


A Guide to Finding and Engaging Relative and Non-Relative Caregivers



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Family is not an
important thing.
IT'S EVERYTHING.

- Michael J. Fox

Why We Believe in a Kin-First Culture:

Placements with kin (relatives & non-relatives) enable children to maintain stronger connections to family, community, and culture; reduce trauma; improve time to permanency, reducing their length of stay under protective supervision; and are associated with fewer placement changes for children. Staff should take a 'kin-first' approach by continuing to inquire about and explore the families' existing ties and building upon the strengths and assets of family and community members.

Top Tips for Identifying Relatives and Non-Relatives:



Prepare for the Conversation by Using Existing Information:

Refer to the Family Finding Connections Log and other case notes prior to talking to parents to know what's been discussed. Utilize FSFN, Accurint, and internet searches (including Social-Media) to prompt the conversation if the family is struggling to identify kin.



Establish Trust :

Prioritize establishing rapport to improve collaborative efforts. Remember, families don't care how much you know until they know how much you care! Start off with trust-building questions that will allow you to get to know the family and child.



Stay Centered on the Child :

Explain why identifying kin is important and best for the child and focus the discussion on building a support network around them.



Use Conversation Tools :

Suggest co-creating a family map or a 'list of emergency contacts' to prompt the conversation. This can be done with children too!



Explore as Many Options as Possible :

There is no "one size fits all" set of family relationships or community, and we want to make sure we are hitting on all possible connections, not just the ones most frequently mentioned. Ask about the father's side of the family, other siblings' parents, and non-relative relationships.

Continued.



Identify Supports Beyond Placement:

Capture as many names and numbers as possible, not just those that may be willing to step in as a caregiver. Consider who in the family's greater network (extended family, school, neighborhood, community, tribe, church) should be maintained for the child(ren) and what supports can be offered beyond placement (respite, transport). Include the list of names, even if no numbers are provided, in FSN.



Exercise Compassion and Focus on Strengths :

Use person-centered language, refer to the parents by name. Listen and respond to their concerns about family connections. Language may include “work together, partnering, collaborating - because we can see how much you love and care about your child.”

How to Start the Conversation with Parents:

♥ Describe rationale:

“This is something we do with every family. We need to get a sense of where you are at, who is around you and how they can support your child's wellbeing. I want to help you to build up a network of trusted people who can support your child. It is easier if we have people to support with transport, babysitting, getting to school/ appointments.”

♥ Acknowledge concerns:

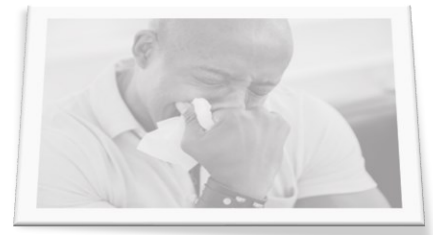
“I can see how this can be not only scary but frustrating. I want you to know that we are here to help you navigate this as best as possible. We value your input; we would like to involve you every step of the way.”

♥ Be transparent about the need to identify placement options and communicate urgency:

“We don't like to place in Foster Care first; we like to start with family and friends. When children do have to live away from their parents, it's best if they can stay with people they already know, rather than strangers, and the sooner we can get them there, the better.”

“Staying with a family or a friend can minimize the feeling of change for your child and reduce how much they move around. It can also give them the chance to bond with family.”

Ways to Respond to Common Concerns from Parents:



“I don’t have anyone who can help – I’m not close to anyone in my family.”

Listen to fears about why parents might not want to involve family. “Let’s talk about the reasons you may not want them to know? Let’s approach it another way – is there anyone else you would be comfortable talking about this with? Who should I not reach out to? Would you rather them be stay with someone in your family, a friend, or a stranger?”

“I don’t want my family to know about the case – I don’t want them to judge me.”

Reassure parents that family and friends often want to be supportive: “They probably want to help you more than you think, but they cannot give support if they do not know what is going on. Even if you are concerned about them judging you, do you think it's worth talking to them to help your kids?”

“My family member won’t want to get a background check- they have a history.”

Remind the parents that you are trying to map out as many family connections as possible, and there are multiple ways for each connection to be a support to their child. If this is a family member who is otherwise willing to be the child’s caregiver, staff *may* be able to help them figure out a solution, depending on the history. They can’t know until they try. Let them know “history” is not necessarily a disqualifier for caring for the child(ren).

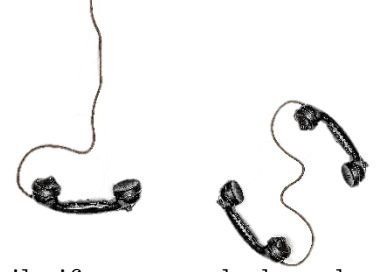
Continuous Efforts to Locate Relative/Non-Relatives:

! It is unlikely that families have no one that you can reach out to. You may have to re-frame the question multiple ways before parents are willing to share information with you.

Use *every* early point of contact with parents to keep asking.


! This should be a part of your conversation in the first 72 hours, at the Family Team Meeting, and during monthly contacts with the parents. Pull from the list of alternative questions (in [“Talking with Parents”](#)) to help you try again and keep reminding them that this is about what’s best for their child(ren). Parents might become more open to this in time, or when you ask a different question than before.


Talking with Parents:



Initial Questions and Strategies to Identify Family Supports:

- ? Talk to me about your family. Who do you go to in your family if you need a hand with childcare?
- ? Who have your kids stayed with before? Family? Friends?
- ? How do you celebrate family occasions? Who is there? Maybe there are people who you are not super close to? What cousins, aunts, and uncles do you keep in touch with (in person, over the phone or on social media)?

 Go through the list on the Family Finding Connections Log (FFCL) and take notes as they respond to each member listed. You can start with who they would consider emergency contacts, but don't stop there: write down any information they give you and encourage them to share as many family members/friends in their network as possible, even if they may not be able to take the child(ren) right now.

 Ask parents to write things down if they don't want to talk: Let's take a few minutes to create a family tree, or a list some people I (or we) can reach out to? They may not be close, but if we can write them down, you might see there is someone who would like to help in some way and won't judge you.

Alternative Questions to Re-Frame or Identify Non-Relative Supports:

- ? Talk to me about your people. Who are your friends? Who do you spend the most time with?
- ? Who would you call if you ran out of gas or needed help moving?
- ? What activities do you participate in outside of work? Are you a member of a church? Groups or sports leagues?
- ? Who are your child's friends? Where and when does your child spend time with them? Do you know their parents?
- ? Who is your child's emergency contact at school?
- ? Talk to me about your employment, current and historic. Are you employed? Who do you talk to at work?
- ? What brought you to this area? What connections did you have when you first moved here? How about now?
- ? Who visited you in the hospital when you gave birth?
- ? **(Substance misuse issues)** Who is your sponsor? Who do you call upon when you are considering using but do not want to?

Talking with the Child:

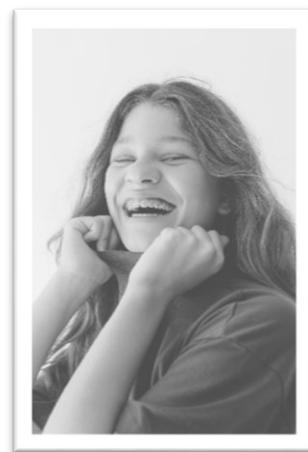
It is important to do your best to make the child(ren) feel safe, build rapport, and give them the chance to engage in placement decisions when appropriate.

Pay attention to the child's facial expressions or reactions to gauge comfort when they talk about their family, friends, and school. These conversations should occur in a setting that makes the child most comfortable (consider privacy and location):



- ? How long have you been at this school?
- ? Walk me through a day at school. What classes do you have? What are your teachers' names? Friends?
- ? What is your favorite subject?
- ? Do you have a favorite teacher or other adult at school that you go to for help?
- ? What kind of things do you do for fun?

- ? Are you involved in any sports teams or after school clubs? Who takes you to practice/club?
- ? What family members do you or your family spend time with?
- ? What cousins do you get along best with?
- ? Who do you hang out with in the neighborhood?
- ? Do you go to your friend's house? Do you like their parents?



Setting Up the Relative / Non-Relative Placement:



Prepare for the Conversation:

Stop and think about what you know about this child/family before contacting the potential caregiver and tailor your conversation accordingly. Identify supports beyond placement that you can share/discuss with the caregiver to help them feel less alone.



Emphasize THEIR Unique Role:

Tell them if the child or parent named them specifically, emphasizing that they are viewed as safe, stable place for the child. Being a relative caregiver can be meaningful and fulfilling, allowing them to build a special relationship with the child and the foundation for a support network around the family in a time of need.

Continued.



Stay Centered on the Child:

Explain why you would rather place the child with them than a stranger foster family- staying with a family or a friend can help with the child’s sense of security, reduce how much they move around, a promote family self-healing.



Be Empathetic:

Acknowledge what a big undertaking this is and normalize their questions and concerns- answer them the best you can without overpromising.



Offer Supports:

Be pro-active in telling caregivers about supports available to them and children in their care. Have resource information and contacts on-hand and ready *before* contacting the caregiver. Take notes during your conversation and be clear on when you, *or another Child Welfare Professional*, will follow-up on outstanding items.



Exercise Compassion and Focus on Strengths:

Use person-centered language, refer to the parents by name. Listen and respond to their concerns.



Ways to Respond to Common Concerns from Relatives and Non-Relative Caregivers:

“I just can’t deal with their [mom or dad] anymore.”

Acknowledge that you understand how family dynamics can be tricky. The caregiver may understandably be angry at the child’s parents, who may have lied, broken promises, or treated them/the child badly. Yet, their understanding of these familial challenges can in many ways make them the best fit as the child’s caregiver and allow them to proactively support and protect the child in the future. Use this point as an opportunity to circle back to focusing on the needs of the child and what is best for their immediate future. Then, offer up ways that you can support the caregiver in this tough role (*“I will be setting up future parent visits, and we can discuss the best ways to...”*).

“I have too much on my plate as it is.”

Normalize their feelings and concerns, then do what you can to offer tangible solutions. Ask specifically about what kinds of support they would need to make this placement possible, and then tailor your conversation to focus on their top concerns. Some caregivers may tell you about very specific needs, but others may not know where to start. Inform them of the supports (financial + other) they could qualify for and offer them the Relative/Non-Relative Caregiver Supports Overview. Mark whatever they express interest in and offer to get them started in accessing that support. Help them build their network. Ask them about other friends and family members that could help and/or bring up others mentioned by the child or parents. Discuss ways to include them up front when figuring out ways to support the child (transportation, respite, extracurriculars).

FAMILY FINDING CONNECTIONS LOG

Child(ren)'s Name(s):

Intake/Hotline Number:

FSFN Case ID:

Mother's DOB:

CONTACTS

| Relationship to Child(ren) | Name | Address and Phone Number | Brief Note – Including Why Not Pursued/Placed, if Applicable | CPI Recommends Follow-up |
|---|------|--------------------------|--|--------------------------|
| MATERNAL FAMILY | | | | |
| Mother | | | | |
| Maternal Grandmother | | | | |
| Maternal Grandfather | | | | |
| Maternal Aunt | | | | |
| Maternal Uncle | | | | |
| Maternal Cousin | | | | |
| Maternal Other: | | | | |
| Maternal Other: | | | | |
| Maternal Other: | | | | |
| Maternal Other: | | | | |
| PATERNAL FAMILY (Cut and paste for multiple fathers) | | | | |
| Father of: | | | | |
| Paternal Grandmother | | | | |
| Paternal Grandfather | | | | |
| Paternal Aunt | | | | |
| Paternal Uncle | | | | |
| Paternal Cousin | | | | |
| Paternal Other: | | | | |
| Paternal Other: | | | | |
| Paternal Other: | | | | |
| Paternal Other: | | | | |
| Adult Sibling | | | | |
| Adult Sibling | | | | |

FAMILY FINDING CONNECTIONS LOG

| NON-RELATIVES | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Step-Parent | | |
| Parent of Half-Sibling | | |
| Godparent | | |
| Neighbor | | |
| Church Member | | |
| School Connection | | |
| Family Friend | | |
| Parent of Child's Friend | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |

For Family Finding Team:

ONGOING SERVICES CONTACT LOG

| Name or Activity | Date | Note |
|------------------|------|------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Getting Started as a Caregiver: *Immediate Needs Questionnaire*

Becoming a caregiver may feel overwhelming for you or your family at times- that is normal. This list of questions is designed help you start thinking about and prioritizing the child's immediate needs and other logistics that might be new to you. You can use the Planning Tool (second page) to write down answers, plan next steps, and note what you still have questions about. When appropriate, you can also ask for input from the child(ren) in your care.

The categories of questions below match the categories of caregiver supports described in the *Relative & Non-Relative Caregiver Supports Overview*. Review them together to match your family's needs to supports that may be available to you. This is a personal tool meant to help you get started with planning *and* inform future conversations with your Case Manager or the Kinship Licensing Team.

Financial

- Are you aware of financial supports available to caregivers? Monthly cash payments, funds for childcare, and other financial resources may be available to you.
- Do you know about your option for become a licensed (L1) relative/non-relative caregiver, and understand the process requirements?
- Are you aware of any benefits the child is currently receiving that you will need to file to become the payee for (i.e., Social Security)?

Medical, Mental

- What are the medical needs of the child?
- Does the child have any private medical insurance?
- Do you have access to formula and diapers, if needed? Does the child need WIC?
- Do you have access to enough food? Do you know if the child has any food allergies?
- Is the child currently receiving mental health services that you would like to maintain? Would you or your child be interested in counseling or other mental health supports?

Food, Clothing &

- Does the child need a crib or bed? Does the child need a proper car seat or booster seat?
- What clothes and outerwear do you have for the child? If needed, do you know clothing and shoe sizes?
- Do you need setting up space for the child(ren) in your home?
- Do you have age-appropriate toys and activities for the child? What are their interests?
- What are the child's routines related to eating and sleeping?
- Is there anything you would like more information about (for example, how to change a diaper, or dietary needs for a young child or a teen)?

School, Childcare &

- If the child is old enough, where are they currently enrolled in school or preschool?
- What supports do you need to keep the child enrolled in this school?
- What school programs does the child participate? What supports do you need to keep the child involved in these activities?
- If you need to transfer the child to a different school, what local options are available?
- Does the child have friends and/or mentors at school that you want to make sure they stay connected to?
- If you are working, what are your childcare needs? Do you know about Broward's childcare subsidy program?
- Is the child signed up for school lunch?
- Who else is in your support network that can help you with this transition? Are there people who can help you with transportation, babysitting, and respite?

Getting Started as a Caregiver: *Personal Planning Tool*

Refer to the *Immediate Needs Questionnaire* and *Relative & Non-Relative Caregiver Supports Overview* to help you get started in filling out each section.

Financial Supports

Medical, Mental Health, Nutrition

Clothing, Safety, Shelter

School, Childcare, Respite

Additional Questions: