

The Family Bound Program: A Toolkit for Preparing Teens for Permanent Family Connections

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Research suggests that all teens need adult role models and family support in order to develop into productive and functioning adults. And yet, teens in public care are often considered inappropriate for family connections. They are often automatically slated for “independent living” until they “age out.”

The goal of the ***Family Bound Program*** is to help teens experience and understand *interdependent living*, a more compassionate, yet realistic goal. The Program provides tools for child welfare professionals who are willing to meet the challenges and get past all of the limiting precepts to ensure permanent family connections for teens.

The ***Family Bound Program*** is a unique curriculum that prepares teens for family life. It provides:

- ❑ *Education and preparation about family life* in nine, two-hour workshop sessions about what it means to be part of a family and the responsibilities of family life.
- ❑ *Experience of family life* through a kick-off “Pizza Party” and five special family weekends with “practice” families who may be a foster, adoptive, kin, birth, or “Bridge” families.
- ❑ *Guidance on recruiting and training Bridge Families.* Bridge Families have never met their teen before but have been recruited to work with a teen in the Program. The Bridge Family concept is unique to the ***Family Bound Program*** but can be useful in many different contexts.
- ❑ *Three step-by step guides:*

Group Leaders Guide for Working with Teens -- a step-by-step guide to the nine workshop sessions and to working with participating families.

The Family Bound Program: Handbook for Teens to use as they go through the program.

Welcome In: Families’ Guide to the Family Bound Program for families to use as they participate in the program.

Who Can Benefit? Although the material covered can become personally challenging to many youths, ability to function in a group setting is the only indicator of readiness. The curriculum has been used effectively with teens from age 13 – 20 in an extensive pilot phase. Groups of no more than ten teens with two group leaders work best.

Introducing the *Family Bound Program* Curriculum. The *Family Bound Program* is not just a support group for teens who need (or need to improve) permanent family connections. It is a therapeutic, educational process that teaches concrete skills and provides participants with the opportunity to open up avenues for personal growth through healing relationships. These lessons are reinforced in the opportunities to practice on the family weekend visits.

The final phase Program provides support for both social workers and teens for the search for permanent family connections. The search effort often involves discussion with each teen and an exploration of the teen's past to establish whether and where there are potential family ties. This connection may be in the teen's life now, or a family resource may need to be recruited. Either way, the *Family Bound Program* is committed to finding/developing stable and loving people who can serve as mentors and role models

The *Family Bound Program* is the second program in The Toolkit Series – a set of curricula that provide training materials and guides for child welfare professionals working with children and families on permanency.

The Workshop Sessions

Session One: The Real Truth About Families identifies misconceptions about family life

Session Two: “What Are Families For, Anyway?” focuses on understanding the purposes that a family serves and the responsibilities that need to be assumed by each family member

Session Three: “What Kind of Family is Best for Me?” teaches teens ways of getting along despite differences with their families. Teens learn and practice the “Four Steps to Negotiation and Compromise” and the importance of diversity.

Session Four: Fitting In focuses on the importance of asking for directions in a new situation, on learning the families' rules, and on the teens' expectations/reactions to these rules.

Session Five: Staying In encourages teens begin to acknowledge their personal values and to understand that everyone possesses strengths and values.

Session Six: Loss is a Part of Living teaches the five stages of grief and helps teens identify actions that promote the grieving process as well as new strategies for facilitating grief work.

Session Seven: “I've Been a Lot of Places” underscores the importance of teens' recapturing their histories, identifying areas of their lives that they have questions about, and finding ways to get their questions answered.

Session Eight: “I've Learned a Lot of Things” teaches that while most people have regrets about past events, teens can help ensure positive outcomes following conflict in the future.

Session Nine: Looking Back – Moving Forward helps teens affirm themselves and what they've learned in the *Family Bound Program* by talking about the positive ways others in the group have viewed them. Session Nine ends with a graduation ceremony.

To order the *Family Bound Program*, complete and mail the Book Order Form or order through the online catalogue at www.thetoolkit.org.