

December 2025

# Preventing & Responding to Placement Breakdowns Involving Newcomer Children & Youth

Refugee Youth Resource Center



# Who Are We?



- Refugee Services
- Policy and Advocacy
- Legal Services
- Trafficking Services
- International Programs
- Children's Services

*\*Note: USCRI is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)*



# Refugee Youth Resource Center



Building provider capacity to foster refugee youth resilience and child safety

Offerings include:

- Monthly webinars
- Targeted trainings
- Case consultation helpline
- Digital resources for families and providers
- Community resource directory

Visit us at [refugee-youth.org](https://refugee-youth.org) !

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the webinar, you will be able to...

- ① Describe the **unique challenges and common stressors** that may lead to placement instability for newcomer youth and their caregivers adjusting to life in the U.S.
- ② Apply **best practices for centering youth voice and family engagement** to support newcomer youth and their caregivers experiencing challenges in their living situations
- ③ Identify **resources and services that support newcomer youth** when their living situations become unstable, strained, or break down

# Defining Terms

①

**Placement** – a youth's living situation with their primary caregiver

②

**Newcomer youth** – a refugee or other ORR-eligible youth, including asylee, Cuban and Haitian entrant, survivor of trafficking, Afghan and Ukrainian humanitarian parolee, and other youth

[Office of Refugee Resettlement \(ORR\) Policy Letter 16-01](#)

# What Might Placement Disruptions or Breakdowns Look Like?



- Youth running away
- Caregiver saying they can no longer care for the youth
- Abandonment by caregiver
- Loss of primary caregiver (e.g., due to illness, death, arrest, deportation)
- CPS intervention

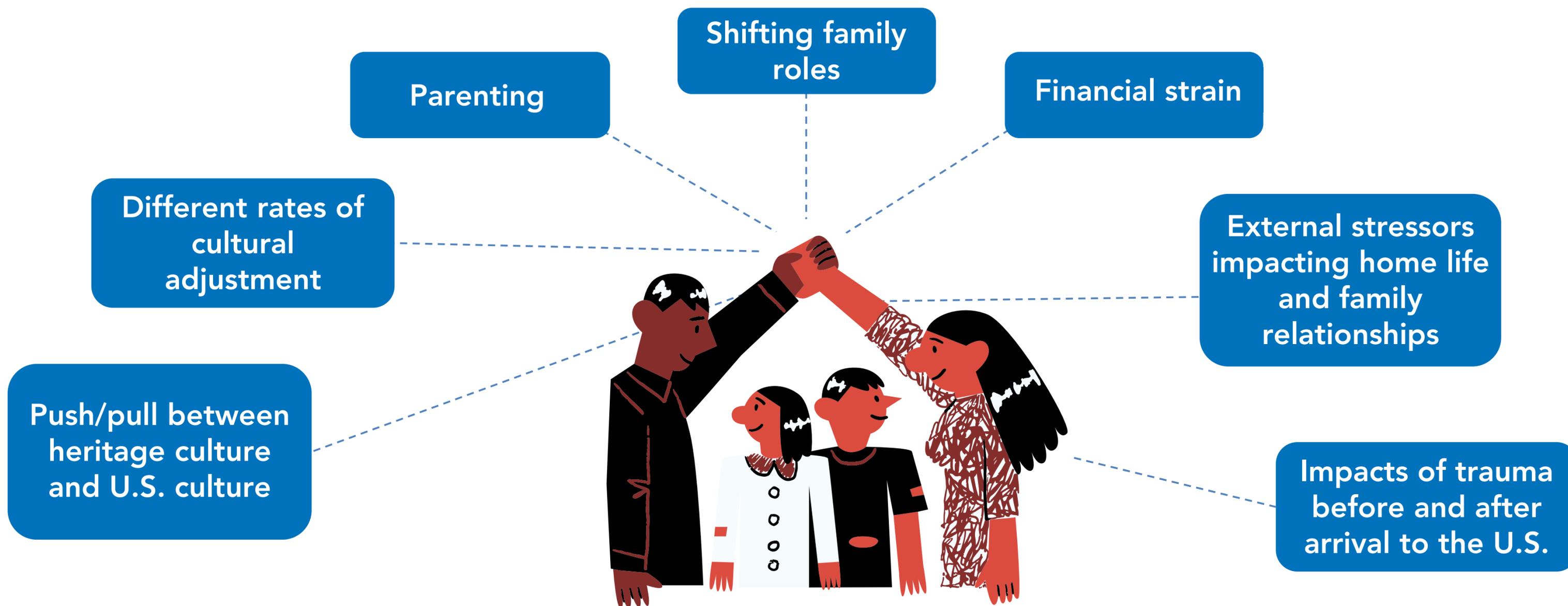
## Potential causes:

- Family conflict
- Misalignment of expectations
- Behavioral health concerns
- Financial strain
- Child abuse or neglect
- Emergency situations



# Understanding Placement Challenges for Newcomer Youth & Their Caregivers

# Common Challenges for Refugee & Newcomer Families



# Examples of Newcomer Youth Living with a Non-Parent Caregiver:



- Refugee minors resettling with non-relatives, or blood relatives other than parents
- Former unaccompanied children living with a non-parent sponsor
  - Asylee youth
  - Cuban and Haitian entrant youth
  - Survivors of human trafficking
  - Unaccompanied Afghan minors



# Additional Challenges for Newcomer Youth Living With a Non-Parent Caregiver



- Lack of prior relationship between youth and caregiver
- Differing expectations (struggle for independence, work vs. school)
- Change in roles (e.g., older sibling becomes caregiver)
- Caregiver without prior parenting experience
- Caregiver with their own children and family obligations/priorities
- Grief, loss, and family separation



# Best Practices for Supporting Family Preservation and Preventing Placement Breakdowns

# Child Welfare Best Practices: Guiding Principles



Center child safety,  
permanency, and  
well-being



Use a  
trauma-informed,  
culturally  
responsive lens



Engage and partner  
with families to build  
from their existing  
strengths, resources,  
and supports



Elevate youth voice  
and empowerment  
in the process

# The Value of Centering Youth Voice



**Improved Case Plans  
& Services**



**Increased  
Confidence & Skills**

**Enhanced Safety  
& Well-being**



**More  
Individualized &  
Responsive  
Services**



# Approaching Placement Challenges with a Strengths-Based Approach



**Empowers Families**



**Increases Engagement**



**Improves Outcomes**



**Supports Staff**

# Family Engagement Best Practices: Cultural Considerations



- Family hierarchy and authority
- Youth independence
- Emotional expression
- Direct vs. indirect communication
- Family roles
- Value of community and extended family
- Family boundaries and privacy
- Honor and shame
- Impact of trauma
- Professional interpretation and the use of cultural brokers

# Family Engagement Best Practices: Empowering Families Through Information

- ✓ U.S. laws: compulsory school attendance, labor laws, child abuse and neglect
- ✓ Responsibilities of the caregiver/sponsor
- ✓ Emergency/crisis resources and when to use them
- ✓ Roles and responsibilities of service providers
- ✓ Positive parenting practices
- ✓ Psychoeducation on grief, loss, adjustment, impacts of trauma



# Family Engagement Best Practices:



## Joint Conversations:

- Create **transparency**
- Allow you to **observe family dynamics**
- Ensure **consistent messaging** of education and information
- **Conflict resolution and mediation** strategies



## Individual Conversations:

- Allow each party to have a **voice**
- Opportunity to **assess individual needs and understanding** of information/education provided
- Help to identify areas of disagreement and conflict
- **Confidentiality** is paramount

# Family Engagement Best Practices:

Assessment Questions with the **Youth**, Caregiver, and Family

**T** Tell me about

**E** Explain

**D** Describe



**Tell me about** your aunt Valentina. How would you **describe** your relationship with her?

**Explain to me** how your aunt handles discipline when you or the other children act out or misbehave.



# Family Engagement Best Practices:

Assessment Questions with the Youth, Caregiver, and Family

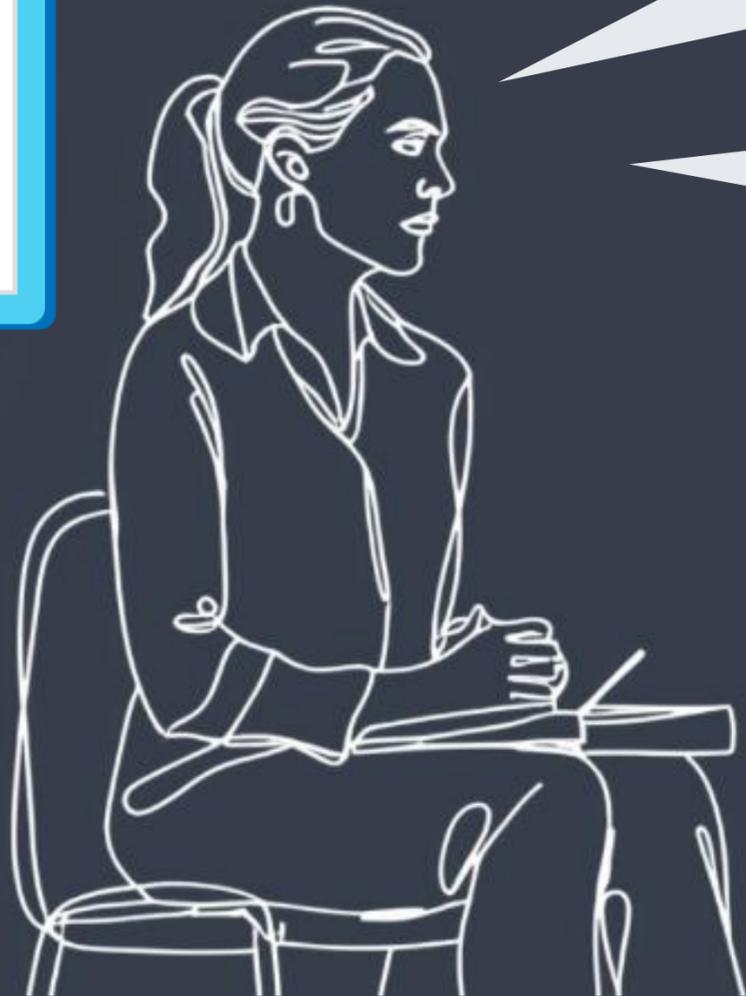
**T** Tell me about

**E** Explain

**D** Describe

**Tell me** a little bit about your niece Daniela. What are some of her strengths or positive qualities?

**Describe** to me your observations of how Daniela has been adjusting and feeling lately.



# Family Engagement Best Practices:



## Assessment Questions with the Youth, Caregiver, and Family

A blue clipboard with a white sheet of paper and a silver clip at the top. It contains three items:

- T** Tell me about
- E** Explain
- D** Describe



Valentina, what expectations do you have of Daniela? **Explain** the rules of the home.

Daniela, **tell us about** your expectations of Valentina – how can your aunt best support you?



# Family Engagement Best Practices: Assessment Questions with the Youth, Caregiver, and Family



## Preventing and Responding to Placement Breakdowns Involving Refugee & Newcomer Children and Youth: Considerations for Providers

Refugee and other ORR-eligible youth, especially those living with non-parent caregivers such as siblings, aunts, uncles, grandparents, or family friends, may experience unique placement challenges. Sometimes, these challenges lead to family conflict, unstable home environments, and even disruptions or breakdowns of the placement. **Challenges may include:**

- Increased complexities for non-parent caregivers: lack of prior relationship, differing expectations, family separation
- External stressors impacting home life and family relationships

**Shifting family roles**  
**Balancing heritage culture and U.S. culture**  
**Parenting in a new environment**  
**Impacts of trauma before and after arrival to the U.S.**  
**Financial strain**

### Supporting Newcomer Families Experiencing Conflict and Placement Instability

#### Guiding Principles

- Center child safety, permanency, and well-being
- Use a trauma-informed, culturally responsive lens
- Work collaboratively with families to build from their existing strengths, resources, and supports
- Ensure youth voice and perspectives guide the process

#### Strategies for Providers

- Assess concerns in joint and individual conversations
- Teach and model communication skills
- Guide the youth and caregiver to see one another's perspective
- Support development of mutually agreed upon solutions
- Provide education and discuss a safety plan with the family
- Connect the family to community supports

### Network of Services for ORR-eligible Children & Youth

#### ORR funded services & programs

##### Refugee Resettlement Agency Services

- Employment
- Preferred Communities intensive case management
- Refugee School Impact
- Youth mentoring

##### Unaccompanied Children's Services

- Post Release Services (PRS) case management

##### Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM)

- Specialized foster care for ORR-eligible youth

##### Refugee Youth Resource Center

- Resources and information for providers and families
- Case consultation and training for refugee-serving providers

#### OTIP funded services

##### Anti-trafficking Services

- Aspire case management for youth under 18
- Trafficking Victim Assistance Program (TVAP) for youth 18+

##### Extended community supports:

- School, legal, mental health, faith/religious community, cultural community leaders, child welfare prevention services, and others

**Find your local resettlement agency:**  
<https://acf.gov/orr/map/find-resources-and-contacts-your-state>

**Contact your State Refugee Coordinator:**  
<https://acf.gov/orr/grant-funding/key-state-contacts>

**Contact USCRI TVAP or Aspire:**  
<https://refugees.org/trafficking/>

**Request PRS for a former unaccompanied child:**  
<https://acf.gov/orr/outreach-material/office-refugee-resettlement-national-call-center>

**Request case consultation with the Refugee Youth Resource Center:**  
<https://www.refugee-youth.org/>

U.S. COMMITTEE FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS  
 Material was supported by Grant #9080054 from the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). Its contents are solely the responsibility of the U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants (USCRI) and do not necessarily represent the official views of ACF.

## Individual & Joint Conversations with Newcomer Children/Youth and Their Caregivers

### Assessment Questions with the Child/Youth

- Tell me how things have been going living with your caregiver. How have you been adjusting so far?
- Tell me a little bit about your caregiver. How would you describe your relationship with them?
- Now that you are here with your caregiver, what are your goals for the future? What matters most to you right now?
- How safe do you feel living in your home and community? Have there been any significant incidents or changes?
- How would you describe your relationship with the other household members?
- If there was ever an instance when you needed help, who is a trusted adult besides the caregiver who you could reach out to for support?
- Explain to me how your caregiver handles discipline, if you or the other children in the home misbehave?

### Assessment Questions with the Caregiver

- Tell me how things have been going with the child living in your home.
- Tell me a little bit about the child/youth. What should I know about them? What are some of the child/youth's strengths or positive qualities?
- How would you describe your relationship with the child/youth?
- Now that the child/youth is with you, what are your goals for the child/youth? When it comes to the child/youth, what matters most to you right now?
- How do you think the child/youth has been adapting and feeling lately? What are your observations of their mood?
- How would you describe the child/youth's behavior at home? At school? In the community?
- Explain how you handle behavioral challenges when they arise.

### Assessment Questions for the Joint Meeting

- What does the daily schedule look like in the home?
- What is the supervision plan?

What expectations do you (caregiver) have of the youth? What are the rules of the household?

What expectations do you (youth) have of the caregiver? How can the caregiver best support you?

There are some families who have others who support them in caring for children, such as supportive family and friends, religious or community connections. Who is that for you? What kind of support do they provide?

What resources are you already familiar with in your community?

Are there any current concerns or problems that you would like help with? (Anything that needs to be addressed urgently?)

At the end of services, how would you like things to be different compared to how they are now?

When you've been living here in the U.S. together, what have you been able to accomplish? What is working well?

What do you each love most about your family? What do you each think is your family's biggest strength?

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## When a Placement Isn't Working: Ensuring Safety and Identifying Alternatives

### Assessing the current placement:

If there are no child abuse, neglect or safety concerns, can the current placement be preserved?

**If not, support the family in considering the following:**

- Exploring other family/kinship ties:** Are there any other immediate relatives willing to care for the child?
- Exploring options with non-relatives:** Does the youth have other supports, such as family friends, neighbors, or members of the youth's faith or cultural community, who may be able to safely assume responsibility for their care and safety?

**If there are any safety concerns identified or reported:**

Report any suspected abuse, neglect, trafficking, exploitation, or abandonment to your local Child Protective Services

**If placement preservation or placement with a relative or non-relative is not possible:**

Facilitate care with **runaway and homeless youth (RHY) programs** including crisis shelters and longer-term options for transitional aged youth

Explore additional support through federally-funded programs (Preferred Communities, TVAP, URM, PRS, etc.) and other resources: school, basic needs services, faith/religious community, etc.

### Additional Considerations When Helping Families Explore Placement Options:

#### Assessing a New Caregiver's Willingness & Preparedness to Care for the Child/Youth

- Motivation to care for the child about the child joining the home
- Prior relationship
- Financial ability
- Caregiver and youth's expectations of one another
- Plans to enroll the child in school and access other services for them (medical, mental health, legal, recreational, transportation, other)
- Physical safety of home and planned sleeping arrangements
- Knowledge/understanding of child's unique needs and plan to meet those needs

#### Engaging the Youth Caregiver

- Education and conversations surrounding:
  - Roles and responsibilities
  - Youth and family's strengths and needs
  - Rules and expectations
- Parenting
- Resources available

**Supporting placement permanency and long-term stability for newcomer youth** involves facilitating systems of care to support the family; ongoing communication to build trust, resolve conflicts, and come to agreed upon solutions; and regular and revision of the youth and family's goals, case plan, and **safety plan**. **Centering youth voice** is critical in this process.

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# Family Engagement Best Practices: Safety Planning



## SAFETY PLAN

Our Plan for Safety, Stability, and Well-being

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**TRIGGERS**  
These are the situations or experiences that make me feel upset, stressed, or unsafe:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**WARNING SIGNS**  
These are signs (such as thoughts, feelings, behaviors, or things happening around me) when things are starting to become unsafe or escalate into a crisis:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**COPING STRATEGIES**  
These are things I can do to calm down, alleviate stress, distract myself from the problem, and make myself feel better (such as drawing, breathing techniques, listening to music, etc.):

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**SAFE PLACES**  
If I don't feel safe where I am, I can go to one of these safe places:

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**TRUSTED ADULTS**  
These are trusted adults who I can call to ask for help. They can help keep me safe.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Safety Plan for  
Older Children

## SAFETY PLAN

Our Plan for Safety, Stability, and Well-being

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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**COPING STRATEGIES** These are things I can do to calm down, alleviate stress, distract myself from the problem, and make myself feel better (such as drawing, breathing techniques, listening to music, etc.):

**SAFE PLACES** If I don't feel safe where I am, I can go to one of these safe places:

**TRUSTED ADULTS** These are trusted adults who I can call to ask for help. They can help keep me safe.

Safety Plan for Older  
Children Using Pictures

## SAFETY PLAN

Our Plan for Safety, Stability, and Well-being

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Draw yourself when you feel safe:**

**Draw yourself when you feel afraid or unsafe:**

Safety Plan for  
Younger Children

# Recap of Family Engagement Best Practices



Identify & address stressors as quickly as possible



Align & focus on shared goals and interests



Recognize the impact of trauma



Keep conversations solution-focused



Assess concerns in joint & individual conversations



Provide education & discuss a safety plan with the family



Connect the family with community supports



Conflict isn't always to be avoided. Clashes can be productive, stimulating learning, fostering understanding, and moving a relationship forward.

(Hart, 2006)





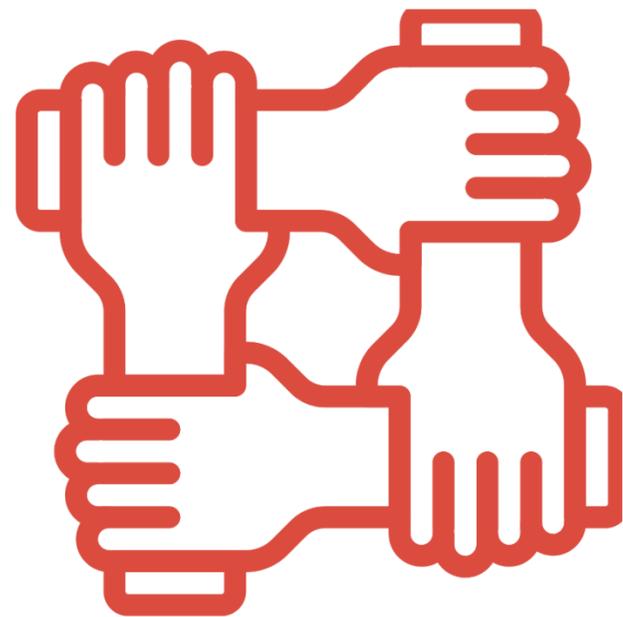
# Resources & Services for Families Experiencing Placement Instability

# Family Group Conferencing



- A collaborative meeting where a child's family, their support network, and professionals meet to create a plan for the child's **safety and well-being**
- Neutral facilitator guides the process, which is based on the principle that families are the **experts on their own lives** and can make the best decisions when given the right support
- Goal: To **empower** families to develop solutions and action plans, rather than having plans imposed by agencies

# Systems of Care



- A collaborative approach that **integrates services across multiple sectors**, such as behavioral health, education, and juvenile justice, to provide coordinated and comprehensive support to children and families
- Key components include **interagency collaboration**, a focus on a child's entire network, and a commitment to protecting families' rights
- Goal: To promote better outcomes through a **holistic, family-centered approach** that moves beyond reactive interventions and focuses on prevention



# Systems of Care for ORR-Eligible Youth

## ORR Funded Services and Programs

### Refugee Resettlement Agency Services

- Employment
  - Preferred Communities intensive case management
  - Refugee School Impact
  - Youth Mentoring
- 

### Unaccompanied Children's Services

- Post Release Services (PRS) case management
- 

### Refugee Youth Resource Center (RYRC)

- Resources & information for providers and families
  - Case consultation & training for refugee-serving providers
- 

### Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) Program

- Specialized foster care for ORR-eligible youth

## OTIP Funded Services and Programs:

### Anti-trafficking Services

- Aspire case management for youth under 18
  - Trafficking Victim Assistance Program (TVAP) for youth 18+
- 

### Extended community supports:

- School
- Legal
- Mental health
- Faith/religious community
- Cultural community leaders
- Child welfare prevention services
- Others



# Systems of Care for ORR-Eligible Youth

**Find your local resettlement agency:**

<https://acf.gov/orr/map/find-resources-and-contacts-your-state>

**Contact your State Refugee Coordinator:**

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# When a Placement Isn't Working: Ensuring Safety & Identifying Alternatives

# Helping Families Explore Placement Options



Assessing the current placement: If there are no child abuse, neglect, or safety concerns, can the current placement be preserved?

If not, consider the following:

- Exploring other family/kinship ties
  - Are there any other immediate relatives willing to care for the child?
- Exploring options with non-relatives
  - Does the child have other supports, such as family friends, neighbors, or members of the child's faith or cultural community, who may be willing and able to safely assume responsibility for their care and safety?
- Last resort: [runaway and homeless youth \(RHY\) programs](#) including crisis shelters and longer-term options (especially for transitional aged youth)



# Helping Families Explore Placement Options



## Assessing a New Caregiver's Willingness & Preparedness to Care for the Child:

- Prior relationship
- Motivation to care for the child
- Other household/family members' feelings about the child joining the home
- Physical safety of home and planned sleeping arrangements
- Financial ability
- Expectations of the child
- Plans to enroll the child in school and access other services for them (medical, mental health, legal, recreational, other)
- Knowledge/understanding of child's unique needs and plan to meet these needs

## Preparing the Youth & New Caregiver:

- Education and conversations surrounding:
- Roles and responsibilities
  - Rules and expectations
  - Youth and family's strengths and needs
  - Parenting
  - Resources available

# When Concerns about an Unstable Placement Warrant Mandated Reporting to CPS



- Physical or sexual abuse
- Domestic violence
- Emotional abuse (demonstrated mental injury)
- Neglect (failure to provide food, shelter, clothing, medical care)
- Trafficking or exploitation
- Abandonment

# Partnering with Child Welfare

- Explaining the need for an interpreter and cultural considerations
- Educating the family on the role of child welfare and what to expect
- Supporting the family in following through with requirements of the case
- Advocating for the child's needs and safety
- Following up and elevating up the chain when needed



***Important: All children, regardless of legal status, are entitled to child protective services, emergency medical care, and shelter if they are abused or neglected.***

# Supporting Placement Permanency & Long-Term Stability



- **Systems of care**, including service providers and extended family, community, and support networks
- Ongoing **communication** to build/maintain trust, resolve conflict, and come to agreed upon solutions
- Regular review and revision of the youth/family's **goals, case plan, and safety plan**
- **Legal guardianship**
  - A guardian is granted permanent care, custody, and control of the child, and assumes many of the rights and duties that customarily would reside with the child's parents ([Children's Bureau](#))



# Conclusion & Resources



## Discussion & Reflection: Key Takeaways

What is **one strategy or new piece of information** that you are taking away from this training that you will implement to support a refugee or newcomer youth/family you are currently working with?



# Questions?

Contact our **Refugee Youth Provider Helpline** for support navigating complex cases involving refugee youth:

[refugeeyouthproviderhelpline@refugees.org](mailto:refugeeyouthproviderhelpline@refugees.org)

**833-286-0864**

Learn more: <https://www.refugee-youth.org/helpline/>

# Resources



## **Safety Planning Guides and Templates:**

- [Refugee Youth Resource Center General Safety Plan Templates \(USCRI\)](#)
- [Safety Planning with Foreign National Children and Youth Survivors of Trafficking \(USCRI\)](#)
- [Introduction to Safety Planning \(Switchboard\)](#)
- [Low-Risk Safety Plan Template \(Switchboard\)](#)

## **Conflict Resolution and Strengthening Families:**

- [Preventing and Responding to Placement Breakdowns Involving Refugee & Newcomer Youth: Considerations for Providers \(USCRI\)](#)
- [Helping Refugee and Immigrant Families Stay Together \(BRYCS\)](#)
- [Raising Children in a New Country: A Toolkit for Working with Newcomer Parents \(BRYCS\)](#)
- [Strengthening Families Program, including handouts in English and Spanish](#)

## **Child Welfare:**

- [Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect \(Children's Bureau\)](#)
- [How can child protection agencies support families and children who lack lawful immigration status? \(Casey Family Foundation\)](#)
- [Refugees and the U.S. Child Welfare System: A Toolkit for Service Providers \(BRYCS\)](#)

## **Legal Guardianship:**

- [Kinship Care & the Child Welfare System \(Children's Bureau\)](#)
- [Kinship Guardianship as a Permanency Option \(Children's Bureau\)](#)
- [Guardianship Toolkit \(BRYCS\)](#)

# [refugee-youth.org](https://refugee-youth.org)



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## REFUGEE YOUTH RESOURCE CENTER



Improving outcomes for refugee children, youth, and their families through resources, education, and provider support



# Thank You!

**Contact Us:**

[refugeeyouthrc@refugees.org](mailto:refugeeyouthrc@refugees.org)

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