



## WE ASKED:

**“What are the EARLY warning signs that a family might be approaching a crisis? To whom or where are you most likely to turn for support.”**

The Family Voices United campaign brings together the voices of young people, birth parents, and relative caregivers with lived experience in the child welfare system to drive change in foster care. Learn more at [familyvoicesunited.org](https://familyvoicesunited.org).

### **What are the current opportunities for Crisis Support?**

As COVID-19 continues to impact the lives and wellbeing of families across the world, it’s critical for leaders to understand the warning signs of families that may be experiencing a crisis. This helps to inform what services can be provided to current and former foster youth, parents and/or relative caregivers of children at imminent risk to address, prevent and support them during and approaching a crisis.

Some key themes that came out of the responses we received to this question:

- Changes in behavior and isolation is a major sign that a family is approaching a crisis.
- Stress from lack of employment, housing, and financial support can lead a family into a



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A collaborative project of The Alliance for Children’s Trust & Prevention Funds, FosterClub, and Generations United with support from Casey Family Programs.

crisis.

- Families need compassionate, and non judgemental support services.
- Families often turn to family, friends, mentors, mental health providers, and school counselors for support.

### Here is what young people, parents and kinship caregivers said...

**Our early signs started with our daughter when she was 16** and carried on through her first child being born at age 38. **Her inability to pay bills, inability to keep a job and constant change in boyfriends and drinking was the worst.** Then when our grandson was born the pregnancy was very difficult. We tried to get her to get help and she refused. The stigma was hard for her to face. **We did seek out help with the mental health system with no support. Even her doctor was not a help,** because they didn't understand the mental health and trauma that she had been through. When the 2nd child was born it just added to the stress that she couldn't deal with. Then the first child was showing signs of developmental disabilities, the situation got worse and it really spiraled down hill. Now 13 years later we are finally feeling OK. **There was no help then and not much help now, we were just determined.** I turned to the school, with no avail, I turned to doctores, mental health facilities. None were much support. We have come a long way since then and it was **due to our determination that we have been able to survive. I would not say we are completely out of crisis as we now have a second generation to raise with uncertainty.** Mental health issues doesn't just happen overnight. It is a cause of something that couldn't be dealt with over time.

Gail Engel, Colorado, Relative or Kinship caregiver

*- Gail Engel, Kinship Caregiver from Colorado*

Early warning signs that a family is likely approaching a crisis is **increased tension in the house, little things begin arguments, the parents cannot stop themselves from arguing, even in front of their children,** the parents are taking anger out onto the children, **the children are withdrawing from school or their friends, and they feel like they cannot turn to their parents,** so they go to friends, which may be bad depending on if they have good friends or not. **It is likely kids will turn to drugs or alcohol to "support" themselves, or they could go to a counselor at school.** I believe the alcohol/drug route is more likely, as being in an unstable household causes stress and doesn't encourage safe communication.

*- Sierra Burns, Former Foster Youth from South Carolina*

When a family is in crisis **the place and people they go to is family**. Family and friends will never turn their back on you. If a family is in crisis because they might have lost their job, no food, lack of money and they don't have anyone to run to when they need help. **If there were more places that would help families that are in crisis or in need a lot of people would be better off**. It would be less homeless and more jobs, if people hired them. If people just ask and not judge people this world would be a better place.

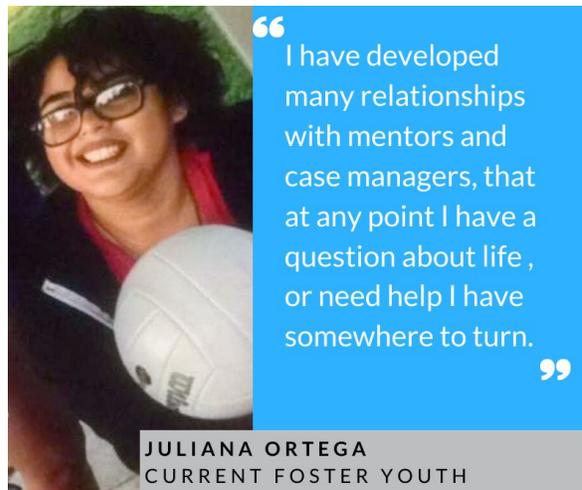
*-Keyna Franklin, Birth parent from New York*

Early warning signs that a family could be approaching a crisis is a **sign of drugs or substance abuse**. Another sign might be the **onset of chronic illness of one or more parents or a child** in the family. **Stress** brought on by employment, finances, illness or death may bring on a crisis. **The first place most people, if they can turn to, is family.**

*-Dr. Nina Fields-Pourvaranttee, Community Partner from Virginia*

A warning sign is kids began to act out more.

*-Joanne Oleary, Kinship Caregiver from Colorado*



**Family members start becoming irritated, snappy, and impatient with one another.** Without noticing it the symptoms worsen and then the explosion happens. I turn to my **spiritual advisor, confidant**, or someone in my **support group** that will understand what happens and most of all I turn to God in prayer.

*-Mercedes Bristol, Kinship Caregiver from Texas*

As a parent I believe that some of the early signs were **housing, jobs and relationships became difficult to keep**. Signs of depression and loss of joy became apparent in both myself and my children. A big warning flag at that point was the loss of my natural supports. I began to push my friends and family away out of fear that they may see the truth in my life unraveling. The other warning sign was that my **children began to miss school and did not participate in extracurricular activities or family functions**. I did not feel safe turning to anyone. **I believe I would have turned to someone who was non-judgmental and compassionate. Someone who made me feel safe.**

*-Leanne Walsh, Birth Parent from Oregon*

This may happen when a **family becomes disengaged and less willing to work with providers or family, friends and resources and they can begin to isolate**. They **may or may not turn to family or close friends**. The family may have secrets such as domestic violence and they may fear it coming to the surface and may isolate to prevent their secret from being revealed.

*-Amber Former Foster Youth from Oregon*

Family is lacking things, sleep patterns are off, meals are very simple or more like all day snacking, less calls or shorter very minimal conversation, avoiding people/eye contact. I think **families turn to friends or relatives or co-workers and if they don't have that to turn to, a good caseworker or social worker** from the past. **If none of that is available, this is when we start to make bad choices to soothe the pain in any way possible.**

*-Tecoria, Birth Parent/Former Foster Youth/Parent Advocate from South Carolina*



The family stops attending church or community events and begins isolating themselves from others. The **children start acting out at school to express the discomfort they are feeling**. They most likely would turn to other **family members or a close friend**.

*-Mickey Axtell-Mauck, Kinship Caregiver from Colorado*

I would completely rely on a **tenured therapist who has dealt with a significant amount of foster children** - hopefully one that a relationship has been established with from the beginning of the placement or adoption or one that an experienced adoptive or foster mother recommends.

*-Beverly Henry, Kinship Caregiver from Texas*

Families turn to friends or other family members.

*-Rachel, Kinship Caregiver from California*



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### How to use this paper

Our hope is that young people, parents and relative caregivers with lived experience in the child welfare system, community organizations, state Family First implementation teams, child welfare agencies, policymakers and other stakeholders will use this document to inform discussions about how to maximize support to families. If you are interested in using the quotes or perspective contained in this document or if you would like to bring young people, parents and relative caregivers to your event or project, email the Family Voices United team at [info@familyvoicesunited.org](mailto:info@familyvoicesunited.org) or call 503.717.1552.

### About the Family Voices United campaign

The Campaign elevates the voices and perspectives of young people, parents, and kinship caregivers, collectively known as family voices or “constituent voices”. Individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system are currently sharing their stories and expertise to educate, inform and transform the systems that serve children, youth and families - both in policy and practice. With new federal legislation - the Family First Prevention Services Act - states, tribes, and territories have new opportunities to implement changes that many constituents have identified are needed to fully support keeping children safe in strong, supported families.

**Join the movement! Sign up at [FamilyVoicesUnited.org](https://FamilyVoicesUnited.org)**