



# THE CONNECTEDNESS MAP

**The Connectedness Map** is a technique used by child welfare workers to help children and youth identify all the persons with whom they are connected and to understand how those connections matter.

The Connectedness Map activity allows the caseworker to discover not only the family members with whom a child or youth feels connected but also all the other persons who do or who can play a role in that child or youth's life.

This activity can be performed in phases over a course of days, weeks or months. As a child or youth remembers additional persons and as new connections are formed, they can be added to the map.

Before completing the Connectedness Map, explain the purposes of the activity to the child or youth. They are:

- to find connections who could be involved in the child or youth's life,
- to find connections who can help with planning for the child or youth's future, and
- to reconnect with connections that may have been lost or have faded.

Explain that this first mapping session will not be the only opportunity to do this exercise. The child or youth can add to the map in the future and may have an opportunity to ask relatives or other adults to add to it.

## **Strategies for engaging the child or youth:**

- Be mindful of the child or youth's developmental stage.
- Allow the child or youth to take the lead.
- Choose a mutually convenient time and a place that feels safe for the child or youth where you can work on the map together.
- Encourage the involvement of caregivers only if the child or youth feels comfortable with their participation.
- Keep a sense of humor.
- Be flexible and patient.
- Respect the child or youth's individuality and cultural norms.
- Understand that achieving a genuine rapport with a child or youth develops over time.

**Materials needed:**

- An assortment of markers (blue, purple, green, yellow, red, orange)
- Paper (Poster-sized paper is preferred if it is available. However, mapping can be done on a standard 8 ½-inch x 11-inch sheet or on the attached template instead.)
- A private space where the child or youth feels safe and can share information without concern about others overhearing

**Instructions:**

1. Place the child or youth's information in the center of the map, such as by positioning the child or youth's name, photo or self-portrait there.
2. Ask the child or youth to think of all the persons (living and deceased) with whom the child or youth feels connected. Include family members, friends, parents who are fostering, mentors, teachers, coaches, spiritual leaders, elders, neighbors and others. If the child or youth is having difficulty identifying connections, ask questions such as:
  - How big is your family?
  - Which people do you miss?
  - Who is important to you?
  - Who believes in you?
  - Who pays attention to you?
  - With whom have you shared holidays or special occasions?
  - Who has looked out for you?
  - With which people do you want to spend time?
  - Who makes you feel special?
  - Is there anyone who has died that you want to make sure is on your map?
3. Add each of these names to the paper, including each connection's location and age (if known).
4. Place the names of individuals who are similar in age to the child or youth on the same level as the child or youth's information on the map. Place the names of older persons above and of younger persons below that level to show different generations. Place all professionals' names at the bottom of the map.
5. Once everyone that the child or youth wants to include on the map has been identified, have the child or youth draw lines from each connection's name to the child or youth's name, using different colors to represent different types of connections. Ask how the child or youth feels connected with each person. For example:
  - Is this person a member of your family? If so, then draw a **BLUE** line from your name to that person's name to show your family connection with each other.
  - Has this person enriched you culturally? In other words, does this person cook cultural foods with you? Do you and this person spend holidays or celebrate traditions together? Do you both speak the same language? Does this person share

stories about times past with you? If so, then draw a **PURPLE** line from this person's name to yours to show your cultural connection with each other.

- Does this person teach you? Do you and this person have deep, meaningful talks together? Does this person mentor you? If so, then draw a **GREEN** line from this person's name to yours to show this connection.
  - Do you feel a spiritual connection with this person? In other words, do you seek advice or comfort from this person when you're feeling lost, alone or confused? Do you and this person share the same spiritual beliefs or worship the same way? If so, then draw a **YELLOW** line from this person's name to yours to show your spiritual connection with each other.
  - Do you love or care for this person? Does this person love or care for you? If so, then draw a **RED** line from this person's name to yours to show your connection with each other.
  - Do you have fun, laugh, play, share sports or other recreational activities with this person? If so, then draw an **ORANGE** line connecting this person's name to yours on the map.
6. If you have more than one type of connection with any of these persons, then draw lines between your name and this person's name in all of the colors that show the connections you have with each other. You will have multiple lines between your name and this person's name.

**KEY:**

**Blue** = Family connection (as the child or youth defines family members)

**Purple** = Richness of culture connection

**Green** = Mind connection (mental, educational, vocational)

**Yellow** = Spiritual connection (religious or belief system, values, moral compass)

**Red** = Heart connection (love, caring, healing)

**Orange** = Fun connection (with whom the child or youth finds fun, joy, play)

This Connectedness Map activity should be performed with children and youth over time. When the map is completed, give the child or youth the original; and keep a copy for your records. It will be a constant reminder of all the people in the world with whom the child or youth is connected.

Child welfare workers can use this map and the discussion that ensues from completing it to identify and to contact persons who can build the child or youth's circle of support. This can lead to obtaining legal, cultural and relational permanency for the child or youth.

