



Conversations with young people about family

Why did we make this document?

'Cause we see you. We hope that any child welfare worker, anywhere, can print out this document and look at it quickly before having a conversation with any child or young person about engaging with family or finding connections.



Vision

This one-pager can be printed or downloaded into every child welfare worker's toolkit and referenced often.

How was this developed?

Changemakers with care experience came together in late 2020 to think tank to turn their professional, personal and heart-led experiences into a tangible offering to child welfare professionals.

All content here is from the minds, hearts and grace of Jamole Callahan, Nimali (Nimmu) Kumari, Lupe Ortiz-Tovar, Ian Thomas, April Curtis, Kelly Sullivan and Miranda Sheffield.

THIS

Allow the youth to be hands on when searching for their family.

They are the reason we are here and have a lot to bring to the table. Give them that space.

Continue to ask the youth about their family often.

Children may be in shock or denial initially. Create an opportunity to engage with them in a different way for family information.

Know there is family beyond mom and dad.

There are so many untapped relatives who want to be involved. We just have to find them.

Be respectful of the culture and language of each youth.

Everyone is unique and families are no different. Show respect to all.

Take the time to reflect before making decisions.

We are all stretched for time but know your decisions can change the path of a youth's life.

Independence is an important skill to learn and takes some time to reach.

No one can make it in this world alone. Everyone needs help from a community of people.

Prepare loved ones for the possible culture identity of foster care the youth may have embraced while in care.

This is new territory for the youth and their families. Explain the trauma that the child has experienced since being in foster care and how to understand that it may be part of their identity.

Look at every case with a fresh set of ideas.

Learning is a lifelong process. Just because you have seen a similar case does not mean it is the same one. Keep an open mind.



Conversations with young people about family

You are in front of a child or young person with the intent of talking about their family and connections. How on earth do you start the conversation?

“YOU MATTER. WHO MATTERS TO YOU?”

Ask open questions that allows the youth to lead the conversation. So much has been decided without them. Let them have a say in who is important to them.

“WHAT DO YOU NEED TO BE SEEN AND HEARD SO YOU CAN MOVE FORWARD?”

Empower the youth to know they have a voice to explain to you what is missing in their life. Even if they are unsure of what they need, asking this will allow you to develop a deep connection and expand the topic.

“WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT WHAT IS GOING ON IN YOUR LIFE?”

Find those things that bring the youth joy. If they are unable to provide anything to you then that sets the stage for exploring what could bring them joy. Ask what things they did like before entering foster care. Be creative and connect them to those resources.

“I DON’T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE GOING THROUGH BUT WANT TO LEARN.”

Even if you have a similar lived experience, try to connect with the youth by letting them know you care about their thoughts. You build rapport when you put the ball in their court to engage with them in an authentic way.

“I AM NOT SURE WHEN YOU WILL RETURN HOME BUT I AM WORKING HARD TO CONNECT YOU WITH LOVED ONES.”

Telling youth they will be home soon will not help their situation when things don’t go as planned. Being in foster care may be a temporary situation, but some youth do not return home. We don’t want to create a false timeline.

“WHO MAKES YOU FEEL JOY?”

We don’t have to start a conversation with who a youth wants to live with. They may not be able to say who that is and can only imagine being with their parents. Find and engage those connections that bring happiness. Remember that foster care is temporary and connections and family are forever.

The Institute

Our team brings ideas, people, and agencies together to implement proven child welfare programs in communities across the country. Our rigorous, evidence-based approach empowers agencies to bridge the gap between policy and people to create the best possible outcomes for children and their families.



Institute Vision

OUR VISION. We want to build a child welfare system that is kind, efficient, collaborative, evidence-based, and centered on children & family well-being.

Institute Mission

OUR MISSION. We support child serving agencies to scale proven solutions, work together, and bridge gaps in policy and practice.

