

# 4

## POST-ADOPTION SERVICES

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# 4

## POST-ADOPTION SERVICES

### 4.1 Introduction

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Because of the lifelong impact of adoption, post-adoption services are an integral part of the services that need to be available to adopted persons and their families. Post-adoption services require that a number of different supports are available to the adoptee and their families.

Many adoptive families may want or need additional support, education, and other services as their children grow. Adult adoptees and their families may want to access information about the adoptee's biological family. Post-adoption services cover a wide range of supports and services, all designed to respond to the growing needs expressed by individuals who have been adopted and their families.

### 4.2 Framework

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Consistent with the Virginia Children's Services System Practice Model, the philosophy that every child deserves a permanent family includes a commitment to adoptive families to offer on-going services to meet the families' needs once the adoption is finalized. Some families need agency involvement throughout the child's minority, while other families require support on a periodic basis. All families need the assurance that supportive services are available and should be encouraged to participate in ongoing educational and training events.

Adoptive families may request services for any number of issues including managing loss and grief, trust and attachment, school problems, post-institutionalization issues and behaviors, identity formation, family dynamics, birth family connections, effects of early childhood trauma, health issues and developmental delays.

Families participating in a PACCA in which a birth parent continues contact with the adoptive parent and child or youth, may need additional support in building these relationships, navigating appropriate roles, and setting boundaries.

Families adopting children and youth from foster care need information on parenting a child who has been abused and neglected, adopting an older child, or if they were foster parents, making the transition from foster parents to adoptive families. Adopting relatives of children and youth that have been in foster care may need support around their changing familial roles in the new adoptive family.

Many families adopt children from racial and cultural backgrounds different than their own. The adoptive family may need to learn to develop skills to cope with public scrutiny or racism. In an effort to maintain and support a child or youth's racial or cultural identity, adoptive parents make seek out resources, learning opportunities or special events.

Some needs will be met through the family's or community's resources and some needs will require adoption-specific intervention. While financial adoption assistance is available to help families integrate their new child into their life, specific services for adopted families are also available.

Adoption support activities are available through local, state, and national adoption organizations and groups. Prior to and after the finalized adoption, agency staff should be available to help adoptive families identify these available supports and assist, if necessary, in making the initial connections. Local community services boards, health departments, and other local governmental agencies often provide other supportive services, available to residents of that jurisdiction. When possible, families should use local services to assist in meeting identified needs.

Some families will require adoption-specific services which should be made available to every adoptive family, as appropriate, after the final order of adoption has been entered. Adoption-specific services can address problems that developed before or after the date of the final order of adoption and are generally provided by "adoption competent" individuals. Many of the private licensed child placing agencies in Virginia can either provide these services or help a family identify where such services are available.

Post-adoption consultation by the LDSS is not a continuation of agency supervision of the adoptive home. It is an agency service given as needed and requested by any of the parties involved in an adoption. Such services reflect the agency's on-going obligation and social responsibility for the welfare of the children for whom it originally had involvement.

Adoptive parents should be provided with information that will assist them in obtaining services if needed. Many localities in Virginia provide post-adoption services in addition to the statewide Adoption Preservation Program provided by VDSS through a contract

with United Methodist Family Services. Several web sites that provide post-adoption service information are listed below:

- [National Foster Care and Adoption Directory Search](#)
- [Virginia Department of Social Services - Adoption](#)
- [Adoption Preservation Services](#)
- [Virginia's Adoption Agencies](#)
- [Adoption.com](#)
- [North American Council on Adoptable Children](#)
- [FACES of Virginia's Families](#)

Families may also receive post-adoption services specific to the child's special needs through the VDSS adoption assistance program. For information *on eligibility requirements* and how adoption assistance can supplement a family's ability to address the adopted child's special needs, see [Section 2](#).

### **4.3 Types of post adoption services**

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The wide range of issues that may need to be addressed with post adopt services means these services should be diverse. [Therapy and counseling services](#) should be provided by adoption competent professionals. The types of post adoption services include but are not limited to:

- Adoptive parent support groups
- Support groups
- Children and youth support groups
- Online support groups
- Camps, social events, and heritage activities
- Therapy and counseling
- Respite Care
- Educational and information resources
  - Books, magazines, and websites

- Workshops, seminars, and conferences
- Information and referral sources
- Search and reunion

The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Child Welfare Information Gateway provides numerous [Fact Sheets for Families](#), available in English and Spanish, on various adoption and post adoption topics that are free for download and distribution.

#### 4.4 Adoption dissolution

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Adoption dissolution is the interruption and potential termination of an adoption after the legal process has been completed and the adoption is finalized. Unlike adoption disruption, adoption dissolution ends the family relationship and the responsibilities of the adoptive parents no longer exist.

Research indicates that families who adopt children with special needs from foster care undergo enormous struggles and face serious barriers to obtaining needed services. The two barriers most often mentioned by adoptive families were lack of information about where to go for services and the cost of services (Festinger, 2002<sup>1</sup>; Soderlund, Epstein, Quinn, Cumblad, & Petersen, 1995).<sup>2</sup>

Families created through adoption may experience problems that require intensive services to help the family gain stability and reduce the risk of out-of-home placement. Post-adoption services recognize that families built through adoption may have characteristics significantly different from those created through birth. This can result in unique challenges for the family. Post-adoption services, as described in [Section 4.3](#), help families who often feel overwhelmed by offering family-centered support and services.

Parents and children who have been through adoption dissolution describe it as a nightmare and one of the worst experiences of their lives.

When dissolution cannot be prevented or an alternative found, it should be approached with the child's best interests at the forefront. Sensitivity to the feelings of the child who leaves the family and the children who stay in the family must be the first priority.

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1 Festinger, T. (in press). Adoption Disruption: Rates, correlates and services needs. In G. P. Mallon and P. Hess(EDs.), *Child Welfare for the 21<sup>st</sup> century: A handbook of children, youth, and family services-Practices, policies and programs*. New York: Columbia University Press

2 Soderlund, J., Epstein, M.H., Quinn, K.P., Cumblad, C. & Peterson,S (1995). Parental perspectives on comprehensive services for children and youth with emotional and behavioral disorders. *Behavioral Disorders* 20(3), 157-170.

A dissolution decision should be made with the focus on the best interest of the child. This means that the agency that originally assisted the family with placement and finalizing the adoption should work in collaboration with the agency currently involved with the family to assist the family when dissolution becomes a possibility.

Once a child's adoption has been finalized, Code of Virginia §§ [63.2-1246](#) and [1247](#) are followed. Pursuant to these statutes, the CPA must send "all reports and collateral information in connection with the case" to the Commissioner to be preserved. Information can be disclosed only under the circumstances and to the recipients designated in these sections of the Code of Virginia, depending on whether the information identifies the birth family or not, and whether the child is under or over 18 years old, and depending on who is requesting the information.

§ [63.2-1246](#) allows disclosure of non-identifying information from the adoption records preserved by the Commissioner to "authorized child-placing agencies providing services to the child or the adoptive parents." When a child is returned to foster care from a disrupted adoption, the original CPA may release non-identifying information in the child's adoption records to the new CPA. (See Section 5.4.1 for definition of non identifying information.) This may include any reports dealing with the actual services provided to the child during the episode(s) of foster care.

Information that is "identifying", i.e. that identifies the birth family, cannot be disclosed except pursuant to § [63.2-1247](#) (for adoptions after July 1, 1994), which gives the Commissioner the authority to disclose such information "for good cause", which means "a compelling and necessitous need for the identifying information". § [63.2-1247\(B\)](#). Information pertaining to biological family shall be deemed "identifying information", thus would require the Commissioner to determine that there was good cause to have it disclosed. When because of a dissolution with the child or youth coming back into foster care; an agency is seeking this information, the CPA may contact the Permanency Unit to determine if the information may be released.

Problems in the adoptive home should be evaluated in light of the family's issues as well as the needs and behaviors of the child. The adoptive family should be encouraged, supported, and assessed in getting services in place that will enable the parents to continue to parent their child. The agency should view the family as the best resource for this child unless there exists a child protective services-related risk.

When a child continues as a family member but does not reside in the family home, adoption assistance benefits shall continue as long as the adoptive parents retain legal or financial responsibility for the child.

A temporary entrustment agreement should be considered only when it is in the child's best interest. At no time should a temporary entrustment agreement be accepted from adoptive parents as their plan to eliminate their legal responsibilities or to obtain treatment for the child. A temporary entrustment agreement does not terminate the

adoptive parents' rights or their duty to support their child. It does, however, place the child back in foster care and communicates a message of failure and instability to the child.

In the event of adoption dissolution, the CPA may need to pursue termination of parental rights. If an adoptive child comes back into foster care and the parents' rights are terminated either voluntarily or involuntarily, the procedure to terminate the adoptive parental rights is the same as for any parent (see Child and Family Services Manual, Chapter E., Foster Care, section 9.5.4).

The termination of parental rights severs the relationship of parent and child between the individual adopted and the adoptive parents. The former parents are relieved of all legal duties and obligations due from them to the adoptee and the former parents are divested of all rights with respect to the adoptee.

Federal law includes a provision for continuing adoption assistance when re-adoption occurs (see Section 2).

Knowing that adoption dissolution can be devastating for both the adopted child or youth and the adoptive family as a whole; an agency should work diligently to prevent a dissolution by providing support and post adoption services specific to the needs of the adoptive child or youth and family.