

GALLUP®



Americans' Views of U.S. Foster Care

Elevating Black Americans' Perspectives and Experiences



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LETTER FROM KIDSAVE

The disproportionate representation of Black children in foster care demands our immediate attention. Black children are overrepresented in foster care 1.6 times¹ their general population rate and are more likely to experience prolonged stays, multiple placements, and less chance of reunification or adoption than their white counterparts.² This crisis erodes trust in our institutions, perpetuates inequality and deprives our children of opportunities to thrive.

The consequences of this crisis are not limited to the individuals involved; they affect us all. By increasing the rate at which Black children find permanent families, we can create a more equitable and inclusive society with numerous benefits. Stable family environments help children perform better in school, secure jobs and break the cycle of poverty, benefiting our entire society. Family stability also leads to healthier children, reducing the need for costly interventions and social services, thus lessening the burden on public resources.

Kidsave's EMBRACE Project — **Expanding Meaningful Black Relationships And Creating Equity** — was created to identify potential solutions. Kidsave partnered with Gallup to understand the barriers to foster care and adoption for all children, especially Black children. In addition to this study, Kidsave has assembled a diverse, volunteer task force of policy professionals and child welfare advocates to propose transformative policies and programs for Black children that leverage what we've uncovered. Core support for EMBRACE was provided by our funding partners, including The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, The Leslie Alexander Foundation, and Conrad N. Hilton Foundation and the Foundation's Foster Youth Initiative.

Through the EMBRACE Project's next phase, our task force is exploring a multifaceted approach to addressing this crisis — from education and mental health support to policy and practice reform. State and federal governments must address systemic issues in legislation to be more supportive of Black families and foster youth, as well as cultural competency for non-Black families. Foster care organizations need to improve their recruitment of Black adoptive families and ensure all potential adoptive families receive adequate training on racial bias and culturally responsive care. Meaningful mentoring opportunities must be provided as well, so more Black foster youth and adults can engage through this channel. The media also has a role to play in educating the public by uplifting the positive stories of Black families and dispelling harmful stereotypes.

By tackling this crisis head on and addressing it with a data-driven, compassionate approach, we can create a brighter future for all children and a more just society for everyone. It is time for our country's institutions, agencies, corporations and communities to unite, set aside differences and ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow and thrive in a loving, stable environment.

Sincerely,



Shantay Armstrong

Strategic Communications Manager: DEI



Randi Thompson

CEO & President

- ¹ *The AFCARS report.* (2022). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-29.pdf>
- ² *What impacts placement stability?* (2023, May 12). Casey Family Programs. <https://www.casey.org/placement-stability-impacts/#:~:text=The%20importance%20of%20placement%20stability,-Child%20development%20research&text=Children%20in%20out%20of%2Dhome,transition%20into%20permanency%20without%20delay>



INTRODUCTION

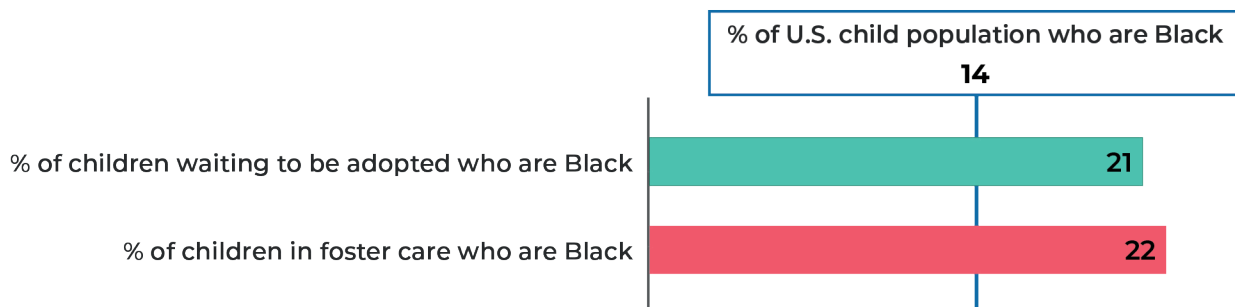
More than 391,000 children and youth are currently in the U.S. foster care system, and a safe, stable home is critical to their wellbeing.³ Yet one in every 10 children (11%) don't have a stable placement with a family, and instead they are living in a group home, institution or supervised independent living. Almost three in 10 (28%) children in foster care are looking for an adoptive family and for many of them (17%), biological parental rights have already been terminated.⁴

The need is even greater for Black children in foster care. Black youth make up 22% of children in U.S. foster care, even though they represent just 14% of American children, and are less likely to find a permanent home through adoption than children of other racial backgrounds.⁵ Black caregivers who can provide culturally responsive care — as foster parents, mentors or adoptive parents — can make a big difference in Black children's lives and help to overcome the disproportionate need for caregivers.

CHART 1

Black Children in Foster Care vs. General Population

Black children are disproportionately represented in foster care and amount to about a fifth of those who are waiting to be adopted from foster care.



³ Ibid.

⁴ *The AFCARS report*. (2022). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-29.pdf>

⁵ Ibid.

In 2023 Gallup partnered with Kidsave, an organization that helps find mentoring connections and adoptive families for older children, to conduct a study as part of its EMBRACE Project. Through this partnership, the study's goal was to better understand how the American public — especially Black Americans — view the foster care system and adoption from foster care. This study is based on a nationwide sample of 5,469 Americans — with an oversample of 1,563 Black Americans to ensure that Black perspectives are represented with depth and precision — who shared their perceptions, knowledge, experiences and opinions related to foster care and adoption. The data are weighted to be representative of the overall U.S. adult population.

This study shows that Americans face several critical barriers when it comes to fostering or adopting: **a lack of resources or training, not being able to meet the home or living situation requirements, and concern about emotional or behavioral challenges with the child.** In addition to these barriers, **Black Americans more often cite the amount of money required and racial or ethnic discrimination** as further obstacles to involvement with foster care than non-Black Americans.

Results from this study are intended to help increase the number of foster and adoptive parents available for children in need of care by identifying the biggest barriers to mentoring, fostering and adopting, especially for Black potential caregivers. The study's emphasis on Black Americans' views and experiences provides a deeper understanding of how these experiences and perspectives can be leveraged to address the systemic barriers and encourage greater involvement with the foster care system.

The EMBRACE Project and Voices of Black Americans

To meet the need for more Black caregivers and improve outcomes for Black children in foster care, Kidsave launched the EMBRACE Project. The EMBRACE Project (Expanding Meaningful Black Relationships and Creating Equity) is a multiyear, research-driven effort to better understand and improve the long-term health and success for Black youth in foster care. As a cornerstone of the EMBRACE Project, the findings reported in this study highlight the perspectives of Black Americans surrounding foster care and adoption. **To further elevate their stories, this report includes selected findings from 50 interviews with Black adults in two major U.S. cities: Houston and Los Angeles.** These cities are among the operational homes of Kidsave and they represent areas which serve a large number of children in foster care. Interviews with Black residents in these communities reveal experiences that are specific to these geographies. However, their insights also reflect greater themes seen nationwide in the survey data, across many communities and Americans of all racial backgrounds.



KEY FINDINGS

The top findings nationally are summarized below, as well as the unique findings among Black Americans.

OVERALL NATIONAL TRENDS

1 Knowledge and Perceptions of U.S. Foster Care

Americans who know more about the foster care system have more positive feelings toward it.

- Nearly two-thirds of all adults (63%) know little or nothing about the U.S. foster care system, and about one in four (27%) have positive feelings about the system.
- Those who know nothing about foster care are less likely to feel positively toward foster care, compared to those who say they know a lot about the foster care system (15% vs. 54%).

Equal treatment for children in care is key to positive perceptions of the foster care system overall.

- Adults who trust that the foster care system gives equal treatment to biological parents and children based on their race or ethnicity are much more likely to also have a positive or very positive perception of the system overall (46-51%), compared to adults who disagree that the system provides equal treatment to biological families or children (14-15%).

2 Significant Barriers to Providing Care

- Need for resources and training: Forty-five percent of adults rate insufficient training and resources as a major barrier to providing foster care.
- Home or living situation: The changes a potential caregiver would have to make to their home or living situation are perceived as major barriers to both fostering (42%) and adopting from foster care (41%).
- Child's emotions and behaviors: Four in 10 Americans (44%) say concern about emotional and behavioral challenges is a major barrier to providing foster care.

3 Encouraging Fostering and Adoption

- While just over half (54%) of the population have considered providing foster care, a majority (68%) don't know if they are eligible to do so.
- Participating in a program to connect with children in foster care increases the odds of also adopting from foster care by seven times, even among those who have never provided foster care.

TRENDS AMONG BLACK AMERICANS

1 Black Americans report knowing more about foster care and adoption from foster care than Americans of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Black adults are also more likely to report they have participated in a program with children in foster care and that they have thought a lot about adopting from foster care.

- Forty-six percent of Black Americans say they know some or a lot about foster care, compared to 37% of Americans overall.
- One in four Black adults have thought a lot about adopting from foster care (26%), compared to about one in six Americans overall (18%).
- Sixteen percent of Black Americans have participated in a program to work with children in foster care, compared to the national rate of 11%.

2 Black Americans report lower levels of confidence in specific aspects of the U.S. foster care system.

- Seventy-one percent agree the foster care system could do more to help biological families stay together, compared to 59% of all adults.
- They are also the least likely to agree the foster care system supports children in need of care, regardless of the child's racial or ethnic background (29%) compared to the viewpoint nationwide (35%).

3 The amount of money required to provide foster care is among Black adults' top five barriers to providing foster care: 42% say it presents a major barrier.

4 One in four Black Americans (25%) say racial and ethnic discrimination is a major barrier to becoming a foster parent, and one in five (21%) Hispanic Americans say the same.

1 Knowledge and Perceptions of U.S. Foster Care

The more Americans know about the foster care system, the more positive their perceptions of it.

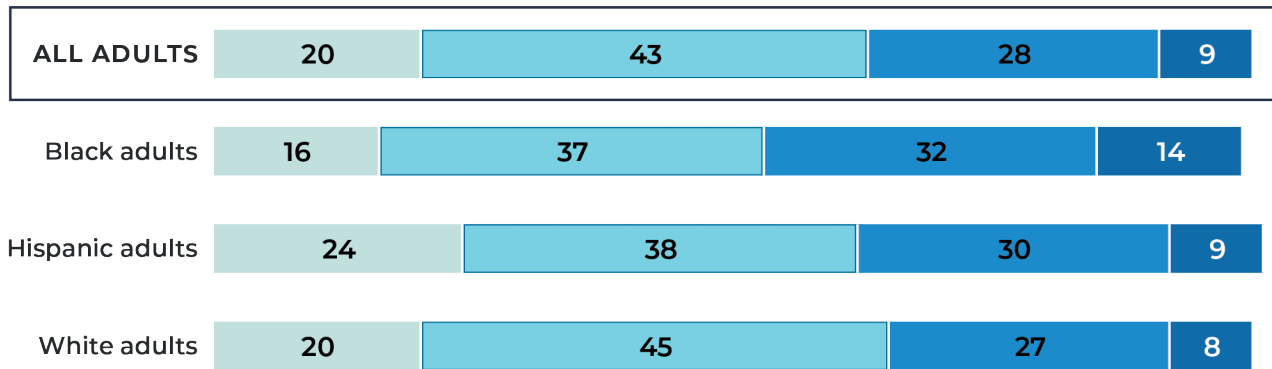
Almost two-thirds of the population know little (43%) or nothing (20%) about the U.S. foster care system, and just one in four (27%) have positive feelings about the system.

Black Americans are the most knowledgeable about foster care and adoption in the United States, compared to other racial/ethnic groups. Forty-six percent of Black Americans say they know some or a lot about foster care, compared to the national total of 37%.

CHART 2
Americans' Knowledge of Foster Care Is Low

Generally speaking, how much do you know about the foster care system in the United States?

■ % Nothing ■ % A little ■ % Some ■ % A lot



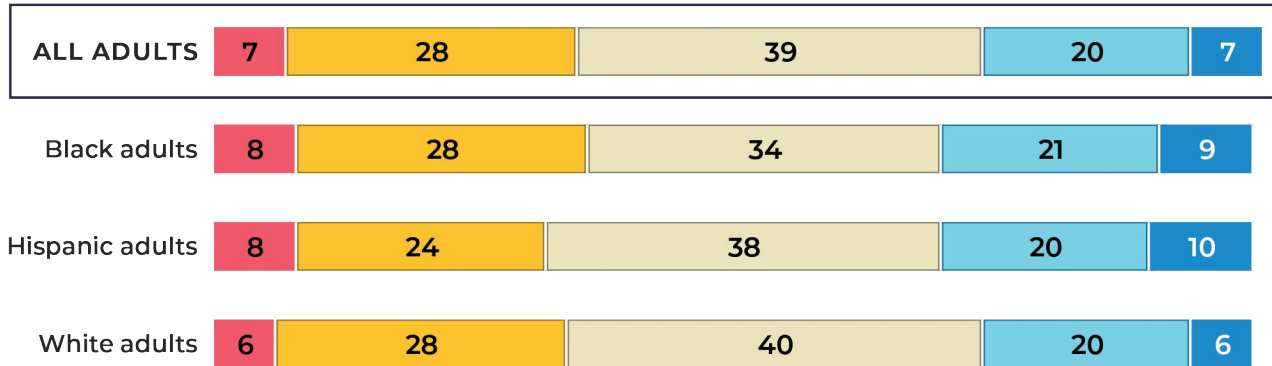
Note: Percentages sum to 100, ±1 percentage point, due to rounding.

CHART 3

Negative Perceptions of the U.S. Foster Care System Are Common

Overall, how would you rate your feelings toward the foster care system in the United States?

■ % Very negative ■ % Somewhat negative ■ % Neutral ■ % Somewhat positive ■ % Very positive



Note: Percentages sum to 100, ±1 percentage point, due to rounding.

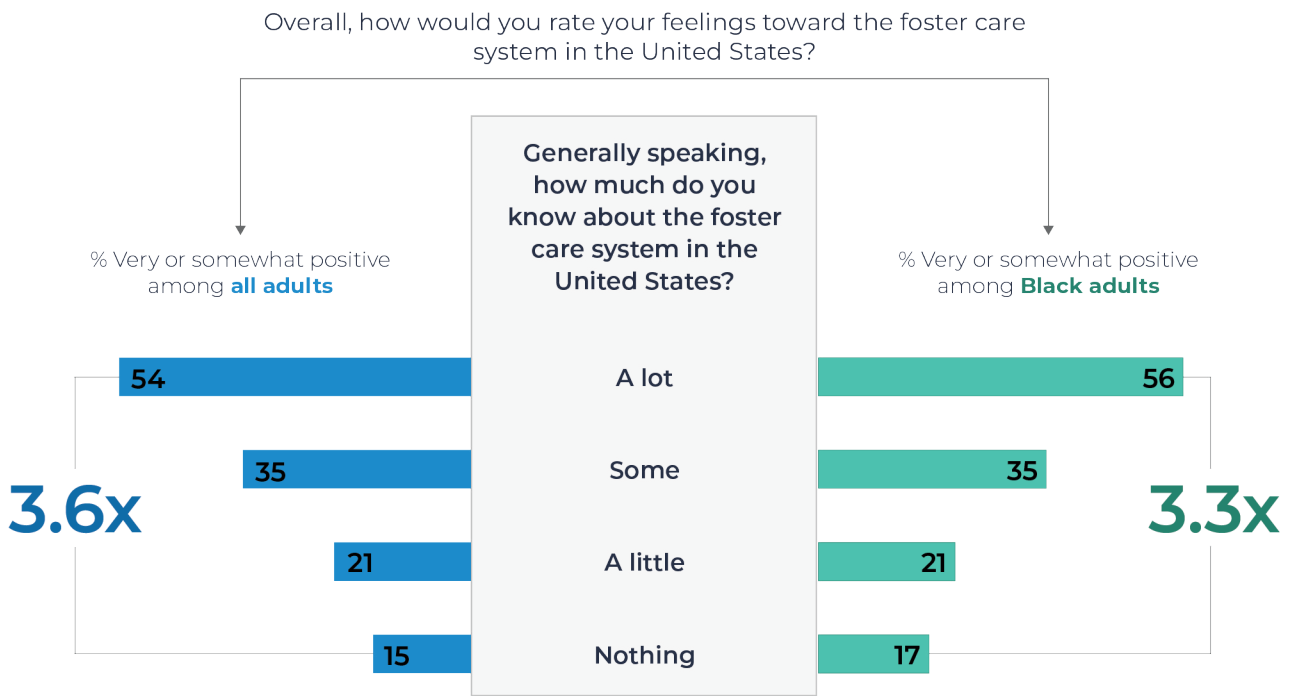


Americans who know more about foster care are 3.6 times more likely to rate their general feelings toward the U.S. foster care system positively. Fifty-four percent of Americans who say they know a lot about the foster care system feel positively toward it; when it comes to those who say they know nothing, just 15% of them rate their feelings positively. This pattern holds true among Americans of all racial/ethnic backgrounds, including Black Americans.

CHART 4
Knowledge and Feelings about Foster Care

Nationwide, adults who know a lot about the foster care system are 3.6x more likely than those who know nothing to say they feel positive toward the system.

Black adults who know a lot about the foster care system are 3.3x more likely than those who know nothing to say they feel positive toward the system.

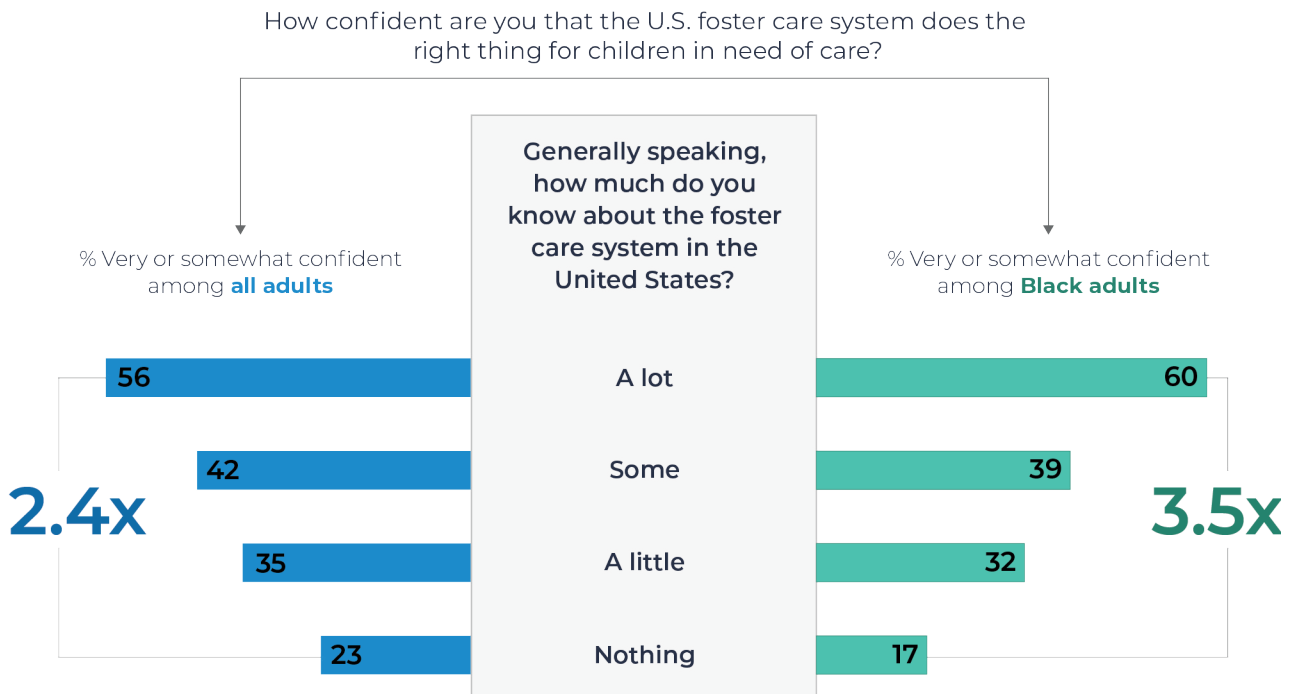


Those who are more knowledgeable about the system are also more likely to report having confidence that the foster care system does the right thing for children in need of care. **However, the relationship between greater knowledge and greater general confidence is even stronger among Black adults.** Black adults with a lot of knowledge about foster care are 3.5 times more likely than those who say they know nothing to be very or somewhat confident that the foster care system does the right thing for children in need of care (60% vs. 17%). Among all adults, those who know a lot are 2.4 times more likely than those who know nothing to say the same (56% vs. 23%).

CHART 5
Knowledge and Confidence about Foster Care

Overall, adults who know more about the foster care system are **2.4x** more likely to say they feel confident in the system.

Black adults who know more about the foster care system are **3.5x** more likely to say they feel confident in the system.



Media portrayals of foster care might have greater influence on Americans with less first-hand experience.

Many Black Americans who were interviewed in LA and Houston who didn't have first-hand experience with foster care said that news, documentaries, social media and other media are their primary sources of information about foster care.

“

I watch a lot of ... police melodramas I guess you call them. A lot of those deal with the bad side of foster (care) and adoption for the dramatic effect ... so I've never seen anything good really in the public eye regarding either foster or adoption.”

– **Angela M.**, age 60, Los Angeles

“

Sadly ... I would say I get my information about the foster care system from the local news, when it is a negative news story about either something that happened to a child in the foster care system or a home that was housing some foster children that somehow made the news negatively.”

– **Ethan P.**, age 45, Los Angeles



Equitable Treatment for Children in Care Is Key to Positive Perceptions

In addition to sharing their general feelings (positive or negative) and confidence toward the U.S. foster care system at large, Americans shared opinions on more specific aspects of the system. This included wide-ranging topics such as the government's role in child welfare, the fitness of foster care providers and the system's equitable treatment of children in care.

Adults who trust that the foster care system gives equal treatment to biological parents and children, regardless of racial or ethnic background or the child's age, are much more likely to have a positive or very positive perception of the system overall. This pattern is true across Americans of all racial backgrounds, including Black Americans.

"I do think that diversity in the foster care system is something that is very important because there are a lot of African American children in the system, and a lot of children of color, and it seems as if they have fewer opportunities for adoption ... diversity doesn't just include race, it includes gender, it includes culture. It includes so many different things. And the foster care system has to be more aware of that."

– Teresa E., age 53, Los Angeles

CHART 6 Perceptions of the U.S. Foster Care System

Adults who agree that the foster care system treats people equally are also among the most likely to have an overall positive perception of the foster care system.

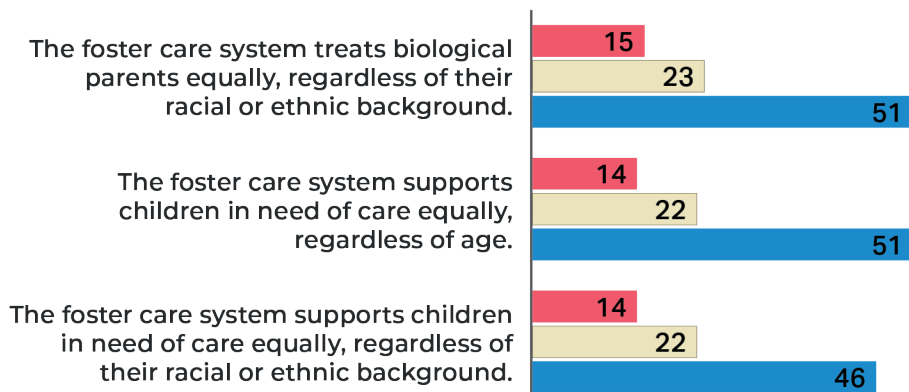
Among those who

- strongly disagree or disagree
- neither agree nor disagree
- strongly agree or agree

with the following statements:

Overall, how would you rate your feelings toward the foster care system in the United States?

% Very or somewhat positive



Americans support children being removed from unsafe homes, but wish the system did more to keep biological families together.

Findings on the more specific aspects of foster care provide a more nuanced view of Americans' perceptions. A majority of the U.S. public agree that society has a responsibility to remove children from unsafe homes (87%) and that government agencies have a right to do so (66%). Yet six in 10 Americans say the foster care system should do more to keep biological families together (59%).



CHART 7

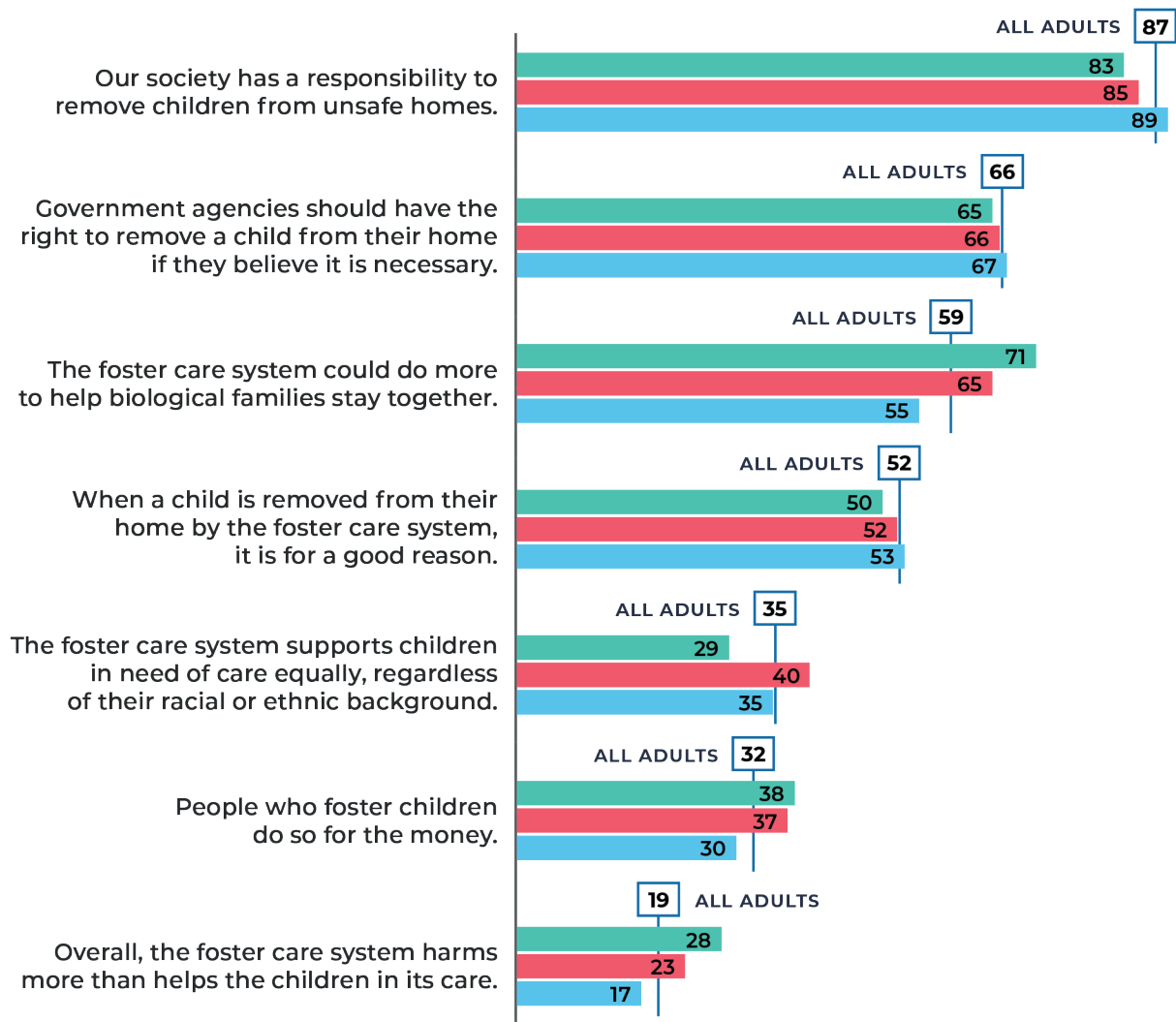
Views on the U.S. Foster Care System

Some of the nuanced perceptions of the U.S. foster care system vary by race or ethnicity.

With your current understanding of the U.S. foster care system, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

% Strongly agree or agree

■ All adults ■ Black adults ■ Hispanic adults ■ White adults



Note: Response options were “Strongly agree,” “Agree,” “Neither agree nor disagree,” “Disagree,” “Strongly disagree,” or “Don’t know.” Between 2% (Our society has a responsibility to remove children from unsafe homes) and 19% (The foster care system treats biological parents equally, regardless of their racial or ethnic background) of Americans chose “Don’t know” for some items.

Black Americans are among the most aware and involved in foster care and adoption, but are more critical of specific aspects of the system.

When looking at differences across race and ethnicity, **Black Americans have less confidence in key aspects of the system.** Seventy-one percent of Black adults agree the foster care system could do more to help biological families stay together, compared to 65% of Hispanic and 55% of White adults. They are also the least likely to agree the foster care system supports children in need of care, regardless of their racial or ethnic background (29%) compared to Hispanic (40%) or White (35%) adults. Finally, Black adults (28%) are more likely than Hispanic (23%) and White (17%) adults to say the foster care system harms more than helps the children in its care.

Many Americans' views on the foster care system may be shaped by their friendships and personal experiences, and Black Americans are especially likely to have these experiences. Black Americans are nine points more likely than the national total to say they or a close family member or friend has received foster care at some point. This is compared to 24% of Hispanic adults and 16% of White adults who say the same. Additionally, 37% of Black Americans know someone who *has provided foster care* (or is currently providing foster care), above the national average of 33%.

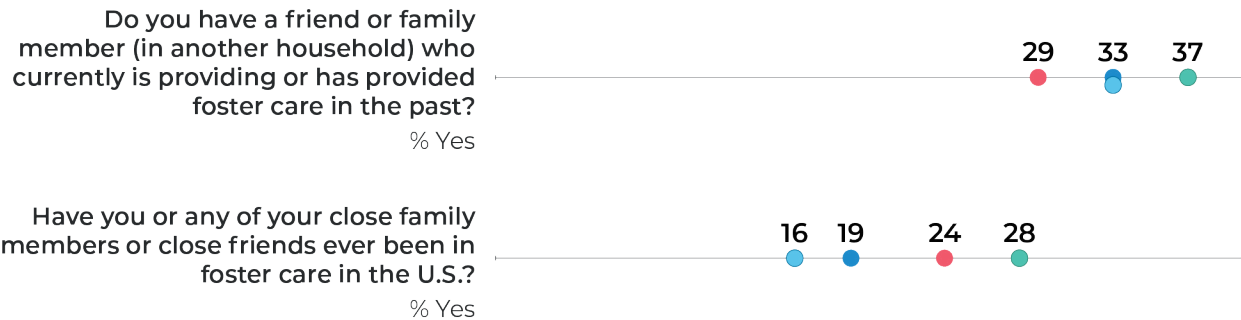


CHART 8

Knowing People Involved in the Foster Care System

Black Americans are more likely than the national average to know someone who has provided foster care and to know someone who has been in foster care.

● All adults ● Black adults ● Hispanic adults ● White adults



Having direct or vicarious experience with the foster care system does result in moderately higher ratings of general positive feelings and general confidence in the system. For example, 42% of Americans who have been in foster care or know someone who has been in foster care are confident the system does the right thing for children in need of care, compared to the overall measure of 36%. These numbers are similar among Black Americans. This trend is aligned with the prior finding that more knowledge also results in higher general confidence and more positive general feelings. Since knowledge and experience go hand in hand, it is difficult to determine whether having knowledge of the system or personal experience is more closely related to increased positive general perceptions.

“ There are so many restrictions that make it difficult for people who genuinely could be a good fit or provide a good home to do so ... I think the home visits are fair. You want to make sure they're in a good, safe environment ... I know they have standards they want to meet. On some level, I understand that, but ... is it better to leave them in the system and have them age out? Or to put them into a home with two other kids who are getting good care already? I know they have to do their job, but it did seem like there were some biases.”

– LeJoyce H., age 43, Houston

2 Significant Barriers to Providing Care

Three ways to get involved with the foster care system:



Providing foster care.



Participating in a program to work with children in foster care.



Adopting from foster care.



Foster care and adoption are on Americans' minds — especially Black Americans. One in four Americans (25%) say they have thought a lot about providing foster care, and about one in five (18%) say they've thought a lot about adopting from foster care.

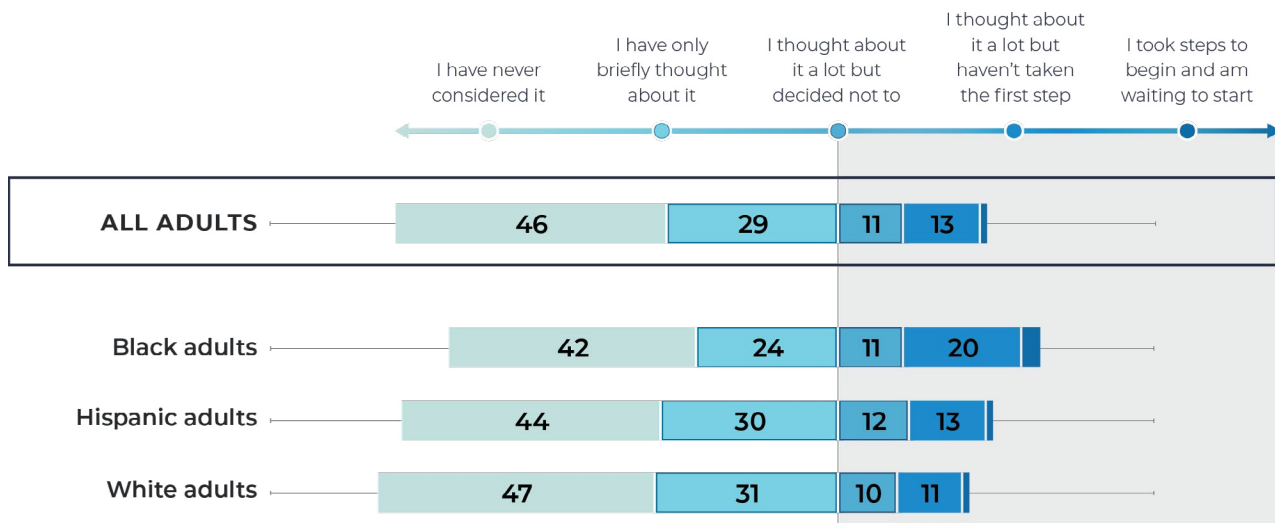
The consideration of foster care and adoption are meaningfully higher among Black Americans. More than one-third of Black Americans have thought a lot about providing foster care (34%) or adopting from foster care (26%), compared to the national averages of 25% and 18% who thought about fostering or adopting respectively.

CHART 9
Thoughts about Being a Foster Care Provider

Black adults are more likely than adults of other racial and ethnic backgrounds to think a lot about fostering.

Have you ever considered providing foster care for a child?

% Selected



Note: Numerical values shown when 5% or higher.

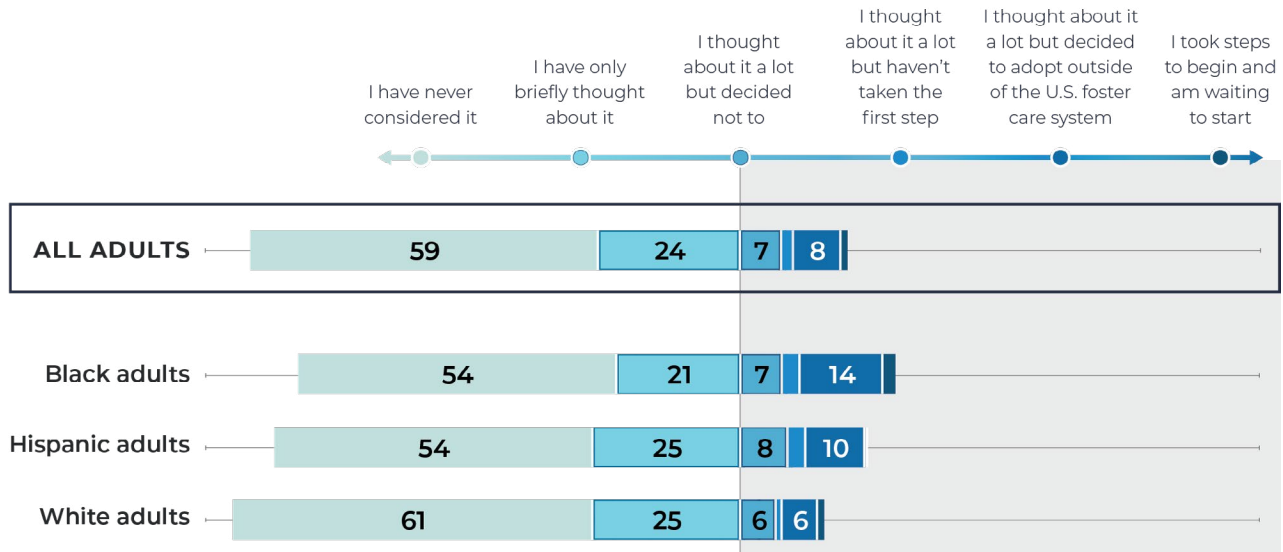
CHART 10

Thoughts about Adopting from the Foster Care System

Black adults are more likely than adults of other racial and ethnic backgrounds to think a lot about adopting.

Have you ever considered adopting a child from the U.S. foster care system?

% Selected



Note: Numerical values shown when 5% or higher.

Additionally, 16% of Black Americans have participated in a program to work with children in foster care (outside of formal foster care or adoption), compared to 13% of Hispanic Americans and 9% of White Americans.

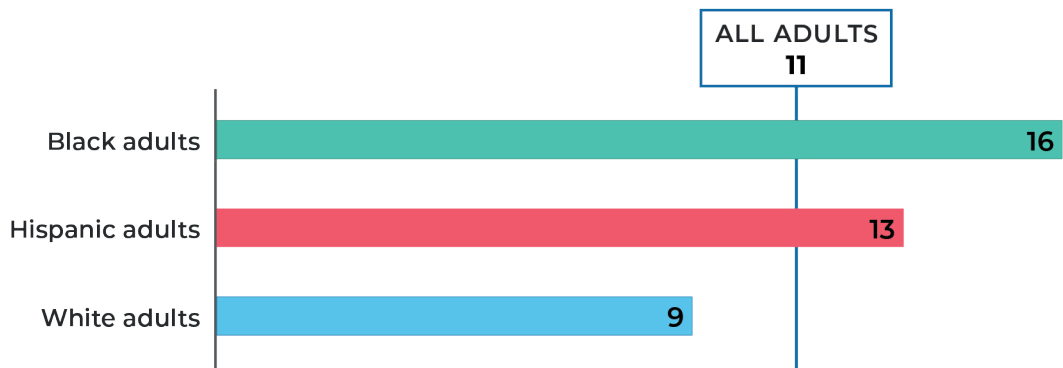
CHART 11

Connection to Children in Foster Care

Black adults are more likely than adults of other racial and ethnic backgrounds to have participated in a mentoring program.

Have you ever participated in a program to work with children in foster care? This could be in the form of periodic meetings, working as a CASA advocate (Court Appointed Special Advocate) or guardian ad litem, or tutoring.

% Yes



Identifying Barriers to Providing Care

Americans were asked to evaluate a list of factors that relate to the three types of actions that could be taken by someone interested in supporting a child in foster care: providing foster care, participating in a program to work with children in foster care (outside of adoption and foster care), and adopting from foster care. While the exact barriers vary between types of actions, strong patterns also emerge. The core barriers to providing care or mentoring include insufficient training and resources, difficulty making changes to one's home or living situation, a lack of awareness about what foster care eligibility entails, concerns about discrimination, and concerns about the impermanence of foster children in one's care.

Insufficient Training and Resources



Nearly half (45%) of Americans rate insufficient training and resources as a major barrier to **providing foster care**. Anecdotes heard in interviews conducted with Houston and Los Angeles residents indicate Americans may consider pay and housing requirements when they think of having insufficient resources for fostering or adopting.



I did think about [providing foster care]. I worked with so many children who are in the system that I thought I was someone who could make a difference by becoming a foster parent, and I looked it up. At the time, it was a long time ago, I didn't think I had the resources to become a foster parent. And sadly, when you work in education, you don't get paid a lot. And the type of housing that you would need, and everything like that, I felt like that had to be set up before you could become one. On my salary, I just didn't think I could do that."

– **Teresa E.**, age 53, Los Angeles



Whatever is included in foster care [like government assistance], I'm sure it's still not enough. Because kids cost a lot of money."

– **Lauren C.**, age 35, Houston

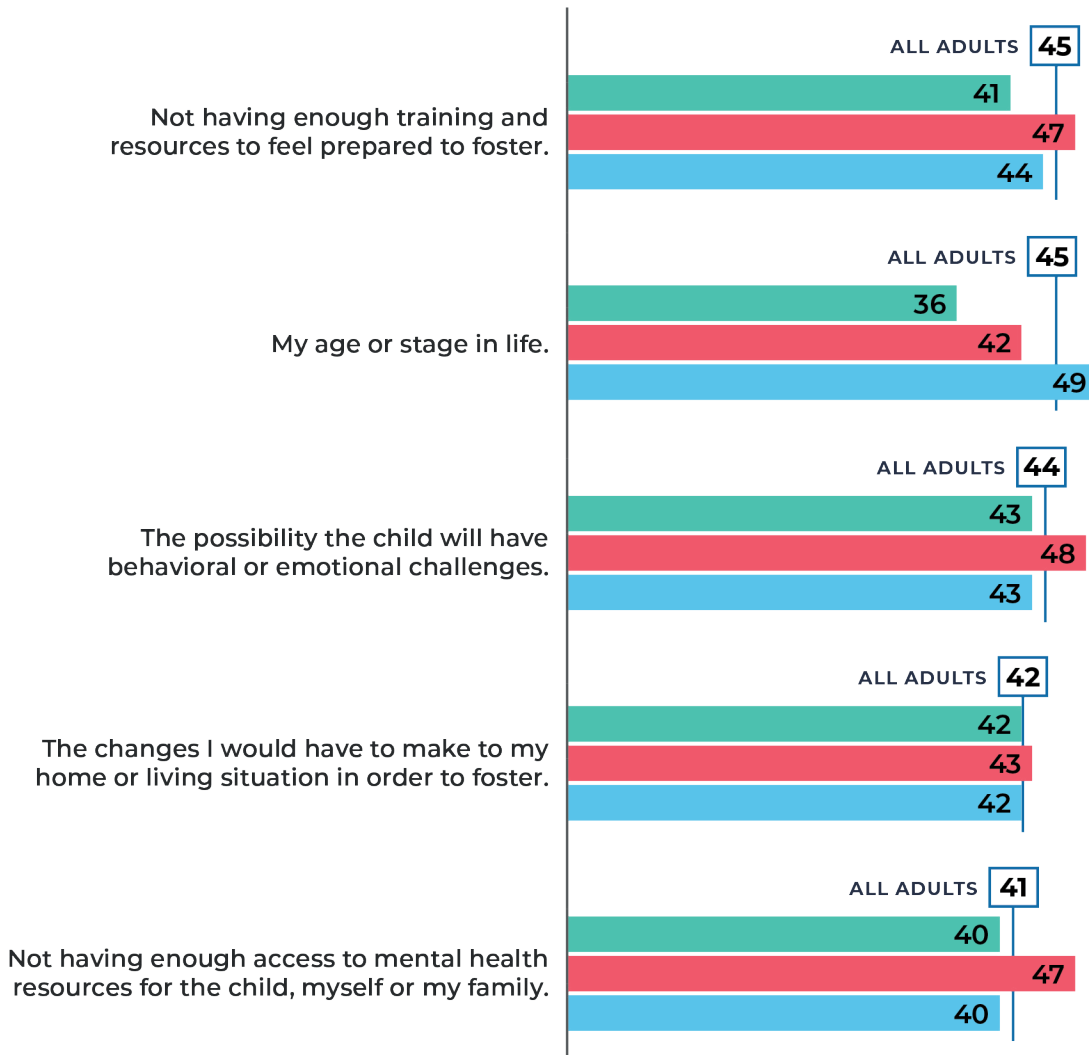
CHART 12

Top Five Barriers among All Americans to Providing Foster Care

To what extent are the following a barrier to getting involved with (or continuing with) providing foster care?

% Major barrier

■ All adults
 ■ Black adults
 ■ Hispanic adults
 ■ White adults



Note: The barriers listed are the most popular chosen as a “major barrier” out of a list of 17 possible barriers.

Difficulty Making Changes to Home or Living Situation

Concern about having to make changes to their living situations is a major barrier for four in 10 Americans in considering foster care (42%) or adoption (41%).

For Americans interested in providing foster care, requirements exist to ensure the home is suitable for a child. While requirements vary by state, usually homes must have functioning and safe utilities and appliances, and adequate space for each child (oftentimes, this includes stipulations on the number of bedrooms).⁶

The concern about having to make changes to the home or living situation doesn't fluctuate among various income levels — except for the very lowest income households (those earning below \$36,000). Roughly four in 10 people of all income levels see having to make changes to their home as a major barrier.

“... I was living in a studio apartment. When you adopt or foster, the kid needs to have their own dedicated bedroom. I needed a second bedroom. If I wanted to move forward, I needed more physical space.”

– Arianne W., age 39, Houston

CHART 13

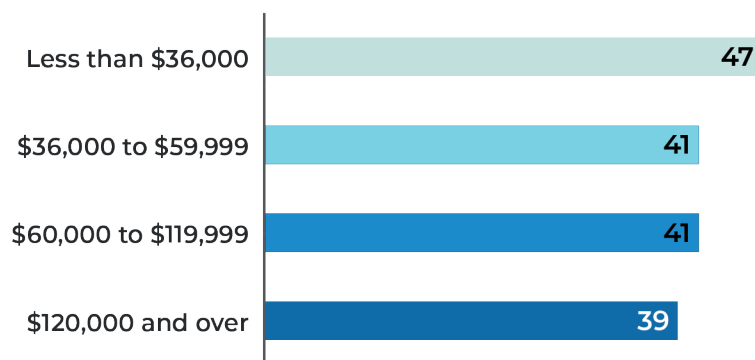
Income Levels and Changing Living Situation

Apart from Americans earning less than \$36,000, household income has little relationship to the barrier of having to make changes to a home or living situation.

The changes I would have to make to my home or living situation in order to foster.

% Major barrier

Annual household income



⁶ Home study requirements for prospective foster parents. (2018). *Child Welfare Information Gateway*. U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, Administration for Children & Families, Children’s Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubpdfs/homestudyreqs.pdf>

However, the obstacle to make changes to the home or living situation still appears to be related to finances in other ways. Americans who said that the amount of money required to foster was a major barrier are also much more likely to say the changes they'd have to make to their home would be a major barrier, and this pattern held true in every income level.

These findings likely reflect nuances in the relationship between home or living situation, financial resources and willingness to provide foster care. For some Americans, making changes to their home or living situation — perhaps relocating or updating an older home — may be untenable, no matter the financial resources at their disposal. The systemic effects of income inequality and a nationwide housing shortage⁷ may both have an impact on Americans' ability to provide foster care or adopt from foster care — even if they are willing and interested.

The same percentage of Black adults and adults of all racial/ethnic backgrounds agree that changes required to the home or living situation is a major barrier to foster care (both 42%), but Black Americans are slightly more likely to see the amount of money required to provide foster care as a major barrier (42% vs. 38%).

Interviews with Black Americans in Los Angeles and Houston reflected the nuanced relationship between financial resources and making changes to their home or living situation, and also highlighted the difficulty of living in areas with a high cost of living.

“

... And then there were so many rules about how your house had to be. I wasn't able [to foster]. I disqualified myself because of some of the ways that your house had to be in order to provide the service ... Like the water had to be a certain temperature that ran out of the faucet. And for me, I was in an older house that didn't have all the upgrades ... The windows for emergency release ... the size of the room ... At the time, the finances weren't there for me in order to fix those things in order to make myself eligible. So, all I remember are the windows, how specific they had to be, especially for those fire escapes, and the water temperature ... It was things like that, for upgrades on older houses that may be the case in African American neighborhoods, that wouldn't allow you to take on being a foster parent.”

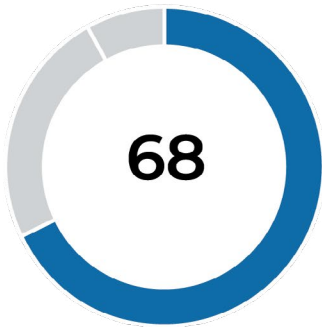
– **Phaebra C.**, age 59, Los Angeles

⁷ Aurand, A., Emmanuel, D., Foley, E., Clarke, M., Rafi, I., & Yentel, D. (2023). *The gap: A shortage of affordable rental homes*. National Low Income Housing Coalition. https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/Gap-Report_2023.pdf

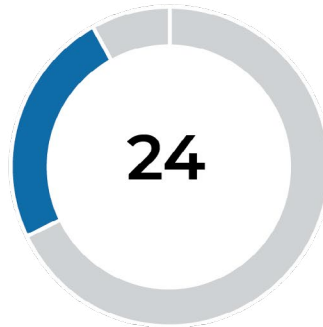
Lack of Awareness of Eligibility

ALL AMERICANS

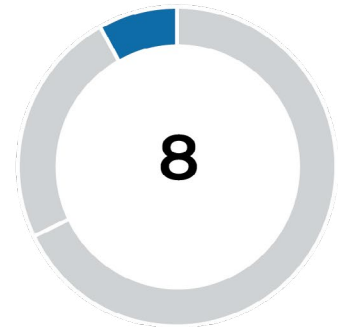
Two-thirds (68%) of Americans don't know if they are eligible to provide foster care ...



... one-quarter (24%) say they know they are eligible ...



... and 8% say they know they are not eligible.



Increased education about foster care eligibility might increase the number of Americans who see it as a real possibility. More Black Americans say they already know they are eligible (30%), compared to Hispanic Americans and White Americans (both 23%).



During interviews with Black adults in Houston and Los Angeles, many expressed uncertainties about the foster care process and what fostering entails. Several suggested that education and awareness campaigns could improve recruitment.

“ Could someone be a foster parent as a single male? Could someone be a foster parent if you're just a single working person, right? Are there limitations? I never knew or [was] exposed to what that looks like on the other end from the foster care agencies. Do they prefer two-parent households? Do they prefer a female over a male foster?”

– **Ethan P.**, age 45, Los Angeles

“ [There needs to be] more education on the process of [foster care] and what all it entails. I know what having a child in a home entails. But what's different about a foster child? More awareness of the process and what the needs are for the child, and the rules and regulations are ... Getting more publicity for foster care.”

– **Lauren C.**, age 35, Houston

“ I really don't know the numbers of children who need adoptive homes so I'm not saying that anyone's not doing enough, but I just don't see a lot of information or solicitation ... I see a lot of opportunity for adoption if it's needed, but I don't see a lot of information about [foster care].”

– **Abina A.**, age 38, Los Angeles

Facing Discrimination as a Foster and Adoptive Parent

One in four (25%) Black Americans say racial and ethnic discrimination is a major barrier to becoming a foster parent. And one in five (21%) Hispanic adults say the same, compared to 16% of the national total. Similar perceptions exist for adoption from foster care: 25% of Black adults see racial and ethnic discrimination as a major barrier to adopting from foster care, as do 20% of Hispanic adults, compared to 14% of all adults.

“What I have seen is that populations of color are far more scrutinized by child protective services. There are cultural misunderstandings of ways in which different cultures raise children, leading to a higher level of mandatory reporting and scrutiny. There is a higher rate of intervention and removal from their homes.”

– Erikson A., age 47, Los Angeles

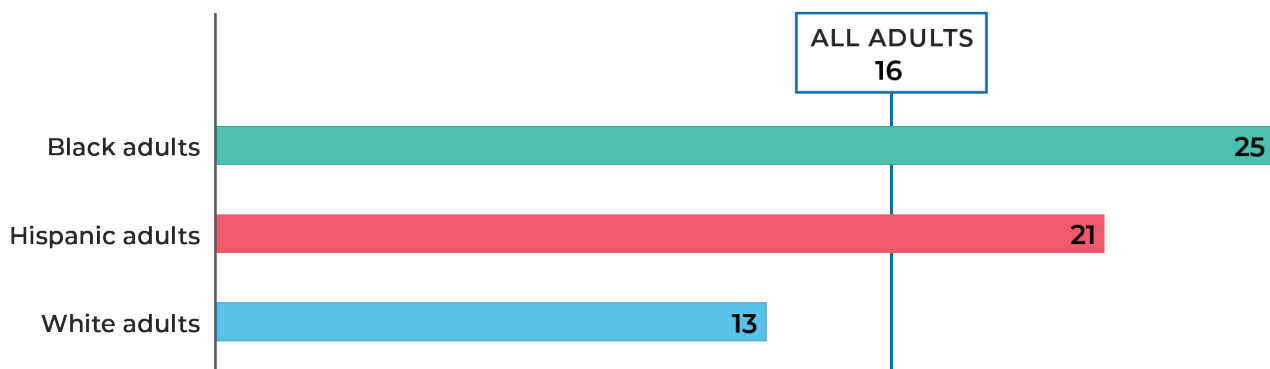
CHART 14

Race and Discrimination

Black and Hispanic adults are more likely to see racial and ethnic discrimination as a major barrier to being a foster care provider.

To what extent are the following a barrier to getting involved with (or continuing with) providing foster care? *The amount of racial and ethnic discrimination I may face in dealing with the foster care system.*

% Major barrier



Discrimination due to gender or sexual identity is a major barrier for one-third (35%) of LGBT adults.⁸

Among all adults, men are also more likely than women to say discrimination due to gender or sexual identity is a major barrier (15% vs. 9%).



... Around 27-28 years old [I was interested in] adopting ... I've always been stable financially. I was just doing a lot of research on what was needed but it was like there's a lot of stigma around single male adoptions ... sometimes when I go to these pages they often show a man and a woman there, or the family, or two-person household. But you know the reality is that a lot of people are single professionals themselves, [and] I still think about fostering or adopting."

– **Brandon H.**, age 33, Houston

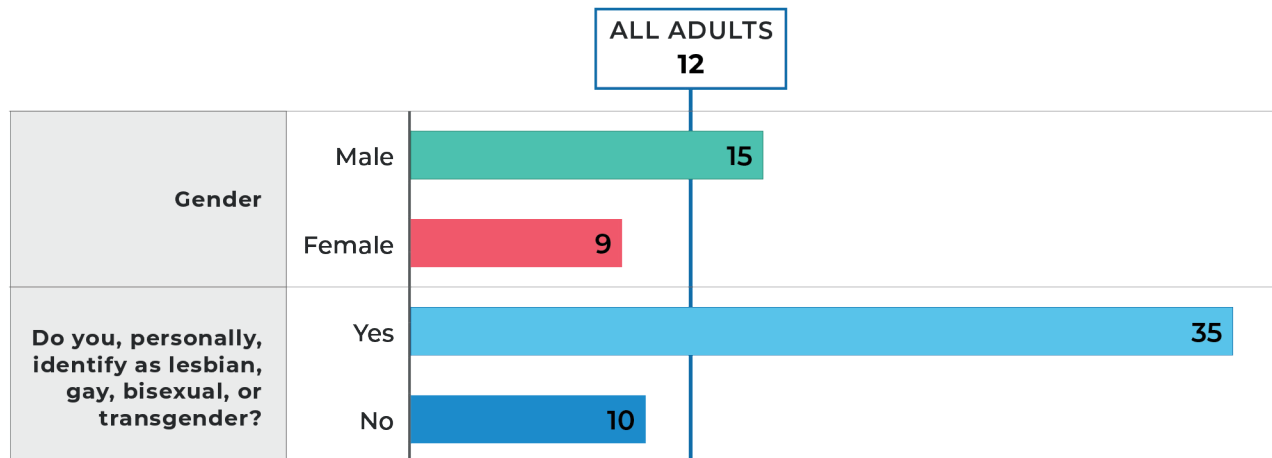
CHART 15

Gender, Sexual Identity and Discrimination

One-third of LGBT adults say discrimination based on gender or sexual identity is a major barrier to providing foster care.

To what extent are the following a barrier to getting involved with (or continuing with) providing foster care? *The amount of discrimination I may face due to my gender or sexual identity in dealing with the foster care system.*

% Major barrier



⁸ Full question text: Do you, personally, identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender?

Fear of Impermanence and Unknowns in Adoption



Age or stage in life, and work or family situations are still major barriers pertaining to **adoption from foster care**. In addition to these barriers, many Americans express significant fears about the prospect of connecting with a child who has experienced trauma or loss, as well as the possibility the child could later be removed from their adoptive home. Four in 10 Americans say concerns about the child, their biological family and removal for the wrong reasons are major barriers. The degree of the concerns vary some by race and ethnicity, but top barriers are generally similar.



The reason I'd say 'no,' I think that it's too temporary, I don't like the temporary nature of it. From what I understand, [the biological] parents can get the rights back, kids can be taken away. I wouldn't want to be emotionally invested."

– **Cherie T.**, age 45, Houston



The only barrier that I could see is making sure you make a long-term commitment. I'd want to make sure there was a pathway to adoption. If I couldn't, that would dissuade me — knowing that there are emotional attachments and knowing you could lose the child."

– **Hannah M.**, age 35, Houston



For those who are considering adoption through foster care ... there's a possibility that they could bond with the child, and then the child leaves anyway. The idea of losing that child is frightening."

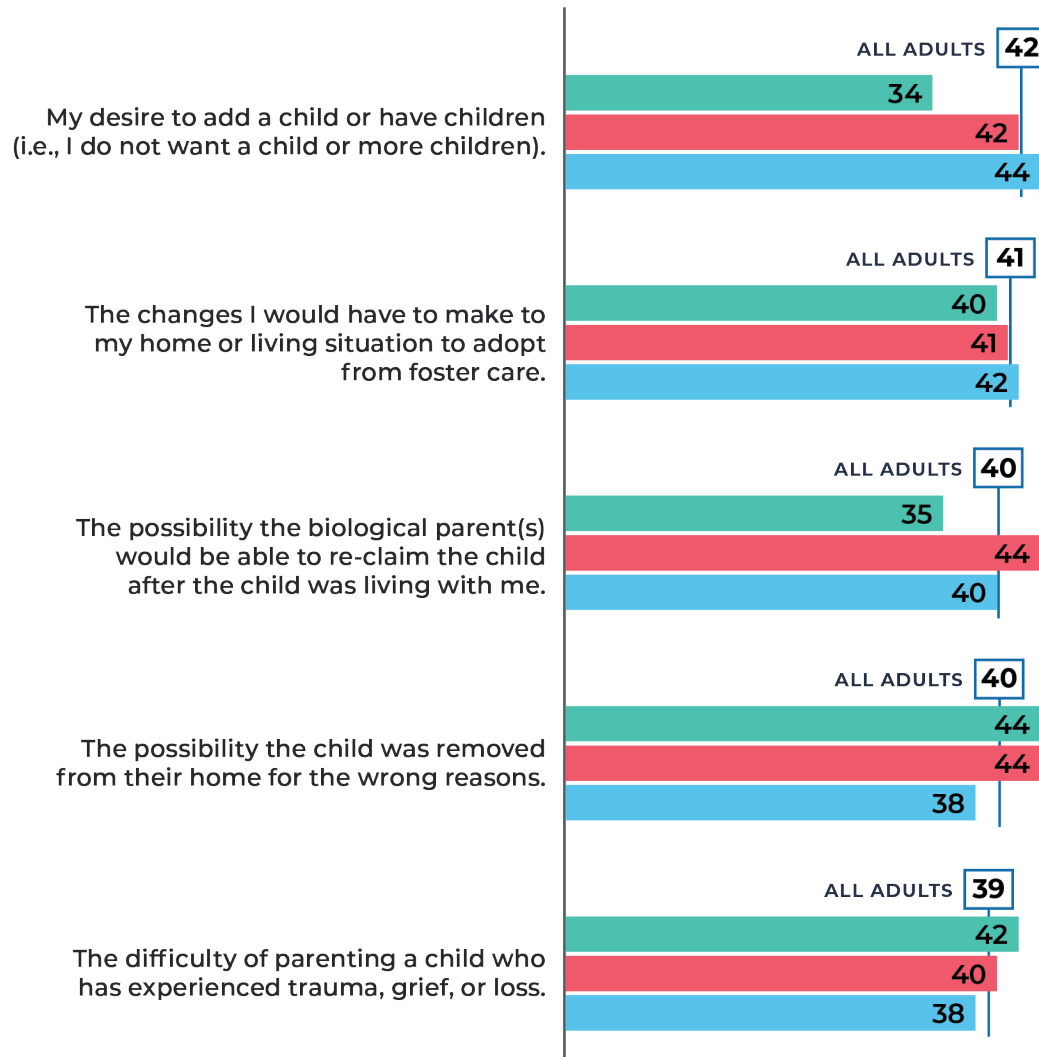
– **Erikson A.**, age 47, Los Angeles

CHART 16
Major Barriers to Adopting from Foster Care

To what extent are the following a barrier to potentially adopting a child from foster care in the U.S.?

% Major barrier

■ All adults ■ Black adults ■ Hispanic adults ■ White adults



Note: The barriers listed were the most popular chosen as a “major barrier” out of a list of 17 possible barriers, excluding “my age or stage in life” (57%) and “my current work or family situation” (47%) which were the top two frequently cited by the full sample of adults.

On the Ground With Kidsave and the EMBRACE Project: Voices of Black Americans in Los Angeles and Houston

To further understand and elevate the voices in two of the largest communities they serve, Kidsave worked with Gallup to conduct 50 in-depth interviews with Black adults in Los Angeles and Houston. These interviews provide insights into the lived experiences of Black adults aged 25-60 in these two communities, and point toward strategies that could improve recruitment of future mentors and foster and adoptive parents. Ultimately, additional Black caregivers could give more children the chance to receive culturally appropriate care — especially the many Black children in foster care who are still waiting to find a safe and stable home.

ON SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES

“Of course all you hear about reported is the ones that fall through the cracks. But you hear those stories a lot. There’s not enough money out there to do whatever it is that these systems in place are trying to accomplish is my feeling. The system as it is right now is just, I think it’s broken. There’s not enough cohesiveness between city, state, and federal policies, systems, laws.”

– **Angela M.**, age 60, Los Angeles

“Well, normally, racism plays a factor, period. That’s just how the world is ... The people enforcing the system is where the personal values and racism would come into play. So, it just depends on the people that are running it.”

– **Miranda H.**, age 40, Los Angeles

ON EDUCATION AND AWARENESS

“I mean they have to put billboards in Los Angeles to get people to adopt children. [laughing] And this big of a place I would think that there would be more people who probably want to adopt but maybe the process is not so cut and dry. We have billboards. That’s terrible. It’s like advertising to come get a puppy. It’s like similar, right? Like ‘come get a kid’. I know there are people out there that want to do this so there’s clearly some barrier of some sort.”

– **Erica F.**, age 40, Los Angeles

“I just think better resources have to be available ... Like shadowing or being able to reach out to foster parents or people who have adopted before maybe that look like me or maybe a single male or a single female and get their experiences on how it’s been would be helpful.”

– **Brandon H.**, age 33, Houston



ON BARRIERS TO PROVIDING FOSTER CARE

"I, myself, wanted to become a foster care parent. I have the loving heart for it. I have the patience for it. But I was told that I couldn't do it because my residence wasn't big enough. They told me once I got a bigger place then they would consider me as a foster parent but I couldn't get going on the process because my place wasn't big enough."

– **KaToya T.**, age 40, Los Angeles

"I know my sole purpose is that I'm supposed to help kids ... We've got to save these kids! I still have to do it, I just have to figure out a way. I believe it's me, I've got to get started, I need help with getting started ... I just feel like there's no help getting to that next level."

– **Starla L.**, age 40, Los Angeles

"I think there's this feeling of 'Oh, the kids are broken,' or 'How do I deal with a kid who's my own that I haven't raised from birth?' But a lot of like fear and stigma around a kid who may have experienced trauma and not knowing how to adequately cope with that. There is a person that I'm bringing into my family who doesn't look like me. You know? Is there a cultural similarity there? What else? Is everything going to be highly scrutinized? And then I think at the end of the day am I going to get along with this kiddo?"

– **Arianne W.**, age 39, Houston

3 Encouraging Fostering and Adoption

The Kidsave-Gallup study also revealed possible solutions for increasing the number of available caregivers, such as additional opportunities for mentorship and creating more clarity around foster care and adoption “unknowns.” More foster parents, mentors and adoptive parents could improve outcomes for children in foster care. This is especially true for Black children, who often spend the most amount of time in foster care and face the lowest rates of finding a permanent home, compared to children of other racial and ethnic backgrounds.⁹

More Mentoring Could Lead to More Adoptions



Adults who connect with a child through one of these mentoring programs (other than through foster care or adoption) have **seven times greater odds of adopting**, even if they've never provided foster care. Getting more adults involved in mentoring experiences could have the potential to increase the number of people who want to adopt through foster care. The finding is meaningful, since adoption is the ultimate goal for 28% of children in care¹⁰ and is perhaps the most crucial way to improve outcomes for the youth who are waiting for a permanent home. As Black children are overrepresented by 1.5 times among those waiting for an adoptive family (and by 1.6 times among those in foster care overall),¹¹ increasing the number of Black adoptive parents could be especially impactful for Black children, who greatly benefit from a culturally responsive home.

What does mentoring look like? There are many ways to connect with a child in foster care outside of formal foster care or adoption, such as through mentoring programs, serving as a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) or as a guardian ad litem. One of Kidsave's mentoring programs, Weekend Miracles, provides opportunities for interested families to meet and get to know foster youth, pairs them for weekend experiences and gives older youth a voice and a choice in developing positive relationships with a caring mentor.

Mentoring programs provide a way for children in foster care to connect with the public while providing productive experiences and caring relationships for the youth. These programs and opportunities can also help potential caregivers to get to know children in foster care and better understand their experiences.

⁹ *Working with black families*. (n.d.). Child Welfare Information Gateway. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/systemwide/diverse-populations/black/>

¹⁰ *The AFCARS report*. (2022). U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/cb/afcars-report-29.pdf>

¹¹ Ibid.

“ [Mentoring] gives that foster child an opportunity to have a third-party relationship for someone who's looking out for their best interests. If they're not comfortable talking to a foster parent, they have a resource.”

– Nate B., age 47, Los Angeles

One in 10 Americans (11%) say they have participated in a program to work with children in foster care. **However, half (51%) of those who haven't participated weren't even aware that this type of program existed.**

“ I think [mentoring programs are] awesome. If that was more advertised that that's a thing, I think that would ease some possible foster parents' mind. Like, just putting your feet in the water if you're not sure, to spend some time around a child that's been through some stuff.”

– Monique R., age 45, Los Angeles



Almost Three-Quarters of Americans (73%) Say Training and Support Would Make Them More Likely to Participate in Mentoring

Expanded training and support could encourage greater participation in mentoring, which may result in more adoptions. Compared to the barriers around fostering and adopting, similar barriers exist for Americans who might consider participating in a program to work with children in foster care.

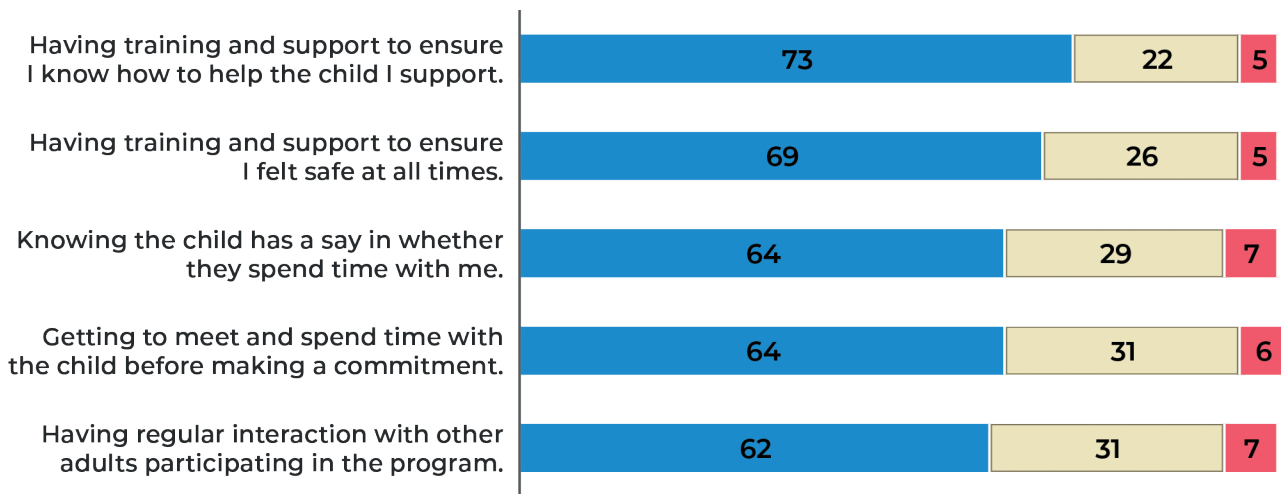
CHART 17

Factors to Increase Participation in Mentoring Programs

Training and support top the list of factors that would make Americans more likely to consider volunteering with a child in foster care.

Would any of the following factors make you more or less likely to consider (or continue) participating in a program working with a child in foster care?

■ More or much more likely ■ No impact ■ Less or much less likely



Note: Percentages sum to 100, ±1 percentage point, due to rounding.

Black (40%) and Hispanic (26%) adults are significantly more likely than White (18%) adults to say that knowing they could volunteer with a child of the same racial or ethnic background would make them more or much more likely to participate in a mentoring program.

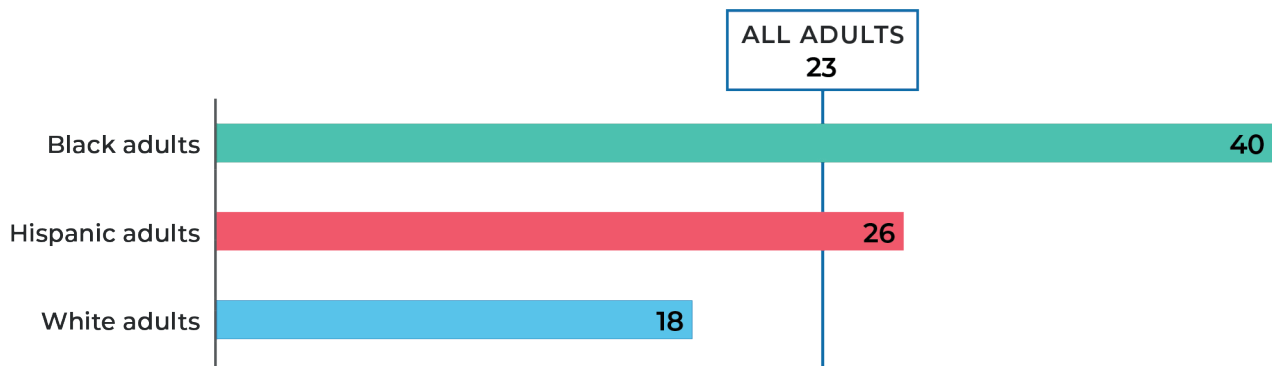
CHART 18

Same-Race Mentoring

Four in 10 Black adults say knowing they could volunteer with a child of the same racial or ethnic background would make them more likely to consider volunteering with a child in foster care.

Would any of the following factors make you more or less likely to consider (or continue) participating in a program working with a child in foster care? *Knowing I could volunteer with a child of the same racial or ethnic background as me.*

% More or much more likely



Making “Unknowns” Known Could Encourage Potential Caregivers

The unknowns that present an obstacle to potential caregivers are unfamiliarity with the foster system in general, the uncertainty of getting to know a child who has faced removal from their biological family, and the unclear level of involvement of the child's biological family.

Americans who have personal experience with the foster care system or who have exposure through a friend or family member, are the most likely to say they have thought a lot about providing foster care, with similar trends for adoption. As shown previously, 25% of Americans say they have thought a lot about it or are waiting to begin, and that number grows significantly among those with personal connections to foster care:



37%

of those with a friend or family member who provided foster care



41%

of those with a close family member or friend, or who themselves, were adopted from foster care



43%

of those with a close family member or friend, or who themselves, were in foster care

Anecdotes from residents in Houston and Los Angeles also describe a “fear of the unknown” when it comes to getting to know a child who has been removed from their home and placed in foster care.

Programs that help prospective parents get to know the children in foster care may be an important way to overcome this concern. This is in line with other study findings about how the value of mentorship can increase the probability of adoption.

“ [The biggest barrier is] not knowing enough ... I think there are people out there who may want to do it, but I think they're scared to ... will they get along, will they fit in, will they be able to help them. So it's hard ... the fear of the unknown. Because you don't know what you're going to get.”

– **A. S.**, age 59, Los Angeles

“ I think a lot of people are just nervous. The mentoring thing could get you involved with a child so you know what it's like. Like tiptoeing to the pool.”

– **Monique R.**, age 45, Los Angeles



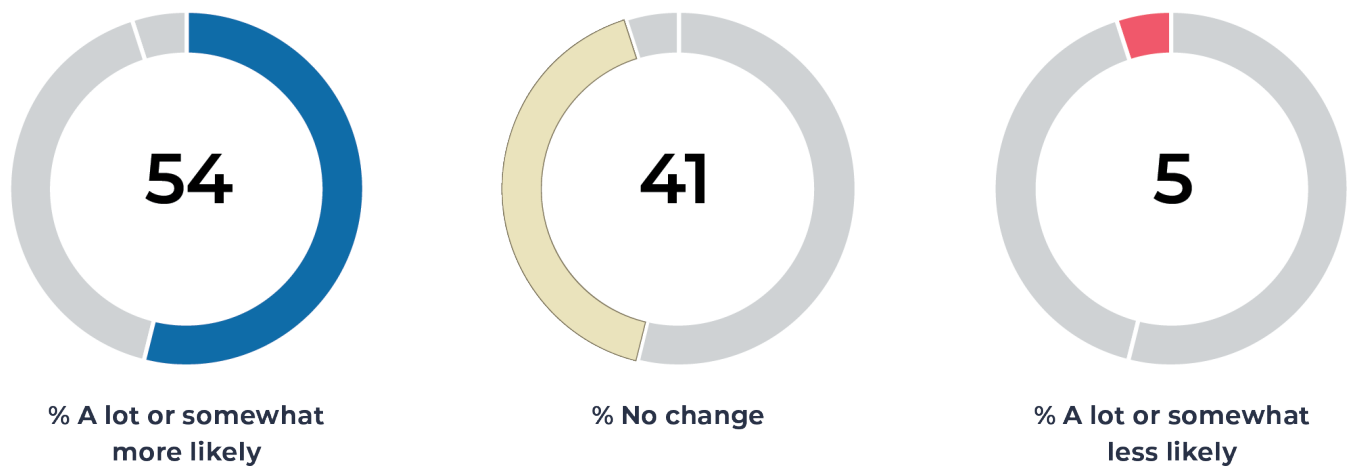
In fact, just over half (54%) of Americans say that temporarily hosting a child in their home would make them somewhat or a lot more likely to consider adopting through foster care. This pattern is similar for adults of all racial backgrounds.

CHART 19

Temporary Hosting Could Lead to Permanent Adoption

Getting to know a child by temporarily hosting them could encourage more adoption through foster care.

If you were able to temporarily host a child in your home before deciding to pursue adoption (not foster care), would it make you more or less likely to consider adoption through foster care?



Americans want to know that a child's biological family would be supportive of the adoption, or not be involved after the adoption.

This appears to stem from a concern that the child's biological parent(s) would be able to reclaim the child, or about the relationship between the child and their biological family, and is consistent with the fears of impermanence described in the previous section.

TABLE 1
Factors Affecting Adoption from Foster Care

A majority of Americans say knowing the child's biological family was supportive would make them much more likely to consider adoption from foster care.

If the following were true, would it make you more or less likely to consider adoption through foster care in the U.S.? If I knew...

Potential factor	% A lot or somewhat likely
The child's biological family was supportive of the adoption.	57%
I could adopt a child of a specific age.	45%
There would be a child with the background or characteristics I was looking for.	40%
The child's biological family would not be involved after adoption.	38%
I could adopt within six (6) months of my first contact with the agency.	33%

The relationship between a child and their biological family is also important while the child receives foster care, a concern raised by Black residents in Houston and Los Angeles. Some interviewees talked about foster care — both formal foster care and informal care — as a “bridge” in the community that could support families until they were better able to provide care. Maintaining a connection with the biological family was an important part of that bridge.

“ [My wife and I] come from a place of believing the best place for the child is with their biological parents. And so we saw ourselves as a support to allow the time and space for the biological parents to get to a place to have the child and not from the standpoint of trying to be their parents or intervene. It's more a bridge of assistance.”

– **Kay E.**, age 39, Los Angeles

“ I'm one of those people that would rather see kids with family members before they can go to foster care ... Because I figure a family member is a little bit more invested in that child versus someone who is a total stranger. But a lot of times when you give them to the family members they don't get the support that they need to keep the kids.”

– **Holly R.**, age 53, Houston

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how the U.S. foster care system is viewed by the American population, with specific insights into the experiences and views of Black adults.

Of the nearly

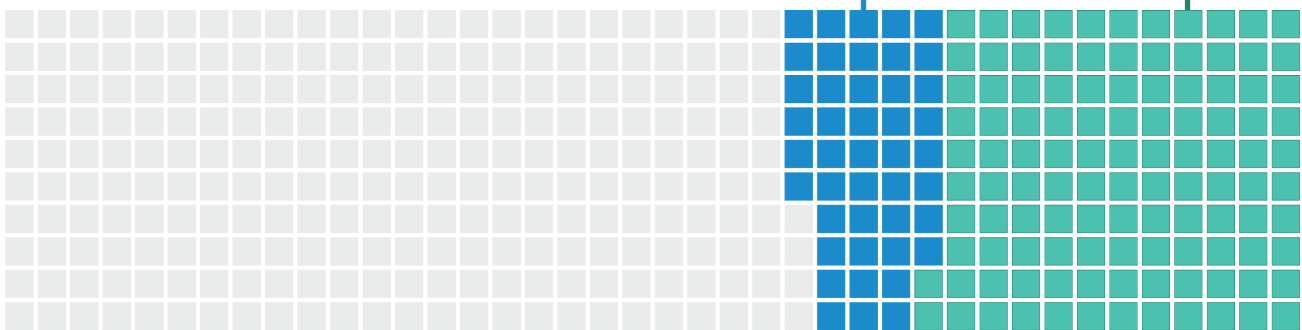
**400,000 children
in foster care,**

11%

don't yet have a family
to stay with consistently

28%

are waiting for a
"forever family."¹²



□ = 1,000 children in foster care

Note: The two groups portrayed in the chart are not mutually exclusive, as some children are waiting for a forever family and do not have a family to stay with consistently while they wait for adoption.

While just over half (54%) of Americans have considered providing foster care themselves, a majority (68%) don't even know if they are eligible to provide foster care. Findings in this report illuminate pathways to connect the needs of foster youth to willing families. Before making a larger commitment to foster, these families may want to know where to start, how to receive support, whether this system is biased against families of color and how to get to know youth in foster care. Black caregivers and parents are especially needed when it comes to supporting Black children's needs and providing culturally responsive care. Findings demonstrate that familiarity with the system, higher knowledge of foster care and financial resources may play a role in better supporting potential caregivers.

Americans have limited knowledge of foster care, as almost two-thirds say they know little (43%) or nothing (20%). The gap in knowledge may be filled in part with negative perceptions from media, such as news and television, as many interviewees described getting their information from news stories or documentaries that highlight poor outcomes for children. Indeed, only 27% of Americans overall have positive views of the U.S. foster care system. However, positive views of the system rise in sync with knowledge about the system, offering a critical opportunity for public education.

Deeply engrained and systemic issues in the U.S. — such as the high cost of living, availability of housing and funding for public foster care — are frequently cited as barriers that prevent Americans from pursuing foster care or adoption from foster care. Four in 10 Americans say the changes they would have to make to their living situation pose a major barrier to both fostering (42%) and adopting (41%). Increasing public awareness of foster care requirements and related resources could help make these barriers less daunting to prospective families.

¹² Ibid.

Roughly one in four Black Americans (25%) and one in five Hispanic Americans (20-21%) see racial or ethnic discrimination as a major barrier to considering foster care or adoption. And, Black Americans have lower confidence in key aspects of the foster care system, such as whether the foster care system could do more to help biological families stay together (71% of Black Americans agree vs. 59% nationwide). Black Americans are already more knowledgeable and interested in foster care than Americans of other racial backgrounds, and addressing areas of systemic distrust and lack of confidence in the foster care system could help recruit more Black Americans as caregivers.

The adults considering adoption from foster care are looking for a strong and sustained relationship with a child. However, “unknowns” represent a meaningful barrier — potential adoptive parents have concerns about the difficulty of parenting a child who may have trauma (39%) and most don't know anyone personally who has provided foster care (61%) or been in foster care themselves (81%). Mentoring programs — which connect children in foster care with members of the public to create and sustain supportive relationships — may be a solution that can help Americans better understand the foster care system, as well as the children in its care.



METHODOLOGY

Quantitative data for this study were collected using both mail and web surveys in March through April 2023. A total of 5,469 surveys were collected. Of those, 3,967 responses were collected using the Gallup Panel, a probability-based panel that selects respondents using random-digit-dial phone interviews that cover both mobile and landline phones (as well as some address-based sampling recruitment). In order to obtain sufficient responses from Black Americans and others, an additional 1,502 responses were collected through a third-party opt-in sample provider. All web responses were collected using the same platform.

The Gallup Panel and opt-in samples were weighted independently and then combined using composite weighting procedures. Base weights for the Panel data were generated to correct for unequal selection probabilities. Post-stratification weights were then used to match national demographics of gender, age, race, Hispanic ethnicity and education, with cross-classified targets within race. Demographic weighting targets were based on the most recent Current Population Survey estimates for the age 18+ population.

The adjusted margin of error (adjusted for design effect) for the 5,469 overall respondents is ± 1.9 percentage points and the design effect is 2.0. All adjusted margins of error are reported at the confidence level of 95%.¹³ The racial and ethnic groups included below are those which had a sufficient number of respondents for reporting.

For the 2,795 White adults in the sample, the design effect is 1.7 and the adjusted margin of error is $\pm 2.4\%$.

For the 1,563 Black adults in the sample, the design effect is 2.6 and the adjusted margin of error is $\pm 4.0\%$.

For the 831 Hispanic adults in the sample, the design effect is 2.6 and the adjusted margin of error is $\pm 5.4\%$.

The qualitative themes and quotes featured in this report are derived from interviews with 50 Black adults in Houston and Los Angeles (25 in each location) from September to October 2023. Gallup researchers conducted 30-minute interviews, and notes and deidentified transcripts were used to generate quotes. Interviews were conducted by trained Gallup researchers who used a semi-structured interview guide to ask about adults' knowledge, perceptions, and experiences as they relate to foster care and adoption from foster care, particularly in their city area. All respondents were Black or African American and lived in either the greater Houston Metropolitan Statistical Area or the greater Los Angeles Metropolitan Statistical Area. Interviewee ages ranged from 25 to 60, and the sample included 15 men, 34 women and one non-binary person. Most respondents were members of the Gallup Panel and some were identified through a third-party sample. No foster care or adoption experience was required to be included in the qualitative interviews, although interviewees were made aware of the subject matter in advance.

¹³ Adjusted margins of error were calculated using an unrounded design effect. The design effect and adjusted margin of error were then rounded to the first decimal for reporting purposes.



GALLUP®

World Headquarters

The Gallup Building
901 F Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20004

t +1.877.242.5587

f +1.888.500.8282

www.gallup.com