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# **What are Black Adults' Perspectives on the U.S. Foster Care System? A Qualitative Analysis of Interviews with Black Adults from Los Angeles and Houston**

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## Introduction

The following report is an analysis of 50 qualitative interviews conducted in collaboration with Gallup as a follow-up to the Kidsave-Gallup study *Americans' Views of U.S. Foster Care: Elevating Black Americans' Perspectives and Experiences* (Gallup & Kidsave, 2024). In this qualitative study, 50 Black Americans, ages 26 to 60 from either Los Angeles, California or Houston, Texas were interviewed about their perspectives and experiences regarding foster care and adoption in the U.S. Respondents were chosen from these two regions because these are two cities with expansive child welfare systems with complex histories. Both cities have large populations of youth in foster care waiting to be adopted, and in both cities, Black youth and youth of color are disproportionately represented (LA County, Texas DFPS, 2024). Kidsave has a vested interest in the perceptions and barriers preventing families and communities from positively engaging with foster care and adoption and it operates its Weekend Miracles program to help connect older youth in foster care with mentors and adoptive families in both cities.

## Methodology

The quantitative Kidsave-Gallup study found that perspectives of the foster care system, mentoring, and adoption change depending on proximity to the foster care system (Gallup). Proximity to foster care was chosen because those with lived experience have valuable insights and perspectives. By centering people with lived experience and analyzing differing levels of proximity, Kidsave hopes to excavate new ideas, recommendations, and solutions to improve the lives of children in the foster care system.

Once the qualitative interviews were completed, the respondents' answers were divided into groups based on how much experience the respondents self-identified they had with the foster care system. The groups were as follows in Table 1.

Table 1: Groups of respondents in proximity to foster care

Group 1	Lived Experience (LE)	Individuals in Group 1 are individuals with direct lived experience interacting with the foster care system either as a child or a biological parent.	There were 9 respondents in Group 1.
Group 2	Secondary Experience (SE)	Individuals in Group 2 are individuals with Secondary Experience with the foster care system. This would be experiencing the foster care system as a foster or adoptive parent, a child whose parents provided foster care to	There were 21 respondents in Group 2.

		other children, or a relative or very close friend of someone who was in the system.	
Group 3	Tertiary Experience (TE)	Individuals in Group 3 are individuals with Tertiary Experience with the foster care system. This would be someone whose neighbor or an acquaintance of theirs has direct lived experience.	There were 16 respondents in Group 3.
Group 4	No Experience (NE)	Individuals in Group 4 are individuals with no experience whatsoever with the foster care system.	There were 4 respondents in Group 4.

The qualitative interviews were then analyzed within the context of their proximity grouping using a Reflexive Thematic Analysis approach developed by Dr. Virginia Braun and Dr. Victoria Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In accordance with the Braun and Clarke method of Reflexive Thematic Analysis, six themes were identified, and the two researchers developed and implemented a codebook for their ease of use. The themes and codes are as follows in Table 2.

Table 2: Themes of Analysis

Perceptions of Foster Care	Code: PFC	Results Metric: Positive, Negative, or Neutral
Perceptions of Adoption	Code: PA	Results Metric: Positive, Negative, or Neutral
Role of Racism in Foster Care	Code: R	Results Metric: Yes, racism plays a role and to what extent; No; racism does not play a role, or I don't know
Resources and Training	Code: RCs	Results Metric: Types of resources they'd like to see provided
Barriers to Foster Care and Adoption	Code: BFC/A	Results Metric: Examples of barriers impacting them/that could impact them
Mentoring	Code: M	Results Metric: Positive, Negative, or Neutral

## Group 1 – Lived Experience

Group 1 is made up of individuals with Lived Experience (LE). As previously defined, these are individuals with direct lived experience interacting with the foster care system, either as a child or a parent. There were nine individuals within this respondent group, and their answers to the interview questions were evaluated on the six identified themes.

## Perceptions of Foster Care

Respondents' perceptions of foster care were evaluated on a scale of *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* and were based on their responses to three questions:

- What three words come to mind when you think of foster care?
- Do you believe the U.S. foster care system harms or helps more?
- How confident are you in organizations that carry out the U.S. foster care system?

All nine respondents in the LE group had a negative perception of foster care. When asked what three words come to mind when they think of foster care, words like “fraud,” “bad kids,” “unloved,” and “unfair” were used. Several respondents made comments regarding the lack of funding, resources, and support—both emotionally and physically—within the foster care system. Comments were also made regarding the need for more clarity about what supports and services are available for children and families and what processes may be taking place.

One respondent, a 35-year-old from Houston, said, “It just doesn’t seem like you can do [foster care] very easily. I would still say by myself looking into it, it looks like it’s a daunting paper process and a time invested process. I would still say, even knowing my parents [were foster parents], I would still say like...I would need a lot of assistance to navigate through that.”

## Perceptions of Adoption

Respondents' perceptions of adoption were evaluated on a scale of *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* and were based on their responses to two questions:

- What three words come to mind when you think of adoption from foster care?
- How confident are you in organizations that carry out adoptions from the U.S. foster care system?

Overall, most of those in the LE group had a much more positive perception of adoption than perception of foster care, with 86% having a positive perception of adoption and only 14% having a negative perception of adoption. When asked what three words come to mind when they think of adoption from foster care, words like “family,” “life-changing,” “belonging,” and “security” were used. This shift in perception from foster care to adoption seemed to be attributed to the permanency and stability associated with adoption compared to that of foster care.

## **Role of Race in Foster Care**

Respondents' perceptions on the role of race in foster care were evaluated on the following scale: *yes, racism plays a role and to what extent; no, racism does not play a role; or I don't know*. The evaluation was determined based on how respondents answered the question, "What role, if any, do you think racism plays in foster care?" Any additional comments made around race or racism throughout the interview were also taken into consideration with regards to this question.

**Sixty-six percent (66%) of respondents with LE were asked about R, and of those asked, all of them said they believe that racism plays some role within the foster care system.** Many believe the role it plays comes in the form of potential preferences of foster or adoptive parents.

One respondent, a 35-year-old from Houston, said, "I would like to think that people who want to watch over children would not have racial biases...But I do know that some people probably have racial preferences of who they may want in their home. And then also how if you have a blended racial family or kids in your home how different stereotypes can be perceived."

Others feel the discrepancies between the races and the ways it impacts children of color are much more blatant and potentially harmful.

One respondent, a 49-year-old from Houston, said, "You get a little blonde-haired, blue-eyed baby, and you got a little brown baby with brown eyes, you know who's going to get adopted first...That always weighs into it because of the stigma attached to it, the unknown, the innate fear, because we're the other. How am I going to explain it? How am I going to do their hair? What are other kids going to say? What are other moms going to say if they see me? Those kinds of things are 100% attached to it."

## **Resources and Trainings**

Respondents in the LE group were asked the following:

- To identify resources and trainings they feel should be provided to potential foster and adoptive parents;
- How could the system be improved or what more resources could be provided?
- Is the U.S. government doing to support foster care?

Some of the recurring suggestions made across the LE group revolved around the following categories: mental health support, training support, peer-to-peer support, and amplification.

Figure 1 shows the categories mentioned by respondents, displaying topics in a Venn diagram to show the importance of these resources.

Figure 1: Resources and Training LE group



The need for mental health support was one of the most mentioned resources. The need for counseling for both children and families, training on how to parent children who have experienced trauma, and training on how to deal with life adjustments were all highlighted.

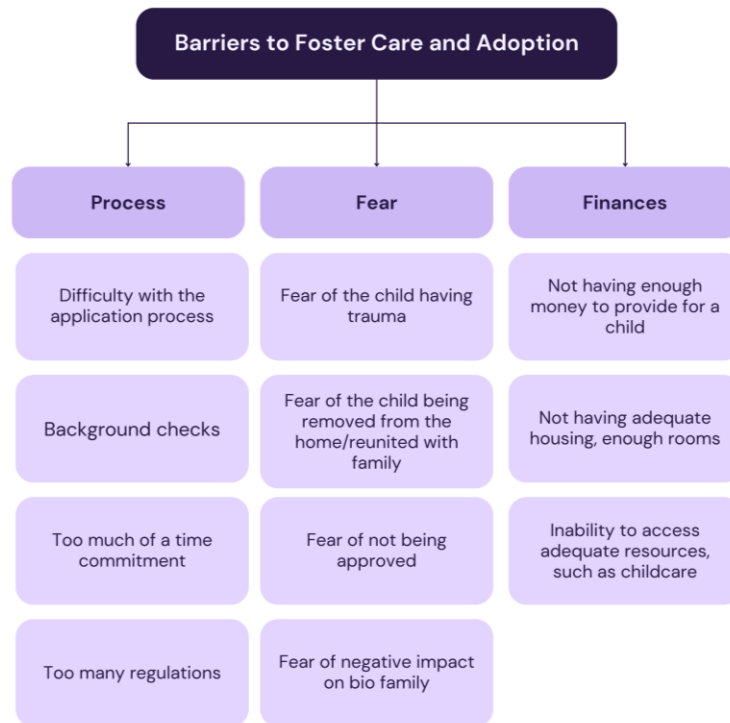
When asked about whether local and federal governments are doing enough to support foster care and families interested in providing foster care and adopting, most respondents in the LE group said the government is not doing enough. Many referenced the lack of funding and neglect of children that can occur within the government-run system.

One respondent, a 45-year-old from Los Angeles who had a family member that provided foster care said, “I don’t believe the U.S. government is doing enough. The U.S. government could do a lot more if they wanted to. But I would say this, I don’t think the U.S. government cares about kids in the U.S. foster care system.”

### **Barriers to Foster Care/Adoption**

When asked to consider barriers to foster care and adoption that may prevent individuals from providing foster care or adopting, respondents in the LE group highlighted barriers within three categories: process, fear, and finances, as shown in Figure 2, listed in order of the prevalence in which they appeared.

Figure 2: Barriers to foster care and adoption LE group



## Mentoring

To conclude the interview, respondents were asked about the idea of and opportunities to participate in mentoring programs that work with youth in foster care outside of formal foster care and adoption. While a few respondents were not asked about their opinions on mentoring programs due to a time constraint on the interview, those who were felt they could have a positive impact on youth in foster care.

## Group 2 – Secondary Experience (SE)

Group 2 is made up of individuals with secondary experience (SE). As previously defined, this would be experiencing the foster care system as a foster or adoptive parent, a child whose parents provided foster care to other children, or a relative or very close friend of someone who was in the system. There are 21 respondents in this group, and their responses to the interview questions were evaluated on the six identified themes.

## Perceptions of Foster Care

Respondents' perceptions of foster care were evaluated on a scale of *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* and were based on their responses to three questions:



- What three words come to mind when you think of foster care?
- Do you believe the U.S. foster care system harms or helps more?
- How confident are you in organizations that carry out the U.S. foster care system?

Of the 21 respondents, 48% had a positive perception of foster care, 43% had a negative perception of foster care, and 9% had a neutral perception of foster care. When asked what three words come to mind when they think of foster care, those who felt positively chose words like “love,” “safe environment,” “care,” and “heartfelt.” Those who had a negative or neutral perception chose words like “abuse,” “neglect,” “traumatic,” “unwanted,” and “lonely.”

When asked to consider whether the system harms or helps children in its care more, there was some conflict amongst those in the SE group. Several respondents expressed that they believe the system does both, mentioning that while it is important to remove the child from a harmful environment, if it is not done properly, it can cause even more harm to the child.

A 33-year-old from Houston said, “I think it helps if it has good intentions. I mean like if you see a child that’s facing neglect or there’s something going on and you get them out of that environment and you try to place them with someone better, then it helps. Harm if we’re just removing children from homes and placing them in foster care and not like having a plan in place to really get on any help needed...If someone’s in foster care three or four years or multiple times then I think that’s just a failure of our system to figure out could those be behavior issues or like what’s exactly going on. But if the intent is good to protect the child or children then yes. If the intent is to remove them without a plan in place and cause harm, then no, I think it actually probably does a lot worse.”

## Perceptions of Adoption

Respondents’ perception of adoption were evaluated on a scale of *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* and were based on their responses to two questions:

- What three words come to mind when you think of adoption from foster care?
- How confident are you in organizations that carry out adoptions from the U.S. foster care system?

**All 21 respondents in the SE group expressed positive perceptions of adoption.** When asked what three words come to mind when they think of adoption from foster care, they used words like “forever family,” “fresh start,” “unconditional love,” and “happy home.”

When asked about confidence levels in organizations that carry out adoptions, most comments from the SE group were still positive, but there were comments made regarding

a need for additional funding and resources. One respondent, a 36-year-old from Houston, mentioned that caseworkers are often overloaded, particularly in rural areas which can lead to children falling through the cracks.

One respondent, a 39-year-old from Houston, mentioned that knowing someone who successfully adopted improved her perception of adoption.

“I would say that [learning about their experience] made [adoption] feel more doable...I would say it made me feel like it was something that was possible if it was something that I wanted to do,” said the respondent. “And also, just with him being a white man adopting a Black child like that is very refreshing. But as a Black woman, I personally feel like I also want to contribute to the Black community in that way. We also want to step up for our kiddos in addition to when people outside of our race support our kids. That’s great, but I also want to contribute.”

### **Role of Race in Foster Care**

Respondents’ perceptions on the role of race in foster care were evaluated on the following scale: *yes, racism plays a role and to what extent; no, racism does not play a role; or I don’t know*. The evaluation was determined based on how respondents answered the question, “What role, if any, do you think racism plays in foster care?” Any additional comments made around racism throughout the interview were also taken into consideration with regards to this question.

A few respondents were not asked this question due to time constraints on the interview, but of those who were asked, **70% said yes, they do believe racism plays some role in the foster care system**, with 24% saying no, they do not believe racism plays any role in the foster care system, and 5% saying they do not know. Of those who said yes, there were mixed responses about how large of a role racism plays, with some saying it plays a “huge role” and others saying, there is “some.” The majority of those who responded yes, mentioned racial preferences by potential foster or adoptive parents, something that was mentioned in the LE group as well.

One respondent who said they believed racism plays a “huge” role in foster care was a 59-year-old from Houston. “Most statistics or things I’ve heard about foster care are that the Black kids or kids of color are the most unwanted kids. Coupled with our own systemic racism, that takes a toll. I mean mentally that would take a toll on you. Just growing up in this country as a Black man, walking in a store can be extremely stressful. Coupled with my home life, especially for the foster care children feeling unloved and unwanted already, it can be stressful,” said the respondent.

## Resources and Trainings

Respondents in the SE group were asked the following:

- To identify resources and trainings they feel should be provided to potential foster and adoptive parents;
- How could the system be improved or what more resources could be provided?
- Is the U.S. government doing to support foster care?

Some of the recurring suggestions made across the SE group revolved around the following categories: mental health support, training and support, peer-to-peer support/mentoring, and amplification. These are shown in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Resources and Trainings SE group



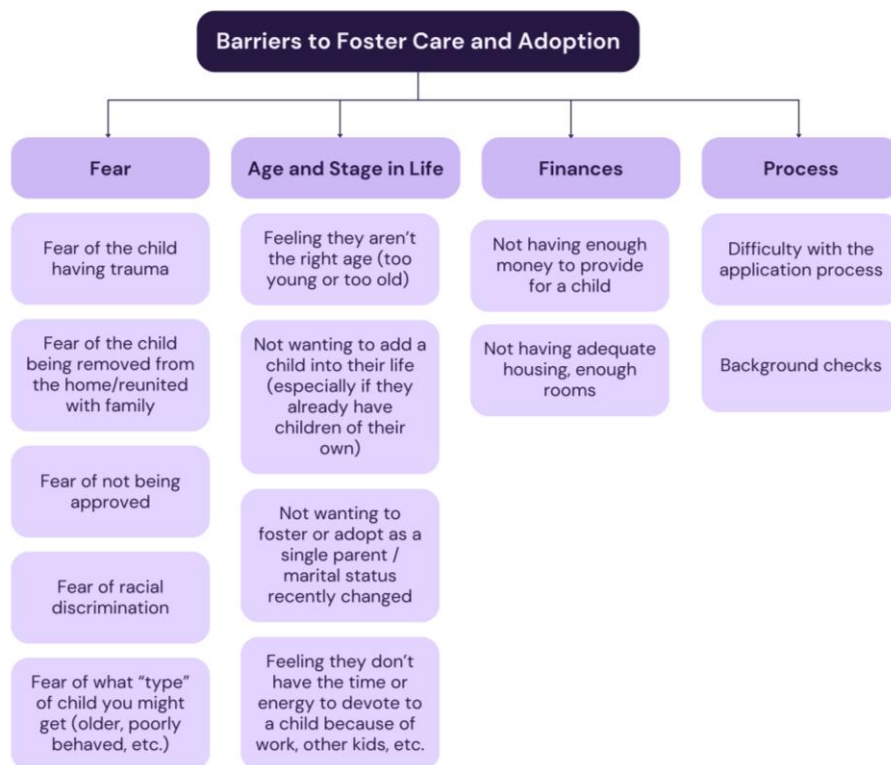
Similarly to the LE group, the need for mental health support was one of the most mentioned resources, with the need for counseling for both the youth and families highlighted. The second most mentioned topic was training and support such as parenting classes, child development classes, financial literacy classes, and workshops to help both the child and families with the transition. Peer-to-peer support programs or mentoring programs that allow both the kids and families to work with people in similar situations were highlighted numerous times as was the need for better amplification of information and available resources for potential families.

All respondents in the SE group who were asked whether federal and local governments are doing enough to support families interested in providing foster care or adopting said no. Respondents mentioned items like lack of funding, a need for more community engagement, more awareness raising, and more accessibility.

## Barriers to Foster Care/Adoption

When asked to consider barriers to foster care and adoption, respondents in the SE group highlighted barriers within the following four categories: fear, age and stage in life, finances, and process, as depicted in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Barriers to foster care and adoption SE group



## Mentoring

Almost all respondents who were asked about mentoring discussed the impact of it as a positive opportunity for parents and children and a great way to raise awareness about fostering. Of the SE group, 10 respondents were asked and all but one had a positive response to it. They commented on its impact in forming fruitful connections between people and allowing the child a chance to talk to someone who can be their role model. One respondent, a 50-year-old from Houston, had a neutral response to mentoring

because of previous experience participating in a court-involved program. While he did note there were positive elements about the program, he noted having difficulty with the time commitment as well as having to “do a lot of things in your home even though you were not the foster parent” and having to follow “stringent guidelines.”

### **Group 3 – Tertiary Experience (TE)**

Group 3 is made up of individuals with Tertiary Experience (TE) to the child welfare system. As previously defined, these are individuals who have someone in their life who is not a close friend or family member but is still part of their life—such as a neighbor or acquaintance or someone they have interacted with through their line of work—with lived experience in foster care either as a child or parent. There were 16 respondents in this group, and their responses to the interview questions were evaluated on the six identified themes.

#### **Perceptions of Foster Care**

Respondents’ perceptions of foster care were evaluated on a scale of *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* and were based on their responses to three questions:

- What three words come to mind when you think of foster care?
- Do you believe the U.S. foster care system harms or helps more?
- How confident are you in organizations that carry out the U.S. foster care system?

Overall, respondents in the TE group had a negative perception of foster care with 63% providing negative responses, 25% providing positive responses, and 13% providing neutral responses. When asked what three words come to mind when they think of foster care, words like “woefully underfunded,” “scams,” “overwhelmed,” and “trauma” were used. Several respondents made comments about how the system is well-intentioned but poorly executed.

When asked whether they believe the U.S. foster care system harms or helps more, one respondent, a 60-year-old from Los Angeles, said “Both. Some kids hit the jackpot and other kids fall through the cracks. Kids die in the system all the time, which is a horrible, horrible thing. It happens in life outside of the system as well, but I think once you’re in the system, especially as a child, you expect to be taken care of.”

#### **Perceptions of Adoption**

Respondents’ perceptions of adoption were evaluated on a scale of *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* and were based on their responses to two questions:

- What three words come to mind when you think of adoption from foster care?
- How confident are you in organizations that carry out adoptions from the U.S. foster care system?

The majority of respondents in the TE group had a positive perception of adoption from foster care with 75% responding positively, 12.5% responding negatively, and 12.5% responding neutrally. When asked what three words come to mind when they think of adoption, those with positive perceptions used words like “hope,” “belonging,” “new beginning,” and “family.” Those with a negative or neutral perception used words like “challenging,” “difficult,” “separation,” and “uncertainty.”

When asked about their confidence in organizations that carry out adoptions from the U.S. foster care system, one respondent, a 26-year-old from Los Angeles, said he has difficulty trusting the government and organizations alike.

“I think once money starts entering and donations and all that, corruption becomes more likely...You don’t know how much the CEO is taking from the top. Not that I’m against organizations for foster care, but do they have the best interest of the kids [in mind]?” said the 26-year-old respondent.

## **Role of Race in Foster Care**

Respondents’ perceptions on the role of race in foster care were evaluated on the following scale: *yes, racism plays a role and to what extent; no, racism does not play a role; or I don’t know*. The evaluation was determined based on how respondents answered the question, “What role, if any, do you think racism plays in foster care?” Any additional comments made around racism throughout the interview were also taken into consideration with regards to this question.

Six respondents within the TE group were not asked about the role of race in foster care because of time constraints in the interview. Of the ten respondents within this group who were asked, 80% of respondents said that they do believe racism plays a role within foster care and 20% said that they do not.

One respondent, a 47-year-old attorney who often works with youth in foster care, believes that race plays a large role, specifically in the adoption process.

“I think for individuals or couples who are looking to adopt unfortunately many folks are focused on having a child that reflects their identity. Their ethnicity. Their culture. So, what we’ve seen over decades is that white families are seeking children or babies that look like them. Meanwhile, here are tens of thousands of children who don’t look like them, who desperately need homes and who are in the foster care system. And so, there’s that

unfortunate kind of individual selectivity that leaves a very vulnerable population with needs that are unmet and leaves those kids in the system,” said the respondent.

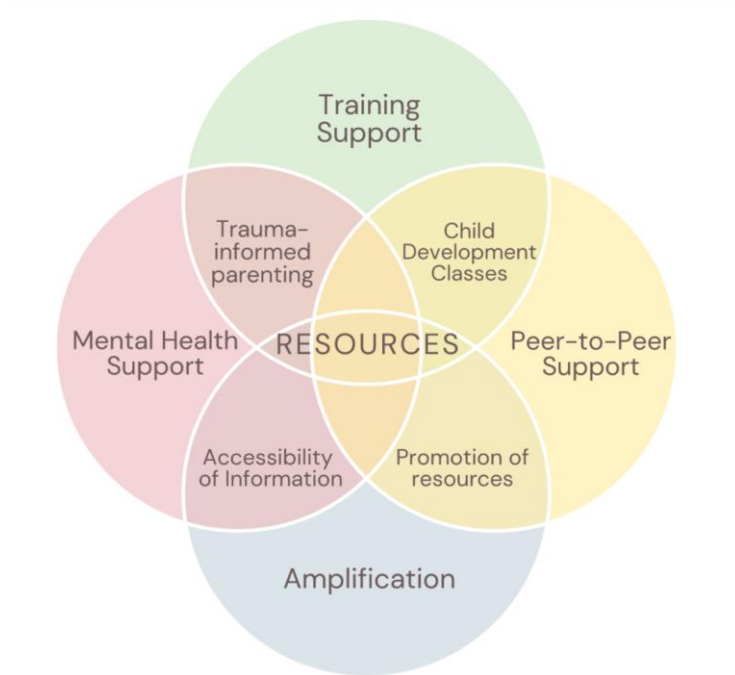
## **Resources and Training**

Respondents in the Tertiary Group were asked the following:

- To identify resources and trainings they feel should be provided to potential foster and adoptive parents;
- How could the system be improved or what more resources could be provided?
- Is the U.S. government doing to support foster care?

The recurring suggestions made across the TE group revolved around the following categories: training support, mental health support, peer-to-peer support, and amplification. These are highlighted in Figure 5.

Figure 5: Resources and training TE group



The need for training support such as parenting classes, child development classes, and general family support and training were highlighted the most across the TE group. The need for mental health support was highlighted the second most frequently with needs for counseling, family therapy, and trauma-informed parenting training all mentioned. The needs for peer-to-peer support for both children and families were also mentioned as well as more accessibility of information and promotion of available resources.

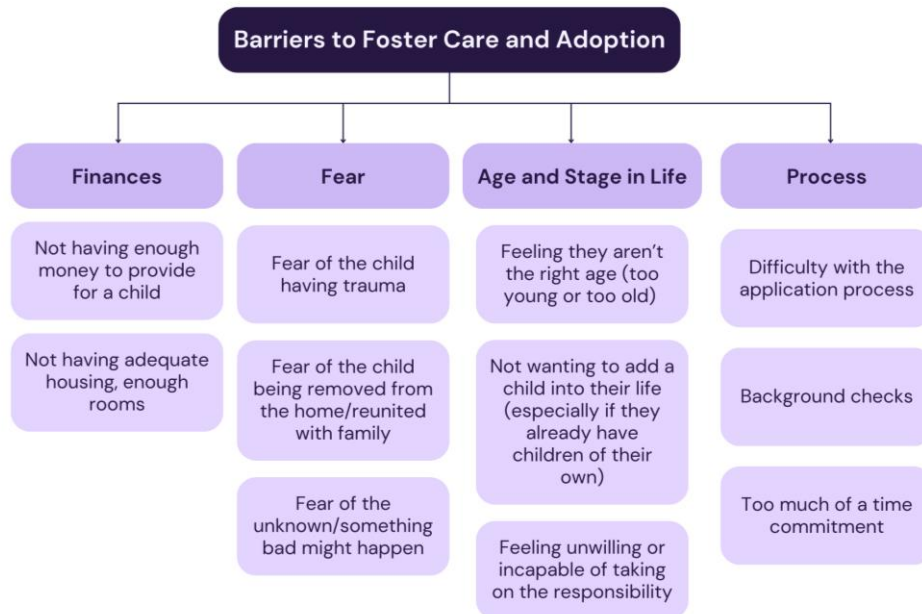
When asked if the U.S. government is doing enough to support those interested in providing foster care and adopting, all who were asked responded negatively. Many referenced the lack of funding provided by the government and the lack of awareness about programs and available resources.

### **Barriers to Foster Care/Adoption**

When asked to consider barriers to foster care and adoption, respondents in the TE group highlighted barriers within the following categories: finances, fear, age and stage in life, and process, which are highlighted in Figure 6.



Figure 6: Barriers to foster care and adoption TE group



Concerns around finances and housing instability were brought up the most among the TE group. One respondent, a 43-year-old child welfare worker from Los Angeles said, “Sometimes for those who want to provide [foster care] for more than one kid, it’s still kind of financial, but you have to have a certain amount of rooms in your home to be able to do that. I’ve even experienced a situation with one [woman] who really wanted to care for this young boy and his siblings, but she was told she had to move because they needed separate bedrooms, and she couldn’t move to get the separate bedrooms.”

Another respondent, a 53-year-old retired teacher said, “The housing prices are so high, that considering becoming a foster parent, you have to at least have a two bedroom. It’s just, especially here in Los Angeles, it’s just sometimes out of reach if you work at a basic income.”

The second most common barrier brought up had to do with age or stage in life, such as being too old or too young to foster or adopt. Additionally, many respondents referenced already having biological children or not wanting to have children as a reason someone might not foster or adopt.

The third most common barrier brought up by the TE were various fears: fear of the child having trauma, fear of the child being removed from the home after they'd moved in, fear of something going wrong or something bad happening to the child. Some manner of fear preventing someone from fostering or adopting was mentioned eight times within this group.

Lastly, like others, the TE expressed that the process could be a barrier to some. The difficulty of the paperwork and application process could be one deterrent keeping people from positively engaging.

## **Mentoring**

To conclude the interview, respondents were introduced to the idea of mentoring programs that work with youth in foster care, pairing them with caring adults for a positive connection outside of formal foster care and adoption. While a few respondents were not asked because of a time constraint on the interview, 89% of those who were asked felt positively about it.

## **Group 4 – No Experience (NE)**

Group 4 is made up of individuals who self-reported having No Experience (NE) with the foster care system. There were four individuals in this respondent group, and their responses to the interview questions were evaluated on the six identified themes.

### **Perceptions of Foster Care**

Respondents' perceptions of foster care were evaluated on a scale of *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* and were based on their responses to three questions:

- What three words come to mind when you think of foster care?
- Do you believe the U.S. foster care system harms or helps more?
- How confident are you in organizations that carry out the U.S. foster care system?

Respondents in the NE group had a majority negative perception of foster care with 75% responding with a negative perception and 25% responding with a neutral perception. When asked to what three words come to mind when they think of foster care, those with negative perceptions, chose words like “scary,” “troubled kids,” “bad parents,” and “inconsistent.”

When asked to consider whether the U.S. foster care system harms or helps more and their confidence level in organizations that carry out the U.S. foster care system, the respondents were a bit more conflicted.

One respondent, a 44-year-old from Houston said, “The foster care system in the United States helps to keep these children from being out in the street and [gives them] a home, so I think it mostly does good in my opinion.”

Another respondent, a 35-year-old from Houston, said they could see both the good and the bad.

“I think that removing children from their homes is traumatic. No matter what it’s traumatic, whether it was justified, and they truly needed to be removed [or not], I think that it’s a traumatic thing for the children involved. I think putting them into the foster care system which you know sometimes things happen in foster care...that’s another traumatic situation. But I do think that it can be helpful [and] for their own good and for their betterment. So, I think it goes both ways,” said the respondent.

## **Perceptions of Adoption**

Respondents’ perceptions of adoption were evaluated on a scale of *positive*, *negative*, or *neutral* and were based on their responses to two questions:

- What three words come to mind when you think of adoption from foster care?
- How confident are you in organizations that carry out adoptions from the U.S. foster care system?

All respondents in the NE group had positive perceptions of adoption and used positive descriptors when asked what three words come to mind when you think of adoption from foster care. A few of the words that were used were “loving,” “compassion,” “family,” “care,” and “permanent.”

When asked about confidence level in organizations that carry out adoptions, respondents in the NE group expressed a limited amount of knowledge and were hesitant to express an opinion.

One respondent, a 52-year-old from Houston said, “I don’t know if I know enough but I would hope that [organizations] are doing the right thing. I haven’t heard enough to say if they are or not or have a clear understanding of what’s been going on. I feel that they would be doing their best by placing the children in a good home. I haven’t heard many negative things in recent years at all about adoption. Not that I recall hearing anything negative lately. So, I would think they’re doing the right thing.”

## **Role of Race in Foster Care**

Respondents' perceptions on the role of race in foster care were evaluated on the following scale: *yes, racism plays a role and to what extent; no, racism does not play a role; or I don't know*. The evaluation was determined based on how respondents answered the question, "What role, if any, do you think racism plays in foster care?" Any additional comments made around racism throughout the interview were also taken into consideration with regards to this question.

Despite being proximally removed from the foster care system, most of the respondents within the NE group seem aware of the issue of discrimination that can occur throughout the foster care system. Three out of the four respondents in the NE group expressed that they believe racism likely negatively impacts youth of color in foster care, resulting in them being treated differently compared to their White counterparts.

One respondent, a 54-year-old from Los Angeles, commented on such trends:

"I suspect that minority children, particularly Black children, probably spend much more time in the system because it's going to be harder to find people to adopt them. People willing to take that on which is a shame. Some of that is prejudice. I suppose some of that is, I mean, I'm not going to say it's all prejudice. I just think some of that is perhaps anybody adopting a child of another race there's probably going to be some trepidation about that, 'do I know how to take care of some kid's hair that is not like mine? Do I know how to raise them and teach them things about their culture and history? Am I going to do them the justice that should be done?' So, I think that I wouldn't say it's all racism but certainly would think that some racism plays [a role]. Some people will not make that choice because of racism."

Another respondent, a 44-year-old from Houston expressed that they do not believe that racism plays a role in foster care.

"I don't think there's racism," said the respondent. "I often hear people say that—and I can respond because I'm African American—I hear a lotta people in the African American community say well the foster care system is racist so children should only be with African American families, but I disagree because you know most of the people in the African American community choose not to foster. If you look in the system specifically African Americans don't adopt as much. I mean if you feel that way, if they really feel [that] way then, they should participate in foster caring in their communities. That's my opinion instead of calling racism. And I can say that because I'm African American. That's just my opinion you know."

## Resources and Training

Respondents in the NE group were asked the following:

- To identify resources and trainings they feel should be provided to potential foster and adoptive parents;
- How could the system be improved or what more resources could be provided?
- Is the U.S. government doing to support foster care?

The recurring suggestions made across the NE group revolved around the following categories: training and support, mental health support, amplification, and peer-to-peer support/mentoring. These are shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Resources and training NE group



One of the most common resources and trainings that respondents in the NE group mentioned was parenting courses. Other ideas proposed by the NE group included assistance understanding the fostering and adoption process; more information and transparency around what the process entails and resources that are available; family counseling; and training to be more culturally aware, especially for families who may be fostering or adopting transracially.

One respondent, a 52-year-old respondent from Houston said “Everything in the beginning is nerve-racking and just trying to know what needs to be done and what’s possible. From the beginning having that knowledge just to know what to expect. I know that no one can tell you exactly what to expect but at least you know you’d have some idea about the process and what’s needed. What you need to do. What you need to have done already. What classes you need to take or what training they will give you and how long it will take. Just everything laid out in that way.”

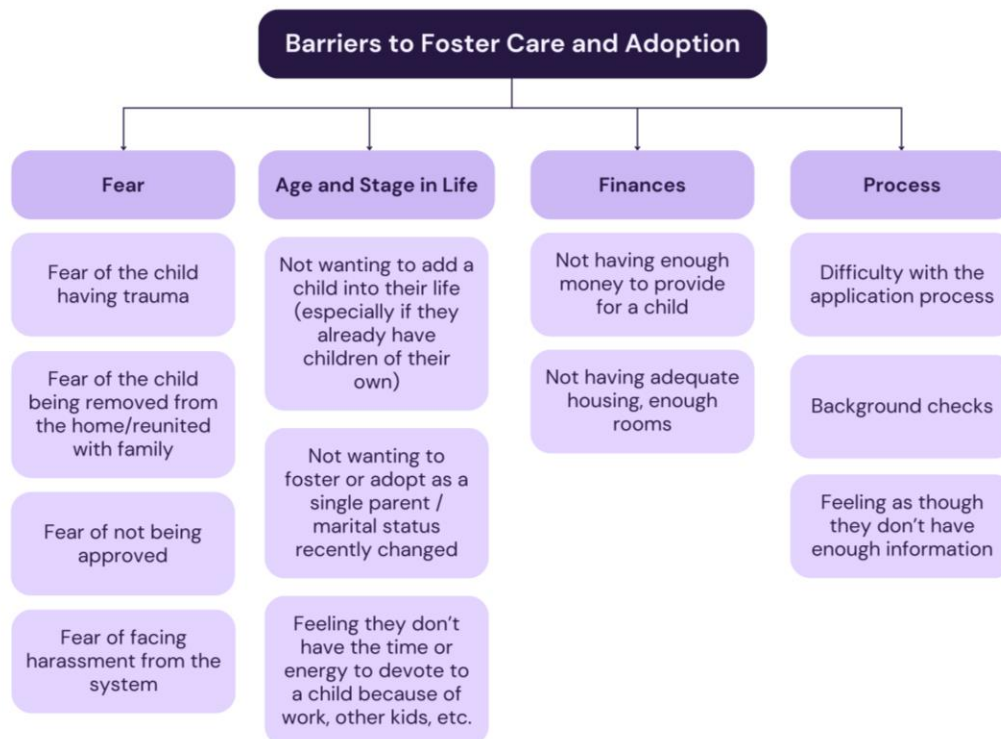
The same respondent later emphasized the need for greater representation and information about what types of families are eligible for fostering and adopting and the need for involving single Black mothers specifically.

“I haven’t seen too much about single mothers adopting, especially single Black ones. I’ve never seen that,” said the respondent. “I’ve seen families with the mom and dad, and they’re all picking up the kids, and it’s always what I’ve seen. And that’s the image that if I think about it that’s what comes up first to me. So maybe get more of the image of you know single-parent families adopting, to make more single-parents comfortable.”

## Barriers to foster care/adoption

When asked to consider barriers to foster care and adoption, respondents in the NE group highlighted barriers within the following categories: fear, age and stage in life, finances, and process. These are shown in Figure 8.

Figure 8: Barriers to foster care and adoption NE group



A few key elements within those categories were perceived difficulty of the process and the strictness of the requirements which one respondent, a 54-year-old from Los Angeles noted were, “necessary, but I don’t want to do it either.”

The most commented on barrier centered around fear: fear that the child might have behavioral issues as a result of trauma, fear that the individual may not be approved, and finally, one of the most common ones, the fear that the individual may be approved and begin to provide foster care, fall in love with the child, and then for one reason or another, the child will be taken away from them. These fears are consistent with the other proximity groups.

## Mentoring

While not all respondents in this group were asked about mentoring because of time restraints on the interview, those who were asked had a positive response. One

respondent, a 54-year-old from Los Angeles, had previous experience participating in a Mentoring program to work with young people. They expressed that they enjoyed the experience and said, “I do see a value in that if you can form that connection.”

Another respondent, a 35-year-old from Houston, said, “I think a mentorship program is a great thing. I think going to mentor children in foster care there are many ways that you can do that and volunteer and not have to be committed to... to taking a child into my home. I think it’s a great idea.”

## Conclusion

By dividing the 50 respondents into four groups based on their self-reported proximity level to foster care and evaluating their responses given in the interviews on the six identified themes, we were able to better identify the perceptions and barriers impacting Black adults in Los Angeles and Houston and determine if proximity to foster care may influence these perceptions or barriers.

After analyzing the four groups we found that perceptions of foster care, perceptions of adoption, the role of race in foster care, and mentoring program results were consistent across the groups. Lived Experience, Tertiary Experience, and No Experience groups all had majority negative perceptions of foster care; the Secondary Experience group had a majority positive perception of foster care, but only by a 5% margin. Perception of adoption results were all majority positive across all groups with few individual respondents having a neutral or negative perception of adoption. In instances where individuals did have a negative perception of adoption, they often cited a negative personal experience or reasoning behind this negative opinion of adoption. While 13 respondents weren’t asked about the role of race in foster care because of time constraints on their interviews, **of the 37 respondents asked across the four groups, the majority responded yes, racism does have an impact on foster care to some extent.** Twenty-six respondents weren’t asked about mentoring programs because of time constraints on their interviews, but of the 24 respondents asked across the four groups, **88% responded positively to the idea of mentoring programs for youth in foster care.**

When it came to resources and trainings and barriers to foster care and adoption, there were consistencies across the types of resources and trainings the groups suggested and the barriers the groups identified, but the priority levels attached to them shifted. **For groups with more experience with foster care, such as the Lived Experience and Secondary Experience groups, there was more emphasis on resources like mental health support, counseling, and peer-to-peer support** whereas groups with more degrees of separation from foster care like the Tertiary Experience and No Experience

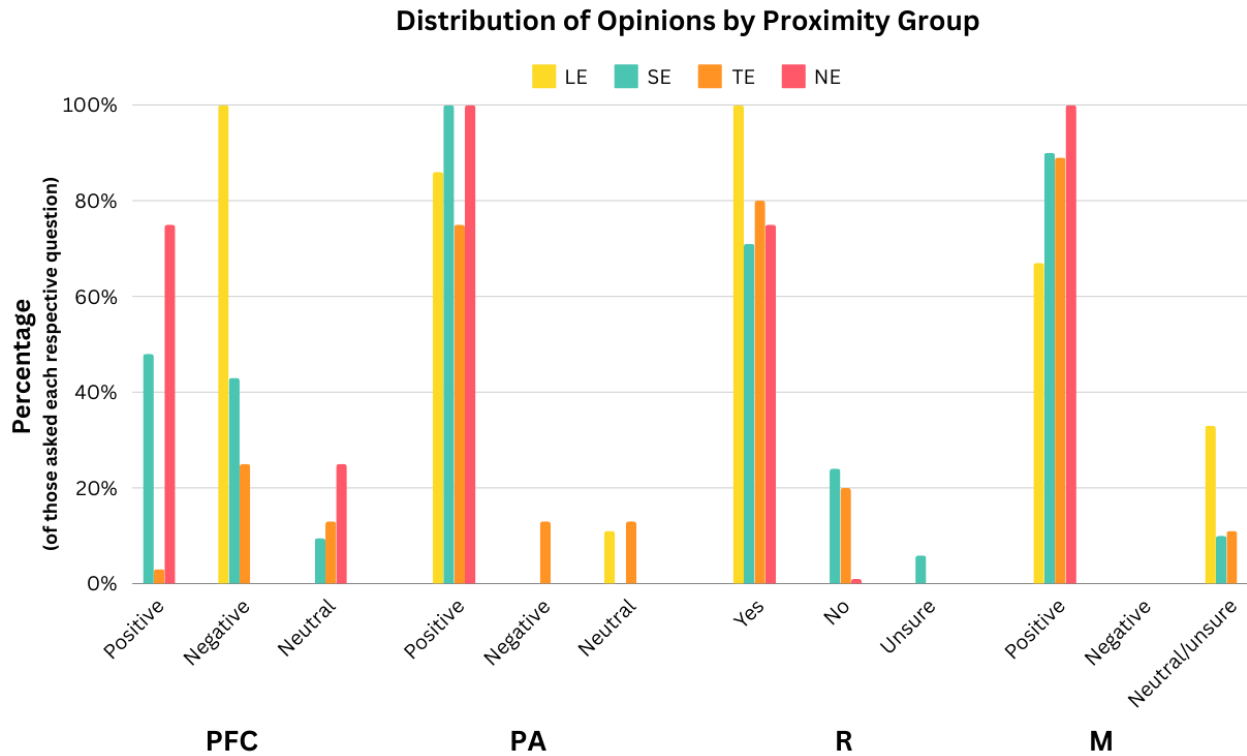


groups emphasized amplification and promotion of resources more, parenting classes, and accessibility of information.

For the barriers to foster care and adoption, where all groups had concerns over finances, the process, and fear of the unknown, the frequency with which each was reported amongst the groups varied. Individuals in the Lived Experience group were more likely to report concerns over the process as a potential barrier than factors attributed to their age or stage in life. Concerns regarding the process were low amongst the list of barriers reported in the Secondary Experience group where fear of the unknown and concerns regarding age and stage in life were high. In the Tertiary Experience group, finances were the most reported barrier and fear of the unknown, age and stage in life, and concerns regarding the process were all closely reported afterward. Fear of the unknown was the highest reported barrier for individuals in the No Experience group with age and stage in life following closely after with the fewest reported concerns about the process.

Because not every participant was asked every question, percentages of responses were calculated by taking the sample of only those asked the question dividing them within the categories of each interview question. Results within groups are listed below in Table 3.

Table 3: Distribution of opinions by proximity group



## Recommendations

One interesting thing that came to light during these interviews and varied greatly across the proximity groups was where the individuals reported getting their information regarding foster care and adoption.

Those in the Lived Experience and Secondary Experience groups were more likely to report receiving first- or second-hand information from someone connected to the child welfare system where those in the Tertiary Experience and No Experience groups were more likely to report receiving their information from television, news, and newspapers.

One respondent, a 60-year-old from Los Angeles in the Tertiary Experience group, said that they get their information regarding foster care and adoption from television and then said, “I watch a lot of police melodramas, and a lot of those deal with the bad side of foster care and adoption for the dramatic effect.”

If individuals who do not have a personal connection to foster care and adoption are relying on television to inform them about the child welfare system, what kind of information are they getting? Even individuals with a personal connection to foster care

and/or adoption reported a need for greater accessibility to information and resources as a potential barrier to foster care and adoption. **Based on the results of this analysis, providing more accessible information on the process and expectations; providing comprehensive training and ongoing support to the families; connecting the family and child with peer-to-peer support/mentoring groups/local community resources; increasing cultural and community support systems for families and youth of color; and providing ongoing, accessible, trauma-focused mental health support to both the child and family are some ways to help start to open the door wider to more potential foster and adoptive families.**

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