Children that have long-term unmet attachment needs, what they need the MOST are primary attachment relationships. It’s terrifying for them to move into the vulnerability of attachment. You will see increased behaviors from them, as they start to get feelings of connection, they will start to get feelings of fear.

Allison Our intention is to keep you safe. But often (in child welfare) what we’re doing is breaking relationships - how can they move forward if we don’t teach them how to make relationships? - Anni

If the kid refuses, I would just ask them what’s going on? What fears, energies, what memories are coming up when they go on visits? We tell everyone this is going to happen, strong emotions will come up... Love is extremely scary! - Michelle

Teens and tweens (are) at the age where they are psychosocially trying to yoyo away from, out of attachment- but if they haven’t had it, they don’t know how to accept it, and they need it! - Allison

No, you don’t have to be sure this is what you want for the rest of your life, you can move in and see how the relationship builds. Now well build a relationship, and when you’re ready YOU will decide when you’re ready. - Michelle

Loving someone, a child who has been traumatized in any way, it’s very challenging, it’s ugly. It looks like running away, acting out, crying, screaming, all the ugly things people are uncomfortable with, but it needs to happen. People are uncomfortable with those ugly feelings and emotions, but it needs to happen for the youth’s emotional health, their spiritual health, and healing. - Anni

The ability of a foster parent to build a relationship with the permanent parent and work in partnership with them can make or break a successful transition for a child or youth. - Lauren

The current caregiver’s #1 job is to be a bridge to permanency. That’s the whole point of the child welfare system, to achieve permanency. - Michelle

Where’s the checklist for a teen to evaluate a prospective match? There isn’t one - the only thing that matters is what committed the new parent is. If they’re not completely committed, nothing else matters; if they’re completely committed to that kid, nothing else matters! Unconditional commitment: that’s the mantra we teach/preach to our parents. - Paul

Overrepresented in substitute care, yet underrepresented in adoption, older youth need love, too! Tweens’ and teens’ needs for extra support in the preadoptive transition process may not be as apparent for younger children. However, experts dedicated to permanency for older youth believe greater youth voice and coordinated support for prospective matches during the visiting period are crucial for success.

Issue:

Just at the age they are most likely to reject primary caregivers, youth (12+ in MA) are rightfully required to consent to formal adoption. CWIG cites a 25% preadoptive disruption rate for 12-17 year in state care. Anecdotally, perhaps twice as many matches “foiled” before move-in? We know ‘giving out’ is a predictor for homelessness, early pregnancy, under-education, incarceration, and a host of health issues.

Much has been written on how to seek permanency for older youth, and on the importance of post-placement services to support families in adjustment. However, the delicate period of meeting and getting to know a new family is less examined, and offers opportunities for gain.

Goal:

1. ID and disseminate best practices for supporting tweens and teens in preadoptive transition
2. Review existing materials and conduct phone interviews with experienced practitioners/advocates, to gather useful links, innovative ideas, and direct testimony on why and how to steward preadoptive matches with tweens and teens.

Present excellence in practice and resources of immediate usefulness in a simple format accessible to busy workers, caregivers, and others who care about and work with youth.

Two valuable classics stood out:

“Breaking Barriers to Teen Adoption” video (Youtube) by You Gotta Believe, NY “Finding a Fit to Last a Lifetime” by AdoptUSKids

Both contain timeless suggestions in a range of voices and perspectives, and informed a preference for direct quotes in our project’s handout.

Outcome:

A handbook of collective wisdom from those in the field!

“Young Enough to Have a Say, Scared Enough to Say No”

The “Letter for When I Freak Out”!!! Teen Safety Plan!!!

The “Predicitions Letter” to Parents (p. 59) - Anni

Contributors & Acknowledgements:

Interviewed sources, in order of appearance in handbook:
Paul Snellgrove, Asst. Dir/Parent Trainer, You Gotta Believe ( permanency for tweens & teens), NY
Anni Keane, Director of the “Nobody Ages Out” Youth Movement, You Gotta Believe, NY
Michelle Chalmers, MD, Co-Founder & Director, Amperseived Futures (permanency for older youth & siblings), MD
Perry Stivender, Senior Advisor from Foster Care to Adoptee, MD
Lauren Frey, PhD, Co-Founder of Permanence Leadership, Plummer Outreach Teen Promise, MA
Harry Chaffin, CEO & Co-Founder of Fostering Change for Children, NY
Allison Maxon, MSW, LICSW, Co-Author & Trainer/Consultant, CA; Co-author & Trainer/Vateris: Pathways to Permanency 4. Promoting the Care of Older Children and Teens,
Jennifer Byers, MSW, LICSW, Asst. Dir/Parent Trainer, You Gotta Believe, NY
Bill Moore, MSW, LICSW, Director of Preparadoens Practice, Harmony Family, MA
Tim L. Leidy, MD, FAAP, Founder of the Maine Adoption Support Foundation, ME

Covered links:

The “Letter for When I Freak Out”!!!
Finding a Fit to Last a Lifetime
The Predictions Letter to Parents

Link to Free Resources!

AdoptUSKids

…

The “Letter for When I Freak Out”!!!

Teen Safety Plan!!!

The “Predicitions Letter” to Parents (p. 59)

Contributors & Acknowledgements:

Interviewed sources, in order of appearance in handbook:

Paul Snellgrove, Asst. Dir/Parent Trainer, You Gotta Believe (permanency for tweens & teens), NY
Anni Keane, Director of the “Nobody Ages Out” Youth Movement, You Gotta Believe, NY
Michelle Chalmers, MD, Co-Founder & Director, Amperseived Futures (permanency for older youth & siblings), MD
Perry Stivender, Senior Advisor from Foster Care to Adoptee, MD
Lauren Frey, PhD, Co-Founder of Permanence Leadership, Plummer Outreach Teen Promise, MA
Harry Chaffin, CEO & Co-Founder of Fostering Change for Children, NY
Allison Maxon, MSW, LICSW, Co-Author & Trainer/Consultant, CA; Co-author & Trainer/Vateris: Pathways to Permanency 4. Promoting the Care of Older Children and Teens,
Jennifer Byers, MSW, LICSW, Asst. Dir/Parent Trainer, You Gotta Believe, NY
Bill Moore, MSW, LICSW, Director of Preparadoens Practice, Harmony Family, MA
Tim L. Leidy, MD, FAAP, Founder of the Maine Adoption Support Foundation, ME

Covered links:

The “Letter for When I Freak Out”!!!
Finding a Fit to Last a Lifetime
The Predictions Letter to Parents (p. 59)

Link to Free Resources!

AdoptUSKids

…

The “Letter for When I Freak Out”!!!

Teen Safety Plan!!!

The “Predicitions Letter” to Parents (p. 59)