



MODULES



 care communities

TABLE OF CONTENTS

MODULE 1	_____	PAGE 2
MODULE 2	_____	PAGE 8
MODULE 3	_____	PAGE 17
MODULE 4	_____	PAGE 22
MODULE 5	_____	PAGE 27



MODULE 1: INTRO/THANK YOU

OVERVIEW

Strong, trusting relationships are the heart of effective support. In this module, you'll learn why connection is foundational to the success of Care Teams and how to build meaningful relationships that uplift families who foster and the children in their care.

WHY CONNECTION COMES FIRST

Connection isn't just a nice extra—it's the foundation of effective care.

- When families who foster feel **seen, valued, and supported**, they are more likely to:
 - Trust volunteers
 - Engage in services
 - Feel less isolated and overwhelmed

According to the Foundation for Social Connection, meaningful relationships are a powerful **protective factor**. They boost mental, emotional, and physical health, and serve as a **prevention strategy** to improve outcomes across the community.

Visit social-connection.org for more information.

CONNECTION IS SUPPORT

Strong social ties aren't just supportive—they're transformative.

For families who foster, connection can:

- Reduce feelings of **isolation and burnout**
- Strengthen their capacity to meet the needs of children in care
- Expand their **network of resources and support**
- Promote long-term **placement stability and healing**

MODULE 1: BUILDING CONNECTION

HOW TO BUILD CONNECTION

Here are five key practices to help Care Team members form lasting and supportive bonds.

1. Be Present and Consistent

- Show up when you say you will.
- Follow through on every commitment, even the smallest ones.
- Remembering a child's favorite snack or asking about last week's doctor's visit can mean the world.

Trust grows in small, repeated moments of reliability.

2. Practice Inclusive Listening

- Listen to understand, not to fix.
- Suspend judgment.
- Acknowledge their **strengths and experiences** before offering help.

"I hear you, and I admire how much you're holding right now."

3. Support Their Role—Don't Replace It

- Ask: "What would be most helpful right now?"
- Avoid assumptions about what families need.
- Focus on **amplifying their goals**, not inserting your own.

See Module 4 for more guidance on offering help with humility.

4. Share Power and Decision-Making

- Involve the family in choices around:
 - Timing and frequency of support
 - Types of assistance
- Respect **personal boundaries** and **cultural values**.

Support works best when it's collaborative and tailored.

5. Focus on Belonging

- Celebrate milestones, holidays, and cultural traditions.
- Offer affirmations and reminders that they are not alone.
- Create a sense of shared community.

Belonging transforms service into relationship.

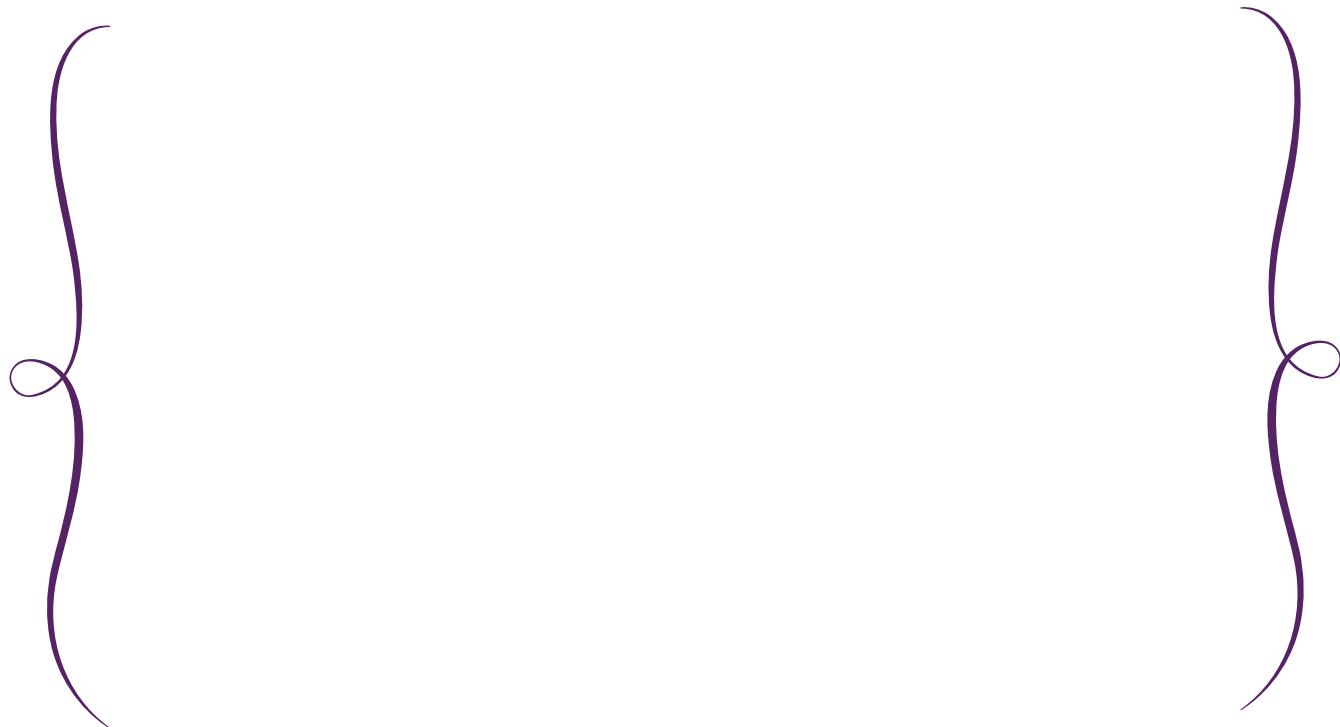


MODULE 1 WORKSHEET: MY ECOMAP

Exploring and understanding your own support system is key to unlocking your ability to serve and connect with others.

STEP 1: YOU AT THE CENTER

Draw a **large circle in the center** of the space below and write your name inside. This represents **you**.



STEP 2: WHO'S IN YOUR CIRCLE?

Around your center circle, draw additional smaller circles to represent the people, communities, and organizations that are part of your life.

Label each circle (name or group), using some of the following categories:

- Family
- Friends
- Neighbors
- Coworkers or mentors
- Faith or spiritual community
- Therapists, doctors, or coaches
- Volunteer or social groups
- Stressful or demanding relationships (if you wish to include them)



MODULE 1 WORKSHEET: MY ECOMAP

Exploring and understanding your own support system is key to unlocking your ability to serve and connect with others.

STEP 3: DRAW THE CONNECTIONS

Use lines to show the strength and nature of each relationship:

- Solid line — strong, positive connection
- Dashed line — weak or distant connection
- Zigzag line — stressed or conflicted relationship

Then use arrows to show the direction of support:

- → You mostly give one-way support
- ↔ Mutual support
- ← You mostly receive support

STEP 4: REFLECT

Where is your support system strongest? _____

Are there areas where you give more than you receive? _____

Who do you turn to when you need help? _____

What surprised you about your ecomap? _____

How might this experience help you support a family who fosters children from hard places with more empathy?

OPTIONAL REFLECTION PROMPT

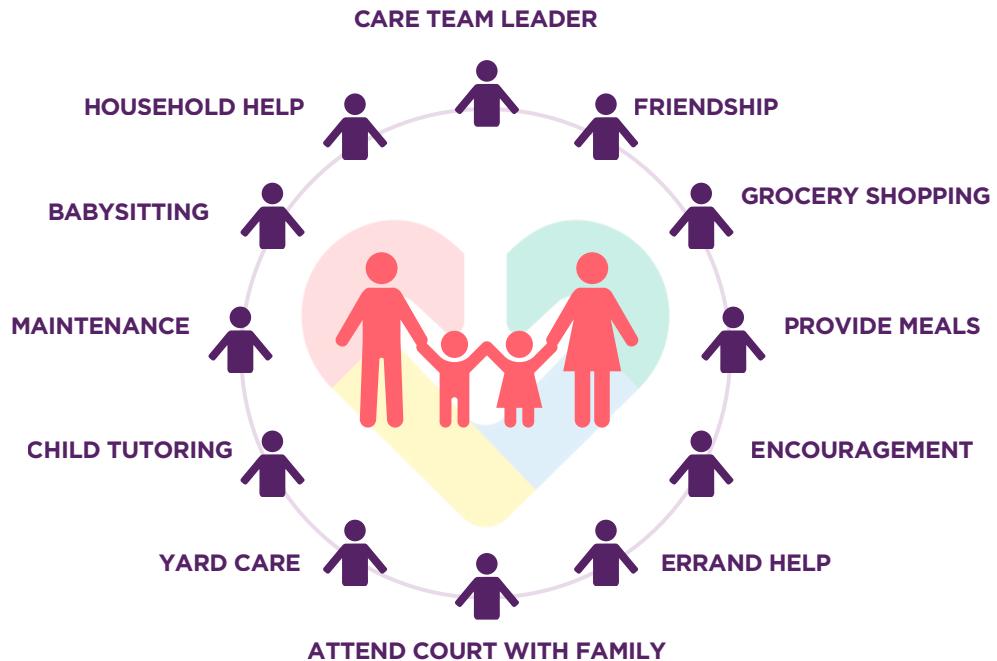
Think about a time you felt truly supported. **What made that experience meaningful?**
How can you bring that same spirit to your Care Team role?

NEXT STEPS

- Reflect on how you can apply one of these practices this week.
- As a team, discuss: *How can we make connection a core part of how we serve?*



MODULE 1 WRAP-UP



CHECK OUT THIS RESOURCE FOR MORE ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CONNECTION.



FOR CARE TEAM LEADERS

Answer the questions below:

- Which parts of this module can help Care Team Members build genuine friendship with the parents who are fostering? Consider how you can help the parents build stronger connections with specific members of the team and **discuss those ideas with team members**.
- During your **regular check-ins with the parents**, how will you assess the quality of connections being formed? What questions will you ask to understand if team members are successfully building trust and genuine friendship? For example: ask who on the team they feel comfortable with and encourage those members to reach out to offer additional connections.
- What specific strategies will you use to **help parents who foster** feel they truly belong to a community of support rather than just receiving services? How will you **ensure your team** creates an atmosphere of mutual relationship rather than one-way help?



MODULE 1 WRAP-UP

FOR CARE TEAM LEADERS CONT.

- Consider hosting a social gathering that is low in pressure and expectation for the family who is fostering and offers social connection for them and the team. Examples may include a front yard gathering, dessert night, games at the park, or a game night at the family's home or a Care Team member's home. Keep the invitation open enough that the family can opt out if they need to or just send part of their family. Help team members understand that the family may opt out of events depending on their current bandwidth.
- Consider hosting a brief social gathering for just the team members to build connections within the team.
- Make note of what has worked well to build connection between the members of the team and the family who is fostering. Then, build on those successes.
- How will you model the five key practices—being present, inclusive listening, supporting roles, sharing power, and focusing on belonging—in your leadership style with both the **family who is fostering** and **your team members**?

FOR CARE TEAM MEMBERS:

Consider the following:

- After completing your ecomap, what surprised you most about your own support system? How does this new awareness help you understand what parents who foster might be experiencing in terms of isolation or support gaps?
- How will you move beyond just "providing help" to building genuine friendship with a family who is fostering children? What does it look like to be present and consistent in small, everyday ways?
- Think of a time when someone helped you in a way that felt empowering versus a time when help felt diminishing. How will you ensure your support amplifies the parents' role rather than replacing their decision-making?
- **Check with your Care Team Leaders** to share ideas and get their feedback. They spend additional time getting to know the family's needs and will guide you in your efforts to build connection.

MODULE 2: CULTIVATING VIBRANT COMMUNICATION

OVERVIEW

The way we communicate with families who foster can either build trust or unintentionally create distance. In this module, we explore how intentional and respectful communication fosters connection, normalizes support, and strengthens the Care Team-family relationship.

WHY COMMUNICATION MATTERS

Words carry weight. Even well-intended messages can send signals we don't mean to send. That's why awareness, humility, and care are key in how we speak and what we share.

- Our communication should reflect:
 - Respect for the foster family's role
 - Curiosity instead of assumptions
 - Consistency, clarity, and kindness

Example: As you're getting to know the foster parents, ask if the child in care calls the parents by their first name, by "Mom/Dad" or by something else.

NORMALIZE NEEDING HELP

Let's challenge the idea that needing support is a weakness. The truth is:

Communities are healthiest when we help each other and allow ourselves to be helped.

One way we normalize this truth is through language.

- Be mindful of messages that suggest "being busy" as a barrier to connection.
- Use phrases that validate interdependence:
 - "We're here because everyone needs help sometimes—including us."
 - "It's okay to lean on others. That's why we have a community."

THOUGHT EXERCISE

Take a moment to reflect:

- How do you feel when someone speaks in a way that feels like they're saying, "I'm so busy, but I'll help anyway"?
- How do you feel when someone genuinely offers support without pressure?
- How might your words unintentionally discourage someone from receiving support?

MODULE 2: CULTIVATING VIBRANT COMMUNICATION

WHAT TO SHARE / WHAT TO AVOID

Ask yourself:

- Am I lifting a burden or unintentionally adding one?
- Am I centering their needs or my desire to be helpful?

You don't need to share:

- Personal challenges or comparisons
- Frustrations about scheduling or other families
- Overly detailed logistics that could overwhelm

Do share:

- Encouragement and affirmation
- Clear and simple options for support
- Flexibility and openness to feedback

Success isn't that help is accepted exactly as you offer it. Success is that the family feels supported.

HOW TO CREATE A STRONG RELATIONSHIP WITH THE FAMILY

1. Introduce yourself warmly and explain your role.

- Try: “Hi, I’m [Your Name], and I’m part of your Care Team. We’re here to support in whatever way is most helpful to you.”

2. Ask how they prefer to be contacted.

- Try: “Do you prefer text, phone calls, or email for quick check-ins and updates?”

3. Establish basic preferences early.

- Try asking:
 - “What time of day is usually best if we need to reach out?”
 - “Would a weekly check-in work for you, or would you rather reach out when something comes up?”

4. Recognize their role and experience.

- Try: “You know your family best—please let us know what works or doesn’t.”



MODULE 2: CULTIVATING VIBRANT COMMUNICATION

MAINTAIN CLEAR, CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION

1. Confirm details when offering support.

- Try: “We’re planning to drop off a meal Tuesday around 6 PM. Does that time still work for you?”

2. Follow up briefly after each interaction.

- Try: A short message like “Hope dinner last night helped a bit—I’ll touch base later this week. Reach out if you have a need in the meantime; we’re always here!” It keeps the door open.

3. Schedule regular (but flexible) check-ins.

- Try: “Would you like a quick message every Friday to see what’s needed for the following week?”

4. Invite feedback in a simple, low-pressure way.

- Try: “Was the way we dropped things off okay? Would you prefer a different time or method?”

5. Clarify boundaries and expectations.

- Try: “We don’t want to overwhelm you—if ever our help isn’t needed, that’s totally okay. Just let us know if you need different support or a different day/time.”

DO

- ✓ Ask about communication preferences
- ✓ Keep communication focused on family’s strengths
- ✓ Respond promptly when they reach out (within the established timeframe)
- ✓ Keep personal info private & secure
- ✓ Use inclusive, non-judgmental language

DON’T

- ✗ Assume texting is okay for everything
- ✗ Dwell on problems or deficits
- ✗ Leave messages unanswered for longer than promised
- ✗ Overshare about other families or volunteers
- ✗ Use labels or assumptions about family dynamics



MODULE 2: CULTIVATING VIBRANT COMMUNICATION

Reminder: Consistent, respectful communication is the **foundation of trust**. Foster families may already feel overextended. Good communication helps ensure that support feels helpful rather than burdensome.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Vibrant communication begins with curiosity, not assumption.
- Normalize receiving help as a strength.
- Clear, respectful, and flexible conversations are at the heart of effective support.
- Always prioritize relationships over logistics.

SCENARIO 1: THE OVERRAGER VOLUNTEER

WHAT NOT TO DO

Jessica is a new Care Team member. She knocks on the foster family's door and, without much introduction, says:

"Hi! I'm here from your Care Team. We've got a bunch of meals planned and a few people ready to babysit. I'll just text you when we're dropping things off. Don't worry—we've done this for other families too, so we know what works!"

The foster parent, feeling caught off guard and uncertain about who Jessica is or what to expect, politely says thank you but closes the door with a tight smile.

MISSTEPS:

- No clear introduction or explanation of her role
- Assumes the family's needs and preferences
- Uses a one-size-fits-all approach
- Doesn't ask for permission or input

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Jessica takes a breath before knocking, then warmly introduces herself:

"Hi, I'm Jessica. I'm part of your Care Team. Our goal is to support you in ways that feel helpful, not overwhelming."

She continues:

"I'd love to learn a little about your preferences. Would you rather we text, call, or email for quick updates?"



MODULE 2: CULTIVATING VIBRANT COMMUNICATION

“And is there a time of day that’s usually better to reach you?”

“Some families like a weekly check-in; others just let us know as needs come up. Whatever works for you is great.”

The foster parent, visibly more relaxed, thanks her and says she prefers texts and would love an occasional check-in on Fridays.

SCENARIO 2: THE ASSUMPTIVE CHECK-IN

WHAT NOT TO DO

Care Team member Aaron sends a message:

“Hi, I’ve scheduled a grocery drop for 3 PM today and left a list of resources you might want to check out. Let me know if you need anything else.”

The foster parent is in the middle of a crisis at school pickup and feels frustrated—not only because they weren’t asked first, but also because the message feels impersonal and directive.

MISSTEPS:

- No greeting or relational tone
- Scheduled something without asking
- Sent resources without context or invitation
- Failed to recognize the parent’s existing knowledge or autonomy

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Aaron revises his approach and sends a message like this:

“Hi [Foster Parent’s Name], I’m Aaron with your Care Team. I’d love to learn what kind of support would feel useful to you right now. If you’re open to it, I could help with grocery pickup or meal drop-offs—whatever fits your routine best.”

Then follows up with:

“Also, I have a few resources that some families have found helpful, if you’d like them. Just let me know.”

The foster parent responds appreciatively, saying they’d love a grocery drop-off but would prefer a different time. They also ask Aaron to hold off on resources for now.



MODULE 2: CULTIVATING VIBRANT COMMUNICATION

SCENARIO 3: THE DISAPPEARING DROP-OFF

WHAT NOT TO DO

Samantha, a Care Team member, drops off a meal on a Wednesday evening but doesn't confirm the time beforehand. She leaves it on the porch with a quick note, then doesn't follow up until the following week.

"Hey! Hope that meal worked out. Let me know if you want anything else."

The foster parent finds the cold meal hours later after returning home late from a medical appointment. They feel unsure about the process and hesitant to rely on the Care Team again.

MISSTEPS:

- No confirmation about timing or availability
- No follow-up to check how the support landed
- Infrequent, unpredictable communication
- Puts the burden on the family to initiate future support

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

Samantha sends a message in advance:

"Hi [Foster Parent's Name], we'd love to drop off dinner this Wednesday. Would 5:30 PM work, or is there a better time?"

After the drop-off, she follows up with:

"I hope the meal helped make your evening a little easier. I'll check in on Friday to see if you'd like anything next week, but no pressure. You can always reach out anytime!"

What She Did Well:

- Confirmed details ahead of time
- Used warm, reassuring language
- Followed up with kindness but no pressure
- Offered predictable communication while honoring flexibility



MODULE 2: CULTIVATING VIBRANT COMMUNICATION

SCENARIO 4: THE SELF-RELIANCE CHEERLEADER

WHAT NOT TO DO

Scott is a new Care Team Leader. When he visits the foster family for the first time, he listens as Casey, the foster parent, shares that she's feeling overwhelmed juggling therapy appointments, caseworker visits, meals, and school drop-offs.

Scott smiles warmly and says:

"Wow, sounds like you're handling a lot—but you've got this! You're clearly capable and strong. I believe in doing hard things, and I can tell you do too. You don't need help; you just need a reminder of how competent you are."

He leaves without offering any tangible support, thinking he's been encouraging. Over the next few weeks, he continues to check in with similar messages:

"I know it's tough, but you're built for this."

"You've done hard things before—you can do this too."

Casey begins to feel discouraged. She appreciates the positive tone, but what she really needs is someone to help lighten the load, not cheer her on from the sidelines. She starts ignoring Scott's messages, unsure how to explain that encouragement isn't enough.

MISSTEPS:

- Equates strength with doing everything alone
- Avoids offering direct support out of fear of undermining the family's competence
- Sends praise without follow-through
- Misses the opportunity to normalize help as part of healthy self-reliance

WHAT TO DO INSTEAD

After reflecting on a Care Communities training about communication, Scott realizes that his view of self-reliance may be too narrow. He reaches out again and says:

"Hi Casey. I've been thinking about our last conversation. I meant to be encouraging, but I may have missed the mark. Self-reliance doesn't mean doing it all alone—it means knowing who your people are and being able to lean on them when it matters."

MODULE 2: CULTIVATING VIBRANT COMMUNICATION

SCENARIO 4: THE SELF-RELIANCE CHEERLEADER CONT.

He continues:

"I'd love to be one of those people for you. Whether it's errands, meals, or just a listening ear, we're here, and it's okay to ask."

This time, Casey responds with relief:

"Thank you for saying that. I've been trying to hold it all together, but some specific support would really help."

WHAT HE DID WELL:

- Reframed self-reliance as supported strength
- Took accountability for earlier communication that felt unhelpful
- Normalized the act of asking for help
- Shifted from praise to partnership

————— “ —————

"I think the structure helped because it facilitated a relationship where we were allowed to be vulnerable in a way that I don't know that we would have been otherwise. I don't know that I would have been able to say, 'Hey, I feel like I'm drowning. Can you help us?'"

- Foster Parent

————— ” —————



MODULE 2 WRAP-UP

REFLECTION

FOR CARE TEAM LEADERS

Consider the following questions as you build and lead your Care Team:

- How are you creating space for each member of your foster family to feel heard and valued? What have you learned about their unique communication styles?
- How do you balance asking direct questions about their needs with being present and listening to what comes up naturally?
- What moments of vulnerability or openness from your foster family have created opportunities for you to offer support in ways you hadn't considered before?
- During your regular **check-ins with the foster parents**, what questions have you asked recently that revealed something new about what this family truly needs to feel supported?
- How can you **help members of the team** use these principles in their communication with the foster family? Consider sharing tips and insights in the group text with your team.

FOR CARE TEAM MEMBERS

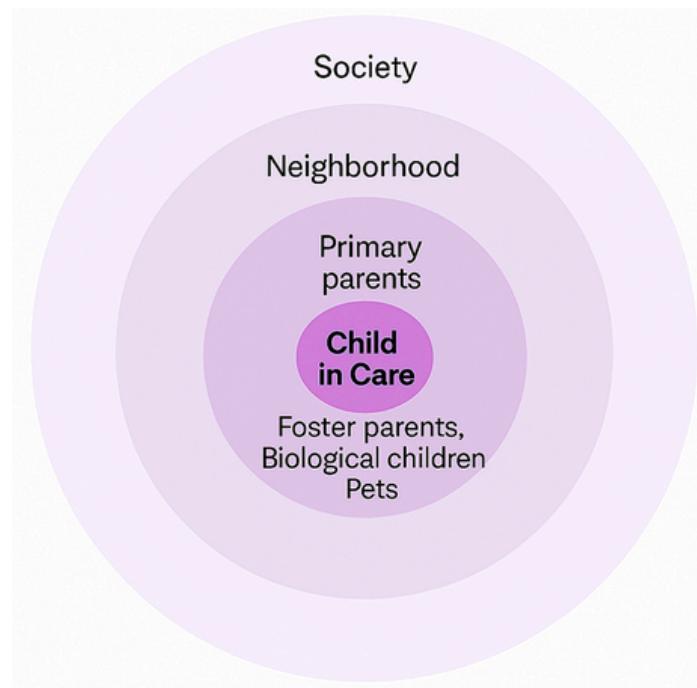
- Reflect on your own communication style. Do you tend to overshare, under-communicate, or make assumptions? How will you **adjust your approach** to center the foster family's needs?
- What language do you currently use that might unintentionally suggest that "being busy" is a barrier to receiving help or that it might feel burdensome? How will you **reframe your language** to make support feel more natural and welcome?
- How will you practice "inclusive listening," meaning listening to understand rather than to fix? What will you do when you feel the urge to offer solutions instead of simply being present?
- How will you establish trust and rapport with your foster family while maintaining appropriate boundaries? What does respectful communication look like in your role? If you have questions about this, **check with your Care Team Leaders** as they will have insight about which types of communication work best for the family.



MODULE 3: SERVING THE WHOLE CIRCLE

OVERVIEW

When you serve in a Care Community, you're not just helping a child—you're stepping into a **web of relationships**. Understanding the full circle of people around a child in care helps you offer **respectful, informed, and impactful support**.



THE WHOLE CHILD, THE WHOLE SYSTEM

Children in care are not isolated individuals. They are part of interconnected systems, each influencing and being influenced by the others. When we serve with this broader lens, we support the child and **everyone who surrounds them**.

WHY THIS MATTERS

As a Care Team member, your actions ripple outward. They influence:

- The child's emotional and psychological well-being
- The stability and stress level of caregivers
- The reunification process and sibling relationships
- The quality of connection across helping professionals
- The broader climate of support around families who are fostering

Earlier in this training, you created an ecomap of your own life—a snapshot of who supports you, who you support, and where energy flows. Now, let's zoom out. What if we did the same thing for a family who is fostering?



MODULE 3 ACTIVITY

ACTIVITY: COMPARE THE CIRCLES

1. Review Your Own Ecomap (2-3 minutes)

- Notice where your strongest supports are. Who's in your inner circle? Who do you lean on when things are hard?

2. Child in Care Circle Graphic

- See the concentric circle diagram of the child in care's systems.
- A child in care may not have consistent access to many of the support systems we take for granted like extended family, trusted friends, or long-term mentors.

3. Guided Reflection

- What's present in your map that might be missing or unstable in the world of a child in care?
- Where do you see parallels?
- How can Care Teams mindfully fill gaps without replacing or overshadowing existing supports?

SCENARIO 1: THE NARROW FOCUS – MISSING THE CIRCLE

The Situation:

A Care Team is excited to support 9-year-old Jayden, who just entered a foster home. They immediately start organizing activities just for him—offering to take him to the park, drop off toys, and plan a special birthday surprise.

They rarely check in with the foster parent, assuming she'll let them know if she needs anything. When Jayden's behavior becomes more reactive and his foster mom, Maria, starts feeling overwhelmed, the team is surprised and unsure how to help. They didn't realize she was also juggling her other children, medical appointments, and a strained relationship with Jayden's school.

Missed Opportunities:

- The team never asked Maria about her needs or preferences
- They didn't recognize that Jayden's emotional regulation was closely tied to Maria's support system
- Their good intentions actually added to Maria's load rather than lightening it
- The team unintentionally isolated Jayden from his own family structure and routines

Takeaway: *When support centers only on the child without honoring the caregiving environment, it can unintentionally add pressure and reduce placement stability.*



MODULE 3 ACTIVITY

SCENARIO 2: THE SYSTEMS-AWARE APPROACH – STRENGTHENING THE CIRCLE

The Situation:

A Care Team is assigned to support 14-year-old Laila and her foster family. Before offering anything, they meet with her foster dad, Andre, and ask about his family's rhythm, values, and any current stressors. They learn that Andre and his husband are parenting both Laila and their adopted 6-year-old son, and that they're navigating court dates and school challenges.

The team offers to help with **family-centered support**, like:

- Dropping off meals that meet everyone's dietary needs
- Taking the 6-year-old to the park so the dads can focus on Laila's therapy appointments
- Offering a quiet space for Laila to study after school, with support from a volunteer who also mentors teens
- Celebrating milestones that include the whole family like a "gotcha-versary" dinner for both kids

System-Smart Decisions:

- They respected the foster parents as the foundation of support
- They created a circle of care that acknowledged both children's needs
- They checked in regularly, adjusted based on feedback, and built trust over time

Laila began to feel more connected and secure. Her foster parents reported less stress and more capacity to meet her needs.

YOUR ROLE: A SYSTEM SUPPORTER

When you offer care, always ask:

- **Who else is impacted by this support or action?**
- **How can I respect and uplift the entire system around the child?**
- **Am I strengthening relationships or creating friction unintentionally?**

Support that honors the system is more sustainable and more compassionate.

REFLECTION PROMPT

- Think of a child you know (personally or professionally).
 - **Who is in their "circle"?** Who shapes their world, positively or negatively?
- How can you apply this systems awareness to your work as a Care Team member?



MODULE 3 WRAP-UP

REFLECTION

FOR CARE TEAM LEADERS

See “Prevention and Protection” and “Ideas for Serving” in your guidebook for additional ways to build healthy relationships with children in care.

Consider the following questions as you build and lead your Care Team:

1. How will you **help your team understand and consider** all the relationships and systems around the child in care? What tools or reminders will you use to keep this broader perspective in mind? For example:
 - a. Give **updates in the group chat** to the team about the entire family and not just the children in care.
 - b. Direct members of your team to “Ideas for Serving” in their guidebook for additional ways to build connection and relationships. Then, invite them to consider how they can use these to support the entire family.
2. How will you **guide your team** to offer support that honors and includes the entire family structure, not just the individual child in care? For example:
 - a. Invite members of the team to include the entire family in items they drop off. Outside of birthday or event celebrations specific to one child, ask them to be thoughtful about dropping off items or doing activities with all the children in the home. If you ask, the family will guide you in identifying what will work best for them.
 - b. Ask the foster parents what types of items would be helpful for the children in their care to take home when they visit their first family. Coloring books or activities they can use during a visit may be a welcome type of support.
 - c. Consider having team members drop off a birthday card for every member of the family or attend sporting and school events for each of the children in the home. Spread that out across the team to avoid burnout.
3. How will you regularly evaluate whether your team’s actions are strengthening relationships within the family system or creating unintended tensions? During your regular **check-ins with the foster parents**, consider asking them if there are unintended consequences or challenges from the service the Care Team is providing. They will have insight to help you and your team navigate family-centered support.
4. During your regular **check-ins with the foster parents**, consider asking how your team can best integrate the service with their existing routines, relationships, and values. Let their answers guide the work and connections with the team.

MODULE 3 WRAP-UP

FOR CARE TEAM MEMBERS:

See “Prevention and Protection” and “Ideas for Serving” in your guidebook for more ways to build healthy relationships with children in care. Consider the following:

1. When you think about the children your team serves, who else is in their circle of relationships? Consider this for each of the children in the home, not just the children in care. How will you ensure your interactions support and strengthen these existing connections?
2. How will you offer support that integrates well with the family's existing routines, relationships, and values rather than adding complexity or conflict? Talk with your Care Team Leaders and other team members to find solutions.
3. What steps will you take to ensure your well-meaning support doesn't inadvertently isolate the child from their family structure or create additional pressure for the foster parents? Be open to feedback from your Care Team Leaders and the foster parents.
4. **Check with your Care Team Leaders** to get their insight on how you can support the entire family. Be open to their feedback on how to best accomplish this and know that their answers and counsel may change as the foster family gets to know the team better.

“

“For a child who came from a background where they have been juggled around—and doesn't have any reason to trust or to build connection with adults—it's been really beautiful to see how they have benefited from building bonds with Care Team Members who have opened their hearts and given their love.”

- Foster Parent

”



MODULE 4: WHAT DOES THE FAMILY REALLY NEED?

OVERVIEW

When we ask foster families, “How can we help?” it may feel well-meaning, but it can unintentionally add to their mental load. Foster caregivers often carry an invisible burden of anticipating and managing countless responsibilities. Sharon Eubank, director of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Humanitarian Services, teaches in Chapter 4 of her book, *Doing Small Things With Great Love*, that our solutions to the needs of others are often not what they need most. As Care Team members, we can ease that burden by approaching conversations with clarity and care. In this module, you’ll learn how to structure your questions in ways that make support easier to accept and more aligned with the family’s real needs, with dignity, gentleness, and trust at the center.

Mental load refers to the invisible, ongoing work of managing responsibilities, planning, anticipating needs, and making decisions—often without recognition. For foster parents, this can mean tracking appointments, navigating caseworker communication, managing school transitions, coordinating services, and handling emotional fallout all while trying to meet the daily needs of their family. When Care Team members take initiative to thoughtfully identify needs and offer specific, manageable options, they help ease that mental load rather than adding to it.

For example, asking open-ended questions like “How can we help?” can sometimes feel overwhelming for a foster family to answer. Instead, see yourself as a collaborative partner in carrying the mental load of identifying needs. By approaching conversations with clarity and sensitivity, you can reduce pressure and offer support that is truly helpful. Below are some practical tips on how to structure questions more effectively.

OFFER CLEAR CHOICES INSTEAD OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Open-ended questions require more effort. *Example: "Would it be more helpful if I brought dinner this week or helped with running errands?" Limit options to 2-3.*

USE YES/NO OR MULTIPLE-CHOICE FORMATS

Easier to answer and less mentally taxing. *Example: "Would it be helpful to have someone check in weekly?"*

BREAK DOWN BIG QUESTIONS INTO SMALLER ONES

Broad questions overwhelm. Focus on specifics. *Example: "Do you need groceries, school supplies, or laundry soap this week?"*

NOTICE AND OFFER, DON'T WAIT TO BE ASKED

Families may not be able to name or express needs. *Example: "You have appointments Tuesday—can I bring dinner or stay with the kids?"*

AVOID VAGUE OFFERS

“Let me know if you need anything” puts the burden back on them. *Example: "I'm free Friday—can I run errands or bring dinner?"*

KEEP OFFERS SIMPLE, KIND, AND OPTIONAL

Pressure makes people retreat. *Example: Normalize "no thanks." Repeated low-pressure check-ins build trust.*



MODULE 4: WHAT DOES THE FAMILY REALLY NEED?

Supporting well begins with asking well. Be specific, be gentle, and always keep dignity and ease at the center. Remind families that you are here to lighten the load, not to push.

Below is a list of suggested questions to help you get the conversation going.

PHYSICAL & PRACTICAL SUPPORT

Does the family need help with **meals** (e.g., meal train, grocery cards, prep help)?

Tip: Offer a specific day or meal instead of asking “Do you need anything?”

Are there **transportation needs** (e.g., rides to school, appointments, visits)?

Prompt: “Would it help to have backup for appointments or activities?”

Is there a need for **household essentials** (e.g., diapers, cleaning supplies, school supplies)?

Tip: Ask what’s running low instead of bringing random items.

Are there **home organization** tasks that could use support (e.g., sorting clothes, setting up a child’s space)?

Prompt: “Could I help set up or organize anything to make life a little easier?”

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

Does the caregiver have someone to talk to or check in with regularly?

Prompt: “Would you prefer a phone call, text or porch visit this week?”

Are there supportive activities for the child in care (e.g., mentoring, tutoring, social outings)?

Prompt: “Would [child’s name] enjoy an activity with a few people from the Care Team?”

Is the family connected to peer support, like other foster families or community groups?

Tip: Invite them to inclusive spaces—don’t assume they already have a network. Care Teams can reach out to Utah Foster Care for vetted resources and connections.

RESPITE & TIME OFF

Could the family use respite care—short breaks to rest or run errands?

Prompt: “Would it be helpful if we spent time with the kids while you take a break?”

Are there ways to help the family celebrate or decompress (e.g., gift cards, activity kits, nature passes)?

Tip: Think fun, low-stress options that include the whole family.

Is there someone regularly checking in on their self-care and well-being?

Prompt: “How are you doing this week?” Be ready to truly listen.



MODULE 4: WHAT DOES THE FAMILY REALLY NEED?

REFLECTION

FOR CARE TEAM LEADERS:

Consider the following questions as you build and lead your Care Team:

1. Thinking about your recent interactions with your foster family, what examples have you noticed of the 'invisible mental load' they carry? How might your support lighten rather than add to that burden?
2. When you've offered help in the past, have you structured your questions in ways that required the family to do more thinking and planning? How could you adjust your approach? See "*Questions to Ask Foster Parents*" in the Care Team Leader Program Guide.
3. Think of a recent conversation where you asked 'How can I help?'. How might you rephrase that question using the strategies from this module to make it easier for the family to respond?
4. During your regular **check-ins with the foster parents**, consider how you can involve the foster family in planning while also taking some of the decision-making burden off their shoulders. What does true partnership look like in practice?
5. **Give your team specific feedback** and updates on what types of support the foster family currently needs. Consider using group and individual texts to offer suggestions to your team. Help them understand the needs of the family will evolve as they become more comfortable with the team. Help them see the 'invisible mental load' of the foster parents.

FOR CARE TEAM MEMBERS:

1. What signs will you watch for that indicate specific support would be helpful?
2. Practice reframing these questions to be more specific and less mentally taxing:
 - a. Instead of "How can I help?", try: _____
 - b. Instead of "Let me know if you need anything.", try: _____
 - c. Instead of "What do you need?", try: _____
3. How will you offer support in ways that preserve the foster parents' dignity and decision-making power? What does it look like to lighten their load without making them feel incapable? See "*Questions to Ask Foster Parents*" in the Care Team Member Program Guide.
4. **Check with your Care Team Leaders** for specific ideas on how to offer support that is meaningful and most impactful for the family. Be open to their suggestions and offer your insights from interactions with the foster parents. The more information they have about the family, the better they can guide this work.



MODULE 4: WHAT DOES THE FAMILY REALLY NEED?

Below is a form you can use to record needs mentioned in conversations with your foster family.

Foster Family Support Form

Go through the list of possible areas of need. Identify if there is a need and the timeframe for that need. This will help you prioritize what is most important to deliver first.

Physical & Practical Support

- Help with meals (e.g., dinners, groceries, meal prep)
- Help with rides (e.g., school, appointments, visits)
- Household supplies (e.g., diapers, laundry soap, school items)
- Help organize or set up spaces (e.g., kids' rooms, storage)
- Other needs at home: _____

Emotional Support

- Someone to check in with or talk to regularly
- Positive activities or mentorship for child(ren)
- Connection to other foster parents or support groups
- Friendly visits or time with other families
- Other social/emotional support: _____



MODULE 4: WHAT DOES THE FAMILY REALLY NEED?

Respite & Time Off

- Occasional respite or time away to rest and recharge
- Help running errands or attending appointments
- Fun experiences or activities (e.g., passes, kits, cards)
- Support for wellness or self-care
- Other ways to rest or reset: _____

Timing & Preferences

Let us know what works best for your family:

- Best times/days to receive help: _____
- Best way to contact you (text, call, email): _____
- Anything else you'd like us to know: _____

MODULE 5: HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL AS A CARE TEAM

OVERVIEW

Successful Care Teams are built on **clear communication, mutual respect**, and a shared commitment to supporting foster families in sustainable, strengths-based ways.

When team members feel **valued**, when their **roles align with their strengths and availability**, and when leaders share appreciation and updates, everyone is more likely to stay engaged and avoid burnout.

Team Strategies That Work

1. Start With Shared Expectations

Set clear team norms around communication, responsibilities, and boundaries.

Tip: Create a basic team agreement or code of conduct.

2. Engage Strengths and Interests

Identify the strengths and interests of each Care Team Member. The Care Team Leaders then engages each team member in those areas through communication with the foster family.

Tip: Watch for burnout in overenthusiastic team members and ensure everyone has a role.

3. Match Roles to Strengths

Allow team members to focus on what they do best—cooking, organizing, childcare, errands, etc.

Tip: Use a sign-up sheet or shared calendar to coordinate.

5. Debrief and Celebrate Together

Check in at regular, predetermined intervals to reflect and reset. Share wins and talk through any issues.

Tip: End debriefs with gratitude for each other's work.



MODULE 5: HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL AS A CARE TEAM

PITFALLS TO AVOID

🚫 Overpromising and Underdelivering

If you're unsure you can follow through, it's better to say no than to disappoint the family. Honest boundaries build trust.

🚫 Duplicating Efforts or Stepping on Toes

Coordination is key. Avoid overlapping tasks or unannounced visits.

🚫 Making It About You

This work centers the family's needs, not volunteer recognition. Be sensitive to how you hold and share personal stories, opinions, and judgments.

🚫 Disregarding Confidentiality

Never share stories, photos, or sensitive information without permission.

🚫 Ignoring Burnout Signs

If someone's doing too much, speak up. Check in with one another and share the load.

HANDLING AWKWARD OR UNCOMFORTABLE SITUATIONS

Among the Care Team:

- Start with curiosity, not accusation.

Example: "Hey, I noticed something felt a little off after our Care Team visit last week—can we talk about it?"

- Name the impact without blame.

"When the plans changed without notice, it left me scrambling. Can we come up with a better way to update each other?"

- Involve a neutral third party if needed.

A Care Team Leader or Care Communities Coordinator can help mediate if direct resolution feels difficult.

With the Foster Family:

- Stick to the scope of your role.

If a foster parent vents or shares more than you're equipped to help with, it's okay to say:

"This sounds like a difficult thing. You might consider bringing this to a Cluster meeting or talking with a mentor about it. They will have great perspective to share with you."

- Redirect gently if boundaries are unclear.

"I'd love to help with groceries or rides, but I can't provide supervision for visits—that's outside our role as Care Teams."

- Ask for guidance.

If you're unsure how to respond to something, check in with your Care Team Leader.



MODULE 5: HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL AS A CARE TEAM

GENERAL TIPS:

- Use “I” statements to express discomfort.
- Avoid talking behind others’ backs. Go directly to the source or appropriate support person.
- Assume positive intent. Everyone is learning.
- Acknowledge that awkwardness is part of trying something new and building trust.
- Talk with Care Communities Coordinators to keep learning and growing as a team and to navigate tricky situations.

REFLECTION

FOR CARE TEAM LEADERS:

Consider the following questions as you build and lead your Care Team:

1. Looking at the team strategies that work, which ones come most naturally to your leadership style? Which areas will require the most intentional development? How will you address your growth areas?
2. Looking at your current Care Team dynamics, which of the five team strategies (shared expectations, engaging strengths, matching roles, clear communication, debriefing together) feels strongest, and which needs more attention?
3. What signs of burnout (**in yourself or team members**) have you noticed, and how might you cultivate honest conversations about capacity and boundaries? **Reach out to team members individually** to gauge their level of comfort in their roles. Allow them space to adjust their engagement and opportunities to re-engage as they have more bandwidth. It is common for their engagement to ebb and flow over time.
4. During your regular **check-ins with foster parents**, consider how you can regularly assess your team’s effectiveness and make adjustments. For example:
 - a. Create feedback loops that you can establish with both team members and the foster family to assess their effectiveness and plan for adjustments.
 - b. Ask the foster family which members of the team they have had positive interactions with and with whom they may feel some discomfort, if any.

FOR CARE TEAM MEMBERS:

1. What specific strengths and capacities do you bring to this team?
2. How will you contribute to positive team dynamics and clear communication?
3. How will you maintain healthy boundaries to prevent burnout while still being genuinely helpful? What warning signs will you watch for in yourself and others? Communicate your desired level of engagement **with your Care Team Leaders regularly**.
4. Think about the guidelines for handling awkward situations. How will you apply these principles if challenges arise? What steps will you take to address concerns directly and constructively? **Share your concerns** with your Care Team Leaders.
5. What experiences on the Care Team stand out this week/month? **Share these stories with your Care Team Leaders** so you can talk through these experiences together.



MODULE 5: HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL AS A CARE TEAM

"I think the biggest thing that they've done is helped us not feel alone."

"It makes a difference that they have an open heart and open mind, and see our family."

"There's definitely been the ability to have some of the stress relieved... I don't know if we would have been able to get to where we are without the Care Community."

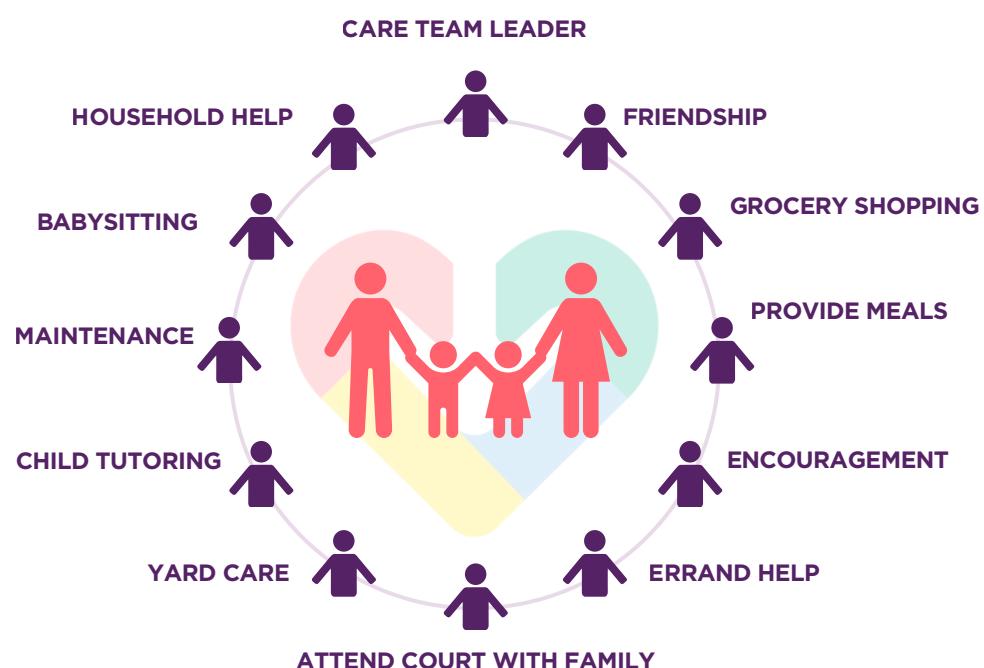
"There are now 8 to 10 adults that our kids know they're safe with. And they have a healthy relationship with these adults."

"For a child who came from a background where they have been juggled around—and don't have any reason to trust or to build connection with adults—it's been really beautiful to see how they have benefited from building bonds with Care Team Members who have opened their hearts and given their love."

"It's been so good for the child in my care, especially since I'm a single mom, to see good men that are willing to serve and help and work hard. Because none of my kids have had that role model in their lives growing up."

"There was one time I mentioned my car had a low tire light on and they took my car and filled up the tire. It was great. It was amazing."

- Avoid setting unrealistic expectations.
- Avoid spending money on the children; rather, ask their foster parents for tips on homemade and inexpensive ways to show them you care.
- Aim for ordinary kinds of activities, not "Disneyland" fun.
- Ask the parents what their children enjoy: games, foods, activities, places, and hobbies.
- When children are discouraged by your "no", try saying, "That's just the rule."
- Give the child two realistic options to choose from. *"Would you like to sit on the couch or the floor to play the game?"*
- If the child is overwhelmed or frustrated, suggest you take a walk to the kitchen to get a drink or snack.





care communities