



Together we hold their future

Spark the Conversation



A facilitation guide for
When We Have Each Other: Teen Adoption Stories

April 2026

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Purpose of this guide

This guide is designed to help child welfare professionals lead conversations while watching *When We Have Each Other: Teen Adoption Stories*. It offers practical strategies to spark reflection, encourage open discussion, normalize mixed feelings, and center youth voice and choice.

Who is the guide for?

This guide supports child welfare professionals and partners who facilitate small-group sessions and individual conversations with resource families.

How to use this guide

Designed for conversations with:

- **Youth:** Guide thoughtful conversations with young people experiencing foster care who may feel hesitant about adoption.
- **Families:** Facilitate small-group conversations with foster and pre-adoptive parents engaged in foster care or the adoption journey.
- **Professionals:** Lead discussions with caseworkers, supervisors, and practitioners supporting teens in foster care, and families parenting or considering foster care or adoption.

Goals

These sessions are designed to support reflection and emotional processing rather than evaluation or persuasion. Conversations should acknowledge and normalize complex emotions such as hope, uncertainty, grief, and commitment, while centering youth perspectives and lived experiences.

The topics are complex and personal, and the discussion questions are meant to be flexible. Facilitators are encouraged to prioritize conversation depth and quality rather than the number of questions. The facilitator's role is to listen, validate experiences, and hold a supportive, respectful space.

- **Youth:** Prioritize choice and emotional safety, especially when engaging directly with young people.
- **Families:** Encourage realistic expectations, patience, and a consistent focus on youth perspectives.
- **Professionals:** Promote self-awareness and honest reflection on system challenges while keeping discussions grounded in strengths, growth, and possibility.

The goal is thoughtful reflection in an emotionally safe space.

About the public service advertisements

The AdoptUSKids National Adoption Recruitment Campaign raises awareness about the need for more foster and adoptive parents and dispels myths about youth and teens in foster care. Through honest, emotional storytelling, the campaign encourages prospective parents to take the next step and learn more about foster care and adoption at [AdoptUSKids.org](https://www.adoptuskids.org).

The public service advertisements (PSAs) feature families sharing their adoption experience and highlight the challenges **and** the benefits of adoption.

Since 2004, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, AdoptUSKids, and the Ad Council have collaborated to create the multi-media National Adoption Recruitment Campaign.

The campaign has evolved to address various needs within the foster care system through a range of creative assets, campaign strategies, and unique partnerships. With more than \$900 million in donated media support, the campaign has changed minds, opened hearts, and inspired action.

To expand these efforts, AdoptUSKids established a speakers bureau. This group includes more than 100 spokespeople across the United States who help raise awareness of the need for foster and adoptive families.

This talented and diverse group of individuals includes parents, youth, young adults, professionals, and experts who inspire others by sharing their stories, expertise, and lived experience. Speakers utilize their voices to assist states, tribes, and territories with raising awareness and the recruitment, retention, and support of foster, adoptive, and kinship families.

We are delighted to introduce the families featured in the video: **Sahra and Shania; Erin and Emma; Jonathan and Nuamey; and Taylor, Nick, and Kelin**. These families share their unscripted, genuine experiences and are active members of the AdoptUSKids Speakers Bureau.

Featured voices



Sahra and Shania

Sahra’s journey as a foster and adoptive parent has shaped her life and commitment to helping children and youth in foster care. She is a mother of six, three biological and three adopted, including two she adopted as teenagers. Sahra continues to be a foster parent for young people.

Though she works full-time, she dedicates her free time and energy to advocating for youth. Additionally, Sahra leads a weekly parent support group, offering encouragement, guidance, and community service. Inspired by her own childhood experiences, Sahra firmly believes that every young person deserves the stability, belonging, and unconditional love of a family.

Supporting children who have experienced the foster care system is more than a role for her—she believes it is an honor and her greatest passion.

Shania’s story is one of resilience and hope. She first entered foster care at the age of 5, and again at 11, before being adopted at 13. Shania shares that adoption helped her grow into the person she was meant to be and provided her with a community of family, love, and support. Currently, Shania works full-time and serves as a member of the AdoptUSKids Speakers Bureau alongside Sahra, using her voice and lived experience to inspire others to consider adopting a teen from foster care.



Taylor, Nick, and Kelin

Taylor has unique and extensive experience with foster care, adoption, and kinship care. Taylor aged out of foster care and later became the adoptive parent of her two nephews, Nick and Kelin.

Taylor’s lived experience shapes everything she does as a parent and professional working in child welfare. Her voice offers a dual perspective, grounded in personal experience and enriched by her roles as a kinship and adoptive parent.

Taylor is passionate about looking beyond a young person’s labels to see their strengths and potential. She is also committed to preserving cultural connections, especially to Indigenous heritage, and believes strongly in teaching and modeling healthy boundaries and relationships. Taylor and her husband also have three children by birth. Currently Kelin is in high school and Nick is in his first year of college. They are both active in as many sports as their schedules allow.



Erin and Emma

Erin and her husband, Ralph, always knew adoption would be part of their family story. Together, they have adopted six children. They adopted twice domestically, through private infant adoption. Years later, they decided to adopt again and began exploring adoption of older youth in foster care awaiting permanency.

After creating a family profile on the AdoptUSKids website, Erin and Ralph were connected with siblings who were featured on the site. The placement was successful, and Emma and her brother Jake were adopted in 2015. Although Emma's oldest sister was adopted by her foster family, the siblings remain close and part of each other's daily lives.

Erin describes their family as social, energetic, and always on the go. Traveling together is a favorite activity. Their commitment to community is as strong as their commitment to family. Erin volunteers for local causes and stays involved in school events, while Ralph serves on nonprofit boards focused on giving back.

Today, Emma is thriving. She earned a bachelor's degree in social work and is pursuing her master's. Emma knew she wanted to work in child welfare, helping youth in foster care find the permanency she experienced. Now a Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiter, Emma connects youth with loving families and believes adoption is beautiful and rewarding for all.



Jonathan and Nuamey

Jonathan and his wife have been foster parents for more than a decade—serving mostly teenage boys in need of stability, guidance, and the benefit of family.

Nuamey connected with Jonathan and his wife at age 16 via a temporary foster care placement. What began as a temporary placement became a mutual choice for family when Nuamey was adopted as an adult. Jonathan often shares that he cannot say enough about what he has learned from Nuamey and the profound ways their relationship has shaped him as a mentor and a parent.

Together, they co-host the podcast, *From Both Sides*, where they speak candidly about their journey—including Nuamey's decision to choose his family and pursue adoption after aging out of care. They openly explore the realities of foster care, the impact of choosing each other, and the honest pros and cons of interracial adoption.

Jonathan is a special education teacher and serves as a Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (MAPP) leader facilitating preservice training for foster and adoptive parents. Nuamey frequently speaks from a youth perspective, offering insight rooted in his lived experience.

Facilitation approach

Timekeeping

The recommended time frame for this session is 60 minutes.

Given the depth and complexity of the discussion questions, facilitators are encouraged to select 1–2 questions from each section to stay within the allotted time. Prioritize quality and depth of conversation over the number of questions covered. Activities and questions are designed to be flexible.

To support effective time management, consider the following tips:

- **Preview questions** ahead of time and choose those most relevant to your group’s goals.
- **Start with clear expectations** about the pacing and focus of the discussion.
- **Use gentle time checks** to guide the session without interrupting the flow.
- **Invite participants to capture additional thoughts** for topics that surface but cannot be explored fully during the session.
- **Reserve a few minutes** at the end for closing reflections or key takeaways.

Setting the tone

In all conversations, the facilitator should approach this work with a strengths-based, nonjudgmental, and curiosity-driven mindset that promotes psychological safety.

For youth

Here are some considerations for facilitating one-to-one conversations or small group discussions with youth. Youth voice, choice, and emotional safety come first.

Your role is to listen, validate, and hold space. Remember that adoption experiences vary. Expect a range of reactions. Avoid false promises. Allow neutral or negative comments without correction. Be trauma informed. Sharing should always remain optional.

Grounding activity

Grounding activity may be especially helpful when facilitating a session with young people.

Prompt: Let's take a moment to settle our minds and bodies before we begin.

Activity: Guide participants to put their feet on the floor, take three slow breaths, and notice one thing you can see, one thing you can hear, and one thing you can feel.

For families

Here are some considerations for facilitating small group conversations with foster and pre-adoptive parents who are actively engaged in the adoption or foster care journey.

Facilitators should encourage realistic expectations, patience, and readiness for lifelong learning, maintaining a strengths-based, nonjudgmental, and curiosity-driven tone throughout the discussion. Care should be taken to remain mindful of participants' potential trauma histories and the possibility of trauma triggers, creating a space that feels respectful and supportive.

Create a safe space

An activity to seek group agreements to create a safe space will be especially helpful when facilitating a small group session with young people.

Prompt: Ask participants what group agreements feel important to them.

Suggested group agreements:

- Share what feels safe.
- Respect different experiences and opinions.
- Confidentiality with safety exceptions.
- No fixing, judging, or correcting feelings.
- It is okay to take breaks.

Agenda outlines

What participants can expect, organizing the agenda by audience.

Agenda outline for sessions with young people

- Welcome and framing: 5 minutes
- Grounding activity: 5 minutes

- Creating a safe space (when leading a small group conversation): 5 minutes
- Pre-video prompt: 5 minutes
- Share video: 10 minutes
- Discussion questions: 20 minutes
- Closing reflections: 5 minutes
- Grounding activity: 5 minutes

Agenda outline for sessions with families

- Welcome and framing: 5 minutes
- Share video: 10 minutes
- Warm-up reflection: 10 minutes
- Reflection and expectations: 10 minutes
- Youth voice and strengths: 10 minutes
- Readiness, growth, and support: 10 minutes
- Closing reflections and next steps: 5 minutes

Agenda outline for sessions with professionals

- Welcome and framing: 5 minutes
- Share video: 10 minutes
- Warm-up reflection: 10 minutes
- Youth voice and relational practice: 10 minutes
- Expectations, preparation, and permanency processes: 10 minutes
- Systems supports and professional learning: 10 minutes
- Closing reflections: 5 minutes

Facilitation reminders

Youth sessions

- Can be used in a group setting or individually with youth.
- Focus is on reflection and emotional safety, not completing every question.
- Youth may respond through discussion, writing, drawing, or quiet reflection.

- One-on-one use:
 - Allow the youth to set the pace.
 - Pause the video, skip questions, or return to grounding as needed.
 - Follow the youth’s lead on which topics feel most relevant.

Family sessions

- Create space for reflection rather than advice giving.
- Avoid comparing families or readiness levels.
- Redirect difficult moments with curiosity and grounding language.
- Encourage participants to connect with their agency or support network for follow-up questions or needs.
- Avoid generalizing youth experiences.
- Pause discussion if emotions become overwhelming.
- Redirect advice back to self-reflection. (“Let’s shift from offering solutions to exploring what this brings up for each of us personally.”)
- Affirm uncertainty as normal.

Professional sessions

- Encourage reflection on practice, relationships, and professional mindset.
- Center youth and caregiver voices as expressed in the video.
- Normalize complexity, ambiguity, and the emotional nature of permanency work.
- Invite honesty about system barriers while maintaining a strengths-based frame.
- Uplift worker self-awareness around bias, expectations, and relational practice.

Prepare resources for participants

Having a few relevant resources available can help participants move from reflection to action and support continued learning after the discussion.

Before leading the discussion, facilitators should identify a small set of post-conversation resources for participants. These may include local supports (agency contacts, community organizations, training opportunities, etc.) and national resources that provide broader guidance and tools.

Two recommended starting points for national information and materials are:

- **AdoptUSKids.org:** resources for families, professionals, and partners focused on adoption, foster care, and permanency.
- **DiligentRecruitment.org:** tools, strategies, and technical assistance related to intentional, data-informed recruitment and family support.

Closing the discussion

A thoughtful closing helps reinforce learning, honor emotions, and support participants in transitioning back to their day feeling heard and valued.

As the session comes to an end, take a moment to acknowledge the work everyone has done. Invite final reflections through a round-robin, paired share, or written response.

For young people and parents, acknowledge that these conversations take courage and can bring up strong emotions. Remind participants there is support and resources available after the conversation.

As the session concludes, facilitators should thank participants for their time and affirm their open reflections are meaningful.

Important!

If you are facilitating a session with a young person and they appear distressed, ensure follow-up support is provided.

Additional closing suggestions and scripts are included with the discussion questions.

Questions for sessions with young people

Audience: Youth experiencing foster care who may be hesitant about adoption.

Remember:

Given the depth and complexity of the discussion questions, facilitators are encouraged to select 1–2 questions from each section to stay within the allotted time. Prioritize quality and depth of conversation over the number of questions covered.

Pre-video prompt

The experiences you will see are unique to the young people and families in the video.

Everyone’s story about kinship care, foster care, adoption, and family connections is different.

You might relate to some parts, some parts might feel very different from your own experiences, and that is completely okay. There are no right or wrong reactions.

Some things may feel familiar, some things may feel surprising, or even uncomfortable. This is a chance to notice what resonates with you, what questions it brings up, and what feelings come up, knowing that your experiences are valid and your story and experiences are your own.

Initial reactions to the video

Question 1

What parts of the video did you relate to?

What parts did not feel true or did not connect for you?

What stood out to you most?

Voice and choice

Question 2

Prompt: In the video, Shania shares, “I’ve learned that I have a big voice. I feel confident in using my voice.” In foster care, many decisions are made for (rather than with) youth.

Reflect: Where would you want more control, voice, and choice when it comes to decisions about your life?

 **Facilitation notes:**

Reinforce that youth voices matter and deserve to be heard.

At the same time, be mindful that many youth in foster care are navigating systems that do not consistently listen to or act on their input, often leaving youth with feelings of powerlessness. Hold space for frustration, disappointment, or skepticism that may arise when discussing voice and choice.

Avoid creating false hope by promising change or implying that speaking up will always lead to different outcomes. Instead, validate their experiences, acknowledge the limits of the system, and emphasize that having a voice is about being able to express needs, feelings, and perspectives, even when decisions may remain out of their immediate control.

Connection and trust over time

Question 3

Prompt: In the video, Nuamey described his experience of getting to know, trust, and love Jonathan and said, “I cannot imagine him not being my father.” Connections and trust can take time and that’s okay.

Reflect: What do you think helps relationships grow over time?

 **Facilitation notes:**

- Reiterate that everyone’s experiences with relationships are unique.
- Trust and connection cannot be rushed, and it’s completely normal for these feelings to develop gradually.
- Encourage them to reflect on what helps them feel safe, respected, and supported as relationships grow.

What adoption means to you

Question 4

When you hear the word *adoption*, what thoughts, feelings, or questions come up for you?

Facilitation notes:

- Options for response include writing or drawing words.
- All responses are welcome.
- Sharing is voluntary.

Addressing mixed feelings and maintaining connections

Question 5

Prompt: Sometimes youth may feel that accepting new connections or family relationships means they are being disloyal to their biological families. These feelings are common and valid. Adoption and connection do not require choosing one family over another. It's okay to hold love, loyalty, and care for more than one family at the same time, and it is okay if those feelings feel complicated.

Adoption is about adding to your circle of supports or connections, not subtracting. In the video, Jonathan talks about supporting Nuamey's family connections, especially with his siblings.

Reflect: Who or what would be important to keep in your life if you were adopted?

Question 6

Prompt: In the video, Shania says, "I just love you, Sahra."

Reflect: How does this example show that adoption doesn't have to mean replacing biological parents or using certain titles, and that adoptees can define relationships in their own way?

Facilitation notes:

Be aware that openness to new relationships can be emotionally complex or difficult.

Past losses, disrupted attachments, or experiences of broken trust may make it difficult to trust new caregivers or connections. Youth may worry that caring for someone new means betraying their biological family, losing existing relationships, or risking future disappointment.

Normalize hesitation, mixed emotions, and ambivalence. Avoid pushing youth toward optimism or readiness. Instead, emphasize that relationships develop at their own pace, in their own form, and on the youth's terms.

Your role is to create emotional safety by validating both the desire for connection and the need for self-protection.

Imposter syndrome

Question 7

Prompt: Imposter syndrome is when past experiences can make you feel like you don't deserve good things or belong, even though you do.

Reflect: Where did you notice elements of imposter syndrome showing up for both the teens and the parents?

Question 8

Prompt: It's not uncommon for teens to feel like they are *too old* to be adopted or that it's *too late* because they're too close to adulthood. Adoption can mean long-term support that extends beyond age 18.

Reflect: What are some ways that families can provide support to young adults after they turn 18?

Facilitation notes:

Reiterate that teens are deserving of permanency and ongoing connection, including after they turn 18.

Permanency does not end in adulthood and does not require traditional family roles or experiences. For many youth, permanency looks like having reliable people and places they can count on over time.

When offering examples, please consider that some youth may not have positive associations with holidays or traditional celebrations or may never have experienced them in a typical way.

Use flexible, everyday examples of support, such as:

- Someone you can call if you get a flat tire or need help in an unexpected moment.
- Someone you can reach out to for guidance, encouragement, or support after a tough day or when you just need to be heard.
- A place where you feel welcome and safe to spend meaningful time, whether that's for a meal, a weekend, or during times when others may be with family.
- If you're in college, a place you can go during breaks or over the summer, or someone who checks in to make sure you're okay.
- Someone who shows up for important moments in your life, big or small, in ways that feel supportive to you.

Emphasize that permanency is about consistency, care, and choice, not about meeting a specific image of family. Youth get to define what support looks like and which connections feel meaningful to them.

Key video moments:

- “I’m so thankful that I was part of your journey and that I get to watch the next phase in your life and see what it’s going to bring,” said Erin.
- “I might not know what the next step is going to be, but it’s going to be okay,” said Taylor.

No matter what families

Question 9

Prompt: In the video, Nuamey got in trouble sneaking someone into the house.

Reflect: What does it mean to be accepted even when a mistake is made.

Facilitation notes:

Normalize this behavior as developmentally typical for teenagers, especially for youth navigating independence, boundaries, and trust. Highlight how Jonathan describes intentionally looking for opportunities to show Nuamey that he loves him no matter what, including when rules are broken or mistakes are made.

Discuss how words and language matter when discussing permanency and family.

Phrases like *forever family* can unintentionally feel unrealistic or idealized for youth who have experienced loss, disrupted placements, or broken promises.

In contrast, *no matter what* communicates commitment while acknowledging that relationships include ruptures, repair, and growth. It emphasizes staying connected through hard moments rather than promising perfection or the absence of future challenges.

Reiterate that youth do not have to be perfect, compliant, or grateful to be deserving of family and belonging. Help youth understand that accountability and consequences can exist alongside care, love, and commitment.

Use this discussion to reinforce that healthy families work through mistakes together, and that being accepted no matter what means not being given up on when things get hard.

Belonging

Question 10

Prompt: In the video, Sahra says, “You have to meet them where they are; learn who they are.”

Reflect: If a prospective family wanted to really understand you, what would you want them to know?

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

- Name the strengths, needs, what helps you feel safe, and what matters most.
- Options for response include writing, drawing, or creating a list.
- Sharing is optional.

Belonging is feeling safe, valued, and accepted for who you are, and being able to show up authentically, as your true self. Some youth may not have been asked these questions before or may not feel ready to share personal details.

Normalize that it can be hard to name needs, strengths, or preferences, especially if past experiences taught them that their input did not matter. Emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers, and that youth are in control of what they choose to share.

Question 11

Reflect: How do you see yourself fitting into different families or communities? What makes you feel like you belong and can be your authentic self?

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

Youth may have difficulty imagining belonging if they have experienced frequent moves, rejection, or conditional acceptance. Allow space for uncertainty, hesitation, or mixed feelings.

Belonging does not have to mean immediate comfort or closeness; it can start with feeling respected, welcomed, and allowed to be oneself over time.

Question 12

Reflect: If you could tell a future family one thing that would help them support you best, what would it be?

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

Reinforce that belonging is built through consistent actions, not expectations of gratitude, compliance, or conforming. Help youth understand that it is okay to need time, boundaries, or flexibility in relationships.

This question is about helping adults learn how to show up in ways that feel supportive to the youth, not about youth having to change who they are to fit in.

Closing takeaways

Question 13

Reflect: What is one thing you are taking with you today (an idea, feeling, or a question)?

Question 14

Reflect: Who can you reach out to for support (caseworker, therapist, trusted adult)?

Facilitation notes:

- Options for response include writing or sharing aloud.
- Sharing is optional.

Grounding activity

As we wrap up, let's pause to help our minds and bodies settle.

1. Press your feet gently into the floor and notice the support underneath them.
2. Place a hand on your chest or stomach and take two slow breaths.
3. Name in your head one person, place, or thing that helps you feel supported.

Facilitation notes:

Take a moment to acknowledge the work everyone has done. Reflection on adoption, family, and connections can bring up many emotions, and simply participating is meaningful.

- Thank the youth for their participation and courage in sharing (or listening) today.
- Remind them that it is normal to have mixed feelings and that all feelings are valid.
- Reassure youth that support is available if they continue to process emotions after the session.
 - If appropriate, coordinate with the child's worker or a trusted adult to follow up and ensure the youth has support for processing lingering emotions.

Closing script

Thank you for being here today. Take care of yourself and remember that you are not alone in your journey.

Important: If any youth appeared distressed or triggered, ensure follow-up support is provided.

Questions for sessions with families

Audience: Foster and pre-adoptive parents who are actively engaged in the adoption or foster care journey.

Reminder:

Given the depth and complexity of the discussion questions, facilitators are encouraged to select 1–2 questions from each section to stay within the allotted time. Prioritize quality and depth of conversation over the number of questions covered.

Warm-up reflections

Question 1

Reflect: Which story or moment in the video stuck with you and why?

Optional follow-up: What did you notice about how the parents talked about fear before moving forward anyway?

Purpose:

- Opens reflection safely, surfaces meaning without debate, allows all voices to be heard.
- Invites emotional, not analytical, responses.
- Validates diverse reactions and emphasizes individual’s unique perspectives.

Key video moments:

- Erin describing fear before meeting the children: “What if we walk in and they don’t like us ... then my heart is broken.”
- Jonathan reflecting on being emotionally unprepared: “I was about 90 percent physically prepared ... 10 percent emotionally prepared.”

Question 2

Prompt: We heard in the video that families moved forward even while feeling afraid. This tells us that foster families often accept emotional risk as part of the role—not because it’s easy, but because the children need them.

Reflect: What emotions did you notice in adoptive parents and youth? How did those emotions change over time?

Purpose:

- Builds empathy and highlights that relationships develop gradually.
- Notes that early hesitancy can coexist with growth over time.
- If judgment appears, redirect to curiosity about the emotion’s meaning.

Key video moments:

- Youth initial impressions focused on safety and environment (Nuamey noticing the refrigerator and ice dispenser).
- Early anxiety and imposter syndrome.
- Later reflections describing love, pride, and connection.

Reflection and expectations

Question 3

Reflect: Families described their journey as meaningful and challenging. How do you relate to that? What challenges do you see?

Optional follow-up:

- What feels most challenging to you right now?
- What would help you feel more prepared, not perfect?
- If things get hard, what would you want to remind yourself of?
- Who or what do you imagine leaning on when challenges arise?

Purpose:

- Normalizes complexity and uncertainty.
- Keeps tone reflective rather than performance based.

 ***Facilitation notes:***

When participants name anticipated challenges, consider these types of responses:

- Normalize, don’t fix.

- Reframe challenges as predictable, not personal failures.
- Invite curiosity instead of certainty.
- Connect challenges to supports (not solutions).
- Validate emotional complexity.

Question 4

Reflect: What did you hear in youth voices about belonging, trust, or feeling understood? What did parents say may have benefited the youth with this?

Purpose:

- Centers youth experience rather than adult expectations.
- Reflects key phrases about safety, respect, and being seen.
- Avoids assumptions about gratitude or behavior.

Key video moments:

- Shania: “In my other homes, I feel like everyone else did not wanna listen.”
- Jonathan describing not forcing disclosure: “I wanted to be respectful of his story ... not trying to drag it out of him.”

Question 5

Prompt: There isn’t a *right* answer here. Many people come into adoption with certain expectations about what the journey will look like. This question is simply inviting you to notice anything that felt different than you expected—either before placement or after adoption. You don’t need to critique yourself; this is about curiosity and learning.

Reflect: What surprised you about the families’ experiences before or after adoption? Did anything challenge your beliefs?

Optional follow-up:

- Did anything about the parents’ fears at the beginning stand out to you?
- Did you notice anything about the challenges that felt more intense—or more ordinary—than you imagined?
- Was anything about the young people’s perspectives unexpected to you?

Purpose:

- Encourages learning mindset.
- Affirms reflection without shame or self-critique.
- Highlights complexity rather than correction.

Key video moments:

- Erin talked about her fear before meeting the children: ‘What if we walk in and they don’t like us ... then my heart is broken.’
- Jonathan said he was ‘about 90 percent physically prepared ... 10 percent emotionally prepared.’

Question 6

Reflect: The video shows moments where families felt conflict and doubt. How do you see yourself responding when expectations don’t match reality?

Optional follow-up: What do you feel helped these families stay connected even when things felt hard?

Purpose:

- Builds resilience planning.
- Normalizes support and flexibility, recognizing struggle does not equal failure.
- Emphasizes that reaching out for support is a normal part of caregiving and helps families stay steady when things feel hard.

Youth voice and strengths

Question 7

Prompt: Shania states, “I have a big voice” and Jonathan names Nuamey’s bravery during their first meeting.

Reflect: What other strengths did these teens bring to their families?

Purpose:

- Counters deficit-based thinking.
- Names resilience, humor, creativity, survival skills, and persistence.
- Invites asset focused perspectives.

Key video moments:

- Jonathan describes Nuamey as intelligent, smart, talented, and impressive.
- Taylor describes her sons as smart and talented.
- Erin describes Emma as an amazing woman.
- Sahra describes Shania as optimistic, hardworking, talented, and creative.

Question 8

Prompt: Youth may need time and consistency before trusting. One of the film’s subtitles says, “Family isn’t found. It’s formed.”

Reflect: What does that mean for early relationship building and for how families stay connected over time?

Purpose:

- Sets realistic expectations for both the beginning and the long arc of relationships.
- Emphasizes that trust grows through repeated safety and consistency.
- Highlights that families often re-form and renegotiate connections at different life stages, particularly in open adoption.
- Normalizes that distance can indicate self-protection rather than rejection.

Facilitation notes:

Key ideas to share if needed.

- Distance or guardedness may reflect self-protection, not rejection.
- Showing up consistently, even when things are hard or awkward, is often what builds belonging.
- Trust is built through predictability, consistency, and emotional safety, not speed.

Key video moments:

- Jonathan describing waiting respectfully for his son to share his story rather than “dragging it out of him.”
- Taylor’s “we’re figuring this out together” stance during hard moments.
- Parents and youth reflecting on who they’ve become and how they see one another.

Readiness, growth, and support

Question 9

Reflect: Adoption doesn't erase loss. How do you practice holding space for grief and loss while offering hope and stability?

Purpose:

- Reinforces that adoption includes loss for youth.
- Validates co-existing emotions such as grief and belonging.
- Normalizes caregivers can honor the past while supporting the present.

 **Facilitation notes:**

Draw examples from the video when parents acknowledge their children's trauma responses.

Key video moments:

- Jonathan naming intentional patience. He described being “really respectful of his story and his trauma” and waiting for his son to share in his own time, rather than “dragging it out of him.”
- Taylor explicitly naming trauma. She noticed a “fight or flight response” and framed challenges through a trauma lens rather than a defiance.

Question 10

Prompt (if needed): “This question is about more than just gaining knowledge. It's about how you plan to apply what you learn and intentionally stretch to meet a young person where they are. It's also about recognizing that no one does this alone. We'll think together about supports from professionals, peers, and the community, that can sustain you over time.”

Reflect: How will you continue to learn, grow, and intentionally stretch throughout your journey? What supports from professionals, peers, and your community would help you?

Purpose:

- Encourages a lifelong learning mindset paired with intentional application.
- Guides participants toward training, consultation, peer support, and community support.
- Highlights growth, reflection, and adaptation over certainty or mastery.

Facilitation notes:

Normalize support comes from many places.

- Other foster or adoptive families
- Therapists or clinicians
- Child welfare professionals and caseworkers
- Kinship networks or extended family
- Faith or spiritual communities
- Cultural or identity-based communities
- Schools, mentors, coaches, or youth programs
- Community-based organizations serving adoptees or foster youth

Question 11

Reflect: How does openness, honesty, and curiosity fit in your relationship with a teen?

Purpose:

- Reinforces communication, humility, and repair
- Encourages authenticity rather than perfection
- Emphasizes honoring youth voice

Key video moments:

- Sahra, “You have to meet them where they are, learn who they are, their culture.”
- Jonathan, “I wanted to be really respectful of his story and his trauma.”

Closing reflection

Question 12

Prompt (if needed): This question is about holding onto a few steady truths when things feel hard—not about having a perfect script or unrealistic expectations. It’s also about recognizing that we rarely remember or stay grounded on our own; we often need other people to help us keep perspective.

Reflect: What messages from the video do you want to hold onto? What will you remember on tough days and who will help you remember?

Optional follow-up:

- If you were writing yourself a note for the future, what would it say?
- When things feel overwhelming, who would you want to call or sit with?

Purpose:

- Anchors hope without romanticizing adoption.
- Invites themes of persistence, compassion, and presence.
- Supports reflective, grounded responses rather than idealized responses.
- Encourages participants to identify who in their natural support system can help them stay grounded when things are hard.

Closing script

Thank you for the thoughtfulness and courage you brought to today's discussion. This journey involves learning, patience, and care—not perfection. The reflections you shared strengthen your capacity to show up for a young person with compassion and understanding.

Questions for sessions with professionals

Audience: Lead discussions with caseworkers, supervisors, and practitioners supporting teens in foster care, and families parenting or considering foster care or adoption.

Remember:

Given the depth and complexity of the discussion questions, facilitators are encouraged to select 1–2 questions from each section to stay within the allotted time. Prioritize quality and depth of conversation over the number of questions covered.

Warm-up reflections

Question 1

Think about the experiences shared in the video.

Reflect: Thinking about the stories in the video, which themes align with what you see in your work with teens experiencing foster care?

Analyze: What are some strong similarities and differences that challenge or confirm your understanding of their experiences?

Apply: What can these patterns teach us about how we show up, engage, and support young people more effectively across the permanency journey?

Purpose:

- Grounds the conversation in lived experience and professional observation and brings all voices into the room.
- Invites workers to reflect without judgment or defensiveness.

Facilitation notes:

Common themes to consider may include the following.

The impact of instability and previous trauma:

- References to multiple placements and the trauma of instability: “bouncing around from placement to placement ... the further trauma that can cause,” said Taylor.

- Imposter syndrome and insecurity when entering a new home: “I think that might have been the first time I’ve ever felt imposter syndrome,” said Nuamey.

The dual vulnerability of youth and caregivers:

- The video shows that youth fear rejection: Erin asked, “What if ... they don’t feel this is right for them?”
- Caregivers are equally afraid of *getting it wrong*: “I was probably about 10 percent emotionally prepared,” said Jonathan.

Question 2

Think about the experiences shared in the video.

Reflect: What messages did you hear from youth about trust, belonging, identity, or safety?

Apply: How might those messages shape casework practice?

Purpose:

- Centers youth voice as a guide for professional decisions.

Facilitation notes:

Encourage naming specific youth statements rather than generalizations.

Trust: Will these people truly accept me?

- Youth masking confidence to protect themselves: “He exuded calm, confident ... the amount of bravery he had in that moment blew me away,” said Jonathan.
- Youth describing difficulty trusting caregivers’ intentions: “I felt challenged, I felt belittled ... this ain’t what I’m used to,” said Nuamey.

Belonging: Do I fit in here? Am I part of this family?

- Experiencing belonging through small rituals or celebrations: “I had never celebrated my birthday ... sometimes I didn’t even remember when it was,” said Emma.
- Belonging formed through shared activities: “Sports has become a big thing in our family,” said Nick.

Identity: Who am I? Where do I come from? Who am I becoming?

- Youth discovering their voice: “I’ve learned that I have a big voice. I feel confident in using my voice,” said Shania.
- Seeing caregivers as identity models: “She’s everything I wanna be: an amazing mom, worker, wife,” said Emma, about her adoptive mother.

Safety: Am I safe emotionally, physically, and relationally?

- Youth seeking emotional safety: “It felt easy to talk to her ... everyone else did not want to listen,” said Shania.
- Fight or flight behaviors as trauma responses: “Some things I did notice was a trauma response—like fight or flight,” said Taylor.

Question 3

Jonathan reflected, “I was about 90 percent physically prepared ... 10 percent emotionally prepared.”

Apply: Considering his experience and the ways children and families describe their transition periods before and after adoption, what concrete actions can professionals take to better prepare caregivers emotionally and strengthen the support offered during the transition process?

Purpose:

- Connects the film’s insights to worker responsibilities in transition planning.

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

Examples of concrete actions can include the following.

Normalize emotional uncertainty for youth and caregivers.

What we hear

- Caregivers express fear “What if we walk in and they don’t like us,” said Erin.
- Teens put on a brave face despite fear “Amount of bravery in that moment,” said Jonathan, describing his son coping with fear.

Action for professionals

- During pre-placement training, name common fears openly.
- Provide a script for caregivers to use such as: “You don’t have to like me yet. We’ll get to know each other at your pace.”
- Teach caregivers that teens’ confidence may mask fear.

Prepare caregivers for trauma responses and *testing* behaviors.

What we hear

- Teens describe feeling belittled, challenged, or wanting to run away (Nuamey).

Actions for professionals

- Train caregivers to interpret these behaviors as survival strategies, rather than disrespect.
- Offer sample de-escalation responses, such as “I care about you. Let’s pause and talk when you’re ready.”
- Provide 24/7 on-call coaching during the first month of placement.

Provide emotional coaching for caregivers.

What we hear

- Caregivers repeatedly express emotional uncertainty: “I needed to learn to let go,” or “I was probably 10 percent emotionally prepared.”

Actions for professionals

- Conduct pre-placement sessions focused solely on emotional readiness.
- Connect caregivers with peer mentors who have adopted or fostered teens.
- Use role-play to practice:
 - Responding to withdrawal
 - Handling anger
 - Navigating silence

Youth voice and relational practice

Question 4

Shania shared, “I’ve learned that I have a big voice. I feel confident in using my voice and going for the goals that I want.”

Reflect: Thinking about her experience, where do you see similar strengths or expressions of resilience in the youth and families you serve?

Apply: What specific actions can professionals take during assessment, planning, and daily practice to intentionally identify, elevate, and build those strengths throughout the adoption process?

Purpose:

- Counters deficit-based narratives and reinforces strengths-based practice.

Actions for professionals

- During assessment: Identify strengths intentionally and early.
- Ask youth focused questions.
- Capture strengths in case documentation.
- Ask caregivers to reflect on youth strengths from first contact.

During planning: Elevate youth voice and build on strengths.

- Ensure youth-led participation in family matching and transition planning.
- Connect youth strengths to real opportunities.
- Help caregivers prepare for strengths, not only challenges.

In daily practice: Reinforce youth strengths consistently.

- Use *strength spotting* in every interaction.
- Coach caregivers to affirm youth identity and voice.
- Support youth in storytelling and reflection.

Question 5

Think about the experiences shared in the video.

Reflect: What moments in the video clearly demonstrated how relationships—built and sustained over time—shaped the experiences of the youth and families?

Apply: Based on those examples, what casework strategies can professionals implement to promote continuity, stability, and long-term relational connection throughout the adoption process?

Purpose:

- Emphasizes the power of long-term connection and consistent casework presence.

Facilitation notes:

The first meetings: Early vulnerability that begins the relationships.

- Multiple youth and parents in the film describe their first encounter with a mixture of fear, hope, and bravery. These early moments laid the foundation for long-term connections.
- Taylor’s immediate desire to welcome the boys into her life: “I just wanted them to be with me.”
- Erin’s worry that the youth wouldn’t feel a connection: “What if we walk in and they didn’t like us ... then my heart is broken.”

Small, shared rituals that build belonging:

- The video emphasizes that everyday activities (not just grand gestures) create family identity and security.
- Taylor talking about games they play “every year and still do.”
- Youth cooking, laughing, and doing silly challenges (like pickle juice and hot sauce experiments).

Maintaining youth’s original connections strengthened family bonds:

- Several parents shared openness to the youth’s prior relationships, rather than replacing them.
- Jonathan embracing his son’s biological family connections: “Yes. Come over and hang out ... his siblings especially.”

Working through conflict as a relationship-building process:

- Conflict wasn’t portrayed as a failure, but growth, especially when handled with love and repair.
 - Teens feeling misunderstood or frustrated: “Mom’s a mean person, she hates me,” said Emma.
- Parents reflecting on fear: Jonathan asked “Did I push him too much?”
- Moments of repair:
 - Taylor telling her sons, “We’re gonna figure this out together.”
 - Erin learning to “let go and let her make mistakes.”

Strategies:

- Center youth voice and meaningful youth engagement: involve youth in case planning.
- Strengthen family engagement and collaboration: establish shared decision-making structures.
- Implement intentional placement planning and transition support: pre-placement visits and bonding activities.
- Ensure adoption-competent mental health support.

Question 6

Taylor shared, “Some things I did notice was a trauma response, like a fight or flight response. There are a lot of times I told Nick and Kelin, ‘I’m figuring this out, you’re figuring this out, we’re gonna figure it out together ...’”

Reflect: Thinking about her experience and the other stories shared, what did you notice about how grief, loss, and attachment show up in the adoption journey?

Apply: In your role, how can professionals help youth and families hold multiple emotions at the same time, while responding sensitively to trauma responses and supporting them to *figure it out together*?

Purpose:

- Reinforces adoption-competent practice and emotional literacy.

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

Grief and loss show up in fear, uncertainty, and self-protection.

- Imposter syndrome as a form of loss and identity disruption: “That might have been the first time I felt...imposter syndrome,” said Nuamey.
- Loss of predictability and past connections: Being amazed by something as simple as an ice dispenser reflects the loss of past stability or access to care.

Grief can appear through conflict, withdrawal, and testing.

- “We were arguing and he’s like, ‘well, I’m running away,’” said Jonathan.
- “I felt challenged, I felt belittled ... this ain’t what I’m used to,” said Nuamey.

Caregivers experience their own grief and loss.

- Fear of failing a child: Erin asked “Am I doing a good job by these children?”
- Loss of control: “I needed to learn to let go and let her make mistakes,” said Erin.
- Loss of expectations: “90 percent physically prepared ... 10 percent emotionally prepared,” said Jonathan.

Attachment builds through consistency, rituals, and shared joy.

- Rituals that create belonging:
 - Emma described her birthday celebration.
 - Nick described how sports became a big thing in the family.
- Laughter and inside jokes:
 - Emma talked about mixing pickle juice and hot sauce challenges.

Maintaining connections builds attachments, not competing relationships.

- Jonathan helped his son maintain sibling relationships.

How professionals can help youth and families hold multiple emotions at once.

- Name the emotions you see without judgement (ex. Caregivers feeling excited and nervous, or youth feeling grateful and overwhelmed).
 - Model statements like, “It makes sense that you feel excited about this family and nervous about getting close.”
- Teach caregivers to normalize complexity: “You can be angry with him and love him at the same time.”

Teach caregivers to interpret trauma responses as communication, rather than rejection.

- Train caregivers to respond with curiosity instead of punishment: “What’s the feeling underneath this reaction?”
- Provide scripts:
 - “I’m not going anywhere. We can take a break and come back to this.”
- Help caregivers anticipate trauma responses during transitions and conflicts.

Support families in slowing down and working through hard feelings.

- Teach caregivers grounding strategies for themselves and youth.
- Encourage a family *pause* when needed: “Let’s all take a breath before we keep going.”
- Reinforce reflective statements over reactive ones.

Reinforce the power of repair.

- Teach families that conflict is not failure; it’s how attachment grows.
- Coach caregivers in specific repair strategies.
 - “I’m sorry for how I said that.”
 - “Let’s try that again.”
 - “I care about you even when we disagree.”
- Help youth understand that coming back after conflict is a sign of safety, not weakness.

Expectations, preparation, and permanency processes

Question 7

Nuamey shared, “I felt challenged, I felt belittled, like this ain’t what I’m used to, this ain’t for me.”

Reflect: Reflecting on his experience and the other stories in the video, what barriers to permanency or emotional connection stood out to you?

Apply: In your roles, where do you see opportunities to reduce or prevent these barriers so that youth and families feel affirmed, safe, and connected?

Purpose:

- Invites systemic awareness and solution focused reflection.

 ***Facilitation notes:***

Barriers you may hear from participants:

- Emotional safety and trust gaps:
 - Youth entering relationships already carrying trauma and grief. Caregivers or workers misinterpret withdrawal, anger, or testing as defiance rather than protection.
- Placement instability:
 - Multiple moves reinforcing the message that the connection isn't safe or lasting. Difficulty forming new attachments due to previous ones being disrupted.
- Lack of youth voice in decision-making:
 - Youth not being fully informed, involved, or respected in planning.

Guiding the group toward solutions in identifying realistic steps within their roles:

- Strengthening affirmation and belonging:
 - Train caregivers and staff to interpret behaviors through a lens of resilience and survival, not defiance.
- Building relational permanency early and often:
 - Invest time helping youth feel emotionally safe before expecting disclosure or closeness.
- Increase youth voice and choice:
 - Meaningfully involve youth in placement decisions, family matching, transition planning, and permanency goals.

Question 8

Analyze: When you think about permanency planning in your work, what does it look like when youth voice is not only heard but actively shapes decisions?

Apply: What practices, engagement strategies, or shifts in team culture help ensure young people feel respected, included, and empowered throughout the planning process?

Purpose:

- Reinforces procedural justice and youth-centered practice.

🕒 ***Facilitation notes:***

Frame the conversation with a reminder to participants that permanency isn't just a plan, but a relational journey.

Invite participants to envision what true youth-driven permanency looks like: Help the group distinguish between tokenism (“We asked their opinion”) and shared power (“Their preferences guided the path forward”).

Examples of practices and strategies that amplify youth voice:

- Relationship-based engagement:
 - Build trust before asking youth to make major decisions.
- Developmentally appropriate communication:
 - Break information into digestible pieces.
- Preparation before planning meetings:
 - Explore what support the youth needs if topics are difficult or triggering.

Question 9

Think about the experiences shared in the video.

Reflect: Where did you notice assumptions or unconscious biases about teens in foster care (ex. expectations about their behavior, readiness for permanency, or capacity to build relationships)?

Analyze: How did the youth and families' experiences challenge, complicate, or reaffirm any of these perceptions?

Apply: As a group, what does this invite us to rethink or do differently in our day-to-day practice?

Purpose:

- Encourages self-awareness and examination of professional assumptions

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

Set the tone for a reflective, non-judgmental conversation.

- Start by naming that unconscious bias is universal and part of being human.
- Remember, the goal is curiosity, not defensiveness.

Surface common assumptions about teens in foster care.

- Behavior assumptions:
 - Interpreting guardedness, anger, or withdrawal as attitude rather than self-protection.
- Assumptions about teen interest in permanency:
 - Believing teens *don't want to be adopted* or are *too old* for permanency.
- Assumptions about capacity for relationships:
 - Viewing teens as *too challenging* or *too much work*.

Consider highlighting the following from the video.

- Youth expressing vulnerabilities, hope, and longing for family, which counters assumptions that teens are not interested in adoption.
- Moments when families stay with a young person through challenges, demonstrating how relationships deepen over time.

Question 10

Sahra shared, “You have to meet them where they are, learn who they are, their culture.”

Reflect: Thinking about her insight and the moments in the video, where did you see examples of support systems (formal or informal) making a meaningful difference for youth and families?

Analyze: In your jurisdiction, which systems of support most need strengthening to ensure we are truly meeting young people and caregivers where they are, honoring who they are, and building culturally responsive, sustained connections throughout the adoption process?

Purpose:

- Illuminates the importance of teamwork and wraparound support.

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

Encourage participants to notice formal support (professionals, programs, services) and informal support (family, community, peers).

Formal support systems:

- Workers or adoption specialists who are connected over time.
- Therapists, mentors, or agency staff who help the youth feel understood.

Informal or community-based support:

- Extended family, kin, or chosen family who play a stabilizing role.
- Friends, peer groups, or siblings who anchor the youth through transitions.

Explore how those supports made a difference.

Look for themes, such as:

- Adults who were curious rather than judgmental.
- Caregivers who adapted their parenting to honor the youth's needs or communication style.
- Systems that didn't give up on the youth, even when challenges arose.

Shift to a local system. Help the group think beyond individual relationships and toward systems-level structures that support or hinder permanency.

Guide toward actionable improvements. Invite participants to think about concrete steps within their roles or spheres of influence.

Systems supports and professional learning

Question 11

In the video, we saw families navigating moments when expectations and reality didn't fully align.

Reflect: Drawing from those examples and your own practice, how can we better equip families to manage these difficult moments with realistic expectations, emotional resilience, and the support they need to stay connected through challenges?

Analyze: What approaches or tools have you seen that help caregivers respond with flexibility, empathy, and stability when things don't go as planned?

Purpose:

- Strengthens caregiver preparation and realistic permanency readiness.

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

Guide the group to reflect on specific examples from the video, such as:

- Families adjust their communication to match the youth's comfort level.
- Adults staying present even when the youth pushed them away or tested boundaries.
- Moments when caregivers acknowledge misunderstandings and rebuild connection.

Explore what families need to be prepared and supported. Such as:

- Establishing realistic expectations early through honest conversations about trauma and normalizing behaviors that arise from grief and loss.
- Continuous learning and skill-building using a trauma-responsive parenting model and coaching families to understand that behavior is communication.
- Emotional support for caregivers through peer support groups or access to respite.

Question 12

After hearing the stories shared by youth and caregivers in the video:

Reflect: What key messages stand out that should shape how we recruit, match, and prepare foster, kinship, and adoptive families for teens?

Apply: As a group, how can these insights guide us toward more thoughtful recruitment strategies, more intentional matching decisions, and more realistic, trauma-informed preparation that helps families understand the needs, strengths, and lived experiences of the teens they hope to welcome?

Purpose:

- Links lived experience to recruitment and matching strategies.

🕒 **Facilitation notes:**

Possible key messages to highlight:

- “See me for who I am, not just my file.”
- Building trust takes time.
- Youth want commitment, not perfection.
- Teens want to be part of the process.

Recruitment: What needs to shift?

- Recruit families who genuinely want to parent teenagers.

- Recruit families who are open to learning.
- Use recruitment strategies that counter stereotypes.

Matching: Be intentional and youth centered.

- Prioritize compatibility over vacancy-filling.
- Include youth in the matching process.
- Strengthen pre-placement relationship building.

Preparation: Set families up for reality, not idealized expectations.

- Normalize the complexity of teen adoption.
- Teach families to interpret behavior through a trauma lens.

Question 13

Analyze: How can we communicate openly and honestly about the real challenges teens may face—such as trauma histories, complex emotions, or past disruptions—without discouraging families?

Apply: What communication approaches, preparation strategies, or relational practices help workers strike the balance between transparency and encouragement, so families feel informed and supported, not overwhelmed?

Purpose:

- Balances transparency with encouragement and hope.

Facilitation notes:

Explore communication approaches that balance transparency and support. Share the reality of trauma histories without catastrophizing.

- “You may see big emotions because they’ve had big losses.”

Present challenges and strengths side by side. Avoid the one-sided narrative.

- “Yes, there may be testing, and this youth is also funny, artistic, and deeply wanting connection.”

Be concrete and specific. Share:

- Real-life examples.
- Descriptions of what behaviors might look like.

Preparation strategies that help build realistic confidence:

- Experiential learning: youth panels, shadowing, role-plays.
- Teach concrete tools: co-regulation techniques, de-escalation skills.
- Encourage families to build a *support village* with peer mentors, community partners, or support groups.

Relational practices for workers to maintain hope and trust:

- Partner with families versus selling to them.
- Provide ongoing reassurance without minimizing .
- Maintain empathy for family’s emotional process.

Closing reflections

Question 14

Reflect: After watching this video, what changes, big or small, feel most important for you to make in your own practice, supervision, or team approach?

Apply: Considering the insights shared by youth and caregivers, which specific actions, habits, or shifts in mindset do you feel inspired to bring back to your daily work?

Purpose:

- Anchors learning in personal and professional growth.

Facilitation notes:

- Encourage participants to reflect on what stood out to them.
- Explore possible shifts in individual practice (strengthening youth voice by giving teens choices in everyday decisions).
- Explore possible shifts in supervision (coaching staff on trauma-attuned practice rather than compliance-based responses).
- Explore possible team or system-level shifts (reframing recruitment messages to reflect what teens value).

Closing script

Thank you for the insight, honesty, and commitment you brought to this conversation. Permanency work is complex and relational by nature, and your reflections today strengthen your capacity to support youth and families with compassion, curiosity, and consistency.

Before you press play

This guide is designed to help you facilitate conversations with youth, families, or child welfare professionals while watching, *When We Have Each Other: Teen Adoption Stories*.

Preparation checklist

- Preview the video before the session.
- Reflect on your audience (youth, families, colleagues).
- Read through the questions and select the most relevant for the conversation goals.
- Consider potential emotional responses and prepare trauma-informed supports.
- Plan for psychological safety and set expectations for respectful dialogue.
- Gather resources for after the session.
- When needed, ensure follow-up support is provided for young people.

Facilitation recommendations

Recommended session time: 60 minutes. Use gentle time checks and invite participants to note any topics that can't be fully explored.

Question selection: Given the depth and complexity of the discussion questions, facilitators are encouraged to select 1–2 questions from each section. Prioritize quality and depth of conversation.

In all conversations, please approach this work with a strengths-based, and nonjudgmental mindset that promotes psychological safety.

- **Youth voice**, choice, and safety come first. Listen, validate, and avoid false promises. Adoption experiences vary, expect a range of reactions. If a young person appears distressed during the session, ensure follow-up support is provided.
- **Encourage families** to stay patient and open to lifelong learning, keeping discussions curious and nonjudgmental. Center youth experience rather than adult expectations.
- **For professionals** promote self-awareness and honest reflection on system challenges while keeping discussions focused on strengths, growth, and possibility.

How to access the video



Direct link: professionals.adoptuskids.org/when-we-have-each-other

Video length: approximately 10 minutes

Accessibility features: captions

Viewing tips:

- Test audio and internet connection before the session.
- Enable captions if participants prefer or need them.
- Consider projecting on a larger screen for group viewing.



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