



Youth Leaving Foster Care: A Developmental, Relationship-Based Approach to Practice (Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics)

Wendy B. Smith

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Each year more than 25,000 youth age out of the American foster care system to face uncertain futures as young adults. Many of them have experienced the trauma of abuse, neglect, disrupted family relationships, and multiple foster care placements. The past two decades have seen increased funding and services in a society-wide attempt to mitigate the effects of such childhood adversity, but a consistent pattern of loss and broken attachments adds up. Development and education are severely compromised. A quarter of youth experience homelessness after exiting care; 25-50% will not complete high school, and only 3-6% will graduate college. Four years after leaving care, less than half are employed, and their earnings remain well below the poverty line. Rates of mental health disorders, early pregnancy and parenthood, and involvement in the criminal justice system are all heightened.

Youth Leaving Foster Care is the first comprehensive text to focus on youth emerging from care, offering a new theoretical framework to guide programs, policies, and services. The book argues that understanding infant, child, and adolescent development; attachment experiences and disruptions; and the impacts of unresolved trauma and loss on development are critical to improving long-term outcomes. It provides an overview of the foster care context, detailed discussion of the effects of maltreatment on development from infancy through young adulthood, and common mental health problems and treatment recommendations. It includes a discussion of delinquency and the juvenile justice system, as well as issues facing pregnant and parenting youth, LGBT youth, and youth with disabilities. Presenting the best practices in transitional living programs and policy and research recommendations, this crucial guide also reviews and summarizes the latest research, which are enhanced with illustrative case vignettes. Each mental health and program chapter concludes with key practice principles reflecting the relationship-based approach.

Presenting a multidimensional, integrated perspective that gives greater consideration to psychological and interpersonal needs, this vital guide offers an approach that will strengthen the capacity of youth leaving care to transition into successful adult lives.

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