

Every child living in foster care has a story of loss; a ruptured or severed connection to their families of origin. For those who have experienced multiple foster home placements, multiple stories of loss and/or trauma exist. While loss can exist without trauma, trauma *cannot* occur without loss, and therefore grieving.

We must acknowledge this within the fostering community, and build in the structures to emotionally support our youth.

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

An alternative view to ‘youth mental illness’ is describing the defiance and oppositional behavior of kids in care as ‘intelligence gathering’. This is a process where they use what is most readily available to them—their behavior—to test, push, and challenge the unfamiliar people and environments that have entered their lives. Youth learn to accurately assess their environment while responding to the numerous threats they perceive around them.

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

Youth in care are typically denied family privilege:

‘invisible benefits that come from membership in a stable family’ (John Seita)

Meaningful connections to youth may be revealed as their relationship(s) to a teacher, coach, former foster parent, current foster parent, social worker(s), counselor or any adult member of their family.

***Who are they? Where are they?
How can they be mobilized to
become (re)involved in the life of this
young person?***

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

These relationships will represent where, and with whom youth experience their sacred places of belonging.

Belonging is different than safety. Children and youth will grieve that which was not safe in much the same way as if they were grieving a death.

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

Developing a Calm and Open Presence (Equality)

However, as stated by Larry Brendtro and his colleagues, if respect, dignity and justice—the ingredients of equality—are dependent on birthdays, then the disempowerment of children will persist.

In order to *Ask...Listen...and Believe...* every opportunity needs to be created to do so.

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

- **Depression may be exposed as grief;**
- **Numbness a way of moderating pain;**
- **Trusting would not be prudent where survival is at stake;**
- **High concentration on surroundings leaves minimal concentration available for school.**

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

Questions that may reveal the context of actions may include:

- **What’s the first thing you do when you’re checking people out...finding out if they want you?”**
- **“How do you do that?”**
- **“...and then what do you do?”**
- **“How do you know if you can trust them?”**

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

■
Questions that serve to bring forth personal and social responses may include:

- **What were you thinking when you first saw the house that would be your foster home?**
- **Do you remember what you said?**
- **How did your social worker act with you?**

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

- **What were you thinking about your mom/dad in that moment?**
- **... What happened next...?**
- **What was going through your mind that first night when you went to bed?**

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

- **When youth have a sense of injustice: they will resist.**
- **When they feel powerless in decisions that affect their lives: they will resist.**
- **When youth feel that their dignity is threatened: they will resist.**

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com

When the acts of resistance are recognized as defiance, such punitive measures as “refusing privileges, removing bedding and other things from their rooms...using chemical restraints...become accepted ‘interventions with youth in care (Lambe, National Youth In Care Network, 2006)

While youth are responding to fractured connections with their family, they are also being assessed, advised and responded to based on their ‘behavior’. A Response-Based Approach strives for the discovery of how youth experience, respond to and resist all of the circumstances in their lives. Most importantly, professionals can hold an assumption of youth mental wellness and health.

The primary relevance to youth is to be fully taken into account, deeply listened to and viewed as vigilantly committed to protecting their wellness, integrity and dignity.

Derek Clark

www.IWillNeverGiveUp.com

www.FosterCareSuccess.com