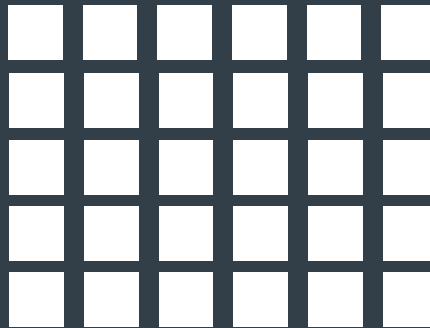


TYPS Sheet for Caseworkers November 2018

As caseworkers, you play a critical role in shaping the life of a youth in foster care. You have considerable influence in case planning, placement, and permanency outcomes. Most importantly, you have the opportunity to provide a supportive relationship for youth.

In 2017, we interviewed **30 young adults** formerly in Texas foster care for the **Texas Youth Permanency Study (TYPS)**.



These youth had a lot to say about their relationships and how you as a caseworker can help them move through the system successfully and contribute to their well-being.

Recommendations from the TYPS Research Team:

One of the most powerful messages youth shared is that nurturing, supportive and committed relationships are essential to their success and well-being while in care and after they leave. The child welfare system assumes that legal permanence means a child has lifelong supportive relationships. However, youth are telling us that this is not always the case.

Based on what youth have shared with us so far, we have come up with 3 ways you can help youth achieve better outcomes, build authentic relationships, and feel more normal:

1 Advocate for, and with, youth around relational permanence.

2 Meaningfully include youth voice in all aspects of case planning.

3 Create an honest and authentic relationship with youth.



Read the full report at **UTYPS.org**

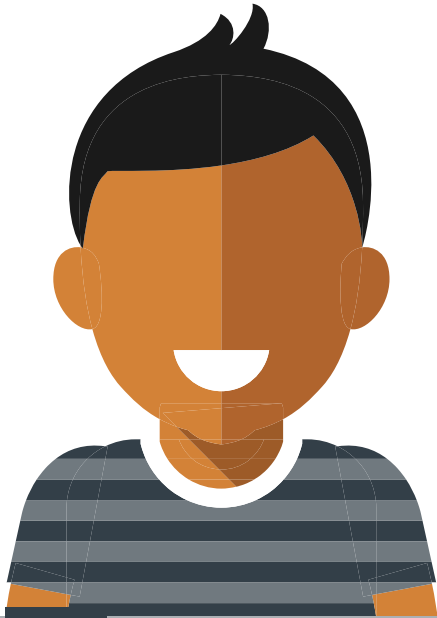
1

Advocate for, and with, youth around relational permanence.

- Help youth maintain connections with everyone they identify as safe and important
- Find safe ways for everyone who cares about the youth to stay involved
- Assist and allow youth access to informal relationships



She even thought about adopting me. I'm like I'm 16. I'm too old to be adopted. She's like, 'well, if you ever want to come home, you know we always have a place here.' If I'm passing in that area, I'll stop by her house or I'll stop at her job and just say hello and see how she's doing. She always tells me she is very proud of me from what I've become.



Youth of all ages crave and need attachment relationships with adults. Unfortunately, youth in foster care experience a tremendous amount of instability in this regard, particularly when they experience placement changes. The more you can help youth create and maintain positive and nurturing relationships with adults, the more likely they are to feel prepared and supported in adulthood. Also, if they have these strong relationships, they are less likely to rely on unhealthy relationships.

Youth seek out family members when they leave care. You can make a big difference in helping youth connect with their families in a healthy way. Ask youth about the people who were there for them or who made them feel safe and important. Contact these adults and encourage a relationship. Remember that these adults may not be suitable placements for the youth, but that does not mean they cannot be a supportive and important part of a youth's life. It is not uncommon for youth to maintain relationships with former foster parents, residential or group staff, or even a "failed" adoptive placement.

2

Meaningfully include youth voice in all aspects of case planning.

- Include youth voice in all aspects of case planning from safety plans, placements, service plans to permanence
- Advocate for your youth by taking their thoughts and opinions back to all caregivers and decision makers
- Build all plans around what youth say they want and need



I mean, honestly, all they had to do was just listen. I know that sometimes kids, especially, you know, kids that have been in foster care, teenagers especially, they're kind of pushed aside sometimes and they have their issues but I think if I had just had a caseworker that would have listened to what I was telling them, things would have been a little bit different.



One theme we heard throughout youth interviews was how important it was for youth to feel heard, listened to, and included in the planning of their own lives. Youth often reported feeling powerless, like an object or just a case number which impacted their self-esteem and increased feelings of shame.

It's also important to remember that youth in care come from a place of powerlessness and trauma and truly need YOUR voice to advocate for them! Not only is it often difficult for them to do it themselves, but it can put them in a very vulnerable place to have to do so. You can lift this burden, listen to their needs and wants and then talk to the other key players in the case to make sure everyone is on the same page.

It is also important to pay attention to whether adolescents truly want to be adopted and what they think is in their best interest. Youth in our study reported that often they felt pressured into an adoptive placement despite their doubts, fears, and wishes. The goal should be stability and relational permanence for youth, regardless of the permanency plan.



3

Create an honest and authentic relationship with youth.

- Be open and honest with youth
- Try not to use generalities or be vague; be direct and specific
- Connect as often as you can with youth in an authentic way

By building an open and authentic relationship with youth, you are not only helping support their relational permanence but you are giving them a powerful voice that helps them feel more normal. This has a big impact on their sense of belonging and self-worth. Youth who had strong relationships with their caseworker reported their caseworkers took them out to eat, spent time with them doing fun recreational activities, and treated them as a person. The humanizing element of this engagement led to stronger relationships and trust, and elevated the caseworker as a trusted individual that the youth could reach out to for life advice and guidance. Many youth reported that they liked the fact that their caseworker could 'call them out' on negative behavior and while they didn't necessarily like to hear it, they felt cared for.

Open communication with caseworkers was a factor that youth felt influenced their relationships in a positive way. Youth who could reach their caseworker and have honest discussions with them felt that they were able to have their voices heard and that their caseworkers would do their best to meet their needs.

Many youth also recognized the burden that caseworkers had with high caseloads and understood that their caseworkers may have not had the necessary time to engage the youth properly. However, it was clear that more communication they had with their caseworker, even in the form of short calls, made a huge difference in feeling like they mattered to adults.

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I had a caseworker for about two-and-a-half years, who I grew to be close with. We would go out to lunch...she would just make me feel really loved. And no matter how many different placements I went to, she was still there. And she was very authentic with me, and honest. And I could do the same with her. And I see that she doesn't think of me as another caseload. She sees me as a person.

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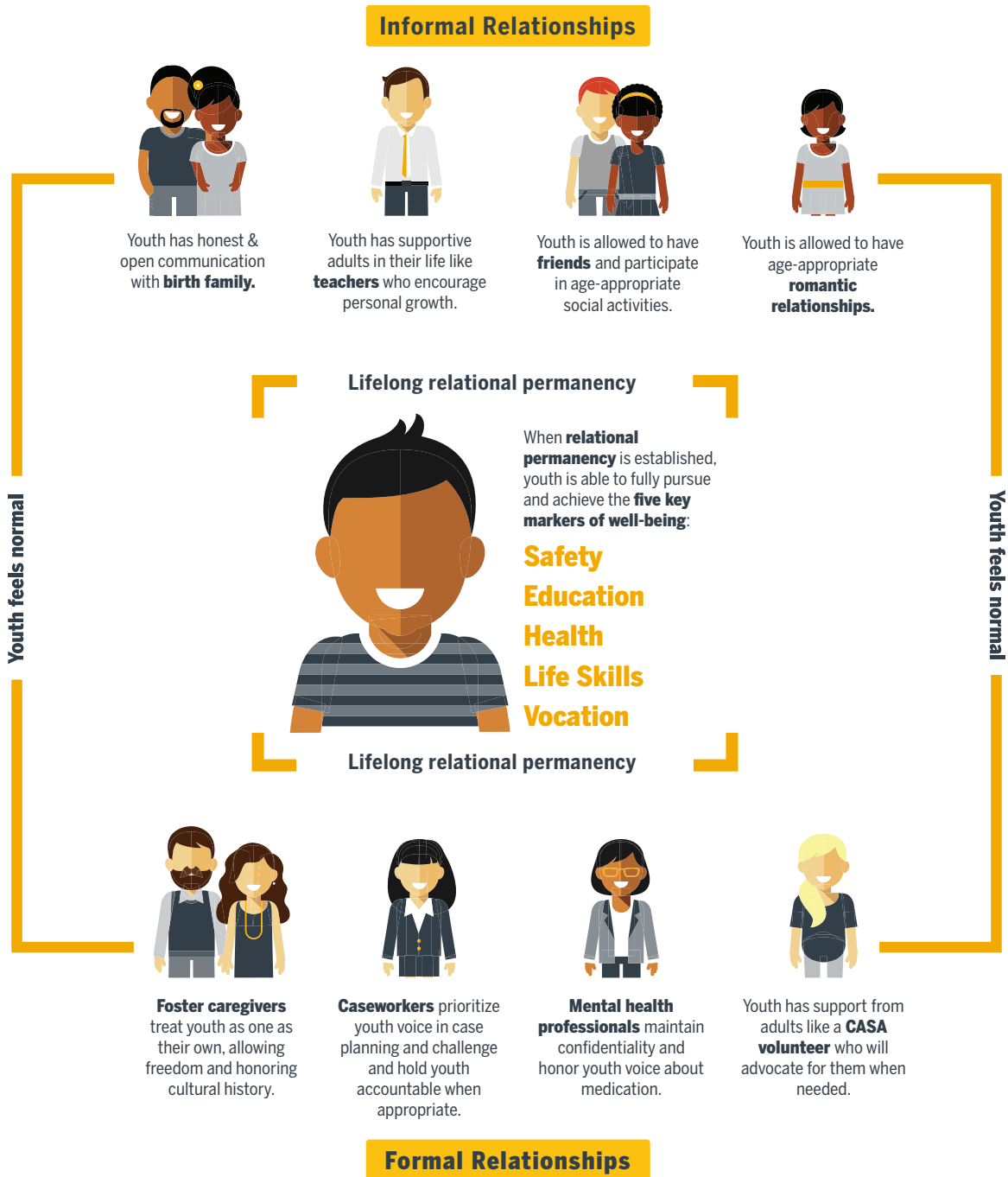
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I feel like, when it comes to the caseworkers, because I see where they're coming from, they have a lot of kids to deal with. So, I can see where things could be chaotic on their end. I totally understand that. But as dealing with kids with such issues as we do, we're a little bit more fragile than regular people... I feel like everyone needs to kind of get the attention that they're asking for...

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Authentic Relationships Matter Most

Based on the 2017 TYPS pilot study, we believe through **informal** and **formal** relationships youth can begin to feel normal which creates **relational permanency**.



About TYPS

The Texas Youth Permanency Study builds evidence to better understand the realities of former foster youth entering young adulthood. In doing so, we are finding new ways of understanding permanency that will create foundations for youth to thrive in young adulthood regardless of how they leave foster care. In our pilot study, we interviewed 30 former foster youth in 2017 and released the pilot study report in March 2018. The purpose of this pilot study was to: 1) gather preliminary information around our conceptualizations of legal, relational and physical permanence; and 2) test our survey and interview protocols. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, The University of Texas at Austin (protocol #2016-10-0140). Sponsored by the Reissa Foundation and The Simmons Foundation.