

Principles Behind QPI

QPI is a *systems change process* rather than a set of predetermined strategies or activities. QPI's values and principles are the basis for each jurisdiction's "brand statement," a vision of what parenting should be. The three QPI principles are detailed below.

Principle 1: *Consistent excellent parenting and meaningful relationships are the most important services we can provide to children and youth in foster care. Every policy, practice action, and statement the system adopts should strengthen parenting skills and relationships.*

QPI is based on the belief that every child needs to grow up in a caring family and that the primary goal of foster care must be to ensure that children and youth in the system receive excellent parenting every single day through committed, developmentally informed relationships with the adults caring for them. This need for relationships cannot be put on hold while a family recovers from a crisis or until an adoption can be finalized.

Too often, foster parent selection is based on physical requirements - a fire extinguisher in the home, no criminal record, and enough room for an additional bed or crib - rather than the quality of care a family can provide. In contrast, QPI sites base foster parent approval on the ability to care for children and develop policies that empower foster parents to treat a child in their care as their own.

Unless caregivers are treated as key members of the team and their relationships with the children in their care are supported, child welfare agencies cannot attract the families who can and will provide excellent parenting in safe, secure, and supportive homes. In QPI sites, birth families, relative caregivers, foster families, and young people in care ensure that these relationships are given the highest priority.

Principle 2: *Research on child, youth, and brain development and the effects of trauma not only demonstrates the importance of parenting and positive relationships but also provides guidance on how best to support them. Agency policy and practice should be informed by research.*

Research shows that all children placed in out-of-home care need high-quality parenting and positive relationships to thrive and recover from abuse, neglect, and other trauma. Unfortunately, this research is often overlooked or ignored in designing policy and practice in child welfare systems. Efforts to develop one-size-fits-all rules and to avoid the risk result in practices that undermine healing.

QPI incorporates attachment theory and developmental and neurological research into its approach to child welfare. QPI works with experts in these fields to educate staff and caregivers on the impact of this research on daily practice. Additionally, these experts consult on the policies, practices, and legislation proposed at QPI sites.

Principle 3: *The individuals most affected by policies and practices are in the best position to design and implement change so that systems ensure excellent parenting and meaningful relationships for children who enter their care.*

Each jurisdiction must determine for itself how to put the first two principles into practice. While support from agency leaders who acknowledge the need for change is critical, the basic ideas and direction come from those who are most involved in and affected by the system. QPI jurisdictions convene a broad group of stakeholders to define what excellent foster and kinship care means for their community, including birth parents, foster parents, youth, caseworkers, attorneys, court personnel, and representatives from schools, health departments, faith communities, and other sectors of the community. Together, this group develops expectations for providing and supporting excellent parenting for children in out-of-home placements.

From this process, a brand statement, a written statement of the agency's expectations for parenting, is developed. This brand statement provides a roadmap for change and forms the basis for new recruitment and training messages that will attract quality caregivers who understand they are valued and equal members of the team.

Once the brand is defined, stakeholders work together to identify barriers and solutions to improve their foster care system. While the system should have expectations for caregivers, it must also ensure that they have the support and respect they need to provide excellent care. The final task of the diverse group is to identify the policy and practice changes needed to make the brand a reality. Starting with the changes that are easiest to accomplish, this QPI steering committee engages in a long-term process of change that will make their vision a reality.

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