



# SUCCESSFUL CONNECTIONS TO SCHOOL AND WORK

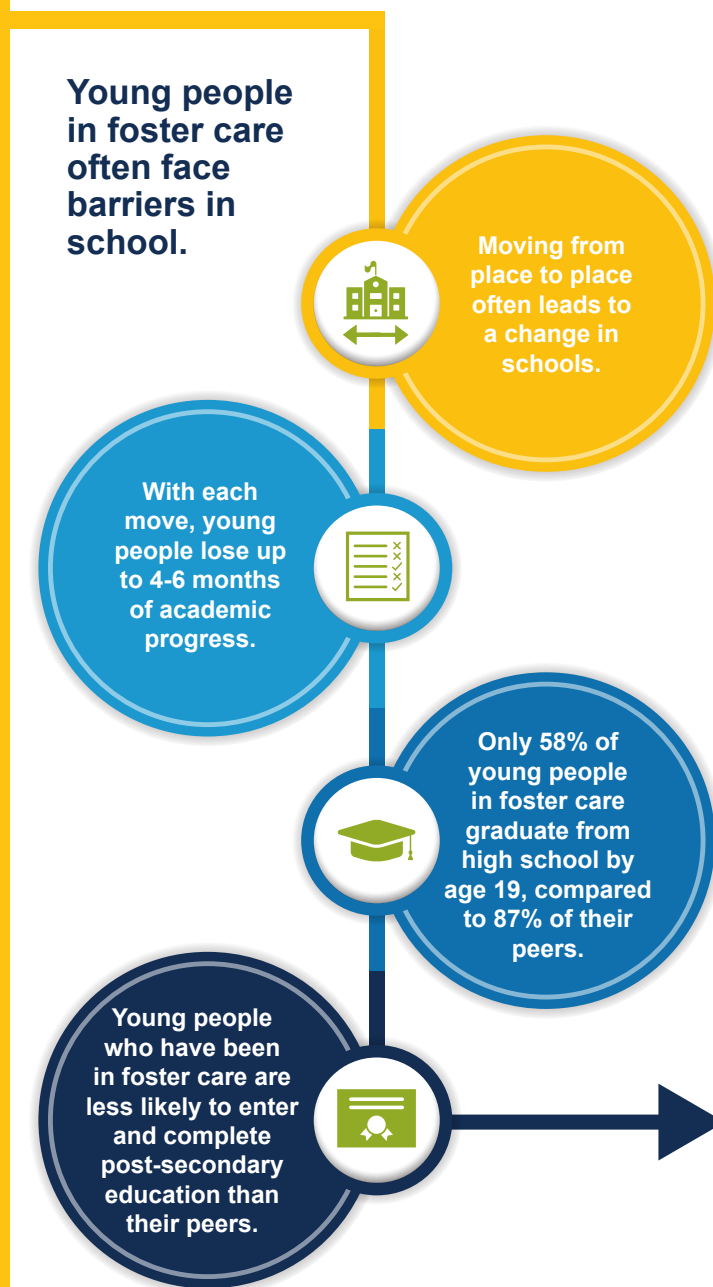


## What Caregivers, Child Welfare Professionals and Other Caring Adults Can Do:

- Ensure school stability to help young people succeed academically and maintain critical connections to teachers and friends. Work with child welfare and education systems to ensure effective implementation of the foster care provisions of the Every Student Succeeds Act.
- Help young people prepare for post-secondary education and/or training while they are in high school. Talk with teachers and counselors about academic progress and needs, and with young people early and often about academic goals.
- Support youth-driven case planning and decision making. The Strengthening Families Act requires child welfare agencies to involve youth in case planning beginning at age 14 and allows them to include individuals who are not part of the system in the process. This is a great way to encourage youth to identify people important to them who can become part of their support network.
- Work with students early to understand the full cost of attending school and the financial resources they may have. Help them learn about scholarships, loans, grants and other benefits, including the federal TRIO program, independent student status on the FAFSA, Chafee Education and Training Vouchers and campus-based student support programs. Practice saving money and financial planning in a supportive environment.
- Support young people in participating in age-appropriate enrichment, extracurricular, social and cultural activities.
- Help young people attain a first job that matches their skills and interests, such as babysitting, managing a garage sale or working in customer service. These jobs provide opportunities to take on responsibility, learn about earning and saving money and contribute to the community.
- Connect young people with workforce resources and professionals from diverse fields that allow them to develop skills, build meaningful relationships and explore strengths and passions. Explore Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs targeted at youth in your community and take advantage of opportunities to ensure that these programs meet the needs of youth in foster care.
- Help young people find their spark! Expose them to many professions and education pathways to find the right fit. Encourage them to volunteer in areas of interest and help them to identify their own strengths to match education and career options.
- Create peer learning opportunities where young people can share education and career resources they have identified. This fosters a sense of belonging and reciprocity.
- Support young people in cultivating and maintaining positive relationships with co-workers and supervisors in early work experiences to connect with as references and supports for the future.
- Help young people develop important soft skills like communication. Discuss what it might be like to encounter conflict in school or the workplace and how to manage that. Provide a nonjudgmental space to share and troubleshoot social skill development.
- Create action plans with young people to ensure school and work success. Use mechanisms like text message reminders, color coding planners and calendar or alarm apps. Create incentives for developing and reaching short- and long-term goals.

Learn more by downloading the full paper, *The Road to Adulthood: Aligning Child Welfare Practice With Adolescent Brain Development*, at [www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood](http://www.aecf.org/resources/the-road-to-adulthood).

## Young people in foster care often face barriers in school.



## DID YOU KNOW?

Participation in **extended foster care** has been shown to help young people graduate from high school, particularly for **youth of color**.



Nationally, only about 10 percent of all young people ages 16 to 24 years old are unemployed. But the unemployment rate for young people aging out of foster care is **47 percent to 69 percent**, depending on age and gender.

**The Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative works to ensure all young people who have experienced foster care have the necessary resources and opportunities to excel academically and be economically secure.**

Preparing young people to successfully pursue their aspirations for postsecondary education and career first requires the adults in their lives to support them in finishing high school or earning an equivalent credential. This is critical for all young people, but youth in foster care often face multiple barriers to completing high school and are often unsupported in further goals. Institutional racism and biased practices in child welfare and educational systems create even more barriers for young people of color in foster care to succeed in their education and careers.

All young people learn, grow and succeed within the context of trusting and supportive relationships, which can expose them to financial and educational resources, career opportunities and support in applying for college and jobs. Relationships help build soft skills in communication and conflict resolution, professionalism, navigating social pressures and prioritizing responsibilities that are still developing during adolescence.

Navigating the path to college and career is difficult. All young people experience self-doubt, but young people in foster care may face additional stressors. Because they are often separated from loving relationships, they may not have a safe, supportive place to talk about issues they are facing. They also may not have supportive adults they can depend on to celebrate accomplishments or have a trusting conversation. It is critical for child welfare professionals and other supportive adults to normalize this developmental process and to help young people connect with peers, process challenges, navigate relationships with friends and family and build social capital outside of child welfare systems. Supportive adults must affirm strengths and encourage young people to pursue their aspirations. Lessons from the field show that even if a young person takes a break from college, they are more likely to re-enter and complete additional semesters if they remain connected to a supportive adult.

Authentically partnering with young people to solve problems and explore the future provides opportunities for them to develop skills and strengthen their sense of self-efficacy. Because many young people often experience and internalize the stigma of being in foster care,

supportive adults must set expectations for success. This can be done through empathetic listening, celebrating big and small accomplishments and providing safe space for young people to practice, fail, reflect and try again. Use motivational interviewing techniques and solution-focused questions to explore their aspirations: What are you passionate about? What do you think you're good at? What do you want to learn? What impact do you want to have on the world?

At the time when most students are planning for college, students in foster care are faced with the challenge of planning transition to independence. Exploring and considering postsecondary options often falls to the wayside and may feel unrealistic for students who are concerned about where they will be living after high school graduation. Supportive adults can bring the postsecondary conversation to young people early in high school and help build it into transition planning.

It is important to recognize that young people who have experienced foster care can succeed in education and at work. These young people are resilient. They've often learned to adapt to new and unfamiliar environments, to be resourceful, to protect and provide for themselves and to manage complex situations. Opportunities abound for adolescents to build on these strengths and develop the necessary skills for success.

Meet young people where they are developmentally. Recognize that young people who have experienced foster care often need unique types of support to be ready for college and career.



**REWIRING FOR GROWTH:**

**Transforming Conversations about Education and Employment**

**When a young person says:**

School is pointless. **I've moved around so much** there's no way I can finish on time now.

**The young person may mean:**

**I am overwhelmed** by what it will take to graduate. I can't do it on my own, but I don't want to ask for help.

**Or:**

I want to stay in school, but I **can't handle this amount of stress.**

**Instead of responding this way:**

**You need to figure it out.** Graduating is important and key to getting a job to support yourself.

**Caring adults can say:**

You have a lot of skills to help you through this situation. Graduating is a new challenge. **When you have worked through difficult issues in the past, what has helped you?**

**Or:**

I can imagine it feels overwhelming. Let's talk about priorities and think about your end goal. **What do you dream of doing? We can make a plan together to get there.**

**Every interaction with a young person matters. Make yours count!**

This is just one example of what a young person in foster care might say about keeping up with school or work — and what might be underneath their words. You can respond in a way that strengthens your relationship, promotes healing and growth and supports skill development in areas such as self-awareness and self-regulation.