

# PARTICIPANT HANDOUTS

CWS3061W:  
PERMANENCY PLANNING  
WITH TEENS  
(Online Version)



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF  
SOCIAL SERVICES

**WDS** Workforce Development  
and Support

## **COURSE COMPETENCIES AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

### **COURSE COMPETENCIES**

1. The trainee understands the need for permanent family connections and the role of relationship permanency in fostering the successful transition to adulthood.
2. The trainee can demonstrate a knowledge of best practices that assist youth to successfully sustain lifelong emotional relationships with adults.
3. The trainee can demonstrate competence in the assessment and recruitment of the most viable permanent option for placement of teens, realizing that a placement is not permanence.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

Upon completion of the course, trainees will be able to:

1. Understand that lack of permanency has high costs for adolescents and puts them at high risk for homelessness, poverty, incarceration, and a lack of education.
2. Identify ways that permanency with family connections elements can be effectively integrated into independent living services.
3. Examine the professional biases and philosophical objections to adoption/ permanency for teens.
4. Identify a variety of family constellations and relationship options such as kinship, guardianship, and adoption that can be considered as permanency resources for teens.
5. Review adolescent developmental domains and the age-appropriate developmental experiences of youth awaiting permanency.
6. Examine the life experiences, the long-term effects of early neglect and/ or trauma, and resilience common to teens in out-of-home care.

7. Identify the key elements of rebuilding permanence, the barriers to permanency within the system, and successful strategies and programs.
8. Examine individual values, beliefs, and developmental issues which affect the professional's ability to achieve permanent family connections for teens.
9. Identify skills needed by youth and best practices that assist the transition of youth served by the foster care system into healthy adult lives.
10. Assess the potential for permanency with teens and adults and develop ways to help teens consider permanency and engage them in the process of identifying permanent family relationships, including the necessity of informed consent.
11. Identify ways to successfully prepare teens for family living and independent living.
12. Know how to help teens identify connections and build or mend those bonds.
13. Explore child-specific recruitment techniques to work with teens to help find permanent families.
14. Practice effective interviewing skills with teens to learn about adoption as a possible permanent connection.

**AGENDA – CWS3061W**  
**Permanency Planning with Teens**

**Day 1**

Introduction to Permanency Planning with Teens

What is Permanency Anyway?

The Adolescent Brain and Development

Who am I? Identity- Culture and Race

**Day 2**

Who am I? Family Identity – The Sibling Connection

Who am I? Gender Identity

Preparation for Permanency

**Day 3**

Congregate Care- roadblock to Permanency

Searching for Legal and Relational Permanency

Building a Network of Support

The Good Better Best Continuum

Building Resilience



# Shifting Our Lens from Child Welfare to Youth Welfare

## Being Reactive

- Decisions are made with minimal youth consultation.
- Protection safety concerns don't change as a young person grows.
- Assessments are based on predetermined parameters.
- Well-being is focused on physical and mental health.
- There is minimal community and partner involvement.

## Being Proactive

- Youth participate in dialogue and share decision-making power.
- Self-sufficiency is encouraged.
- Assessments are based on relationships and trust between young people and caseworkers.
- Well-being is focused on normalcy as well as physical and mental health
- Collaborative practice is the norm.

## Being Case-Driven

- Connections with biological family are driven by the caseworker.
- Youth voice is secondary in decision-making and case-planning.
- Youth have few choices in most areas of their lives.

## Being Youth-Driven

- Connections with biological family are driven by the youth.
- Youth voice is primary in decision-making and case-planning.
- Youth have choices in most areas of their lives.

## Being Protection-Focused

- Protection and safety of youth are the only concerns.
- Organizations focus only on protocols to keep children safe.
- Care is not individualized and not driven by youth desires and capacities.

## Being Normalcy-Focused

- Emphasis on protection is relaxed, to focus on normalcy.
- In addition to safety, organizations encourage youth to take on developmentally appropriate challenges.
- All care is individualized and services are aligned with needs.

## Being Focused on the Past or Present

- A child's past or present situation informs service delivery.
- Organizations do not provide many services to help young people prepare for the future.

## Being Focused on the Future

- Youth have access to services and case planning that will benefit them in the future.
- Organizations work with youth to prepare them for adulthood.

# The Parameters of Youth Welfare

Statewide coordinators for the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (formerly the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program [CFCIP]) and Education and Training Vouchers met in Washington, DC, in June 2017. During that meeting, participants discussed an important shift in child welfare culture, one that identified a new paradigm for “youth welfare.”

This new Youth Welfare approach can be viewed as a logical extension of the shift from child welfare to youth welfare. It presents the four transformations that need to occur at the organizational and practice levels to meet the needs of young people in foster care.



## Shift From Being Reactive to Being Proactive

Under a Youth Welfare approach, being proactive rather than reactive means working with young people in foster care on an ongoing basis to plan for the future, identify what they need and want, and create a realistic plan for moving forward. Rather than simply responding to crises as they occur, child welfare staff and young people work together to shape the future.

- ▶ **Dialogue and shared decision-making power:** Youth in foster care should be engaged in dialogue and share in decision-making about the best ways to meet their developmental needs, as well as regarding their goals, aspirations, and identity exploration. Throughout their time in care, young people should receive developmentally appropriate information about the policies and procedures related to the services they receive and the expectations for their role in their own care. For their part, caseworkers should respond to young people's requests for assistance in their own care in a timely manner, for example, by proactively assisting them in getting access to documents they need.
- ▶ **Self-sufficiency:** Organizations should encourage young people's present independence and future self-sufficiency by helping them explore meaningful career pathways and find work, internships, and volunteering and leadership opportunities based on their interests and skills. Young people in foster care should be encouraged to explore and make connections to resources in the community.
- ▶ **Assessments based on relationships and trust:** Life skills/Independent Living assessments for young people need to occur in a context of trust and relationship building to elicit the best possible information necessary to plan for a young person's future. Assessments and interventions should be initiated at the outset of engagement only if they are mandated or otherwise necessary in a particular circumstance for a particular youth. Otherwise, they should occur as appropriate, after a relationship is built, and be adapted as needs change on an ongoing basis to move the young person's development process forward. Young

people in foster care should work on assessments together with staff to provide additional input outside of the assessment to give a clearer picture of themselves as individuals. Assessments should be positive, strengths based, conducted largely for the benefit of the young people themselves, and focused on their needs, aspirations, goals, identity explorations, and vision of the future. Assessment regarding developmental readiness and benchmarks should be understood in the context of research on adolescent development and developmental capacity and the youth's level of social capital.

- ▶ **Permanency and connections:** Organizations should help young people achieve legal, emotional, and physical permanency by facilitating their ability to build varied familial, social, and peer connections in a developmentally appropriate manner. Each organization should work to create a guiding document to assist young people and child welfare staff in working toward permanency according to the youth's developmental stage. Organizations must remember to implement an opportunity-focused environment in a developmentally appropriate way when exploring possible connections.
- ▶ **Well-being:** Interventions should promote well-being through the lens of normalcy. It is critical that young people get the medical, dental, and mental/behavioral health care they need, including interventions for concerns like trauma, coping, and emotion regulation if warranted. Mental health services should focus on trauma-informed and trauma-responsive care and promote resiliency. However, a more holistic definition of well-being for young people should be built around a broad understanding of physical, social, and emotional development, as well as psychosocial and trauma-focused needs, rather than just focusing on narrow categories of medical health and education. In building and accessing this definition, listening to young people themselves is crucial.
- ▶ **Collaborative practice:** When working with young people, it is important that child welfare organizations should work together with other public agencies and private organizations that shape the lives and futures of young people in foster care, potentially including education, employment, housing, health-care, social service, and other organizations. By working creatively with the youth and other organizations and looking outward to communities and other supports, child welfare agencies can help young people comprehensively plan for their future.

## Shift From Being Case-Driven to Being Individualized and Youth-Driven

Shifting from a case-driven to a youth-driven framework for care means giving young people in foster care more autonomy and control over decisions that affect their lives. Rather than focusing only on adhering to a general case plan for the family, staff should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to engage with youth to collaboratively develop a holistic, individualized plan that incorporates their voice and is grounded in their strengths, interests, and needs.

- ▶ **Biological family:** Young people in foster care should be able to decide what their connections with biological family should be. Organizations can help youth make safe connections and learn skills to interact with their biological families. They can also help young people maintain connections, use natural supports, and create space for more caregiver flexibility and development if they are removed. The decision to remove a young person from biological family should be made holistically, and significant weight should be given to the wishes of the young person involved, in addition to the protective factors that exist in the youth's life that can mitigate risk.
- ▶ **Youth voice:** Organizations should emphasize youth voice in decision-making and youth-driven case planning. In their relationships with young people, organizations should consider how to create a better balance of power between young people and child welfare staff. The ideal relationship is a collaborative partnership or mentorship between young people and adults. Young people should be viewed as individuals, not members of a care system, and should be engaged in legislation and policy conversations about normalcy and foster care, as well as in conversations about their own cases.

- **Choice:** Organizations should make sure that young people have safe spaces to be themselves and access to an array of program and service options. Organizations should also allow and assist young people to explore and develop other supportive relationships in their lives, including those with family members, mentors, friends, and community members. Youth should be taught and expected to advocate for themselves with support from child welfare staff. The necessary support to develop self-advocacy skills is a process that occurs over time and requires coaching.

## Shift From Being Protection-Focused to Being Normalcy-Focused (Developmentally Framed)

Shifting from a focus on protection to a focus on normalcy means that young people in foster care will have the opportunity to experience their teenage years in a way similar to their peers not in foster care. Child welfare organizations should assess the way they think about risk factors and protective factors and adjust these views as needed based on what is now known about normal adolescent brain development and risk taking.

- **Protection focus:** While the safety of all children and youth in foster care is important, research suggests that the emphasis on protection that is the norm for younger children in foster care should be relaxed for youth in foster care. Like other adolescents, youth in foster care should be given some room to have experiences and take risks without negative judgment. When they face challenges, even those that result from their own decisions and behaviors, youth in care should be provided a safety net, as well as support and guidance, to learn from them.
- **Normalcy and risk taking:** Organizations should think about how they can keep young people safe while at the same time providing them maximum normalcy, allowing them to take appropriate risks, and encouraging them to engage in developmentally appropriate activities. This means creating space for healthy risk taking, increased independence, connections with peers and caring adults, access to enrichment activities, and access to the same experiences as their same-age peers to build resilience and learn by doing.
- **Individualized care:** Organizations should not assume the capabilities of youth but offer individualized care for all young people that corresponds with their developmental stage, needs, and preferences. Organizations should meet young people where they actually are and align services with their needs and risks in a developmentally appropriate manner.

## Shift From Being Focused on the Past or Present Situation of a Child to Being Focused on the Future of the Youth and Young People Being Served

A shift from past- or present-focused to future-focused care means that child welfare workers shift from concentrating on the child's present needs and past trauma to focusing on planning for the future as the young person transitions to adulthood. This doesn't mean that trauma-informed care is no longer relevant for the young person in foster care. Rather, there is a new orientation to helping the young person prepare for adult life.

- **Future-focused care:** In a future-focused model of care, youth needs, goals, and aspirations drive services in a present and future perspective. Young people need to be supported in the present in ways that will facilitate their access to services that will benefit them in the future. In the youth welfare model, young people are engaged in ongoing case planning and asked about what they need in the present and future, including the long-term future. Caseworkers and adult supporters can help youth think through the ways in which decisions and planning in the present can lead to a variety of outcomes.



- **Preparation for adulthood:** Organizations should aim to assist youth in preparation for adulthood with concrete skill-building and development opportunities. This preparation should start by asking young people where and how they see their future selves. Organizations should then focus on strengths-based assessment to empower youth to take positive action in their lives and work with mentors to develop a plan that builds skills needed for the future. Staff should also help young people build communities of support to assist them in their adult lives and work with them on skills build their social capital. At this stage in a youth's development, it is critical that child welfare organizations, together with the young people they serve, be able to anticipate the supports young people in foster care might need as they move forward into adulthood.

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# Stages of Adolescence

By: Brittany Allen, MD, FAAP & Helen Waterman, DO

Adolescence is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood. It includes some big changes—to the body, and to the way a young person relates to the world.

The many physical, sexual, cognitive, social, and emotional changes that happen during this time can bring anticipation and anxiety for both children and their families. Understanding what to expect at different stages can promote healthy development throughout adolescence and into early adulthood.



## Early Adolescence (Ages 10 to 13)

- **During this stage, children often start to grow more quickly.** They also begin notice other body changes, including hair growth under the arms and near the genitals, breast development in females (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Physical-Development-Girls-What-to-Expect.aspx) and enlargement of the testicles in males (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Physical-Development-Boys-What-to-Expect.aspx). They usually start a year or two earlier in girls than boys, and it can be normal for some changes to start as early as age 8 for females and age 9 for males. Many girls may start their period at around age 12, on average 2-3 years after the onset of breast development.
- **These body changes can inspire curiosity and anxiety in some—especially if they do not know what to expect or what is normal.** Some children may also question their gender identity (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Identity-and-Gender-Confusion-In-Children.aspx) at this time, and the onset of puberty can be a difficult time for transgender children (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/Pages/Gender-Diverse-Transgender-Children.aspx).
- **Early adolescents have concrete, black-and-white thinking.** Things are either right or wrong, great or terrible, without much room in between. It is normal at this stage for young people to center their thinking on themselves (called "egocentrism"). As part of this, preteens and early teens are often self-conscious about their appearance and feel as though they are always being judged by their peers (/English/family-life/work-play/Pages/What-Parents-Can-Do-to-Support-Friendships.aspx).
- **Pre-teens feel an increased need for privacy.** They may start to explore ways of being independent from their family. In this process, they may push boundaries and may react strongly if parents or guardians reinforce limits (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx).

## Middle Adolescence (Ages 14 to 17)

- **Physical changes from puberty continue during middle adolescence.** Most males will have started their growth spurt, and puberty-related changes continue. They may have some voice cracking, for example, as their voices lower. (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Physical-Development-Boys-What-to-Expect.aspx) Some develop acne. Physical changes may be nearly complete for females, and most girls now have regular periods.
- **At this age, many teens become interested in romantic and sexual relationships.** (/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/default.aspx) They may question and explore their sexual identity—which may be stressful if they do not have support from peers, family, or community. Another typical way of exploring sex and sexuality (/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/Deciding%20to%20Wait.aspx) for teens of all genders is self-stimulation, also called masturbation (/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/pages/Masturbation.aspx).

- **Many middle adolescents have more arguments** (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/How-to-Communicate-with-a-Teenager.aspx) **with their parents as they struggle for more independence**. They may spend less time with family and more time with friends. They are very concerned about their appearance (/English/family-life/Media/Pages/Points-to-Make-With-Your-Teen-About-Media.aspx), and peer pressure may peak at this age.
- **The brain continues to change and mature in this stage, but there are still many differences in how a normal middle adolescent thinks compared to an adult.** Much of this is because the frontal lobes are the last areas of the brain to mature—development is not complete until a person is well into their 20s! The frontal lobes play a big role in coordinating complex decision making, impulse control, and being able to consider multiple options and consequences. Middle adolescents are more able to think abstractly and consider "the big picture," but they still may lack the ability to apply it in the moment. For example, in certain situations, kids in middle adolescence may find themselves thinking things like:
  - *"I'm doing well enough in math and I really want to see this movie... one night of skipping studying won't matter."*
  - *Do I really have to wear a condom during sex if my girlfriend takes the pill?"*
  - *"Marijuana is legal now, so it can't be that bad."*

While they may be able to walk through the logic of avoiding risks outside of these situations, strong emotions often continue to drive their decisions when impulses come into play.

## Late Adolescents (18-21... and beyond!)

Late adolescents generally have completed physical development and grown to their full adult height. They usually have more impulse control by now and **may** be better able to gauge risks and rewards accurately. In comparison to middle adolescents, youth in late adolescence might find themselves thinking:

- *"While I do love Paul Rudd movies, I need to study for my final."*
- *"I should wear a condom...even though my girlfriend is on birth control, that's not 100% in preventing pregnancy."*
- *"Even though marijuana is legal, I'm worried about how it might affect my mood and work/school performance."*

Teens entering early adulthood have a stronger sense of their own individuality now and can identify their own values (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Share-Your-Values.aspx). They may become more focused on the future and base decisions on their hopes and ideals. Friendships and romantic relationships become more stable. They become more emotionally and physically separated from their family. However, many reestablish an "adult" relationship with their parents, considering them more an equal from whom to ask advice and discuss mature topics with, rather than an authority figure.



## Parents: How To Help Your Children Navigate Adolescence [Back to Top](#)

Children and their parents often struggle with changing dynamics of family relationships during adolescence. But parents are still a critical support throughout this time.

Here are some things you can do:

- **Help your child anticipate changes in his or her body.** Learn about puberty (</English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Physical-Development-of-School-Age-Children.aspx>) and explain what's ahead. Reassure them that physical changes (</English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Physical-Development-of-School-Age-Children.aspx>) and emerging sexuality (</English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/Teenage-Sexuality.aspx>) is part of normal, healthy development. Leave room for questions and allow children to ask them at their own pace. Talk to your pediatrician when needed!
- **Start early conversations about other important topics.** Maintain open communication (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/default.aspx>) about healthy relationships (</English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/Expect-Respect-Healthy-Relationships.aspx>), sex (</English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Talking-to-Your-Child-About-Sex.aspx>), sexuality, consent, and safety (such as how to prevent sexually transmitted infection (</English/health-issues/conditions/sexually-transmitted/Pages/default.aspx>) and pregnancy (</English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/Birth-Control-for-Sexually-Active-Teens.aspx>), and substance use (</English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Drug-Abuse-Prevention-Starts-with-Parents.aspx>)). Starting these conversations during early adolescence will help build a good framework for discussions later.
- **Keep conversations** (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/How-to-Communicate-with-a-Teenager.aspx>) **with your child positive.** Point out strengths. Celebrate successes.
- **Be supportive and set clear limits** (</English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Disciplining-Your-Child.aspx>) **with high (but reasonable) expectations.** Communicate clear, reasonable expectations for curfews, school engagement, media use (</English/family-life/Media/Pages/How-to-Make-a-Family-Media-Use-Plan.aspx>), and behavior, for example. At the same time, gradually expanding opportunities for more independence over time as your child takes on responsibility. Youth with parents that aim for this balance have been shown to have lower rates of depression and drug use.
- **Discuss risky behaviors (such as sexual activity and substance use) and their consequences.** Be sure to set a positive example yourself. This can help teens consider or rehearse decision-making ahead of time and prepare for when situations arise.
- **Honor independence and individuality.** This is all part of moving into early adulthood. Always remind your child you are there to help when needed.

The adolescent years can feel like riding a roller coaster. By maintaining positive and respectful parent-child relationships during this period, your family can (try to) enjoy the ride!

## Additional Information:

- [Ages and Stages: Teen \(/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/default.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/teen/Pages/default.aspx)
- [Ages and Stages: Puberty \(/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/default.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/default.aspx)
- [What is an Adolescent Health Specialist? \(/English/family-life/health-management/pediatric-specialists/Pages/What-is-an-Adolescent-Health-Specialist.aspx\)](/English/family-life/health-management/pediatric-specialists/Pages/What-is-an-Adolescent-Health-Specialist.aspx)
- [Concerns Girls Have About Puberty \(/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Concerns-Girls-Have-About-Puberty.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Concerns-Girls-Have-About-Puberty.aspx)
- [Concerns Boys Have About Puberty \(/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Concerns-Boys-Have-About-Puberty.aspx\)](/English/ages-stages/gradeschool/puberty/Pages/Concerns-Boys-Have-About-Puberty.aspx)

# Developing Adolescent Identity



Joanna Williams / [Puberty & Other Changes](#)

Sep 04, 2018



## Adolescent Identity Development: The Factors of Change

Among the profound and exciting changes taking place in adolescence is the process of self-discovery. Our teens are working to figure out who they are, making adolescent identity development a central feature of teen life. Young people's identities are shaped by lots of factors — family, cultural and societal expectations, experiences with institutions like school and the media, and friends. Young people also take active steps and make choices that shape their identity. They select the environments and people they want to be around. They adjust their beliefs and behaviors based on feedback. And they reflect on all of this while working to figure out who they are.

Adolescent identity is developed, in part, based on relationships and feedback received from others. As young people move from early to late adolescence and their [brains continue to develop](#), their adolescent identity is also likely to change.

While your tween or teen may not be doing all of these, here are a few ways they may be changing as they seek answers to the question, "[Who am I?](#)":

Early Adolescents (11-14):

Desire to identify themselves in multiple ways outside of their role in the family

Increase awareness of themselves as part of a peer group (for some, navigating where they fit into the social landscape may take time and involve multiple changes)

Develop flexibility in how they present themselves in different situations

Prioritize personal values and decisions to reflect how they see themselves

Experience greater sensitivity to feedback from others, particularly peers

#### Middle Adolescents (14-18):

Begin to imagine their own adolescent identity and role in the larger world

Actively explore adolescent identity alternatives — trying on different hats to see which one fits best

Consider themselves and their beliefs in relation to broader social-cultural groups like gender, race, and religion

Take stronger stances on social, ethical, or moral issues

Increase stability in how they see themselves across different places and social groups

#### Late Adolescents (18-24):

Give deeper consideration of self in terms of adult roles or career goals

Think about who they are in the context of intimate relationships

Begin to balance idealistic views of who they may become with a more accurate understanding of reality

Can make strong commitments to personal and social group identities (gender, race, religion), but new experiences can result in further exploration and change

It is important to be open as youth try out different presentations of themselves.

## The Process of Exploring One's Adolescent Identity

Typically, young people will shift from not giving much thought to identity to actively engaging in the process of exploring identity options. This shift can be prompted by an experience — sometimes positive, sometimes negative — that creates just enough conflict to get them thinking about their place in the world. Or it can come when youth begin noticing that how they act with their friends may be different than how they act with family.

Not only are teens working to create a meaningful sense of self overall, they may also be trying to understand themselves in relation to different aspects of identity — gender, religion, race, sexuality, and others. Ultimately, teens want to create a sense of self that is consistent — meaning that they feel harmonious and in alignment with each other. That is a tall order.

## Identity as a Family Affair

For some young people, defining aspects of their identity can come from participation in rich family traditions — religious and cultural affiliations may be particularly shaped by family experiences. During adolescence, teens with a strong connection to a particular identity may engage in activities to deepen their understanding or connection to this aspect of themselves. This may include joining clubs or organizations related to this aspect of their adolescent identity.



As teens explore, they may be excited to share newfound knowledge with you. If they share something that you have already given deep consideration, remember that it is still new for them and they may not be looking to you for answers. In fact, it is a good time for you to remind yourself that your children are experts on their own lives and their active search for answers to the question, “Who am I?” is helping them gain even more expertise. Your role is to be a sounding board. You supportively listen to their growing understandings and developing thoughts. And you guide them when needed.

## Support the Navigation Process

How tweens and teens see themselves is going to be shaped in part by how others — you, peers, teachers, siblings — see them. They may also be influenced by how teens “like them” are portrayed in the media. For some teens and in some settings, the range of “possible selves” seems endless. For others, it may be limited by lack of access to opportunities or by stereotypes about expected outcomes. Both ends of this spectrum can be challenging, but consistent support from parents empowers teens as they envision themselves in the present and future.

Parents can help by conveying that figuring out who they are — with all of the ups and downs that may bring — is normal and healthy. It is important to be open as youth try out different presentations of themselves. Of course, being consistent with the [rules and boundaries](#) you’ve created to keep them safe still applies. Choices that [involve risky behavior or compromise morals](#) require action even if they are part of the identity exploration process.

## When Identity Development is a Challenge

For some teens, the process of identity exploration may be more challenging. For teens feeling like they don’t know who they are or where they fit in, you can help by asking them to share their experience. Ask how they feel when they’re with different people or doing different activities. Ask when they feel most connected, disconnected, or the most comfortable. Telling teens to just “be themselves” may not be helpful if they’re struggling, but giving opportunities for self-reflection can create the space to start figuring out the answers on their own.

Of course, even if young people appear to have a strong sense of self, sudden changes — moving to a new town, loss of a loved one, changes in family structure — can leave them feeling like they must reinvent themselves. Just like when you became a parent for the first time and had to figure out how your new role fit into your previous version of yourself, teens need support to create a clear sense of self under new circumstances.

## Offer Your Love

Even when our teens don’t yet feel good about themselves, it is critical they know we will love them just as they are. It is our stable presence and [unwavering love](#) that supports them to withstand challenges and offers them the security that allows them to find themselves.

## Identities Online

[Social Media tools](#) provide a wealth of opportunity for teens to create, test, and recreate various versions of themselves. In an era where hanging out face-to-face with friends after school may be challenging, many teens use social media to stay in close contact with the same friends they have at school. Other teens use social media or gaming sites to tap into their creativity and imagine new, virtual identities. Some may go online to connect with peers who share similar interests in music, fashion, or other hobbies.

What's important to remember, is that more often than not, you are not the intended audience for your child's posts. As teens use online spaces to project themselves to virtual audiences, they may do so in a way that seems inconsistent or out-of-character with how you see them. The feedback teens receive through their self-portrayals online is part of the process of identity development. Jumping to conclusions or interpreting their posts out-of-context may push teens to find ways to hide their online personas from you. If you're concerned, engage them in a discussion ([not a lecture](#)) to find out more about why they choose to present themselves in a particular way.

## Normal Dev. Tasks Required to Transition to Adulthood

Breakout Groups: Select a group that matches a challenge facing the youth you brought with you today; or one that most interests you.

### GROUP 1: Physical & Emotional Changes/Adjustments

Adolescents are expected to:	For youth who have experienced foster care: What if.....	Cultural considerations: What if....
Adjust to a new physical sense of self	I have grown to feel disconnected from my physical sense of self as a coping mechanism?	I don't have a sense of who I am and almost every message I receive is negative?
Gain emotional & psychological independence from parents	my bond & relationships with my parents were disrupted before I gained independence and interdependence?	I did not have the opportunity to bond with my parents & my experiences have primarily been in group placements?
Learn to manage sexuality & sexual identity	I don't have someone safe to talk to about safe sex? What if I have been displaced from several homes based on my sexual or gender identity?	no adult in my life shares my cultural background and context for such an intimate conversation?

## Group 2: Cognitive

Adolescents are expected to:	For youth who have experienced foster care: What if.....	Cultural considerations: What if....
Adjust to new intellectual abilities	my need to focus on survival has overwhelmed or distracted my cognitive capabilities?	I can't think clearly or take intellectual risks because of my sense of not being good enough.
Meet increased cognitive demands at school	multiple moves and school changes prevent me from applying myself in school?	I am disciplined more than my peers, which means I am often out of the classroom and will never catch up, so why try?
Expand verbal skills	my stress responses have limited my ability and confidence to verbalize how I feel and what's important to me?	I don't feel like anyone wants to hear or believes what I have to say, so I just remain silent?

## GROUP 3: Identity

Adolescents are expected to:	For youth who have experienced foster care: What if.....	Cultural considerations: What if....
Develop a personal sense of identity	my experiences with adults have not validated that I matter? What if most people have just identified me as a troubled child?	every message I get from society tells me that as a youth of color or identifying as LGBTQ I am inferior?
Establish adult career goals	I've been focused on survival – here and now – day to day – and not my future?	I have been in foster care for many years with no significant person in my life? What if all I can focus on is who will be there for me when I leave foster care?
Adopt a personal value system	I have not had a consistent and loving relationship to help define a healthy, strong personal value system?	I have always had to agree with someone else's value system, even though mine might be different?



## Group 4: Impulse Control

Adolescents are expected to:	For youth who have experienced foster care: What if.....	Cultural considerations: What if....
Develop increased impulse control	I haven't had the care, guidance and nurturing to teach and reinforce healthy control over my impulses so that my judgement and behavior mature with my development.	I have been disciplined and restrained for behaviors that my peers were not?
Consolidate capacity to control impulses, reg emotions	I have not had the foundation and environment to develop and consolidate these skills?	my experiences have limited my capacity to look into the future? What if I see too many bad things that I don't understand happening to people who look like me? What if I am unsure that I will even have a future?
Develop Impulse control & behavioral maturity		

## Sibling Assessment Form

---

### SIBLING RELATIONSHIP CHECKLIST 1

Child A \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_

Child B \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_

#### Behavior of Child A to Child B

*Frequency (select one)*

**A** Defends or protects 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**B** Recognizes Sib's distress and offers comfort 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**C** Accepts comfort from sib 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**D** Teaches or helps 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**E** Initiates Play 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**F** Responds to overtures to play 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

## Sibling Assessment Form

**G** Openly shows affection 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**H** Misses sib when apart 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**I** Resolves conflict through age-appropriate reasoning 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**J** Annoys, irritates or teases 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**K** Shows hostility or aggression 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**L** Blames or attempts to get sib into trouble 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**M** Behavior sabotages efforts to meet other sib's needs 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Sibling Assessment Form

## SIBLING RELATIONSHIP CHECKLIST 2

Child A \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_

Child B \_\_\_\_\_ DOB \_\_\_\_\_

### Behavior of Child B to Child A

*Frequency (select one)*

**A** Defends or protects 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**B** Recognizes sib's distress and offers comfort 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**C** Accepts comfort from sib 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**D** Teaches or helps 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**E** Initiates play 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**F** Responds to overtures to play 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Sibling Assessment Form

---

**G** Openly shows affection 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**H** Misses sib when apart 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**I** Resolves conflict through age-appropriate reasoning 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**J** Annoys, irritates or teases 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**K** Shows hostility or aggression 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**L** Blames or attempts to get sib into trouble 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**M** Behavior sabotages efforts to meet other sib's needs 1 Often ☐ 2 Sometimes ☐ 3 Never ☐

Examples of this behavior \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

---

**SIBLING CHECKLIST 3**

**Interactions**

1      What evidence is there of sharing:

Examples

Boisterous play	<hr/> <hr/>
Imaginative activities	<hr/> <hr/>
Rituals (e.g. bed or bath time)	<hr/> <hr/>
Jokes and fun	<hr/> <hr/>
Secrets	<hr/> <hr/>
Other	<hr/> <hr/>

2      Are there marked differences between them in any of the following respects:

Examples

The roles they adopt	<hr/> <hr/>
Activities and interests	<hr/> <hr/>
Behavior	<hr/> <hr/>

## Sibling Assessment Form

Personality

Other

### 3 What evidence is there of reciprocity e.g.

Example

Pride in each other

Praise and criticism

Mutual help

### 4 Do they model on each other e.g.

Example

Think they look alike

Imitate each other

Emulate the qualities they like

Unite in face of problems

Other

## Sibling Assessment Form

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**5 Other observations on this relationship**

---

---

**6 What are these siblings' own views of their relationship?** (views of other siblings can also be very illuminating).

---

---

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**7 On the basis of all this evidence, sum up the positives and negatives that this relationship holds for each sibling**

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Date checklist completed

Name of person completing checklist

Relationship to the child

---

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# SIBLING DECISION MAKING MATRIX

Developed by: Connie Maschmeier, LISW, MSSA, CCDC III

Northeast Ohio Adoption Services' Sisters and Brothers Together Project  
(Funding provided by Federal Adoption Opportunities Grant #90-CO-0821)

**Usage:** To be used in all situations in which decisions involving siblings are being made.

**Premise:** Siblings should be placed together in order to support and maintain existing ties and to minimize the degree of loss experienced by the children unless there is a compelling reason in the children's best interest to the contrary.

**Instructions:** The following issues are listed in order of importance and each question should be weighted accordingly. Please refer to pages 8 and 9 for a visual matrix after discussing the following questions.

## 1. Assess past, current and potential relationships/attachment for all of the siblings.

Fully describe the sibling relationship using concrete, observable and measurable examples.

- **Degree** of the biological relationship of the siblings. This can be characterized as full siblings (same biological parents), half siblings (share only one biological parent), or assumed siblings (share no common biology but have been raised together and they assume that they are siblings).
- **Duration** of the sibling relationship.
  - **Length**  
The length of time they have known one another, i.e. the older sibling will know the younger sibling for as long as the younger sibling has been alive (unless they have been placed separately).
  - **Developmental Stage**  
Developmental age affects children's perception of duration for example, two days away from home feels much longer to a three year old than to a 13-year old. Use a child's developmental ages (rather than biological age) when assessing their behaviors.
  - **Significant Circumstances**  
Traumatized children often experience time distortions and distortion of sequence of events. Children's sense of time and inability to remember

events and sequences of events with their siblings should not be misinterpreted. It is often helpful to visually depict a child's life including moves and significant events using tools such as a placement timeline (found in Keck, G. PhD & Kupecky, R. LSW (1995). *Adopting the Hurt Child*, (p. 153). Pinon Press Co.), a placement genogram (found in McMillen, J.C. & Groze, V. (1994). *Using Placement Genograms in Child Welfare Practice*. *Child Welfare*, LXXII (4): 307-318.), or Rosenberg's life map (found in Pinderhughes, E.E., & Rosenberg, K. (1990). *Family bonding with high-risk placements: A therapy model that promotes the process of becoming a family*. In L.M. Glidden (Ed.) *Formed Families: Adoption of Children with Handicaps* (pp. 209-230). New York: Hawthorne Press.)

- **Quality**

MUST have a thorough knowledge of the maltreatment experienced by the children while in their birth home.

- Cannot be assessed at one point in time, must take into account the lifetime of the sibling relationship.
- Must take into consideration what is happening around the child/ siblings i.e. within the family, at school, in the neighborhood, at church/ synagogue, with peers, etc.
- Describe the roles the children play within the family i.e. parenting sibling, protector, nurturer, history keeper, etc.
  - ◆ If their roles are deemed unhealthy, what steps have been taken to help them develop healthier roles?
  - ◆ Have the children been in a stable environment long enough to feel safe relinquishing the roles that they may have developed for survival?
- Who does the child turn to for support/ guidance?
  - ◆ If not currently living with siblings (and therefore unable to turn to them) did they turn to their siblings for support when living together?
  - ◆ Have the children been allowed to visit at least twice a month while in care to maintain their bond?
- How do the children experience/ express sibling rivalry?
  - ◆ Is it within normal developmental limits?
  - ◆ What steps have been taken to reduce inappropriate behaviors?

- **Intensity** of the relationship.

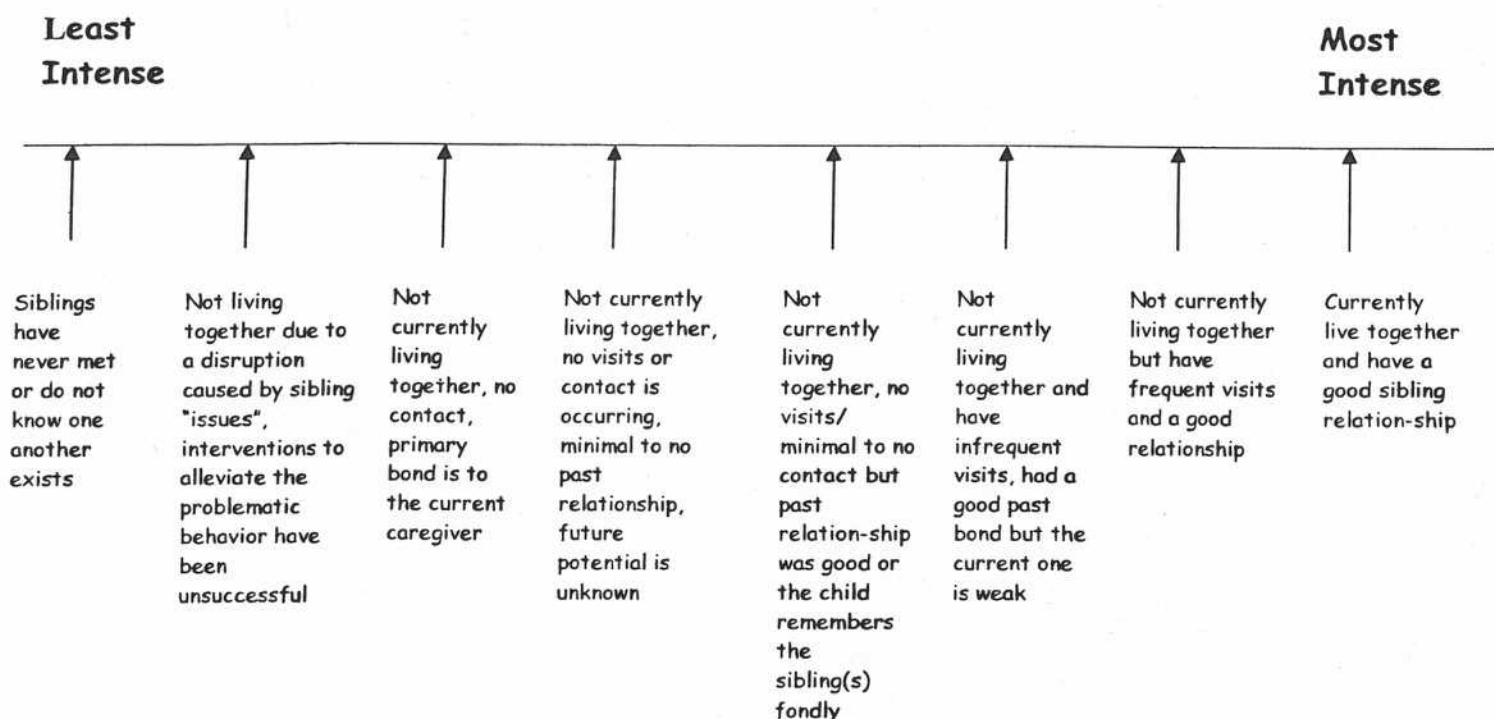
**Note:** Intensity should be measured over the lifetime of the sibling relationship. The intensity of the current sibling relationship should be weighted most heavily, unless the children are living separately and are not visiting at least two times per month. In this situation they may not have an opportunity to have a strong relationship. Child development research indicates that the potential future relationship should be considered more significant than the past relationship.



When assessing the intensity of sibling interactions it is imperative that the developmental ages of the children be taken into account. For example, when school aged children get together for a visit they may not play together but instead engage in parallel play because they are developmentally delayed or adolescents may not express a significant interest in their siblings because they are participating in many outside activities - these should not be taken as signs of dis-interest, rather developmentally age appropriate behaviors.

- When a professional visited and observed the children interacting during visits what did he/she observe?

The continuum below depicts the intensity of the sibling relationship based on their current situation.



## 2. Are there any safety risks associated with the children being placed together?

- Describe any risk factors associated with the children being placed together, most common being:
  - Sexual Reactivity - inappropriate sexual touching or fondling
  - Sexual Offending - an older/ more powerful sibling victimizes a younger/ less powerful sibling
  - Aggression - that results in physical harm
- Describe the context of the behavior and the dynamics of the situation in which this behavior occurred.

- ♦ Were the children made to touch one another in the birth home or observe sexual activity?
- ♦ If there has been sexual activity between the siblings does it seem more like sexual reactivity (acting out abuse they have experienced or witnessed) or a sexual offense involving a perpetrator and a victim?
- ♦ How much time has passed since the last incident?
- ♦ What is the likelihood that it would be repeated?
- ♦ What interventions have been implemented thus far to reduce risk? What was the result?
- ♦ Have the children matured or made progress in therapy?
- ♦ What services can be implemented to reduce risk? i.e. sibling therapy, alarms on doors, individual therapy, etc.

**Note:** If the risk of re-occurrence is high, treatment interventions have been unsuccessful, and no family can be found then separation is necessary. An appropriate plan should be developed to maintain contact as the reunification plan is developed and implemented. If developing a reunification plan is not in the children's best interest then a plan should be made to maintain contact and the children should be guided through the grief process.

### 3. Weigh the possible long-term benefits of keeping the siblings together vs. potential attachment damage in the future:

#### Benefits experienced by the children due to placing/keeping the siblings together:

- The children do not have to experience another loss (can begin to heal.)
- The children have a shared history (sense of roots.)
- Learn to work through their problems rather than running from them.
- Feel safer in a new home when they are with their siblings.
- Better able to attach to caregivers when the sibling attachment has not been damaged.
- There are other people in the family that look like them.

\* Personalize the list for these particular children.

#### Benefits experienced by the siblings due to separating/keeping them separated:

- They have a shared biological/ genetic history that can predict future health needs for the siblings.
- If the child(ren) is staying with a family that they have resided with for a significant period of time and have formed attachment to, their ability to attach may not be damaged.
- The children may be physically and emotionally safer remaining separated.
- The children's special needs may be better met if they are placed separately.

\* Personalize the list for these particular children.

If a current caregiver wants to adopt a child(ren) in their care (but not the entire sibling group) utilize the following questions to identify the best permanent placement plan for the children.

### **Child**

- \* Does the child feel close to the caregiver?
- \* Does the child give affection to the caregiver (i.e. appropriate kisses, hugs, cuddling?)
- \* Does the child like to spend time with the caregiver?
- \* Does the child demonstrate respect towards the caregiver?
- \* Does the child communicate with the caregiver?
- \* Does the child generally get along with the caregiver?
- \* Does the child trust the caregiver?
- \* How does the child relate to the caregiver's significant other (if one exists?)
- \*

### **Caregiver**

If both the child and the caregiver answer yes to the majority of the questions there is a strong mutual Bond.

If the parent answers yes to the majority of the questions and the child does not, it is probably best to have the child remain with the caregiver as they are demonstrating their commitment to the child in the absence of the child having formed a mutually satisfying attachment.

If both the child and the caregiver or just the caregiver answer no to the majority of the questions it is not a good placement match at this time.

- \* Does the caregiver feel close to the child?
- \* Does the caregiver give affection to the child (i.e. appropriate hugs, kisses, cuddling?)
- \* Does the caregiver like to spend time with the child?
- \* Does the caregiver demonstrate respect towards the child?
- \* Does the caregiver communicate with the child?
- \* Does the caregiver generally get along with the child?
- \* Does the caregiver generally trust the child?
- \* How does the caregiver's significant other (if one exists) relate to the child?



If both the child and the caregiver answer yes to the majority of the questions there is a strong mutual bond.

If the parent answers yes to the majority of the questions and the child does not, it is probably best to have the child remain with the caregiver as they are demonstrating their commitment to the child in the absence of the child having formed a mutually satisfying attachment.

If both the child and the caregiver or just the caregiver answer no to the majority of the questions it is not a good placement match at this time.

#### **4. Assess the foster/ adoptive family's ability and willingness to meet all of the children's needs.**

- Describe the family's values about siblings.
  - ◆ With appropriate support services could all of the siblings remain together?
  - ◆ If yes, list what services would be necessary to preserve the placement.
  - ◆ Have these services been offered?
  - ◆ If yes, what was the family's reaction?

**Note:** If the family is not willing to accept the necessary services to preserve the placement then they probably do not fully appreciate the significance of the sibling bond. This makes it unlikely that they will maintain ongoing contact if the children are separated.

#### **5. The children's expectations and wishes regarding their placement**

**Note:** This should be assessed independently from the caregiver's wishes by interviewing each child alone. Remember that these children are dealing with multiple loyalty and safety issues that can affect their ability to make healthy decisions for themselves. They are probably unable to take into consideration the longevity of the sibling relationship and they may base their decision solely on their current relationship with their siblings or their current caregivers. They may also be repeating messages they are hearing from their current caregivers. Their developmental age must be considered when evaluating their wishes; it is not developmentally congruent to ask children to make life-altering decisions.

**Note:** If it is entirely necessary that the siblings be separated/ remain separated then a viable visitation/ sibling bond maintenance plan must be created during the staffing/ meeting. It should include:

- Frequency of face-to-face visits, phone calls, picture sharing, E-mails, letters, etc. Who will coordinate/transport and who is responsible for initiating and carrying out the efforts should be specified. The names, addresses and phone numbers of the foster/adoptive homes where all of the siblings are living should be included in the plan.
- All parties need to sign the plan.
- Everyone, including the children, should receive a copy of the plan that same day.

Questions and comments regarding this decision making tool can be directed to:

**Attention:** Northeast Ohio Adoption Services  
Please contact Northeast Ohio Adoption Services with comments and/or questions regarding this decision making tool.

Phone: 330-856-5582  
Mail: Northeast Ohio Adoption Services  
5000 East Market Street, Suite 26  
Warren, OH 44484

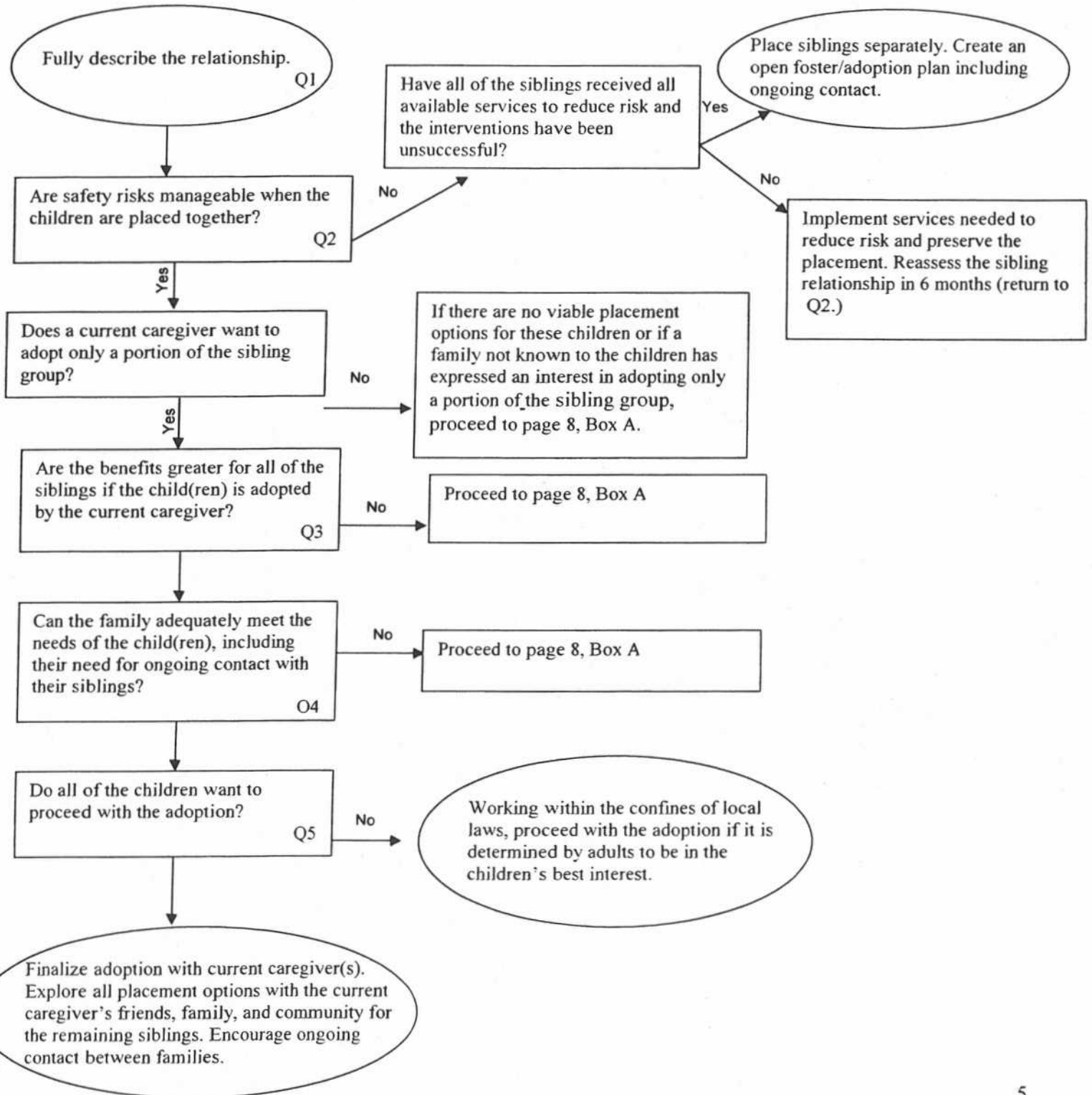
Cm/cm  
8-30-01  
rev. 10-1-03



# Sibling Decision Making Matrix

Created by: Northeast Ohio Adoption Services  
Sisters and Brothers Together Project  
(Grant #90 CO 0821)

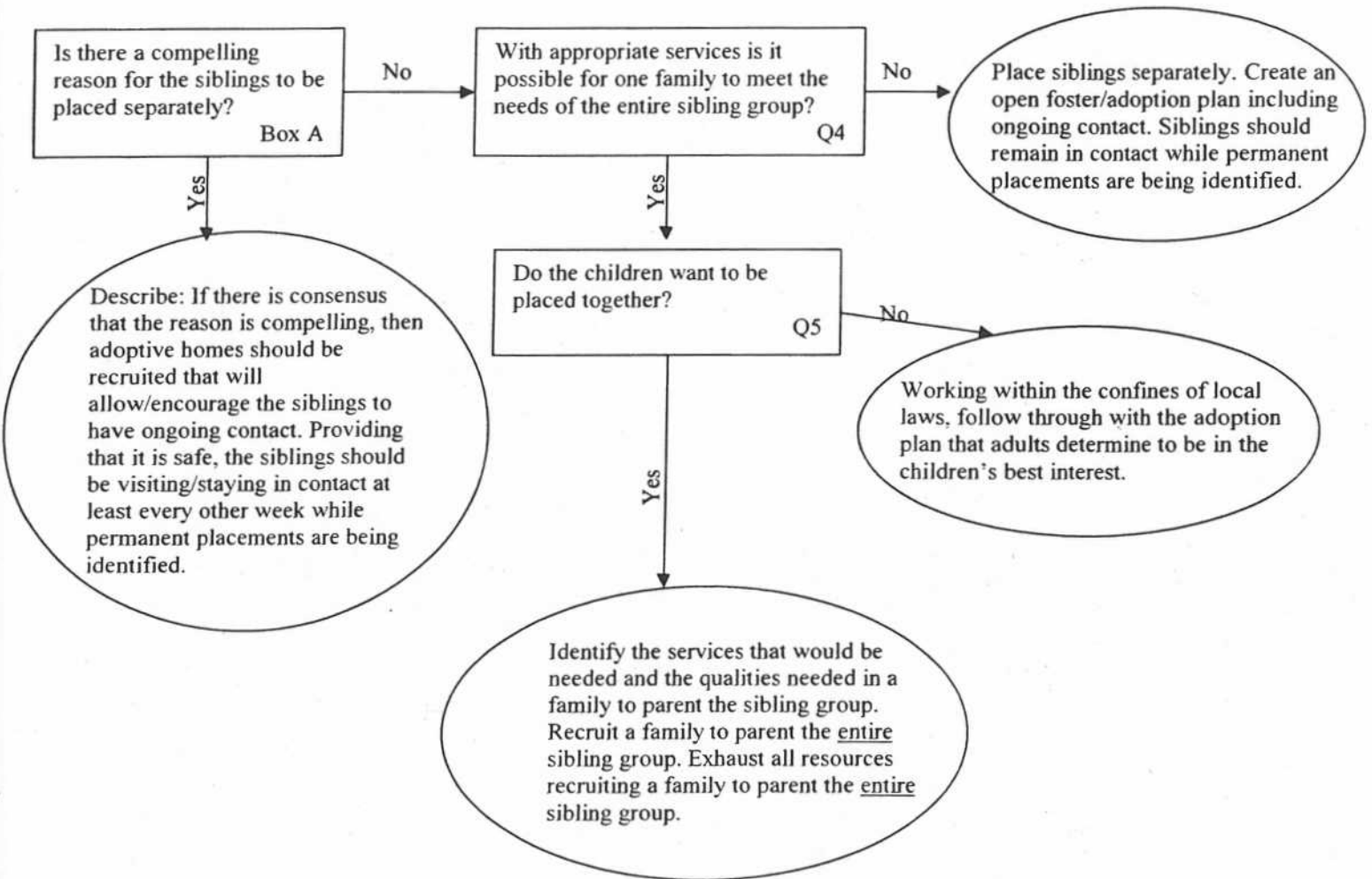
NOTE: This matrix is to be utilized in conjunction with the questions provided to guide your discussion.



# Sibling Decision Making Matrix

Created by: Northeast Ohio Adoption Services  
Sisters and Brothers Together Project  
(Grant #90 CO 0821)

Continued...



Note: If a compelling reason in the children's best interest does not exist, then they should not be separated. The most common examples of compelling reasons include:

- Sexual offending behavior that has not been responsive to therapeutic interventions
- Extreme physical aggression toward siblings that has not been responsive to therapeutic interventions.
- Current caregiver wants to adopt the child(ren) in their home but not the entire sibling group. The child(ren) in the home have a strong mutual bond with the caregiver. Services were offered to support the caregiver in providing for all of the available siblings but the caregiver declined the services.

*Copies of this document may be made but not altered.*

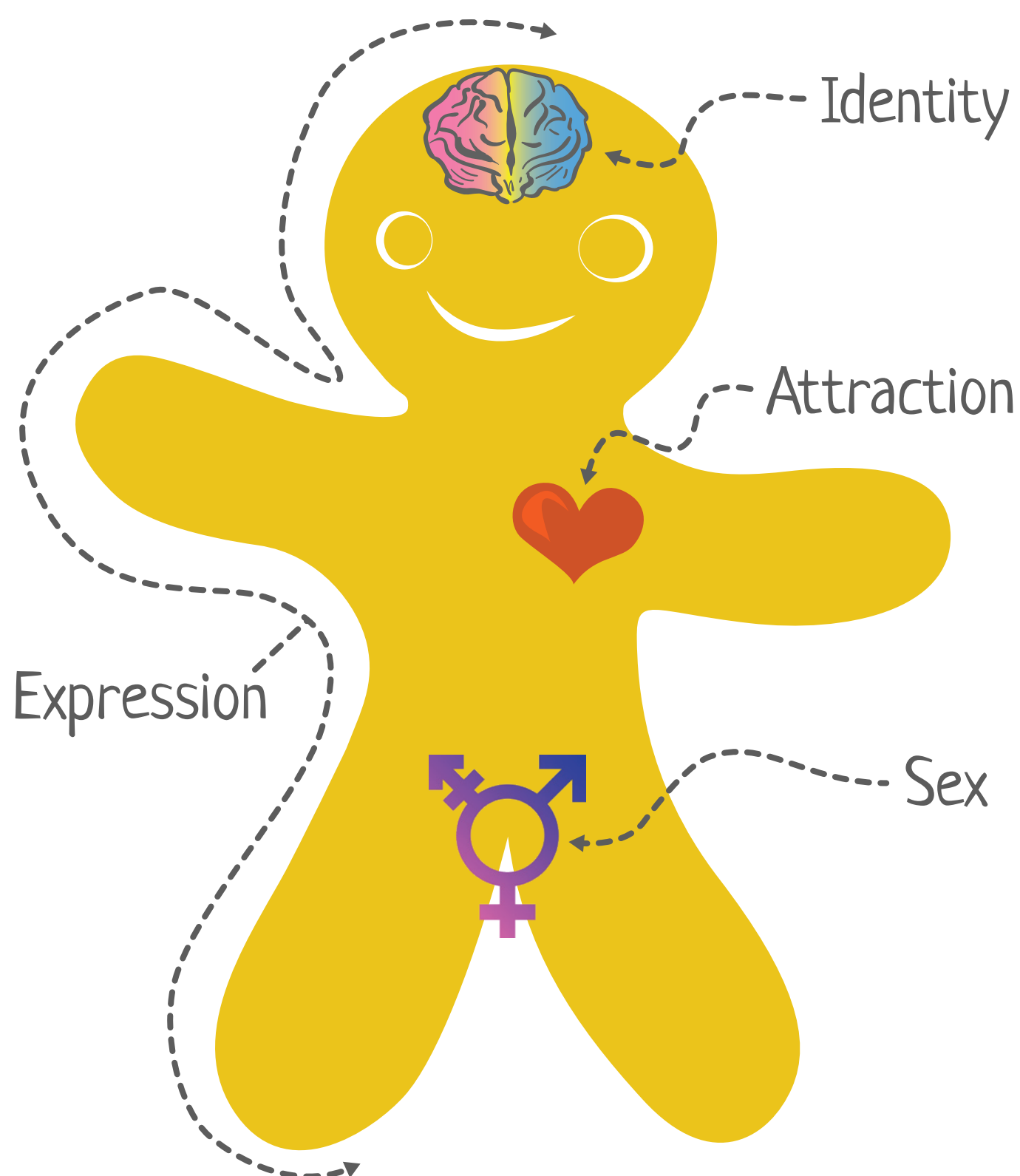
# LGBTQ is an acronym

meant to encompass a whole bunch of diverse **sexualities** and **genders**. Folks often refer to the Q (standing for “queer”\*) as an **umbrella term**, under which live a whole bunch of identities. This is helpful because **lesbian**, **gay**, and **bisexual** aren’t the only marginalized sexualities, and **transgender\*** isn’t the only gender identity. In fact, there are many more of both!



\* The “Q” sometimes stands for “questioning” and “transgender” is often thought of as an umbrella term itself (sometimes abbreviated “trans”; or “trans\*” in writing). Lots of asterisks, lots of exceptions, because hey – we’re talking about **lots** of different folks with different lived experiences to be inclusive of.

# The Genderbread Person v4 *by it's pronounced METROsexual.com*



⊘ means a lack of what's on the right side

 Gender Identity

⊘ → Woman-ness

⊘ → Man-ness

 Gender Expression

⊘ → Femininity

⊘ → Masculinity

 Anatomical Sex

⊘ → Female-ness

⊘ → Male-ness

Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex  
Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation

Sex Assigned At Birth  
☐ Female ☐ Intersex ☐ Male

 Sexually Attracted to... and/or (a/o)

⊘ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People

⊘ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

 Romantically Attracted to...

⊘ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People

⊘ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People



## Pronouns 101

### What is a pronoun?

A pronoun is a word used to refer to either the people who are talking (like “I” or “you”) or a person being talked about in the third person (like “she/her,” “he/him,” and “they/them”). Since some pronouns are gendered (“she/her” and “he/him”), it is important to be intentional about the way we use pronouns as we all work to create as inclusive an environment as possible.

### Why do pronouns matter?

Ask yourself how many times someone has used your name or a pronoun to refer to you today. Chances are this has happened countless times. Now, imagine that your coworker, or a family member, or your doctor or a friend routinely calls you by the wrong pronoun. That would be hard. This is why using a person’s chosen name and pronouns is essential to affirming their identity and showing basic respect. The experience of being misgendered – having someone use the incorrect pronouns to refer to you – can be uncomfortable and hurtful. The experience of accidentally misgendering someone can be difficult for both parties. Routinely asking and providing pronouns helps everyone avoid assumptions and feel comfortable interacting.

### Pronoun Etiquette Tips

- **Create opportunities for people to share their pronouns** with you rather than assuming you know their pronouns based on their appearance. For example, when introducing yourself share your pronouns like this:
  - *In one-on-one conversation:* “Hi, I’m John and I go by he/him. Nice to meet you.”
  - *In a meeting:* “Hi everyone. I’m Mollie. I’m the senior program manager and I go by she/her.”
  - *In your e-mail signature next to your name:*  
E. Wilson (pronouns: they/them/theirs)
- **If you don’t know someone’s pronouns, it’s okay to ask.** You can say, “What pronouns do you use?” or “What pronouns do you go by?” or “What pronouns would you like me to use when I refer to you?”
- **Always use someone’s chosen (preferred) pronouns unless you’ve been asked not to** do so for a specific reason (e.g., safety or privacy concerns).
- **Practice! Practice! Practice!** It takes intention to consistently use someone’s correct pronouns if you previously used different pronouns for that person or if you’re using pronouns that are new to you. Take the time to practice referring to the person with the correct pronouns in conversation and in written communication. (Tip: Worried about misgendering someone in an email? Do a quick “CTRL+F” and search for any use of an incorrect pronoun before hitting send.)
- **If you make a mistake, apologize and move on.** Help others by gently correcting them if they misgender someone.



## EXAMPLES OF PRONOUNS IN USE



**all children  
all families**

She/Her/Hers	He/Him/His	They/Them/Theirs	Ze/Zir/Zirs	Ze/Hir/Hirs
She is here now.	He is here now.	They are here now.	Ze is here now.	Ze is here now.
Her phone call just started.	His phone call just started.	Their phone call just started.	Zir phone call just started.	Hir phone call just started.
She excused herself from the meeting.	He excused himself from the meeting.	They excused themselves from the meeting.	Ze excused zirself from the meeting.	Ze excused hirself from the meeting.
That seat is hers.	That seat is his.	That seat is theirs.	That seat is zirs.	That seat is hirs.
Let's wait for her.	Let's wait for him.	Let's wait for them.	Let's wait for zir.	Let's wait for hir.

The image above provides examples of how to use different pronouns. For much more information on talking about pronouns with youth and adults that you serve, visit [hrc.im/acaf-sogje](https://hrc.im/acaf-sogje).

# Considerations for LGBTQ Children and Youth in Foster Care

Exploring Normalcy as It Relates to P.L. 113–183



Capacity Building  
CENTER FOR STATES

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) children and youth deserve the same opportunities for growth and learning as their non-LGBTQ peers, yet they often face misunderstanding, discrimination, and rejection.

## What is Normalcy?

The Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (P.L. 113–183) requires child welfare agencies to promote normalcy and well-being for children and youth in foster care. Normalcy means creating age-appropriate experiences for these youth and taking other steps to support healthy development.

P.L. 113–183 defines “age or developmentally appropriate” activities as:

***“Activities or items that are generally accepted as suitable for children of the same chronological age or level of maturity or that are determined to be developmentally appropriate for a child, based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacities that are typical for an age or age group.”<sup>1</sup>***

LGBTQ youth require the same opportunities for growth and learning as their non-LGBTQ peers; however, they often face misunderstanding, discrimination, and rejection that threatens normalcy. These challenges ultimately may limit development or lead to a higher risk of mental and physical health issues.

## Know the Letters

L	esbian
G	ay
B	isexual
T	ransgender
Q	uestioning

<sup>1</sup> Social Security Administration. 2014. *Compilation of the Social Security Laws, P.L. 113–183, Approved September 29, 2014 (128 Stat. 1919): Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act of 2014 (sec. 111(1))*. Retrieved from [https://www.ssa.gov/OP\\_Home/comp2/F113-183.html](https://www.ssa.gov/OP_Home/comp2/F113-183.html)

# Creating Normalcy for LGBTQ Children and Youth

Research shows that adults who respond to LGBTQ children and youth with accepting behaviors promote a greater sense of well-being as compared to those that respond with rejecting behaviors.<sup>2</sup> Child welfare systems promote accepting behaviors by:

- ▶ Training staff to be comfortable discussing sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (SOGIE)<sup>3</sup>
- ▶ Creating emotionally and physically safe spaces for LGBTQ children and youth<sup>4</sup>
- ▶ Training staff to be familiar with sexuality and gender terminology and concepts<sup>5</sup>
- ▶ Developing policies that address normalcy considerations for LGBTQ children and youth<sup>6</sup>
- ▶ Encouraging LGBTQ youth to participate in decision-making bodies that can inform improvement efforts<sup>7</sup>
- ▶ Including SOGIE in nondiscrimination policies<sup>8</sup>
- ▶ Displaying symbols that represent the LGBTQ community<sup>9</sup>

## LGBTQ Normalcy Principles

- ▶ Exploring sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression is a normal part of human identity development.
- ▶ Young people who identify as LGBTQ or gender non-conforming are as “normal” as their heterosexual and cisgender peers.<sup>10</sup>
- ▶ Providing normalcy for LGBTQ children and youth requires creating safe spaces for them and providing services that directly address sexuality, gender-based needs, and the “coming out process.”
- ▶ It is best practice for child welfare agencies to support LGBTQ children and youth in accessing the highest quality opportunities to meet their needs.

<sup>2</sup> Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2014. *A Practitioner's Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children*. Retrieved from <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/PEP14-LGBTKIDS/PEP14-LGBTKIDS.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections. (n.d.). *Twenty Things Supervisors Can Do to Support Workers to Competently Practice with LGBTQ Children, Youth, and Families*. Retrieved from [http://nrcpfc.org/is/downloads/TwentyThingsSupervisorsNeedtoKnow\\_Practice\\_with\\_LGBTQ\\_CYF.pdf](http://nrcpfc.org/is/downloads/TwentyThingsSupervisorsNeedtoKnow_Practice_with_LGBTQ_CYF.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Girl's Best Friend Foundation & Advocates for Youth. 2005. *Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: A Toolkit*. Retrieved from <http://www.advocatesforyouth.org/storage/advfy/documents/safespace.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> American Institutes for Research. 2015. *Improving Policies and Practices for LGBTQ Children and Youth: A Strategic Planning Tool*. Retrieved from [http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/LGBT\\_Improved\\_Support\\_Tool.pdf](http://www.tapartnership.org/docs/LGBT_Improved_Support_Tool.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> American Psychological Association. 2016. *Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender*. Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/topics/lgbt/index.aspx>



**Table 1. Examples of LGBTQ Youth Normalcy Considerations**

Normal Childhood/ Adolescent Activities	Examples of Additional Considerations for LGBTQ Youth
Field trips, camps, and sleepovers	Should the “same-sex only sleepovers” rule be modified for gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth? If so, how? Will transgender youth be allowed to stay with friends who share their gender identity rather than their sex assigned at birth? Are facilities equipped to keep transgender and gender non-conforming youth safe and comfortable? How will you keep the rules fair and consistent between LGBTQ and non-LGBTQ youth?
Sports and extracurricular activities	Will an out, gay boy be safe and accepted on the football team? What will be his experience regarding coaches, team members, parents of team members, and fans? What about a transgender boy in the same situation? <sup>11</sup> How are sports teams and other clubs monitored for LGBTQ inclusivity?
Dating, prom, etc.	What are the rules for non-LGBTQ youth in terms of dating, sexual activity, prom attendance, etc.? For example, are they allowed to invite a significant other to their foster home? Do the same rules apply for LGBTQ youth? Can youth bring a same-sex date to the prom and/or wear clothes of their choosing based on their gender identity? What will those experiences be like for LGBTQ youth in their particular school, community, or home?
Community groups and faith-based practices	Are the community groups and communities of faith in your area open and affirming to LGBTQ youth? Are there LGBTQ-specific services, support groups, and peer groups for youth? If youth need to travel longer distances to access LGBTQ-inclusive services and supports, they may require additional funds or later curfews.
Independent living skills (employment and housing)	LGBTQ people are not protected from discrimination under housing and employment laws in many States. <sup>12</sup> How should LGBTQ youth be educated about potential job <sup>13</sup> and housing <sup>14</sup> discrimination?
Long-term relationships with parental figures, mentors, and trusted adults	What opportunities do young people have to create long-term, stable relationships with adults? How do you ensure the same opportunities for LGBTQ youth? <sup>15</sup>



<sup>11</sup> Students who attend schools that receive Federal funding are protected under Title IX, which prohibits discrimination based on sex. The U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Justice have concluded that this includes individuals who are transgender or who do not conform to sex stereotypes. In other words, schools and educational programs are expected to treat students according to their gender identity just as they would all other students of that gender, in terms of educational programs and other activities offered by the institution. Source: Transgender Law Center. 2014. *Big News! DOE Guidance Says Transgender Students Protected Under Federal Law*. Retrieved from <http://transgenderlawcenter.org/archives/10249>

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Campaign. 2016. *Maps of State Laws and Policies*. Retrieved from [http://www.hrc.org/state\\_maps](http://www.hrc.org/state_maps)

<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Campaign. (n.d.). *GEN EQ: Guide to Entering the Workforce*. Retrieved from [http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-](http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/GenEQ_guide_entering_workforce.pdf)

[1.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/GenEQ\\_guide\\_entering\\_workforce.pdf](http://hrc-assets.s3-website-us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files/assets/resources/GenEQ_guide_entering_workforce.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> Lambda Legal. (n.d.). *Resources for LGBTQ Youth By State*. Retrieved from [https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/fs\\_resources-for-lgbtq-youth-by-state\\_1.pdf](https://www.lambdalegal.org/sites/default/files/publications/downloads/fs_resources-for-lgbtq-youth-by-state_1.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> Child Welfare Information Gateway. 2016. *Permanency for LGBTQ Youth*. Retrieved from <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/permanency/specific/youth/lgbtq/>

# "COMING OUT" ... "of the closet." is the process by which someone...

1. Accepts and identifies with their gender identity and/or sexual orientation; and
2. Shares their identity willingly with others.

**Sometimes** We talk about coming out as if it were a one time thing. But for most folks coming out is a series of decisions – sometimes daily – that LGBTQ people navigate in every new setting they enter. (Most people aren't like Ellen, where they come out once and then the whole world knows.)

**People** may be "OUT" → in some spaces, and "IN" → in others.

→ / → to Family → / → to Friends → / → to Classmates/Coworkers → / → to Religious Community

A decision to come out to a person or group is one of safety, comfort, trust, & readiness.

**It's dangerous, unhealthy, and unhelpful to force someone to come out, or to "out" someone else** (i.e., disclosing someone's gender identity or sexual orientation to others without the person's consent), **regardless of your intentions** (sometimes people think they're being helpful, or acting on the person's behalf to conquer their fears), but...

## IF SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU...

**DON'T:**

1. Say "I always knew," or downplay the significance of their sharing with you.
2. Go tell everyone, bragging about your "new trans friend."
3. Forget that they are still the person you knew, befriended, or loved before.
4. Ask probing questions, or cross personal barriers you wouldn't have crossed earlier.
5. Assume you know why they came out to you.

**DO:**

1. Know this is a sign of huge trust! (Yay!)
2. Check-in on how confidential this is (Do other people know? Is this a secret?)
3. Remember that their gender/sexuality is just one dimension (of many) of them.
4. Show interest and curiosity about this part of them that they are sharing with you.
5. Ask them how you can best support them.

# Family Behaviors that Increase Your LGBTQ Child’s Health & Well-Being

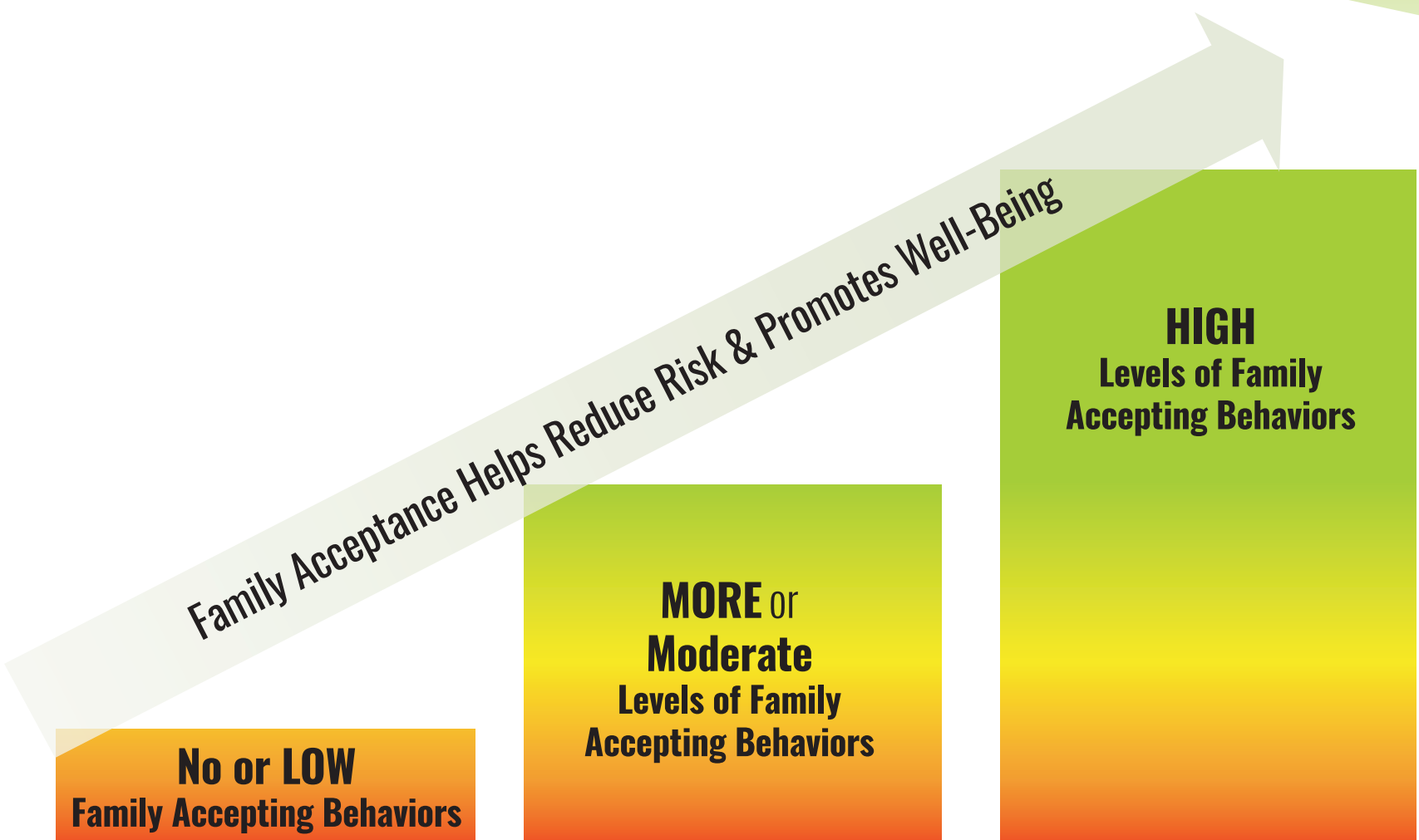
Research from the Family Acceptance Project® found more than 50 family accepting behaviors that help protect your lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer-identified (LGBTQ) child against health risks like depression, suicide and illegal drug use and help to increase your LGBTQ child’s self-esteem, health and well-being. A little change makes a difference in decreasing your child’s isolation and risk and giving them hope that their family will be there for them.

Family support saves lives!

## BEHAVIORS THAT HELP...

<b>Tell your LGBTQ / gender diverse child that you love them</b>	<b>Support your child’s gender expression</b>	<b>Talk with your child or foster child about their LGBTQ identity and listen respectfully – even when you feel uncomfortable or think that being gay or transgender is wrong</b>	<b>Require other family members to treat your child with respect</b>	<b>Show affection when your child tells you or when you learn that your child is LGBTQ</b>
<b>Ask your child if – and how - you can help them tell other people about their LGBTQ identity</b>	<b>Welcome your child’s LGBTQ friends to your home</b>		<b>Bring your child to LGBTQ groups and events</b>	<b>Get accurate information to educate your-self about your child’s sexual orientation, gender identity and expression</b>
<b>Find a congregation that welcomes your LGBTQ / gender diverse child and family</b>	<b>Participate in family support groups and activities for families with LGBTQ and gender diverse children to get support for yourself and your family and guidance for supporting your LGBTQ child</b>	<b>Use your child’s chosen name and the pronoun that matches their gender identity</b>	<b>Tell your LGBTQ / gender diverse child that you’re proud of them</b>	
<b>Tell your LGBTQ / gender diverse child that you will be there for them – even if you don’t fully understand</b>		<b>Talk with your religious leaders to help your congregation become supportive of LGBTQ people</b>	<b>Stand up for your child when others mistreat them because of their LGBTQ identity or gender expression – at home, at school, in your congregation and in the community</b>	<b>Speak openly about your child’s LGBTQ identity</b>
<b>Welcome your child’s LGBTQ partner to family events and activities</b>	<b>Connect your child with LGBTQ adult role models</b>	<b>Express enthusiasm for your child having an LGBTQ / gender diverse partner when they’re ready to date</b>		<b>Believe that your child can be a happy LGBTQ adult – and tell them they will have a good life</b>

*The more of these behaviors that parents and families do, the better your LGBTQ child’s health & well-being*



- Better health
- Higher self-esteem
- Stronger social support
- Better family relationships
- Less likely to be depressed
- 3 times less likely to attempt suicide
- 3 times less likely to think about suicide
- Less likely to have substance abuse problems



# Talking With Older Youth About Adoption

HANDOUT G-1

## Introduction

Exploring permanency options for older youth in foster care requires a focus on two key components: (1) recruiting and preparing adoptive families who can meet the needs of older youth and (2) engaging and supporting older youth in conversations about their future and their openness to adoption.

This tip sheet provides child welfare professionals with a framework for how to talk with older youth about permanency and offers tangible tips and suggestions on ways to make these conversations more effective and meaningful.

## Remember to ENGAGE

**E** Explain what permanency means—in general and what it can mean for youth

**N** Not a one-time conversation, but an ongoing discussion

**G** Give youth opportunities to explain their feelings about adoption

**A** Ask youth who they feel connected to

**G** Give youth choices so they can practice self-determination

**E** Explain their options and help them understand the pros and cons

## Key Considerations

**Begin** preparing for permanency early (not just in the final few months before a youth will age out of foster care) through ongoing discussions about their future and by helping them cultivate supportive relationships.

**Use** words that youth will understand, not child welfare jargon that might be confusing.

**Explain** the meaning of permanency and adoption. For example, permanency is a family relationship and bond that is intended to last a lifetime. Adoption makes the family permanence legal.

**Assess** and be aware of your own thoughts and attitudes—including possible biases or resistance—about adoption for older youth. If you have doubts about the possibility of finding families for older youth, you may reflect that doubt in your work.

**Keep in mind** that the word “adoption” may carry negative or confusing connotations for youth, especially if they think it means replacing their biological family or other important relationships. Understanding each youth’s perspectives and experiences is key to helping them talk through their own concerns and questions.

**Support** youth in understanding their different options as you talk about adoption; help them build skills of self-determination and using their voice.

**Consider** engaging a youth’s independent living worker as a messenger and partner for helping youth explore the possibility of adoption and the importance of permanency.

**Involve** youth in their own recruitment, such as being part of writing their profile for photolistings, arranging for a professional-quality photo or video to accompany their profile, identifying characteristics of potential parents for them, and sharing their ideas about recruitment messages.

**Involve** older youth – whether they have been adopted or not – in mentoring their peers in foster care. Read stories and watch videos together highlighting foster care alumni and discuss the stories with the youth. See stories and videos on the [AdoptUSKids website](#).

**Consider** whether everyone involved with the youth has done everything they can to support the youth’s permanency options through reunification or guardianship with relatives. As you discuss adoption, the youth may have questions about whether there were other options for having a permanent family.



# Suggestions for Starting a Conversation

Helping youth think about adoption and the importance of having lifelong supportive relationships requires ongoing conversations and a willingness to listen closely and carefully to what youth are telling you—directly and indirectly—about their goals, concerns, questions, and dreams. Conversations with youth should be authentic—not scripted—and responsive to how each youth wants to engage. There are many effective ways to prompt these discussions and help youth explore the idea of adoption. The questions below may be used as a starting place or as topics to incorporate into your conversations with older youth.

## Possible Questions

- What do you want for your future? What dreams do you have for yourself?
- What does permanency mean to you? What have you heard or do you believe about adoption? Do you have concerns or questions about either?
- Do you know anyone who has been adopted? If so, what do you think about their experience? What questions does their experience raise for you?
- What benefits do you think there would be to having more adults who love and care about you as you become an adult and throughout your life?
- Are there ways I can help you find out more about adoption and what permanency could look like for you? Are there people you'd like to talk with about adoption?
- Who in your life – past or present – do you see as a support to you? Who do you call to ask for advice? Who believes in you and loves you? Who would you call at 2:00 AM if you were in trouble?



## Possible Topics to Discuss

- Adoption doesn't mean giving up, replacing, or rejecting any of the other important people in your life, including your birth family.
- Even as you're becoming more independent, having an adoptive family can guide and support you in following your dreams and help you to be the best version of yourself.
- Adoption doesn't mean changing your identity or who you are, or even your name if you don't want to. What it does mean is adding to the number of people who care about you and support you throughout your life.
- Homelessness and unemployment are very real risks for youth who age out of foster care. Having an adoptive family can be a safety net as you transition to adulthood – you can go to school and you will have a place to go home to when you need it.
- Let's talk through your options and write out the pros and cons of each. Help us identify caring, committed adults in your life who can be there for you no matter what.



# How to Communicate With and Listen to Your Teen

Many parents have questions that start with, “*What do I say when...?*” However, parents need to understand that it is “*less important what you say (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Talking-With-Your-Teen-Tips-For-Parents.aspx), and more important that you listen.*”



1. **Turn off the “parent alarm.”** Listen without judgment and reaction. When your son says, “*Mom, I met this girl!*” and you react by saying, “*You’re too young to date,*” that instinctual alarm prevented you from being able to hold a meaningful discussion on healthy sexuality.
2. **Don’t catastrophize.** When teens come to their parents with concerns, they need a calming, rational presence that will create a safe space for them to figure things out. When parents make it seem worse than they had imagined, they leave more anxious and won’t return.
3. **Don’t over empathize.** Adolescents need a sounding board. Sometimes they exaggerate; sometimes they express fleeting feelings. When you over empathize, it can heighten their emotions and make you look naïve or overly involved. Imagine your empathizing by condemning their friend who your daughter had a fight with. You’ll look “wrong” the next day when your daughter is best friends again with the girl she hated yesterday.

## Your Values & Opinions

Teens are happy to hear their parents’ values and opinions (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Share-Your-Values.aspx), but these opinions should not be shared in a way that feels judgmental or condescending and should try to avoid personal territory that will position a teen to need to become defensive of friends or self.

## Avoid “The Lecture”

Parents who lecture are not heard. The lecture is often condescending or hostile, and is delivered with an abstract string of possibilities loosely tied together. Young adolescents are still not thinking abstractly, and all teens who are upset or in crisis mode will not absorb lessons delivered abstractly. Parents may increase their yield if they are able to convey their wisdom in a more concrete manner that adolescents can follow.

## Additional Information:

- Communicating with Your Teen: Avoiding the ‘Should Do’ (Video) (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Communicating-with-Your-Teen-Avoiding-the-Should-Do-Video.aspx)
- Fair and Reasonable Limits for Teens (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/Fair-and-Reasonable-Limits-for-Teens.aspx)
- How To Resolve Conflicts With Your Teen (/English/family-life/family-dynamics/communication-discipline/Pages/How-To-Resolve-Conflicts-With-Your-Teen.aspx)

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**Last Updated** 11/21/2015

**Source** Reaching Teens: Strength-based Communication Strategies to Build Resilience and Support Healthy Adolescent Development (Copyright © 2014 American Academy of Pediatrics)

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## OVERALL STRATEGIES FOR PROFESSIONALS, CAREGIVERS AND SYSTEMS

Equipping young people with strategies to make sense of things that have happened to them — which include experiences with racism and/or discrimination — helps maximize their developmental gains. Insight into their experiences and internal development serves as a validating and empowering protective factor for them to heal from trauma, adversity, internalized racial oppression and difficult emotions.

Ways professionals and caregivers can help young people respond to trauma:

- Talk about and honor past relationships while recognizing those who will continue to provide support. Understand the role of historical and intergenerational trauma due to racism.
- Introduce activities and practices that are particularly useful in helping young people begin to heal from their experiences of trauma and loss through such practices as mindfulness meditation, restorative yoga and self-guided sports like swimming and running.
- Some youth may feel that prayer or other spiritual activities are useful for healing. Encourage young people to discuss their faith and cultural traditions and provide opportunities for them to continue to participate in ways and with people meaningful to them.<sup>33</sup>
- Listen to and respect young people's truths that may not align with your beliefs or experiences.
- Encourage open communication and validate the need to grieve and receive support. Have conversations with young people about their interests and hopes for the future. Making thoughtful decisions and plans requires young people to have hope and see themselves as worthy of having the future they deserve. Create a liberated space for conversations on race, racism and discrimination.
- Understand that loss may keep a young person from warming up to a practitioner or a new family, no matter how caring the family is. Help young people reduce stress and take care of themselves by making sure they get enough sleep, eat a healthy diet and limit the use of stimulants such as caffeine.
- Plan as far in advance as possible with young people about upcoming changes and transitions, including changes in caseworkers. Be open about case planning. Let them know what to expect and what resources they will have.
- Actively engage young people in processing and talking through moments of hot cognition. Provide space to reflect with the young person about what was triggering, maddening or confusing. Create a plan for handling similar situations in the future.
- When dealing with a young person during a moment of hot cognition, monitor your own reactions. Reflect on the ways in which you might be heightening emotional arousal or helping to balance it so the young person can have room and time to respond productively.
- Recognize that trauma can prompt substance abuse as a form of self-medication and work to equip youth with alternative coping mechanisms. Reduce the chances that young people will turn

**Equipping young people with strategies to make sense of things that have happened to them, including experiences with racism, helps maximize their developmental gains.**

**“What we experience really puts our adult life in our hands. What experiences do we want to rewire our brains?”**

— *Jim Casey Initiative*  
*Young Fellow*

to harmful substances by providing and modeling a clear, safe, caring value system that has relevance to a young person’s identity and background including, but not limited to, race, ethnicity, gender identity and sexual orientation. Recognize the signs that a young person is smoking or using drugs or alcohol, and seek help from expert community organizations if needed.<sup>34</sup> Share with young people in foster care the added risks of substance abuse for youth who have experienced adversity and trauma.

- Provide opportunities for young people to attend cultural events that allow them to explore and affirm their racial and ethnic identity, ideally with peers. When considering new roles or experiences for a young person to take on, ensure you are not making assumptions about their racial or ethnic background that would limit their opportunities.

Systems can support these practices by doing the following:

- Work to recruit a diverse pool of foster parents and mentors to expose young people to many different positive role models.
- Use data disaggregated by race and ethnicity at each decision point to hold systems accountable for equity in outcomes for all youth.
- Develop systems improvement strategies by analyzing disaggregated data using a racial impact assessment tool.
- Use a racial impact assessment tool on current and new policies and practices.
- Engage all levels of staff and partners in bold and courageous conversations

that examine attitudes, assumptions and stereotypes about the “why” of the data.

- Facilitate training that focuses on creating a common definition and understanding of institutional and structural racism so that a common language emerges to have honest discussions that address racism as being at the very core of racial inequities.

Understanding the developmental stage of emerging adulthood has important implications for practice and programming. Because of the increased neuroplasticity of the brain during adolescence, neural connections can be rewired when the individual has the benefit of corrective experiences and relationships.<sup>35</sup>

## Promoting Development in Four Focus Areas: Recommendations for Child Welfare Professionals and Caregivers

The following recommendations are organized according to the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative’s four focus areas: permanence, educational attainment and economic security, housing stability and supports for young parents. These four areas are interconnected and critical components to ensuring that all young people transitioning from foster care have the relationships, resources and opportunities to ensure well-being and success. Research on adolescent brain development has strong implications for how professionals and caregivers approach young people.



## THE CONNECTEDNESS MAP

### KEY:

**Blue = Blood (biological) connection**

**Red = Heart (love) connection**



**Yellow = Spiritual connection**

**Green = Mind (mental) connection**

**Purple = The Richness of Culture Connection**

Place the child in the CENTER. Ask them to think of all the people (living or deceased) they are connected to. Include family members, friends, teachers, coaches, pastors, rabbis, etc. – anyone with whom they have /had a connection.

Use one shape to represent males and a different shape to represent females.

Example:  = Male  = Female

1. Next to each shape, write the person's name and age (if known).
2. Place individuals who are of similar age as the child on the same level as the child, older people above the child, and younger people below to show different generations.
3. Ask the child how he/she feels connected to each person.

**Is this person a blood relative?**

**Does the child love this person?**

**Does this person teach the child, or do they have good, meaningful talks together?**

**Does the child feel a spiritual connection with this person?**

**How has this person enriched this child culturally?**

The child should then draw the appropriately-colored line between him/herself and the other person. If there are multiple connections, there will be a multiple lines. When children have completed their connectedness maps, they may want to hang them up their rooms. This can be a consistent reminder of all the people in the world with whom they are connected.

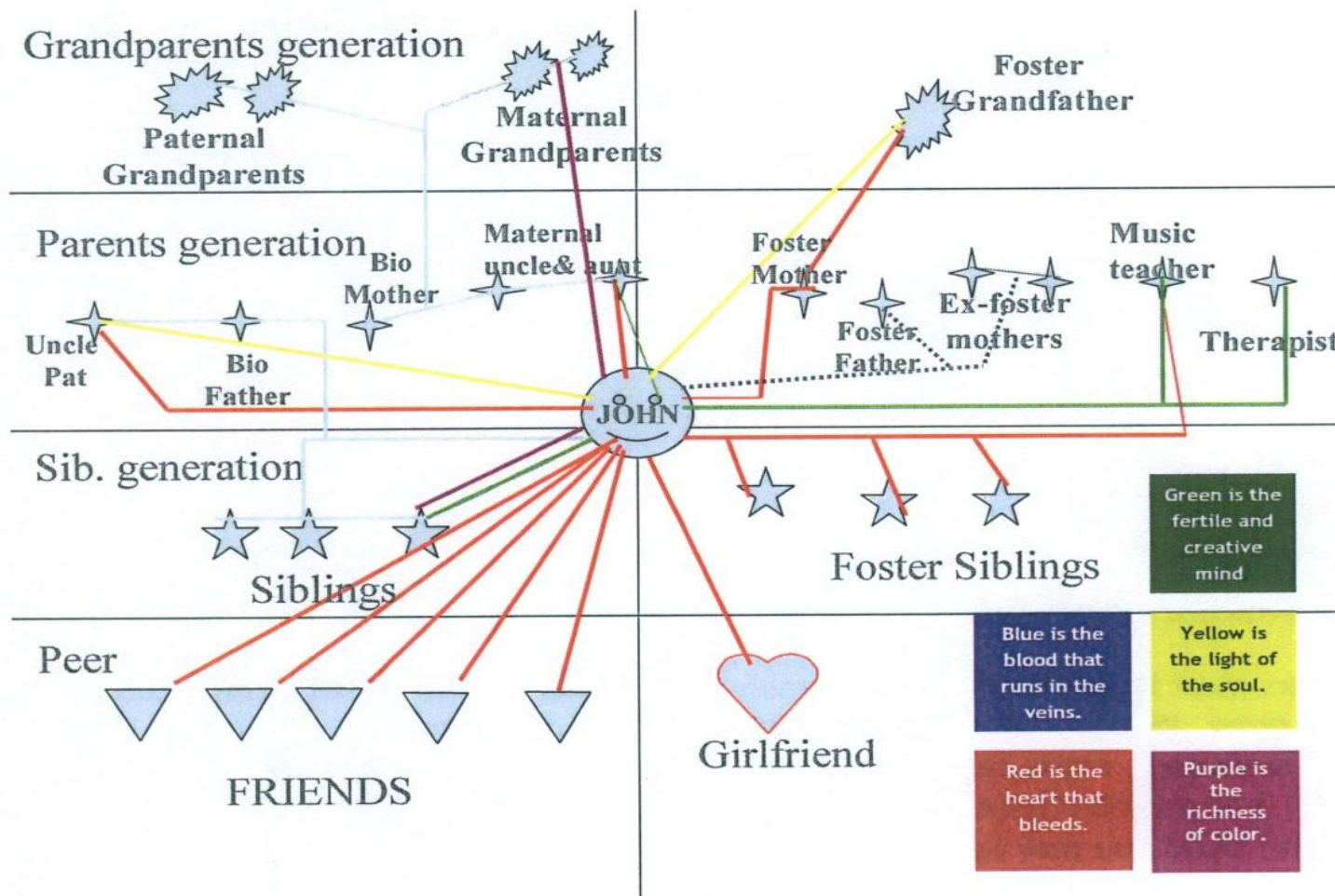
**Contributed by CASA of Santa Cruz County and EMQ.**

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### SOURCE:

Louisell, M.J. (n.d.). *Six steps to find a family: A practice guide to family search and engagement (FSE)* (p. 59). Available from the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections at the Hunter School of Social Work Web site: [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info\\_services/family-search.html](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/info_services/family-search.html)

## JOHN'S CONNECTIONS MAP



SOURCE:

Catholic Community Services of Western Washington and EMQ Children & Family Services. (2008). *Family search & engagement: A comprehensive practice guide* (p. 64). Available from the National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections at the Hunter School of Social Work Web site: [http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/info\\_services/family-search.html](http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcp/info_services/family-search.html)

# FAMILY GRID

## BIOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS

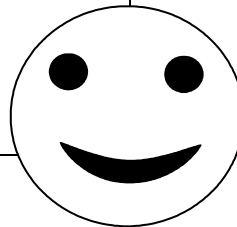
## NON-BIOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS

Grandparents' Generation

Parents' Generation

Sib. Generation

Peer Generation



Blue = Biological   Green = Creative   Yellow = Spiritual   Red = Love

BASED ON SOURCES IDENTIFIED ON PAGES 1 AND 2 OF THIS HANDOUT.

# Youth Connections Scale

## (A) Tools for Youth Connections

	Yes	No
Has a genogram or connectedness map been completed with youth?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Lifebook been created with or for the youth?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## (B) Number of Supportive Adult Connections:

For each category, please write the total number of meaningful relationships that apply for youth at this time.

“Meaningful relationships” are defined by the youth. This would include adults who have some on-going contact with the youth and who can be counted on for some type of support.

### Total # of Adult Relationships for Each Category

Mother (birth, adoptive, stepmother)	
Father (birth, adoptive, stepfather)	
<b>Adult siblings</b>	
Other adult relatives	
Current foster parent	
Former foster parent	
Current or former social worker	
Current or former teacher	
Current or former therapist, counselor or psychologist	
Pastor, rabbi or other spiritual leader	
An adult friend, mentor or sponsor	
Other adults (Please list relationships):	

## (C) Strength of Youth Connections:

Indicate the strength of the relationship between the youth and adult right now.

In categories where there is more than one person, choose the most meaningful relationship and answer about that person. You can list up to two additional adults in the last two rows. Circle the best response for each row.

**Very Weak:** No Contact

**Weak:** Infrequent contact; youth can't count on this adult for support

**Moderate:** Some contact with this adult but may not be consistent; youth feels a connection but can't count on this adult all the time

**Strong:** Contact at least once per month; youth feels a connection of the heart, mind or spirit with this person; youth can usually count on this person

**Very Strong:** Contact at least once per week; youth feels a long-term connection of the heart, mind or spirit with this person; youth can count on this person to be there for them when needed

**N/A:** Not applicable because adult is deceased or youth has no siblings

	Very Weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong	N/A
Parent 1 ( <i>birth, adoptive or step mother or father</i> )	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Parent 2 ( <i>birth, adoptive or step mother or father</i> )	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Siblings	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other adult relatives	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other caring adult identified by youth:	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other caring adult identified by youth:	0	1	2	3	4	N/A

**(D) Support Indicators:** Answer yes or no for each indicator. *These do not have to be from the same adult.*

You have an adult in your life whom you will be able to count on for the following support after you leave foster care:

Yes	No	Indicator
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing a home to go to for the holidays
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing an emergency place to stay
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing cash in times of emergency
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Help with job search assistance or career counseling, or providing a reference for youth
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Help with finding an apartment or co-signing a lease
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Help with school ( <i>homework, re-enrolling in school, help in applying to colleges</i> )
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisting with daily living skills, such as cooking, budgeting, paying bills and housecleaning
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing storage space during transition times
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional support – a caring adult to talk to
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sharing in or supporting experiences of youth's cultural and spiritual background
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Checking in on youth regularly – to see how they are doing
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisting with medical appointments so youth does not have to experience that alone
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisting with finding and accessing community resources.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A home to go for occasional family meals
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Help providing transportation ( <i>help with purchasing a car</i> ) or figuring out public transportation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone to send care packages at college
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisting with purchasing cell phone and service ( <i>for example, youth is added to a family plan</i> ).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A place to do laundry
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Supporting youth in civic engagement such as voting and volunteering

List has been modified and adapted from the FosterClub Permanency Pact (2006).

**(E) Level of Youth Connections:** Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Circle the best response.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
While in foster care, you have connected or re-connected with relatives or caring adults who will be lifelong supportive connections	0	1	2	3	4
An adult has made a commitment to provide a permanent, parent-like relationship to you	0	1	2	3	4
You are living with an adult who has or plans to adopt you or become your legal guardian	0	1	2	3	4
You feel very disconnected from any caring adults	0	1	2	3	4

Office Use Only: Youth Name \_\_\_\_\_ Youth Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_  
Worker Completing Form \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Completion of Form \_\_\_\_\_  
Form Completed: Within 30 Days of Placement ☐ Within 30 Days of Discharge ☐ Other ☐  
Form Completed Without Youth at Discharge: Yes ☐ No ☐ If Yes, Explain: \_\_\_\_\_



## FOSTER & ADOPTIVE CARE COALITION FOR EVERY CHILD... A PLACE TO CALL HOME

### Concurrent Recruitment List

List the date when you engaged in the following recruitment activities during the last 12 months.

#### General Recruitment (public recruitment)

- ☐ Online video profile
- ☐ Wednesday's Child
- ☐ Heart Gallery
- ☐ AdoptUSKids
- ☐ Newspaper feature
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Targeted Recruitment (focused on a specific constituency)

- ☐ Faith-based (i.e., One Church, One Child)
- ☐ Businesses
- ☐ Faith-based (i.e., One Church, One Child)
- ☐ Service clubs (Kiwanis, Optimists, etc)
- ☐ Support groups or agencies that match the child's needs (autism, cerebral palsy, etc)
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Child-Specific Recruitment (reaching out to the child's natural network)

##### COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- ☐ Teacher
- ☐ Coach
- ☐ Former neighbors
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

##### FOSTER PARENT

- ☐ Current foster parent
- ☐ Former foster parent
- ☐ Adoptive parent of sibling
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

##### COURTS (recruitment efforts)

- ☐ CASA
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Diligent Search (i.e., family finding)

- ☐ Review Child Protective Services (CPS) file
- ☐ Review court file
- ☐ Review closed files
- ☐ Develop genogram
- ☐ Conduct internet search
- ☐ Interview family/kin

Extreme Recruitment is operated by the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition and is made possible by grant number 90C010391 from the Children's Bureau. These contents are solely the responsibility of the Foster & Adoptive Care Coalition and do not necessarily represent the official views of the Children's Bureau,ACYF, ACF, or HHS.



1750 S. Brentwood Blvd., Suite 210  
St. Louis, Missouri 63144

t 800.FOSTER.3  
o 314.367.8373

w www.foster-adopt.org  
f 314.241.0715





Family Finding Relative Log for:

Name of Contact	Relationship to Child	Possible Addresses	Check if Good		Phone Numbers	DOB	SSN	Contact? (Y / N)	Response	Checks	Notes
									<input type="checkbox"/> Contributed Info. <input type="checkbox"/> Wants placement of child <input type="checkbox"/> Wants contact with child <input type="checkbox"/> No contribution <input type="checkbox"/> Do not recontact	<input type="checkbox"/> CA/N  <input type="checkbox"/> Unofficial Background  <input type="checkbox"/> Official Background	
									<input type="checkbox"/> Contributed Info. <input type="checkbox"/> Wants placement of child <input type="checkbox"/> Wants contact with child <input type="checkbox"/> No contribution <input type="checkbox"/> Do not recontact	<input type="checkbox"/> CA/N  <input type="checkbox"/> Unofficial Background  <input type="checkbox"/> Official Background	
									<input type="checkbox"/> Contributed Info. <input type="checkbox"/> Wants placement of child <input type="checkbox"/> Wants contact with child <input type="checkbox"/> No contribution <input type="checkbox"/> Do not recontact	<input type="checkbox"/> CA/N  <input type="checkbox"/> Unofficial Background  <input type="checkbox"/> Official Background	
									<input type="checkbox"/> Contributed Info. <input type="checkbox"/> Wants placement of child <input type="checkbox"/> Wants contact with child <input type="checkbox"/> No contribution <input type="checkbox"/> Do not recontact	<input type="checkbox"/> CA/N  <input type="checkbox"/> Unofficial Background  <input type="checkbox"/> Official Background	
									<input type="checkbox"/> Contributed Info. <input type="checkbox"/> Wants placement of child <input type="checkbox"/> Wants contact with child <input type="checkbox"/> No contribution <input type="checkbox"/> Do not recontact	<input type="checkbox"/> CA/N  <input type="checkbox"/> Unofficial Background  <input type="checkbox"/> Official Background	
									<input type="checkbox"/> Contributed Info. <input type="checkbox"/> Wants placement of child <input type="checkbox"/> Wants contact with child <input type="checkbox"/> No contribution <input type="checkbox"/> Do not recontact	<input type="checkbox"/> CA/N  <input type="checkbox"/> Unofficial Background  <input type="checkbox"/> Official Background	



# Permanency Pact

*Life-long, kin-like  
connections between  
a youth and  
a supportive adult*

A free tool to support permanency for youth in foster care



The national network for young people in foster care

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

get educated advocate  
speak up  
belong  
involved + informed

*What's a Permanency Pact? A pledge by a supportive adult to provide specific supports to a young person in foster care with a goal of establishing a lifelong, kin-like relationship.*

## Permanency Pact

Youth transitioning from foster care are often unsure about who they can count on for ongoing support. Many of their significant relationships with adults have been based on professional connections which will terminate once the transition from care is completed. It is critical to the youth's success to identify those adults who will continue to provide various supports through and beyond the transition from care. Clarifying exactly what the various supports will include can help to avoid gaps in the youth's safety net and misunderstandings between the youth and the supportive adult.

### A Permanency Pact provides:

- structure and a safety net for the youth
- a defined and verbalized commitment by both parties to a long term supportive relationship
- clarity regarding the expectations of the relationship

A Permanency Pact creates a formalized, facilitated process to connect youth in foster care with a supportive adult. The process of bringing the supportive adult together with youth and developing a pledge or "Permanency Pact" has proven successful in clarifying the relationship and identifying mutual expectations. A committed, caring adult may provide a lifeline for a youth, particularly those who are preparing to transition out of foster care to life on their own.

### Participants in a Permanency Pact

In addition to the two primary parties in a Permanency Pact (the youth and the supportive adult), it is recommended that a Facilitator assist in developing the Pact.

The *Facilitator* may be a Case Worker, Independent Living Provider or other adult who:

- is knowledgeable in facilitating Permanency Pacts\*
- is familiar with the youth, and
- can provide insight into the general needs of the youth transitioning from care

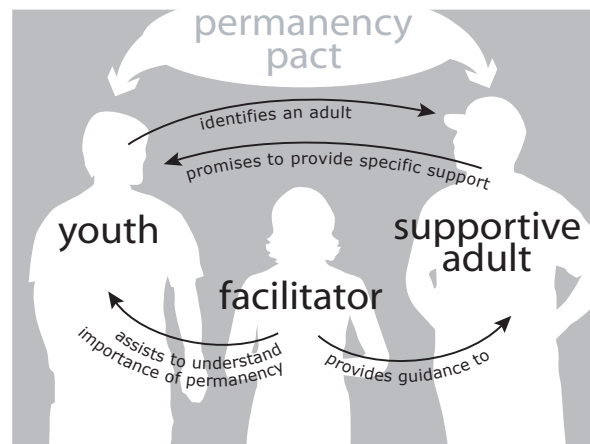
The *Supportive Adult* is an adult who:

- has been identified by the youth
- has a relationship with the youth
- is willing to commit to a life-long relationship with the youth
- is a positive role-model and
- is able to provide the youth with specific support on an on-going basis



Shawn from Michigan,  
FosterClub All-Star

"As I get older I am seeing the importance of family, community and peer support. Ever since I became engaged and active in my community my circle of support has expanded. My life has become so much more enriched now that I have accepted that I have a lot of people that care about me, I genuinely believe that family: peers, bio, foster, adoptive, in-laws are the most valuable thing a person can have in their life."



\*A Permanency Pact Toolkit will be available  
Summer, 2007 at [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org)





# Developing a Permanency Pact

The first step is to engage the youth to identify the supports they want or need as they prepare for the transition out of foster care, and beyond to adulthood. The following list of 45 Suggested Supports can help with this process. Together with the youth, the Facilitator can then begin to develop a list of adults who may be able to provide some of those supports. This list may include current relationships or adults with whom the youth has had a previous connection to which they wish to reestablish.

The Facilitator then:

- obtains necessary releases of information
- makes initial contact with the indentified adult(s)
- updates them regarding the youth's current situation
- gauges their level of interest
- assists the adult in identifying possible supports they will provide, and
- schedules and facilitates the Permanency Pact meeting

Working with the Supportive Adult, the Facilitator can use the following list of 45 Suggested Supports to draft a list of supports that the adult wishes to offer the youth. The list is then presented to the youth who will acknowledge the offer and accept those supports that they feel would be most beneficial. Additional supports may be suggested by either the youth or the supportive adult.

The final list may then be hand written using the attached list or entered into the Pact template, available in Microsoft Word, Wordperfect, and PDF formats (available in the Permanency Pact toolkit, order through [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org) starting Summer 2007). The youth and Supportive Adult sign the Pact and the Facilitator provides a witness signature. Copies of the Permanency Pact are provided to the youth, the Supportive Adult and maintained in the case record as part of the youth's Transition Plan. It is recommended that a certificate be prepared which documents the Pact between the adult and youth (certificate templates available in the Permanency Pact toolkit). All other members of the youth's Transition Team, including foster parents, CASA, judge, etc. should also receive copies of the Permanency Pact.

Taking a step toward trusting a relationship is often a very great accomplishment for a youth with a background where relationships are broken, promises are often not kept, and disappointment in caretakers prevails. The gift that a Supportive Adult contributes by way of a life-long commitment to the relationship is heroic. The impact of the forged relationship may be profound to all parties. To symbolize the importance of the commitment, it is recommended that a Permanency Pact be held in conjunction with some sort of ceremony or celebration. The Supportive Adult may want to give the youth a token keepsake gift (a piece of jewelry, photo frame, watch, engraved item, a special note, photo album, etc.), a celebration meal can be enjoyed.

A Certificate has been provided in this packet which may be used to affirm the Permanency Pact made between a youth and supportive adult.

*FosterClub member Caliguy94037,  
age 18, from California*

"I consider permanency to be a life long connection with an adult and consider it very important. In my experiences, I have just met adults that seem to stay in my life and that connection with them helps me to succeed in life."



*Schylar From Montana,  
Fosterclub All-Star*

"I have been through a lot in my life, and sometimes felt as if I were the only one alive in the world even when I was surrounded by lots of people. I am not always sure why I felt this way, maybe because I was a foster kid or maybe because I had always been told I was meant for nothing. But after a life of trials, I found someone that can almost make me forget a lot of the hurt and bad relationships. He is my 6th grade music teacher, my mentor, my savior through 11 placements, and now... my dad. I am 23, and am soon to be adopted your never too old to be adopted."



# 45

## 45 Suggested Supports...

*...that a Supportive Adult might offer  
to a youth transitioning from care*

### ☐ **A HOME FOR THE HOLIDAYS**

Spending the holidays without a family and with nowhere to go is a significant issue cited by young people who have transitioned out of foster care. Extending an invitation to holiday celebrations, or birthdays can help a youth fend off the depression that usually sets in around these important times of year.

### ☐ **A PLACE TO DO LAUNDRY**

Many adults can look back at the times they returned home as a youth with bags loaded with dirty clothes to wash. The offer to use laundry facilities can be a great way to keep a regular connection with a youth and provide them with a way to maintain pride in their appearance, regardless of an unstable housing situation.

### ☐ **EMERGENCY PLACE TO STAY**

Statistics show 25% of young persons will spend at least one night homeless within the first 2-4 years of leaving foster care. The offer of an emergency couch to sleep on or a guest bedroom to stay in can reduce anxiety and keep young people safe during hardships. Supportive adults may want to specify limits in time or expectations (help with housework, etc.) as a condition of this offer.

### ☐ **FOOD/OCCASIONAL MEALS**

A friendly, family-style meal every thursday evening or an invitation to Sunday brunch or a monthly lunch can provide a youth with a healthy alternative to the fast-food that often composes a youth's diet. It also provides a chance to connect and to role-model family life. An open invite to "raid the pantry" can be very comforting to young students or those on a limited budget and will help to ensure that the youth's health isn't jeopardized when funds are low.

### ☐ **CARE PACKAGES AT COLLEGE**

Students regularly receive boxes of homemade cookies, a phone card or photos from their parents when away at college. A regular package to a foster youth who has transitioned from care reminds them of connections "back home", and allows them to fit in with their peers.

### ☐ **EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY**

An employer or person in a position to hire, can help by providing special consideration when hiring for a new position. A phone call to the youth inviting them to apply, help with a written application, coaching for a job interview are all ways to help. Supportive adults can offer a youth the chance to help with yard work, housecleaning, babysitting, etc. in order to earn extra money and to establish a work reference.

### ☐ **JOB SEARCH ASSISTANCE**

Finding a job can be a daunting task for anyone. Advice, help filling out applications or creating a resumé, rehearsal of interview questions, transportation to interviews, preparation of appropriate clothing, discussion of workplace behavior, and just plain cheering on can help a youth successfully land a job.

### ☐ **CAREER COUNSELING**

An adult working in the youth's field of interest can offer advice which could launch a youth's career. Youth particularly benefit from connections and introductions which lead to apprenticeships, job shadows, or other real-world experience. Supportive adults can help the transitioning youth make these contacts.

### ☐ **HOUSING HUNT**

Securing a first apartment is a rite of passage to adulthood. But without guidance, finding housing can turn into an overwhelming experience. Youth leaving care often lack references or a co-signer which a supportive adult may be able to offer. Former foster youth may have opportunities for financial assistance, but may need help locating it or applying for it. Also, supportive adults can utilize apartment hunting as an opportunity to discuss other daily living challenges, like roommates, utilities, selecting a neighborhood, transportation to job and needed services, etc.

### ☐ **RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES**

Extending an invitation to a youth to go bike riding, go bowling, shoot some hoops or to simply take a walk can promote health, relieve anxiety, and provide a comfortable way to connect. Recreational activities like cooking, woodworking, painting or playing guitar can provide an outlet for youth and help to develop skills. Other activities include going to a movie, playing cards or chess or Monopoly, taking photographs, going shopping or taking a short trip.

### ☐ **MENTOR**

Mentors have proven to be an effective influence on youth. Whether a formal or informal mentor to a youth in care, the supportive adult can be a role-model, coach and a friend.

### ☐ **TRANSPORTATION**

Youth often need help with transportation and may have no one to turn to. A supportive adult can be a transportation resource, specifying the limits of the offer, i.e. for school, to find employment, for medical appointments, to visit relatives, etc. Youth can often use help to figure out how to use public transportation.



## □ **EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE**

According to statistics, only 50% of foster youth will graduate from high school. These shocking statistics show that many youth in care struggle through school against terrible odds including multiple moves, learning disabilities, lack of parental support and missed time in class. A supportive adult can help by becoming a tutor, an educational advocate, or by simply providing advice when needed. Youth planning to attend college can use help with college applications, finding financial aid, and visits to perspective college campuses.

## □ **RELATIONSHIP/MARRIAGE/PARENTING COUNSELING**

Youth coming out of foster care often lack the skill to cultivate and maintain lasting personal relationships. In many cases, role-modeled relationships for the youth have included biological parents with dysfunctional relationships and paid caretakers from group homes or facilities. Supportive adults can provide frank discussions about relationships, marriage, the role of a spouse and how to be a good parent when the time comes.

## □ **ASSISTANCE WITH MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS/ CHAPERONE**

It can be scary attending a medical appointment all alone. A supportive adult can accompany a youth to a medical appointment or rehearse what questions to ask, interpret a doctor's instructions, or provide advice about obtaining a second opinion.

## □ **STORAGE**

Sometimes the life of a youth can be transient, moving from location to location before getting settled. The supportive adult can provide a safe place to store valuables and help ensure that the youth doesn't lose track of valuables, including photo albums, family keepsakes, and records.

## □ **MOTIVATION**

Everyone does better with a personal cheering section. The supportive adult may be the only one to offer encouraging words to a youth.

## □ **SOMEONE TO TALK TO/DISCUSS PROBLEMS**

When a youth transitions out of care, there are often moments of insecurity, loneliness and anxiety. The supportive adult can provide a listening ear for a youth to vent, offer advice and wisdom, or be a sounding board for ideas. It may be wise to establish "calling hours" to avoid late night or early morning calls, if that is a concern.

## □ **A PHONE TO USE**

Sometimes a phone is simply not an affordable luxury for a youth starting out on their own. A supportive adult could provide use of their phone as a message phone for the youth's prospective employers or landlords. Use of the phone can be helpful to keep in touch with caseworkers, siblings, parents, former foster parents, or to access resources in the community.

## □ **A COMPUTER TO USE**

Access to a computer is a valuable tool for a youth for school work, employment or housing search, or contact with siblings or other relatives. A supportive adult can provide this access from a computer at work or at home, and may want to establish limits in time, websites visited, or downloads that are acceptable.

## □ **CLOTHING**

A youth may need assistance and/or advise in purchasing or preparing clothing for events like a job interview, weddings or special occasions, or graduation. Sometimes special opportunities need special gear, like a school ski trip, a costume party, etc. A supportive adult can assist with laundry, ironing, mending, shopping for new clothes, or occasionally purchasing a new item. Improving a youth's personal appearance can boost self confidence.

## □ **SPIRITUAL SUPPORT**

Youth often develop the same spiritual beliefs as their parents. Youth coming from care may have lacked this spiritual guidance. A supportive adult can invite a youth to join them as they search for their own spiritual path. The adult can offer to explore religion with the youth and invite them to participate in church or other spiritual activities.

## □ **LEGAL TROUBLES**

A youth emerging from care who gets into legal trouble usually cannot afford legal advice. When youth have a tangle with the law, they often land in deeper trouble because of their lack of experience and resources in navigating the legal system. A supportive adult can assist by connecting youth to needed legal services. The supporter may also wish to provide preventative advice to the youth who may be headed for legal entanglement.



*JJ from Michigan,  
FosterClub All-Star*

"Permanency is a feeling that is different for everyone, it is not bound by time nor can it be measured. It has to be discovered and often times it has to be tested, and rejected more than once before permanency can be established. Permanency is so hard to understand because it is a conceptual idea of an emotion and is received on both ends very differently for every person. There is no straight "by the book" definition of permanency because the emotions I feel cannot be felt by anyone else, and that's the great thing about it."

## □ **CULTURAL EXPERIENCE**

Supportive adults who share a cultural background with a youth may wish to engage them in cultural activities. Even if the cultural backgrounds are different, the youth can be motivated to participate in cultural events. Support can be given to examine cultural traditions and beliefs and encouragement given to take pride in their cultural identity.

## □ **APARTMENT MOVE-IN**

Moving is so much easier with the support of friends, from packing, to manpower, a truck to move, to help setting up the new apartment. The supportive adult can also invite the youth to scout through their garage or storage area for extra furniture or household items that might be useful.





#### ☐ **COOKING LESSONS/ASSISTANCE**

Many times youth coming out of care have not had the opportunity to practice cooking on their own. Meal preparation is often a natural way to engage in meaningful conversation and build a relationship. The supportive adult may decide to take a youth grocery shopping, or help stock the youth's first kitchen with a starter supply of utensils, spices, cleaning supplies and food.

#### ☐ **REGULAR CHECK-IN (DAILY, WEEKLY OR MONTHLY)**

Simply knowing that someone will be aware that you are missing, hurt or in trouble is important. A supportive adult can instigate regular check-in's with a youth transitioning out of care, easing feelings of anxiety and building confidence that someone is concerned about their safety.

#### ☐ **BILLS AND MONEY MANAGEMENT ASSISTANCE**

Sorting through bills and balancing a checkbook can be a particularly daunting task for a youth with a learning disability, deficient math skills or experience. Understanding how to maintain and obtain credit, deciphering loan applications, and budgeting are some of the items where a supportive adult can lend help.

#### ☐ **DRUG AND ALCOHOL ADDICTION HELP**

A high percentage of youth in care have parents who had drug or alcohol dependency problems. Working with young people transitioning out of care to avoid these dangerous pitfalls and offering support if a problem should develop could help break a familial cycle of addiction.



*Sharde from Indiana, FosterClub All-Star*

"Permanency is important because if you spend your entire life moving around it doesn't give you a chance to get close to anyone, and you don't learn how to build those essential relationships you will need later in life. Moving around also influences you to run away from your problems."

#### ☐ **MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT**

Some youth in care suffer from mental health challenges. Depression, attention-deficit disorder, eating disorders, and other illness may afflict the youth. It is suggested that the supportive adult educate themselves about any mental health disorders that are at issue.

#### ☐ **CO-SIGNER**

Many times youth need co-signers to acquire housing, car loans, or bank accounts (particularly when the youth is under 18 years old). Consider the financial liability if the youth were to miss payments or not fulfill the financial agreement. It is suggested that an adult who acts as a co-signer closely supervise the arrangement until the youth has established a consistent pattern of responsibility.

#### ☐ **HELP WITH READING FORMS, DOCUMENTS, AND COMPLEX MAIL**

Many youth in care have learning disabilities which may make complicated reading assignments all the more difficult. The supportive adult can make arrangements for a youth to collect materials for review on a weekly basis or to give a call on an as-needed basis.

#### ☐ **MECHANICAL AND/OR BUILDING PROJECTS**

Youth may need help keeping an automobile in good repair. Teaching a youth about the care of their car can help them build self-confidence and skills that can last a lifetime. Helping a youth fix up their apartment or a rented home, or asking for their assistance in projects around your home, can teach new skills which may be put to use throughout life.

#### ☐ **HOUSEKEEPING**

Some youth, particularly those who have lived in a residential facility or restrictive environment, may not have had real-life experience in keeping a home clean. The supportive adult can discuss cleaning supplies to use for particular household chores, how to avoid disease, and organization of clutter once a youth has transitioned to their own home.

#### ☐ **HOME DECORATING**

Helping a youth decorate their home can be a fun and rewarding way to contribute to the youth's sense of pride and self esteem.

#### ☐ **VOTING**

Youth in our society often form their first political impressions based on their parents' political beliefs. Youth in care often do not receive this role modeling. A supportive adult may wish to discuss current local, state and national issues, help a youth register to vote or take a youth to the polling location to vote.

#### ☐ **VOLUNTEERISM**

Volunteering to help others or for a worthy cause is an excellent way to build self-esteem. Supporters can offer to engage a youth in their own good work or embark on a new volunteer effort together.

#### ☐ **FINDING COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

Navigating through the maze of government agencies and myriad of social service programs is difficult at best even for a resourceful adult. The supportive adult can help the youth make a list of useful resources in the community and offer to visit them together.

#### ☐ **SAFETY AND PERSONAL SECURITY**

The youth transitioning from care needs to take charge of their own personal safety. The supportive adult can encourage them to take a self-defense class, get CPR certified, get current on health and safety issues. The adult can take a tour of the youth's apartment and make suggestions regarding home safety, can help develop an evacuation plan, and make plans with the youth on what to do in an emergency situation. The supportive adult can offer to be called when something goes wrong, and offer to be listed as "person to contact in an emergency" on business forms.



#### □ **BABYSITTING**

If the youth is a parent, babysitting services can be the relief that is needed to keep a young family intact. In addition to providing a time-out, the offer to watch a child while the young parent gets other chores around the house accomplished (laundry, cleaning, etc.), provides an excellent opportunity to role-model good parenting skills.

#### □ **EMERGENCY CASH**

Most of us have experienced a cash shortage at one time or another as a youth. Youth coming from care usually lack this important “safety net”. The supportive adult may wish to discuss up front their comfort level in supplying financial assistance. They would discuss what constitutes an emergency (not enough to cover rent? a medical emergency? cash for a date? gas money?).

#### □ **REFERENCE**

Many applications, including those for college, housing and jobs, require a list of references be provided by the applicant. If the supportive adult is able to give a positive reference for a youth, they should make sure a youth has their current contact information so that the supporter can be included on their list of references.

#### □ **ADVOCACY**

Sometimes youth have a difficult time speaking up for themselves in court, at school, with government systems, etc. Supportive adults can help a youth organize their thoughts, speak on their behalf, or assist in writing letters.

#### □ **INCLUSION IN SOCIAL CIRCLE/COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES**

Often youth in care have difficulty forming new friendships and relationships when they leave care. A supportive adult can extend regular invitations to the youth to attend social and community gatherings as an opportunity to form new friendships and make connections with people. Good opportunities to make new friends include family weddings, hiking trips, garden clubs, community service projects and volunteer opportunities, dances, sporting events, debate groups, community college classes, etc.

#### □ **ADOPTION**

Even for many older youth, including those over the age of 18, adoption remains a dream. An adult who is able to offer this ultimate permanent connection for a youth may make an initial offer to adopt through a Permanency Pact. Often youth may have fears about adoption, interpreting adoption to mean loss of contact with bio parents or siblings (this should be taken into consideration when discussing this option). Youth who once declined to be adopted often change their minds, so an adult may want to renew the offer from time to time.

## About FosterClub



*FosterClub is the national network  
for young people in foster care.*

**Every 2 minutes**, a child's life changes as they enter the foster care system. There are more than 513,000 young people living in foster care across the country, and FosterClub *is their club* — a place to turn for advice, information, and hope. Our peer support network gives kids in foster care **a new spin on life**.

At FosterClub's **web sites**, kids are asking questions and getting answers: [www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com) is for young people and [www.fyi3.com](http://www.fyi3.com) is designed for youth transitioning from care. FosterClub's gateway for adults who support young people in foster care is [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org). Our **publications** supply youth with tools for success and also provide inspiration and perspective from their peers who have successfully emerged from foster care. FosterClub's **training and events** are held across the country and feature a dynamic group of young foster care alumni called the FosterClub All-Stars. **Outreach tools** designed to improve communication with young people in care and engage them in achieving their own personal success.

The members of FosterClub are resilient young people determined to build a better future for themselves and for other kids coming up through the system behind them. Their success depends on the generosity of concerned individuals and collaborations with partner organizations. If you would like to learn more about FosterClub or how you can support young people in foster care, visit [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org) or call 503-717-1552. FosterClub is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization. EIN 93-1287234.



The pinwheel is an enduring symbol of the happy, carefree childhood all kids deserve. For more than 513,000 youth living in the U.S. foster care system, childhood has been interrupted by abuse, neglect or abandonment. FosterClub's peer support network gives kids in foster care a new spin on life by providing information, resources, encouragement and hope.

*the national network for young people in foster care*

FOSTERCLUB



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# PERMANENCY PACT

In an effort to substantiate and sustain  
an on-going connection between a youth and a supportive adult,

S U P P O R T I V E   A D U L T

pledges to provide specific support to, and has been accepted as a  
provider of such support by,

Y O U T H

confirmed this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_  
DAY MONTH YEAR

as witnessed by \_\_\_\_\_  
F A C I L I T A T O R



*FosterClub's Permanency Pact documents a  
life-long, kin-like commitment to a relationship  
between a youth and a supportive adult.*

the national network for young people in foster care | [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org)

- ☐ A Home For The Holidays
- ☐ A Place To Do Laundry
- ☐ Emergency Place To Stay
- ☐ Food/Occasional Meals
- ☐ Care Packages At College
- ☐ Employment Opportunity
- ☐ Job Search Assistance
- ☐ Career Counseling
- ☐ Housing Hunt
- ☐ Recreational Activities
- ☐ Mentor
- ☐ Educational Assistance
- ☐ Relationship/Marriage/Parenting
- ☐ Transportation
- ☐ Assistance With Medical Appts
- ☐ Storage
- ☐ Motivation
- ☐ Someone To Talk To/Discuss Problems
- ☐ A Phone To Use
- ☐ A Computer To Use
- ☐ Clothing
- ☐ Spiritual Support
- ☐ Legal Troubles
- ☐ Cultural Experience
- ☐ Apartment Move-in
- ☐ Cooking Lessons/Assistance
- ☐ Regular Check-in
- ☐ Bills & Money Management Assistance
- ☐ Drug And Alcohol Addiction Help
- ☐ Mental Health Support
- ☐ Co-Signer
- ☐ Help Reading Forms, Complex Docs
- ☐ Mechanical/Building Projects
- ☐ Housekeeping
- ☐ Home Decorating
- ☐ Voting
- ☐ Volunteerism
- ☐ Finding Community Resources
- ☐ Safety And Personal Security
- ☐ Babysitting
- ☐ Emergency Cash
- ☐ Social Circle/Community Activities
- ☐ Advocacy
- ☐ Reference
- ☐ Adoption
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

# Getting Through the Holidays

## Tips & Tricks

Young people in foster care have unique challenges, especially around the holidays. Feeling lonely because of separation from family, feeling forced to take part in different holiday activities/traditions, or feeling uncomfortable due to increased attention and gifts are common. Holidays are never easy, so FosterClub's PeerUp! youth created these 8 tips and tricks for youth in care. Our hope is child welfare professionals, foster parents, and guardians can use these to support youth. **Together we can make foster care suck less.**



### 1. Advocate for yourself

Let your guardian, foster parents, or caseworker know what kind of support you need around the holidays. Advocating for your needs and wants helps and may even open up doors to receive more support.

**Ask for phone access to call your loved ones or for an extra visitation with your family.**



### 2. Take time for yourself



It is never easy to celebrate the holidays with new people. It is ok to ask for time alone. Our mental and physical health is important, so take time out for you. **You are worth it.**

### 3. Staying well-rested

Make sure you are getting enough rest. If you aren't, take a nap. Lack of sleep can contribute to the stress and anxiety around the holidays.



**It is best to get as much rest as possible to maintain good mental health.**

### 4. Honoring your Family

We know holidays are especially tough when we aren't with our family. **Ambiguous losses are tough to grieve and process.**



If you have photos, clothing, or anything that resembles your family and is meaningful to you, carry those items with you throughout the day.

### 5. Peer Support



Spending time with friends or siblings is important to young people, no matter the time of year. Being around peers who share a similar life experience as you help make the challenges youth face less stressful. **Connection matters.**

### 6. Keeping traditions alive

Many youth in foster care come from different cultures and celebrate different holiday traditions than their foster families. **It is important that youth feel empowered to share their holiday traditions and have a safe space to celebrate.**



Whether it is celebrating Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, Día de las Velitas, or Solstice. Some youth may decide not to celebrate holidays at all and that is okay too.

### 7. Be budget aware & friendly

Gift-giving/purchasing can be stressful. Know the cost of items you request and set an amount for your spending. **You don't need to spend lots of money, it's the thought that truly matters.** If you are unable to purchase a gift, consider making something instead.



### 8. Holidays with strangers

For some youth, the holidays can feel like they are celebrating it with strangers depending on when they entered the home. It may be tough to receive gifts from new people or sometimes due to reasons outside of our control not receive anything at all. It can cause unneeded stress and discomfort.



It may be helpful to ask for a board game or a deck of plays cards like UNO. Something you enjoy playing. It will help break the ice.

**Be sure to communicate with your caseworker your worries around the holidays.**



# FosterClub

For more information about PeerUp or FosterClub visit [www.fosterclub.com](http://www.fosterclub.com)



## Where on the Good-Better-Best Continuum Do Your Agency's Services Fall?

Using the examples provided above, think about the services your agency provides related to employment and internship opportunities for youth in foster care. First, outline the local and federal policies or procedures your agency follows for services related to employment. Then, consider your own work with youth and that of other caseworkers at your agency—where do the services you provide fall along the Good-Better-Best continuum? In what areas can you take service provision to the next level? To access a printable, standalone version of this worksheet, visit <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/focus-areas/youth-development/youth-welfare-guide>

### *Federal policies/procedures:*

### *State, county, and agency policies/procedures:*

A **Good** level of service provision includes:

- ▶ Satisfying federal requirements
- ▶ Basing service provision on individualized planning
- ▶ Ensuring that service provision takes into account each youth's level of cognitive, social, physical, and emotional development
- ▶ Providing the youth with printed or digital information
- ▶ Meeting regularly with youth and responding when they reach out for advice or assistance
- ▶ Arranging for the youth to be referred to or signed up for life skills or similar classes
- ▶ Documenting work and services provided and making the youth's official records and documents readily accessible

A **Better** level of service provision includes:

- ▶ Beginning the transition planning process early in a youth's development, around age 13 or 14 (as appropriate)
- ▶ Following up with the young person, monitoring developmental progress, and providing assistance as needed
- ▶ Providing extensive printed and digital information, as well as opportunities to discuss it and ask questions
- ▶ Working with young people to develop their knowledge and skills
- ▶ Using the caseworker's deep understanding of life skills development to help the young person develop his or her capacity to benefit from the information acquired in life skills or other training classes
- ▶ Building a close relationship between the caseworker and the youth, which will form the foundation for all assessment, planning, and service provision

- ▶ Connecting youth with community partners and resources to help them creatively plan for the future and reach their goals

A **Best** level of service provision includes:

- ▶ Ensuring that service provision is transparent, equitable, and developmentally appropriate
- ▶ Framing available services in a developmentally appropriate way that is easily navigable for young people
- ▶ Ensuring that the services provided add real value to the youth's life from her or his point of view without the need for additional incentives
- ▶ Working with the youth to develop "soft skills" so that concrete skill development occurs in the context of community and peer relationships
- ▶ Evaluating the services provided from the youth's perspective and providing many opportunities for youth feedback
- ▶ Framing peer advocacy within the child welfare system as normal healthy behavior, providing opportunities for this advocacy, and modifying programming, when possible, based on youth feedback
- ▶ Creating a culture of problem solving that is led by young people themselves

What barriers might there be to providing the **Best** level of service related to employment for youth at your agency? How might these barriers be overcome?



## Assessing Resilience

### Three Sources of Resiliency

Edith Grotberg of the International Resilience Project defines resiliency in terms of three sources. For a young person to be resilient, he or she needs to have more than one of these strengths.

#### I HAVE

Social and interpersonal supports

Awareness of those who support them

Who I have

#### **Trusting and loving relationships with others**

Parents, siblings, teachers, friends.

#### **Structure at home**

Clear rules and routines, comprehensible and fair sanctions when breached, praise when followed.

#### **Role models**

Parents, other adults, peers, siblings, who model good behaviour and morality.

#### **Encouragement to be independent**

People who offer praise for growing autonomy.

#### **Access to health, education and social care**

Consistent direct or indirect protection for physical and emotional health.

#### I AM

Inner strengths

How they view themselves

Who I am

#### **Loveable**

The young person possesses, or is helped to develop qualities that appeal to others.

#### **Loving**

The young person is able to express affection to others, and is sensitive to their distress.

#### **Proud of myself**

The young person feels they have the capacity for achievement and resists discouragement.

#### **Responsible**

The young person accepts and is given responsibilities, and believes their actions can make a difference.

#### **Hopeful and trustful**

The young person has faith in institutions and people, is optimistic for the future and is able to express their faith within a moral structure.

## I CAN

Interpersonal and problem solving skills

Degree of confidence they have in their own abilities

What I can do

### **Communicate**

The young person is able to express feelings and thoughts and listen to those of others.

### **Solve problems**

The young person can apply themselves to problems, involve others when necessary and be persistent.

### **Manage my feelings**

The young person knows and understands emotions, recognises the feelings of others and controls impulsive behaviour.

### **Seek out trusting relationships**

The young person has the ability to find people, peers or adults, in whom they can confide and develop mutual trust.

### **Understand my temperament**

The young person has insight into their personality and that of others.

**For example, if a young person has good self-esteem (I AM), but lacks anyone whom they can turn to for support (I HAVE), and does not have the capacity to solve problems (I CAN), they will not be resilient.**

This finding is in line with other research showing that resiliency is the product of a number of mutually enhancing protective factors. It is not a personality attribute, but the result of many factors which combine to buffer a young person against the potentially harmful effects of adversity.

# Top Ten Things that Youth Say DSS Needs to Do Better

<b>1. Listen to what we say. Let us make our own decisions.</b>	When the decision isn't one that we get to make, ask us what we think and take that into consideration, explain to use what the options are, and make sure we understand why you are making the decision you're making (whether we stay in foster care or go home, where we live, what school we will go to, etc.) When the decision is one we can make for ourselves, support us, encourage us, and make sure we have all the information we need to make a good decision (working, being in a relationship, taking Music instead of Art, etc.)
<b>2. Make sure we have spending money.</b>	Foster parents and group homes get money to take care of us but don't give us an allowance. If we can't practice spending our own money, we aren't going to learn how to manage our own money. We shouldn't have to miss out on doing things with our friends because we can't pay. Support us in getting jobs and managing bank accounts.
<b>3. Keep siblings together.</b>	We wouldn't feel so alone and would be happier and feel more supported if we were with our siblings. If we can't, let us live closer together and offer ways to get together, like sleepovers, or camps for siblings. Work together to set up better visitation plans and establish communication between sibling's parents and foster parents. Offer phone calls and FaceTime if we are far away.
<b>4. Let us do other things like normal kids.</b>	Trust us and let us do things that other normal kids get to do like, go out with friends, have a phone and privacy on our devices, and buy a car. When we do go out, let us check in with texts or calls, ride with friends who have a license and spend the night at a friend's house. We should have a right to how we look and the ability to take photos with friends. We shouldn't have to inform someone, we don't live with, of simple plans. Leave the decision making up to the foster parent and youth. We should be able to have fun!
<b>5. Make sure we get to see our families regularly.</b>	Even if we can't live with them, our families are important to us. We want to see them and spend time with them- not just at court. Don't require visits to be supervised, if we're old enough to handle ourselves. Provide transportation assistance so that it's easier to visit. We want to be able to do normal activities with our families like birthdays, weddings, and beach vacations. Understanding that we also want to see our extended relatives, not just our parents. We need visitations to be more frequent, like every week, and if not, we want to be able to FaceTime and/or call regularly. If we see our families regularly we will be happier and build bonds. We can make memories that will never be forgotten.
<b>6. Make it easier to get our driver's license.</b>	We would have more freedom, more independence, more responsibility and be like normal kids. Give foster parents the permission to take us to the DMV. Help us study and take us "on the road" to practice. Find a way to help provide cars for kids who are in foster care.
<b>7. Help families get their kids back.</b>	The time needs to be longer for parents to change. People don't change that quickly. Offer financial support by sending parents money or not having them pay child support. Focus on rehabilitation of the family and offer more resources to help with reunification. There should be better communication between all parties and we should be kept in the loop and not treated as children. Work harder at offering regular visits with family and family group conferences. If there was more focus on helping parents, then there would be less children in foster care. Everyone: foster parents, youth, and parents would be happier.
<b>8. Make sure foster parents know how to support us and treat us.</b>	Train foster parents so that they know how to parent youth. Don't place us with foster parents who treat us like little kids. Make sure foster parents understand what we've been through and what we need- so that they don't give up on us the first time we do something they don't like. We want foster parents to treat us like their child because want to be part of a family, like a normal child, after all, we are normal. Our foster parents would embrace us, show us support (come to our events) and treat us with respect.
<b>9. Make sure we're not taking medications we don't need.</b>	Make sure we know why medications have been recommended or prescribed. Listen to us when we tell you how they make us feel. Make sure we know what side effects we might have. Support us in talking to the doctor about when we might stop taking medication, or when we have concerns about the medication we're taking. Help us advocate for what we want or don't want with medication.
<b>10. Be there for us.</b>	Reduce turnover. Reduce caseload size. Make sure that our workers have time for us. That they take our calls. That they text us back. When we need something from our workers, they should treat us like we're important. Show us that you care by checking in on us and asking us how we are doing. Be our cheerleaders and support us by sharing information and resources to help us succeed in the future.