



Talking Points

The Quality Parenting Initiative is an approach to strengthening foster care, including kinship care, by refocusing on quality parenting for all children in the child welfare system. It is a process designed to develop new strategies and practices, rather than imposing a predetermined set of "best practices."

When parents can't care for their children, the foster or relative family must be able to provide the loving, committed, skilled care that the child needs, working effectively with the system to achieve the best possible permanency option for that child. Both the caregiver's parenting skills and the system's policies and practices should be based on child development research, information and tools.

QPI is an effort *to rebrand* foster care, not simply by changing a logo or an advertisement, but by changing the expectations of and support for foster parents and other caregivers. The key elements of the process are:

- Defining the expectations of caregivers,
- Clearly articulating these expectations (the brand statement), and
- Aligning the system so that those goals can become a reality.

When these changes are accomplished, the new brand becomes the basis for developing communication materials and designing integrated recruitment, training and retention systems.

When QPI is successful, caregivers have a voice, not only in issues that affect the children they are caring for, but also in the way the system treats children and families. Caregivers, agency staff and birth parents work as a team to support children and youth. Caregivers receive the support and training they need to work with children and families and know what is expected as well as what to expect. Systems are then able to select and retain enough excellent caregivers to meet the needs of each child for a home and family.

There are 11 states with over 50 sites in the QPI network that share information and ideas about how to improve parenting and recruit and retain excellent families. They develop policies and practices that are based on current child research to support skilled loving parenting. The major successes of the project have been in systems change and improved relationships. Sites have also reported measurable improvement in outcomes such as:

- Reduced unplanned placement changes;
- Reduced use of group care;
- Reduced numbers of sibling separation; and
- More successful improvements in reunification.

QPI implementation began in July 2016 in Covington and Lafayette regions with statewide implementation completed in May 2017.

Initial implementation included educating the entire Child Welfare system of changes in the foster and adoptive parent system and curriculum and policy development. This included training for staff, stakeholders, foster parents, providers, legal stakeholders, and others. It also included developing online educational resources for staff and foster or adoptive parents, with the goal of improving foster parent recruitment and retention, increasing the quality of the foster care experience for children in foster care and supporting more timely permanency. See www.qpi4kids.org for more information.