**TALKING WITH PARENTS**

**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 build up a network of trusted people who can support your child. It is easier if we have people to support with transportation, babysitting, and getting to school or appointments.”
* **Acknowledge concerns:** “I know this is scary and frustrating. I want you to know that we are here to help you navigate this. We value your input; we would like to involve you every step of the way.”
* **Emphasize benefits:** “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 children a chance to bond with family.”
* **Be transparent about the alternatives:** “We don’t like to place children with foster families first; we like to start with family and friends. When children do have to live away from their parents, it is best if they can stay with people they already know, rather than strangers, and the sooner we can get them there, the better.”

**Initial Questions & Strategies to Identify Family Supports**

* “Can you tell me about your family? Who do you go to when you need help with child care?”
* “Have your kids ever stayed with other family members?”
* “How do you celebrate family occasions? Who is there? What about people you may know less well? Do you have any cousins or aunts and uncles you talk to?”
* Go through the list on the [**Family Finding Connections Log**](https://govlab.hks.harvard.edu/sites/hwpi.harvard.edu/files/govlabs/files/family_finding_connections_log.docx?m=1712677816) and take notes as they respond to each member listed. You can start with who they would consider emergency contacts, but do not 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 do not want to talk: “Could you take a few minutes to draw a family tree, or list a few people I can call? 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 Ways to Frame Questions to Continue Identifying Kin Supports**

**Use every early point of contact with parents to keep asking about kin. It is unlikely that families have no one that you can reach out to.** You may have to re-frame your questions in multiple ways before parents are willing to share information with you.

* “Tell me about your network. 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 do you do outside of work? Are you a member of a church? Groups or sports leagues?”
* “Does your child ever have friends over? Do you know their parents?”
* “Who is the child(ren)’s emergency contact at school?”
* “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? What connections do you have now?”
* “Who visited you in the hospital when you gave birth?”
* (If there are substance use concerns) “Do you have a sponsor?”

**TALKING WITH CHILDREN**

**It is important to do your best to make children feel safe, build rapport, and give them the chance to share their preferences for placement decisions when appropriate.** Pay attention to the child’s or teen’s facial expressions or reactions to questions. This can help you gauge comfort when they talk about their family, friends, and school.

* “Tell me about your day. What did you do? What classes did you have?”
* “How long have you been at this school? What do you like about it?”
* “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?”
* “What is your favorite subject? Do you have a favorite teacher or other adult at school that you go to for help?”
* “Who does your family spend time with? Does your grandma or aunt ever come around? What about other relatives? Who else is in your family?”
* “What cousin do you get along best with?”
* “Who do you hang out with in the neighborhood? Do you ever go to your friend’s house? Do you know their parents?”