



Project STAR at  
**The Children's Institute**

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# **The Child Preparation Program**

A Service of The Children's Institute



**Children in the child welfare system have experienced a great deal of pain and inconsistency in their lives.**

Children who have not fully grieved for their past losses can have a difficult time forming lasting bonds with permanent families. That's why Project STAR at The Children's Institute offers the Child Preparation Program. In the program, children receive the information and tools they need to work through their painful pasts. The Child Preparation Program also helps them learn how to meet their permanency goals.

**Permanency goals include:**

- Returning to his or her birth family.
- Moving to a foster or an adoptive home.
- Living with a permanent guardian.

# Basic Concepts of Child Preparation

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Established by the Pennsylvania Statewide Adoption and Permanency Network (SWAN), child preparation consists of three components:

- **Clarification** — helping the child understand what happened to him or her and why.
- **Integration** — helping the child realize that he or she is a member of many families.
- **Actualization** — helping the child visualize himself or herself as a member of a permanent family.

In addition, SWAN recommends that the criteria for child preparation include:

- **A child preparation team** — which should include the child’s pre-adoptive or foster parents or caregivers, and/or birth family, when appropriate; the county caseworker making the referral; the affiliate doing the child preparation work and any other significant service providers or adults involved with the child.
- **A child preparation plan** — this plan details the child preparation tasks and must be agreed upon by the child preparation team.
- The gathering of background information, including placement history.
- A minimum of ten face-to-face meetings between the child and his or her child preparation worker during a six-month period. The plan will be implemented and completed during this time.



## Child Preparation Course Details

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Child preparation activities are designed to help the child answer the following five key questions:

- Who am I?
- What happened to me?
- Where am I going?
- How will I get there?
- When will I know I belong?

Child preparation involves the discussion of personal information and history. The staff of Project STAR usually conducts child preparation on an individual basis, but value the group process as well. Project STAR can manage groups of children who are similar in age and who share a permanency goal.

Each child’s preparation plan is based upon his or her own developmental level, interests and abilities but there are standard tasks and activities included in each plan.

## Creating a Lifebook

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One of the activities in every child's preparation plan is the creation of a Lifebook — a scrapbook and diary about the child. It includes birth family and placement history information. Each child's Lifebook contains sections entitled: *All About Me; My Birth Family; My Foster Care Journey and My Future*. Lifebooks also include photographs, memorabilia from important milestones in the child's life and other information about him or her.

A Lifebook helps children understand and cope with their past and is an important healing step in the child preparation process.

## Understanding is Key

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Child preparation work involves discussing sensitive experiences from the child's often-painful history. It is important for caregivers to understand that these discussions can cause children to have increased feelings of grief and loss.

Children have a difficult time expressing their emotions in words when grieving. Often times caregivers may notice an increase in negative behavior. Children may use coping skills that aren't appropriate and/or exhibit age regression, or act younger than they are in their behavior. These behaviors are usually signs that the child is progressing and working through unresolved grief and anger.



## Supporting the Child

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The staff of Project STAR hopes that parents and caregivers will support their children as they become more prepared for living in a permanent home.

### Caregivers can support the child by:

- Letting him or her know they can discuss anything.
- Keeping rules and consequences consistent.
- Giving the child space and permission to grieve.
- Understanding that the child's grieving process may result in a temporary increase in disruptive behavior.

### Caregivers can also help the child preparation process run smoothly by:

- Being aware of the child preparation schedule and having his or her child attend sessions whenever possible.
- Helping with transportation when necessary.
- Contacting the child's preparation caseworker at Project STAR if they have any questions or concerns throughout the process. ♪♪



# The Children's Institute

Amazing Kids. Amazing Place.

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## About The Children's Institute

Established in 1902, The Children's Institute is an independent, nonprofit, licensed organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of children, young people and their families and to providing services that meet their special needs. The Children's Institute is made up of three components:

- **The Hospital**

Inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation

- **The Day School**

A state-approved private school for children ages 2 to 21

- **Project STAR**

Family placement, family preservation and family enrichment services

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To better support our children and families, Project STAR has locations in Pittsburgh and Beaver County:

### **Pittsburgh Office**

467 S. Trenton Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15221  
412.244.3066

### **Beaver County Office**

1598 Virginia Avenue  
Monaca, PA 15061  
724.775.0209

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### **The Children's Institute**

1405 Shady Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15217  
412.420.2400

[www.amazingkids.org](http://www.amazingkids.org)