

# Chapter 28

## Youth in Foster Care: Creating Avenues for Success

**Chiquita Long Holmes**

*Mississippi State University, USA*

**Kevin Merideth**

*Mississippi State University, USA*

**Eugenie Joan Looby**

*Mississippi State University, USA*

**Alexis M. Jackson**

*Mississippi State University, USA*

**Lindsey L. Donald**

*Mississippi State University, USA*

**Sherri Nozik**

*Mississippi State University, USA*

**Candice L. Chapman**

*Mississippi State University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the distinct needs of youth who have been placed in the custody of the foster care system. The authors discuss the impact of abuse and neglect, removal from the biological family, and repeated relocation to different home and school settings upon the mental health and development of youth in foster care. The developmental impact of adverse experiences on these youth across different psychosocial development stages, mental health conditions to which this population is vulnerable, and challenges to meeting educational needs are delineated. The authors identify and discuss strategies for effective clinical intervention and advocacy that counselors may implement in school settings.*

### INTRODUCTION

School counselors are an essential link in developing collaborative relationships with child welfare professionals, teachers, school administration, and foster care students. Students belonging to at-risk populations, such as youth in foster care placement, have a distinct set of concerns for which school counselors are uniquely poised to provide assistance. To best address the co-occurring academic, career, social, and emotional needs of youth in foster care, school counselors must be knowledgeable about

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the vast implications of foster care placement. School counselors must also understand the associated policies and procedures as well as counseling practices and resources most useful in supporting youth in foster care (American School Counselor Association, 2018).

The chapter begins with an overview of the foster care system, including demographic data and selected statutes and guiding principles. Common developmental concerns of youth in foster care are discussed through the lenses of **Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development** and **Maslow's hierarchy of needs**. The chapter articulates educational barriers, mental health, and physical and social concerns that arise from the foster care experience. Additionally, interventions with utility for youth in foster care are presented. Advocacy initiatives appropriate for the engagement of and implementation by school counselors conclude the chapter.

## **BACKGROUND**

The most recent data available on foster care placement indicate that as of 2018, more than 437,000 school-aged youth live in the custody of the foster system in the United States (US) as a result of childhood maltreatment and neglect (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Foster Care Placement is intended as a safe family-structured alternative that meets the child's basic needs, and that supports healthy childhood development. Foster care settings range from relative or kinship care to specialized residential facilities with a highly structured therapeutic milieu to address acute physical and psychological conditions.

Adverse experiences ranging from trauma, frequent placement disruption, and poor educational attainment adversely impact the well-being of youth in foster care. For example, youth in foster care are disproportionately affected by emotional distress, behavioral problems, and social skills deficits (Larsen et al., 2018), often leading to academic difficulties (McKellar & Cowen, 2011). Frequent changes in foster home and school placement further compound these challenges. It is not uncommon for youth in foster care to require special education services, repeat courses due to poorly archived school records, and to lack the necessary support to motivate them past the low expectations held for them (Clemens et al., 2017; Day et al., 2012; Mountz et al., 2019).

Through advocacy, school counselors can implement strategies to support a stable school environment, build relationships with **stakeholders**, and execute change that addresses the emotional and educational needs of youth in foster care (ASCA, 2018). However, without appropriate intervention, youth in foster care placement experience considerable academic, social, emotional, and financial disadvantages compared to the general population. Youth in foster care are also less likely to complete high school and attend college (Pecora et al., 2018). Further, males who enter **foster placement** during their teenage years are more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system (Lindquist et al., 2014).

## **YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE**

### **Demographic Snapshot of Youth in Foster Care**

Of the over 400,000 school-aged youth in foster care, approximately 42% are White, 23% Black, 21% Hispanic, 8% Multiracial, 2% Native American/Alaska Native, and under 1% Asian or Native Hawaiian

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