

Supporting Children and Families in Foster and Kinship Care

Building Safety, Connection, and Resilience

Children in foster or kinship care are surrounded by a network that includes foster and kinship caregivers, birth parents, child welfare professionals, health and developmental professionals, and early childhood educators. As part of this network, educators can offer consistent relationships, predictable experiences, and ongoing support.

High-quality early care can encourage resilience in children who faced adversity. Caring and responsive relationships and opportunities to develop adaptive skills can mitigate the effects of difficult experiences.

Partner With Families and Caregivers

Foster and kinship caregivers may carry significant responsibility for a child while having limited control over decisions made by child welfare and court systems. They may also be managing appointments, visitation, relationships with birth parents, and uncertainty about permanency plans.

ECE professionals can support caregivers with information and a consistent point of contact. When appropriate, collaboration with birth parents and other professionals can also create greater continuity around the child. Their experiences should not define them or determine what educators expect of them.

Practical Strategies

- Listen to caregivers and value what they know about the child.

- Share observations on the child's development, relationships, and care experiences.
- Communicate strategies that appear to help the child feel safe and regulated.
- Anticipate that visits, separations, and transitions may affect the child.
- Collaborate with relevant professionals like child welfare, early intervention, early childhood special education, and health.

Build Responsive Relationships

Relationships are vital tools for early childhood educators. A caring, secure relationship can buffer the effects of trauma, promote resilience, and help children regulate emotions, attention, arousal, and behavior.

Children can develop attachments to multiple people. Being a reliable, nurturing adult doesn't compete with foster, kinship, or birth parents but provides another experience of a dependable, responsive adult.

Practical Strategies

- Respond consistently to children's cues and needs.
- Offer comfort and reassurance when children are distressed.
- Make time for individual attention and interaction.
- Be emotionally and physically available when children seek help.
- When possible, provide a consistent primary caregiver within the ECE setting.

Create Stability and Predictability

Children in foster and kinship care often face instability. **Stability** offers consistent relationships, resources, and support, while **predictability** helps children anticipate daily events. Predictable routines and relationships give children a sense of mastery and safety, freeing them to explore, build relationships, and learn, addressing their needs rather than just age.

Practical Strategies

- Maintain consistent daily routines.
- Prepare children for transitions.
- Use visual schedules when helpful.
- Inform children of staff changes.
- Explain staff absences or changes rather than expecting them to adjust.

Help Children Know They Matter

Mattering is the experience of feeling valued and knowing each person has value to contribute. For young children, this sense develops through everyday interactions with adults who see them, understand them, respond to them, and delight in them. ECE programs can become places where children reliably experience safety and recognition.

Practical Strategies

- Give children moments of focused, individual attention.
- Notice and respond to their attempts to communicate.
- Listen and show interest in their ideas and experiences.
- Express delight in their presence and accomplishments.
- Engage in responsive “serve and return” interactions.

Be A Co-Regulating Partner

Young children learn regulation through relationships. Children who have experienced trauma or high levels of stress may need adults to help regulate their emotions, attention, arousal, and behavior more frequently and more intensely. When a child is overwhelmed, connection and regulation come before teaching or problem-solving.

Support The Educator, Too

Working with trauma-affected children and families can trigger strong emotions like protectiveness, frustration, sadness, helplessness, or judgment. Prolonged exposure may lead to secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue. Being aware of responses, maintaining well-being, setting healthy boundaries, and seeking supervision help educators stay responsive and emotionally available.

Additional Resources

[The Importance of Stability](https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resource-guides/guide-toxic-stress/)
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resource-guides/guide-toxic-stress/>

[Universal Baby Cherokee](https://vimeo.com/168985892)
<https://vimeo.com/168985892>

Content contributed by: Michele Fallon

For more information, visit www.inclusivechildcare.org.
Copyright © 2026 Center for Inclusive Child Care

These materials may be freely reproduced for educational purposes. Information in this tip sheet has been modified from multiple sources.

Funding provided by [Greater Twin Cities United Way 80x3-Resilient from the Start](#).

