

Measuring Relational Permanence of Youth: The Youth Connections Scale Implementation Guide



Youth Connections Scale

(A) Tools for Youth Connections

	Yes	No
Has a genogram or connectedness map been completed with youth?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Lifebook been created with or for the youth?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(B) Number of Supportive Adult Connections: For each category, please write the total number of meaningful relationships that apply for youth at this time.
"Meaningful relationships" are defined by the youth. This would include adults who have some on-going contact with the youth and who can be counted on for some type of support.

Category	Total # of Adult Relationships for Each Category
Mother (birth, adoptive, stepmother)	
Father (birth, adoptive, stepfather)	
Adult siblings	
Other adult relatives	
Current foster parent	
Former foster parent	
Current or former social worker	
Current or former teacher	
Current or former therapist, counselor or psychologist	
Pastor, rabbi or other spiritual leader	
An adult friend, mentor or sponsor	
Other adults (Please list relationships):	

(C) Strength of Youth Connections: Indicate the strength of the relationship between the youth and adult right now. In categories where there is more than one person, choose the most meaningful relationship and answer about that person. You can list up to two additional adults in the last two rows. Circle the best response for each row.

Very Weak: No Contact
Weak: Infrequent contact; youth can't count on this adult for support
Moderate: Some contact with this adult but may not be consistent; youth feels a connection but can't count on this adult all the time
Strong: Contact at least once per month; youth feels a connection of the heart, mind or spirit with this person; youth can usually count on this person
Very Strong: Contact at least once per week; youth feels a long-term connection of the heart, mind or spirit with this person; youth can count on this person to be there for them when needed
N/A: Not applicable because adult is deceased or youth has no siblings

	Very Weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong	N/A
Parent 1 (birth, adoptive or step mother or father)	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Parent 2 (birth, adoptive or step mother or father)	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Siblings	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other adult relatives	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other caring adult identified by youth:	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other caring adult identified by youth:	0	1	2	3	4	N/A

4.

(E) Level of Youth Connections: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. Circle the best response.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
While in foster care, you have connected or re-connected with relatives or caring adults who will be lifelong supportive connections	0	1	2	3	4
An adult has made a commitment to provide a permanent, parent-like relationship to you	0	1	2	3	4
You are living with an adult who has or plans to adopt you or become your legal guardian	0	1	2	3	4
You feel very disconnected from any caring adults	0	1	2	3	4

Office Use Only: Youth Name _____ Youth Date of Birth _____
 Worker Completing Form _____ Date of Completion of Form _____
 Form Completed: Within 30 Days of Placement Within 30 Days of Discharge Other
 Form Completed Without Youth at Discharge: Yes No If Yes, Explain: _____

5.

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- Adolescent and Family Growth Center, Springfield, Virginia
- Ampersand Families, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Anu Family Services, Minnesota and Wisconsin
- Dakota County Social Services, Minnesota
- Family Alternatives, Minneapolis, Minnesota
- Northwood Children's Services, Duluth, Minnesota
- People Places, Inc., Staunton, Virginia
- Scott County Human Services, Minnesota
- Volunteers of America, Family Treatment Programs, Edina, Minnesota

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Introduction of the *Youth Connections Scale*

Relational Permanence and the Youth Connections Scale

Research and practice wisdom confirms the belief that all youth need the support of caring adults. Youth who are placed in foster care often come to placement with connections to adults who are important in their lives; yet, many of these connections are lost while children are in out-of-home care. Legal permanence,

YOUNG PEOPLE, IN GENERAL, NEED THE SAFETY NET OF FINANCIAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FROM THEIR PARENTS OR PARENT-LIKE FIGURES, AND THIS SUPPORT OFTEN CONTINUES WELL INTO YOUNG ADULTHOOD.

or the reunification, adoption, or transfer of legal guardianship of the youth, remains a critical goal to achieve for youth in child welfare systems. However, in recent years emotional and relational permanence have been introduced as concepts that are equally important. Relational permanence is defined as youth having lifelong connections to caring adults, including at least one adult who will provide a permanent, parent-like connection for that youth (Louisell, 2008). Many experts and scholars now advocate for child welfare agencies to increase their focus on building permanent, supportive connections for youth while in out-of-home care (Charles & Nelson, 2000; Samuels, 2009).

Research findings indicate that the benefits for youth of being connected to supportive adults include positive long-term effects on youths' social, psychological, and financial outcomes, including improved self-esteem, educational achievement, and social skill development (Geenen & Powers, 2007; Massinga, 2004; Perry, 2006). Connecting foster youth to supportive adults and creating a financial and emotional safety net is particularly critical during the late adolescence as youth begin to transition to adulthood.

Youth who age out of foster care or exit care without a permanent parent-like connection experience increased risk of homelessness, early pregnancy,

incarceration, job instability and unemployment, and poverty (Hook & Courtney, 2011). Foster youth without supportive connections also experience risks related to their socio-emotional well being with increased incidence of mental health and behavioral problems including depression (Barth, 1990).

Alternatively, other studies indicate that youth who reported higher levels of social support from friends and family also had improved health and developmental outcomes and increased resilience (Daining & DePanfilis, 2007). Youth also noted an increased sense of self-identity when able to maintain relationships with family and other adults important in their lives (Rashid, 2009). Unfortunately, feedback from many former foster youth indicate they felt they had little say in maintaining the most important relationships in their lives (Samuels & Pryce, 2008).

Research also indicates that many youth seek out relationships with their biological family after leaving foster care (Geenen & Powers, 2007). Many organizations and professionals are beginning to recognize the opportunity to work with youth while in foster care to help youth address issues of grief and loss and to help them build positive connections with their families and other supportive adults (Mendes & Moslehuddin, 2006).

THE YOUTH CONNECTIONS SCALE HAS BEEN DEVELOPED TO HELP CHILD WELFARE AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS BETTER WORK WITH YOUTH IN STRENGTHENING AND BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE SAFETY NET FOR ALL YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE.

Young people, in general, need the safety net of financial, social and emotional support from their parents or parent-like figures, and this support often continues well into young adulthood. This safety net is not always available to young people leaving foster care. The *Youth Connections Scale* has been developed to help child welfare agencies and organizations better work with youth in strengthening and building a supportive safety net and achieving relational permanence for all youth in foster care.

Based upon a review of current research on the importance of youth connections to caring adults, the *Youth Connections Scale (YCS)* was developed by the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare (CASCW) at the University of Minnesota, in partnership with Anu Family Services. This guide introduces the *Youth Connections Scale*, a tool to measure the relational permanence of youth. Included in this implementation guide are the following: (1) development and pilot study of the tool, (2) the *Youth Connections Scale*, (3) instructions for implementing the tool, (4) the instructions and scoring guide for the scale, (5) a scoring sheet for tracking results of the tool, and (6) links and contact information for further support and resources on the *Youth Connections Scale*.

BASED UPON A REVIEW OF CURRENT RESEARCH ON THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUTH CONNECTIONS TO CARING ADULTS, THE YOUTH CONNECTIONS SCALE (YCS) WAS DEVELOPED BY THE CENTER FOR ADVANCED STUDIES IN CHILD WELFARE (CASCW) AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ANU FAMILY SERVICES. THIS GUIDE INTRODUCES THE YOUTH CONNECTIONS SCALE, A TOOL TO MEASURE THE SAFETY NET FOR FOSTER YOUTH.

Development of the Youth Connections Scale

The *Youth Connections Scale* was developed to fill a current gap in the field to measure and evaluate increased efforts to identify and strengthen supportive connections. Experts in the field were consulted in development of this scale, including social workers, supervisors and administrators of public and private child and youth serving agencies, and researchers and scholars in child welfare. Specifically, in Section D of the *Youth Connections Scale*, indicators of support were identified from various sources (FosterClub, 2006; Frey, Cushing, Freundlich & Brenner, 2008; Benson, 2004). Community practitioners assisted in narrowing and prioritizing a revised list of Support Indicators. It is significant to note that through this process, the resulting list of indicators overlapped with FosterClub's Permanency Pact, which further

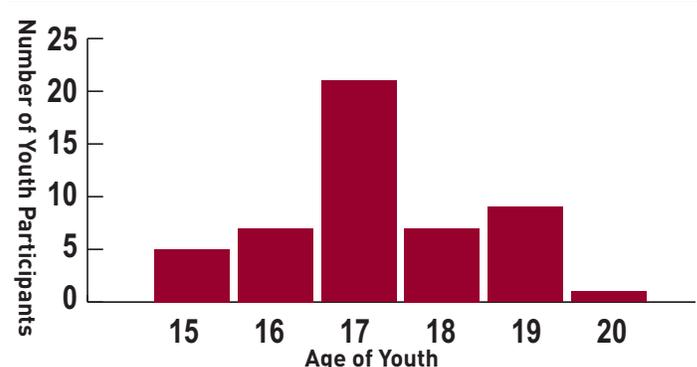
validates the important work they began in 2006. For more information on the Permanency Pact see <http://www.fosterclub.com/transition/article/permanency-pact>. The *YCS* is scored on a scale from 0 to 100 and consists of four sections which measure: (1) the number of meaningful connections or relationships the youth has with supportive adults; (2) the strength of those connections, including the frequency of contact and the consistency of the support the adult provides for the youth; (3) the specific types of supports that have been identified as most important in the literature and in feedback from former foster youth; and (4) the overall level of connectedness of foster youth to caring and supportive adults.

Pilot Study of the Youth Connections Scale

Following the development of the *Youth Connections Scale*, the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare conducted a pilot study to test the validity and reliability of the tool. The study sample included 53 adolescents, aged 15 to 21, who had been in out-of-home care for at least three months (See Figure 1.) Participating youth were also cognitively and developmentally able, as assessed by their workers and supervisors, to complete the tools. Subjects were recruited from two public and seven private child welfare agencies.

Data was collected by the youths' social workers in participating agencies, all of whom completed a 45 minute orientation training with the researcher. The social workers assisted the youth in completing the *Youth Connections Scale* at two points in time. Time One (T1) occurred at the convenience of the social worker and the youth. Time Two (T2) occurred between one and two weeks following Time One to assess the test-retest reliability of the *Youth Connections Scale*. The average total score for the *Youth Connections Scale* at T1 was 52.87 and T2 was 52.75 (See Table 1 below).

Figure 1. Age of Youth in Pilot Validation Study.



When the youth completed the *Youth Connections Scale* at T1 they also completed a portion of an existing validated scale, the *Social Support Behaviors (SSB) Scale*, which measures a similar construct of supportive relationships (Vaux, Riedel & Stewart, 1987). This allowed for the testing of the concurrent validity of the *Youth Connections Scale*.

the *Youth Connections Scale* to the Social Support Behaviors Scale (Vaux, Riedel & Stewart, 1987).

The next section of this guide includes a copy of the *Youth Connections Scale*, followed by detailed instructions for implementing the tool.

Table 1. Scale Scores in Pilot Validation Study.

	Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Average Score	Standard Deviation
Youth Connections Scale – T1	15	83	52.87	16.34
Youth Connections Scale – T2	12	81	52.75	15.94

Results of this pilot study suggest that the *Youth Connections Scale* appears to be a valid and reliable tool to measure the relational permanence of youth in foster care. Results of the test-retest reliability analysis indicated a statistically significant and strong correlation ($r=.88$, $p<.001$). As illustrated in Table 2, each of the subscale scores also demonstrated a strong correlation between the first and second testing. For the test of concurrent validity, results also indicated a statistically significant and moderately strong correlation ($r=.74$, $p<.001$), when comparing

Table 2. Findings of test-retest reliability of Youth Connections Scale.

Subscales and Total	Correlation: Between T1 and T2
Section A: Tools for Youth Connections	.86*
Section B: Number of Supportive Adult Connections	.82*
Section C: Strength of Youth Connections	.72*
Section D: Support Indicators	.82*
Section E: Level of Youth Connection	.77*
Total Score	.88*

**Statistically significant correlations, $p<.05$.*

Although further testing of the *Youth Connections Scale* with a larger sample of foster youth is needed, the results of the pilot study suggest that this is a useful instrument for child welfare agencies to strengthen and evaluate their practice of creating a safety net for youth of caring and supportive adults.



Youth Connections Scale

(A) Tools for Youth Connections

	Yes	No
Has a genogram or connectedness map been completed with youth?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Has a Lifebook been created with or for the youth?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(B) Number of Supportive Adult Connections:

For each category, please write the total number of meaningful relationships that apply for youth at this time.

“Meaningful relationships” are defined by the youth. This would include adults who have some on-going contact with the youth and who can be counted on for some type of support.

Total # of Adult Relationships for Each Category

Mother (birth, adoptive, stepmother)	
Father (birth, adoptive, stepfather)	
Adult siblings	
Other adult relatives	
Current foster parent	
Former foster parent	
Current or former social worker	
Current or former teacher	
Current or former therapist, counselor or psychologist	
Pastor, rabbi or other spiritual leader	
An adult friend, mentor or sponsor	
Other adults (Please list relationships):	

(C) Strength of Youth Connections:

Indicate the strength of the relationship between the youth and adult right now.

In categories where there is more than one person, choose the most meaningful relationship and answer about that person. You can list up to two additional adults in the last two rows. Circle the best response for each row.

Very Weak: No Contact

Weak: Infrequent contact; youth can't count on this adult for support

Moderate: Some contact with this adult but may not be consistent; youth feels a connection but can't count on this adult all the time

Strong: Contact at least once per month; youth feels a connection of the heart, mind or spirit with this person; youth can usually count on this person

Very Strong: Contact at least once per week; youth feels a long-term connection of the heart, mind or spirit with this person; youth can count on this person to be there for them when needed

N/A: Not applicable because adult is deceased or youth has no siblings

	Very Weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong	N/A
Parent 1 (<i>birth, adoptive or step mother or father</i>)	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Parent 2 (<i>birth, adoptive or step mother or father</i>)	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Siblings	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other adult relatives	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other caring adult identified by youth:	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other caring adult identified by youth:	0	1	2	3	4	N/A

(D) Support Indicators: Answer yes or no for each indicator. *These do not have to be from the same adult.*

You have an adult in your life whom you will be able to count on for the following support after you leave foster care:

Yes	No	Indicator
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing a home to go to for the holidays
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing an emergency place to stay
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing cash in times of emergency
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Help with job search assistance or career counseling, or providing a reference for youth
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Help with finding an apartment or co-signing a lease
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Help with school (<i>homework, re-enrolling in school, help in applying to colleges</i>)
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisting with daily living skills, such as cooking, budgeting, paying bills and housecleaning
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Providing storage space during transition times
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Emotional support – a caring adult to talk to
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sharing in or supporting experiences of youth’s cultural and spiritual background
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Checking in on youth regularly – to see how they are doing
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisting with medical appointments so youth does not have to experience that alone
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisting with finding and accessing community resources.
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A home to go for occasional family meals
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Help providing transportation (<i>help with purchasing a car</i>) or figuring out public transportation
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Someone to send care packages at college
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Assisting with purchasing cell phone and service (<i>for example, youth is added to a family plan</i>).
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	A place to do laundry
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Supporting youth in civic engagement such as voting and volunteering

List has been modified and adapted from the FosterClub Permanency Pact (2006).

(E) Level of Youth Connections: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Circle the best response.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
While in foster care, you have connected or re-connected with relatives or caring adults who will be lifelong supportive connections	0	1	2	3	4
An adult has made a commitment to provide a permanent, parent-like relationship to you	0	1	2	3	4
You are living with an adult who has or plans to adopt you or become your legal guardian	0	1	2	3	4
You feel very disconnected from any caring adults	0	1	2	3	4

Office Use Only: Youth Name _____ Youth Date of Birth _____
 Worker Completing Form _____ Date of Completion of Form _____
 Form Completed: Within 30 Days of Placement Within 30 Days of Discharge Other
 Form Completed Without Youth at Discharge: Yes No If Yes, Explain: _____

Instructions for the *Youth Connections Scale*

The *Youth Connections Scale* is designed to be completed by the youth with their workers. This tool is used to capture the youths' perceptions about their level of connectedness and the strength of their emotional, financial and social safety nets. The *Youth Connections Scale* provides an opportunity to have intentional and guided discussion about the youths' perceptions of adults in their lives. Emerging research on practice in this area indicates that most youth experience ambivalence around past relationships with family and other adults as well as mixed feelings about building or rebuilding future healthy relationships (Samuels,

THE *YOUTH CONNECTIONS SCALE* PROVIDES AN OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE INTENTIONAL AND GUIDED DISCUSSION ABOUT THE YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS OF ADULTS IN THEIR LIVES.

2009). Many youth also experience feelings of grief and ambiguous loss, which may be difficult for the youth to name and address (Henry, 2005). For these reasons, the tool was developed to be completed by the youth with a trusted and supportive person, their caseworker. A case illustration highlighting the use of the *Youth Connections Scale* provides insight into the application of this scale as a practice tool (see page 10). Outlined below are general strategies for workers to consider in using this scale as a tool in practice as well as more detailed instructions for completing each section of the *Youth Connections Scale*.

Strategies for Completing the Tool:

- The actual process for filling out the form may vary slightly with each youth based on his or her intellectual and cognitive ability, age and personality. One approach to completing the instrument is for the worker to retain a copy of the scale and to give a copy to the youth. Then, the worker can read through each question aloud allowing time for the youth to write in his or her answer. Another approach is to have the youth complete one section at a time and then stop for discussion of each item that has been completed. Whatever method the worker and youth use to complete the instrument, it is important to remember that the scale is not designed as a

checklist for youth to complete but rather as a tool for discussion and dialogue about supportive adults in the youth's life.

- This instrument captures the youths' perceptions about their level of connectedness. The worker may not agree with all of their responses. **That is ok.** The *Youth Connections Scale* can be a tool to have intentional and guided discussion about the youths' perceptions of adults in their lives. Youth might overestimate or underestimate what the worker sees as their actual levels of support from some adults. If a worker is surprised by or disagrees with an answer, he or she can talk to the youth about it or ask the youth to think more about the answers and ask clarifying questions. **It is important that the worker ultimately honor the youth's responses on the tool and avoid debating answers with which the worker may not agree.** Again, this tool measures the youths' own perceptions of their connections, and those perceptions are honored in this process.

EMERGING RESEARCH ON PRACTICE IN THIS AREA INDICATES THAT MOST YOUTH EXPERIENCE AMBIVALENCE AROUND PAST RELATIONSHIPS WITH FAMILY AND OTHER ADULTS AS WELL AS MIXED FEELINGS ABOUT BUILDING OR REBUILDING FUTURE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS.

- This tool is meant to measure **positive** and supportive relationships with adults. If youth are identifying adults who are not supportive (such as a pimp or an abusive relationship), this provides an opportunity for the worker to have deeper discussion about what is meant as a caring and supportive relationship.
- Even though this instrument helps youth identify and explore positive and supportive relationships, one key role for the worker is to help the youth talk through (not debate or direct the youth) and think about those important relationships that may not be supportive and healthy connections. In using this tool for discussion, the worker can help to normalize the feelings of ambivalence, grief and loss that the youth may be experiencing as they think about important adults in their lives.

- In completing the scale for the first time with the youth, the worker should allow time for debriefing and discussion. For some youth, this scale might be quick and easy to complete. For others, it might raise very intense emotional responses, including: anger, grief, loss, disappointment, or confusion as well as a mixture of positive and happy emotions. A critical aspect of developing a tool to be completed by youth with their workers is the benefit of having a safe and supportive person with whom to process their complex feelings.
- Consider completing the instrument with the youth in a comfortable place taking into consideration the privacy and openness of the youth. For example, considering the impact of having other youth or a foster parent present or nearby.
- Youth with cognitive, developmental, or emotional challenges will likely be able to utilize this instrument. That said, workers should use their judgment on how best to utilize the scale as a tool based upon the unique needs and characteristics of each youth. (Note: Pilot testing of the tool was completed with youth whom social workers determined to be cognitively and developmentally able to complete the instrument.)
- The information captured by this instrument is a snapshot of the youths' perceptions of their supportive connections with adults at the time of completion. This is important to consider if using this scale for evaluative purposes.

THE INFORMATION CAPTURED BY THIS INSTRUMENT IS A SNAPSHOT OF THE YOUTHS' PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR SUPPORTIVE CONNECTIONS WITH ADULTS AT THE TIME OF COMPLETION. THIS IS IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER IF USING THIS SCALE FOR EVALUATIVE PURPOSES.

Directions for the Youth Connections Scale:

SECTION A: TOOLS FOR YOUTH CONNECTIONS

Section A assesses whether or not a genogram, ecomap, and/or Lifebook have been completed with the youth. The specific tools identified in this section are commonly used tools in child welfare and youth serving agencies to identify important connections in a youth's life.

If your program does not use these tools or the youth has not yet completed any of these, simply ask the youth to mark "No" in this section. Do not leave it blank.

SECTION B: NUMBER OF SUPPORTIVE ADULT CONNECTIONS

Section B measures the number of meaningful and supportive relationships youth have with adults at the time the instrument is completed.

The youth are asked to write down the number of meaningful connections in each category. The youth can determine which relationships they have with adults are meaningful. The social worker can help them think about adults with whom they have some regular contact and those adults they can really count on for some type of financial, emotional or social support.

For example, if the youth has a meaningful connection to his biological mother and a stepmother, the youth should place a number '2' in the first row (*Parent 1*). Responses in this category will possibly include multiple adults, such as birth, adoptive, step parents, and/or same-sex parents. If the

youth identifies other adults who do not seem to fit into any of the categories provided, the youth can add their names in the last row and write the number for this group of adults in the last column.

In considering adults who are a source of emotional or spiritual support, youth might identify an adult who has passed away. This is something that should be considered and honored, particularly in recognizing that some cultures have deep beliefs and reliance upon elders and ancestors who have come before. The youth may decide to include such connections when completing their scale.

If the worker is unaware of or surprised by any of the responses in this section, he or she should discuss those responses with the youth. This tool is designed to assess the youths' perceptions of their connections; so while the worker may not always agree with every response, the youth should list the connections they believe should be included.

SECTION C: STRENGTH OF YOUTH CONNECTIONS

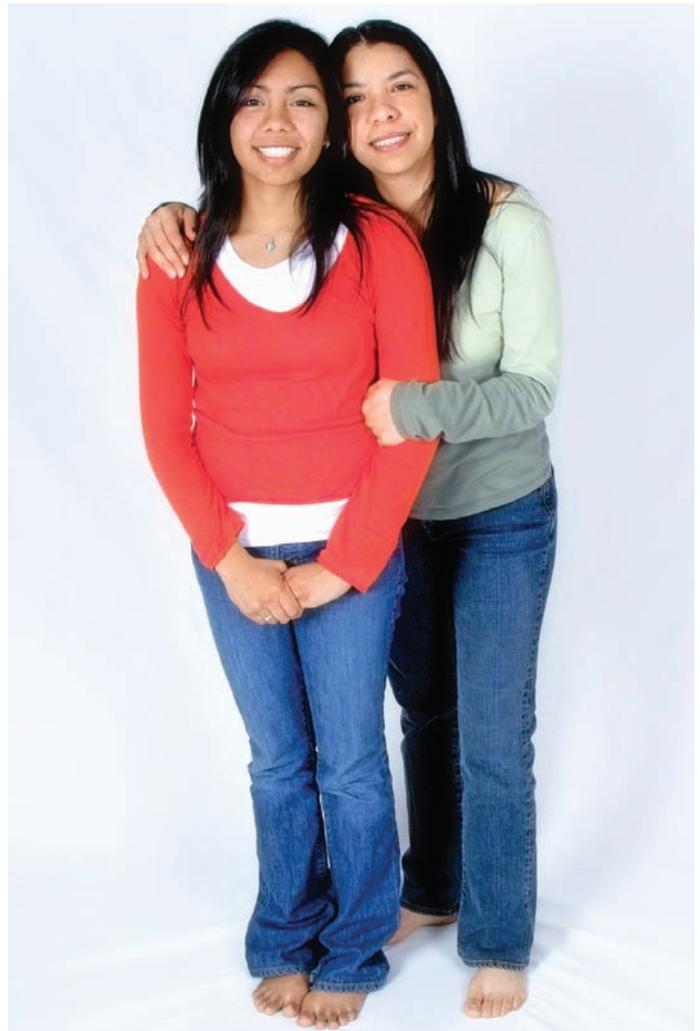
Section C identifies the youth's key relationships and assesses the strength of those relationships. Categories in this section were identified in the literature as the most significant relationships for youth, including parents, siblings and relatives.

Youth are asked to identify one person in each of the listed categories (mother, father, siblings, and other adult relatives). If the youth has connections with more than one person in a category, such as biological mother and stepmother, the youth should pick the most significant relationship and answer for that person. If he or she chooses, the youth could write the other person's name in the final two rows of "other caring adults." Youth with same-sex parents might face the situation of multiple people in a single category. In that circumstance, the youth can include one parent on the parent line and the other parent in the open fields at the bottom of this section. (Note: N/A or not applicable should only be used if the adults are deceased or if the youth have no known siblings or other relatives.)

SECTION D: SUPPORT INDICATORS

Section D assesses the youth's perception of the types of support they have from the caring adults in their life. This section was developed using research and feedback from foster care alumni about what types of support youth considered to be most important after they left care.

Youth are asked to think about adults in their life who would provide each type of support after the youth leaves foster care. This might include a current foster parent but only if that person would likely provide that type of support after the youth is discharged from foster care. The types of support do not all have to be from the same caring adult. Workers should encourage the youth to think about this section realistically – to include the types of support they really think they will be able to count on after foster care. The youth should check yes or no for each indicator.



SECTION E: LEVEL OF YOUTH CONNECTION

Section E assesses the youths' perception of how well connected they are to caring and supportive adults at the time the instrument is completed. Youth are asked to circle the best response to each of the four statements. For example, if a youth has a legal guardian but is not living with them, he or she might agree with the second statement (an adult has made a commitment to provide a permanent, parent-like connection) but disagree with the third statement (youth is living with an adult who plans to adopt or become legal guardian).

Implementation of the *Youth Connections Scale*

The *Youth Connections Scale* is a versatile, reliable instrument that can be used by practitioners, supervisors, administrators, and program evaluators. Several suggestions for using this instrument in these various roles are outlined below.

Direct Practitioners

The instrument can be used as a tool by practitioners to guide discussion with youth in foster care about adult connections that may provide on-going support and nurturing to the youth after they leave foster care. If implemented at the time of intake, this instrument can also guide the case planning process and identify areas of strength and challenges related to youth connections to caring adults. A worker can examine the scores for each subsection of the tool to better understand which specific aspects of the youth's level of connections needs to be strengthened. The scale can also help the worker better understand the youth's perception of his or her safety net and learn which elements may or may not match with the worker's perception. Again, the *YCS* can be used to facilitate discussions with the youth about important adults and rebuilding connections. One group of foster youth for whom this scale may be particularly helpful is youth transitioning to adulthood.



Supervisors

Supervisors may find the *Youth Connections Scale* a useful tool to track the efforts of workers as they assist youth to identify, maintain and strengthen their connections to supportive adults while in care.

THE *YOUTH CONNECTIONS SCALE* IS A VERSATILE, RELIABLE INSTRUMENT THAT CAN BE USED BY PRACTITIONERS, SUPERVISORS, ADMINISTRATORS, AND PROGRAM EVALUATORS.

Research has shown that the role of supervisors is key to achieving desired outcomes in child welfare (Frey et al., 2012). The instrument can be used in both individual and group supervision to discuss specific cases and address challenges that might exist or arise. Tracking the scores of the scale across caseloads can also help supervisors and administrators identify and address areas of strength and areas for growth in the challenging work of increasing the relational permanence of youth in foster care. Supervisors can also use this as a tool in group supervision by asking workers to discuss specific challenges and successes they have had in working to identify and build connections with youth.

Administrators and Quality Improvement

The *YCS* may also be useful for administrators and efforts for quality improvement in child welfare. The scale can be used as part of efforts to evaluate practices and strategies to increase the relational permanence of youth. One example of how to use the *Youth Connections Scale* as an evaluative tool is to measure the level of connection for youth at time of entry and at time of discharge and to compare the scores to see if the overall level of connectedness has increased, decreased or remained the same. The individual subscales of the tool may also be examined to look at changes in the overall number and strength of adult connections as well as looking at specific types of support youth perceive and how this changes over time.

The Youth Connections Scale in a Practice Setting: A Case Illustration

ANU FAMILY SERVICES, a treatment foster care agency serving families across Wisconsin and Minnesota, utilizes the *Youth Connections Scale* as part of its case planning, on-going supervision and program evaluation efforts. All youth between the ages of 15 and 21 complete the *Youth Connections Scale* with their social workers within the first 30 days of placement with Anu Family Services. Anu social workers use the information from the *Youth Connections Scale* to identify areas of potential strengths for each youth, including identifying specific adults who may be able to support the youth in his or her path to legal and relational permanence. Results of the *Youth Connections Scale* also provide Anu social workers with valuable information about areas for on-going case planning that need increased attention, including information about the youth's perception of the types of support they may be lacking after they leave care.



Anu Family Services supervisors also are using the *Youth Connections Scale* in individual and group supervision with Anu social workers. Supervisors review all completed *Youth Connections Scales* with the workers in supervision to further discuss the on-going plan to address the strengths and opportunities that were identified. This review is also used in follow-up sessions to ensure on-going work and attention is being paid to improving the relational permanence of each youth in placement with Anu Family Services. Additionally, youth complete the scale at the time of discharge, which allows Anu Family Services' quality assurance unit to better understand progress in improving relational permanence and level of connectedness to caring adults for youth in their care.

Youth Connections Scale Scoring Guide Description

The *Youth Connections Scale* is comprised of five sections. The scoring of the tool is based on a scale of 0 to 100. Table 3 below outlines the range of possible points for each section. The text that follows describes the possible points for each item, according to section.

SECTION A: TOOLS FOR CONNECTIONS

The *Yes* response is scored as a “1” and the *No* response scored as a “0.” Simply tally these items on the score sheet provided, as part of the overall score.

Table 3. Scoring Range of Five Sections of Tool

Section	Minimum Value	Maximum Value
A: Tools for Connections	0	2
B: Number of Connections	0	39
C: Strength of Connections	0	24
D: Support Indicators	0	19
E: Overall Level of Youth Connection	0	16
Total Scale Score	0	100

SECTION B: NUMBER OF CONNECTIONS

Items in this section are weighted (scored) differently depending upon the relationship. Items 1 and 2 (Mother and Father) are weighted more heavily with possible scores of 0 through 3. For these items, the youth’s response is multiplied by two. For example, if the youth had a meaningful relationship with his or her birth mother and stepmother, the score would be “2” for this item. The response is then multiplied by two for this item resulting in a score of 4 (2 people X 2= score of 4).

Items 3 through 12 each have different maximum responses. For example, item #3 – *Adult siblings* can be scored a maximum of 5. For youth responses of zero through 5, simply convert the response into a numerical value as the score (3 siblings = score of 3). For youth with responses greater than 5, record a score of 5 for that item which, again, is the maximum score for that item. An additional example, item # 7 – *Current or former social worker* can be scored a maximum of 1. Youth who indicate a response of 0 (or blank) will score 0 points. Youth who respond 1 or greater will score a maximum of 1 point.

Assign a score for each item of this section on the score sheet provided. Scores within Section B will be tallied for a section score and will be added to the other section tallies for the total scale score.

SECTION C: STRENGTH OF CONNECTIONS

Tally each of the numbers circled by the youth for each survey item. If the youth left an item blank or circled *N/A*, that item is scored as a zero.

SECTION D: SUPPORT INDICATORS

The *Yes* response is scored as a “1” and a *No* response scored as a “0.” Tally these items for a section score.

SECTION E: OVERALL LEVEL OF YOUTH CONNECTIONS

Tally each of the numbers circled by the youth for the first three items in this section. *The final item is scored differently.* This item is a negative statement, whereas the previous three items are positively stated. Therefore, the scoring for this item must be reversed. The scoring guide (below) provides details on assigning points appropriately. If the youth left any item blank in this section or circled *N/A*, the item is scored as a zero.

OVERALL SCORE

An overall score for the instrument is determined by adding the section scores together. The scoring guide is a resource for further clarification of how to calculate scores for each section of the instrument. A scoring sheet is also included later in this guide. The worker can enter scores for each of the sections on the scoring worksheet. For interpretation of the overall score, see Table 4 below.

Table 4. Interpretation of Scoring

Scale Score	Level of Connectedness
80-100	Very High
60-79	High
40-59	Moderate
20-39	Low
0-20	Very Low

Youth Connections Scale – Scoring Guide

(A) Tools for Youth Connections

	Yes	No
Has a genogram or connectedness map been completed with youth?	1	0
Has a Lifebook been created with or for the youth?	1	0

Total: 0-2

(B) Number of Supportive Adult Connections:

For each category, please write the total number of meaningful relationships that apply for youth at this time.

“Meaningful relationships” are defined by the youth. This would include adults who have some on-going contact with the youth and who can be counted on for some type of support.

Total # of Adult Relationships

Mother (birth, adoptive, stepmother)	0-3 (x2)
Father (birth, adoptive, stepfather)	0-3 (x2)
Adult siblings	0-5
Other adult relatives	0-6
Current foster parent	0-1
Former foster parent	0-2
Current or former social worker	0-1
Current or former teacher	0-2
Current or former therapist, counselor or psychologist	0-2
Pastor, rabbi or other spiritual leader	0-1
An adult friend, mentor or sponsor	0-4
Other adults (Please list relationships):	0-3

Total: 0-39

(C) Strength of Youth Connections:

Indicate the strength of the relationship between the youth and adult right now.

In categories where there is more than one person, choose the most meaningful relationship and answer about that person. You can list up to two additional adults in the last two rows. Circle the best response for each row.

Very Weak: No Contact

Weak: Infrequent contact; youth can't count on this adult for support

Moderate: Some contact with this adult but may not be consistent; youth feels a connection but can't count on this adult all the time

Strong: Contact at least once per month; youth feels a connection of the heart, mind or spirit with this person; youth can usually count on this person

Very Strong: Contact at least once per week; youth feels a long-term connection of the heart, mind or spirit with this person; youth can count on this person to be there for them when needed

N/A: Not applicable because adult is deceased or youth has no siblings

	Very Weak	Weak	Moderate	Strong	Very Strong	N/A
Parent 1 (<i>birth, adoptive or step mother or father</i>)	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Parent 2 (<i>birth, adoptive or step mother or father</i>)	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Siblings	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other adult relatives	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other caring adult identified by youth:	0	1	2	3	4	N/A
Other caring adult identified by youth:	0	1	2	3	4	N/A

Total: 0-24

(D) Support Indicators: Answer yes or no for each indicator. *These do not have to be from the same adult.*

You have an adult in your life whom you will be able to count on for the following support after you leave foster care:

Yes	No	Indicator
1	0	Providing a home to go to for the holidays
1	0	Providing an emergency place to stay
1	0	Providing cash in times of emergency
1	0	Help with job search assistance or career counseling, or providing a reference for youth
1	0	Help with finding an apartment or co-signing a lease
1	0	Help with school (<i>homework, re-enrolling in school, help in applying to colleges</i>)
1	0	Assisting with daily living skills, such as cooking, budgeting, paying bills and housecleaning
1	0	Providing storage space during transition times
1	0	Emotional support – a caring adult to talk to
1	0	Sharing in or supporting experiences of youth’s cultural and spiritual background
1	0	Checking in on youth regularly – to see how they are doing
1	0	Assisting with medical appointments so youth does not have to experience that alone
1	0	Assisting with finding and accessing community resources.
1	0	A home to go for occasional family meals
1	0	Help providing transportation (<i>help with purchasing a car</i>) or figuring out public transportation
1	0	Someone to send care packages at college
1	0	Assisting with purchasing cell phone and service (<i>for example, youth is added to a family plan</i>).
1	0	A place to do laundry
1	0	Supporting youth in civic engagement such as voting and volunteering

List has been modified and adapted from the FosterClub Permanency Pact (2006).

Total: 0-19

(E) Level of Youth Connections: Indicate your level of agreement with the following statements.

Circle the best response.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
While in foster care, you have connected or re-connected with relatives or caring adults who will be lifelong supportive connections	0	1	2	3	4
An adult has made a commitment to provide a permanent, parent-like relationship to you	0	1	2	3	4
You are living with an adult who has or plans to adopt you or become your legal guardian	0	1	2	3	4
You feel very disconnected from any caring adults	0=4	1=3	2=2	3=1	4=0

Note: This item is scored differently. This item is a negative statement whereas the other statements are positive; therefore the scoring is reversed. See scoring guide to the right.

Total: 0-16

Youth Connections Scale Scoring Sheet

Youth YCS ID: _____ Youth DOB: _____

Worker completing form: _____ Date of Form Completion: _____

Section	Possible Range	Enter Score
A: Tools for Connections	0 to 2	
B: Number of Connections	0 to 39	
C: Strength of Connections	0 to 24	
D: Support Indicators	0 to 19	
E: Permanent Connections	0 to 16	
Total Scale Score	0 to 100	

Interpretation of scoring:	
Scale Score	Level of Connectedness
80-100	Very High
60-79	High
40-59	Moderate
20-39	Low
0-20	Very Low

Subscale Scoring for Number of Connections:

Section B: Number of Connections	Possible Range	Enter Score
Professional Connections		
#5 – Current foster parent	0-1	
#6 – Former foster parent	0-2	
#7 – Current or former social worker	0-1	
#8- Current or former teacher	0-2	
#9 – Current or former therapist, counselor or psychologist	0-2	
#10 – Pastor, rabbi or other spiritual leader	0-1	
Total Professional Connections	0-9	
Other Connections		
#1 – Mother	0-6	
#2 – Father	0-6	
#3 – Adult siblings	0-5	
#4 – Other adult relatives	0-6	
#11 – An adult friend or mentor	0-4	
#12 – Other adults	0-3	
Total Family (or Identified Family) Connections	0-30	

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Youth Connections Scale Utilization and Scoring

A summary report of the Youth Connections Scale (YCS) pilot study is available on the Center for Advanced Studies in Child Welfare website at

<http://z.umn.edu/YCS>

For further questions about the development and research of the YCS or for information about utilization and scoring of the YCS, please contact the CASCW.

CASCW facilitates and conducts research and evaluation to provide empirical information about issues confronting the child welfare system, including local and statewide evaluation studies as well as research and evaluation with national relevance to the child welfare system. As home to the Minn-LInK Project, CASCW also offers the opportunity for researchers to access state administrative data from multiple agencies to answer questions about the impacts of policies, programs, and practice on the well-being of children in Minnesota.



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Implementation Consultation and Training

Anu Family Services was a collaborative partner in the development of the Youth Connections Scale (YCS) and, therefore, uniquely equipped with expertise to provide consultation, training, and technical assistance on the implementation of the YCS. Consultation and training can be tailored to each individual organization's or agency's needs and may include: use of the YCS as a tool for social workers, case managers, supervisors, researchers; use for youth engagement; outcomes measurement; organizational advancement; or creating a permanence-driven organization. Anu Family Services can assist organizations in reaching their goals of assisting youth to achieve higher levels of relational permanence with the YCS and other evidence informed techniques.



For more information on Anu Family Services and their consultation and training:

www.anufs.org/youthconnectionsscale.asp
info@anufs.org

877-287-2441

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