

Then & Now



Capacity Building
CENTER FOR STATES

Looking Back and Moving Forward
in Support of Children, Youth, and Families

Activity and Discussion Guide

The journeys of children, youth, and families in child welfare are seldom a straight line. Typically, there are highs and lows and winding paths in between.

The Capacity Building Center for States' **Then and Now: Looking Back and Moving Forward in Support of Children, Youth, and Families** video series ("Then and Now") features five sets of digital stories that present family experiences at two points in time. Four adoptive parents and one young adult formerly in care tell their personal stories and speak candidly about moments of joy and accomplishment as well as struggles and sadness. Examining family experiences at different time periods can provide valuable insight into needed supports and services. Looking backward and forward provides a chance to identify actions and services that made a difference and to consider missed opportunities for what might have been helpful.



Who Can Use the Discussion Guide and How?

The discussion guide and videos can support group learning, individual coaching, and action planning by a variety of individuals:

- ◆ **Foster care or adoption program managers** can use the resources in group meetings and community forums to explore how the child welfare system can best address the complex needs of children, youth, and families and ensure that they feel connected and supported. Discussions can contribute to efforts to strengthen an agency culture that values well-being alongside safety and permanency.
- ◆ **Supervisors** can use the resources in team meetings or one-on-one coaching with workers to develop strategies for making connections, helping children, youth, and families access needed supports and services, and promoting self-care.
- ◆ **Training managers** can integrate the resources into preservice or inservice training for child welfare workers, supervisors, and resource parents. The discussion questions can facilitate critical thinking on investing in support and building resilience.
- ◆ **Recruitment and licensing specialists** can integrate the resources into outreach, training, or "ice breaker" activities with kinship caregivers and other current or prospective resource families. The videos and discussions can prompt reflection on the realities of parenting children and youth exposed to trauma and the importance of advocating for supports.

While the guide presents activity and discussion guidance for onsite sessions, the content can be adapted for virtual use.

Use This Guide to Create an Optimal Learning Experience

Combine this discussion guide with the “Then and Now” videos to spark conversations and critical thinking about:

- ◆ **Promoting child and family well-being** through connections, trauma-informed supports, and ongoing services
- ◆ **Building youth, caregiver, and worker resilience** and sustaining motivation in the face of challenges

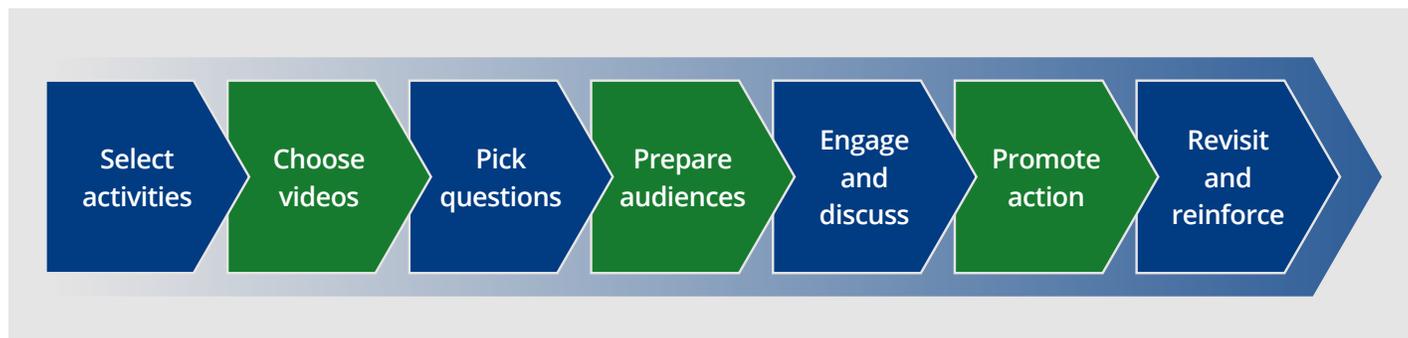
In both areas, protective factor approaches can provide a useful lens for strengthening families and supporting a healthy workforce.

Plan to use one or a combination of the three activities in this guide to help achieve the changes you want to see.

Activity	Learning Objectives
1 Invest in supports for future well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Deepen awareness of the complex needs of children, youth, and families◆ Recognize the importance of ongoing supports and trauma-informed services to child and family well-being◆ Explain how supportive relationships and connections—including those with birth families—affect youth◆ Identify service gaps and determine strategies to fill those gaps
2 Foster resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Consider the importance of resilience to youth, caregivers, and workers◆ Explain how challenges experienced by children, youth, and families may affect caregivers and workers◆ Identify opportunities for improving resilience and self-care among youth, caregivers, and workers
3 Strengthen protective factor thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none">◆ Understand how protective factor frameworks can be used to identify strategies for strengthening families, building resilience, and supporting a healthy workforce

Pair the activities with one or more of the “Then and Now” videos described in appendix A and found online at <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/foster-care-permanency/then-now-videos/>

Maximize the impact of the videos and activities by following the seven steps shown below.



Activity 1: Invest in Supports for Future Well-Being

Use Activity 1 to help audiences understand how trauma-informed supports, connections, and postadoption services can contribute to child and family well-being. This activity underscores the concept that investing now will help build reserves for later challenges.

Video Viewing and Initial Discussion

1. Begin the session by asking participants to discuss these questions:
 - ◆ What does the term “well-being” mean to you?
 - ◆ How can child welfare agencies strengthen child and family well-being?
2. Explain to participants that they will be watching videos that include two stories about the same individuals—one from several years ago and another from more recently. Ask participants to take notes as they watch. Using the handout in appendix B, participants should identify:
 - ◆ **Examples of supports, services, or connections** that helped the children, youth, and family and made a positive difference in their lives (e.g., counseling, faith community)
 - ◆ **Gaps in supports, services, or connections** that might have helped to promote well-being or buffer negative outcomes
3. Begin to show the video set, pausing at the end of the “then” video to allow for notetaking. Continue with the companion “now” video and again ask participants to take additional notes using the handout.
4. Bring participants together in small groups. (This can be modified for individual coaching or virtual training, as appropriate.)
 - ◆ Ask participants to compare notes on examples and gaps in their small groups.
 - ◆ Ask a lead from each group to report out items from their collective list and record new entries for the full group to see.
5. Pose discussion questions. Find examples below and in appendix A.
 - ◆ What highs (achievements, moments of joy) and lows (challenges, difficult circumstances) stood out to you in this set of stories?
 - ◆ How did services and supports appear to contribute to child and family well-being? (Refer to the collective list of supports that helped.)
 - ◆ What role did community connections play in supporting well-being?
 - ◆ How did relationships with birth family members affect well-being?
 - ◆ How might things have evolved differently if the gaps in supports, services, and connections had been filled earlier? (Refer to the collective list of supports that could have helped.)
 - ◆ What could have been done to better prepare young adults for their adult lives?
6. Repeat steps 3 through 5 if additional videos are selected.

Promoting well-being is central to helping children, youth, and families thrive. According to *ACYF's Framework for Social and Emotional Well-Being*, well-being relates to meeting needs in four key areas:

- ◆ Physical health and development
- ◆ Cognitive functioning
- ◆ Emotional and behavioral functioning
- ◆ Social functioning and relationships

Child abuse and neglect and related trauma may have long-term negative effects in each of these areas. Yet child welfare supports, services, and connections can help buffer the negative effects and promote well-being.

For more information and resources on well-being, visit <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/well-being/>



7. Discuss the concept of investing today to build reserves for tomorrow. Ask for everyday examples of this concept (e.g., putting aside money for a “rainy day”). Discuss the following:
- ◆ How can we invest in ongoing services, supports, and connections so that children, youth, and families may draw on reserves during challenging times?
 - ◆ How do we know when children, youth, and families have sufficient reserves?

Further Reflection and Application

Facilitate discussion and promote future action using selected questions from below or appendix A.

► Questions for Child Welfare Agency Program Managers and Staff

- ◆ What did you learn from the videos and discussion that may change the way you work with children, youth, and families?
- ◆ What strategies can you and your agency use to ensure that children and families have needed services, supports, and connections to draw on before and after adoption?
- ◆ How can you and your agency encourage supportive relationships, including relationships with birth families?
- ◆ What can you and your agency do to make sure that children and youth who appear to be doing well—as well as those with more visible challenges—get what they need for the long-term?
- ◆ What one approach can you start immediately? What steps will you take? What support do you need to move forward?

► Questions for Caregivers

- ◆ What struck you or surprised you in these stories?
- ◆ What did you learn that may change the way you approach parenting or caregiving?
- ◆ What services, supports, and connections will help the children and youth in your care thrive?
- ◆ What services, supports, and connections do you need to help you in providing care?
- ◆ What actions can you take to access needed services and supports and strengthen connections? Where do you need assistance? What steps will you take to move forward?



Resources for More Information on Child and Family Well-Being

- ◆ ["Prepermanency Services for Adoptive and Guardianship Families,"](#) Capacity Building Center for States (2017)
- ◆ [Well-Being webpage,](#) Child Welfare Information Gateway
- ◆ [Well-Being webpage,](#) Capacity Building Center for States

Activity 2: Foster Resilience

Select Activity 2 to encourage audiences to think about strategies that foster resilience in youth, caregivers, and workers.

Video Viewing, Drawing Exercise, and Discussion

1. Begin the session by asking participants to discuss the following question:
 - ◆ What does the term “resilience” mean to you? Why is it important?
2. Explain to participants that they will be watching videos that include two stories about the same individuals—one from several years ago and another from more recently. Josh’s story is a good choice for this activity. Show the selected “Then and Now” video.
3. Ask participants by themselves or in small groups to think about the youth during the “now” digital story:
 - ◆ Draw a picture that conveys what the youth is thinking or feeling. This can be done through facial expressions or symbols (e.g., weights on shoulders).
 - ◆ Now add to the picture with illustrations of what may have helped the youth to handle challenging circumstances.
4. Divide participants into pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss their drawings. Ask for volunteers to share their drawings with the full group.
5. Discuss as a group using the questions below or in appendix A:
 - ◆ What might have been done to help the youth in the video develop the inner strength to cope with everyday stresses and larger crises?
 - ◆ What role can supportive relationships play in helping youth meet challenging circumstances and rebound when things are not going well?
 - ◆ How can caregivers and workers build youth confidence to handle unexpected difficulties?
6. Using the same video, or after showing another one, ask participants to think about the turns in events from the perspective of the caregiver or a child welfare caseworker whose caseload includes the youth or family. Ask participants by themselves or in small groups to:
 - ◆ Draw a picture to convey what the caregiver (or worker) is thinking and feeling
 - ◆ Illustrate what the caregiver (or worker) could do to support themselves in this scenario
7. Divide participants into pairs or small groups and ask them to share their drawings. Ask for volunteers to show their drawings to the full group.
8. Discuss the following questions as a group:
 - ◆ How might the challenges and difficulties experienced by the children and youth in the videos affect the emotions and well-being of their caregivers (or workers)?
 - ◆ What can caregivers (or workers) do to take care of themselves and build their own resiliency to handle stress and challenges?
 - ◆ What are similarities in the ways that caregivers (or workers) can help children and youth strengthen their resilience and strengthen their own?
 - ◆ What happened in the story that might provide the caregiver (or worker) hope or optimism? How can hope or optimism serve as an “anchor” in the face of difficult circumstances?

Resilience relates to the ability to adapt to adversity.

Resilience in children and youth allows them to cope and “bounce back” after difficulties ranging from daily stress to significant threats and traumatic losses. Promoting confidence, connections, and contributions are among the keys to fostering resilience in children and youth (Ginsberg, 2020).

Child welfare professionals and caregivers often experience stress and secondary trauma that create adverse conditions (McFadden, Campbell, and Taylor, 2013). As such, it is important for caregivers and workers to focus on self-care and build resilience to avoid burn out.

Further Reflection and Application

Facilitate discussion and promote future action using selected questions from below or appendix A.

► Questions for Child Welfare Agency Program Managers and Supervisors

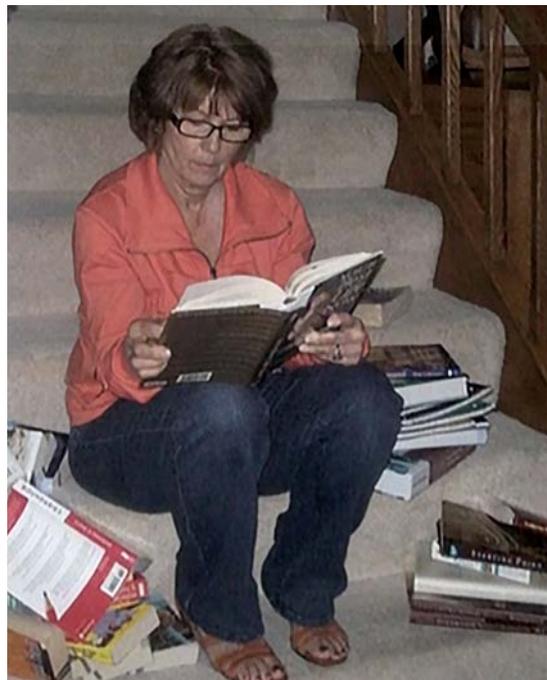
- ◆ What strategies can you and your agency introduce or enhance to support youth resilience and better prepare youth for meeting life's challenges?
- ◆ What strategies can you and your agency introduce or enhance to support worker well-being and resilience during challenging cases? To support caregivers?
- ◆ What opportunities exist to foster connections and supportive relationships?
- ◆ What is one action you can begin immediately to build resilience? What steps will you take?

► Questions for Caregivers/Resource Parents

- ◆ What strategies can you use to support the resilience of youth in your care?
- ◆ What strategies can you use to take care of yourself, particularly when children and youth in your care are experiencing difficulties? How can you manage stress?
- ◆ What networks or relationships can you draw on during difficult times?
- ◆ What can you do to remind yourself of why you wanted to become a caregiver, or foster parent, or adoptive parent?
- ◆ What is one thing you can commit to doing this week to build your inner reserves?

► Questions for Child Welfare Workers

- ◆ What strategies can you and your agency introduce or enhance to support youth resilience and better prepare youth for meeting life's challenges?
- ◆ What strategies can you use to take care of yourself, particularly when working with youth or families that are experiencing difficulties or when a case has undesired outcomes?
- ◆ What do you do to remind yourself of why you do the work you do?
- ◆ What can your coworkers, supervisors, or managers do to further support you?
- ◆ What is one thing you can commit to doing this week to build your inner reserves?



Resources for More Information on ...

Child and Youth Resilience

- ◆ ["Building Resilience in Children and Teens,"](#) Child Welfare Information Gateway
- ◆ [Building Resilience webpage,](#) American Academy of Pediatrics

Workforce Well-Being and Resilience

- ◆ [The Child Welfare Worker Safety Guide](#) [See section on Emotional Trauma and Resilience], Capacity Building Center for States (2017)
- ◆ [Workforce Well-Being and Self-Care webpage,](#) Child Welfare Information Gateway
- ◆ [Secondary Trauma and Child Welfare Staff: Guidance for Supervisors and Administrators,](#) National Child Traumatic Stress Network (2016)

Activity 3: Strengthen Protective Factors

Select Activity 3 and the companion discussion questions to build on Activities 1 and 2 and make connections to protective factor frameworks.

Protective Factor Supplement to Activity 1

1. Assign prereading on protective factors. (Find ideas below under resources for more information.)
2. Ask participants to discuss the following questions:
 - ◆ How can protective factors support child and family well-being?
 - ◆ How does the concept of investing and building reserves connect to protective factor approaches?
 - ◆ Which protective factors did you see featured in the “Then and Now” videos? (Review lists of “supports that helped” and match them to the five categories of protective factors in the highlight box.)
 - ◆ What strategies can you and your agency use to help children, youth, and parents strengthen protective factors (or you as a caregiver to help children and youth in your care) in the following areas:
 - To build **resilience**? Manage stress? Recognize inner strength? Feel hopeful?
 - To form **social connections**? Build supportive relationships? Find spiritual support? Feel empowered to “give back”?
 - To find and access **concrete supports** and services when needed? Navigate community service systems?
 - To improve caregiver **knowledge of parenting and child/youth development**? Explore questions on how best to respond to a child’s needs?
 - To develop **social and emotional competence**? Communicate clearly? Recognize and express emotions effectively?
3. Follow up later and ask participants to share one example of how they are strengthening protective factors among children, youth, and parents.

Protective Factor Supplement to Activity 2

Assign prereading on protective factors and self-care. (For example, [CSSP’s Taking Care of Yourself: Putting Protective Factors into Play for Yourself](#) or other resources listed below).

4. Ask participants to discuss the following questions:
 - ◆ How can protective factor approaches help us think about how we take care of ourselves?

Protective factors are conditions or attributes of individuals, families, communities, and the larger society that reduce risk and promote the healthy development and well-being of children, youth, and families (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2020).

There are several [different protective factors approaches used in child welfare](#). The factors below are adapted from the [Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework](#):

- ◆ Personal resilience
- ◆ Social connections
- ◆ Concrete supports
- ◆ Knowledge of parenting and child development (of parent)
- ◆ Social and emotional competence (of child or youth)

Several Children’s Bureau resources, including the annual [Prevention Month Resource Guide](#), also feature a sixth factor—nurturing and attachment.

While protective factors approaches are often associated with prevention efforts, they can be useful throughout child welfare practice. Practitioners working with children and youth in foster care can help build protective strengths that help them navigate challenging circumstances (Development Services Group, Inc., & Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2015). Child welfare professionals and caregivers also can apply protective factor thinking to their own self-care and personal resilience (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2018).



- ◆ In the “Then and Now” stories, which protective factors supported caregivers?
 - ◆ What strategies can you use to strengthen protective factors:
 - To build personal **resilience**? Relax and feel calm? Manage stress?
 - To form **social connections**? Build supportive relationships (with peers in similar positions or through outside networks)? Find spiritual support? Be empowered to “give back”?
 - To find and access **concrete supports** and services when needed? Navigate service systems? Reach out to supervisors or agency contacts for assistance?
 - To build **knowledge of parenting and child/youth development**?
 - To support the development of **social and emotional competence** among children in your lives?
5. Follow up later and ask participants to share one thing they’ve done in the last week to take care of themselves and strengthen their resilience.

Resources for More Information on Protective Factors

- ◆ ["Protective Capacities and Protective Factors: Common Ground for Protecting Children and Strengthening Families,"](#) Capacity Building Center for States (2016).
- ◆ [2019/2020 Prevention Resource Guide,](#) Child Welfare Information Gateway and FRIENDS National Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (2019) [For resource parents, see “Keeping Your Family Strong” tip sheet in the guide.]
- ◆ ["Protective Factors Approaches in Child Welfare,"](#) Child Welfare Information Gateway (2020)
- ◆ ["About Strengthening Families and the Protective Factors Framework,"](#) Center for the Study of Social Policy (n.d.)
- ◆ [Protective Factors to Promote Well-Being webpage,](#) Child Welfare Information Gateway



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Then & Now

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Appendix A

“Then and Now” Digital Story Descriptions

Following are brief overviews of each of the five “Then and Now” digital story sets. The video-specific discussion questions can be used for individual viewing or as supplements to the activities in this guide. The videos are available at <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/foster-care-permanency/then-now-videos/>

Joan's Story

(6:27 minutes)



Provides a “then and now” snapshot of a grandmother, Joan, and her adopted grandson, Chad. This set of digital stories underscores the importance of community connections and ongoing supports to child and family well-being.

Questions to Consider

- ▶ How does “surround-sound parenting” help Chad?
- ▶ What other services and supports contribute to Joan and Chad’s well-being?
- ▶ Think about Joan’s analogy of children and Lego sets. What can agencies and resource parents do to set a strong foundation for how the pieces come together?

Josh's Story

(7:26 minutes)



Relays the highs and lows of Josh, a young adult with a passion to help children in foster care. While poised for success as he graduates college, Josh meets challenges later in life after the loss of critical supports. In this set of digital stories, Josh points to trauma-informed strategies that build youth resilience and help create “reserves” for when crises hit.

Questions to Consider

- ▶ What factors contribute to Josh’s achievements and struggles?
- ▶ What additional supports might have helped Josh navigate his transition to adulthood?
- ▶ What can help youth before their “survival mechanisms go bankrupt”?
- ▶ How does giving back help Josh?
- ▶ Think about Josh’s list of suggested strategies at the end of the video. In your role, which strategies can you help move forward? How?

Melissa's Story

(6:11 minutes)



Tells the story of Melissa and her two sons, David and Emilio, following their adoption. This set of digital stories underscores the need for connections, educational supports, and postadoption services.

Questions to Consider

- ▶ What types of services and supports did David, Emilio, Tim, and Melissa need to strengthen child and family well-being?
- ▶ What types of support might have helped David and Emilio in their transition to adulthood?
- ▶ Where did they encounter barriers to services and supports?
- ▶ Think about Melissa's comments about complicated family relationships. What might have made a difference in the connections among families?

Jammie's Story

(6:45 minutes)



Addresses the importance of being open to agency supports and the necessity of self-care in working through family transitions and meeting family needs. In this set of digital stories, Jammie, a kinship parent caring for her niece's children, reflects on family connections and supportive services.

Questions to Consider

- ▶ What are some of the challenges experienced by Jammie and her family during the transition to adoption?
- ▶ Where does Jammie find strength to meet challenges?
- ▶ Think about Jammie's comments about their "tug-of-war placement." What might help support children and parents during such experiences?

Shary's Story

(7:10 minutes)



Reveals the complexity of family dynamics through the experiences of Shary, a kinship parent caring for her niece, Brianna, and her grandson, Random. In the first digital story, Brianna seeks to reconnect the pieces in her family puzzle. The second digital story highlights Random's unflappable resilience despite medical challenges.

Questions to Consider

- ▶ How did Brianna's experience reconnecting with her parents affect her well-being and sense of self?
- ▶ What contributes to Random's resilience?
- ▶ Think about the complex family dynamics in Shary's story. How can agencies support kin in caring for children with diverse needs?

Appendix B

Use the following template for taking notes while watching “Then and Now” videos.

Video title:	
Supports That Helped	Missing Supports That Could Have Helped

Video title:	
Supports That Helped	Missing Supports That Could Have Helped