

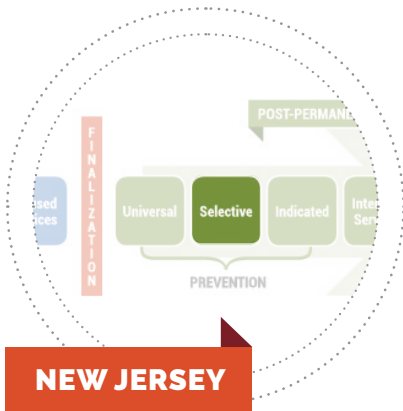


TUNING IN TO TEENS (TINT)[©]

**INTERVENTION IMPLEMENTED IN NEW JERSEY
FOR THE QIC-AG PROJECT**

OVERVIEW OF THE QIC-AG

The Quality Improvement Center for Adoption and Guardianship Support and Preservation (QIC-AG) is a 5-year federally funded project that promotes permanence (when reunification is no longer a goal) and improves supports for adoptive and guardianship families. Working in partnership with eight sites, the QIC-AG is identifying and testing promising practices and evidence-based models of support and services for children and families both pre and post permanence. Effective interventions are expected to achieve long-term stable permanence in adoptive and guardianship homes not only for waiting children but also for children and families after adoption or guardianship has been finalized. To learn more about the work of the QIC-AG, please go to www.qic-ag.org.



The QIC-AG created a Permanency Continuum Framework to help structure work with sites and families pre and post permanency. The Continuum Framework was developed on the premise that children in adoptive or guardianship families fare better when their families are fully prepared and supported to address issues before they arise, and if issues arise, before they escalate into a crisis. The Continuum Framework is comprised of eight intervals; three intervals start prior to finalization (*stage setting, preparation, and focused services*); three intervals continue after finalization and focus on prevention services (*universal, selective, and indicated services*); and the last two intervals focus on the provision of *intensive services and maintenance of permanency*.

New Jersey is implementing an intervention that falls into the **selective interval** on the Permanency Continuum Framework. Selective interventions are prevention efforts targeted at families with characteristics known at the time of finalization that may put them at an elevated risk for discontinuity (instability)¹. Decades of child welfare research have yielded significant insight into these characteristics which are then used to identify children and families for proactive outreach.

OVERVIEW OF INTERVENTION SELECTED BY NEW JERSEY AS DESIGNED BY THE DEVELOPER



Tuning in to Teens (TINT) © was developed at the Mindful Centre of the University of Melbourne. *TINT* is an emotion coaching program designed for parents of youth ages 10–18 years. The program equips parents with strategies for responding empathically to their adolescent’s emotions with the aim of increasing communication and parent-youth connections, increasing parents’ awareness of their own meta-emotions, and thereby enhance the emotional competence of teens. *TINT* coaching is facilitated for caregivers in six to eight sessions; the eight-session format has been used with caregivers of teens with more complex issues.

TINT training staff receive a 2-day, 14-hour *TINT* training workshop. The *TINT* training manual fully supports the implementation of the intervention, including organizing the coaching strategies into core practice components that are repeated in each session. The manual includes a CD of resources, including PDF files of handouts and customizable Word templates for resources such as the recruitment letter, session plan, session fidelity checklist, and certificate of program completion. The *TINT* program uses a small-group format with approximately 7 to 10 participants and one facilitator. *TINT* can also be conducted in residential treatment centers with child care providers.

The *TINT* curriculum is highly interactive, and therefore, it is critical to conduct the intervention in a space that allows participants to move around freely. The room needs to have chairs and tables that can be easily reconfigured as needed. In addition, to show online video examples of key content, the space needs to be equipped with a computer, projector, and screen. At the end of each session, facilitators complete a brief fidelity checklist indicating if they completed all activities for that session as described in the *TINT* manual.

¹ Post-permanency discontinuity encompasses the following: displacement (child no longer in the physical custody but guardianship/parental rights remain intact); post-adoption placement; dissolution (guardianship or adoption legally terminated for reason other than parent death or incapacitation); and subsidy ended prematurely (subsidy payment ends prior to the child reaching age 18; may be related to child’s absence from household or caregiver death).

WHY *TINT* WAS SELECTED BY NEW JERSEY

Feedback from adoptive parents and guardians in New Jersey indicated concerns about whether they were adequately prepared to parent their children through the unique challenges faced by adolescents who joined their family through adoption or guardianship placements. Additionally, these parents and guardians expressed a desire to engage with other adoptive parents and guardians during challenging developmental periods. This feedback was especially critical in light of findings from research conducted in New Jersey that found the likelihood of post-permanency discontinuity is highest among adolescents. These factors contributed to the selection of *TINT* by the New Jersey QIC-AG team. New Jersey offers *TINT* statewide to adoptive and guardianship families (i.e., families with a child they adopted or for whom the parents assumed Kinship Legal Guardianship) whose children are aged 10–13 years, and who are receiving an adoption/guardianship subsidy. In addition, families eligible to participate in *TINT* must meet one of the following criteria:

- » At the time of the adoption or Kinship Legal Guardianship (KLG) finalization, the child was 6–13 years old;
- » While the child was in the foster care system, the child was placed in group care.

The *TINT* project will also serve adoptive families whose children are currently age 10–13 years, and who were adopted through a private domestic or intercountry process.

The anticipated short-term outcomes include the following:

SHORT-TERM OUTCOMES

- » **decreased** child behavioral issues
- » **increased** caregiver commitment
- » **improved** family interactions or sense of belonging
- » **improved** relationships between the parent/guardian and the child

ADAPTATIONS MADE TO *TINT*



As a condition of using *TINT*, the developer reserved the right to approve all adaptations made to the program. This right-of-approval maintains the intervention's integrity and fidelity to the model. The original *TINT* program is targeted broadly to parents of adolescents; therefore, the New Jersey site team adapted the program to address issues related to families formed through adoption or guardianship. New Jersey developed a series of adoption, kinship, guardianship overlays to the *TINT* manual to ensure both the *TINT* curriculum and the facilitators delivering *TINT* were sensitive to the unique needs of these families. These overlays were created based on feedback from a review of the *TINT* manual by a group of stakeholders recruited by the New Jersey site team; the stakeholders included foster/adoptive parents and child welfare professionals. These stakeholders reviewed the *TINT* manual to determine if the curriculum was sensitive to the needs of adoptive and guardianship families, or what adaptations were needed. The stakeholder group determined that although the training content was not specifically designed for adoptive and guardianship families, the curriculum could competently be used with adoptive and guardianship families. The stakeholders recommended that adoption and guardianship competent overlays

be created that expanded upon or highlighted issues that might differentially impact adoptive and guardianship families. The overlays included topics such as attachment, identity, separation, and loss. In addition to the overlays, the stakeholders recommended additional handouts with enhanced information on adoption, guardianship, and kinship. These adaptations and extra materials required additional session time to cover sensitive topics for this target population; therefore, the site team added a seventh week to their *TINT* program schedule.

RECRUITMENT: OUTREACH TO FAMILIES



OVERVIEW OF RECRUITMENT

To select the sample of eligible caregivers, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families worked with Rutgers University on participant recruitment. This process included mapping the addresses of adoptive/guardianship families (address at the time of finalization) to determine locations of clusters of families who met the *TINT* eligibility criteria. Mapping helped the New Jersey site team organize the rollout of *TINT* to the counties and also helped in determining the specific locations within the counties where *TINT* workshops would be offered.

Prior to beginning the actual recruitment, the site team made decisions about the program design to encourage enrollment. Careful consideration was given to session logistics such as timing of the sessions during the year, session length, place, location, and child care. In addition, the site team carefully considered the image of *TINT* created and conveyed in recruitment materials to ensure the program would be perceived positively and would appeal to the needs and interests of the target population. Ultimately, the site team made the following decisions about how the *TINT* program would be represented:

- » Sessions were called “workshops.”
- » Engaging marketing materials were created that focused on normalizing the support needs of parents of teens.
- » The program was offered as a 7-week course, comprising seven consecutive workshops, held once a week from 6:30 PM to 8:30 PM.
- » Reimbursements (\$150) for travel and childcare were provided to ensure that parents could attend the workshops without impacting their budgets. The reimbursement was divided and distributed at different times over the course of the program.
- » Childcare was not provided on site.
- » Dinner was provided each week.

DECISIONS

Eight weeks in advance of the *TINT* start date, eligible adoptive/guardianship families were contacted via a series of phone calls, letters, and e-mails. To foster enrollment, an introductory flyer and letter were sent to families describing the *TINT* program. These letters were followed by phone calls from staff from the Adoption Subsidy Unit. A deliberate decision was made to use the adoption staff because, in many instances, the staff were familiar to the families, and the site team felt this familiarity would help increase participation. Once a family registered for the program, they received follow-up reminders via mail and phone to encourage attendance. The outreach process was designed to yield four to six contacts or “touches” with families.



REFINEMENTS TO RECRUITMENT

Once the outreach process began, it was clear that modifications were needed. The site team determined that asking families to commit to participating in *TINT* after one phone call might lead to less than a sincere agreement. Therefore, the protocol was modified so that families who had expressed an interest in participating received a follow-up phone call one week later, so they could ask questions as well as reaffirm their commitment. Those who expressed a commitment to attending *TINT*, were asked to place their dinner order for the first meeting. This protocol was based on the rationale that if participants knew a dinner had been purchased just for them, then they would be more likely to attend, thus increasing program attendance. In addition, a letter with detailed information about the workshops, including directions to the meeting site, was mailed to the parent or guardian so that it would arrive a few days before the workshop. The site team developed and timed the mailing of the printed materials to minimize logistic barriers to attending training.

RETENTION: KEEPING FAMILIES CONNECTED TO THE PROCESS

using the *TINT* strategies
even 30% of the time
has an impact on a teen's
emotional competence

New Jersey was invested in ensuring that families that started *TINT* participated in all seven *TINT* workshop sessions. *TINT* facilitators endeavored to create an environment in which all participants felt emotionally safe and felt a sense of community. To accomplish this goal, participants shared the dinner meal each week. During the first workshop session, each parent and guardian was given a brief time to tell the story of his or her family. As relationships began to form, participants were encouraged to share their contact information with each other, and to work together to organize a final potluck dinner for the last session. Parents/guardians were given copies of the New Jersey Post Adoption/KLG service booklet that provides information on all support services offered to adoptive/guardianship families, and a book that supports the concepts covered in *TINT*. In addition, participants were given the opportunity to attend the local adoption conference free of charge.

The New Jersey site typically uses two facilitators for each *TINT* workshop (designed to be one Post Adoption Clinician and one Public Child Welfare staff). The facilitators are diverse in terms of age and ethnicity and experience. To foster a sense of community and connection within the group, the same two facilitators deliver all seven *TINT* sessions. In addition, to encourage and support ongoing participation, the facilitators work to connect with families, including reaching out to families who miss a session to check in and try to make arrangements for the family to come early to the next class and catch up on information they missed.

The design and organization of *TINT* encourages retention. The sessions are designed to be interactive and dynamic, providing information that can be immediately applied. Families are encouraged to learn that using the *TINT* strategies even 30% of the time has an impact on a teen's emotional competence. The expectations of using *TINT* strategies are feasible and manageable; while it may not replace current parenting style, families who use *TINT* may see immediate impact and therefore, may use it more often as it continues to be successful.

LINKS

Purveyor site: <http://www.tuningintokids.org.au/professionals/research/>

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MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the QIC-AG visit www.qic-ag.org

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