

## Policy Statement

### Identity and Connectedness to Birth Family

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*"My mother's rights were terminated. Not mine."* Foster youth quote

In order to love all parts, we must know all parts. Even in the most complex life situations, we must honor that truth.

#### The Issue

Removal from family, out of home placement, and/or termination of parental rights are not neutral interventions in the life of a child. Intervention itself impacts the safety and well-being of the child, and separation from culture and family relationships will, in every case, result in lifelong implications for the child and adult the child will eventually become.

#### Practice and policy values

- It is the responsibility of adults\* to ensure that every case decision is weighed based on its potential to develop, maintain or impede the youth's connections to family and culture - which all have a significant impact on a young person's healthy identity development.
- Decisions regarding on-going family contact should always be made weighing the potential long term implications of the decision on the youth's well-being, including identity development. These decisions should never be made based on worker caseload, preference of care providers or competing interests of adults.
- Youth involved in the child welfare system have the right to know who members of their immediate and extended birth family are, regardless of their current potential as placement/permanency resources. Given the easy access and competence in using social media that most youth have, the reality is that youth in the child welfare system and people in their families remain in touch and stay connected, whether or not the child welfare professionals approve of that contact. It is the responsibility of adults\* to authentically model how to build and maintain these relationships safely and to provide young people with the tools to navigate those complex yet critical relationships. Whenever placement out of the home is considered, practices that identify and involve people suggested by the children, youth and/or parent/s should be explored and utilized.
- A person's birth certificate is the first tangible documentation of his or her identity and should be an accurate reflection of the facts of the person's birth. A copy of this fundamental connection to family should be available to the person regardless of whether he or she grows up in their birth family or in an adoptive family.
- Because the right to family identity and connection are so vital to the human spirit and healthy identity development, youth who are aging out of foster care without having been adopted should have the opportunity to request that their parents' legal rights be restored through re-adoption, reinstatement, vacation of the termination order or whatever method is available in the youth's state. The state has an obligation in all such situations to determine whether this action is in the best interest of the youth, and this action may or may not include physical reunification.

***\*Adults refers to case workers, guardians ad litem, adoptive parents, foster parents, judges, children's and county attorneys, CASA workers, group home staff, residential treatment staff, ICPC staff, supervisors, adoption workers, child protection workers.***