

# Post Adoption and Guardianship Instability (PAGI) Toolkit

## Project Team

- Nancy Rolock, Case Western Reserve University
- Kevin White, East Carolina University
- Rong Bai, Chelsea Flanigan, Case Western Reserve University
- Heather Ringeisen, Leyla Stambaugh, Rose Domanico, RTI International



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## Project Officers

Alysia Blandon and Jackie Gross

# Definitions for Key Terms used in the Toolkit

- **Post adoption and guardianship instability** is when children who have exited foster care to adoption and guardianship no longer live with their adoptive parent or legal guardian.
- **Tracking instability** is a data-driven process that records data in a systematic and consistent way, building on information already collected.
- **Four categories of stability:**
  - **No recent contact:** An agency has had no contact with the family over the past year.
  - **Stability:** A child has not reentered foster care.
  - **Stability unclear:** A child may be experiencing some difficulties.
  - **Instability:** A child who exited foster care through adoption or guardianship no longer resides with their adoptive parent or legal guardian.

# Rationale for Toolkit

- We conducted the Agency Study to learn about how agencies are in contact with or receive information about children who exit foster care through adoption or guardianship.
- We found that:
  - Agencies vary in their readiness to track post adoption or guardianship instability
  - A one-size-fits-all approach for tracking instability will not work
- We wanted to develop tools to track instability that build on data that agencies already collect

# Tracking Instability Takes Resources

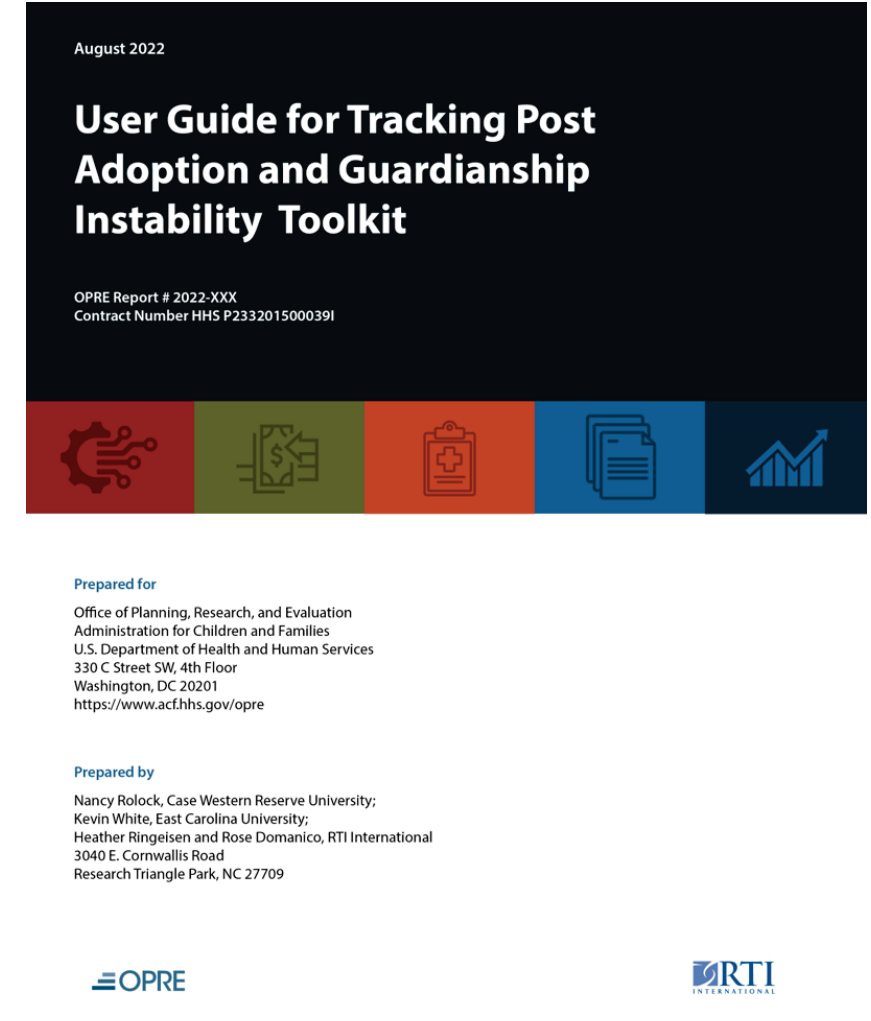
- Many Adoption Program Managers mention how they wish they had the time, resources, and staff to dedicate to tracking instability.
- This Toolkit is based on discussions with Adoption Program Managers about the information that would help them understand instability. It is also based on our experience as researchers, and the data we have used to track instability.

# Toolkit Goals

- Provide tools that states can use to help track post adoption and guardianship instability in the short and long-term.
- Provide a range of tool options that fit different levels of agency readiness.
- Spark ideas about how your agency might use data differently to help track post adoption and guardianship instability, even if these tools are not yet feasible within your agency context.

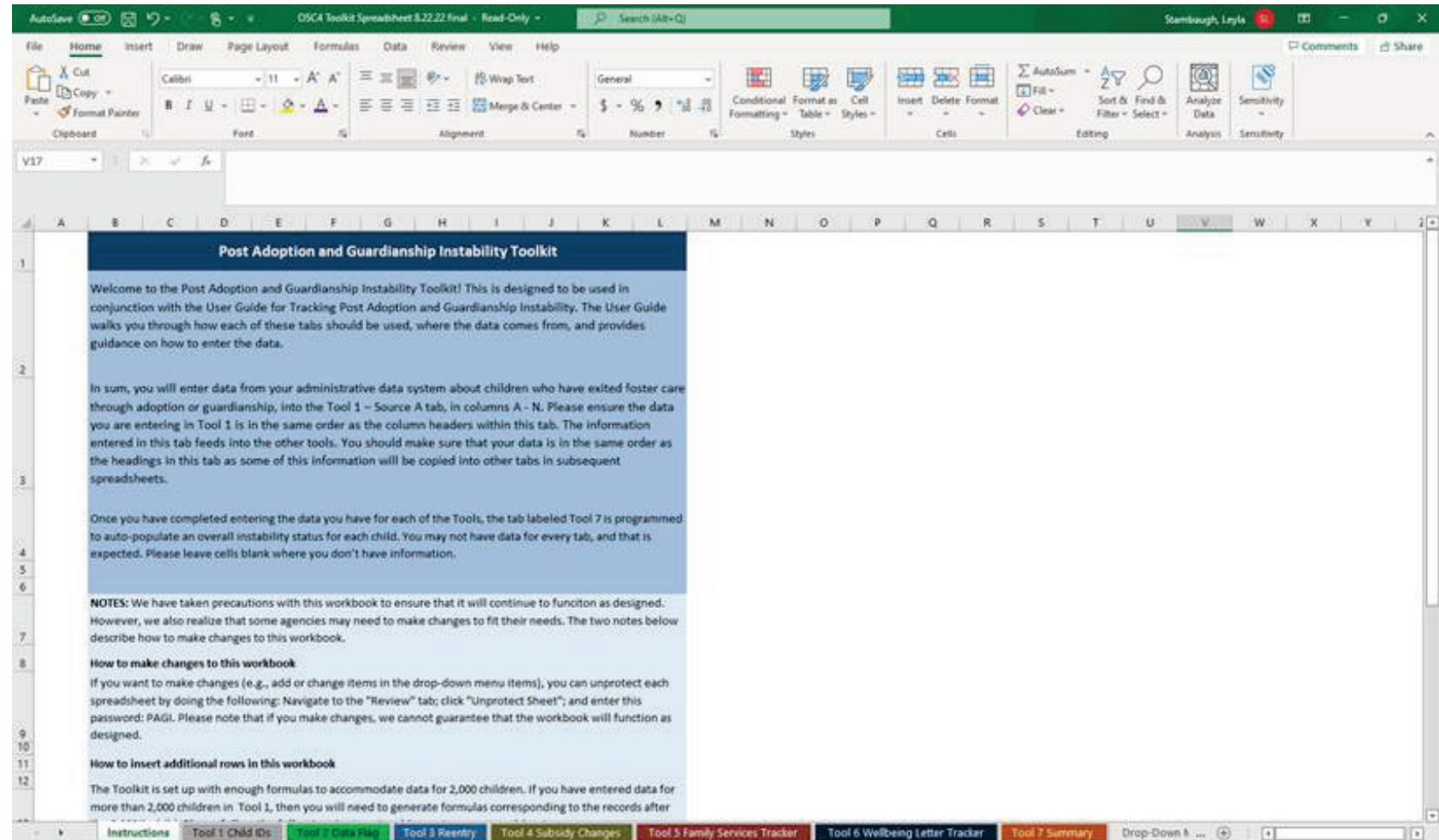
# Toolkit Structure: 3 Components

- **Excel workbook** with 7 spreadsheets, each a tool with a different source of data to help track post adoption and guardianship instability.
- **User Guide** that explains how to use the tools within the tracking spreadsheet.
- **A well being letter example** in the User Guide Appendix that provides sample questions that ask about the child's well being.



# Tracking Workbook Structure

- Each Tool is in a separate tab in the Excel Workbook.
- You don't need to use all tools. You can pick those that fit your agency's needs.



# Different Ways to Use the Toolkit

- **Use all the tools.** A comprehensive stand-alone system for tracking post adoption and guardianship instability.
- **Use individual tools.** Select tools that reflect the needs and data collection capabilities of your agency.
- **Use the Toolkit as a guide to update your systems.** The Toolkit can provide a starting point for conversations within your agency about what information you can collect to understand instability.
  - We recommend working with the data team at your agency, show them the Toolkit, as an example of the types of information you want to collect. Discuss where the current data you collect is stored, and what is new data that is not being systematically collected.



**Spreadsheet  
to Compile  
Child IDs and  
Case  
Information  
in  
Preparation  
for Tracking  
Instability**



## Tool 1 (Child IDs) Overview



- **Purpose:** Compile the child-level information needed to track instability.
- **Data Source:** Your SACWIS or other administrative data systems.
- **Type of information collected:** A list of children who exited foster care to adoption or guardianship and their **child IDs**
- **How is this tool helpful?** Tool 1 is foundational, it is the list of all children whose stability or instability will be tracked. The information will be used in the other tools.

# Single vs. Multiple IDs



- **Agencies where the child's ID changes at the time of adoption**
  - Challenging because you will need to engage the data system team to help you figure out how to compile all IDs in one location.
- **Agencies where a single ID is used for the child**
  - Using this tool will be straight-forward.

## Tool 1 (Child IDs)

# How will this tool help your agency track instability?



- When children's IDs change after adoption and then children come back into foster care, their reentry may be associated with their Foster Care ID, their Adoption ID, or a new ID. The only way to capture reentry is if foster and adoption ID's are compiled in one location.
- Compiling all child IDs in one location allows your agency to determine the rate at which children and youth are reentering foster care after adoption.

## Tool 1 (Child IDs)

# Step 1: List all children who exited foster care through adoption or guardianship



Child First Name	Child Last Name	Foster Care ID	Adoption ID	Child Date of Birth	Child Sex	Child Race	Child Ethnicity	Date of Adoption or Guardianship	Type of Legal Permanence

- These are the columns in the Tool.
- Pay attention to the order, column headers will repeat automatically in other tools.

## Step 2: Include all Foster Care and Adoption Child IDs



- **Agencies where the child's ID changes at the time of adoption:**
  - There are columns to include a ***Foster Care ID*** and an ***Adoption ID***.
- **Agencies where a single ID is used for the child:**
  - Enter the ONE child ID into the spreadsheet in the ***Foster Care ID*** column.
  - Leave the ***Adoption ID*** column blank.

**Spreadsheet  
to Compile  
Child IDs and  
Case  
Information  
in  
Preparation  
for Tracking  
Instability**



## Tool 2 (Data Flag) Overview



- **Purpose:** Incorporates information about instability using a data flag in child welfare administrative data systems.
  - A **data flag** that indicates a child has reentered foster care after adoption or guardianship (if the data system for your agency has such a flag).
  - If no data flag, we have suggestions on what should be included if your agency would like to develop one.
  
- **Data Source:** Your SACWIS or other administrative data systems.



## Tool 2 (Data Flag)

# How will this tool help your agency track instability?



- When children reenter foster care, sometimes there are challenges identifying them in the administrative data.
- Many agencies change IDs at adoption, making it difficult to link a child to their foster care record.
- This tool integrates both the adoption ID (or guardianship) and foster care record at the child level to help track instability events.

## Tool 2 (Data Flag)

# Step 1: List all children



- The columns for the ***Child's First Name*** through ***Type of Legal Permanence*** entered in the **Tool 1** spreadsheet, will auto populate with the same information in columns A-J in the **Tool 2** spreadsheet.
  - There will be a row for each child.

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
Child First Name	Child Last Name	Foster Care ID	Adoption ID	Child Date of Birth	Child Sex	Child Race	Child Ethnicity	Date of Adoption or Guardianship	Type of Legal Permanence

- If you did **NOT** use **Tool 1**, follow the instructions for **Tool 1** to enter information for each child into columns A-J in the **Tool 2** spreadsheet.

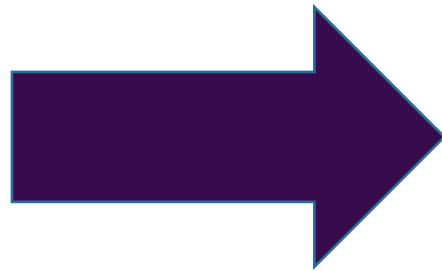
**Step 1 is the same for Tools 2 – 6.**

Tool 2 (Data Flag)

## Step 2: Determine if your agency uses a data flag



**YES, there is  
a data flag**

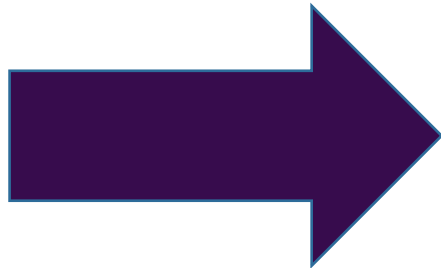


Go to Step 3

# Step 2: If your If your Agency does NOT have a Data Flag



NO



## Sample Question for Tracking Reentry from Adoption

*Was this child previously adopted? Yes / No*

*If yes, adopted through (select one)*

- 1. This child welfare agency*
- 2. A different public child welfare system*
- 3. Intercountry adoption*
- 4. Private domestic adoption*
- 5. An unsubsidized adoption*
- 6. Other: please describe*

## Sample Question for Tracking Reentry from Guardianship:

*Did this child previously exit the child welfare system through guardianship? Yes / No*

*If yes, through (select one)*

- 1. Federally subsidized guardianship program (e.g., Kin-GAP) or similar program at this child welfare agency*
- 2. Federally subsidized guardianship program (e.g., Kin-GAP) or similar program at a different public child welfare system*
- 3. State-subsidized guardianship program at this child welfare agency*
- 4. State-subsidized guardianship program at a different public child welfare system*
- 5. An unsubsidized guardianship*
- 6. Guardianship relinquishment*
- 7. Other: please describe*

## Step 3: Examine child welfare administrative data for foster care reentry date flags



- Examine your child welfare administrative data.
- Keep track of child IDs recorded in your administrative data that have been flagged by your data system as having reentered foster care after an adoption or guardianship.
- Note: The specifics for how to do this will vary by state and county child welfare systems, but you are encouraged to look up all child IDs (Foster Care ID and Adoption ID).

## Step 4: Enter the Foster Care Reentry Date in the Spreadsheet



- For each child listed in the spreadsheet (from Step 1), if you have found a data flag or information that the child re-entered foster care, enter the ***Foster Care Reentry Date***.
- For children with no foster care reentry flags, leave ***Foster Care Reentry Date*** blank.

Foster Care Reentry Date
2/24/2020

## Step 5: Record Instability Status

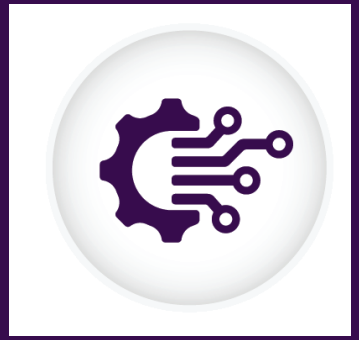


- For children with no ***Foster Care Reentry Date***, select “No recent contact”.

## Drop down menu options

[illegible]

## Step 6: Comments



- The ***Comments*** column is for additional information you want to record about the child.
- There is a ***Comments*** column in each tool.

Comments



# Spreadsheet to Track Instability using Foster Care Entry Records



## Tool 3 (Foster Care Reentry) Overview



- **Purpose:** Track foster care reentry data for children who exited foster to adoption or guardianship.
- **Data Source:** Your SACWIS or other administrative data systems.
- **Note:** For agencies with a data system flag, you may want to skip this tool.

# How will this tool help your agency track instability?



- Not all agencies have a foster care reentry flag in their data system.
- Many agencies change IDs at adoption, making it difficult to link a child to their foster care record.
- This tool walks you through how to use information from foster care entry data to track post adoption and guardianship instability. This will likely require close coordination with the data systems team at your agency.

## Step 2: Look for foster care reentry dates in child welfare administrative data



- Examine your child welfare administrative data to see if any of the child IDs included in Tool 1 (***Foster Care ID*** or ***Adoption ID***) appear in your foster care entry data.
- The specifics for how to do this will vary by state and county child welfare systems.

## Step 3: Enter the Foster Care Reentry Date in the Spreadsheet



- For each child listed in the spreadsheet (from Step 1):
  - If you find that a child re-entered foster care, enter the date this occurred in the ***Foster Care Reentry Date*** column in the row for that child.
  - For children with no foster care reentry records, leave the ***Foster Care Reentry Date*** blank.

Foster Care Reentry Date	Instability Status	Comments
6/9/19		

## Step 4: Record Instability Status



- For each child where there is a ***Foster Care Reentry Date***, select “Instability” in the drop-down menu for ***Instability Status*** column.
- For children with no ***Foster Care Reentry Date***, select “No recent contact”.

## Drop down menu options

Foster Care Reentry Date	Instability Status	Comments
6/9/2019	<div>▼</div> <div>           No recent contact            Instability         </div>	

**Spreadsheet  
to Track  
Instability  
using  
Adoption or  
Guardianship  
Subsidy  
Records**



## Tool 4 (Subsidy Changes)

# Overview



- **Purpose:** Provide a way for agencies to organize information related to when and why adoption and guardianship subsidy agreements are modified.
- **Data Source:** Subsidy change requests and records.



## Tool 4 (Subsidy Changes)

# How will this tool help your agency track instability?



- Administrative data systems track when subsidies are modified, yet they may not track *why* changes are made.
- Changes to subsidy agreements may indicate meaningful changes in the family that have implications for child stability and well being.
- Not all subsidy changes are related to instability events (e.g., when a parental rights remain intact while a child receives inpatient treatment).
- Keeping a record of the reason for a subsidy change helps agencies determine which events are related to instability.

## Tool 4 (Subsidy Changes)

# Step 2: Gather information about subsidy changes



Subsidy Change Request Date	Who requested the subsidy change?	Reason the Subsidy Change was Requested	Instability Status	Comments

- As a reminder, there will be a row for each Child ID with general child and family information (either auto populated from Tool 1 or entered in Step 1), but we are not showing those columns here.
- These are the columns in Tool 4 where you will enter data on subsidy changes.

## Step 3: Enter the date of the subsidy change request



- If a family has requested a change, insert the ***Subsidy Change Request Date*** in the row for that child.
  - If multiple subsidy changes are requested for the same child, we suggest you report the most recent subsidy change request.
- For children with no subsidy change requests, leave ***Subsidy Change Request Date*** blank.

Subsidy Change  
Request Date

3/2/20

## Tool 4 (Subsidy Changes)

# Step 4: Enter information about who requested the subsidy change



Drop-down menu options

- Read the information about each subsidy change request and select one option from the drop-down menu to indicate who requested the subsidy change.
- Use the “other” field if there are others requesting the subsidy change who are not included in this list.

## Who Requested the Subsidy Change?

Select an option ▼

Adoptive parent or guardian

Birth family member

Caseworker

Child or youth

Medicaid worker

Post-adoption or guardianship staff

Other

## Tool 4 (Subsidy Changes)

# Step 5: Enter information about the reasons for subsidy changes



- Select the reason for the subsidy change from the drop-down menu options in the next column.
- When multiple reasons apply, consider the most pressing issue for the family and record that issue.

Drop-down menu options,

### Reason the Subsidy Change was Requested

Select an option ▼

Adoptive parent or guardian died

Adoptive parent or guardian is not using the subsidy for the child's needs or not supporting the child

Adoptive parent or guardian made another custody agreement

Adoptive parental rights terminated

Child behavioral issues

Child is homeless or has runaway

Child is not living at home, temporarily

Child is not living at home, permanently

Child needs group home or residential care

Child needs specialized medical care

Child needs specialized mental health care

Child removed from home or re-entered foster care

Families that are just requesting supportive services

## Step 6: Enter Instability Status



- For each child, you will need to infer instability status from the subsidy change information you entered in the other columns:
  - **No recent contact:** The agency has no record of a subsidy change requests.
  - **Stability:** You have been in contact with the family, and they are doing well.
  - **Stability unclear:** You have information that suggests the child may be experiencing some difficulties.
  - **Instability:** You have information indicating that the child no longer resides with their adoptive parent or legal guardian.

## Drop down menu options

[illegible]

**Spreadsheet  
to Track  
Instability  
using Post  
Adoption and  
Guardianship  
Services  
Records**



## Tool 5 (Family Services) Overview



- **Purpose:** An organized record of services provided to families after adoption or guardianship to better understand risks for instability.
- **Source:** Agency records (either internally or external agencies) of services provided to adoptive or guardianship families.
- **Types of information collected:** **Service dates, family needs, and services provided.** These may be captured informally or formally (e.g., caseworker notes or spreadsheets).
- **Note:** It may take some work for agencies to find a way to systematically track these data.



# How will this tool help your agency track instability?



- More than 90% of agencies report that families contact them after adoption or guardianship.
- When families receive services, information about the services could inform an agency's understanding of instability.
- Keeping a centralized record of service requests could identify additional cases of instability that are not recorded elsewhere.

## Tool 5 (Family Services)

# Step 2: Gather information about services provided



Date Services Began	What is the Most Urgent Issue Identified for the Child?	What is the Most Urgent Issue Identified for the Parent or Guardian?	Services Provided	Instability Status	Comments

- These are the columns in Tool 5 where you will enter data on the services the family received for each child listed in the spreadsheet (from Step 1).

## Tool 5 (Family Services)

# Step 3: Enter the date services began



- If you find records that services have been provided for a child, enter the most recent ***Date Services Began***.
  - We suggest you report the most recent service start date.
- If no services are recorded, leave ***Date Services Began*** blank.

Date services Began

7/31/2022

## Tool 5 (Family Services)

# Step 4: Enter the most urgent child issue

- After you enter the ***Date Services Began***, if the service was for the child select the reason the child needed the service from the drop-down menu options in the next column.
- If multiple reasons apply, record the most urgent issue.

### Drop-down menu options

## What is the Most Urgent Issue Identified for the Child?

Select an option ▼

Attachment issues  
Child behavior issues  
Family conflict or issues  
International rehoming  
Involvement with juvenile justice system or probation  
Maltreatment  
Mental health of the child  
Parent or guardian death or incapacitation  
Physical health of the child  
Respite  
Runaway  
School-related issue  
Substance abuse/use  
Other

# Step 5: Enter the most urgent parent or guardian issue



Drop-down menu options

- If the service request was for the parent/guardian, select the reason the parent/guardian needed the service from the column for the most urgent issue identified for the parent/guardian drop-down menu options.
- If multiple reasons apply, record the most urgent issue.

## What is the Most Urgent Issue Identified for the Parent or Guardian?

Select an option ▼

- Attachment issues
- Death or incapacitation parent or guardian
- Family conflict or issues
- Financial assistance
- Housing
- Information request
- International rehoming
- Maltreatment
- Mental health of the parent or guardian
- Respite
- Substance abuse/use
- Other

## Tool 5 (Family Services)

# Step 6: Enter the types of services provided



### Drop-down menu options

- Select the most recent or most important service provided to the family from the drop-down menu options.
- Use the **Comments** column or add columns to Tool 5 to record other services.

### Services Provided

Select an option ▼

Financial assistance  
Housing  
In-home preservation services  
Information provided (e.g., tax information)  
Parent or guardian education/support  
Post-adoption/guardianship support or services  
Referral for counseling or other mental health services  
Referral for medical services  
Referral to other community-based services  
Referred for legal services  
Referred to Child Protective Services for investigation  
Residential placement or group home  
School assistance (e.g., IEP, 504 plan)  
Other

## Tool 5 (Family Services)

# Step 7: Enter Instability Status



- For each child listed in the spreadsheet, determine the ***Instability Status*** based on the information you entered in this spreadsheet:
  - **No recent contact:** The agency has no record of services provided to the family.
  - **Stability:** The agency has been in contact with the family, and they are doing well.
  - **Stability unclear:** You have received information that suggests the child may be experiencing some difficulties.
  - **Instability:** You have information indicating that the child no longer resides with their adoptive parent or legal guardian.

### Drop down menu options

	Instability Status	Comments
	<div><div></div><div>No recent contact Stability Stability unclear Instability</div></div>	

**Well Being  
Letter  
Example and  
Spreadsheet  
to Track  
Instability  
using  
Information  
from Well  
Being Letters**





## Tool 6 (Well Being Letter) Overview



- **Purpose:** 2 tools to gather information on child well being to help track instability: (1) a **well being letter example** and (2) a **spreadsheet to track responses to the letter**.
- **Source:** Responses to questions included in well being letters sent by agencies to adoptive and guardianship families.
- **Type of information collected:** contact information, whether the child is still in the home, and child well being information.
- **Note:** Setting up a system to track responses may be time consuming.

## Tool 6 (Well Being Letter)

# How will this tool help an agency track instability?



- Well being letters provide an opportunity for agencies to have regular contact with parents and guardians after adoption or guardianship.
  - These generally include simple questions to update contact information, learn if there are requests for additional services, and learn if there are incidents that would meet the criteria to terminate a subsidy.
- Responses can augment the instability record.
- An example well being letter is included as an appendix in the user guide.

## Tool 6 (Well Being Letter)

# Example Well Being letter



- The example letter includes optional questions your agency may ask. These questions cover:
  - The status of the child
  - The parent or guardian's confidence that they can meet their child's needs, ask for help when needed, and know where to go to get information to help their child.
- You should revise the letter for your agency and decide which questions to include.
  - The questions that use rating scales are more complex and should be considered an 'extra' if you want to use them.
- The spreadsheet for this tool includes a column for each question included in the example letter to record responses to that question if you use any of them.
  - If you use different questions, you will need to edit the spreadsheet.



## Tool 6 (Well Being Letter)

# Record dates associated with the Letter

- If you sent a letter to a family about a child listed in the spreadsheet, enter the date in the ***Date Letter Sent*** column.
  - If responses were received, enter the date received in the ***Date Responses Received*** column.
  - If no response was received, leave the ***Date Responses Received*** column blank.
- If a letter was not sent for a child, leave the ***Date Letter Sent*** column blank in the row for that child.

Date Letter Sent	Date Responses Received
7/17/2021	9/6/2021

## Tool 6 (Well Being Letter)

# Enter Instability Status



- If the family did not respond to the well being letter, select “**No recent contact**”
- The user manual describes how to enter instability status if you use any of the questions in the example letter.

**Spreadsheet  
that Provides  
the Overall  
Instability  
Status Based  
on  
Information  
Collected in  
Tools 1  
through 6**



## Tool 7 (Instability Summary)

# Overview



- **Purpose:** To determine the instability status for each child, based on information from all the prior tools.
- **Source:** Data you entered in Tools 1 through 6.
  - If you use any of the other Tools in the Excel workbook you do not need to enter any data. The columns in this spreadsheet will auto-populate.
  - If you do not use the other Tools, you can take the logic from the decision tree for **Tool 7** to program your data system to determine the overall instability status.

## Step 2: How Overall Instability Status will be determined



- If the instability status in any Tool is '**Instability**', the ***Overall Instability Status*** for that child will be '**Instability**'.
- If the instability status in any Tool is NOT '**Instability**', Tool 7 will use the logic illustrated in the decision tree to determine the ***Overall Instability Status***.

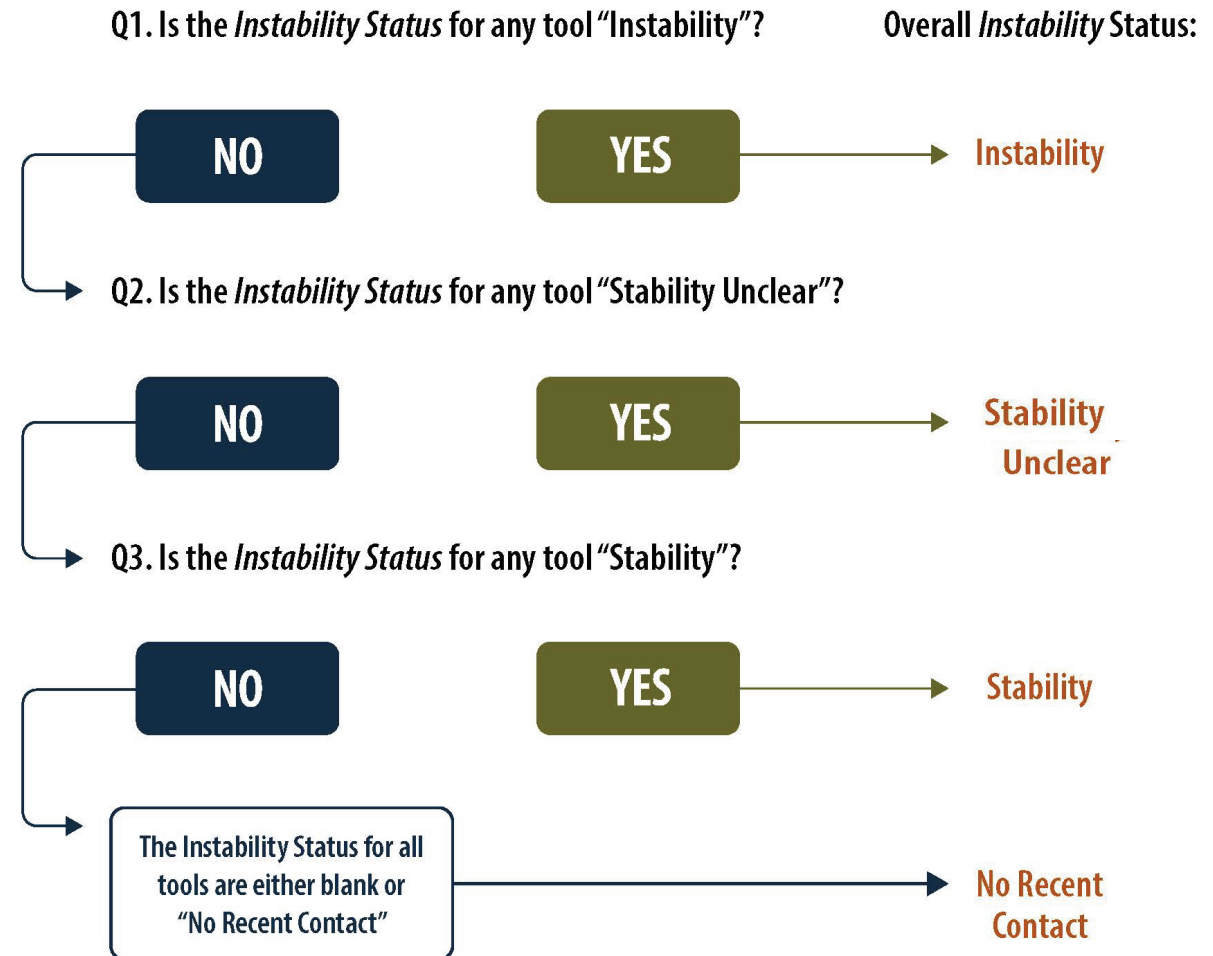


## Tool 7 (Instability Summary)

# Decision Tree Logic



- Agencies who create their own system to track instability can use this decision tree to program their data systems to determine the overall instability status.



## Ways to use Tool 7 information



- Understand which children experience post adoption and guardianship instability and target resources or outreach to those children.
- Create reports about the overall stability of children who have exited foster care through adoption or guardianship, which can be used to better understand how often this occurs and which children are most likely to experience post–adoption or guardianship instability.

# Toolkit Suggestions Provided by Adoption Program Managers

- Agencies need to create system warnings so that information on the child is not inadvertently shared with the wrong person.
- There may be legal barriers to linking foster and adoption records. Agencies should consult their legal teams in this process.

# How often should the Toolkit be updated?

- This will depend on what your agency is able to do.
- We recommend, you update Tool 1, Tool 2 and Tool 3 at least once a year.
  - However, more frequent updates may be useful to ensure you have accurate and timely instability information.
- You may want to do quarterly updates on Subsidy Changes (Tool 4) and Family Services (Tool 5).
- We recommend that you enter information from well being letters as you receive them (Tool 6).

# Thank you!

We would like to thank all the Adoption Program Managers (APMs) who took the time to speak with us during the development of this Toolkit.

We know that you are very busy, dedicated people. We so appreciate the time you spent with us, and for all that you do for adoptive and guardianship families across the United States!