**How to Have the Permanency Conversation with Youth**

* **Allow the youth to be in control of the process**
  + “I work with you to make a plan that will address your needs and wants; it’s about you and your future.”
  + “It works best if you are at the planning table where we work together to find the best direction for your future.”
  + “This may feel like a new way of working together.”
* **Decrease the stigma and shame associated with being in foster care**
  + “I work with many others in similar situations.”
  + “I’m working with another young man/woman who…”
  + “I’m working with five other adolescents right now to help plan their futures.”
* **Be flexible about the permanency outcome**
  + Avoid using the terms “adoption,” “guardianship,” or “family”
  + Use the terms “adult connection,” “support person,” “someone you can count on,” or other words that signify permanence without implying a traditional family relationship.
  + “Have you thought about who you’d like to spend time with as you get older?”
* **Suggest possible connections with adults who have made a positive impact on the youth**
  + “I’m sure there are people in your past or present (a relative, teacher, coach, other) with whom you feel a connection.”
  + “I’m here to help you reconnect or make the connection more secure.”
* **Provide examples of when having these connections might be used**
  + Celebrating holidays and special occasions
  + Getting a driver’s license
  + Graduating
  + Getting married
  + Co-signing a loan
* **Be future-focused**
  + “When you think about yourself five years from now, what are your hopes?”
  + “If you could design a plan or draw a picture for your future, what would it look like and who would be in it?”
* **Provide general timeframes for the process**
  + “It’s not going to happen overnight.”
  + “It will take a few months to get to know you, to meet the people you’d like to have in your life, and to make a good plan.”
* **Be flexible in your approach**
  + You may not get to these later steps during the first conversation.
  + All that really needs to happen during the first conversation is to plant the seed and begin to establish *your* connection with the youth.
* **Be positive and comfortable**
  + This is a no-pressure, informational conversation.
  + Try to provide a warm and comfortable setting.
  + Try to meet one-on-one with the youth without program staff or resource parents.
* **Be honest even if it isn’t what the youth wants to hear.**
* **Food is always good!**