How RAFT Connects to Adoption

This guide is for prospective adoptive parents preparing to care for a child who has experienced foster care.

What is RAFT?

Resource and Adoptive Family Training (RAFT) is Oregon's foster care certification training for resource parents and prospective adoptive parents.

Why RAFT matters

In Oregon, returning a child to their parents when it is safe to do so is the first goal of foster care. When that cannot happen and adoption is the plan, RAFT helps prospective adoptive parents prepare for the child's needs.

Adoption gives you permanent legal rights and responsibilities. It does not erase a child's history or their connections. Their culture and identity are part of who they are.

Caring for a child who has experienced foster care means adjusting how you parent as you get to know them and as their needs change. RAFT helps you prepare for that.

Getting to know a child

Children of different ages wait for adoption. Some are over age 5. Some are part of a sibling group.

A child may need support for a physical, mental, developmental, or emotional disability.

Separation from parents, siblings, relatives or familiar places can bring grief. A child can feel safe with you and still miss their family. These feelings may change as the child grows.

Take time to learn what matters to the child. and who is important in their life. Listen to their story. Support connections with family, culture and community. Make room for the child's questions and feelings without assuming how they should feel about adoption.

What RAFT covers

Much of RAFT is adapted from the National Training and Development Curriculum for Foster and Adoptive Parents. The U.S. Children's Bureau funded that curriculum, and Spaulding for Children led its development with partner organizations. Research and input from families, young people and professionals helped shape it.

RAFT covers child development, trauma, separation, grief and loss. It also covers parenting, maintaining a child's connections, and caring for children in racially and culturally diverse families. These topics matter before placement and as a child grows.

You can take RAFT live with an instructor or complete it at your own pace. The current options are:

RAFT option	What you complete
Live with an instructor	12 two-hour sessions, for 24 hours total.
At your own pace	17 courses and a short user guide, for about 22 hours total.

How RAFT connects to parenting

Parenting a child who has experienced trauma, separation or loss may mean responding to their behavior and feelings in new ways. A child's behavior can be shaped by earlier experiences. RAFT invites you to ask what a child may need at that moment and to adjust your response.

You can build trust through steady routines, honesty and time together. Listen to the child without judgment. Name feelings when that helps and give the child time to settle before trying to solve a problem.

The training includes the experiences of resource, relative resource and adoptive families. Their stories can help you connect what you learn to everyday situations. You bring strengths of your own, and you can keep building skills over time.

Understanding trauma

RAFT explains how trauma can affect a child's development, feelings and behavior. You may know only part of a child's history when they join your family.

RAFT features Dr. Bruce Perry and introduces "regulate, relate, reason" as a way to respond when a child is overwhelmed. First, help the child settle. Then connect with them. When they are ready, talk through what happened. Listen to what they share and explore together what might help next time.

Being trauma-informed means paying attention to how past experiences may affect the child now. It also means responding in ways that help the child feel safe and supported.

Honoring identity and culture

A child's identity includes many parts. RAFT covers race, culture, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression. It also asks you to reflect on your own beliefs and assumptions.

Learn what matters to the child rather than assuming you already know. Help them stay connected to their family, culture and community after adoption. What these connections mean to the child may change as they grow.

Keep learning

Questions may come up months or years after a child joins your family. Return to what you learned in RAFT, talk with people who support the child and find more training when you need it.

Visit the ODHS RAFT page for current training options and registration steps. The ODHS Adoption Process page explains the steps to adopt a child through foster care.