



Talking Points

Foster Care

Lead with **Civic Responsibility** to establish youth in foster care as a shared, public concern.

“We have a *shared responsibility* as a city to all the children of Jacksonville. We have to make this *civic duty* an even higher priority when it comes to children in the foster care system because we, the public, have an *obligation* to ensure that they have what they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

Use **Toxic Stress** to make *social conditions*—not families—the “bad guy” in the story we tell about youth in foster care.

“When children are separated from their families of origin, it is a highly stressful situation. Minor, everyday stresses are a healthy part of child development, but major stressors can have a long-term effect on children’s mental health and even on their physical health. Severe adversity that lasts over long periods of time can send the body’s stress systems into permanent high alert, flooding the body’s vital organs and the brain with stress hormones. This ‘toxic stress’ response can derail healthy development and undermine health. It has, for example, been linked to adult health problems like heart disease and diabetes.”

Use **Toxic Stress** to show how policies and programs can help children overcome adversity.

“The scientific research that uncovered the ‘toxic stress’ response also found that children have a powerful source of protection against the long-term negative effects of adversity.” What is it? Stable, supportive relationships with caring adults. These relationships literally buffer them from toxic stress, softening and moderating the biological stress response. Our programs and policies have tremendous power to ensure that the youth in our city’s foster care system have access to these critical buffering relationships.”

Talk about solutions to ward off fatalism.

“[Give an example of a specific program or policy that better connects foster youth to caring adults.] Through our System of Care *Initiative*, the city’s agencies are much better at coordinating the different ways we can support these young people. [Give an example of coordination here.]”

Close with the values of **Civic Responsibility** + **Civic Potential**.

“Jacksonville is working hard to make sure we’re doing right by foster youth. By doing a better job of living up to our *shared responsibility* to our foster youth, Jacksonville is also on its way to living up to the *potential it has to be a truly great city for everyone*.”