

# Session 7

# Family & Community Connections for Positive Youth Development

## Facilitator Notes

### Key Concepts

- Family, friends and other important relationships are key to providing support for youth in care.
- Current practices both promote and discourage continued relationships with family, friends and other persons that were involved in youths' lives prior to placement in foster care.
- Strategies can promote continued relationships with those who are important for youth in care.

### Highlights

- Recalling how participants were supported by others when they first moved away from home
- Session video
- Identifying strategies to connect youth in care with existing relationships and foster new connections
- Developing a plan to maintain existing and new relationships after care

### Challenges

- Working with participants to understand their roles in identifying, coordinating and encouraging youth in care to develop and maintain supportive relationships
- Facilitating a discussion about system policies and practices that encourage and inhibit relationships important to youth (family members, peers, community individuals)
- Facilitating a visualization where participants consider how they would feel if placed in foster care and removed from the important people in their lives

### Materials

- Quotes for Practitioners
- Sticky wall
- Half sheets of paper of various colors
- Index cards
- Handouts and overheads
- Flip chart, markers and tape
- ILC video
- Journal



# Session Objective

To promote strategies for connecting youth with relationships and resources that support their positive development

## Session Outline

- ❑ Activity 7.1  
Welcome and Introduction (50 minutes)
  - ⌘ Identifying how community relationships and resources can support youth transitioning out of care
  
- ❑ Activity 7.2  
Session Video (20 minutes)
  - ⌘ Highlighting how youth in care view their network of supportive relationships
  
- ❑ Break (15 minutes)
  
- ❑ Activity 7.3  
Strategies Connecting Youth with Supports (40 minutes)
  - ⌘ Identifying strategies to connect youth in care with supportive relationships
  
- ❑ Activity 7.4  
Strings of the Heart (40 minutes)
  - ⌘ Identifying strategies to support and strengthen family connections
  
- ❑ Activity 7.5  
Wrap-up (15 minutes)

## Session Handouts and Overheads

- 📄 Circles of Support . . . . . 7a
  
- 📄 Process of Reconnecting quote . . . . . 7b
  
- 📄 Personal Connections quote . . . . . 7c
  
- 📄 Contact with Birth Parents quote . . . . . 7d
  
- 📄 Strings of the Heart Worksheet . . . . . 7e
  
- 📄 Ties With Family quote . . . . . 7f



# Session 7—Activity 7.1

## Welcome and Introduction

### Learning Objective

Participants will be able to use supports as a strategy for youth competency.

### Materials

- Flip chart, markers and tape
- Handouts 7a and 7b

### Time

50 minutes

### Facilitator Preparation

- Identify group norms, if this is a stand-alone session.
- Hang Quotes for Practitioners from **Introduction Handout b**—printed on separate sheets of card stock paper—around the room.

### Procedure

#### Step 1

- Welcome participants to Session 7.
- Tell participants that this session will explore the various relationships and community resources that are needed to succeed in life.

#### Step 2

- Ask participants to recall when they began living away from home.
- Conduct a visualization activity by asking participants to recall their first “home away from home.”
  - “Imagine your furniture.”
  - “What cooking utensils did you have to prepare meals?”
  - “What was your mode of transportation?”
- Give participants a few moments to recall this part of their lives and then ask them to recall the persons who were available supports for them during this transitional time.

#### Step 3

- Distribute **Handout 7a**.
- Ask participants to complete the handout based on whom they could call at this time in their lives if they experienced a crisis.
- Direct participants to identify persons in the following categories:
  - Immediate family, extended family, close friends, acquaintances, community members (i.e., teachers, counselors, coaches, job placement counselors, doctors, pastors, etc.).
- Ask participants to identify persons in each of these categories that they could have turned to for support—emotional, motivational and/or strategic.

*Note: Stress that the relationship doesn't have to be significant or long-term. For example, if the crisis was not having enough money to pay rent and the landlord allowed you to pay in phases, the landlord would be a strategic support.*

#### Step 4

- Once identified, ask participants to place the persons' names in the appropriate rings.
  - Self is in the middle of the concentric circles, with immediate family in the second ring, extended family in the third ring, acquaintances in the fourth ring, and community members in the fifth ring.

### Step 5

- ❑ Ask participants to find a partner and discuss their circles of support.
- ❑ Ask participants to share with their partner whom they could have turned to when they needed: money, a sympathetic ear, assistance in purchasing a car, or help fixing a leaky faucet.

### Step 6

- ❑ Invite participants to introduce themselves and share one person they identified as a support in Step 4.

### Step 7

- ❑ Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - “Were there any surprises for you in identifying supports?”
  - “What did you find heartwarming?”
  - “What was difficult?”
  - “How would these circles look for the youth you identified in Session 1?”
  - “What are the challenges to ensuring that youth have a range of supports when they leave care?”

### Step 8

- ❑ Distribute **Handout 7b**.
- ❑ Make the following points in a discussion:
  - Research shows that the process of reconnecting with a family or significant other represents an important step toward emancipation and healthy functioning in the community, solidifying the adolescent’s identity, affirming family connections, clarifying personal history, and reintegrating past trauma.
  - In other words, youth in out-of-home care need the same permanent family connections as do youth in the general population.
  - It is important to recognize that supports should change over time and move between a variety of persons and resources.
  - Teaching youth to forge supportive relationships and to use people and the community as resources is a lesson that will remain with them throughout adulthood.

**From** *It’s My Life*

### Step 9

- ❑ Review the highlights from the previous sessions:
  - Session 1
    - Importance of healthy youth/adult relationships
    - Importance of promoting interdependence
    - Attitudes which inhibit and promote positive youth development
  - Session 2
    - Development goals in working with youth in care
    - Existing services, resources and strategies
  - Session 3
    - Characteristics of youth culture
    - Barriers to youth input and participation
  - Session 4
    - Engaging youth as participants and resources
  - Session 5
    - Promoting application of worker knowledge and skills for positive youth development
  - Session 6
    - Understanding the supports necessary to promote positive youth development.

## Step 10

- Review Session 7 objective:
  - To promote strategies for connecting youth with relationships and resources that support their positive development



# Session 7—Activity 7.2

## Session Video

### Learning Objective

Participants will understand how youth in care view relationships and resources.

### Materials

- Video
- Flip chart, markers and tape
- Half sheets of paper and markers
- Sticky wall

### Time

20 minutes

### Facilitator Preparation

- Write the questions asked of youth in the video on flip chart paper:
  - “Who is part of the family that you have created to support you once you leave care?”
  - “Why is a support system important for you to be successful on your own?”

### Procedure

#### Step 1

- Invite participants to share youth responses to the interview questions that they were assigned in the last session:
  - “Who is part of the family that you have created to support you once you leave care?”
  - “Why is a support system important for you to be successful on your own?”
- Distribute half sheets and ask participants to write what youth reported in their dialogue assignment from the last session.
- Ask participants to write one idea per half sheet.
- Place the half sheets on the sticky wall to compare with the responses of youth in the video.

#### Step 2

- Introduce the video by acknowledging that the *Interdependent Living Curriculum* video was produced by young people and showcases youth in care.
- Mention that youth were behind and in front of the camera.
- Underscore that it is important to recognize that youth in care are “experts” on foster care since they are living the experience.

#### Step 3

- Before showing the video, assign table groups one of the following focus areas for which to pay particular attention:
  - Key words and phrases
  - Why is a support system important?
  - How can youth maintain or initiate supports?
  - How can workers facilitate support for youth in care?

#### Step 4

- Show Session 7 video.

#### Step 5

- Facilitate a discussion by asking each group to share their observations of the video.

- Review youth interview responses to identify similarities and differences.

### Step 6

- Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - “What are some of the barriers and challenges to promoting relationships which support youth in care?”
  - “How can youth maintain or initiate supports for themselves?”
  - “How can supports help youth understand why they are in care?”
  - “What were some of the responses in your dialogue with youth?”

### Step 7

- Stress to participants that the *Interdependent Living Curriculum* emphasizes that relationships are key to human development.
  - Relationships and resources provide guidance and safety nets for all of us as we maneuver through life.
  - Youth in care need intentional connections prior to leaving care in order to reduce their dependence on the child welfare system and increase their self-confidence.
  - Relationships and resources support youth and provide opportunities to encourage success and define purpose.
  - Practitioners play important roles as coaches, networkers, and advocates to connect youth in care with important relationships and resources.
  - Session 7 will continue to explore the role child welfare professionals play in promoting positive relationships that provide support and guide youth transitioning out of care.

# Session 7—Activity 7.3

## Strategies Connecting Youth with Supports

### Learning Objective

Participants will be able to identify strategies to connect youth in care with support networks.

### Materials

- Flip chart, markers and tape
- Handout 7c

### Time

40 minutes

### Facilitator Preparation

- Write strategies listed under Step 4 on the flip chart.
- Write the following key words of support on the flip chart:
  - Emotional
  - Motivational
  - Strategic
  - Affirming and respectful
  - On-going
  - Offered by a variety of people
  - Accessible
  - Individualized

### Procedure

#### Step 1

- Remind participants of the supports discussed in Session 6 (**Handout 6a**) that are important to promote positive youth development.
- Stress that facilitating relationships and resources for youth in care should be intentional and individualized.

#### Step 2

- Distribute **Handout 7c** and review with participants.
  - “Youth report that relationships with people who care about them and are there for them consistently make all the difference in the world when they are on their own.”
  - “Through these personal connections, youth can develop a stronger sense of themselves and define their roles within the larger community.”

**From** *It's My Life*

#### Step 3

- Make the following points in a discussion:
  - In the video, youth expressed their continued dependence upon foster care staff.
    - This reflects a lack of connections to relationships and resources outside the child welfare system.
  - Connecting youth in care with external supports prior to their discharge is an important component of our work.
  - Promoting positive youth development ensures that youth in care view themselves as important resources and supports. Becoming self-confidant and self-reliant further promotes success.
  - Healthy relationships often lead youth to become their own greatest resource.

#### Step 4

- Tell participants that over 200 child welfare practitioners,

responding to a project survey, identified the following strategies to maintain and promote relationships with youth in care.

- ❑ Flip chart the following strategies under the heading *Strategies for Supporting Youth in Care*.
  - Enhancing existing relationships - visitation, telephone contact, mail, life books, family counseling, sibling visits, department sponsored family events, sleepovers, sibling camps, family gatherings, weekend passes and extended visits
  - Finding potential relationships—summer camps, church youth groups, sports teams, employment, hobby groups, community projects, volunteerism, school activities

### Step 5

- ❑ Invite participants to work in groups to identify strategies that connect youth to relationships and resources that promote positive youth development.
- ❑ Stress the following points prior to group work:
  - Youth in care typically have fewer on-going supports than other youth.
  - Workers need to be intentional in working with youth to involve supports.
  - Family members are key supports even if they can't be placement options.
  - Youth can operate as resources in managing their supports.
- ❑ Ask participants to think about the youth they identified in Session 1 to spur their thoughts.

*Note: This is meant to be a quick brainstorm to identify strategies to connect youth to relationships and resources that are available.*

### Step 6

- ❑ Invite participants to share strategies by writing them on separate half sheets and placing them on the sticky wall.

### Step 7

- ❑ Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - “What did you find challenging about this exercise?”
  - “In scanning the strategies, is there anything missing?”
  - “How can youth in care serve as resources in maintaining and developing relationships?”
  - “How can workers be more intentional in helping youth maintain and develop supportive relationships?”

### Step 8

- ❑ Remind participants that positive youth development strategies prepare youth to be their own resources in establishing relationships and identifying community resources that will support them.
  - Practitioners need to be advocates and networkers to promote relationships and resources that support youth in care.

# Session 7—Activity 7.4

## Strings of the Heart

### Learning Objective

Participants will be able to describe strategies to support and strengthen family connections.

### Materials

- Flip chart, markers and tape
- White 3x5 index cards, enough for one card per participant
- Half sheets of paper
- Handouts 7d, 7e and 7f

### Time

40 minutes

### Facilitator Preparation

- Write different adult roles on one side of separate half sheets.
  - These roles should include: foster parent, judge, guardian ad litem, big brother/big sister, coach, mentor, teacher, foster brother/sister, therapist, employer, group home staff, caseworker, treatment program counselor, youth minister—feel free to add others.
- Once all of the cards have separate roles, number them on both sides.
- Place strategies from Session 7.3 on the sticky wall.
- Prepare participants for the emotional nature of this activity.

### Procedure

#### Step 1

- Write “Family Connections” on the flip chart and discuss how important family connections are for youth in care.
- Make the following points in a discussion:
  - The child welfare system has historically shielded children from knowing their family histories.
  - Today, we understand that foster youth need connections with their birth families whenever this is possible and safe.
  - Such connections provide a link to one’s identity and can help youth with the identity development process.
  - Research has clearly confirmed that youth often go back to live with their birth families once they “age out” of care.
  - These youth deserve assistance in resolving some of the pain they have experienced and in developing relationships with their birth parents on their own terms.

**From** *It’s My Life*

#### Step 2

- Distribute **Handout 7d** and review.
  - “Research shows that foster youth who have contact with their birth parents while in care have better outcomes than youth who do not maintain these contacts.”
- From** *It’s My Life*
- Make the following points in a discussion:
  - Research shows that the majority of foster youth initiate contact with their birth families once they leave care.
  - It is important for child welfare professionals to prepare youth in care for

these experiences.

- Opportunities and supports are critical for youth to be able to explore family relationships while they are in care.

### Step 3

- Facilitate a discussion by asking the following question:
  - “What barriers might hinder your supporting youth to maintain family contact?”

### Step 4

- Tell participants that the next activity was developed by youth in care.
- Tell participants that they will be asked to visualize themselves as youth that have been placed into care.
  - The goal is to identify players in the foster care arena who will help youth maintain contact with family members.

### Step 5

- Ask participants to think about who was important to them when they were thirteen years old.
- Other than self, parents or guardians, ask participants to identify the three most important people in their lives at that time.

*Note: These should be tangible persons, not fictional or supernatural.*
- Distribute **Handout 7e** and an index card to each participant.
- Ask participants to write the three important people on their cards.
- Ask participants to complete the first two boxes on **Handout 7e**.
- Invite participants to share whom they identified and why they were important.
- Encourage participants to use youth development outcomes as reasons why these persons were important.

### Step 6

- Facilitate the following visualization with participants.
  - “You are thirteen years old and have just finished your last day of school before the summer break. You are walking home from the bus stop thinking about all of the things you are going to do this summer. When you arrive at your house, you see several strange cars, including a police car. You walk through the front door and notice your mother or caregiver sitting on the couch crying. A woman approaches you and says that she is going to take you to live with another family until your mother or caregiver is ready to have you come back home. She doesn’t tell you anything else other than your mother or caregiver is not feeling well and it would be better for you to stay somewhere else for a while.”

### Step 7

- Walk around the room and collect the index card from each person.
- Process the removal of key relationships by asking:
  - “What were your feelings when these persons were taken from you?”
  - “What thoughts ran through your mind while this was occurring?”
  - “What might be some of your behaviors after this occurred?”

### Step 8

- Place the prepared half sheets on the sticky wall in front of the group with numbered sides up.
- Ask each participant to select three numbers and write them down on **Handout 7e**.
- Once everyone has selected three numbers, turn all of the cards over and ask participants to write down the role identified under the numbers they selected.
- Explain to participants that these three roles are their new families since they have been removed from their birth families.

### Step 9

- ❑ Ask participants to work in groups to identify strategies to maintain contact with their three most important people.
  - Participants should focus on strategies that a worker can use to engage the new family members as supports in maintaining existing relationships.
- ❑ Ask participants to complete Section 4 of **Handout 7e**.

*Note: Invite participants to include one or more development outcome areas.*

- ❑ Provide an example such as:
  - Important relationship—sister in another city
  - New relationship—neighbor to foster home
  - Strategy to maintain contact with important relationship—sister stays at neighbor’s house since there is not enough room in the foster home
  - Development outcome—Belonging and Membership

### Step 10

- ❑ Review the roles listed on the half sheets and invite participants to share the strategies they identified to maintain these key relationships.

### Step 11

- ❑ Facilitate a discussion by asking the following questions:
  - “What were some of your thoughts when you were assigned to a new family?”
  - “What might have been some of your behaviors?”
  - “What barriers or challenges might interfere with some of the identified strategies?”
  - “What are some negative effects if important relationships aren’t maintained for youth in care?”
  - “How might some of these strategies support positive youth development?”

### Step 12

- ❑ Tell participants that while resources and policies vary in different states, it is important that foster care providers promote family connections to support positive youth development.
- ❑ Distribute **Handout 7f** and review.
  - “Adolescents moving toward independence need to feel that someone cares about them. We cannot assume that foster caregivers will be providing this kind of ongoing support. For this reason alone, we must do everything possible to maintain children’s ties with their families.”

**From** *Maintaining Family Ties: Inclusive Practice in Foster Care*.

### Step 13

- ❑ Ask participants to use **Handout 1c** and complete boxes 5 and 6.
- ❑ Invite participants to identify relationships important to this youth and community resources where the youth is engaged.



# Session 7—Activity 7.5

## Wrap-up

### Learning Objective

Participants will be able to recall session information and learning.

### Materials

- Flip chart, markers and tape
- Journal

### Time

10 minutes

### Facilitator Preparation

- Write words and phrases that capture the essence of this session on the flip chart. Some words or phrases include:
  - Family connections
  - Community resources
  - Strategic supports
  - Motivational supports
  - Affirming and respectful
  - Ongoing
  - Offered by a variety of people
  - Emotional supports

### Procedure

#### Step 1

- Invite participants to recall what stood out for them in Session 7 and its relevance to their work.

#### Step 2

- Review highlights of the session by referring to words and phrases written on the flip chart.
- Relate the session to learning from previous sessions.
- Review comments made during this session (or contained within project survey information) regarding the importance of relationships and resources for positive youth development.
- Mention the importance of working with youth to identify relationships and resources that they view as essential supports.
  - Some people might not be the best influences or dependable in certain situations, but these people can be significant supports in specific ways to youth.
  - Youth must learn to maneuver within these relationships to best understand the benefits and the drawbacks.
  - With healthy opportunities and supports, youth in care can safely explore and learn from these experiences.
  - Thus, it is important to intentionally promote and support family connections and community relationships for positive development outcomes.

#### Step 3

- Invite participants to complete Session 7 of their journals.

#### Step 4

- Remind participants of the next training date and time and to bring handout materials with them to the next training.



# Session 7—Handout 7a

## Circles of Support

### Identifying Supports

- Identify relationships and resources that were supports (emotional, motivational, strategic) for you when you first moved away from home.

#### Step 1

- Recall your first “home away from home.”

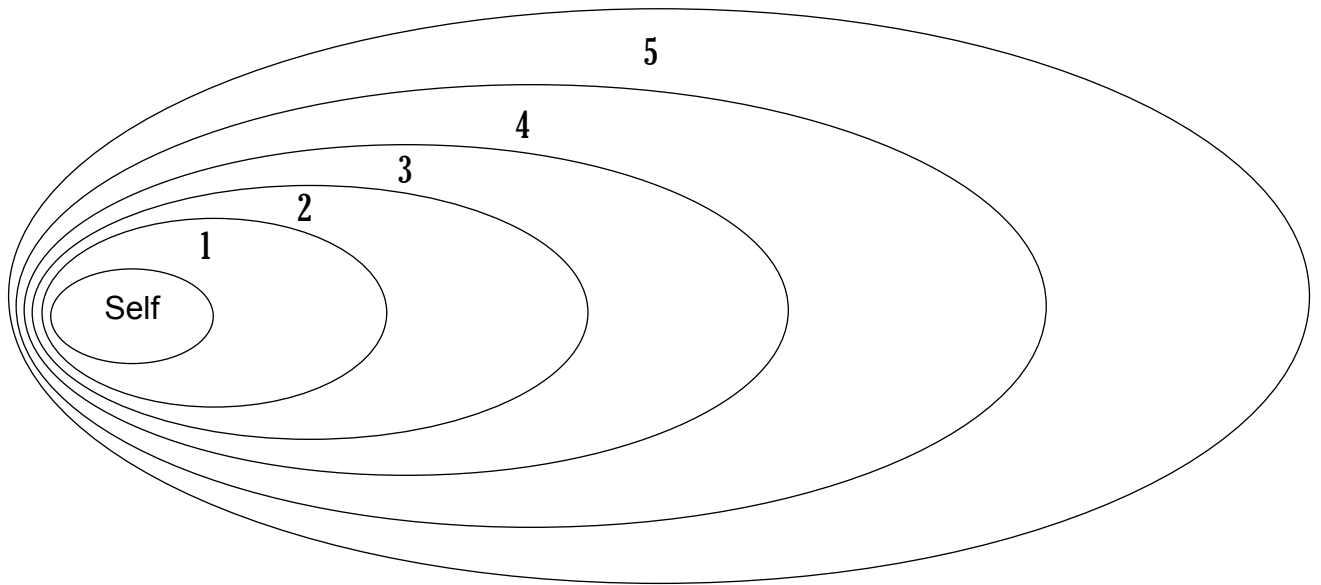
#### Step 2

- Identify 2–3 persons in each of these categories that you could turn to for help.

	Immediate Family	Extended Family	Close Friends	Acquaintances	Community
1					
2					
3					

#### Step 3

- Place their names inside the appropriate rings of the circle.
  - Ring 1      Immediate family
  - Ring 2      Extended family
  - Ring 3      Close friends
  - Ring 4      Acquaintances
  - Ring 5      Community





# Session 7—Handout 7b

**“The process of reconnecting with a family or significant other represents an important step toward emancipation and healthy functioning in the community, solidifying the adolescent’s identity, affirming family connections, clarifying personal history, and reintegrating past trauma.”**

**From**

Casey Family Programs. (2001, September). *It's my life: A framework for youth transitioning from foster care to successful adulthood*. Seattle, Washington: Author.



# Session 7—Handout 7c

**“Youth report that relationships with people who care about them and are there for them consistently make all the difference in the world when they are on their own. Through these personal connections, youth can develop a stronger sense of themselves and define their roles within the larger community.”**

**From**

Casey Family Programs. (2001, September). *It's my life: A framework for youth transitioning from foster care to successful adulthood*. Seattle, Washington: Author.



# Session 7—Handout 7d

**“Research shows that foster youth who have contact with their birth parents while in care have better outcomes than youth who do not maintain these contacts.”**

**From**

Casey Family Programs. (2001, September). *It's my life: A framework for youth transitioning from foster care to successful adulthood*. Seattle, Washington: Author.



# Session 7—Handout 7e

## Strings of the Heart Worksheet

During this time, who were the three most important people in your life?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

Why were these individuals important to you?

1. \_\_\_\_\_ 1. \_\_\_\_\_ 1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_ 2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_ 3. \_\_\_\_\_

Select three numbers from half sheets and write them below:

# \_\_\_\_\_

# \_\_\_\_\_

# \_\_\_\_\_

Strategies to help maintain contact with three important persons:

Role	Strategy	Developmental Outcome



# Session 7—Handout 7f

**“Adolescents moving toward independence need to feel that someone cares about them. We cannot assume that foster caregivers will be providing this kind of ongoing support. For this reason alone, we must do everything possible to maintain children’s ties with their families.”**

**From**

Palmer, S. (1995). *Maintaining family ties: Inclusive practice in foster care*. Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America.

