

Belonging and Emotional Security Tool (BEST)

INTRODUCTION

This introduction is for social workers and mental health professionals seeking to orient themselves to using the BEST. Please do not distribute this page to youth or parents.

WHEN TO USE THE BEST

The BEST is designed for a specific subset of youth: those who are unable to reunify with their family of origin and do not yet have a legal family relationship. For those youth, their closest family or family-like relationships may be with foster parents. The tool also could be used with youth who reunify with their birth family but want to maintain connections with their foster family.

The BEST can be used to explore the possibility of a deeper emotional and/or preferably legal commitment, and to assess ambivalence about permanence among both foster parents and youth. It is meant to help youth and foster parents explore their feelings toward one another. Permanency social workers can use BEST responses to help youth and parents understand the degree to which each feels a sense of emotional security and mutual claiming in their relationships with one another.

WHAT IS EMOTIONAL SECURITY?

Emotional security is a shared sense of family belonging, entitlement, and commitment. It is also a building block of permanency. This makes emotional security important to permanency social workers who are striving to achieve for each child on their caseload the optimal degree of physical safety, emotional security, and legal permanence within the context of family.

WHO FILLS OUT THE BEST?

There are two versions of the BEST – one for foster parents and one for youth.

The tool is administered individually to foster youth and parents. When there are two foster parents, each parent completes the tool independently to provide an opportunity for confidential exploration of a potentially sensitive topic.

HOW TO SCORE BEST RESPONSES

Casey is currently developing a BEST scoring method. At the moment, Casey divisions and technical assistance clients are using BEST results in one of three ways:

- Eliciting verbal or written responses to each statement
- Tabulating responses using yes/no scoring
- Using a 1 through 5 rating scale, described below

USING A RATING SCALE

To use a rating scale to score BEST answers, add the following instructions to the top of the tool:

This questionnaire asks you about your feelings. For each question, please choose a number (1 through 5) that best describes your feelings:

1	2	3	4	5
Completely agree	Mostly agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Mostly disagree	Completely disagree

If you ‘completely agree’ with a statement, choose 1; if you ‘completely disagree,’ choose 5, and so on. Please remember: There are no right or wrong answers.

PROMOTING PERMANENCY CONVERSATIONS WITH BEST

Regardless of the scoring method, BEST responses can be used as a starting point for conversations with foster parents and youth about their relationship. Social workers meet with each individual to discuss responses, then bring the parent(s) and youth together to share what they learned through the process of responding to the BEST statements.

For more on the BEST, read: Frey, L., Cushing, G., Freundlich, M., & Brenner, E. (2008). Achieving permanency for youth in foster care: Assessing and strengthening emotional security. *Child and Family Social Work*, (13)2, 218-226.

Questions about this tool? Contact the Field Operations Department, Casey Family Services, 127 Church Street, New Haven, CT 06510. Call Field Operations at 203.401.6900 or send email to info@caseyfamilyservices.org (please include “Field Operations – BEST” in the subject line).

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PARENT VERSION

- (1) I would not kick this youth out of the family, no matter what.
- (2) This youth belongs to this family.
- (3) I expect to exchange holiday cards or gifts with this youth just like everyone else in this family.
- (4) I would loan or give this youth money if he/she really needed it.
- (5) When something really important or exciting happens to this youth, I want to talk with him/her about it.
- (6) I care deeply about what happens to this youth.
- (7) It makes me feel happy when we spend time together.
- (8) I let this youth know he/she is not wanted.
- (9) I want this youth to be home for the holidays.
- (10) I feel close to this youth.
- (11) I love this youth.
- (12) I trust this youth.
- (13) I include this youth in family photos and portraits.
- (14) I pay attention to this youth when she/he asks for help.
- (15) This youth cares deeply about what happens to me.
- (16) I include this youth in family vacations.
- (17) This youth loves me.
- (18) I let this youth know he/she will be in this family for life.
- (19) I let this youth know he/she will always be able to count on my help.
- (20) I will do everything to keep this relationship going even when the youth is not living at home.
- (21) I find a way to support, stand behind, or believe in this youth even when he/she is wrong.
- (22) I have done everything I can to make this youth feel he/she belongs to this family.

Consider the following items only if there are other youth in the family:

- (23) I treat this youth the same as I treat other youth in the family.
- (24) I like this youth the same as other youth in the family.
- (25) I give this youth gifts that are just as good as the gifts I give other youth in the family.

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YOUTH VERSION

- (1) My foster parent(s) would not kick me out of the family, no matter what I do.
- (2) My foster parent(s) makes me feel like I belong to the family.
- (3) My foster parent(s) expects to give and receive holiday cards or gifts with me just like everyone else in this family.
- (4) My foster parent(s) would loan or give me money if I really needed it.
- (5) My foster parent(s) wants to talk when something really important or exciting happens to me.
- (6) My foster parent(s) cares deeply about what happens to me.
- (7) It makes me feel happy when we spend time together.
- (8) My foster parent(s) makes me feel I am not wanted.
- (9) My foster parent(s) wants me to be home for the holidays.
- (10) My foster parent(s) is someone I feel close to.
- (11) My foster parent(s) loves me.
- (12) My foster parent(s) is someone I trust.
- (13) My foster parent(s) includes me in family photos and portraits.
- (14) My foster parent(s) pays attention to me when I ask for help.
- (15) I care deeply about what happens to my foster parent(s).
- (16) My foster parent(s) includes me in family vacations.
- (17) I love these/this parent(s).
- (18) My foster parent(s) makes me feel like this is my family for life.
- (19) My foster parent(s) will always be someone I can count on for help if I need it.
- (20) My foster parent(s) will do everything to keep the relationship going even when I am no longer living at home.
- (21) My foster parent(s) finds a way to support, stand behind me, and believe in me even when I'm wrong.
- (22) My foster parent(s) has done everything I need to make me feel like I belong.

Consider the following items only if there are other youth in the family:

- (23) My foster parent(s) treats me as well as the other youth in the family.
- (24) My foster parent(s) likes me as much as other youth in the family.
- (25) My foster parent(s) gives me gifts that are just as good as the gifts they give to other youth in the family.