

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Sibling relationships are sacred and must be prioritized in placement and other court decisions.” (National Association of Counsel for Children. (2023). *NACC Draft Policy Framework*.) Research shows that the failure to maintain sibling relationships in foster care harms children’s ability to form their identities, deprives them of a vital source of support as they grow and develop, and causes lifelong grief and yearning. Further, direct accounts from youth with lived experience in foster care describe how critical sibling relationships are and the trauma of sibling separation. Roughly two-thirds of children in foster care in the United States have at least one sibling, many of them are separated – often forever – and courts rarely consider the damage such separation causes. Counsel for parents and children should advocate for the placement of siblings together and, when siblings cannot be placed together, for frequent visitation in order to maintain the sibling relationship. The sibling bond is often the most enduring relationship in a person’s life. Maintenance of sibling bonds increases the likelihood of both adoption and reunification, helps improve each child’s mental health, reinforces feelings of stability, shapes identity, and ameliorates educational and adult life competence. Research and lived experience show that continuation of sibling relationships is imperative for children in the child welfare system.