

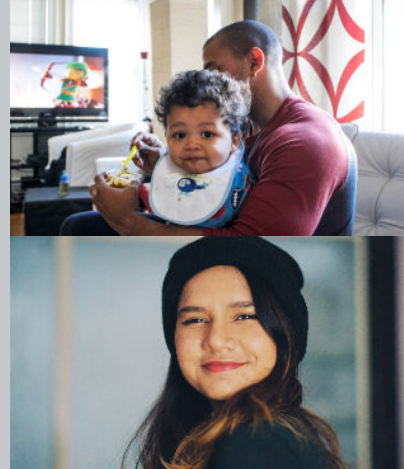


UNIVERSITY of HOUSTON

GRADUATE COLLEGE of SOCIAL WORK



Center for the
Study of
Social Policy



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

This document is meant to be an evolving list detailing some key aspects of the upEND Movement. The following questions are ones that we have received to date in conversations with old and new partners.

What is the upEND Movement?

The upEND Movement is an emerging, collaborative movement aimed at ending the surveillance and removal of Black, Native, and, in many jurisdictions, Latinx children* and families by the child welfare system and increasing meaningful supports so families can care for their children. Currently, public systems by design hyper-surveil Black, Native, and Latinx families; community-based supports and basic safety net supports are minimal; and child welfare's response to "helping" families in need results in high rates of removal for Black and Native children. upEND seeks to end the practice of state sanctioned separation of children from their families as a response to social problems like food insecurity, poverty, lack of affordable and safe housing, and lack of meaningful prevention services. upEND also seeks to reimagine how we support and serve families and eliminate the root causes that create conditions for harm to occur.

Right now, upEND is focused on two key components:

- Identifying the road to abolition—what are the critical components to shrinking the power of the child welfare system (returning the power to Black families) and building fundamental and robust supports for families and communities; and
- Reimagining how we support and serve families and eliminating the root causes that create conditions for harm to occur.

Using our platform, upEND calls out and describes historic and current racist policies, practices, and research that support the current functioning of child welfare systems and is working collaboratively to identify and build out an agenda that supports anti-racist policies, practices and research.

*Currently, the disparities among Latinx children and families is a regional phenomenon. For more information see: NCJFCJ: https://www.ncjfcj.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/NCJFCJ-Disproportionality-TAB-2015_0.pdf. Their data show that in 2000 Latinx children were overrepresented in 8 states, whereas in 2015 they were overrepresented in 22 states.

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Why upEND the system?

As a field, we have attempted multiple types of child welfare reforms that explicitly center racial equity. Still our collective efforts at reform have resulted in limited improvement for Black, Native, and Latinx families, and poor outcomes despite system intervention persist for children and youth who are Black, Native, and Latinx. The roots of racism are deeply entrenched in our systems and in our broader society to effect change. The child welfare system—which is perceived as a helping system—is operating as designed yet that design is perpetuating harm and trauma. It is for these reasons that we are working to upEND the child welfare system through a process that places the emphasis on ending the harm perpetuated by the system and supporting communities, especially Black and Native communities, with resources they need to thrive.

What about cases of extreme abuse?

We recognize that there are extreme cases of abuse and neglect. We also recognize that the child welfare system often cannot prevent these extreme cases and intervenes after harm has already occurred. We want to support the formation of communities and a society where harm does not occur in the first place and where harm does occur, communities are able to respond in ways that do not create more harm. That is, we are seeking to address root causes that tackle the questions: why does harm occur within communities and families, and how can we truly prevent harm from occurring? What structures and supports should be in place to prevent this harm? What supports are necessary after harm occurs to respond in a way that does not create more harm and trauma and promote healing?

Why focus on Black and Native children and families?

The racist origins of the child welfare system have disproportionately impacted Black and Native children and families. Specifically, anti-Black racism leads to the overrepresentation of Black families in the system, the criminalization of Black mothers, and dismissal of Black fathers. The country's legacy of colonialism has harmed Native communities through removing children from their communities under the guise of assimilation into White, western culture. In addition, more recently, Latinx children and families are increasingly overrepresented in the child welfare system and impacted by family separation through racist immigration policies. upEND is anti-racist and intersectional—we work to understand and combat the differing experiences of oppression that youth, parents, and families face in the full complexity of their identity. The systems often punish those who live at the intersections of multiple identities. That is, we know that girls of color face unique and different disparities, that Black and Latinx youth who are LGBTQ+ experience high rates of instability in foster care and are disproportionately placed in congregate care settings, and that youth with disabilities are disproportionately involved in the criminal legal system.

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What about challenges that families experience like substance use, domestic violence, and mental health?

Substance use, domestic violence, and mental health impact many children, parents and caregivers, and communities, and too often communities do not have adequate resources to address these challenges. An abolitionist framework asks us to shift how we think about addressing the very real challenges that families face as opposed to punishing families for their challenges. We advocate for human-centered, anti-carceral responses to mental health, substance use, and domestic violence through interventions that allow for people to get the support they need where they live.

Who is leading the upEND Movement?

The Center for the Study of Social Policy and the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work launched the upEND Movement in June 2020.

Why are CSSP and U of H qualified to lead this work? How do you hold your respective organizations accountable?

Within the context of our institutions, CSSP and the University of Houston Graduate College of Social Work have the same issues that exist in our society and we are working to have the difficult conversations needed to move toward being anti-racist. As organizations, we recognize that means that we remain on a journey to being anti-racist. We will continue to do work to improve equity within our respective organizations, identify and root out White supremacy, and improve our external efforts. We commit to being transparent about our own internal journeys towards becoming anti-racist organizations.

What are your organizations doing to address your past actions of contributing to family separation and the oppression experienced by families from systems?

A large part of this work is understanding past harms. As institutions and people who have worked with and within child welfare systems, we recognize that we have tried to make positive change but have not always had the impact we hoped for. In our shortcomings, we have contributed to the harm and trauma that families experience at the hands of these institutions. We also recognize that through our system reform work we have, at times, strengthened the power and financing of child welfare systems. As part of the work we are doing to address our past actions we commit to:

- Owning areas of our work that have contributed to harm and relying on demands from parents, families, communities, and advocates for guidance on what harm reduction looks like within the context of abolition.
- Being open and transparent about all of our work and partnerships, including funding.
- Regularly examining our own work, especially to ensure that what we are supporting and

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advocating for actively pushes the vision of abolition and remains in opposition to tinkering with systems or implementing little meaningful effort.

- Authentically partnering and engaging with the advocates, grassroots organizers, and parents and youth who have been protesting against the surveillance of families and calling for meaningful family supports. Authentic engagement means amplifying others' work and demands, sharing power, compensating for their work and contributions, and understanding that we are accountable to communities.

How is this work happening? How are you doing this work?

The upEND Movement seeks to join with those who have long advocated for abolishing the child welfare and foster care systems and those who have been working for meaningful and robust social supports for families. Using our platform, upEND calls out and describes historic and current racist policies, practices, and research that support the current functioning of child welfare systems and is working collaboratively to identify and build out an agenda that supports anti-racist policies, practices and research. A critical component to upEND is co-designing anti-racist alternatives and reimagining care with organizers, parents, and families. To that end, we seek to partner with and support organizations with robust parent and youth leaders and organizers. See our pledge for basic tenets of this work.

What does it mean to abolish child welfare?

We, along with others, call for the abolition of child welfare and foster care as we know it, because all children deserve to live at home safely with their families and within their communities. We recognize that abolition is a process. Abolition as a goal requires that we are actively dismantling racist policies and creating anti-racist policies and practices that reduce harm to families that are already involved with the child welfare system while supporting communities in building up resources and supports they need to ensure that all children can remain at home safely with their families. The process also requires the shifting of power from institutions of social management, such as foster care, to communities. Instead of regulating families' behavior and traumatizing families through separation, we believe that we should build strong systems of support that enable families to have access to the resources in their community that they need to truly thrive. We believe in co-creating, improving, and supporting systems of community-based support that provide a child allowance, safe and affordable housing, jobs that pay sustainable wages, mental health services, food, domestic violence supports, and substance use programs. Ultimately, we believe we can support communities where community members intervene when needed, community members who have experienced recovery provide support to those who need it, a sufficient community array of supports and interventions exist, and there is a community system of care that can minimize and address harm.

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What do you mean by anti-racism?

Anti-racism is the active process of identifying and challenging racism, by changing systems, organizational structures, policies, practices, and attitudes, to redistribute power in an equitable manner. We believe that we must challenge and upend racist ideologies that permeate child welfare, including White supremacy, while actively dismantling and ending racist policies and practices. We also understand that anti-racism is not sufficient without centering the ways that anti-Black racism and colonialism are foundational to the racist oppression communities face. In addition, we seek to redistribute resources and supports to communities to address poverty and inequities, so the conditions that lead to child welfare interventions are no longer necessary.

Who are your partners? Are you working with organizations on the ground?

upEND isn't unique in calling for the abolition of the child welfare system. We want to partner with others already engaged in thinking radically about supporting children and families and ending punitive, carceral state interventions. We also hope to continue to work with our long-term child welfare partners who have worked to end racial disproportionality and disparities and invite new partners interested in abolishing the child welfare system as we know it and doing the work of reimagining a different approach for supporting families.

If you are interested in getting involved with the upEND movement, we invite you to join us in the following ways:

- Follow us on Twitter [@upENDmovement](https://twitter.com/upENDmovement)
- Tag us on Twitter using #upEND and #upENDmovement
- Sign up to receive more information as it becomes available
- [Sign on to our pledge to support the movement](#)

Active partners in the upEND Movement will be featured prominently on our website and be tapped to help us as we build and expand the upEND Movement. For more about becoming a foundational partner in the upEND Movement, please contact us at info@upENDmovement.org.

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