

The Whole Tree: Extended Families in Education



Megan Carolan
Director of Policy Research
Institute for Child Success

National Families Learning Conference 2018



#NCFL18



INSTITUTE *for* CHILD SUCCESS

Session Goals

- Discuss extended family engagement impact on child wellness & education
- Identify barriers to engaging extended family in educational and community-based programs
- Workshop daily strategies to engage extended family in their settings



What's Your Role?

- Teacher/child care provider
- Administrator/
Program director
- Special education provider
- Librarian
- Community volunteer
- Mental health provider
- Community program staffer
- Aunt/uncle/
grandparent
- Parent
- Neighbor



Roadmap



Family Composition

- 64% of minors lived with two married parents
- 24% single-mother households
- 4% single-father households
- 4% with neither parent
- 114,000 same-sex couples raising children
- 85 million people live in extended families (2014)
 - Up from 58 million in 2001
- About 10% of all households contain a grandparent, either as head or resident



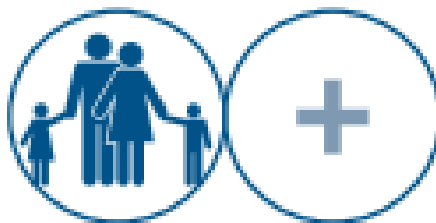
INSTITUTE *for* CHILD SUCCESS

How do we define “family”?



NUCLEAR FAMILIES

Married parents and their own unmarried children under the age of 22.



EXTENDED FAMILIES

A group of individuals whose relationships to each other extend beyond the nuclear family.

Extended Family Definitions

Vertical



Downward

adult progeny:

Primary families

hosting unmarried adult
progeny at least
22 years of age



Downward; other

Primary families

hosting adult children
with their own spouses/
partners/children



Upward

Primary families

hosting aging parents/
parents-in-law, with
or without the parents'
own spouses/partners

Horizontal



Primary families
hosting siblings or
other same-generation
relatives with or
without their own
spouses/partners/
children

Other

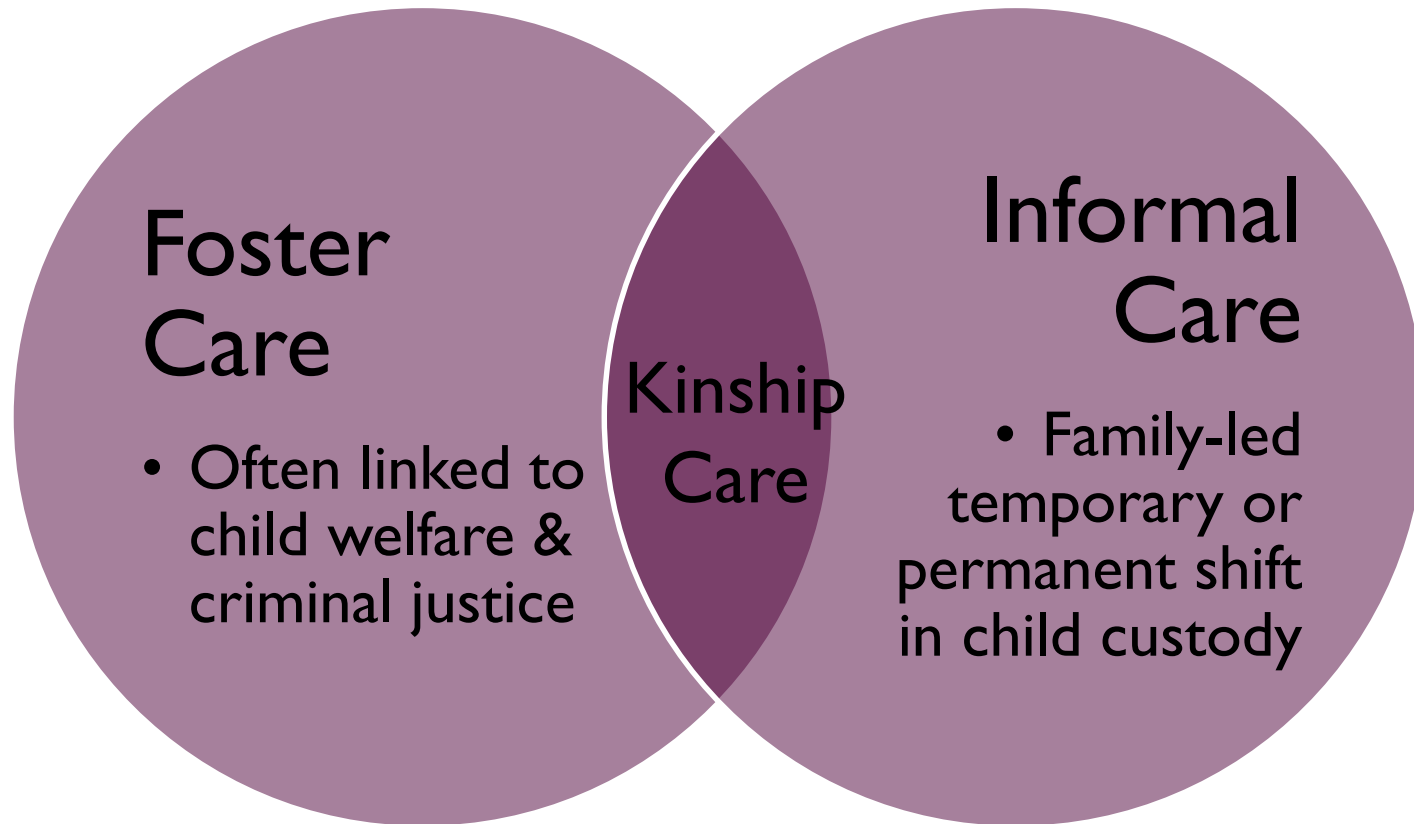


Multiple extension
families: Primary
families with vertical
and horizontal
extensions.

i(cs)

INSTITUTE for CHILD SUCCESS

Kinship Care, Fictive Kin, & Everyone in Between



Kinship care – provided by family members or “fictive kin” (people who are like family) is crucial component of both formal & informal custody arrangements

Why do extended families matter?

Alloparent “refers to any group member other than the parents who helps them rear their young...

Without alloparents, there never would have been a human species...”

- Anthropologist Sarah Blaffer Hrdy

“Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally crazy about him or her.”

- Child development expert Urie Bronfenbrenner

Roadmap



How Extended Families Are Engaged

Family “inclusive of all adults who interact with early childhood system ... include biological, adoptive, and foster parents; grandparents; legal and informal guardians; and adult siblings”

“States could support ...examples of how to create diverse opportunities for families...specifically for fathers, grandparents, young parents”

Now
what?

i(cs)

INSTITUTE *for* CHILD SUCCESS

Role of Family Engagement

- No “one size fits all” model of family engagement
 - Create multiple opportunities for various kinds of engagement over year
- Family engagement linked to positive learning environments and academic benchmarks for students
 - No standardized ways to measure “family engagement”
 - Factors in both schools and individual families play a large role



Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

- Federal privacy law; state privacy laws may add on
- Speed bump to meaningful family engagement but *not* the end of the road
- By and large, refers to “education records”
- Important to work with families at beginning of year to understand
 - who is allowed access to child info;
 - who can pick children up from school; and
 - who can (or *can't*) attend events
- Create flexibility in updating these lists throughout year



Opportunities to Elevate Extended Families



Welcoming
Environment



Assignments
and
Activities



Events &
Opportunities

Know Your Families

- Motivation for extended household
 - “Double up” based on low economic resources
 - Caregiving needs
 - Convenience
 - Cultural expectations
- Poverty rate tends to be higher among downward vertical & multiple extension families
- Racial and ethnic groups overrepresented in certain structures:
 - Downward vertical families & Black households
 - Horizontal families & Latino households
 - Vertical families & Asian and Pacific Islander households



How can you address family needs based on individual situation?

Know families you work with

- Who is at home? Who is a frequent presence if they live separately?
- What are those adults concerned about, and what do they bring to the table?

Accept that sometimes *you will not know their needs*

- You will not always get the full back story.
- You are not entitled to dig into personal & painful chapters to ease your own practice

Build a **system** that doesn't rely on knowing each story.

- Remove bias towards nuclear families & foster extended family opportunities *as the norm, not the exception*

i(cs)

Towards Inclusive Activities

- Assignments where “focus is on a child’s background, personal information, genetics, or other topics...can set the adopted child apart and make him or her feel different than classmates”
- **Teachers should consider:**
 - **What are the goals of the project?**
 - **Can those goals be achieved via different routes?**
- Iowa Foster and Adoptive Parents Association.

Inclusion, Every Day

Autobiographies



Student chooses a
specific time
period or special
events to focus on

Family Trees



“Family circle” w
child at center;
“caring trees” w
separate branches

Inclusion, Every Day

Mother's/Father's
Days



Create flexibility for assignments & events for student to identify someone who plays role for them

Bring a Baby
Picture



Draw your younger self; favorite picture, with no age specified

Representation Matters

- Avoid child/family having to serve as ambassador
 - Opportunities to share experiences & traditions is good – but avoid creating emotional labor
- Ensure language is *positive and strengths-based*
 - “Illegitimate,” “orphan,” “gave up,” “broken up,” “dissolved” are emotionally loaded and inaccurate
- Incorporate books on all family types into your classrooms



Roadmap



What Barriers Do You Face in *Your* Classroom?





INSTITUTE *for* CHILD SUCCESS

ICS's work on extended family engagement is ongoing! If you want to share resources or highlight programs in your community meeting this need, please reach out.

Megan Carolan:

Director of Policy Research

Institute for Child Success

mcarolan@instituteforchildsuccess.org

<http://instituteforchildsuccess.org/>



INSTITUTE *for* CHILD SUCCESS