

Strategies for Addressing Initial Resistance¹

When a Youth Says “No” to Permanency...

1. Consider the Underlying Factors

- **Resistance is a normal part of adolescent development.** Adolescence is a time when young people alternate between distancing themselves from adults and establishing their independence. Although children at this age still need guidance and support, it is normal for teens to resist the suggestion of having even more adults in their lives telling them what to do.
- **Fear of losing familial connections.** Often youth believe that adoption will force them to sever all ties to their birth family. In some cases, the young person may not want to change his or her last name.
- **Fear of further loss.** Youth may blame themselves for separation from their birth family or foster parents and not want to go through yet another painful loss if they “mess up again.” They also may be pessimistic about their chances for lifelong permanency because they feel “everyone always leaves” based on past experiences.
- **Fear of another move.** Young people generally wish to avoid the disruption that comes from having to change schools, acclimate to a new household, or navigate an unfamiliar neighborhood.

2. Involve Youth in the Process

- Take the time to explore any concerns the youth may have about adoption and other permanency options. Help them envision their future needs by asking questions such as:
 - *Where do you see yourself spending holidays in the future?*
 - *Who would you call for advice about parenting when you have your own children?*
 - *What if you needed a second opinion about a major purchase, like a car...whom would you contact?*

¹ Sources: Sue Hoag Badeau, “Permanency Values Training: Who wouldn’t Want a Family” (2009); Gerald P Mallon, “Unpacking the “No” of Permanency for Older Adolescents” (2011); Robert Lewis & Maureen Heffernan, *Adolescents and Families for Life: A Toolkit for Supervisors* (2000)

- Help the young person to identify past, present and future connections. These types of questions may help uncover potential Permanency resources:
 - *Who cared for you when your parents could not?*
 - *Who paid attention to you or looked out for you?*
 - *Who cared about what happened to you?*
 - *Who are the three people in your life that you've had the best relationships with?*
 - *Would it help to review where you have lived in the past and remember important adults in your life?*
 - *Whom have you felt connected to in the past?*
 - *Whom do you want to stay connected to in the future? How? Why?*
 - *Who have you shared holidays or important occasions with?*
 - *Who do you like or feel good about? Who do you admire or enjoy being with?*
 - *Who believes in you? Who stands by you? Who compliments you?*
 - *Who would you call at 2:00 a.m. if you were in trouble?*
 - *Who would you call to share good news? What about bad news?*
 - *If you were going to become part of a new family, what do you think would be the best part? What would be most challenging?*
 - *How do you feel about this process? What feelings, memories, or fears does this process/discussion stir up inside you?*
- Remind young adults (age 18 and over) that they can consent to their own adoption (no TPR).

3. Reassure Youth About Common Fears Related to the Process

- **Youth don't have to sever their biological connections.** Although a termination of parental rights prevents birth parents from petitioning the court for visits or other contact with their children, a TPR does not prevent youth from visiting or contacting members of their birth families. Ongoing familial relationships and shared parenting options remain viable even after a TPR is in place.
- **The goal is to add (not limit) family.** When it comes to establishing permanency connections, it is not an either/or situation. Youth are encouraged to keep existing relationships with everyone they already have in their lives (birth family, former foster parents, etc.) as they add new connections to their circle of support.

Moving Beyond the “No” with Adults

1. Consider the Underlying Factors

- **Cultural beliefs and other factors may contribute to a family’s reluctance to terminate parental rights.** Relatives may prefer not to interfere with generational relationships (may occur with grandparent adoption cases) or tribal affiliations and/or attempt to “save face” in response to the transgressions of birth parents.
- **Anxiety related to the financial responsibility** is common for those considering taking on an expanded caregiver role.
- **Loss of Services.** Fear that if the youth is adopted, he/she will no longer be eligible to receive important services previously provided by the jurisdiction.

2. Address Concerns

- **Exercise patience.** Permanency is a process. It is important not to push someone who isn’t ready to make this significant commitment. Go slowly and take the time to listen carefully to the adult’s objections and concerns. Meet them where they are before making judgments.
- **Discuss financial considerations openly and honestly.** Provide information about available adoption support programs and benefits.
- **Address perceived barriers and misperceptions to demystify Permanency.** Talk about what the adult feels ready to do (and what they are not ready to do right now). For example, would they consider being a visiting resource or mentor?

3. Clarify Information

- **Discuss the differences between Permanency and Placement.** It is possible to be a life-long connection and support resource even if the youth doesn’t ever live with you.
- **Answer FAQs about Permanency options, such as:**
 - *What’s the difference between adoption, guardianship and third-party custody?*
 - *How old does my child have to be in order to consent to adoption?*
 - *Will I still have a social worker if we choose guardianship?*
 - *What school benefits will my child keep/ lose if we adopt him/her?*