

Deciding Together

A Program to Prepare Prospective Foster and Adoptive Families

Building Support Systems for Foster and Adoptive Families



Book Six

Consultation 7

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Center for Development of Human Services
Institute for Community Health Promotion
SUNY Buffalo State

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What is *Deciding Together*?

Deciding Together is a series of six practical, easy-to-read guides that will help you decide whether you want to become a foster and/or adoptive parent. Going through the various sections of each of the *Deciding Together* guides will give you a clearer picture of what being a foster and/or adoptive parent is really like. You will learn what a child who becomes part of your family will need from you on a day-to-day basis as he or she grows up. You will also learn what help will be available to help you to meet those needs. In particular, Book Six is a day-to-day manual which you will probably want to rely on for years to come.

Deciding Together is designed so you can discuss each guidebook in weekly meetings with a person from your local child welfare agency. These times with your agency worker will allow you opportunities to engage in person-to-person talks and also allow you the opportunity to ask any questions to help you to best “decide together” whether you want to take the important step of becoming a foster and/or adoptive parent.

These six guidebooks are included in the *Deciding Together* series:

Book One: Understanding Foster Care and Adoption Today

Book Two: Understanding Separation and Loss

Book Three: Helping Children Express and Meet Their Needs

Book Four: Helping Children Maintain and Build Connections

Book Five: Understanding the Impact of Fostering and Adopting on Families

Book Six: Building Support Systems for Foster and Adoptive Families

Mapping the Final Route

By now, you and your family are almost ready to make a decision about becoming a foster and/or adoptive family. The *Deciding Together* program has helped you experience the world of child welfare through a child's eyes. You have seen the trauma of separation and loss, understood the attachment of children to their parents and gained an understanding of your critical role as a partner in bringing permanence into children's lives.

In Book One, you learned that *Deciding Together* is a preparation and selection process. Other guidebooks in the *Deciding Together* series helped you prepare for fostering and/or adopting a child. Book Six, *Building Support Systems for Foster and/or Adoptive Families*, helps you move beyond preparation so you can select whether fostering and/or adopting is right for you at this time.

Since Book Six is the last journey in our *Deciding Together* series, it is structured somewhat differently from the other books. Book Six is divided into three sections: *Ready, Set, Go*. The "Ready" section includes information to help you make a decision whether to foster and/or adopt. The "Set" section includes information to help you set up your support network should you decide to become a foster and/or adoptive parent. The "Go" section is a chance for you to say goodbye to this part of the program.

A glossary of terms is located at the back of each guidebook in the *Deciding Together* series. You can use the glossary when you need to look up a word you might not understand. The glossary includes national definitions of child welfare terms. Your agency may define some of these terms differently. Your agency worker can explain any terms you do not understand.

There is a Family Activities section at the end of this book, which has activities to help your child learn what it would mean to be part of a foster and/or adoptive family. These activities are divided into age categories, which are symbolized as follows:



The **tricycle** is for activities suitable for children ages 3-7



The **bicycle** is for activities suitable for children ages 8-14

Rules of the Road

Here's a quick review of some signs you may see as we continue our journey through Book Five.



The **car keys** are all the concepts, skills, and abilities that are necessary to acquire while traveling.



A **green light** signals that it's time to move on to a new point.



A **yellow light** cautions us to slow down.



A **red light** signals that it's time to stop, pause, review, or reflect.



A **gas pump** signals that it's time to refuel and take a break and do some quick review.



An **oil can** signals that it's time for an oil check, which means that it is time to take a break before going on to a new place or activity.



Each **travel tip** gives additional information to help you to avoid potholes, which are any difficulties that you may encounter on the road.



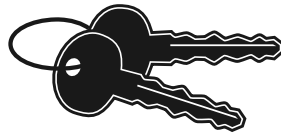
If you get stuck on a particular point, use one of the **tow truck** stickers to mark the section. (If your package of guidebooks does not include a set of tow truck stickers, simply place question marks beside those sections that are unclear. The agency worker will explain those points for you.)

Key Learning Goals

This is the final leg of our journey. During this trip through Book Six we will cover practical day-to-day tips for caring for children. We will also learn about community and state resources that will help you should you decide to become a foster and/or adoptive parent. Finally, we will say goodbye to the preparation part of the Deciding Together program.



Let's get our set of keys for this trip.



After completing this guidebook, you will be able to do all of the following:

- Make an informed, mutual decision with the agency on whether to become a foster and/or adoptive family.
- Identify ways other families become involved in foster care and/or adoption and what has helped them become successful.
- Describe what it would be like to be a foster and/or adoptive family.
- Identify tasks to accomplish in preparing for your first placement.
- Prepare your family and friends for your decision about becoming a foster and/or adoptive family.
- Identify the kind of child you would be most capable of and comfortable with parenting.
- Identify personal and community resources that will support you in parenting a child with special needs.
- Identify the placement process in the agency with which you are working.
- Identify the partnership role of the agency placing children with special needs.
- Identify ways to work with the court, community resources and agency staff.

Bridge to Book Six



Before we start our travels in Book Six, let's review what we learned in our earlier travels.

In Book One, we learned:

- Children and families need foster care and adoption services for four major reasons: abandonment, sexual abuse, neglect and physical abuse.
- When children enter care, birth parents, foster parents and agency staff work as partners to help provide children with stability and a sense of permanence.
- The reason a child is in care may directly affect that child's feelings about being in care.
- Children often use behaviors to show how they are feeling.
- Children's behaviors often signal their unmet needs.
- We can use the reason for the child's entry in care, how the child might feel about being in care and the child's behaviors while in care to determine the child's underlying needs.
- We can use birth parents' attachments to their children as the foundation for teaching them healthier ways to parent.

In Book Two, we learned:


- Separation and loss are common experiences for children in out-of-home care.
- When we are separated from someone or something important to us, we experience loss.
- Loss triggers feelings and behaviors to help us grieve for our losses. These feelings and behaviors are part of the grieving process.
- Grieving helps us cope with or adjust to loss.
- Children who are separated from their birth families will experience loss and will grieve for those losses.
- Children's behaviors will often reflect their grieving.

Take a look at the following chart. It highlights the major needs of children in care and shows how foster parents and adoptive parents work to meet those needs.

NEEDS	FOSTER CARE	ADOPTION
The children have been abused, neglected, abandoned or surrendered and need care.	Provides a temporary home for children. The main goal is to return children to their birth families.	Provides a permanent home for children when they cannot return to their birth families.
Parenting is needed to meet the children's physical, emotional, psychological and developmental needs.	Foster families make decisions for children's day-to-day care. The agency is the children's legal guardian. Foster parents must consult with the agency to make decisions which affect the children's well-being.	Adoptive parents make all decisions regarding children's needs. They are legally the children's parents. Once an adoption is finalized, the parents no longer have to consult with the agency.
The children have experienced losses because they have been separated from their birth families.	Though the children have experienced the loss of their birth parents, they can still visit with their birth families and become close to new families. The children can still hope to go home to their birth families.	Children who have been adopted have the same sense of loss as children in foster care. They may also experience the loss of foster parents and other important people to whom they were close.
Children become confused about who they are and wonder what will happen to them.	Children ask, "Who am I? How did I come into care? What is going to happen to me?" Foster parents help children understand they are taking care of them temporarily and are not substitutes for their birth parents.	Children need answers to, "Who am I now that I'm adopted? What does adoption mean?" Adoptive parents help children understand they are now their legal, permanent parents. The parents help children feel good about themselves and their past, present and future.
Parents must cope with how children with special needs behave.	Foster parents develop skills and abilities to manage behaviors while the children are in their care.	Adoptive parents develop skills and abilities to manage children's behavior through childhood and their lifetime.
Children who have been separated from birth families may find it hard to be close to others.	Foster parents try to become close to children by building on the relationships children have with their birth parents. When foster parents need help with parenting, they can ask for respite care (temporary relief from day-to-day parenting) through the agency.	Adoptive parents work on becoming close to children by building on previous relationships children have with birth parents and foster parents. When adoptive parents need help with parenting, they need to know what community resources they can use and look for relief in their personal support network.

This chart shows how adoption and foster care are different. Think about this a moment and answer the following question.


Why does adoption offer more permanency for children than foster care?



Your ideas may have included:

- Foster care provides temporary homes for children, while adoption provides permanent homes.
- Foster parents are temporarily committed to caring for children and have to work closely with the agency, which is the children's legal guardian. Adoptive parents are committed to children for life, have legal responsibility for them and can make their own decisions in caring for the children after the adoption is final.

This chart also shows things foster parents and adoptive parents have in common. What are some things that **both** foster parents and adoptive parents do in caring for children?



Your ideas may have included:

- Both foster and adoptive parents help children understand what foster care and adoption are and the kinds of relationships they can have together.
- Both foster and adoptive parents learn skills and abilities to help children with special needs manage their behaviors.
- Both foster and adoptive parents work on becoming close with children by building on the children's relationships to their birth families, former foster families and others.

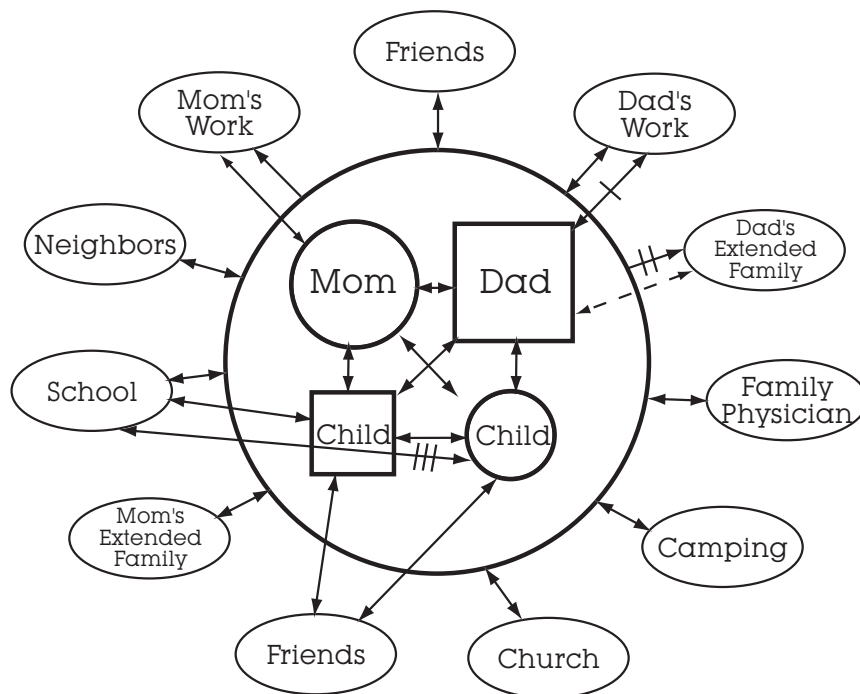
You can see that foster and adoptive parenting differ in terms of goals, commitment, permanence and legal responsibility. At the same time, foster and

Your Personal Support Network (Optional Activity)

In Book Five, we learned how fostering and adopting can affect families. You completed an EcoMap which helped you look at your family in relationship to your environment. This map identifies people and activities that give and take your energy. Once you become a foster and/or adoptive parent, there will be many new demands on your energy. As you put your energy into meeting the needs of the child or children placed with you, your own reserves may run low. You will need ways to fill your own cup with love and stamina, even as you are pouring your resources into a child. While you dedicate your time and energy to caring for a child, you must not forget to draw on the sources that give you the strength you need for yourself.


Family, Friends and Neighbors

Let's look at some of the people who can provide you with energy and support. There is a *Family, Friends and Neighbors Work Sheet* for you to complete. On this work sheet, you will list people you have talked with or will talk with about your preparations to become a foster and/or adoptive parent.







What is our morning routine like?



What time do we eat dinner?



How do we get ready for bed?



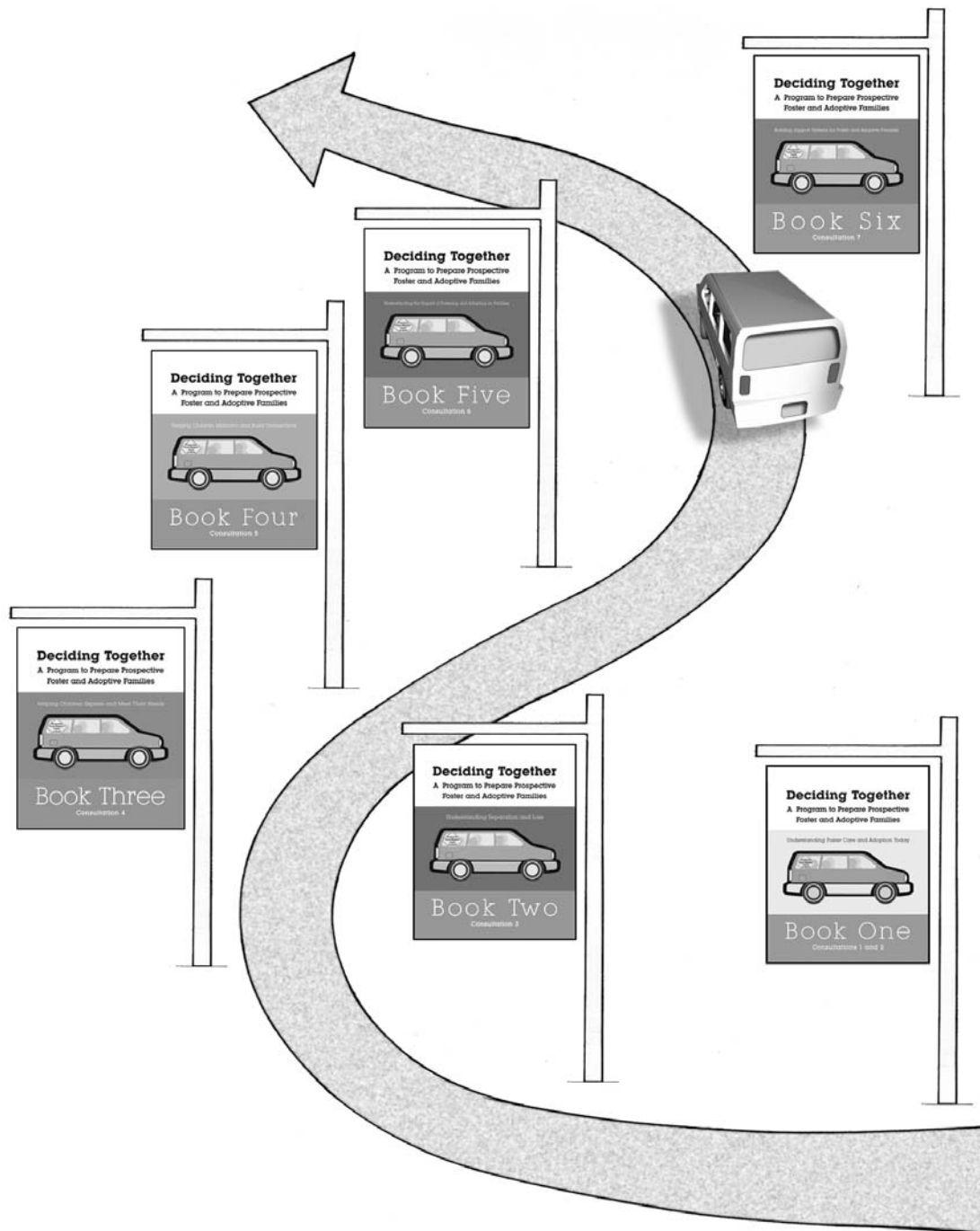
What time is bedtime?



What are our rules about food and eating?



Book Six: Building Support Systems for Foster and Adoptive Families





Suggested Activities for Ages 8-14

Word Search

The following game is a word search. The object of the game is to find all the letters in a word from the alphabetical list below and then circle the word. The words in the puzzle may appear horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backwards. Good luck.

R	M	V	D	M	U	S	I	C	J	R	I	E	K
S	O	S	G	H	D	I	N	N	E	R	O	L	R
K	T	T	Y	N	S	E	C	H	U	R	C	H	A
O	H	I	E	N	Z	S	C	H	O	O	L	L	P
O	E	I	K	L	A	A	B	F	A	M	I	L	Y
B	R	O	T	H	E	R	D	G	A	M	E	S	P
F	X	B	C	T	O	P	E	D	L	L	O	I	S
O	R	C	B	S	L	K	H	P	Q	E	Y	S	P
C	E	H	F	E	C	S	P	O	R	T	S	T	L
I	H	C	H	I	L	D	R	E	N	T	C	E	L
N	T	C	M	V	C	K	Y	N	D	E	O	R	U
C	A	P	U	O	P	I	C	T	U	R	E	S	N
I	F	C	N	M	L	P	Y	R	E	S	O	N	C
P	X	V	O	T	Y	S	Y	A	D	I	L	O	H

books	games	park	dinner	lunch	sisters
brother	holidays	picnic	family	mother	sports
children	home	pictures	father	movies	teacher
church	letters	school	friends	music	telephone

GLOSSARY

Note: *Certain terms defined here are dictated by statutory or regulatory language. Citations for the statute or regulation appear in parentheses. The abbreviations used are as follows: Family Court Act (FCA); Social Services Law (SSL); and New York State Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR). The symbol (§) refers to the section being referenced.*

Abandonment (Child) – In New York State law: A child is abandoned by his or her parent if such parent evinces (shows) intent to forego his or her parental rights and obligations. Such intent is manifested by his or her failure to visit the child and communicate with the child or agency, although able to do so and not prevented or discouraged from doing so by the agency [FCA § 1012; SSL § 384-b (5)]. Child abandonment occurs when parents leave their children for a long period of time without telling anyone where they can be contacted and/or without making any kinds of arrangements for the care of their children.

Abused Child – In New York State law: A child less than eighteen years of age whose parent or other person legally responsible for his or her care: (i) inflicts or allows to be inflicted upon such child physical injury by other than accidental means which causes or creates a substantial risk of death, or serious or protracted disfigurement, or protracted impairment of physical or emotional health or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ; or (ii) creates or allows to be created a substantial risk of physical injury to such child by other than accidental means which would be likely to cause death or protracted disfigurement, or protracted impairment of physical or emotional health or protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily organ; or (iii) commits, or allows to be committed, an act of sexual abuse against such a child as defined in the penal law [SSL § 371 (4-b)].

Adoption – A legal procedure that transfers responsibilities for a child from the birth parents to the adoptive parent(s). The adoptive parent(s) have full parental legal rights and responsibilities for the child.

Adoption Planning – A procedure begun by an agency for a child, once the guardianship and custody of the child has been transferred from the birth parents to the agency. This process includes identifying the needs of the child, selecting a potential adoptive family, completing a homestudy of that