



Q&A: Adoption & Foster Friendly Schools™ Program 2026-2027

Q: What is the Adoption & Foster Friendly Schools™ Program?

It is a school-based movement led by iCARE designed to build stronger schools, skilled educators, and supportive environments where students from adoptive, foster, and kinship families can truly thrive.

Q: What is the core philosophy behind this framework?

The next chapter of post-permanency support lives directly in the classroom. Students who have experienced foster care or adoption frequently face systemic misunderstandings, which can lead to behavioral misdiagnoses and strained family placements. This initiative changes that by embedding a trauma-informed lens directly into the school ecosystem.

Q: How does the program maximize its reach and impact without overwhelming school staff?

The program utilizes a scalable model that embeds a trauma-informed lens across Tier 1 and Tier 2 school environments. Rather than adding more to educators' plates, it mobilizes school social workers as a vital macro-level workforce.

Q: What exactly does the training and workshop commitment look like?

It's a simple four-step pathway designed for school teams: **One Team, One Hour, One Kit, One Lead.**

1. **Build Your Team:** Register a group of at least three staff members (e.g., educators, foster care liaisons, nurses, administrators, or mental health staff).
2. **Watch the Training:** Access the on-demand virtual workshop, Beyond the Family Tree™, available starting August 1. (Earn free PDHs/CEUs via IASSW)
3. **Deploy the Kits:** Seamlessly integrate physical Connection Kits™ into daily school routines to support students.
4. **Empower a Lead:** Ensure at least one mental health professional on your team completes the specialized School-based Mental Health Professionals Training by C.A.S.E.

Q: What do educators say about the real-world impact of the Beyond the Family Tree™ training?

The feedback from teachers, counselors, and school staff who completed the webinar proves that when educators understand these family dynamics, students and families feel the difference. Data from our recent survey shows:

- **Confidence & Support:** 95% find the training highly relevant, 93% better understand these students' unique needs, and 90% feel more confident supporting them.
- **Behavior & Communication:** 93% are better equipped to recognize behavior driven by trauma or stress, and 92% know how to communicate with caregivers to build trust.
- **School Alignment:** 94% note that the training directly aligns with their existing school district and improvement plan.

Q: : How does a school earn its official designation?

A school earns its official designation once the school team completes the four-step pathway: forming the team, watching the Beyond the Family Tree™ training, integrating the Connection Kits™ into daily practice, and having at least one school-based mental health professional complete the C.A.S.E. training course.

Q: What are the Connection Kits™, and how will they be distributed?

Connection Kits™ supply school staff with practical tools, many bilingual, to support adoptive, foster, and kinship students in daily practice. These resources are ready to go right out of the box and can be easily copied and laminated for school staff to use immediately. To ensure IL schools are equipped, one (1) free Connection Kit™ will be distributed to each school through cooperation with their local Illinois Regional Offices of Education (ROEs).

Q: Can a school receive more than one Connection Kit™?

Yes. Extra kits can be ordered for \$45 each (which includes shipping), and discounts are available for larger orders over 100 kits. Additionally, free extra kits may be provided to schools as funding and materials allow.

Q: How does this initiative help students?

It ensures that children with complex family stories feel safe, seen, and understood without having to explain their trauma. By replacing systemic misunderstandings with a structured, supportive framework, it reduces disciplinary friction, prevents misdiagnoses, and creates an environment where students can socially, emotionally, and academically succeed.

Q: How does this initiative help teachers?

It equips teachers with practical, everyday language and tools, like the bilingual Connection Kits™, rather than just giving them more abstract concepts to manage. Teachers gain a resiliency-oriented, strengths-based approach to handling complex classroom behaviors, lightening their load and making existing classroom management strategies much more effective.

Q: How does this initiative help school social workers?

It shifts their role from reactive crisis management to proactive prevention. Instead of treating trauma-impacted students exclusively in isolated, one-on-one sessions after an issue arises, it provides a scalable Tier 1 and Tier 2 framework. This equips social workers to implement early interventions and weave trauma-informed practices directly into the school culture, de-escalating challenges before they become crises

Q: Isn't trauma-informed training already part of standard social work education?

While standard social work curricula cover general trauma awareness and crisis intervention, they rarely focus on specialized attachment and developmental trauma. For students with these specific backgrounds, traditional behavior management strategies can unintentionally escalate dysregulation rather than resolve it.

This distinction directly changes how mental health support is delivered by including family-centered interventions.

Q: Is this initiative just for adopted, foster, and kinship students?

While designed with the unique and often invisible needs of adoptive, foster, and kinship students at the center, the framework also addresses the relational loss and displacement from home experienced by children in immigrant, military, and divorced families. In fact, the framework benefits all students by creating a more empathetic, stable, and highly regulated classroom climate.

Q: Does this framework fulfill the mandates outlined in Illinois HB 4536?

Yes. Illinois HB 4536 explicitly updates education policy to require trauma-informed professional development that names adoptive, foster, and kinship students. This initiative aligns perfectly with those legislative standards, translating the statutory requirements of HB 4536 into turnkey, practical training and physical tools that schools can deploy immediately.