TIPS FOR TALKING TO YOUTH ABOUT FAMILY CONNECTIONS

Purpose: When talking with foster care youth about family connections, the goal is not to convince them to reconnect with family, but to create a safe space where they can explore relationships, ask questions, and identify people who matter to them. Many youth have complicated feelings about family that may include love, loss, anger, loyalty, grief, and uncertainty all at the same time.

01 Have a Plan but Let the Youth Lead.

Some youth prefer to have a plan in place prior to meeting with family. It's also important to remain open-minded and ask the youth what they would prefer before making suggestions. This helps them feel they have some control in a situation where they may otherwise feel they have little.



02 Be Mindful of Body Language & Potential Triggers.

When discussing family connections with foster care youth, remember that not all communication is verbal. A youth's body language can often tell you as much as their words. Conversations about family, loss, separation, abuse, neglect, or past relationships may trigger strong emotions, even when the youth appear calm on the surface.



03 Don't Rush the Conversation.

Conversations about family connections should be viewed as a process rather than a single discussion. Trust, especially for youth who have experienced loss, trauma, broken relationships, or multiple placement changes, is built over time. Pushing for answers too quickly can unintentionally create resistance or cause youth to disengage.



04 The Three C's: Comfortable, Considerate, Consistent.

When engaging with foster care youth in conversations about family connections, it is important that they experience the Three C's:

- Comfortable enough to feel safe sharing their thoughts, feelings, and experiences.
- Considered enough to feel respected, heard, and understood without judgment.
- Consistent support so they can develop trust in both the process and the adults who are helping them.

Creating an environment that is comfortable, considerate, and consistent helps to foster meaningful conversations, strengthen relationships, and empower youth to explore and maintain important family connections at their own pace.



Tips for Helping Youth Feel Comfortable Talking

- Fidget Toys
- Puzzles
- Draw / Paint
- Play Card Games
- Listen to Music
- Go for a Drive
- Go for a Walk
- Get Food Together
- Bake or Make Crafts Together
- Do an Activity Together Like Basketball, Fishing, or Ping Pong

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