

## What is QPI?

QPI, the Quality Parenting Initiative, is a national movement for foster care change, made up of a network of states, counties and private agencies committed to ensuring that all children in care have excellent parenting and lasting relationships so they can thrive and grow.

QPI is built on the belief that excellent parenting with strong, positive relationships are the best intervention we can offer children to enable them to heal as they grow up to become adults. Creating a system that ensures excellent parenting requires the support and involvement of birth families, relative caregivers, foster families, young people, and others in the child welfare system.

Research has demonstrated that children and youth need consistent and effective parenting to thrive. When parents cannot care for their children, another caregiver, in partnership with the child welfare system, must be able to provide loving, committed, and skilled care that enables the children to feel trust in their relationships with the adults in their lives.

### A Change in Mindset

Children who enter the foster care system have had traumatic experiences far different from the experiences of ordinary childhood. They are removed from their parents, homes, and neighborhoods without understanding why or what happens next, losing meaningful connections to siblings and familiar adults.

To undo this harm, we must organize the child welfare system around a simple principle: *every child deserves excellent parenting every day*. How would that system look different from the one we have now? What would it mean to measure success in terms of our ability to maintain and build strong relationships for children in the care of the state or county government? Would we select, train, and support families in a different way? How would policies and practices that disrupt relationships change? These are the questions that the Youth Law Center's Quality Parenting Initiative asks jurisdictions to consider and address to transform child welfare systems.

QPI is based on three core principles:

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.

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.
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.

QPI is an approach adopted by a network of sites who share information and ideas about how to improve parenting as well as recruit and retain excellent foster families. It is an effort to rebrand foster care, not simply by changing a logo or an advertisement but by changing the agency's expectations of and support for caregivers and the caregivers' expectations of the agency. Participating child welfare systems commit to fully supporting excellent parenting by putting first the needs of the child for strong relationships.

The key elements of the QPI approach are:

- Defining the expectations of and by caregivers,
- Clearly communicating these expectations to all staff, caregivers, and other stakeholders, as well as the general public, and
- Aligning system policy and practice with those expectations

All stakeholders in each jurisdiction must work together to reshape their culture, practices, and policies; encourage active and meaningful communication; build relationships among birth families, relative caregivers, foster families, youth, and the child welfare agency; and ensure that children have access to the childhood and teenage experiences that will help them heal, grow, and flourish.

When QPI is successful, caregivers have a voice. Birth and foster families work together as a team with agency staff and other stakeholders to develop consensus about a definition of excellent parenting. Caregivers receive the support and training they need to work with children and families, to understand what is expected of them, and to know what to expect from the system. Agencies are then able to select and retain enough excellent caregivers to meet each child's needs for a home and family.

QPI works to refocus child welfare systems and help kin, foster, and other resource families become expert parents—to help them become professionals in parenting. When these changes are accomplished, outcomes for children, youth, and families improve.

Launched in 2008 in Florida, QPI has expanded to more than 75 jurisdictions in 8 states: California, Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Minnesota, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Texas.

The QPI staff supports jurisdictions throughout this process and provides access to a range of implementation and advocacy resources. Our staff provide strategic consulting and organizational support while jurisdictions develop expectations, identify barriers, and create an implementation plan. QPI staff also provide ongoing consultation and technical assistance with a primary focus on building a network and community of sites across the working county. In some areas, QPI trains and supports internal local champions who can support and maintain the process in their own jurisdictions.

For more information, visit [www.qpi4kids.org](http://www.qpi4kids.org) or email us at [info@qpi4kids.org](mailto:info@qpi4kids.org)

December 2020