

# CHILDREN EXITING OUT-OF-HOME CARE

## Definition

*Children exiting out-of-home care* is the number of children who exited foster care to any type of placement. *Percent reunified with family* is the percent of children exiting foster care who were legally returned to the custody of their parent or caregiver or were legally placed in the permanent custody of relatives. *Percent adopted* is the percent of children who exited the foster care system through adoption.

## Data in context

All children need safe, permanent homes to develop lifelong connections to families. For children who spend time in foster care due to abuse or neglect, finding a permanent, safe home is critical. Some children return to their homes of origin after parents have made strides to provide safer care, while other children join new families through adoption. Youth ages 18 to 21 years old may be emancipated from the foster care system, known as “aging out,” and stop receiving services and oversight from child welfare agencies. Youth who exit care without a connection to a family may lack the resources and support necessary to succeed as independent adults.

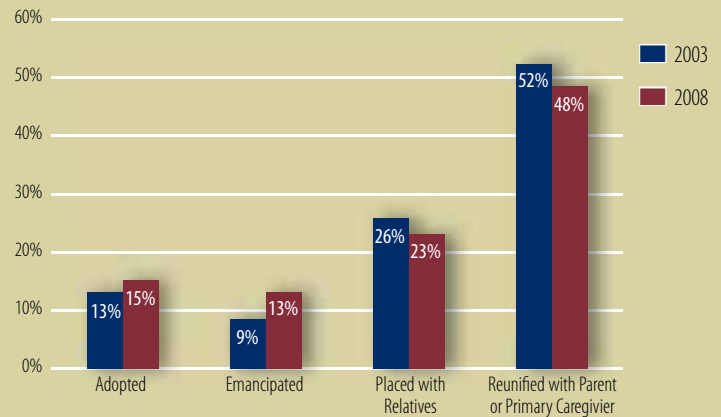
Approximately 303,000 children entered foster care in the United States during federal fiscal year 2006, while 289,000 children exited care.<sup>1</sup> Of those exits, 49 percent had been in foster care for less than one year.<sup>2</sup> In 2006, 53 percent of children exited out-of-home care in the United States through reunification with parents or other relatives.<sup>3</sup> That year, nearly 51,000 were adopted from foster care.<sup>4</sup> More than 26,000 youth nationwide age out of foster care each year.<sup>5</sup>

In 2008, nearly 5,300 Kentucky children and youth exited foster care. The total number did not change significantly from 2003 to 2008, although the proportions of children by exit type changed during that time. Overall, fewer children were reunified with family members during that time and more children were adopted; however, the reverse is true for Black or African American children. The number of Kentucky youth who were emancipated from care increased by 54 percent to 696 youth in 2008.

While out-of-home placements offer children much-needed safety and care, it is important for all children to move toward permanent outcomes with loving families. Yet national data indicate that despite similar rates of abuse across races, children of color remain in out-of-home care for longer periods and are reunified with family less often than White children.<sup>6</sup> In Kentucky, 2008 data show an increase in the proportion of youth of color exiting care, indicating progress on reducing the overrepresentation of youth of color in out-of-home care. Improvements also appear in reunifications with a parent or primary caretaker; the gap nearly closed in 2008 between Black or African American children and White children as a proportion of children exiting care.

When youth exit care, support services help families through the process of reunification and enhance family stability to avoid additional out-of-home care placements. The number of youth entering out-of-home care in 2008 who had already been in out-of-home care in the past 12 months was 568, a slight decline from 2007.<sup>7</sup> Statewide, 11 percent of entries to foster care were re-entries. These figures include several dozen youth ages 18 to 21 who chose

**Outcomes for Kentucky Children Exiting Foster Care, 2003 and 2008**



Source: Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services.

to re-enter foster care, a positive move given the independent living support and tuition assistance benefits for older youth in care.<sup>8</sup> Kentucky’s Family Reunification Services provides intensive case management to families reunifying with a child exiting out-of-home care. This program has proven successful in increasing reunification rates among participating families and decreasing the odds of future substantiated maltreatment.<sup>9</sup> Support services include frequent contact with the family, linking families with resources such as food or family counseling, and financial assistance with rent or utility payments to avoid crisis.<sup>10</sup>

Boyd County saw the largest increase in the number of children exiting care from 2003 to 2008 (110 children), while the number decreased by 89 in Pulaski County. Among counties with six or more children exiting care in both years, the number of exits more than doubled from 2003 to 2008 in nine counties.

Child welfare systems can enact a variety of policy and practice changes to enhance permanency for children in foster care. These include: appropriately addressing youth mental health challenges that can impede permanency efforts; engaging youth in the formulation of their case plan; using older youth as mentors for younger youth in the case planning process; expanding the ways in which birth parents and families are involved, to establish healthy family connections; allowing youth to remain in care through their mid-20s; and continuing permanency efforts regardless of a youth’s age.<sup>11</sup>

**Data Source:** Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services, Department for Community Based Services.

**Data Note:** The data include some youth older than 18, as youth may elect to stay in care after turning 18 years old. The number of children exiting foster care and placed in the custody of relatives is underestimated because some children are directly placed by the courts in the custody of relatives without entering the foster care system.

**Rate Calculation:** (number of children who exited foster care through reunification with parent, caregiver, or relative in 2003 \* 100) / (number of children who exited foster care in 2003) + (number of children who exited foster care through adoption in 2003 \* 100) / (number of children who exited foster care in 2003) + (number of children who exited foster care through reunification with parent, caregiver, or relative in 2008 \* 100) / (number of children who exited foster care in 2008) + (number of children who exited foster care through adoption in 2008 \* 100) / (number of children who exited foster care in 2008)

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(number, percent reunified with family, & percent adopted)

	2003			2008		
	Number	Percent reunified with family	Percent adopted	Number	Percent reunified with family	Percent adopted
<b>Kentucky</b>	<b>5,284</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5,294</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>15</b>
Adair	20	95	0	4	75	0
Allen	7	86	0	25	56	24
Anderson	24	83	13	26	85	0
Ballard	4	25	75	4	100	0
Barren	90	90	6	69	84	7
Bath	10	70	0	14	86	0
Bell	36	89	8	20	90	0
Boone	29	83	7	21	90	0
Bourbon	16	75	13	24	83	0
Boyd	45	73	4	155	67	21
Boyle	58	88	0	54	87	4
Bracken	6	83	17	14	43	29
Breathitt	14	79	14	7	86	0
Breckinridge	18	89	6	38	71	16
Bullitt	65	85	3	48	77	0
Butler	20	95	0	24	88	0
Caldwell	15	93	0	3	67	0
Calloway	41	59	27	40	90	3
Campbell	89	22	69	159	21	67
Carlisle	4	100	0	4	75	0
Carroll	2	0	100	12	75	0
Carter	44	82	11	25	80	16
Casey	12	92	0	5	100	0
Christian	54	63	35	53	92	0
Clark	43	84	12	26	58	35
Clay	84	83	11	100	84	10
Clinton	25	48	48	16	50	44
Crittenden	9	89	0	2	50	0
Cumberland	0	*	*	0	*	*
Daviess	177	83	7	172	74	15
Edmonson	18	94	6	28	82	14
Elliott	15	87	0	4	100	0
Estill	50	78	16	13	62	31
Fayette	322	66	25	379	66	19
Fleming	22	68	32	31	45	39
Floyd	34	97	0	33	88	0
Franklin	100	91	2	41	66	29
Fulton	16	56	31	15	87	7
Gallatin	3	100	0	8	100	0
Garrard	15	67	27	42	86	0
Grant	29	93	0	7	71	0
Graves	35	77	14	66	45	42
Grayson	19	95	0	54	78	2
Green	16	100	0	13	100	0
Greenup	18	56	6	61	82	0
Hancock	5	80	0	2	0	0
Hardin	99	78	9	134	69	13
Harlan	32	72	6	54	65	22
Harrison	12	100	0	4	75	25
Hart	16	75	25	12	75	8
Henderson	56	77	20	50	56	28
Henry	1	0	0	11	64	0
Hickman	5	60	0	5	60	0
Hopkins	53	64	30	37	92	0
Jackson	27	96	0	38	58	37
Jefferson	764	70	19	713	62	21
Jessamine	64	84	8	46	80	11
Johnson	107	81	6	70	49	46
Kenton	232	80	6	224	88	2
Knott	18	94	0	15	33	0

	2003			2008		
	Number	Percent reunified with family	Percent adopted	Number	Percent reunified with family	Percent adopted
Knox	56	80	16	49	84	2
LaRue	9	67	33	17	94	0
Laurel	132	92	1	156	89	3
Lawrence	23	100	0	28	79	0
Lee	12	100	0	7	100	0
Leslie	27	100	0	20	95	0
Letcher	31	45	48	49	53	41
Lewis	9	100	0	7	86	0
Lincoln	57	88	0	31	35	42
Livingston	14	79	0	2	50	0
Logan	39	97	0	41	73	10
Lyon	9	78	0	13	77	0
McCracken	68	72	18	86	73	7
McCreary	83	94	0	29	97	0
McLean	17	76	6	8	63	0
Madison	58	74	14	85	59	19
Magoffin	19	89	0	32	88	0
Marion	20	80	15	28	75	0
Marshall	21	57	19	22	55	18
Martin	11	82	0	23	100	0
Mason	23	100	0	12	67	0
Meade	34	97	3	28	86	0
Menifee	11	73	27	20	50	45
Mercer	37	84	14	40	78	13
Metcalfe	14	100	0	10	90	0
Monroe	6	100	0	8	38	38
Montgomery	19	79	16	27	81	19
Morgan	12	75	17	13	31	54
Muhlenberg	52	98	0	18	83	0
Nelson	24	96	0	19	84	11
Nicholas	8	63	38	6	83	0
Ohio	54	65	30	38	89	8
Oldham	17	88	0	30	87	0
Owen	5	100	0	5	100	0
Owsley	3	100	0	14	86	0
Pendleton	32	94	3	10	80	0
Perry	61	90	2	66	73	0
Pike	37	76	0	62	97	0
Powell	25	96	0	8	88	0
Pulaski	170	84	9	81	86	2
Robertson	1	100	0	0	*	*
Rockcastle	50	94	0	27	89	0
Rowan	42	93	5	45	89	4
Russell	25	84	16	17	65	29
Scott	36	97	3	54	74	19
Shelby	87	57	37	81	49	48
Simpson	14	93	7	28	79	11
Spencer	8	88	0	16	94	0
Taylor	38	89	5	36	69	31
Todd	4	75	0	9	89	0
Trigg	9	89	0	8	63	13
Trimble	8	50	0	12	50	0
Union	8	100	0	11	82	0
Warren	148	65	23	183	79	9
Washington	15	73	27	13	69	15
Wayne	12	92	0	17	88	0
Webster	11	91	0	1	100	0
Whitley	124	86	10	75	85	1
Wolfe	11	82	18	11	64	0
Woodford	10	80	20	28	82	14

\* County had no children exiting out-of-home care.