

6H: Tips for Caregivers

Children and Youth In Care } TIPS *for* Caregivers

Caregivers, such as foster parents, group home staff, and extended family, help children and youth in care discover their strengths and abilities and overcome challenges and adversity. A caregiver, such as a foster parent, group home staff member or extended family member, can help a child or youth in care discover his/her strengths and abilities and overcome challenges and adversity. A caregiver can celebrate the successes of a child or youth in their care, to acknowledge accomplishments, to build

confidence and to grow relationships.

A caregiver is also a critical voice in advocating for a child or youth in care, working with school staff to best meet the child or youth's needs. By assisting the child or youth to express wishes and set goals in and out of school, caregivers can help them succeed in school and life. Most importantly, caregivers offer love, compassion, and sense of belonging to the children and youth in their care.



AT HOME

Build a relationship based on trust, showing the child or youth that they are important, cared for and valued, even when they may test the boundaries. Be a good listener, respect their opinions and make them feel comfortable to continue talking without fear of getting in trouble or being rejected.

Talk to and listen to the child or youth about school, friends, activities, teachers, assignments, and daily events, showing your interest in his/her life.

Learn about what a child or youth's personal interests and goals are and how they can be supported. Communicate your hopes about their future and your affirmation that they can graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education or job and skills training.

Teach life skills to your child or youth, including them as a part of the family and setting them up for success once they age-out of care. Depending on their age and ability, children and youth in care need to be given chores and participate in family meal planning and cooking. It is also important to teach them about financial planning, how to be organized, and how to seek help when required.

Provide a quiet study area in your home and help with academic learning, supporting the education success of children and youth in care. Showing enthusiasm about school and learning sends the message that school is important and that you care about their success at school. Simple things like bedtime reading will improve the educational success of your child or youth and will also strengthen the bond between you.

Establish structure and regular routines, helping to provide a sense of normalcy in the lives of children and youth in care who often experience frequent changes and transitions.

Play games and engage in activities together such as sports or cultural events to support well-rounded development and educational achievement. Having fun together also promotes a sense of family togetherness and belonging, and shared enthusiasm about the importance and enjoyment of learning.

Acknowledge and learn about the child or youth's culture, offering opportunities for a child or youth in your care to explore their cultural background and participate in cultural activities if they are interested. Home based activities could include cooking, crafts, books or movies that feature a child or youth's culture.



IN SCHOOL

Work with the school to help school staff recognize that the child or youth needs extra love, care, respect, and accommodation for their needs; this is important to their success in school.

Become an active member of the school-based team that supports your child or youth. You have a unique perspective from the amount of time spent with the child or youth; share this with the school-based team and advocate for your child or youth to help ensure they are well supported in their school and community.

Talk with school staff on an ongoing basis, helping them understand when your child or youth may be worried, frightened, or missing their parents. Explain that some behaviour is a reaction to a specific circumstance or experience of trauma, which can interfere with concentration, learning, socialization and normal behaviour; let them know what strategies have been successful at home.



IN THE COMMUNITY

Support your child or youth's involvement in extra-curricular activities such as sports, drama, clubs and volunteering; these activities can help build positive relationships and self-esteem. Encourage and assist your child or youth to participate in activities they enjoy.

Spend quality time with your child or youth by engaging in family activities such as going to the movies or taking part in outdoor activities; this sends an important message that they are a valued member of the family and community.

Support your child or youth's attempts to make and keep positive friendships, helping to normalize the difficult situation of being in care. Friends can also help them cope during difficult times.

Support a child or youth's connection to their cultural community, birth parents and extended family when possible as an important part of their social network.

WHAT STUDENTS ARE SAYING

“Adults should be aware of how valuable and necessary their support is to youth, and should recognize the difference that they can make in a young person's life.”

“We want to feel ‘normal’ and that we are a part of the family.”

“There is nothing someone in care wants more than to feel ‘normal.’ I want to make mistakes and know that I will still be able to stay with you and that you will help me learn how to deal with things in a different way.”

