CPS Adoption Process

Jackie A. Hubbard
Division Administrator

Jillian Bonacquisti
Adoption Program Specialist

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services
Objectives:

• Understand the CPS adoption process

• Understand permanency and barriers to permanency in the adoption process

• Understand CASA’s role in the adoption process

• Understand what CASA can do to help achieve permanency
What Is Permanency?

“Life without CPS involvement”

- Reunification – Home is safe, Child can return home
- PMC to relatives – Parental rights cannot legally be terminated, but it is unsafe for child to return home
- Adoption – Parental rights have been terminated; Child needs a long-term safe, loving home environment

- More than 6,000 abused and neglected children in Texas are awaiting adoption. About 60 percent of them are age 6 or older. The older the child, the longer they tend to wait for adoption.
- Last year 5,040 children and teens were adopted from state care. While there are many success stories, there's no shortage of children or teens waiting for permanent homes. Texas needs foster and adoptive parents for children of all ages. Some of these children have special medical, physical, or emotional needs. We particularly need families interested in adopting African-American children who are overrepresented in foster care.
Why Adoption?

- **The "independence" myth**
  Some people think teens automatically become adults at 18 and outgrow the need for parents. The truth is, regardless of their age, teens draw on the relationship with their families for strength and support long after they turn 18. Without the bonds of adoption, a young adult has no such safety net.

- **The "unwanted child" myth**
  Saying no one wants an older child is an easy way to let ourselves off the hook. In many extended families, there is an aunt or an uncle, grandparents, or a mature individual or couple who have love to share. Those with a true commitment to raising children know their relationship will continue past the teen years into young adulthood and beyond.

- **The "un-adoptable child" myth**
  Some think older child adoptions are rare and these children may not want to be adopted. Too often, however, teens are faced with the uncertainty surrounding the concept of adoption, not the warm reality of a family willing to share their lives. Prospective adoptive parents or foster parents can help older children realize the rewards of being with permanent families.

- **The "older children are too hard to raise" myth**
  Being an adoptive parent or foster family isn't easy, but just as in birth families, adults get through with a good sense of humor and tolerance for a growing youth. Anyone who adopts or fosters an older child must be comfortable with the fact that they will make mistakes. It takes love, courage, endurance, commitment, and faith. Most of all, it takes someone who cares and can advocate for that child.
Parental Rights Terminated

• Child is in intended to be permanent placement at the time parental rights are terminated

  • Examples:
    - Foster parent wants to adopt
    - Relative wants to adopt

• Child is NOT in intended to be permanent placement at the times parental rights are terminated

  • Examples:
    - No appropriate relative could be located
    - Foster parent does not want to or cannot adopt
Parental Rights Terminated

- Child is in intended to be permanent placement at the time parental rights are terminated
  - Examples:
    - Foster parent wants to adopt
    - Relative wants to adopt

- Child is NOT in intended to be permanent placement at the times parental rights are terminated
  - Examples:
    - No appropriate relative could be located
    - Foster parent does not want to or cannot adopt
Child in Intended to Be Permanent Placement

Step 1: Home Study Process

- In order to adopt, all families must be approved to adopt.
- Ensure family is approved for adoption and request home study (and update if needed).
- If family is not approved, refer home to a private CPA or the CPS Foster/Adoption Home Development (FAD) program.
Child in Intended to Be Permanent Placement

**Step 2: Review Child’s Information**

- Adoptive family reads the Health, Social, Educational, Genetic History report (HSEGH)

- Adoptive family reviews the child’s redacted CPS case record and all available background information

- Adoptive family asks questions regarding CPS history and/or background information

**Purpose:** To ensure family is able to make an informed life-long commitment to ensure they are willing and able to meet the child’s needs.
Child in Intended to Be Permanent Placement

Step 3: Adoption Assistance

Program designed to help families pursue adoption and promote adoption of minority children.

• Qualifications:

  - Minority children over the age of two
  - Non-minority children over the age of 6
  - Any child being adopted with a sibling or joining a sibling that was previously adopted by the same parents
  - Children who have a verifiable physical, mental, or emotional handicapping condition, as established by an appropriately qualified professional
Child in Intended to Be Permanent Placement

Step 3: Adoption Assistance Cont’d

- **Benefits:**
  - Monthly adoption assistance payments until child is 18 (21 if adoptive placement occurred after child is 16)
  - Medicaid coverage until child is 18
  - Non-recurring payments not to exceed $1,200 to reimburse families for certain adoption-related expenses. Those expenses include home study costs, attorney fees, court costs and travel expenses related to the placement.
  - If child is placed in adoptive placement after the age of 16, benefits last until age 21

- [http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/About_Adoption/assist.asp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Adoption_and_Foster_Care/About_Adoption/assist.asp)
Child in Intended to Be Permanent Placement

**Step 4: Adoptive Placement**

Adoptive placement is the meeting in which the child's caseworker, the family's case manager and the adoptive family sign paperwork officially placing the child in the home for adoption. The Department will ask the adoptive family to read and sign paperwork and answer any questions the family may have.

**Step 5: Consummation**

Consummation is the final court hearing in which the adoption is finalized with the court. At this hearing, conservatorship of the child is given to the adoptive parents and the Department's case is closed for that child.
Parental Rights Terminated

- Child is in intended to be permanent placement at the time parental rights are terminated
  - Examples:
    - Foster parent wants to adopt
    - Relative wants to adopt

- Child is NOT in intended to be permanent placement at the times parental rights are terminated
  - Examples:
    - No appropriate relative could be located
    - Foster parent does not want to or cannot adopt
Child NOT in Intended to be Permanent Placement

**Step 1: Recruitment**

- Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE)

- Adopt US Kids

- Heart Gallery

- Television Segments

- Adoption Match Meetings

- Email Broadcasts
Step 2: How is a family selected?

- **Screening of Home Studies** - Child’s TARE recruiter, caseworker and supervisor will work together to narrow the pool of home studies to a few families who would best meet the needs of the child.

- **Selection Staffing** – A selection staffing is a formal meeting between the Department, CASA, Attorney ad Litem, foster parents and prospective adoptive families' case managers to determine the one family out of the families previously selected that is the best fit for the child. If a family opts out, the worker continues with the other families from the pool of consideration.

- All legal parties (CPS, CASA and Attorney Ad Litem) must agree on moving forward with an adoptive family. If not, decision is left to the Judge and is based on recommendations.
Child NOT in Intended to be Permanent Placement

Step 3: Presentation Staffing

• Family reviews record and all available background information

• Presentation staffing held within 30 days of selection staffing

• Prospective family talks to important people involved in the child's life and asks questions, discusses the child's daily care

• Attendees collectively develop an appropriate transition plan

• The family may request additional information or consultation prior to committing to a particular child (i.e. talking to medical or counseling professionals who may not have been a part of the presentation staffing)

• Family must will be given a timeframe after the presentation staffing to give final decision about moving forward with adoption of the child. The family does NOT meet the child until they have made a commitment to adoption.
Child NOT in Intended to be Permanent Placement

Step 4: Pre-Placement Visits

- Adoption Assistance Process is also completed for children who are not in their intended to be permanent placement. The process is the same and completed before adoptive placement.

- Pre-placement visits occur if the selected adoptive family is different than the child's current family. Pre-placement visits are a way to help the child get to know and become comfortable and familiar with the prospective adoptive family before the actual placement is made. Pre-placement visits increase in duration as the child becomes more comfortable with the family. The child's caseworker is involved in these visits to help the child transition.
Child NOT in Intended to be Permanent Placement

**Step 5: Adoptive Placement**

- Adoptive placement occurs after child has transitioned into the adoptive home

**Step 6: Monitoring Child’s Transition and Consummation**

- Child must be monitored in their adoptive home for a minimum of 6 months before the adoption can be finalized

- If at the end of 6 months, the child has adjusted and is doing well with no significant concerns, the adoption is finalized at the consummation hearing.
Common Barriers

- Legal Issues/Cases on Appeal

- Waiting on Required paperwork from family

- Waiting on home studies from the Child Placing Agency, Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) and Child Placing Agencies
  - This sometimes involves issues with the family such as background checks or the home not being able to meet approval requirements

- Waiting for Review of Required Records per TFC (HSEGH, redacted record, updated psychological, etc.)
What CASA Can Do?

• **Help “case mine”** for possible relatives, friends of the birth family and other people involved in the child’s life that could be considered for adoption

• **LifeBooks** – Gather pictures and information for child as he/she is growing up

• **Assist with Positive Transition** – Children who may have experienced abrupt placement moves before should experience the placement into an adoptive home as a celebratory experience that may involve ceremonies to say good-bye.

• **Build Adoption Competencies** – Become more knowledgeable in the differences between children being in temporary care vs. by a family intending to be forever.

• **Be Patient** – See attached task sheet; there are approximately 70 tasks that need to be completed by the caseworker during the adoption process!

• **Manage Own Feelings** – One of the most difficult issues for individuals who have worked so hard on behalf of a child is to ensure ones own emotions does not affect the child’s transition. Ask for help to support the child’s pace in moving forward.

• **Help family** through the approval process by helping them gather documents for the home study, fill out paperwork and get to appointments by transporting

• **Continue to work with the Department** to achieve permanency for youth in CPS care
What is a LifeBook?

• Therapeutic tool to help the child process their experience in CPS care through activities and worksheets

• Although it contains some pictures, it is NOT a scrapbook that only includes pictures

• Should be started immediately after the child enters foster care, telling their story from birth to hopes for the future

• Lifebook template or binder can be obtained from the child’s caseworker or created if area does not have standardized version

• Belongs to the child and should involve the child in it’s creation
LifeBooks

4 sections

1. **About Me**: Helps child build self-esteem and self-identity
2. **Birth Family**: Helps child remember and keep information on their birth family including where family lives
3. **Journey Through Foster Care**: Helps child remember their journey through foster care, why they came into care, the places they have lived, schools they have attended, relationships they have had
4. **Adoption**: Helps child communicate fears, hopes and expectations about adoption
5. **“I Wish You Well” pages**: Letters from every teacher, caseworker and foster parent a child has had to wish them well as the case progresses to the next stage of service or the child moves

*See “The Essentials of Creating LifeBooks” document for additional instructions*
Questions?