



## Kinship & Alternate Care Awareness Week 2023: Day 2

### Relationships

Broad kinship engagement is important throughout child welfare service delivery to ensure best outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities. Early and ongoing family search and engagement, and the development of broad kinship networks, keeps children and youth connected and improves outcomes. Where possible, reunification remains to be the paramount principle in service delivery. The relationship built with alternative care providers is a journey and a collaboration that requires transparency from both service provider and the home. The Anishnaabe Seven Grandfather teachings premise the work that alternative care providers are to exhibit: bravery, truth, humility, wisdom, honesty, respect and love. The Heart and Spirit Home Study is formulated on these teachings.

### **Spotlight: Family Preservation, Kin Connections & Engagement Network**

The Provincial Family Preservation, Kin Connections and Engagement Work Group meets quarterly to discuss best practices for family engagement and connections for children and youth across the province.

The group's philosophy is one of family preservation first, with a goal to integrate collaborative family engagement practices into day-to-day work, ensure that all workers appreciate their role in that work, and connect the work to legislation, including the Child and Youth Family Services Act in Ontario, Child Protection Standards, and An Act Respecting First Nation, Inuit, and Métis Children Youth and Families.

Collectively, the group sees children and youth coming into care as a risk to their safety and well-being because of the disconnection it can create from their family, community, and culture. The group considers solutions to barriers to engaging family and making and supporting connections, with the hope of preventing children from coming into care and remaining with their families and their communities, where possible.

We know that practices have disempowered families and contributed to the overrepresentation of First Nation, Inuit, and Métis, Black and racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ families, children, and youth in our system. We aim to shift our practice towards collaborative engagement, planning, and decision-making, and incorporating the risks our system poses to families into our assessment.

We recognize that the definition of family goes beyond biology, and that supportive networks include many people and relationships who wraparound children, youth, and families. Our goal is that the network of support around a family is chosen by them and incorporates lifelong, sustainable connections that are not dependent on having an open file in the child welfare system.

For children and youth who require out of home care, we promote meaningful, **consistent** and active connections to their parents, families, communities and culture, along with [cultural plans](#). It is vital that there be interagency protocols in place to ensure this consistency when there is an agency transfer or more than one agency involved in a child or youths care.

For more information and to discuss how to connect with this group, contact Tabitha Mercer at [Tabitha.Mercer@durhamcas.ca](mailto:Tabitha.Mercer@durhamcas.ca).

### **Family Search & Engagement – Tools & Strategies**

The following are practical tools and resources to apply in daily practice to expand support networks and promote lifelong family and community connections:

#### **GENOGRAMS**

A genogram is a graphic representation of a family tree that displays detailed data on relationships among individuals. Depending on your agency and which genogram software is being used, you can build out your family tree electronically using one of many genogram software programs such as GenoPro. A question you may want to ask yourself when developing a genogram is, when we are working with a family, how much do we know about their story, their extended family, their community, and non-relatives? The hope is to build genograms that extend into multiple generations on each side of the family tree, both paternal and maternal.

Please note that learning about genograms and/or the development of a genogram may be triggering for direct service staff. It is critical for organizations to have a plan

in place for staff who may be experiencing distress, including timely access to pertinent mental health supports and resources.

Link: [How to make a family tree - YouTube](#)

## **MOBILITY MAPPING**

This tool is used to help children and youth recall their earliest memories, and to draw a picture of their first home that they remember living in. Next, the worker asks the child or youth questions to encourage them to rediscover people and places from past to present.

Link: [How to make a mobility map - YouTube](#)

## **CONNECTEDNESS MAP**

The Connectedness Map is a technique used to explain the connections or lack of connections of a child or youth by showing family members and others. The map can be completed with a child or youth and is a tool that is quick and easy to complete.

Link: [How to make a connectedness map - YouTube](#)

## **TREE OF LIFE**

The “Tree of Life” uses the tree as a metaphor to tell stories about one's life. Families, youth, and children are invited to think of a tree, its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, etc., and imagine that each part of the tree represents something about their life.

Link: [Tree of Life - YouTube](#)

## **CIRCLES OF TRUST**

The purpose of circles of trust is to visualize what role friends or families have in a person's life to determine their intimate, close, or distant friends and families. The Circles of Trust make relationships visual and can be used with children, youth, or adults.

Link: [Circles of Trust Tool - YouTube](#)

## **THREE HOUSES**

This tool provides a way to have a conversation with a child or youth around good things, their worries, and hopes and dreams.

Link: [Three Houses tool – YouTube](#)

## ECOMAP

An ecomap shows the complex system that a person is involved within their life, and highlights with arrows the output of energy to each source, i.e., whether more energy is given, received, or a reciprocal amount of energy is shared.

Link: [How to make an ecomap – Bing video](#)

## CULTURALGRAMS

A culturalgram is a strengths-based, empowering method to understand how cultural identity manifests for a person individually.

Links: [Culturagrams – Social Work \(weebly.com\)](#)

[The Social Work Podcast: Visual Assessment Tools: The Culturagram – Interview with Dr. Elaine Congress](#)

## ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a responsibility. Every contact is an opportunity to have a conversation with the family, child, and youth about relatives and non-relatives in their community, network, or family. The conversation should never stop after one conversation; instead, engagement is a process and takes time. It is important to keep having conversations with families, youth, and children, even when families are initially reluctant to include their network.

Strategies for engaging the child or youth:

- Be mindful of developmental stage
- Allow the child or youth to take the lead
- Work with the child or youth at their convenience

Tips/Examples for Workers:

- Ask yourself what is holding you back from asking questions around their network, or why you aren't engaging networks.
- Avoid simply asking the family, children, and youth direct questions, e.g., asking for a list of "supports" or "who can care for your child." Instead, engage in conversations about their family tree, culture, and community.
- Examples of open-ended questions to explore their network:



- Who are the people that have stuck with you at your best and worst moments in your life?
- Who is someone in your life that you can call on or depend on in a time of crisis?
- If there was an important celebration to you, who would you want there to be to celebrate with you?

### Resources

A [library guide](#) has been developed to offer resources, tools, and support to child welfare workers about family search and engagement, and kinship and alternate care, and offer resources for kinship/alternate caregivers.

### Training for Agencies/Staff

If you or your organization are seeking to expand your family engagement strategies, training is available to inform and shift practice. Read more [here](#). For training inquiries, email [360FamilyEngagement@facswaterloo.org](mailto:360FamilyEngagement@facswaterloo.org).

