

Foster Care

A summary of the scientific literature on foster care and Child Protective Services (CPS).



How This Impacts Children's Development

Foster care is meant to be a safe respite for children being harmed by their family members. However, the assumption among the public and some scholars and practitioners is that placements can be harmful, and

rarely, if ever, justified. Major pieces of legislation impacting and improving foster care include the “Family First Protection Services Act” (FFPSA) of 2018, and the “Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act” of 2008.

[READ THE BRIEF: Foster Care: How We Can, and Should, do More for Maltreated Children, 2020](#)

[READ THE BRIEF: youth in foster care: easing the transition into adulthood, 2009](#)

Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- In 2018, over 680,000 children were in foster care, with 62% placed due to neglect, 36% due to parental substance abuse, and 13% due to physical abuse.
- The foster care system often fails to meet safety standards, causing harm to children’s development through frequent moves and leaving them without legal family ties or stable homes as they reach adulthood.
- The FFPSA allows Title IV-E funds for mental health, substance abuse, and parenting services to support families and prevent children from entering foster care. It also limits funding for congregate care and promotes uniform foster family licensing standards.
- Native American and Black children are disproportionately involved in the child welfare system and are often socially and economically disadvantaged compared to White, Asian, and Hispanic children.
- While nearly all foster children are eligible for Medicaid, many health providers, including 39% of dentists and 36% of psychiatrists, do not accept Medicaid, impacting foster children’s access to necessary health care. Additionally, youth aging out of foster care receive limited transition services, and there is a lack of evidence on what works for supporting independent living.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

1. Agencies should leverage strategies to eliminate the potential influence of individual-level bias, such as color-blinded team decision-making for removal and reunification recommendations and ethical use of predictive risk modeling.
2. Agencies can cautiously use predictive risk modeling (PRM) to help identify the risk of serious maltreatment, injury, or death and inform early intervention or child protection decisions, but PRM tools should not be seen as a replacement for human judgment, as they cannot eliminate all decision-

making errors.

3. Minimum standards for foster homes should be strengthened, including prohibiting licensing for people convicted of misdemeanor child abuse or violent crimes, and people who were substantiated as having perpetrated child maltreatment through a Child Protective Services (CPS) case.
4. States should do more to support families that provide care for children with high levels of physical, mental, or behavioral health problems, and extend foster care support beyond the age of 18.
5. Federal policymakers should invest in research and evaluation, including evaluating models of coordination between child welfare agencies and other public institutions that support young people in foster care.

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