents grieve the natural way that racial competence is transmitted to them by parents of the same race. Even adopted children that have not been maltreated or

placed past infancy, still grieve at intervals throughout their lives for the loss of the opportunity to live with their birth parents.

**What are losses that members of the adoption triad suffer? Many are obvious, but others are not quite so apparent.**

**Losses Adoptees May Suffer Include:**

- Loss of genetic, cultural, racial and medical history.
- Loss of the environment in which they could have been raised in.
- Geographical losses, particularly with international adoptions
- Loss of birthparents and extended birth family
- Siblings
- Shared times and experiences
- Folklore of birth family – stories of and about the family
- Knowledge of whom in the birth family they look like and physically resemble.
- Place them on the family tree
- Stories about conception, delivery, and birth
- Original place on the human continuum, i.e., they may have been born into the Jones family and are now a part of the Smith family. Placement is often happenstance and random
- Religion
- Family traditions
- With older children, there is the potential for miscellaneous losses such as homes, toys, clothes, pets, and teachers
- Time periods in their lives. Gaps due to lack of records regarding hospitalizations, moves between foster homes, etc.
- Birth name and knowing who gave the birth name and the significance it had.
- Original birth certificate
- Sense of belonging
- Opportunity to grow up in a traditional family. Adoption makes them different.
- Racial identification and role models, particularly in transracial adoptions
- Continuity in care-taking
- Sense of values, morals and ethics
- Being part of the majority – adoptees are in the minority
- Birth order

### **Losses A Birthparent May Suffer Include:**

- Loss of the baby itself
- Pleasure of caring for their baby
- Attention that goes with motherhood
- Approval of some family and friends
- Status of being a mother
- Knowledge of child's specialness
- Loss of future grandchildren
- Loss of sibling for later child(ren)
- Loss of impact and influence of their family on the child
- Loss of self-esteem

### **Losses the Adoptive Parent May Suffer Include:**

- Loss of immortality (through heredity)
- Loss of confidence in the body's ability to function
- Loss of control
- Loss of privacy
- Loss of identity or self-esteem
- Loss of fantasy child – the child they expected to have
- Loss of making a genetic contribution to a child
- Loss of sharing the child's early years, months, weeks, days, or prenatal period
- Loss of the opportunity to nurture the child; keep the child safe during the early years, months, weeks, days, or prenatal period
- Loss of status as a "normal" family
- Loss of the myth that love is enough

To further explore feelings associate with the triad experiences, lets look at information taken from **Making Sense of Adoption**, by Lois Ruskai Melina 1994

Children express grief and loss in many ways, including through anger and sadness.

**Anger** at separation from birthparents may be directed toward the birthparent or toward the adoptive parent. If your child is angry with you, try not to take it personally as a sign of rejection. Your child may be angry at the separation from the birth parent, but may also be quite happy to be part of your family.

- Allow them appropriate ways to express their anger:
- Let your child know that it is alright to feel angry and to express anger – as long as he/she doesn't hurt himself or other people
- Scream in the shower, punch a pillow, hit a tree with a stick. Some children enjoy playing a musical instrument or creating art as a way of expressing emotions
- Give him an opportunity to express what he is angry about and to mourn the losses he may feel.

**Sad and Conflicted:** "I'm angry, sad, confused about not being with my birth mother, but if I were with her, I wouldn't be with you."

- 1) Unless children remember their birth parent, they probably are not grieving the loss of a particular person, but are saddened by what we might call a "missed opportunity."
- 2) The thought of not being with their adoptive parents makes them sad as well.
- 3) Statements like: "Aren't you happy to be with us?" or "If you lived in India, your life would be very hard" sends a message that they must choose which parents they'd rather be with: Children who feel they have to decide whether they would rather be with one parent or the other are faced with what can only leave them with a sense of loss for one or the other parent.
- 4) Expressions of understanding give the child permission to express his feelings: "It must be hard to understand why you were adopted" or "It must be sad to not know your birthparents"
- 5) Share your own feelings of sadness if infertility is an issue: "We wanted so much to get pregnant, but were unable to. We were so sad. But now I realize that if we had gotten pregnant, we wouldn't have adopted you. That makes me so sad now to think that I would never have known you or been your mother because I love you so much."

### **Moving On from Loss:**

Moving on from loss involves recognizing loss and then taking steps to overcome it. In order to be able to move on from loss you need to understand the key components of loss.

Key components of loss include: (1) the significance of the loss, whether the loss is temporary or permanent, (2) inherent coping abilities of the child or adult, (3) availability of supports; age and cognitive abilities of the child at the time of the loss and at the present time. Consequently, while some children or adults may react in extreme ways (withdrawal, depression, anger, and rage) others may respond mildly or not at all.

Different children have different reactions to loss, both internal and external reactions:

1. Some move through the grief stages quickly and with seeming grace
2. Some may experience a more intense kind of grief
3. A few may need professional help
4. If they don't grieve now they will have to do it at a later time, and later the issues will be much more complex because they have not been resolved throughout the development of the child.

Adoptive parents are usually normally the first committed person who is capable of helping their child through grief and loss associated with adoption. To fully understand separation, grief and loss, the staff at ACRF recommends that you research our library regarding this important topic. For the purpose of this course, it is important that you understand that loss is a component of the adoptive relationship between all triad members.

*If you think that your family or adoptee may be experiencing aspects associated with loss, we recommend that you consult counseling professionals or the ACRF Family Support Specialist for further resources.*

## **Core Issue #2: REJECTION**

The second core issue for all triad members is rejection. Most triad members (the child, adoptive parents and birth parents) fear rejection and do everything they can to prevent it. In an effort to avoid painful feelings or having other losses, people may become overly compliant to fend off fears of further rejection. They can become “absolute people pleasers”, to counter feelings of worthlessness or they may even reject others before they are again rejected.

Adoptees often feel they were placed for adoption because they were worthless or defective. They may think of their placement in an adoptive home as a rejection from a birth parent, even if that parent involuntarily lost legal rights. To further complicate the adoptee’s feelings, even if they were chosen by a family to be adopted, they sometimes feel they must first be rejected by a birth parent to be chosen. Children who are adopted from other cultures or countries may feel they were rejected by their culture, race or religion.

Regardless of the actual circumstances surrounding the child’s adoption, the child’s self-perception is frequently one in which he or she was rejected and subsequently abandoned by the birth family. Consequently, some adopted children or youth may feel hurt or angry toward their birth parents. Some adopted children feel they are unlovable and unkeepable and may “act out” in an effort to test the commitment of the adoptive family. To avoid rejection, some adopted persons may not allow themselves to get close to others or they may reject others before they can be rejected. Some adopted persons react by continually seeking acceptance and approval from those around them, being almost “too good” It is not surprising that developing and maintaining relationships is a difficult task for some.

Not only do feelings of rejection lead to impaired self-esteem, adoptees may anticipate rejection and either set themselves up for it in their relationships or try to please others so they are not rejected. Birth parents may reject themselves for being irresponsible as or an unworthy parent. They often keep the fact that they placed a child for adoption or lost legal rights to a child a secret because they fear people would reject them if they knew the truth. Adoptive parents who deal with infertility may feel their bodies have rejected them or that some greater power has rejected them. They may worry that birth parents won’t approve of the way they are raising their child or that their social worker is critical of them. Largely, they feel that their child will someday reject them.

It is vital that as adoptive parents, you look at feelings you may have regarding rejection and again openly discuss these feelings in a safe environment. Furthermore, as your adopted child travels through developmental stages, feelings of rejection may surface in different ways at different times. Again it is important for you to recognize this is a normal part of adoption.

### **Core Issue #3: GUILT AND SHAME**

The third core issue involving the adoptive triad is guilt and shame. When people personalize a loss to the extent that they feel there is something intrinsically wrong with themselves, and that they somehow caused the loss, they often feel guilt that they did something wrong or feel shame that others may know about their history. Adoptive parents may feel that others look upon them as being inadequate somehow, particularly if they are childless. Birth parents feel immense guilt and shame for being unable to care for their newborn or having the State intervene in their lives.

Many times adoptive parents can give positive affirmations to an adopted child, and the child may feel inside that the adoptive parent is deluded because the child feels a great deal of shame for his/her life circumstance. Parents who ignore a child's past history and child abuse history that are shame-producing, are ignoring part of the child that may explode at any given time. At some point in the child's life, parents will need to find ways to explore if or why their child feels shame. Otherwise, over time children will seek out situations that seem to match their authentic selves.

Events that cause out-of-home placement often occur during the toddler or preschool years. At that age it is normal for children to believe that they are the cause of life's events. Children can be shamed by the meaning they attribute to the maltreatment or loss they have experienced.

Several years ago when working with an amazing adoptive family, I asked them how they explain 'what happened' to their adopted son, who was obviously flourishing. The family took me to the fireplace where they had pictures of their family, including the adopted child's birth mother, who had died several years earlier from a drug overdose. The adoptive family said, "We have a place for her, and we honor her and include her in all of our celebrations by lighting candles, making gifts, and most importantly, never ever forgetting her. We talk about her openly; we acknowledge her strengths and weaknesses as part of being human.

And, in front of him, we thank her for our son".

-- Deborah Hayes

Shame can be much deeper than guilt because shame is usually connected to some deficit that can never be fixed in the eyes of the person feeling it. Unresolved shame can lead to a sense of being inadequate, unworthy, or "bad". Guilt is usually related to misconduct and sometimes adoptees feel guilt that they were adopted and somehow responsible for their condition. Adoptees, birth parents and adoptive parents may be filled with shame for the person or family that they will never quite become.

### **Core Issue #4: GRIEF**

Recognizing and acknowledging grief is part of the adoption process. Because adoption is seen as a problem solving event, in which everyone gains, rather than an event to which loss is integral, it is difficult for adoptees, adopted parents, and birth parents to grieve. Grief can be described as sadness and pain that we feel when we have lost something or someone we care about. It is essential to remember that there are a variety of feelings children and adults have when they lose someone or something that is important to them. Even children who have been adopted at birth may experience grief regarding the loss of a birth parent or about the unknowns surrounding the reason the child was placed for adoption. Every person involved in the triad will experience grief differently, depending upon their specific situation.

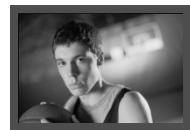
Remember, everyone experiences grief differently but there are some basic stages to grief. These stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Adoptive parents may experience grief due to the loss of a “fantasy” child and their unresolved grief may block attachment to an adopted child. A parent also walks through a summary of his own childhood while parenting. In the process of determining how to parent, parents reference what and how their parents did things. Parents who have not adequately dealt with their own grief may have difficulty in assisting their adopted child work through his or hers. Instead, they find their own unresolved grief facing them.

Children do not grieve the way adults do. Although their grief process tends to either flow or sprint it can slip past a parent’s attention that the child is grieving. Children who are permanently separated from their birth parents face a mourning process that can be similar to a child’s reactions to parental death. This process will vary somewhat from age to age. Sorting out information that is part of healthy grief work provides a parent model for children that is realistic about negatives but includes good wishes for children for the future. It is very important for children to have accurate, reliable and consistent information about their birth parents, their family history and any abuse they may have suffered. Grief work through a therapeutic process may be very important for you and your adopted child and it is important to understand that grief is a normal part of adoption.

It is important for all members in a triad to understand grief as a normal process in the adoptive family. Out of the stages of grief comes the ability to make sense of what has happened. It doesn’t mean that the child understands and accepts everything, but for the time being he has organized what he knows about his adoption into his life in a meaningful way. It does not mean that a parent fully comprehends loss and sadness, but that the parts of grief are recognized so the person is able to move forward in life in a positive way.

### **Core Issue #5: IDENTITY**

Identity is another core issue surrounding the adoptive relationship. Children who are adopted may have deficits in information which may impede the integration of their identity. Adopted people may search for their own identity as they are asked in school to complete a family tree or with the birth of their own children. Adopted teens may resort to extreme behaviors and styles in order to create a sense of belonging. Both birth parents and adoptive parents can have a sense of confusion of identity because they “are parents, yet aren’t parents”. Birth parents may not know how to answer when asked how many children they have had. Adoptive parents may feel deeply inside that they experience a diminished sense of continuity and are not really parents.



### **Core Issue #6: INTIMACY**

It is human nature to attempt to avoid emotional pain whenever possible. Fear of intimacy and of getting hurt if one gets too close to another person is another possible core issue in adoption. For birth parents, an intimate encounter may connect the parent to the loss of their child and the parent may fear intimacy because of the intensity of these painful memories. Adoptive parents may resist intimacy with an adoptee in order to avoid the pain that comes from potential loss. For an adopted child, especially one that is adopted after attaching to a birth parent or other placement, fear of intimacy may be seen in as an inability to get too close because of the earlier loss of that caregiver.

## **Core Issue #7: CONTROL**

Control is the last core issue in adoption. For the adoptee, a sense of powerlessness may prevail because the child may feel that about the separation from his birth family or his placement with his adoptive family. For those children who were adopted when older – and may have consented to the adoption – there may still be feelings associated with a lack of control. For instance, these older adoptees may feel powerless to help their birth parents, or powerless to “fit into” their new lives. Parents who surrender their children to the care of another, either voluntarily or involuntarily, also feel a loss of control. If the relationship was involuntary, such as termination of parental rights, the parent has lost control of their child. The parent has lost all legal rights to this child. For parents who voluntarily surrender their child, they may feel a sense of loss of control because of the circumstances they experienced which influenced the surrendering of the child. The adoptive parent can feel a lack of control with infertility issues, or with the long legal process inherent in adoption.

## **ADOPTION LANGUAGE**

As you begin to consider adoption and learn more about it, you will find that the words you choose to use with your children and with others can be very powerful. There have been many negative connotations around adoption, as being second best or not as good as giving birth to your children. This sometimes is still reflected in the language people choose to use. Using accurate language instead of inaccurate or negative language reflects the positive value we place on adoption. Some are small changes that emphasize that adopting a child means you are the rightful parent of that child. Notice the difference in the following phrases.

### **ACCURATE LANGUAGE**

*Birth parent*

*Birth child, child born to us*

*My child*

*Choosing adoption*

*Deciding to parent the child*

*Parent*

*International Adoption*

*Child with special needs*

*Born to unmarried parents*

*Was adopted*

### **INACCURATE OR NEGATIVE LANGUAGE**

*Real or natural parent*

*Real child, natural child, my own child*

*My adopted child*

*Giving away; putting up for adoption*

*Keeping your baby*

*Adoptive parent*

*Foreign Adoption*

*Handicapped child; problem child; special needs child*

*Illegitimate*

*Is adopted*

And one final word about language: Adopted children often change their names at the time of adoption; however, a change of name should be carefully considered and should depend on the child's age, the child's preferences and what the adoptive family can accept. Some children who are older desire a brand new name which is sometimes symbolic of a new beginning. Other children prefer to keep their birth names or to hyphenate their name adding the adoptive parent's last name.

## Chapter Summary

As families prepare for adoption it is vital that they have as much information as possible about adoption and the child they are considering. Parents must explore their readiness for adoption and be willing to accept that there are no “guarantees”. When we talk or think about adoption, we want to include the triad members (adopted child, adoptive parents, birth parents). All members experience loss, anger, sadness, confusion, rejection, guilt and shame, grief, identity and intimacy elements, and control issues, as a natural part of adoption. Each of these different feelings are normal and require acknowledgment. When talking to children and others about adoption it is also important to use language that shows sensitivity and compassion for the adoption experience.

**Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Self Study Workbook Section 4 1.0 Hour**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

*Street or Post Office**City/State**Zip*

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

 **Yes! I would like to receive ACRF's upcoming training and the quarterly newsletter by email.**Are you a foster parent?  YES  NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_If NO, please check one:  Pending Foster Parent  OCS  Birth Parent  Adoptive Parent  Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_)  Agency: \_\_\_\_\_ Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING****COURSE: "SECTION FOUR: CORE ISSUES IN ADOPTION"**

*Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. Try filling out the questionnaire first from what you remember from the course. Then review if necessary. These questions address information specifically stated in this course.*

1. What are the seven (7) core issues of adoption that are addressed in this self study?

1)

2).

3)

4)

5)

6)

7)

2. Who are the triad members in adoption?

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. The adoptive parents, their priest and the adopted child  
 \_\_\_\_\_ b. The adoptive parent(s), the child, and the birth parent(s)  
 \_\_\_\_\_ c. The adoptive child, the birth parents and the grandparents  
 \_\_\_\_\_ d. The birth parents, the judge and the child

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING  
PAGE 2 - "SECTION FOUR: CORE ISSUES IN ADOPTION"

3. Children who were adopted as infants may still grieve at intervals through their lives for the loss of the opportunity to live with their birth parents.

\_\_\_\_ a. True  
\_\_\_\_ b. False

4. Though adoption can be a very positive experience, adoption is also created through loss. For each person below, name one (1) loss that the person might experience in the adoption process.

Children or Adoptees: \_\_\_\_\_

Birth Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

Adoptive Parents: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Anger at separation from birthparents may be directed toward the birthparent but will never be directed toward the adopted parent.

\_\_\_\_ a. True  
\_\_\_\_ b. False

6. Children who are adopted may have issues around \_\_\_\_\_ because they have deficits in information about themselves and this may make things more difficult when asked in school to complete a family tree or with the birth of their own children. (FILL IN THE BLANK)

7. Children may have many different reactions to loss. Give two (2) examples of ways that children might react to loss.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING  
PAGE 3 - "SECTION FOUR: CORE ISSUES IN ADOPTION"

8. What of the following terms is the more accurate language to use? (CIRCLE THE PREFERRED TERM IN EACH ROW.)
- |                             |    |                           |
|-----------------------------|----|---------------------------|
| a. Birth parent             | OR | Real natural parent       |
| b. My own child             | OR | Birth child               |
| c. Choosing adoption        | OR | Put up for adoption       |
| d. Child with special needs | OR | Handicapped child         |
| e. Illegitimate             | OR | Born to unmarried parents |

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**FOR SCORING AND CREDIT OF 1.0 TRAINING HOUR, MAIL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

**Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second AVE STE 101  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Or fax to: 907-479-9666**

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**Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Self Study Workbook Section 4 1.0 Hour**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

*Street or Post Office**City/State**Zip*

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CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING  
PAGE 2 - "SECTION FOUR: CORE ISSUES IN ADOPTION"

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a. True  
 b. False

4. Though adoption can be a very positive experience, adoption is also created through loss. For each person below, name one (1) loss that the person might experience in the adoption process.

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5. Anger at separation from birthparents may be directed toward the birthparent but will never be directed toward the adopted parent.

a. True  
 b. False

6. Children who are adopted may have issues around \_\_\_\_\_ because they have deficits in information about themselves and this may make things more difficult when asked in school to complete a family tree or with the birth of their own children. (FILL IN THE BLANK)

7. Children may have many different reactions to loss. Give two (2) examples of ways that children might react to loss.

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING  
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|-----------------------------|----|---------------------------|
| f. Birth parent             | OR | Real natural parent       |
| g. My own child             | OR | Birth child               |
| h. Choosing adoption        | OR | Put up for adoption       |
| i. Child with special needs | OR | Handicapped child         |
| j. Illegitimate             | OR | Born to unmarried parents |

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Or fax to: 907-479-9666**

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## Section Five: Maintaining Connections to Culture and Family

### Introduction

It is not uncommon for multi ethnic or multi cultural adoptive placements to happen in Alaska. Placement of children from another culture or race occurs and then the adoptive family decides if they will agree to adoption of a child who is of another culture or race. As an adoptive parent, we ask you to honor cultural or racial differences and help a child learn a positive identity of self. To do so, adoptive parents must embrace the culture or race of their adoptive child, as they would their own.

It is impossible to learn about every culture in just a few short pages of reading. The goal of this unit is to sensitize you to the important issues an adoptive parent may face when caring for a child from a different culture and to understand the cultural basics of caring for Alaskan Native children.

#### In this course you will learn:

- The difference between culture, race and ethnicity
- What helps to define a person's culture
- About different Native cultures in Alaska
- How to maintain connections for Native children
- The importance of maintaining cultural and family connections
- How the Indian Child Welfare Act Impacts Adoption of Native Children



When a child is adopted from another culture or country, the adoptive family becomes multicultural in every sense of the word, not for just a short while but for generations to come. But what does it mean to be a multicultural family? What does culture mean anyway? Sometimes parents think that when they adopt an infant of another race or culture that that child will be taught or socialized to fit into main stream and often “white” America. But questions remain about if, when, how and how much to acknowledge the cultural heritage of the birth family in ethnic or international adoptions. The task of finding this answer is compounded by a lack of consensus on the best or most appropriate ways to acknowledge the adoptee's cultural heritage or differences that exist between family and child.

### What is Culture?

To be an effective adoptive parent, it is important to understand your own culture and to accept the importance of the culture to the child you are about to adopt. Culture, race and ethnicity are interrelated, but these words mean different things. When we make assumptions that all people of one race all share the same characteristics, we are using stereotypes. We all have stereotypes and prejudices in our heads, but the key is to not let them misguide us in caring for the children in home.

*Race* is determined by heredity and refers to a system of classification of humans based on physical characteristics. We sometimes refer to it as “color” such as white, black, yellow, but

those are very inaccurate labels. Many more people these days are identifying themselves as multi-racial. Even people of the same skin color can have a wide variety of values, characteristics and experiences.

*Ethnicity* generally refers to a classification of people based on regional origin or nationality, such as Irish, German, Nigerian or Chinese.



*Culture* is much more complex than ethnicity or race. Culture is a system of values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions and standards of behaviors that are generally accepted by a group. Culture is handed down from generation to generation, sometimes by explicit teaching and sometimes by exposure and modeling.

***Some of the things that help define a person's culture include:***

Religion, language and dialect, beliefs, generational influences, family rule, family structure, definitions of strengths, ways of relating to outsiders, traditions, child rearing practices, food preferences, codes of conduct, work habits, hygiene and physical care, coping strategies, family relationships, discipline styles, art and music, dress codes and style, and educational systems.

If we understand ourselves better and stay open to how other groups handle these life activities, we better care for the children in our home, who are of a different culture or whose histories reflect a culture different from yours.

**Questions to ask yourself about culture:**

- Does your family have any strong cultural identity with a cultural, ethnic group or race? How do you show or participate in your culture as a family?
- Do you have any religious affiliation or belief system that affects the way you live? What are your family's strongest values and beliefs?
- What holidays and celebrations do you enjoy in our family? What rituals are associated with these celebrations? Does our art reflect who we are as a culture?
- Are there any foods that have been passed down from previous generations that our family enjoys? Is there a certain kind of music or songs that our family enjoys or plays or sings? Where did we learn those songs?
- What are our extended family relationships? Do we have an older generation that influences us or is involved in our lives? How do we treat our elders? Are they involved in child rearing at all?
- Was someone in our extended family raised with language other than English? Is that language still spoken within the family? Are there phrases or words that we use with other family members that persons outside the family may not understand?

**Alaska Native Cultures**



In Alaska, we have many different cultures native to our state including the Inupiat, (Northern Alaska), Yup'ik (Southwest), Tlingit (Southeast), Haida/Tsimshian (Southeast), Athabaskan (Interior) and Aleut (Aleutian Chain) and Eyak/Alutiiq (Kenai Peninsula.) These groups are generally referred to as Alaskan Native, but it

is important to know that there are many cultural differences amongst the groups.

A child from Barrow will have a very different cultural practice than a child from Sitka. Just because the child is an Alaskan Native, this does not mean that all of the groups are the same. It is important that you learn about the specific culture and tribe that your child belongs to.

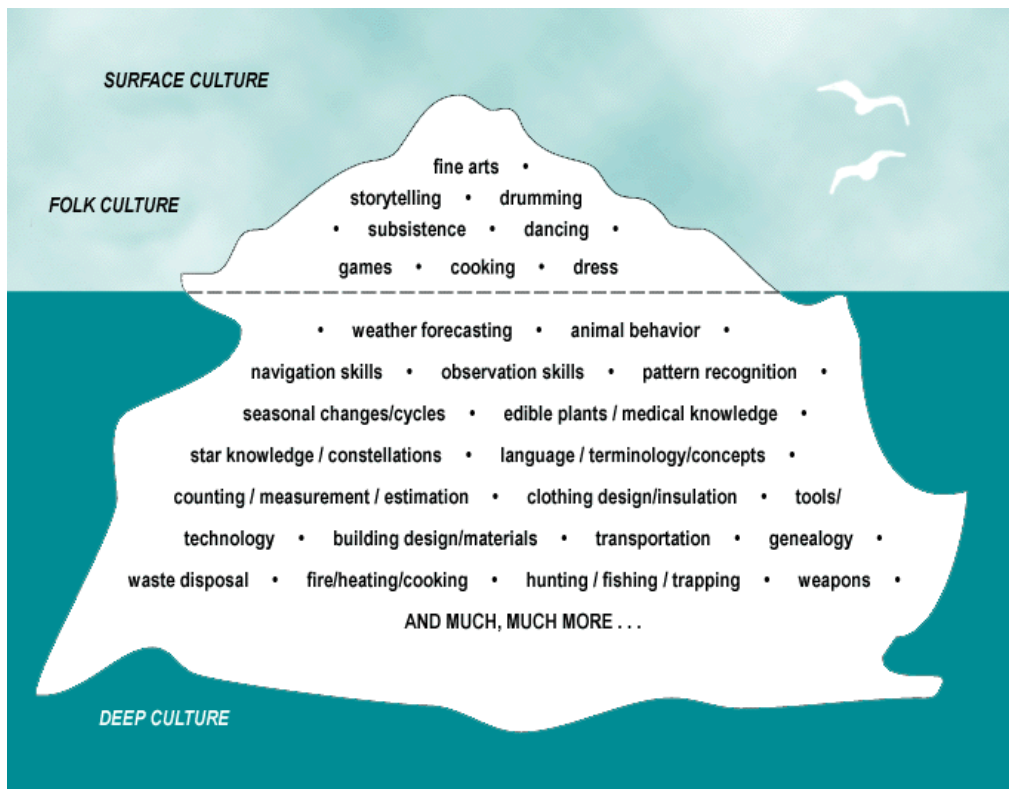
Many of these cultural values come from the nature of the history of the people and how they have lived throughout many generations. People on the coast, such as Aleut and the coastal Inupiat, have a strong relationship with marine animals such as fish, whales and seal because these animals helped these people to live for thousands of years. The Interior Native groups have a close identity with animals, such as caribou and moose. The Southeast Native groups have a deep relationship with the ocean.

Often, the values shared by Native groups are based on a value system that places the group well being above an individual's pursuit of individual interests. Thus, respect for elders, sharing of wealth and goods, getting along, avoiding confrontation and not boasting about oneself are often values shared by Alaskan Natives. Native values and identity with a person's respective community are shared and promoted through singing, drumming, cultural crafts, dance, community gatherings, foods from the area, language and family relationships.

Sometimes, cultural differences will also include the difference between living in "bush" or rural Alaska and living in the more urban areas of the state. You may have a child in your home that is very at ease riding a snow machine in a village, hauling water to his home, and living without regular plumbing. Going to a large school, needing to be street smart about safety and dodging traffic might all be a cultural shock when a child comes to a larger community. These, too, are cultural differences.

Alaska is a very large and diverse state and what makes one native culture unique, may not be present in another culture.

## **Model of What Makes Alaskan Native Culture**



*This model was developed by the Lower Kuskokwim School District.*

Indigenous people are defined by their culture. Most people outside the culture recognize certain aspects of the Indigenous people. Those aspects recognized by others are merely the tip of the iceberg. There is much deep knowledge embedded in the culture which does not appear on the surface.

### **Adopting a Child from a Different Culture**

When a child is separated from his birth family, it is a frightening experience and can cause great anxiety for the child. When a child is placed outside of his culture, it can also be anxiety producing. If an adoptive foster care placement can be culturally sensitive, it will lessen a child's fears and provide the child with a more familiar environment. How the adoptive family integrates cultural practices into their family will depend on the age of the child to be adopted and the child's relationship with their birth family and extended family or relatives.

Michelle Conte writes. "It is easier for us in the mainstream of society to develop our own identity. For many minority children growing up with racism and prejudice, positive feelings of self worth, self-esteem and identity are very hard to come by. Ethnic families and communities can provide a myriad of positive functions for its member. As a responsible parent, we will have to assume those roles when we take on the job of parenting cross culturally."

You can use the following guidelines in your quest to provide a culturally sensitive home for your foster children.

#### ***How adoptive families can help Native children maintain connections to their culture:***

#### **Educate yourself:**

- Accept that culture and race is important. It doesn't make you bad if you are not the same race or culture, but it does put more responsibility on you as a parent.
- Understand that all of the love in the world will not take away a child's longing for their culture.
- Understand if you and your adoptive child have visual differences (color of skin, eyes color) society will see this difference-even if you do not.
- Find out everything you can about the Native culture of the child in your home. Educate yourself on what you might need to learn to do differently. For example, many Native people do not make eye contact during conversation, or some Native American children have trouble digesting cow's milk.
- Start by being open to learning more. Seek out resources in the community, on the Internet and in the library about your adoptive child's culture, heritage, race and ethnicity.

### **Make your home culturally diverse:**

- Include some books and maybe a piece of Native, African American, or Chinese art or music in your home that reflects your adoptive child's culture.
- You may even want to subscribe to a shareholder or regional newsletter that reflects the culture and provides information on community events.
- If your child is at the age that she or he plays with dolls or family figures, make sure you have dolls of the same skin color as the child.
- Make sure that you include books and videos that present a child's culture or race in a positive light. Look at the people you interact with everyday.
- Embrace the music, art and dance of your adopted child's culture and share it openly with your family.
- Do you have a doctor or dentist, therapist, grocer, car mechanic, hairdresser, etc. of different cultures and races? Seek out multi-cultural care providers. If you are caring for Native children, you may want to seek services from Native individuals in order to diversify the child's exposure.

### **Provide knowledge of a child's heritage:**

- Take your adopted child(ren) to cultural events that promote and teach about the culture, such as the Festival of Native Arts.
- Make frequent visits to the local museum or attend cultural dances, potlatches, or gatherings.
- Call local cultural service groups to find out what events may be coming up in the community. Not only do your adopted children get to learn about their culture--your family as a whole is enriched through the learning as well.

### **Seek role models in the community and within the Tribe:**

- Ask tribal workers to assist with the child's needs, whether it be services or social workers.

- ☑ Welcome the tribal workers into your home and provide them with information about the child, foods, religious beliefs, and cultural activities.
- ☑ Help the child find positive role models by becoming part of a cultural community in your area.
- ☑ Seek Native Elders.
- ☑ Acknowledge that learning about other cultures is important and try not to feel threatened if your foster child looks up to someone who is of a culture or race different than you.
- ☑ If there is extended family in the area who has a good relationship with the child or another foster family or that child's race, try to spend time with them.

## **The Indian Child Welfare Act and Adoption of Native Children**

In Alaska, over half of all adopted children are of Alaskan Native heritage. Of those adopted about half are adopted in families that are not Alaskan Native. Currently, the State of Alaska is looking at measures to reduce these statistics. At the same time, the State is also ensuring that they make active efforts to locate Native families for Native children.

As an adoptive or guardian parent, you should be aware that there is a Federal Law called the Indian Child Welfare Act (P.L. 95-608) that impacts the adoptive placement of Native children through the child protection system. The Indian Child Welfare Act (also called ICWA, pronounced "ick-wah") was established by the United States Congress in 1978 as a national Policy to protect the best interests of Native American children and to promote the stability and security of Indian Tribes. Congress realized that there is no resource more vital to the continued existence and integrity of Indian Tribes than their children. If you have a Native child placed in your home, and you are not a member of a Native tribe, it is important to understand the implications of ICWA on the permanency placement of Native children for adoptive purposes.

Special considerations and procedures are required for adoptive placements of Native children. The Indian Child Welfare Act ("ICWA") specifies an order of preference for the adoptive placement of Native American children. Social workers must research each placement preference when attempting to locate an adoptive home for a Native American child. Native American children cannot be placed for adoption outside of the preferences unless a diligent search for a preference placement has been made without success.

### ***The placement preferences for adoption are:***

First Preference Placement for Adoption: A member of the Native American child's extended family. "Extended family member" is defined by the law or custom of the Indian child's tribe. In the absence of law or custom, extended family includes a Native and Non-native person who is a grandparent, aunt, uncle, cousin, brother or sister, niece or nephew or stepparents. If a member of the child's extended family cannot be located, or shows no interest in adopting the child, or is inappropriate, then the next alternative placement for adoption is researched.



Second Placement Preference for Adoption: Other members of the Native Child's tribe.

Third Placement Preference Placement for Adoption: Placement of the child with other Native American families. Whenever possible, the other Native family should be of a

similar Native/Indian heritage and language group. Indian families in other parts of the United States from other cultural or language groups also fall under this preference.

Adoption by any other person is considered “out-of-preference”. If a Native child is placed in a non-native home for adoptive purposes, the social worker must continue to search for a preference placement until the child is formally adopted. If a Native child is placed with a non-Native family for adoption, until that adoption is finalized in the court, it is possible a preference placement will come forward and the child will be moved to that placement, because OCS social workers are bound by ICWA to follow the placement preferences. This means that even if a child has been in your home as a foster/adoptive child for many months, and you are not a preference placement, and a preference placement is located, the Native child must be moved into that home.

All adoptive placements should be discussed regularly by OCS social workers, in conjunction with the OCS regional ICWA workers, who must involve the child’s tribe or tribes in the placement, at scheduled case conferences. If you are an out of preference adoptive home for a Native child, it is vital that you are working with the assigned social worker and are fully informed of the placement status. To learn more about the Indian Child Welfare Act, request the self study course with this same name.

## **TIPS FOR ADOPTIVE PARENTS**

***If you have a Native child placed in your home, be sure to:***

- ☑ Maintain contact with your child’s tribal representative, or agent of the tribe. A list of tribes and the federally recognized tribal agents are listed on the ACRF web site at [www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org) . Or you can ask your social worker how to contact the child’s tribe or ask ACRF for a tribal directory.
- ☑ Understand that the ICWA is a Government-to-Government agreement to protect the stability, welfare and culture of Indian families.
- ☑ Remember that the tribal worker is another member of a team of professionals who are very concerned about the best interest and well being of the child and their precious resource.
- ☑ Make an effort to become connected to the child’s tribe –get on the mailing list of events-and attend them.
- ☑ If you are an adoptive placement, if at all possible, travel to the child’s village, with approval/invitation of the tribal worker (with the child if you can) to visit and make connections. In-person contact is always best.
- ☑ Remember that you are very important in helping Native children cherish and preserve their cultural heritage.

## ***WE JUST DON’T SEE COLOR IN OUR FAMILY***

***By Elaine Cordova, M.A.***

Several years ago one adoptive mother told me: “Race doesn’t mean anything to us...the fact that Alicia is African American is just not an issue. We don’t see her skin as being dark...to us, she is just our little girl – and we love her because she is part of our family!” (I mention this because I’ve since heard other parents of children adopted transracially say similar things.)

What are your thoughts as you hear this? Doesn’t it say that this parent looks beyond her daughter’s skin color and into the heart of a child who is a vitally important part of her family? Doesn’t it say that love breaks down the barriers that race has historically erected between people? Isn’t this parent’s statement a noble one?

I wish race were a simple matter. Unfortunately, the issue of transracial or bi-racial adoption is much more complex than the love a family has for an adopted child... because racism exists in the world.

Another adoptive parent says, "But, our Isaac is half black and half white. He's as much white as he is Native, so shouldn't we help him fit into the white culture since that's the one he's living in?"

While this statement seems to have validity, we know that the world responds to a child as it racially identifies him. This means that even though a child may have mixed racial heritage, if he has the appearance of a Black, or Hispanic, or Native American, or any other minority race, society will see him as a member of that race, and may react to him according to all the stereotypes, prejudices, and biases afforded to that group of people.

A major parental task – right along with providing for basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, affection – is to teach a child the necessary skills to survive outside the protection and safety of his family. Although mothers and fathers, grandparents, and siblings may cherish and honor a child's unique personhood, we know that racism and prejudice exist outside the walls of the child's home.

People of the dominate race are often oblivious to what it is like to be a "person of color" because they have been immersed into something called White Privilege. White Privilege is defined as a "right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by the class of white persons beyond the common advantage of all others." [www.whiteprivilege.com](http://www.whiteprivilege.com).

Let me give you some examples of privileges that whites so often take for granted, but ones that some minority people may not experience.

I can go shopping alone most of the time and am pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match my skin

If a traffic cop pulls me over I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my skin color

At a very early age children begin to see the differences between themselves and others and understand that society places a higher value on some characteristics than others. I remember hearing a story told by an adoptive mother of a five year old. The child had gone into the bathroom and after several minutes when the child didn't return, the mother called out to her asking if she was alright. There was no answer from the child. Concerned, the mother went to the bathroom where she found her daughter "scouring" her arm with soap and a washcloth. Looking down at the child's arm the mother was horrified to see that the child had rubbed her forearm so long and so hard that she had rubbed it almost raw. The little girl, tearfully, looked up and said, "I want to be white like everybody else." Another story, written by Toni Morrison tells of another little girl who prayed each night, without fail, that God would give her blue eyes. Both of these stories attest to the struggle many transracially adopted children experience: judging their own beauty by the standards of a culture that is not their own.

Successfully parenting a child of a racial background different from your own - the challenge of raising confident children with a positive self identity - is not easily accomplished, nor is it done by being color blind. Dr. Joseph Crumbley, an African American psychologist and adoption therapist, presented several suggestions for parents in an article entitled, "7 Tasks for Parents: Developing Positive Racial Identity."<sup>1</sup>

Acknowledge the existence of prejudice, racism and discrimination

Explain why the child's minority group is mistreated

Provide the child with a repertoire of responses to racial discrimination

Provide the child with role models and positive contact with his or her minority community

Prepare the child for discrimination

Teach the child the difference between responsibility to and for his or her minority group

Advocate on behalf of your child's positive identity

Racial color blindness is, in fact blindness. Seeing, acknowledging and embracing racial differences celebrates the fullness of a minority child and helps provide him with the necessary skills to be successful as he enters the world.

There is much to learn about racism, and the challenges of parenting children of another race. If you are interested in learning more please call your local Alaska Center for Resource Families for information for upcoming presentations on transracial adoption.

<sup>1</sup>Adoptive Families, September/October, 1999.

### ***A Transracially Adopted Child's Bill of Rights***

1. Every child is entitled to love and full membership in her family.
2. Every child is entitled to have his heritage embraced and valued.
3. Every child is entitled to parents who are not adopting to save the world.
4. Every child is entitled to parents who know she will experience life differently than they do.
5. Every child is entitled to parents who know that transracial adoption changes the family forever.
6. Every child is entitled to parents who know if they are white, they benefit from racism.
7. Every child is entitled to ongoing opportunities to connect with people of his or her race

*(Adapted from Liza Steinberg Triggs from "A Bill of Rights for Mixed Folks,")*



## **Seven Tasks for Parents: Developing Positive Racial Identity**

By Joseph Crumbley, D.S.W.

Each night, without fail, she prayed for blue eyes. Fervently, for a year, she had prayed. Although somewhat discouraged, she was not without hope. To have something as wonderful as that happen would take a long time. Thrown, in this way, into the binding conviction that only a miracle could relieve her, she would never know her beauty. She would only see what there was to see: the eyes of other people.

In her description, in *The Bluest Eyes*, of a young black girl who wishes that her eyes were blue so would be as beautiful as all the blond, blue-eyed children in her school, author Toni Morrison captures the struggle that many transracially and transculturally adopted children face: judging their own beauty by the standards of a culture that is not their own.

Although transracial adoption and foster care have been a controversial topic for more than a decade, the number of children entering such placements continues to increase. In 1997, approximately 17 percent of all domestic adoptions were transracial placements in which at least one of the parent's race was different from the child's. In 1998, Americans adopted 15,774 children born outside of the United States. The largest number of these children were adopted from regions of the former Soviet Union and from China. As of March 31, 1998, at least 110,000 children were in foster care, with the goal of adoption. Twenty-nine percent were white, 59 percent were African American, and 10 percent were Latino. Twenty-seven percent (3,601) of the African American children who were adopted and 7 percent of the white children were in transracial adoption. The realities of children living in transracial families raise many questions:

- How does a child develop a positive racial or cultural identity?
- What are the affects of transracial adoption or foster care on a child and his or her family?
- What are the special needs of adopted or foster children living in transracial families?
- What are the parenting tasks specific to transracial families? And...
- What skills, attitudes, knowledge, and resources must parents in transracial families have or develop?

## **How Positive Racial Identity Develops**

Theories on social learning, object relations, and identification are useful in explaining how a child's identities (racial, religious, ethnic, class and gender) develop. These theories are also useful in understanding the similarities and differences in how identities develop in children from dominant groups and from children in minority groups experiencing discrimination.

Object identifications suggest that a child's identity is influenced by significant role models and relationships to which the child is consistently exposed to in his or her environment (family, school, society, and the media). The child from the dominant group-the group that has power over the distribution of goods, services, rights, privileges, entitlements, and status-begins his or her identity formation by:

- Observing what group is in power,
- Observing that members of the group in power are like him or her (i.e. in race, gender, or religion), and
- Assuming that because he or she is like members of the group in power, he or she has the same rights and will achieve similar accomplishments and power as members of that group.
- The ultimate result of the child's identity is a sense of positive self-esteem, confidence, worth, entitlement and goals. In contrast, the child from the minority group-the group subject to the power, control, discretion, and distribution of goods and privileges by another group-begins his or her identity formation by:
  - Observing what group is in power,
  - Observing that group members who are like him or her are not in positions of power and control,
  - Observing or experiencing prejudice, discrimination, and exposure to stereotypes, and
  - Assuming that because he or she is like members in the minority group, he or she has the same limited rights, can only achieve the same accomplishments, position, and status as similar group members, and that members of the minority group are not as good as those in power.

- The minority child's identity affects his or her self-esteem, confidence, goals, worth, self-respect, sense of entitlement, and expectations by making him or her feels inferior. This inferiority is not the result of identifying with or being a member of a minority group, but from exposure to discrimination, prejudice, and negative stereotypes about the group. A child from a minority group that is celebrated, held in esteem, or that shares power and control with the dominant group can have identities that are just as positive as a child's from the dominant group.
- To counteract a minority child's formation of negative identities, he or she must see and be told:
  - That members of his or her minority group can also make positive achievements if given equal opportunities,
  - That he or she and his or her minority group should also have the same rights and entitlements as members in the dominant group,
  - That he or she and his or her group are equal to and as good as any other group,
  - That stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are wrong, and
  - That there is proof that prejudices and stereotypes are untrue. The child must be able to see it to believe it.
- This last task may be the most difficult and challenging to accomplish if the minority child's group is not in a position of power, control, and success in the child's environment. Alternatives may need to include:
  - Exposing the child to historical figures and information about his or her group's accomplishments, capacities, values, and culture,
  - Redefining and reframing the child's definitions of success, strengths, and accomplishments by not using standards and definitions based on those of the dominant group (e.g. highlight individual accomplishments, family commitment, group survival, spiritual and moral integrity, and civil rights activities against discrimination),
  - Exposing the child outside of his or her environment to members of the minority group in positions of power and control (e.g. geographically, in other countries, through films and other media).

## **Parenting Tasks that Facilitate Positive Racial Identity**

Because children from minority groups (Asian, Latino, African American, or Native American) who experience prejudice or discrimination are subject to developing negative racial identity, they require monitoring, with attention paid to their perception of racial identity. They should not be expected to develop positive racial identity without support and reinforcement from their families, role models, and the community. Parents can provide support and reinforcement through the following 7 tasks.

### **TASK 1: ACKNOWLEDGE THE EXISTENCE OF PREJUDICE, RACISM, AND DISCRIMINATION.**

Adoptive parents must recognize not only that racism, prejudice, and discrimination exists, but that they, too, have been victims and survivors of it. By admitting the existence of inequities,

parents can avoid racist, prejudicial, or discriminatory behavior. By admitting being a victim and survivor, parents are able to: **1)** recognize inequities and how they affect others; and **2)** elicit strategies for intervening on behalf of their child, based on personal experiences and knowledge.

While the victimization of minority groups is fairly obvious, that of members from the dominant culture and race may not be. Children in the dominant group are victims of racism by inadvertently developing superiority complexes.

### **Superiority complexes occur when a child:**

- Observes that those in power are racially the same as he or she is,
- Observes those not in power are of a different race or color,
- Observes or is exposed to prejudicial and discriminatory beliefs and practices against a minority race,
- Assumes, therefore, that he or she and his or her race are better or without having any contact with a minority group.

Once parents understand how racism victimizes members from both the dominant and minority communities, they are prepared for the second task.

### **TASK 2: EXPLAIN WHY THE CHILD'S MINORITY GROUP IS MISTREATED.**

Parents must explain and define racism, prejudice, discrimination, and bigotry, and why such behavior exists and understanding that the behavior exists. Understanding the functions and reasons for the behaviors increases the child's range of responses beyond anger or retaliation.

### **TASK 3: PROVIDE THE CHILD WITH A REPERTOIRE OF RESPONSES TO RACIAL DISCRIMINATION.**

Parents must work to minimize their children's feelings of helplessness. A child's identity can be more positive if he or she perceives him or herself and members of racial groups to be empowered with choices, resources, and the ability to acquire and protect their rights. This repertoire of responses may include:

- Selective confrontation or avoidance,
- Styles of confrontations (passive, aggressive),
- Individual, legal, institutional, or community resources and responses (i.e. grievances, suits, NAACP, protests)
- Priorities and timing (when to avoid and when not to avoid issues),
- Goal-oriented responses rather than unplanned reactions,
- Institutional/organizational strategies (positioning, coalitions, compromising).

### **TASK 4: PROVIDE THE CHILD WITH ROLE MODELS AND POSITIVE CONTACT WITH HIS OR HER MINORITY COMMUNITY.**

Parents of a different race from their child are quite capable of modeling and helping the child develop various identities (i.e. gender, class). However, counteracting the racial identity projected by a racially conscious or discriminating society requires positive exposure to same-race models or experiences. These contacts and experiences require: **1)** interacting with the

child's minority community, **2)** providing the child information about his or her history and culture, and **3)** providing an environment that includes the child's culture on a regular basis (i.e. art, music, food, religion, school, integrated or same race community).

This task requires that the parents be comfortable with **1)** being a minority when interacting in the child's community, and **2)** sharing the role of modeling with members from the child's race. Same race contacts and experiences function to: **1)** counteract negative stereotypes, **2)** teach the child how to implement the repertoire of responses, and **3)** provide a respite from being a minority (i.e. the only child of color, the object of stares, or needing to prove one's equality).

#### **TASK 5: PREPARE THE CHILD FOR DISCRIMINATION.**

Providing the child with information on how his or her racial identity might be degraded helps him or her develop better coping skills and methods of maintaining a positive identity. Feeling self-confident about his or her ability to cope with and appropriately respond to discrimination reinforces a child's positive self-image and identity.

Same race role models may be a helpful resource for information and preparation if an adoptive parent has not experienced discrimination similar to the child's minority group (i.e. double standards, slander, interracial dating, and gender issues).

#### **TASK 6: TEACH THE CHILD THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RESPONSIBILITY TO AND FOR HIS OR HER MINORITY GROUP.**

This task relieves the child of: 1) feeling embarrassed or needing to apologize for his or her racial identity or group, 2) not having to overcompensate or prove his or her worth because of his or her racial identity or negative stereotypes. However, the child is able to develop a commitment to his or her individual and minority group's accomplishments, resources, and empowerment.

The Clark Doll Test suggests that children are aware of differences in race as early as four years old. This study also found that African American children became aware of stigma associated with race as early as seven years old. Although parents cannot stop the minority child's exposure to racial prejudice, discrimination, and stereotypes, parents (adoptive, birth, same or different race) of any minority child must help develop the positive racial identity necessary to counteract the effects of racial inferiority.

#### **TASK 7: ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF YOUR CHILD'S POSITIVE IDENTITY.**

The purpose of this task is to provide the child an environment that is conducive to the formation of a positive identity. The parent should advocate for family, social, and educational experiences that are respectful, reflective, and sensitive to cultural diversity. Therefore, the parent may need to be prepared to correct or confront individual or institutional racism, prejudice, or discrimination that the child may encounter.

As an advocate the parent models for the child how to advocate for themselves. The child also sees and feels their parent's protection, loyalty, and commitment, which are essential in attachment and bonding. Confronting prejudice and discrimination on the child's behalf is no longer optional once a parent adopts transracially.

*Joseph Crumbley, D.S.W., is in private practice as a consultant and family therapist. His most recent areas of concentration have been kinship care and transracial adoptions. This article is adapted from his book, Transracial Adoption and Foster Care, available from the Child Welfare League of America Press. This article was originally published in Adoptive Families, September/October 1999 taken from the NACAC website 2005.*

## **Chapter Summary**



To be an effective adoptive parent it is vital that you understand your own culture and the culture of your adoptive child. Culture, race and ethnicity are interrelated but they mean different things. As adoptive parents, you should define the meaning of culture for your adopted child and examine what is the same and what is different so you and your child are culturally aware of cultural sensitivity: culture is a system of values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions, and standards of behaviors that are generally accepted by a group, and is handed down from generation to generation. In Alaska, there are distinct Alaskan Native cultures. If you are adopting an Alaskan Native child, it is important to know about your child's culture and make active efforts to keep your Native child culturally connected. Tools for families to keep children culturally connected include educating yourself about your child's culture, making your home culturally diverse, adding to your child's knowledge at your child's appropriate developmental levels about their heritage and integrating the knowledge into your home, and seeking culturally or racially similar role models in the community for your child. There is a Federal law called the Indian Child Welfare Act that governs the placement and adoption of Native children. ICWA is a nation to nation agreement which establishes placement preferences. If you are a non-native family, it is vital that you understand how important ICWA is to Native people and realize there will be a chance that the Native child placed in your home may be moved to a Native family if one is located prior to adoption. Furthermore, all families caring for Native children should maintain contact with tribal members and help the child stay connected.

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**Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Self Study Workbook Section 5 1.0 Hour**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Street or Post Office City/State Zip*

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

**Yes! I would like to receive ACRF's upcoming training and the quarterly newsletter by email.**

Are you a foster parent?  YES  NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_

If NO, please check one:  Pending Foster Parent  OCS  Birth Parent  Adoptive Parent  Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_)  Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_

**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING****COURSE: "SECTION FIVE: MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS TO CULTURE AND FAMILY"**

*Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. Try filling out the questionnaire first from what you remember from the course. Then review if necessary. These questions address information specifically stated in this course.*

1. Race is determined by heredity and refers to a system of classification of humans based on physical characteristics.

\_\_\_\_ a. True  
 \_\_\_\_ b. False

2. Ethnicity generally refers to a classification of people based on regional origin or nationality, such as Irish German or Chinese.

\_\_\_\_ a. True  
 \_\_\_\_ b. False

3. Culture is more complex than ethnicity or race. Culture is a system of values, beliefs, attitudes, traditions and standards of behaviors that are generally accepted by a group. Culture is handed down from generation to generation.

\_\_\_\_ a. True  
 \_\_\_\_ b. False

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 2 - "SECTION FIVE: MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS TO CULTURE AND FAMILY"

4. List three (3) of your family's cultural traditions:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

5. List three (3) ways an adoptive or guardian family can help a child stay connected to their culture:

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

6. According to the Indian Child Welfare Act, there are three (3) placement preferences for Native children. What are they?

1) \_\_\_\_\_

2) \_\_\_\_\_

3) \_\_\_\_\_

7. If you are an adoptive parent, and you are not a Native person, then you are considered to be out of preference for the purposes of adoption of a Alaska Native child.

\_\_\_\_\_ a. True

\_\_\_\_\_ b. False

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**FOR SCORING AND CREDIT OF 1.0 TRAINING HOUR, MAIL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

**Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second AVE STE 101  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Or fax to: 907-479-9666**

**Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Self Study Workbook Section 5 1.0 Hour**

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*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*

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Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Or fax to: 907-479-9666**

## **Section Six:**

# **State of Alaska Adoption or Guardianship Subsidy Program**

The State of Alaska Adoption and Guardianship Subsidy program can seem to be very complex. There are many intricacies when discussing subsidies. Ultimately, subsidy negotiations happen between the social worker and the adoptive family who together define the subsidy agreement. The subsidy agreement is then approved by the OCS Regional Adoption Specialist and the OCS Director.

This section is an overview of the elements of an adoption subsidy and should not be considered the authority on Alaska adoption subsidy but as a guide to help you through this process.

### **In this section the resource family will learn:**

- Aspects of adoption subsidies and who qualifies
- General guidelines for subsidy determinations
- Other factors to consider that impact adoption or guardianship subsidies
- Definition of a deferred subsidy
- Adoption Subsidy Definitions
- Other Resources

## **Overview**

Earlier in this course we discussed the meaning of “special needs” and the kinds of children in the State of Alaska child protection system who become available for adoption. Many of the children who are available for adoption from the State of Alaska system have special needs. Traditionally, children with special needs have been considered harder to place for adoption than other children, but experience has shown that many children with special needs can be placed successfully with families, if they have additional support. The Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-89) has focused on making sure that families who adopt children with special needs receive post adoption services and financial assistance, called an “adoption” or “guardianship” subsidy, to help with the special needs of the child.

### **Which Children Qualify?**

Most children who are adopted, or in guardianship, qualify for some sort of adoption or guardianship subsidy through the State of Alaska. In order to qualify the child must be considered a special needs child, as described earlier in this series. Additionally, the social worker must show that, “The State must determine that in EACH CASE a reasonable, but unsuccessful, effort to place the child with appropriate parents without providing adoption assistance has been made.” The social worker must demonstrate and document that they have made efforts to place the child without a subsidy by conducting a complete relative search, listing the child on adoption exchanges, engaging in recruitment activities to locate a home to adopt the child without a subsidy or engaged in other activities to place the child without a subsidy.



## Subsidy Determination

When an adoption or guardianship subsidy is considered, the State must also “pose the question of whether or not the prospective adoption parents are willing to adopt without assistance.” However, there are some exceptions to the above criteria.

### Exceptions:

- ✓ The child has significant emotional ties to the adoption or guardianship family and
- ✓ The placement meets statutory requirements on the placement of children with relatives, such as in an ICWA case.

Second, “The State must determine that the child cannot or should not be returned to the home of his or her parents” as determined by

- ✓ Parental Relinquishments
- ✓ Termination of Parental Rights
- ✓ Tribal Adoption with State’s Consent

Finally, the State must determine that there exists a specific factor or condition which precludes that the child cannot be placed with adoptive parents without providing title IV-E adoption assistance or Medicaid. Such a factor or condition may include (but is not limited to)

- ✓ ethnic background,
- ✓ age or membership in a minority or sibling group,
- ✓ the presence of a medical condition, or
- ✓ Physical, mental or emotional disabilities.”

In order to qualify for the above bulleted factors, criteria to measure medical conditions, physical, mental or emotional disabilities must be examined by the social worker or State of Alaska officials. Let’s look at the criteria for qualification of special needs.

What Qualifies As A Special Needs Determination? The following conditions may qualify a child as “special needs” for the purposes of an adoption or guardianship subsidy. However, there must be documentation of the disability from a qualified expert in order for the determination to be made.

**Mentally retarded****Visually impaired****Hearing impaired****Physically disabled**

- Cerebral Palsy
- Paraplegic
- Spina Bifida
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Quadriplegic

**Emotionally Disturbed**

- Attachment Disorder
- Autism
- Depression/Suicidal Tendencies
- Mental Illness/Psychosis
- Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**Other Medical Conditions**

- ADD/ADHD
- AIDS/HIV Positive
- Asthma/Chronic Respiratory Problems
- Diabetes
- FAS/FAE
- Learning Disability
- Organic Brain Damage
- Sickle Cell Anemia
- Speech Disability
- Failure to Thrive

**Recognized High-Risk of Physical and Mental Disease:**

- Abandonment
- Alcohol/Drug Abuse in the Home
- Domestic Violence
- Emotional Abuse
- High Risk Behavior—Alcohol Abuse
- High Risk Behavior– Drug Abuse
- Neglect
- Physical Abuse
- Prenatal Exposure to Alcohol
- Prenatal Exposure to Cocaine
- Prenatal Exposure to Other Drugs
- Sexual Abuse

**Race or Origin****Age****Membership in a Sibling Group**

## Are There Other Factors To Consider In Determining A Subsidy?

### Supplemental Security Income (SSI):

**Is child SSI eligible?** SSI is means tested, which means that the family's income will count against the benefit. Adoptive families may chose (based on their income) to accept the SSI benefit only, without a subsidy. Should the family choose to receive an adoption subsidy, the family would lose the SSI benefit. Therefore, SSI is not a factor in the negotiation process. In guardianship, SSI benefits will continue. However, the subsidy must be deducted dollar-for-dollar based on the amount of the SSI benefit. If the child is eligible for Social Security Income, that amount would go with the child and be provided to the adoptive parents to assist in caring for the child.

### Survivor Benefits through Social Security

**Does the child receive SSA (survivor) benefits?** Social Security Survivor's Benefits are available to children whose parent(s) is deceased. These benefits follow the child in both adoption and guardianship. The Survivor's Benefits are deducted dollar-for-dollar from the negotiated subsidy amount. Social Security Survivor benefits are for the child and often transfer with them in an adoption or guardianship. Always check with the Adoption Specialist to determine SSA benefits for your specific situation.

### Other Factors:

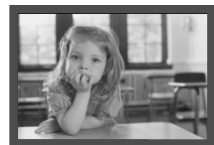
**What funds and services can an adoptive family provide?** It is expected that the family will provide basic care for their child once adopted; therefore, if they were receiving foster care payments (which is reimbursement for the cost of care for the child) the foster care payments end with the implementation of the subsidy.



If a child is legally free, a subsidy can be implemented prior to an adoption. Adoption subsidies can begin as soon as a child is legally free for adoption, if the adoptive family has an approved adoption home study and the child placed with them is legally free for adoption. The family does not need to be licensed as a foster parent and can begin the adoption subsidy on the date placement begins.

### Deferred Subsidy for Ages 3 And Younger

In Alaska, if a child is under the age of three and has not been diagnosed with a special needs condition the child is not eligible to receive an adoption subsidy. If the child has no CURRENTLY DIAGNOSED special needs, as described above, a ZERO dollar deferred subsidy with Medicaid is put into place. However, the paperwork to implement a subsidy should be done prior to the adoption to ensure the possibility of re-evaluating a child's special needs in the future after age three. If a child acquires a special needs diagnosis and the family needs financial support, the subsidy can be re-negotiated at any time up until the child's 18th birthday to ensure the possibility of a future diagnosis that would necessitate the need for a subsidy.



### ZERO SUBSIDIES OCCUR WHEN:

- ✓ You are able to financially meet your adoptive son or daughter's needs, also
- ✓ \$0 Subsidy Agreement is insurance for the future and is a safety net
- ✓ A Zero Subsidy for Guardianship subsidies does not exist.
- ✓ Preferable to do \$0 paperwork rather than no subsidy

## Other Things to Know:

- ✓ Families must apply and be approved for a subsidy before an adoption or guardianship is finalized.
- ✓ The amount of the subsidy cannot exceed the existing amount for foster care.
- ✓ Subsidy agreements are reviewed annually and can be renegotiated as the needs of the child or family change.
- ✓ Medicaid health coverage can be included in the adoption subsidy after consideration of adoptive parents' health insurance resources.

## Things you need to know about subsidies...

Adoption or guardianship subsidies do not replace foster care payments. Subsidies are financial assistance to families to assist them in providing for the child's special needs. Subsidies are an amount of funding that is based on the child's current special needs. The subsidy amount is negotiated between the adoptive or guardian parent(s) and the State of Alaska through the social worker and Regional Adoption Specialist, but must be approved by the OCS Director. The subsidy amount cannot exceed the OCS foster care amount. Once the agreement is signed by the State of Alaska designee, the agreement becomes a legal agreement with the State of Alaska and will continue until the child's 18th birthday.

An increase or decrease in amount can be renegotiated at the adoptive family's request, depending on the situation. If the child develops problems later in life, the subsidy amount can be increased, with supporting documentation

## Adoption Subsidy Definitions – United States

In foster care and adoption, many abbreviations, acronyms, and special phrases are used. Below is a brief list of common subsidy-related terms and their definitions.

<b>Adoption Assistance</b>	Adoption assistance, or subsidy, is provided for children with special needs as an incentive to help families meet a child's special needs. A subsidy agreement should be negotiated prior to the finalization of an adoption, and may include monthly maintenance payments, medical coverage, and other services such as therapy and respite care, as outlined in state and county policy.
<b>Title IV-E</b>	The federally funded adoption assistance program that provides financial support to adoptive parents of children with special needs. A portion of the support is federally funded, and the remaining portion may be all state dollars or a mix of state and county dollars. Title IV-E children are either AFDC- or SSI-eligible prior to adoption.

<b>Non-IV-E</b>	State funded children are often referred to as non-Title IV-E children. These special needs children are funded by state and/or county dollars, and are neither AFDC- nor SSI-eligible prior to adoption.
<b>AFDC</b>	Aid to Families with Dependent Children. This program no longer exists at the federal level as it was replaced with TANF—temporary aid to needy families. However, the rules for AFDC as of June 1996 are used to qualify a child for the Title IV-E Adoption Assistance Program. Specifically, a child whose biological family is of low income (e.g., receiving food stamps or some other type of welfare) and who is deprived of parental support (i.e., only one biological parent was in the home when the child was removed from the home) can be considered eligible for AFDC.
<b>SSI</b>	Supplemental Security Income. Children eligible for SSI are significantly disabled. Common diagnoses that qualify a child for SSI include Down’s Syndrome, deafness and blindness, and cerebral palsy.
<b>Non-recurring</b>	Non-recurring adoption expenses are one-time expenses directly related to the finalization of a child with special needs. Typical expenses that are paid or reimbursed to the family include the home study fees, attorney fees, replacement of the birth certificate, and travel to and from the child, including mileage, lodging and meals.
<b>Means Testing</b>	<p>This refers to using a family’s income to determine eligibility for a subsidy. While this is not common among states, it does happen occasionally. Means testing eligibility is different from means testing to establish the level of the subsidy. While it is permissible to look at the child’s condition along with the family’s resources to set the monthly rate of the subsidy, it is not appropriate to disqualify a child for eligibility based on family income.</p> <p>Federal policy guidance states that means testing eligibility for Title IV-E is not allowed. However, state funded (non IV-E Programs) can be means tested. In addition, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is means tested.</p>

<b>Title XX</b>	Title XX Social Services are a flexible block grant of monies from the federal government to state governments. Some states pass the money directly from the federal level to the county level. Few states provide direct services to adoptive families using these monies, as was once the common practice. If a state does provide a service such as day care or respite care, families can apply for these services just like any other family.
<b>Specialized Rates</b>	Specialized maintenance rates are based on the extraordinary needs of the child, and/or the additional parenting skills required to raise the child. These rates are provided at state option. Other terms used by states include level of care (LOC) increments, difficulty of care rates (DOC), and exceptional rates.
<b>Fair Hearings</b>	An administrative hearing can be requested by parents if they believe they have been treated unfairly by the agency or in an untimely manner. Often, parents take the agency to hearing because the agency reduced the foster care or adoption subsidy rate without due notice or if the parents finalized an adoption of a special needs child without subsidy and believe the child is (and was) eligible.
<b>EPSDT</b>	Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment Services is a program intended to maintain and enhance the health and development of Medicaid eligible children and adolescents. Basic benefits under EPSDT are screening (e.g., medical history, physical exams, tests) vision, dental and hearing services, and other necessary health care. Title IV-E children are automatically eligible for these services, and non-IV-E adoptees may be Medicaid eligible if the state providing the subsidy elected to cover them in accord with program options in the law. The importance of EPSDT is that if a doctor finds in a screening or test that a child has a specific condition, Medicaid must provide treatment of that condition.
<b>Subsidized Guardianship</b>	Private guardianship involves the transfer of legal responsibility for a state ward from public custody to a private caregiver who becomes the legal guardian of the child. Unlike adoption, guardianship does not require surrender or termination of parental rights. Subsidized guardianship allows the caregiver to receive a monthly payment on behalf of the child, similar to the adoption assistance payments.

### **Other Adoption and Guardianship Resources Available in Alaska**

Each OCS office has a Regional Adoption Specialist (RAS) who monitors and facilitates adoptions through the State of Alaska. The RAS reviews the applications, helps to match children to families, and serves as a great source of information to resource families and social workers. Find out who the RAS is for your region by asking your caseworker or the ACRF Family Support Specialist.

Alaska Center for Resource Families provides ongoing support, assessment, referrals and limited case management to pre-adoptive, post-adoptive, and guardianship families. For more information, go to [www.acrf.org](http://www.acrf.org) or contact 1-800-478-7307 for the ACRF Family Support Specialist in your area.

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**Adoption and Guardianship Preparation Self Study Workbook Section 6 1.0 Hour**

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_ PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

*Only one person per questionnaire. Feel free to make additional copies if needed.*ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_  
*Street or Post Office City/State Zip*

EMAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

 **Yes! I would like to receive ACRF's upcoming training and the quarterly newsletter by email.**Are you a foster parent?  YES  NO If YES, what is your Foster Home License #: \_\_\_\_\_If NO, please check one:  Pending Foster Parent  OCS  Birth Parent  Adoptive Parent  Residential Treatment Facility (License #: \_\_\_\_\_)  Agency: \_\_\_\_\_ Other (*please specify*): \_\_\_\_\_**CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING****COURSE: "SECTION SIX: STATE OF ALASKA ADOPTION OR GUARDIANSHIP SUBSIDY PROGRAM"**

*Check or fill in the appropriate answer to the following questions. Try filling out the questionnaire first from what you remember from the course. Then review if necessary. These questions address information specifically stated in this course.*

1. Subsidy Negotiations occur between the adoptive or guardian family and the social worker; however, they must be approved by the Regional Adoption Specialist and the OCS Director.

\_\_\_\_ a. True  
 \_\_\_\_ b. False

2. Adoption or guardianship subsidies are a kind of financial assistance that helps families meet the special needs of the children.

\_\_\_\_ a. True  
 \_\_\_\_ b. False

3. Medicaid health coverage can be included in the adoption subsidy after consideration of the adoptive parent's health insurance resources.

\_\_\_\_ a. True  
 \_\_\_\_ b. False

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

PAGE 2 - "SECTION SIX: STATE OF ALASKA ADOPTION OR GUARDIANSHIP SUBSIDY PROGRAM"

4. In order for a child to qualify for a subsidy they must have a documented special need.
- \_\_\_\_\_a. True  
\_\_\_\_\_b. False
5. If a child has no currently diagnosed special needs, a \_\_\_\_\_ dollar deferred subsidy with Medicaid is put into place, leaving an opportunity to renegotiate in the future if any future special needs are diagnosed. (FILL IN THE BLANK)
6. The adoption subsidy amount cannot exceed the OCS foster care amount.
- \_\_\_\_\_a. True  
\_\_\_\_\_b. False
7. If a child receives Social Security survivor benefits or Supplemental Security income Security disability benefits, the child can continue the benefits after an adoption or guardianship; therefore, any subsidy amount would be offset by this financial support.
- \_\_\_\_\_a. True  
\_\_\_\_\_b. False
8. There is no subsidy possibility when a legal guardianship is involved.
- \_\_\_\_\_a. True  
\_\_\_\_\_b. False

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**FOR SCORING AND CREDIT OF 1.0 TRAINING HOUR, MAIL THIS QUESTIONNAIRE TO:**

**Alaska Center for Resource Families  
815 Second AVE STE 101  
Fairbanks, AK 99701  
Or fax to: 907-479-9666**

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# ALASKA CENTER FOR RESOURCE FAMILIES COURSE EVALUATION

## ADOPTION AND GUARDIANSHIP PREPARATION FOR ALASKA'S RESOURCE FAMILIES

Deborah Hayes, Alaska Center for Resource Families, 2005 (Revised 2011)

### 6.0 HOUR TRAINING CREDIT

After you have answered **ALL** the questions in each section of this workbook, please **send your completed questionnaires to the Alaska Center for Resource Families, 815 Second AVE STE 101, Fairbanks, AK 99701.** We will score your answers, credit 1.0 training hour per section for a total of 6.0 training hours to your training record, and return a copy of your training record to you. A score of 70% correct or better will entitle you to receive the training credit. In the event your score is less than 70% correct, we will give you the option of retaking the course if you choose.

If you have questions or concerns about this self-study course, please call us on our **toll-free line 1-800-478-7307.** If you are calling from the **local Fairbanks/North Pole area dial: 479-7307.** **Anchorage dial: 279-1799.**

**The following section is an evaluation of the self-study materials. Please fill it out upon completion of the questionnaire, and return this page to us with the rest of the course materials. Thank you for your time and comments. It helps us provide appropriate training to meet the needs of foster parents.**

#### \*\*\*\*\*EVALUATION OF SELF-STUDY MATERIALS\*\*\*\*\*

**Please complete the following questions.**

1. Did this self-study course meet with your expectations?  YES  NO
2. How would you rate the written presentation of information on the topic?  
 Excellent  Good  Fair  Poor
3. Did this course add to your knowledge and/or skills?  YES  NO

Comments/Concerns: