



Family Connectedness FAQ

Defining the Need for Connectedness

Q: How do we determine the appropriate level of urgency?

A: The need for increased connectedness is always urgent when the child or young person has no connections with family (i.e., parents, other family members, or caring and consistent adults who provide appropriate levels of affection).

Possible circumstances include:

- The child or young person is removed from a parent (or parents) and for a significant period of time has been isolated from other family members and caring adults
- The child or young person is in a “non-permanent” foster family placement and the foster parents are not likely to be a guardianship or adoptive resource
- The child or young person will likely be leaving the home on a planned or unplanned basis in the future

Q: What if a child is already stable in his/her home with his/her family members or in a “stable placement”? How do we start this process for families where a child is not in dire need of placement?

A: If the young person is living with his/her parents or a relative with an expectation of permanency, the family finding process would be utilized as a means of increasing natural team members and support to further protect his/her permanent belonging in the family. If the young person is in a “stable placement” but there is no expectation of permanency, then permanency planning activities must occur.

Perspective Issues

Q: How far do we push when a child, parent, or foster parent is reluctant?

A: Keep revisiting the issue and focus on the interrelated needs of children, young people and parents. Adults suffer from loneliness and isolation also. Revisit the big unmet needs identified by the parent(s) or caregivers and discuss the value of increasing connectedness as a way to sustainably meet their support and friendship needs. Continue to be frank about the limited value and sometimes harmful effects of out-of-home placements and the increased risks to their child’s safety and well-being in congregate care settings, including hospitals.

Q: Is it problematic when the child is not present at a meeting to determine a family connection?

A: The child’s best interest is taken into account when determining the possibility of family connections. It is important not to give a child false hope before the possibility of future connections is finalized. Safety continues to be our highest priority. Prospective relative connections and non-relative supports must be assessed for background information and suitability prior to initiating the hope of connections for the child or young person. Remember the underlying need and related urgency—the child is alone and should not be subjected to further preventable relationship losses.

Q: How do we help parent(s) and relatives resolve past differences and troubled relationships within the family and with friends?

A: Begin with a belief that conflict in close relationships with family members and friends is a normal part of human relationships. Consider your own experiences. What important relation do you have that has not included strong disagreements or hurt feelings at times? With your support and that of others these relationships can be healed and strengthened. Start the process with the most likely situation for success and use your training and life experience to facilitate a resolution. The initial fears of those in conflict will be greater than the reality of the conflict in most situations. This is an area of practice well suited to the skills and training of probation officers and juvenile justice staff. There is no reason to avoid this important work, instead; welcome the opportunity to help with something that can lead to quick results.

Q: Do we move forward with family finding even if the family doesn't want it?

A: If the family truly does not want family finding, it will not be forced on them. Remember that your focus should be on supporting the family to create sustainable solutions to their big unmet needs. It is suggested to revisit the issue occasionally while stressing the importance of natural connections and the essential role that safe and consistent adult relationships play in the future success of developing children, young people and adults.

Connectedness Map

Q: Is the connectedness map a useful tool during the assessment phase?

A: Yes, this an excellent way for a child, family and probation officer or juvenile justice staff to identify people who are important to them. This tool can also establish a visually compelling image of loneliness for young people separated from consistent adult relationships over time as a result of multiple moves in out of home care and long-term separation from family members. Connectedness maps are a very effective perspective blending exercise for team members.

Q: Do you always have to go through the parents or social worker to do the connectedness map with a child?

A: Connectedness mapping with the child or young person is not done without the parents' or juvenile justice staff's permission.

Q: In what situations might a connected map be inadvisable with a child or young person?

A: In rare situations, children or youth may present with acute suicidality which may be aggravated by acknowledging their profound loneliness with no clear, short-term solution. Working with the child or youth to stabilize this serious condition will be required prior to assessing connectedness with them. Connectedness mapping can still be done with parent(s), probation worker, and other adult team members.

Legal Issues

Q: What is our liability if we connect a child with someone who is abusive or who has done negative things in the past?

A: There is a shared risk between the entire team in situations like this. For children and young people who are dependants of the court, background checks and a home study may be required prior to the child or young person having unsupervised visits. Approval of adults who visit the child is required by parents and probation officers or juvenile justice staff when facilitating visitation or respite.

Q: How do we work around legal red tape regarding reconnecting a child to natural family (i.e. a no contact order with a family member who would like to make contact or a parent whose parental rights have been terminated)?

A: Situations that involve no-contact orders or parent(s) who have had their parental rights terminated require careful assessment. Experience tells us that adults can change over time (i.e. establish sobriety and greater stability with support). Also, the information that led to the no-contact order may be inaccurate, or circumstances may have changed that reduce or eliminate the original concerns behind the court order. It is essential that you consult your supervisor and the parent(s) or probation officer before proceeding to create connections for the child in these situations. All court orders must be followed. It is possible for the parent(s) or probation officer to request the court to modify or remove court imposed restrictions based on new information.

Q: Should we connect or re-connect a child or young person to a relative who has harmed children or adults in the past or might pose an imminent risk to a child or young person?

A: Children and young people **will not** be connected to adults who are known to pose an imminent risk to the child or young person’s physical or emotional safety.