



Strength-Based Child Welfare Words and Expressions*

The words and expressions used in child welfare are often passed down from one generation of staff to another and thus are also commonly used by families and children. To continue the focus on strengths, the following historical words and expressions have been reframed to convey a more positive approach.



Historical Words & Expressions →	Preferred Strength-Based Words & Expressions
Aging Out	Connecting to a relationship that is safe, nurturing, and intended to last a lifetime Every young person who leaves foster care must be connected to at least one adult who is committed to providing that young person with a safe, nurturing, and enduring relationship.
Caretakers	Caregivers Recognizes the care that is provided, such as a kinship caregiver.
Continuum of services	Array of services Means encircling the child and family with essential services and getting the right service(s) to the child and family immediately.
Damaged children	Children who have experienced trauma; children with special needs Avoid labeling children negatively.
Foster or adoptive home	Foster or adoptive family Focus is on the individuals who comprise the family, not on the home. In other words, it is the family (not the home) who will heal or hurt children.
Going through training	Participating in training Individuals must be actively involved in the training process, so they participate in the activities.
Hard-to-place children	Safe and nurturing families are hard to find Instead of making children seem responsible for a shortage of qualified foster and adoptive families, this places the responsibility on communities and agencies to identify and support quality foster and adoptive families.
House and home study; home visit	Mutual family assessment; consultation A process in which agencies identify the competencies that prospective foster and adoptive parents need. Together, they mutually assess an individual's or family's ability, resources, and willingness to be team members in child protection and trauma-informed care of children.
Natural parents or natural family	Parents, or birth parents, or birth family, or primary family, or family of origin Parents and family members may not need to be labeled, however if they should be identified, using the term "natural" implies that other families are unnatural.
Permanency	Connecting children to relationships that are safe, nurturing, and intended to last a lifetime A goal for family foster care; this outcome focuses on ensuring that every child leaves foster care status connected to at least one adult who is committed to providing a relationship that will be safe, nurturing, and intended to last a lifetime.



Historical Words & Expressions →	Preferred Strength-Based Words & Expressions
Placing children with foster or adoptive families	Joining children with foster and adoptive families Instead of “placing” children as if they are objects, children “join” foster and adoptive families, and the entire family is supported.
Problems or weaknesses	Strengths and needs Identifies positive areas to build upon when addressing issues of concern.
Recruitment and retention	Develop and support After being recruited, foster and adoptive parents/families must be developed and supported, commensurate with the mission of the agency.
Removal	Separation Children and parents are separated; this term implies the possibility of reuniting the family.
Screening or weeding out	Selecting in Emphasizes a positive approach to inviting foster and adoptive parents into the agency as team members in child protection.
Services for foster and adoptive parents	Supports for foster and adoptive parents The goal of family foster care is to provide services to children and birth parents. Foster parents require supports to fulfill their role as members of a professional team.
Substitute care	Family foster care Recognizes that no one can “substitute” for our birth history and also recognizes that the strength of foster care is that it offers family living.
Visits or visitation	Family time Emphasizes the significance of quality time in which parents can practice parenting skills that are appropriate to their children’s age and stage of development.

* Developed by Eileen Mayers Pasztor, DSW and Eshale Williams, PsyD, LMFT; courtesy of CWLA’s *PRIDE Model of Practice* to Develop and Support Foster and Adoptive (resource) Parents as Team Members in Child Protection and Trauma Informed Care of Children.