

WRAP GUIDE



TENNESSEE
KIDS BELONG[™]
THE AMERICA'S KIDS BELONG FAMILY



TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is a WRAP Team?	1
Why Foster/Adopt/Kinship Families need support?	2
WRAP Team Structure	4
What Does It Look Like To Wrap Around A Foster Family?	5
Understanding Kids in Foster Care	6
Types of Foster Care	9
For Faith-Based Wrap Teams	10
Talking To Your Kids About Foster Care	12

WHAT IS A WRAP TEAM?

WRAP Teams “wrap around” kinship and foster families to provide practical, hands-on support to help them foster longer and stronger. The type of support is defined in collaboration with the family, in response to their unique situation and needs, but can include a wide range of support.

Not everyone is called to be a foster or adoptive parent, but everyone is called to care!



WHY FOSTER/ADOPT/KINSHIP FAMILIES NEED SUPPORT?



Kinship and Foster Care Create Lifestyle Changes

When families say yes to fostering they often are saying yes to taking on one or more children on a moment's notice, usually under traumatic circumstances.

Foster parents often are co-parenting with the child's biological parent(s), communicating and visiting with them to help facilitate successful reunification.

The Commitments Involve More Than Providing A Home

In addition to building a trusted relationship with the bio family, foster parents juggle myriad meetings and check-ins with case workers, healthcare providers and other specialists based on the child's specific circumstances and needs, in addition to ongoing training requirements.

It requires a different approach to parenting.

Kids in foster care and those who have experienced adoption need parents who understand and are equipped to help kids heal from trauma and loss. A lot of time and intention must be given to gaining trust, building attachment, and providing a balance of nurture and structure to promote healing and experience belonging.

Your WRAP support gives foster and adoptive parents more time to invest in relationships with children and caring for themselves to stay healthy for the long haul.

WHY FOSTER/ADOPT/KINSHIP FAMILIES NEED SUPPORT? *(continued)*

Your WRAP support also strengthens the foster care system.

Nationally, as many as 50% of foster parents quit after the first year. Adopting and changes in family circumstances are two common reasons; but there are other preventable reasons foster parents quit. Many feel inadequately supported and resourced. One report from the National Foster Parent Association showed that “struggles dealing with stress” and “difficulty processing grief and loss” were among the top reasons given. (<https://fostercare.team/foster-parent-turnover>)

When good foster parents quit, children in foster care suffer.

A big reason for multiple placements for kids in foster care is high turnover rates among foster parents. Every time a kid in foster care is placed into a new foster home, they lose emotional, relational, and often academic stability. Continued severed relationships among important adults in their lives continue patterns of trauma and cause setbacks in forming trust.

Losing so many foster parents annually hampers states’ already burdened foster care systems. Even significant recruiting gains are not net gains if within a year many of these foster families are no longer active. This places enormous burden on the morale and performance of case workers who also have significant turnover rates.

The loss of foster parents stunts foster care itself.

The culture of success and wisdom gained collectively through experience suffers greatly in foster care when good foster parents call it quits too soon. Faith communities are filled with loving families, many of whom would be phenomenal foster parents! If they don’t have the proper emotional, financial, relational, and spiritual support they will likely become another sobering attrition statistic.

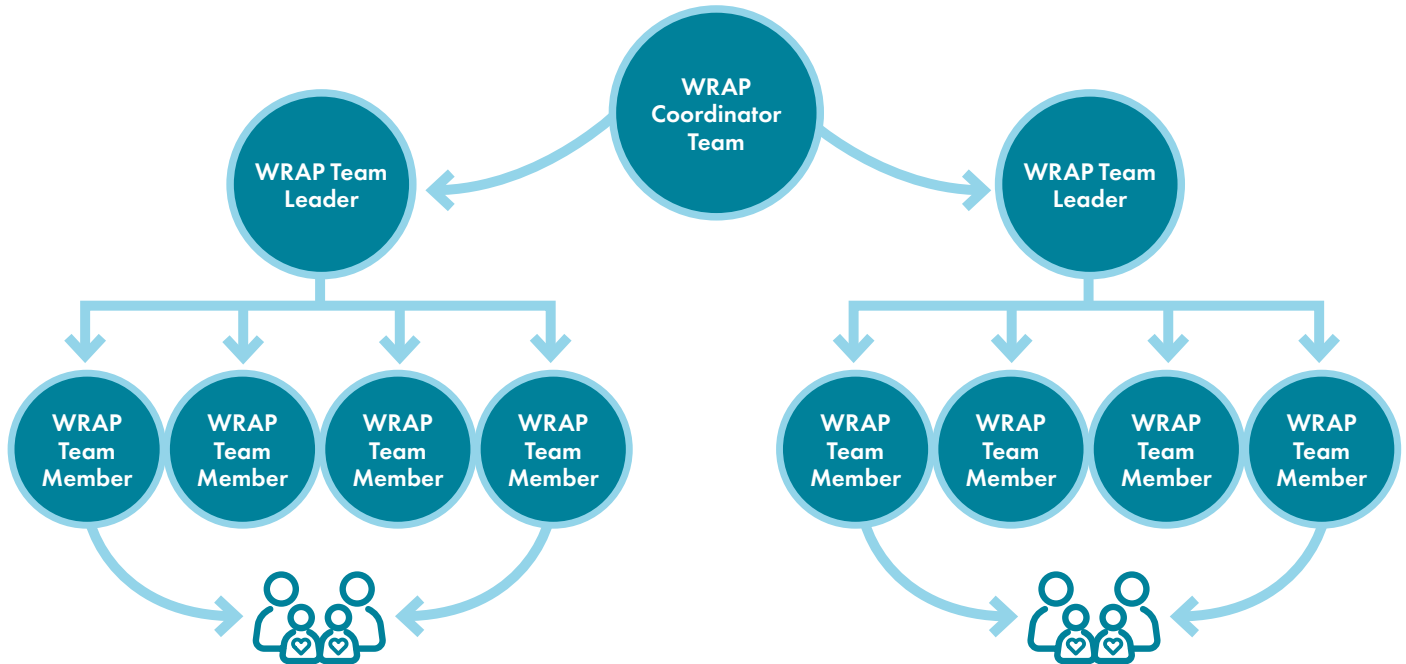
The Solution: The Faith Community & WRAP Around!

Your faith community has a unique array of built-in supports, assets, and strengths that when harnessed could provide a game-changing solution to help foster parents stay the course. That starts by wrapping around foster and adoptive families—**one family at a time!**



WRAP TEAM STRUCTURE

While it's possible to gather your tribe and start a WRAP team organically to support one family, we recommend engaging a community or faith organization to seed teams to serve multiple area kinship and foster families. This is an approach best suited to a team structure.



Each Foster/Adoptive Family is matched with its own WRAP Team

Teams include a team leader and team members. Each leader and member chooses to serve at least once a month in the following way: **W - words of encouragement, R - respite, A - acts of service, P - prayer**

1. WRAP Team Leader

- ✓ The Primary contact with the Foster/Adoptive Family weekly or monthly to discuss needs, receive updates and prayer requests
- ✓ Email WRAP Team and WRAP Coordinator weekly/monthly updates, always offering encouragement for action and gratitude
- ✓ Communicate with WRAP Coordinators any concerns or additional support needed, or when a team member is no longer able to serve

2. WRAP Team

- ✓ Receives a weekly or monthly email from their Team Leader and provides support
- ✓ Support the Foster/Adoptive Family at least once a month: WRAP!
- ✓ Remains flexible and communicates well and briefly with Foster/Adoptive Family while serving
- ✓ Communicates with Team Leader any updates

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO WRAP AROUND A FOSTER FAMILY?

The first and most important guideline is to allow the family you seek to serve to define what type of support and at what frequency would be most helpful to them.

General Guidelines For Supporting A Foster Family Well

- ✓ Protect privacy and confidentiality.
 - » Do not ask kids or foster parents specifics about their fostering situations. Anything you do learn about a child in foster care or the foster family must be held in confidence. If there is any concern, talk to your supervisor and/or WRAP coordinators.
 - » Do not take photographs of the foster family or children/youth or post or share photos online or via email.
 - » Do not exchange contact information with the kids, only with the adult caregivers.
- ✓ Refrain from gift-giving to specific children unless planned ahead of time with the foster parent. We don't want to single a child out unless it is for a special occasion and with the parents' consent. Wrap Teams are serving the entire family.
- ✓ Follow "safe touch" suggestions. Do not initiate touching a child (pats on arm, back or head, hand-holding or hugs). It is okay to respond to child's initiation of appropriate touch within reason, for example fist bumps and high fives are positive and safe ways to show affirmation.
- ✓ Be specific in the ways you can help support the foster family. Instead of a vague statement like "let me know when we can help," say something like, "When is your next court date? Can I help with the kids that day?" Here are some other examples:
 - » **Instead of:** You sure have your hands full! Wish I could help somehow.
Say: I make a really great chicken soup. Can I bring you dinner on Tuesday or Friday?
 - » **Instead of:** I'd love to help. Call me if there is anything I can do.
Say: I love to do laundry. What day can I come and pick up the kids' laundry and do it for you?"
 - » **Instead of:** Let us know if there is something we can do to help.
Say: We want to give you a date night. What time can we come over on Saturday to watch the kids?

Specific Ways To Serve A Foster Family

When A Child Moves In

- ✓ Organize meals for the first two weeks, delivered in disposable containers with paper plates, cups and utensils
- ✓ Donate staples such as socks, underwear, diapers, etc.
- ✓ Deliver a basket of pre-packaged, healthy snacks
- ✓ Prepare a sensory box as a gift for the child/family
- ✓ Make a "cuddle kit" with a new blanket, a pillow, nightlight and plush toy
- ✓ Provide new pajamas, a fun toothbrush and toothpaste
- ✓ Recruit friends to write welcome cards you can mail to the child
- ✓ Monogram a cup, water bottle, lunchbox or other useful item with the child's first name

When A Child Is Moving Out

- ✓ Provide a new duffel bag, suitcase or storage container to help the family pack up the child's belongings
- ✓ Offer to put together an album of pictures for the child to take with him or her
- ✓ Recruit friends to write letters of encouragement for the child to take and open daily during their transition

General Ideas

- ✓ Offer to mow the family's lawn
- ✓ Help with school supplies, holiday and birthday gifts or seasonal items like summer/winter gear
- ✓ Prepare activity bags for the kids to take with them on court days
- ✓ Gift the family a membership to a fun destination like the zoo or children's museum
- ✓ Sponsor the child's extracurricular activity

UNDERSTANDING KIDS IN FOSTER CARE

According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Institute trauma may look like:

- ✓ Hyperactivity or hypervigilance
- ✓ Increased medical problems
- ✓ Problems with boundaries
- ✓ Oppositional behavior
- ✓ Self-destructive behavior
- ✓ Difficulties with focusing or regulation
- ✓ Sleep disturbances
- ✓ Social isolation
- ✓ Poor motor skills
- ✓ Flat affect or shut down state of being
- ✓ Anger and/or aggression
- ✓ Reenactment of past trauma experiences
- ✓ Altered perception of reality
- ✓ Withdrawn or distant



We should view behavior as the language of unmet needs.

- ✓ Not all defiant actions and attitudes are truly willful.
- ✓ Regulating emotions and impulses are difficult for those with history of trauma.
- ✓ A quiet, crying, complaining, or controlling child may have sensory issues, become dehydrated quicker, or process information slower.

Be patient, graceful and nonjudgmental with kids in foster care and the families that care for them. Parenting kids with trauma histories may look different than you expect.

UNDERSTANDING KIDS IN FOSTER CARE *(continued)*

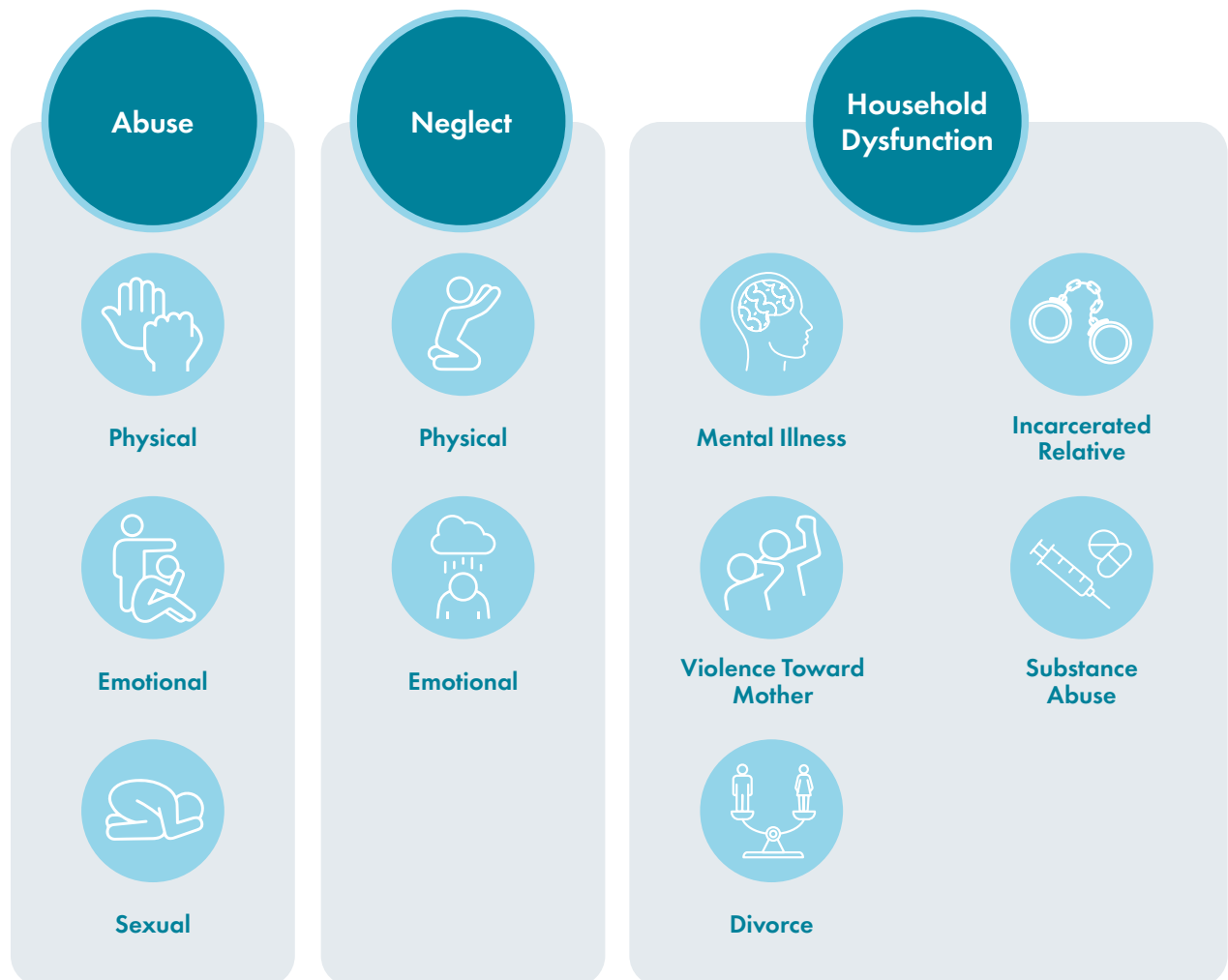
The following two pages of information is just a small piece of a much larger conversation surrounding trauma, toxic stress, grief and loss—all of which are experienced to one degree or another—by kids in foster care. **For a free Trauma Awareness Course, visit [BelongUniversity.com](https://www.belonguniversity.com).** This course builds both empathy and skills for kids and families involved in foster care.

Understanding Kids in Foster Care

Children placed in foster care may have different pasts, behaviors, and thought patterns than children from safe, stable backgrounds. It's good to have a basic understanding of the impact trauma can have as you serve Foster/Adoptive Families and the children in their care.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

A child's ACE number plays a significant role in the way children behave, process information, and develop. Children in foster care typically have much higher scores than other children. Each Adverse Childhood Experience equals a traumatic incident. The number of these experiences (ACE traumas) is directly related to the amount of healing in which a child will need.



UNDERSTANDING KIDS IN FOSTER CARE *(continued)*

The Words We Use Matter

What we call someone or something can change what we think and feel about that person or thing. We want to use accurate and honoring language when we discuss fostering and adoption. By speaking the truth in a loving way, we can dispel negative connotations and dismiss myths. As we represent such a sensitive issue and reality, let's represent it in the most honoring and accurate way.



DON'T Say	DO Say
Foster kids	Kids in foster care
Orphan	Kids eligible for adoption
Real parent/Natural parent	Birth parent/Biological parent
Own child/Real child	Birth child
Adopted child/Own child	My/Your Child
Adoptee	Person/Individual who was adopted
Illegitimate	Born to unmarried parents
Give away/Adopt out/Give up/Put up	Make an adoption plan/Choose adoption
To keep the baby	To parent the baby/Child
Adoptable child/Unwanted child	Child in need of a family
Handicapped child/Hard to place	Child who has special needs
Giving away your child	Choosing an adoption plan
Putting your child up for adoption	Finding a family to parent your child
Closed adoption	Confidential adoption
Unwanted/Problem pregnancy	Unintended pregnancy

TYPES OF FOSTER CARE

Caring for children in foster care falls into five major categories.

1. Fostering

A family (individual, couple, or family with/without children) licensed by the state who opens their home temporarily to a child until they are reunited with their biological family. This includes respite foster homes.

2. Foster-to-Adopt

A licensed foster family is placed with a child from foster care who's biological parents have had termination of their parental rights (TPR) by the court and are legally free for adoption. The family starts off as a foster family, but the intent is to legally adopt the child(ren).

3. Therapeutic Foster Home

Therapeutic foster parents go through a higher level of training to care for children with "specialized" needs (significant medical conditions or a mental health diagnosis).

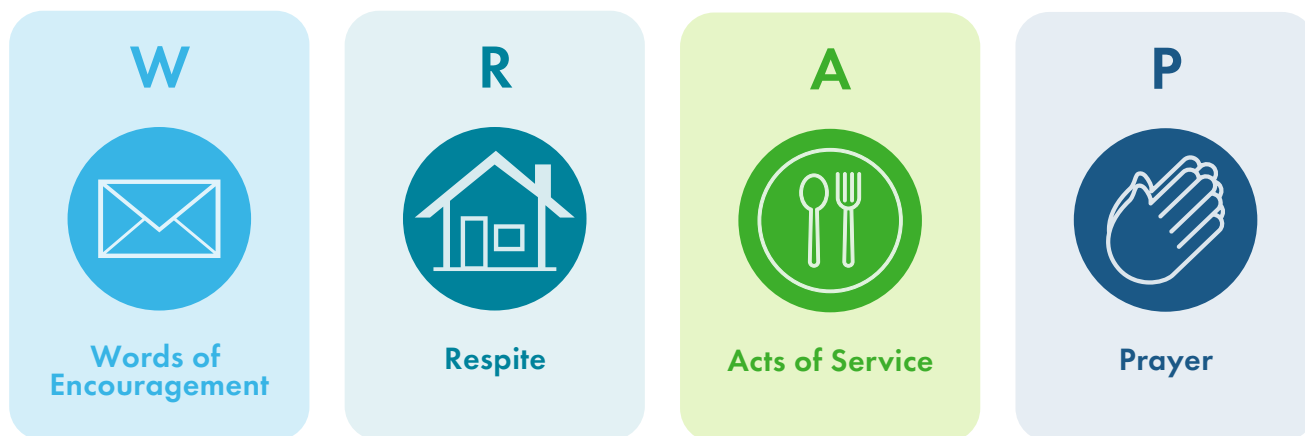
4. Kinship Care

When children are removed from their home, government workers first try to find a reliable relative or someone close to the child who can take the children into custody instead of having to place the children with a foster family they don't know.



FOR FAITH-BASED WRAP TEAMS

Wrap Teams started as a faith-based outreach and stood for:



If your team is faith-based here are some ways you can serve families in your community well.

Words of Encouragement

- ✓ Write a note, blessing or prayer to your foster family encouraging them on their journey.
- ✓ Recognize special occasions and send cards for birthdays, holidays, etc.
- ✓ Send a gift card to a family destination or restaurant.

Respite Care

An offer to provide respite care should not happen until the child has had time to adjust to their family. Here are some tips for offering respite to a foster family:

- ✓ Be sure you know and can maintain the family's house rules while the child is in your care. Consistency is important.
- ✓ Provide childcare for a few hours, either taking the child for an afternoon or babysitting for an evening so the parents can have a date night.
- ✓ Offer to take their kids with yours. "I'm taking my kids to the park today. Can I take your kids too?"
- ✓ Offer to help one child with homework so the parent can spend time with the other kids.

Acts of Service

Start with the family's needs, but also consider your special skills and talents. Here are some examples.

- ✓ "I'm headed to the store tomorrow. Can I pick up anything for you this week?"
- ✓ "I have a few hours free. Can I help you do something around the house?"
- ✓ "I'd like to give you a night off cooking. May I bring you dinner this week?"
- ✓ Be on call to gather supplies when the family receives a placement.

Prayer

- ✓ Pray Scripture daily for the family.
- ✓ Pray protection of the marriage and children and that the child will build trust with the foster family.
- ✓ Pray for spiritual eyes to see, for truth to be revealed and for ears attuned to His voice.
- ✓ Pray for endurance to continue and support to surround the family.
- ✓ Pray for the healing of wounds and strength, patience, grace and understanding of the child's trauma.

FOR FAITH-BASED WRAP TEAMS *(continued)*

Child Welfare Pray...

- ✓ for their ability to connect children and families with services and supplies they need
- ✓ for wisdom to handle all of the changing demands
- ✓ for safety and health to continue doing their jobs well
- ✓ for grace and strength to handle all of the moving pieces in their caseloads
- ✓ that they will stay well connected to the children on their caseloads
- ✓ for their personal relationships, marriages, family, health, and work life/balances

Kids in Foster Care Pray...

- ✓ that they will feel loved and cared for and not be fearful
- ✓ for them to feel a sense of belonging in a foster family, a church, a group of friends and in their community
- ✓ for them to receive the services and resources they need to thrive
- ✓ that God would lead them as they work through their trauma
- ✓ for their birth families to heal and be supported so they can reunite with their children

Foster Families Pray...

- ✓ for patience and creativity as they parent the kids in their homes well.
- ✓ that their homes would be a healing environment
- ✓ for provision for their tangible needs, that they will have connections to helpful resources
- ✓ for endurance and encouragement as they work with the system and care for children
- ✓ that they would have soft hearts and be open to supporting birth families and reunification

Youth That Aged Out Pray...

- ✓ for community to see them and surround them
- ✓ for their basic needs for shelter and food to be met
- ✓ for those that are in school-perseverance to finish well
- ✓ for those that work-for growth in job skills and new opportunities to open up
- ✓ for them to have wisdom and hope for a bright future

Birth Families Pray...

- ✓ for family visitations to go well
- ✓ for resources to meet their physical and emotional needs
- ✓ for hope as they work their plans so they can be healthy enough to be reunited with their children
- ✓ for connection to a community to provide support
- ✓ they will be encouraged and find healing

The Movement Pray...

- ✓ for more people to get involved in foster care
- ✓ for communities to become foster friendly
- ✓ for birth families to feel supported and not judged
- ✓ for foster families to feel supported
- ✓ for waiting children to be adopted and find belonging

TALKING TO YOUR KIDS ABOUT FOSTER CARE

1. Do you know what foster care is?

Children come to stay with a foster family when their parents need some help to get better. A foster family is a family just like us that are able to take care of the kids for a while. Most of the time the parents get the help they need and the kids can go back to them, or one of their other family members when everyone is better. Sometimes, they don't get better and the foster family decides they are able to keep the child forever, and adopts them.

2. Do you know how many kids are in foster care in Tennessee?

Over 8,000 kids! Explain the number that makes sense to the child. For example, that is more than the stars you can see at night. That's more than the baseball stadium. That's more than our church, etc.

3. What do you think our family can do to help kids in foster care in our town?

Offer to babysit for a foster family we know. Offer to take a meal to a foster family. Donate toys and clothes to the local foster closet. Donate money to Tennessee Kids Belong that advocates and equips all the right leaders to change foster care for the better.

Foster care is slowly coming out of the shadows and being more accurately portrayed in mainstream media. "Sesame Street" has introduced a new Muppet with the aim of highlighting the stories and unique love of foster families. The center of the new initiative is a Muppet named Karli, a yellow-haired friend of Elmo's who introduces viewers to the concept of 'for-now parents."

4. What happens when a child in foster care turns 18 years old?

Sometimes the moms and dads can't make the changes they need to, and the child doesn't have a safe place to live when they turn 18. Imagine if you were all on your own and had to find your own job, pay for a place to live, groceries, work, etc. Kids that have not reunited with their family and have not been adopted by 18 years old "age out" of foster care. Many teens can end up in prison or homeless if they don't have the right support or mentors to help them get a job, find a home, or go to college.

Questions To Ask

- ✓ "Have you ever heard anyone talk about being in foster care or being adopted?" "Would you treat someone in foster care any differently?"
- ✓ "If any of your friends told you an adult was hurting them, who would you tell?"
- ✓ Visit tnkidsbelong.org and choose "Meet the Kids" to watch videos of kids in Tennessee who need adoptive families. This will help normalize children in foster care by connecting them with kids.



IN CLOSING

*By being intentional and committing to serving a foster family with WRAP Around you are helping that family feel connected, seen, and valued. Foster families are able to foster stronger and longer and kids in their care get the consistent support they need to heal and find belonging. By taking this step you are working to change the experience and outcomes for kids in foster care. **Thank you.***



TENNESSEE
KIDS BELONG
THE AMERICA'S KIDS BELONG FAMILY

tnkidsbelong.org