WHAT'S A CONVERSATION AND CONNECTIONS GUIDE? A WAY FOR A SUPPORTIVE ADULT TO HELP NAVIGATE A PATH TO PERMANENCY WITH FOSTER YOUTH IN THEIR HOME.

THE CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS GUIDE

Youth transitioning out of foster care often come out at a disadvantage. The norm they had grown accustomed to where supportive adults fulfill specific needs typically comes to an end when they leave care, however, that’s where more supportive adults and this guide come into play. The youth need more support, not less. This guide is designed to help caretakers have the conversations needed to discover the supports youth will have when they leave care.

A CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS GUIDE PROVIDES:

- Suggested topics to cover with your youth in conversations establishing specific supports
- Fillable forms for individualized need input
- Templates to show how to have conversations in the most organic way

WHO USES THE CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS GUIDE?

As caregivers, it’s important to partner with the youth in order to establish who the youth already see as supports and what gaps need to be filled.

A supportive adult is someone who:
- Has been chosen by the youth
- Brings a healthy relationship to the youth
- Is willing and able to provide an identified support to the youth
HOW TO UTILIZE THE CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS GUIDE

The first thing as a caregiver is to read through this and begin thinking about all of the areas where youth need support when they transition. Some may be obvious, but some will come as a surprise and often get overlooked. When engaging in these conversations you can start with the template of supports and get more and more individualized with the youth in your home. It's recommended to lean more into what the youth vocalize their needs are and use this guide as a baseline.

The goal is to have these conversations as organic as possible. Given that is the goal, you may or may not want to actively work through the guide with the youth having the document in hand. That typically comes off in a way that breaks down youth engagement. It's easy to forget that because these youth are coming from the foster care system, they typically don't have naturally formed relationships. If we stop and think about where we formed some of our friends and family, we will remember we met people through college, work, activities, etc. It's the same with these youth, but sometimes they need help building the skills in order to make these connections or they need help clarifying who provides what specific support. In some cases, that works itself out. If there's something that sticks out as a major question mark, i.e housing, then there may need to be more deliberation and specific conversations that need to be had.

Your relationship that you've built with the youth up to this point is critical. Being able to pull from that bond and effectively have these conversations in a non-intrusive way will help the youth navigate transition easier. Once supports have been decided upon they can be written down if the youth wants that and finds it helpful, or they can just know in the back of their head who provides what support. There shouldn't be any confusion as you and the youth can decide to check in as frequently as you want to see how supports are being met.

Beyond that, it might be a good idea to be there for the youth as they reach out to each support and touch base on what help they think the supportive adult can provide. Youth really need encouragement and direction on how to ask for what they need from pillars of support in their life. A lot of youth exit care feeling alone and isolated. They feel like a burden and a lot of them don't like asking for help. The reality is, we all need help and there's no shame in finding that in our support system.
THE CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS GUIDE: *Adding supports to youth in transition*

**1 HOME**
- Place to go for the holidays
- Emergency place to stay
- Storage resource
- A place to do laundry

Home is where the heart is, and we need a heart in order to live. A lot of youth that leave care need connections to provide necessities that a home provides.

**2 FINANCES**
- Cash for emergencies
- Bills and money management
- Co-signer

Finances are an important part of anyone's life, but especially to a youth in transition. These are a few supports that would be helpful to have.

**3 EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT**
- Job search assistance
- Career counseling
- Employment opportunities

Employment support can take many forms. Advice, skill building, connections, interview practice, etc. Anything that can be provided should be sought after. Employment has a major impact on the youth's ability to reach and maintain sufficiency.
Transition resources can come in all shapes or sizes. Oftentimes, youth need certain things in order to start off on the right foot when it comes to self-sufficiency.

A lot of things will be learned in your home, but whenever they transition, the learning will keep going. As youth develop, there are many things that they will experience in adulthood and anyone who can guide them would be a life raft in a new world.

One of the biggest parts of transition and taking that first step toward independence is having a home of your own. Whether it’s moving expenses, physical help, or just learning to decorate; any and all help will give that youth’s first step the momentum for success.
One of the biggest obstacles that challenge youth is when they transition into adulthood and face difficult times. Adversity for a foster youth can be easily amplified just by not having any support to be a stable force. Youth having someone in their corner can make or break success.

Fish are great, but teaching someone to fish is better. The same can be said for skills. Having someone to teach youth skills can have a deep and longstanding impact. A lot of things may even seem simple for us, but can make a world of a difference to youth.

As youth develop and start to build their new adult life and community, there are certain supports that need to be more on an on-going basis instead of a term-based type situation. This is really when the word "family" starts to have power and take shape. These are supports that maybe we get from our families all the time, but it’s important for us to remember how these youth don’t have a traditional family. Families usually don’t have term limits. Family or not, those on-going supports are still needed.
This isn't an all-inclusive list of needs that youth have when they transition. There may be something else that isn't covered above. In that scenario, feel free to use these open spots in order to write something down that you want to make sure you talk over with the youth in your care.
**THE CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS GUIDE (CONT.): Adding supports to youth in transition**

**Conversation Template: (Home)**

**Parent:** Hey, how's it going? You excited about graduation?

**Youth:** Nervous, but yeah, I'm glad I can move forward to the next chapter.

**Parent:** Listen, I know you're going to be moving out soon and starting college. You're right, this is a whole new chapter. There's going to be ups and downs along the way, but I want you to know this is always your home.

**Youth:** Oh ok, I know that.

**Parent:** I don't mean that in the cliche way either. A place to stay, food, community, etc. I just want you to know I'm there for you. I want you to succeed and I'm in your corner.

**Youth:** That means a lot. I appreciate everything you've done since I moved in. Even though I didn't want to be adopted, I'm so glad to have you in my life.

**Parent:** The biggest thing is that you're comfortable and you have your needs met. Adoption or not, I'm glad I got the chance to take you in and see you develop. If you ever need anything, you know who to call.
CONVERSATION TEMPLATE: (TRANSITION RESOURCES)

**Youth:** Hey Ms. Jones, do you think you can pick me up every other weekend from college?

**Parent:** Yeah, I can do that. I'll be there, we just need to work out a time with your schedule.

**Youth:** Ok, that sounds good. As soon as I get my class schedule, I'll let you know.

**Parent:** One thing I want to talk to you about is making some savings though.

**Youth:** Ok, yeah I think that's a good idea, what makes you say that though?

**Parent:** What I'm gonna do is put $500 in a savings account. In the summer, I want you to get a job and add to it.

**Youth:** Thank you! I definitely want to build a savings.

**Parent:** That's the plan. I want you to add to it and save enough money to get you a car. The next $500 you save in there, I'll match it.

**Youth:** I can't thank you enough Ms. Jones! I'm definitely motivated to save now!
THE CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS GUIDE (CONT.): Adding supports to youth in transition

CONVERSATION TEMPLATE: (Transition Resources)

*Ring-Ring*

**Parent:** Hello?

**Youth:** Mom, I'm just tired.

**Parent:** Tired? What do you mean?

**Youth:** I'm tired of school, dating, just everything right now.

**Parent:** I can only imagine how difficult all this change has been.

**Youth:** I don't know what I need, but I just feel overwhelmed.

**Parent:** Why don't you come home this weekend and you can take a break from that environment; I'll make your favorite meal.

**Youth:** That would be nice! Sounds like a plan.

**Parent:** Ok it's a date then. You remember your football coach Mr. Jenkins?

**Youth:** Yeah, why?

**Parent:** Well you remember he said you can hit him up anytime. He's always been sort of a mentor to you; it might be good to give him a call as well.

**Youth:** Yeah, you know what? That's a good idea!
THE CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS GUIDE: Adding supports to youth in transition

This section of the guide has fillable forms. The purpose of these forms is to help you capture the individualized needs of your youth. The categories are similar to above, but a key difference is where it says “for __”. This spot is for you to put the name of your youth, so that you can work through this form and place on it specific support needs under each category. You may discover unique supports that aren’t covered in the above template. In that case, these forms are a tool for you. Feel free to generate a list of needs and then talk them over with the youth in your home to discover supports for each one.

1  HOME FOR __________
   ▶
   ▶
   ▶
   ▶
   ▶

   Home is where the heart is, and we need a heart in order to live. A lot of youth that leave care need connections to provide necessities that a home provides.

2  FINANCES FOR __________
   ▶
   ▶
   ▶
   ▶
   ▶

   Finances are an important part of anyone’s life, but especially to a youth in transition. These are a few supports that would be helpful to have.

3  EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT FOR __________
   ▶
   ▶
   ▶
   ▶

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### NAVIGATING DIFFICULT TIMES FOR _________

One of the biggest obstacles that challenge youth is when they transition into adulthood and face difficult times. Adversity for a foster youth can be easily amplified just by not having any support to be a stable force. Youth having someone in their corner can make or break success.

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As youth develop and start to build their new adult life and community, there are certain supports that need to be more on an on-going basis instead of a term-based type situation. This is really when the word "family" starts to have power and take shape. These are supports that maybe we get from our families all the time, but it's important for us to remember how these youth don't have a traditional family. Families usually don't have term limits. Family or not, those on-going supports are still needed.

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