



Department of  
Job and Family Services

# Foster Youth Rights Handbook



From Youth

For Youth





# Introduction

## Purpose of the Handbook

As you enter foster care, you might wonder whether you've done something wrong, why you're not at home and above all, what foster care is. You might be feeling a lot of confusing emotions, and maybe nothing makes sense right now. Through no fault of your own, you have been removed from your home, possibly because your safety and well-being were in danger. This doesn't mean the person who was caring for you was a bad person. But it does mean that you have some adjustments to make and information to learn. This handbook was designed by a collection of youth from across Ohio to help you do just that. This new edition of the Foster Youth Rights Handbook is a result of Governor Mike DeWine's Children Services Transformation Advisory Council's 37 recommendations, released in November 2020, to reform Ohio's children services system.

"Too many young people and their caregivers are not always informed of their rights, causing confusion when it comes to a child living as normal a life as possible while they are in the children services system," Governor Mike DeWine said. "While there is still work to be done, the bill of rights included in this handbook are a major win for Ohio's most vulnerable youth and their caregivers."

The revised Foster Youth Rights Handbook is designed to inform youth in foster care of their rights within the children services system. The Foster Youth Bill of Rights not only ensures that youth have a safe place to live, but also that they have a voice regarding their care. You'll also find information on the new Youth and Family Ombudsman Office and how to advocate for yourself. This handbook also contains sections on preparing to live on your own, education after foster care, frequently asked questions, finding other resources, and more. You will find personal stories of former foster youth and their experience while in care.

"At one point and time I was sitting in the same spot you were. Away from everything that was familiar and made me feel like myself. I am here to tell you that it gets better. Although I may not have the opportunity to get to see you, I want you all to utilize the resources you have available to you. Those of you who are over the age of 14 can let your voices and experience be heard in Youth Advisory Boards (YABs) that may be in your areas. If there are not any there, try starting one! We can never have too many advocates when it comes to speaking on change for those who are in foster care." - Talia Holmes, foster alum and Ohio Department of Job and Family Services team member.

To help you understand the terminology, this handbook highlights key terms in bold. These words appear in the "Glossary/Definitions" section at the end of the book. While this might not answer every single question you have about foster care, we hope it will be one of your main resources as you navigate the system.

Most importantly, know that this Foster Youth Rights Handbook is a source of information to help you understand your right to have a safe place to live. You have a voice regarding your care.



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# Personal Resources

MOTHER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

FATHER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

FOSTER PARENT: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

CASEWORKER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

CASEWORKER'S SUPERVISOR: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

INDEPENDENT LIVING CASEWORKER:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

THERAPIST: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

CASA/GAL: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTORNEY: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

HEALTH CARE PROVIDER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

DENTIST: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

GUIDANCE COUNSELOR: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

MENTOR: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

ADULT SUPPORTER/OTHER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Email: \_\_\_\_\_

# Foster Care Overview

## Ohio's Child Welfare System

The **OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES (ODJFS)** supervises the state's child welfare system, and county **PUBLIC CHILDREN SERVICES AGENCIES (PCSAs)** administer it. County agencies receive and investigate child welfare reports. If they determine that **ABUSE, NEGLECT, or DEPENDENCY** has occurred, a **CASEWORKER** will work with the youth and his or her family to identify needed services and to develop a **CASE PLAN** to reduce the risk of future issues.

Many times, the youth and his or her **BIOLOGICAL FAMILY** will receive services while the youth still is living at home and/or involved with the juvenile court. However, sometimes a youth may need to be removed from the home due to safety concerns. In most situations, the goal is to address these concerns so the youth can live at home again. This is known as **REUNIFICATION**.

## What Happens When You Are Placed in Custody?

If you were removed from your home, a caseworker at your county's PCSA will put you in a **SUBSTITUTE CARE SETTING**, or placement. The person who takes care of you in your placement is your **SUBSTITUTE CAREGIVER**. The caseworker will first try to find a placement among your relatives or people your family trusts. This is called a **KINSHIP CARE** placement. If a kinship placement isn't possible, you will be placed with a **FOSTER PARENT** or in a **RESIDENTIAL OR GROUP HOME**. You will live in your substitute care setting until

you can safely return to your home. When your caseworker is deciding which placement is right for you, he or she should consider how close the placement is to your home and school, the caregiver's ability to provide for you, and which setting is the least restrictive for you.

Sometimes a placement doesn't work out. This can happen for a variety of reasons. There may be issues with your caregiver or your behavior. You may need a different level of care or a less restrictive setting, such as with a relative. If you are removed from your own home on an emergency basis, a court hearing will take place within 72 hours to determine whether you should be in the custody of the county, a relative or if you should return home.

## Your Future

From the time you enter care, you may wonder when you will be allowed to go home. This is hard to say and is ultimately the decision of the court. You can return home only if your family members complete their case plan goals. If they are unable to complete these goals and you cannot return to your parents' or a relative's home, you and the PCSA will work together to find a family that can provide a forever home through **ADOPTION**. If you are 16 or older, you may choose not to be adopted. In that case, you would be placed into a permanent living arrangement until you reach adulthood, at which point you will **EMANCIPATE** from the **FOSTER CARE** system. Whatever happens will depend largely on why you came into care in the first place. Just know that all you can do is complete your own goals. No matter what happens, you should work on learning all you can to become a successful young adult.

## Inside Perspective

Foster care is here to help you be who you want to be in your future and to prepare you and teach you life skills. So when it's time to live on your own, you know where to begin and exactly how you want to live your life. Remember, you have one life to live, so live it well.



Justin, Montgomery County

## Keywords

Throughout this document, you'll notice that some words are **LIKE THIS**. You can find definitions for these words in the "Glossary/Definitions" section that begins on page 36.

# Foster Care Overview, CONT.

## Important People in Your Case

When you're in foster care, many people will be involved with your case. Keeping these people straight and knowing their roles may be difficult. If you're not sure what someone's role is, don't hesitate to ask them. Some of the people who may be involved in your case include:

- Caseworker and/or independent living caseworker
- Guardian ad litem (GAL) or court-appointed special advocate (CASA)
- Public defender
- Prosecutor
- Other attorney
- Judge or magistrate
- Resource caregiver
- Mentor
- Birth family
- You!

## Legal Process

County PCSAs make recommendations to local juvenile or family courts about custody matters, and the court's judge makes the final decision. Court hearings are held in front of the judge or a magistrate to review and determine your custody status. Other people who participate in these court hearings could include anyone listed on the left. You should be involved and present at these hearings whenever possible. Be sure to talk to your caseworker about attending.

The Supreme Court of Ohio created a brochure that can help you prepare for – and make sure your voice is heard at – court hearings. It's called "Tips for Youth in Court." Ask your caseworker or caregiver to help you get a copy.

## Resiliency

The first time I was in foster care, I cannot remember the details because I was a toddler, but I do remember that I loved it. Unfortunately, my mom eventually got custody of us again. That time, she kept us for little over three years. In that time I started doing drugs, stealing, being unruly, car hopping, sex and everything else a kid shouldn't do. My mom swore that we wouldn't end up in foster care again, but we did. I hated it. Most of all I resented my mom for lying.

The people my brother and I went to live with weren't horrible. They were fair and protective. But only four days into junior high, I got suspended for smoking. I did unforgettable and unthinkable things, but my foster parents got me off of probation and turned me into a man. They even took me to Florida to visit my foster father's family. We had a blast. It was my first time on a plane and going to Florida.

But you want to know my true feelings about foster care? I am so grateful. If I weren't in foster care, I'd either be in jail or dead. Yes, I hate the rules. I wish I could get a truck without having to ask the county, and that I could be like a normal child with my parents making my rules. I don't like that I haven't seen any of my friends, but I am drug-free and out of jail so I am doing great. I have a job and am working on getting a truck and my license. I would like nothing more than to stay with my new family. All I have to say to all of the people out there who are in foster care is: **I know how you feel.** I've had 16 years of experience in foster care. **You aren't alone.**



Jose, Wood County



# Your Rights

The best way to improve the lives of young people in foster care is to make sure they know their rights and responsibilities and to involve them as partners in determining the services they will receive.

ODJFS and the OHIOYAB want to make sure that all youth involved in Ohio's child welfare system are aware of their rights and responsibilities. While in foster care, you have 15 basic rights. All of these rights are listed on this page and explained in greater detail throughout this handbook. You also can find these rights spelled out in Ohio Administrative Code rule 5101:2-5-35, "Foster Youth Rights." See page 34 of this handbook. Understanding your rights is the best way to make sure those rights are respected, so you can have the best possible experience in foster care.

## Your Rights

**1** Free from abuse and inhumane treatment.

**2** Protected from all forms of sexual exploitation.

**3** Receive timely and consistent access to housing, food, and clothing.

**4** Privacy and personal belongings.

**5** Own money.

**6** Visitation and communication.

**7** Contact with professional involved with your case.

**8** Have your opinions heard.

**9** Receive timely, adequate, and appropriate medical care, dental services, vision care, and mental health services.

**10** Enjoy freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or to abstain from the practice of religion.

**11** To receive guidance, support, and supervision from adults in your life.

**12** To participate in an appropriate educational program.

**13** To life skills preparation.

**14** To participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities.

**15** To protection from discrimination or harassment based on race, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, color, or national origin.

## Chain of Command

A "chain of command" means if a staff member is unable to be reached or able to help you, you can reach out to their supervisor. For example, if you have difficulty reaching your caseworker, you can reach out to their supervisor.

## You Should Know...

Custodial agencies and residential facilities are required to provide and explain the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and this publication – the JFS 01677, “Foster Youth Rights Handbook” – to all youth in foster care who are age 14 and older.

Residential facilities also are required to include the Foster Youth Bill of Rights and their complaint procedures in their handbooks and to post them so they can be easily seen.

Restrictions should be placed on your rights only when it is necessary for your and others’ health and safety. If your rights are restricted for more than two hours, the agency must inform you immediately and your custodian within 24 hours of the conditions and reasons for the restrictions. The agency should also include a written report in your record summarizing the reasons for the restrictions, and it should inform anyone the restrictions may affect.

The Foster Youth Bill of Rights does not prevent resource caregivers or residential facilities from providing care, supervision, and discipline.

If your rights conflict with the rights of a resource caregiver, your rights preempt the resource caregiver’s rights.

The rights established and summarized in this handbook do not create grounds for a civil action against the department, the recommending agency, or the custodial agency.

If you feel your rights have been violated, you can talk to your resource caregiver, agency staff, caseworker, caseworker supervisor, your GAL or CASA volunteer, or another trusted adult. You can also ask for the custodial agency’s complaint or grievance procedure, and you can make an official grievance with the agency or file a complaint with the Youth Ombudsman. See page 22 of this handbook.

# 1.

## The right to be free from physical, verbal, and emotional abuse and inhumane treatment.

Foster care is intended to keep you safe and protected from physical, verbal, and emotional abuse and inhumane treatment.

- You should express your concerns of any experiences that make you feel unsafe to your caregiver, caseworker, or another trusted adult.
- Caseworkers and resource caregivers are mandated to report allegations of abuse and inhumane treatment.
- Some rules prevent resource caregivers from using certain types of punishment. For example, caregivers cannot do the following:
  - Use any form of PHYSICAL ABUSE or CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, including spanking, paddling, or rough handling.
  - Punish you by denying you opportunities to visit or communicate with family.
  - Make negative remarks about you, your family or foster children in general; threats to remove you from their home; or threats of physical harm.
  - Use physical restraints – unless you are in danger of hurting yourself or others and only if they have been trained in proper physical restraining procedures.
  - Use mechanical restraints.
  - Restrict your access to food.
  - Commit abuse or neglect.

### Perseverance

First of all, I'd like you to know you aren't alone in this. I'm sure you're experiencing hard times and have been confused and scared along the way. No one can say they understand [your exact situation] and feel the pain like you do, but there are people willing to learn what you've experienced to help you and to understand how you feel. The hard times will pass, and you will get through them no matter the problem. There is always a silver lining.

I was 11 when I came into the custody of Children Services. You'll never forget the day you go into foster care. You're scared, nervous, vulnerable and probably on the verge of crying. I know; I was right there where you are now. Living with someone who is a complete stranger is probably one of the scariest things you can go through. I promise you, if you have good foster parents like I've had, in a month you'll be the happiest person alive. You wouldn't trade them for the world.

Since I came into foster care, I've learned that foster care was where I was meant to be. I thank God for my experiences in my past because [they have] made me the person I am today. God has brought me through the hardest times in my life and has always been there when I needed him, and even when I thought I didn't.

Everyone deals with their problems differently, but after several years of searching for what I was meant to do in life, I decided to use my past to help someone else's future. I hope I've helped you in ways I wish someone could've helped me.



Dasha, Scioto County

# 2.

## The right to be protected from all forms of sexual exploitation.

If anyone makes statements that make you uncomfortable, tell your caregiver, caseworker, or another trusted adult. Caseworkers and resource caregivers are mandated to report allegations of sexual exploitation.

### What is Human Trafficking?

Human trafficking is a form of sexual exploitation and comes in two different forms: sex trafficking and labor trafficking.

Sex trafficking is when someone pays money or goods (such as shelter, food, drugs, or even “fun” items like concert tickets in exchange for sex with another person). Sex trafficking can also consist of prostitution and performing at sexual venues. Young people in these situations are considered victims even if no one forced or threatened them. We tend to think of sex trafficking as organized crime with lots of victims, but it can happen with just one youth, and traffickers can be family members or close friends.

Labor trafficking of children happens when youth are forced, tricked, or threatened to work for no pay. Young people have been trafficked to work on farms, in restaurants, in nail salons, or on sales crews that travel across the country. Some youth have been forced to beg for money. Traffickers go after all kinds of young people, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, financial situation, or citizenship status. It occurs in big cities, small towns, and rural farming communities.

Although trafficking implies movement, youth can be trafficked right in their own homes. Traffickers often try to make contact with their potential victims through the internet—either through advertisements and websites or by reaching out to them through social networking sites. It’s important to know how to stay safe when using the internet.

If you or someone you know is being trafficked, remember: It’s not your fault. It’s also important to get help. You can tell your caregiver, your parent, your caseworker, or the police. You also can call the national anti-trafficking hotline at 888 373-7888 or send a text to “HELP” (233733). Traffickers often lie and tell victims they’ll get in trouble if they get caught or if they tell someone. In Ohio, this is not true. You will not go to jail if you are a victim of sex or labor trafficking. The most important thing to do if you suspect human trafficking is tell someone. For more information, visit [polarisproject.org](http://polarisproject.org).



# 3.

## The right to receive timely and consistent access to housing, food, clothing.

You have the right to receive timely:

- a) **Housing** –Your home should be a clean and safe living environment free of bugs, rodents, and poison. You should also be able to enter your home at any time during your placement; within agreed upon entry and exit timeframes (such as household rules and curfew).
- b) **Food** -Your meals should be nutritious, well-balanced, and available in sufficient quantity. This includes three meals a day at regular intervals and nutritious snacks. Meals should also support any religious dietary restrictions or special instructions by a physician. Additionally, you should not be denied the opportunity to eat with other members of the foster home.
- c) **Clothing** –Your clothing should be appropriate to your age and gender identity. This includes the right to participate and provide input regarding the selection of your clothing.

Your resource caregiver is to provide for your basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter including personal hygiene products.

You may have some needs that are unique to you. Be sure to communicate your needs and express any concerns regarding your living environment that make you feel unsafe or uncomfortable to your caseworker, resource caregiver, guardian ad litem, or trusted adult.

### Beating the Odds

I entered foster care after the sudden death of my mother, even though I tried to avoid it. I stayed with family members who couldn't care for me and my 2-year-old son, and with friends whose parents didn't know that I had nowhere to go after spending a weekend with them. I knew foster care would provide shelter and food for my son and me, but the horror stories kept me away. I was told that I may never see my son again.

Caseworkers actually put plenty of effort into making sure that my son and I were placed together, as long as I promised to do right by him. I even got a say in how his room was decorated. While this comforted me, I still had fears when certain situations came up, such as not being able to talk to my son's teacher.

These issues bothered me tremendously, so I began to ask questions, voice concerns, and involve myself in the court process in regards to my rights as a teen parent. There were many challenges, but it was worthwhile when my son and I became independent. I learned the importance of speaking up in the face of any injustice.

I never lost my son to the system, like so many warned. He is educated, happy, and NORMAL, in spite of our circumstances. It just took self-advocacy.



Vanessa, Montgomery County

# 4.

## The right to privacy and personal belongings.

While you are in foster care, you have a right to privacy. Although you may not have complete privacy, you should have privacy around your personal belongings and personal space. This could mean the following:

- Reasonable privacy when using a phone.
- Being able to receive and send emails and letters without them being read. (Your care team will let you know if, for safety reasons, phone calls or correspondence needs to be monitored.)
- The right to privacy while in the bathroom and getting dressed in your bedroom.
- Your resource caregiver should only search your room, pockets, or property if there is reason to believe you possess items that belong to someone else, are illegal, or are potentially dangerous. When doing so, you and your caseworker should be made aware that your personal belongings were searched.
- The right to not have your personal information shared inappropriately. However, your resource caregiver can share information about you with members of your case plan team if that information is important for your well-being. Information can be shared with people outside your case plan team only if it is required by that person (for example, a teacher or other adult supporters). You should be made aware of what was shared. It is inappropriate for your resource caregiver to share personal information with neighbors and friends.

It is important that you make your caseworker and resource caregiver aware of your personal boundaries (for example, unwanted hugs). You should express any concerns regarding your privacy or personal belongings with your caregiver, caseworker, or another trusted adult.

### What is a Lifebook?

Every young person who has been in foster care for six months or more should have a **LIFEBOOK**. This is similar to a scrapbook. Your lifebook can hold anything that is important to you while you are in foster care. This may include such things as your report cards, newspaper articles, school notes and photos. When you leave custody, you should take your lifebook with you.



# 5.

## The right to your own money.

Age appropriateness is based on the development of cognitive, emotional, physical, and behavioral capacity that is typical for an age or age group. As age and developmentally appropriate, you have the right to:

- Earn your own money.
- Open a bank account.
- Receive guidance on how to save and spend money.

You are allowed to work if you follow state labor laws and if your resource caregiver and/or caseworker give you permission. In Ohio, young people ages 14 to 18 may work with certain restrictions and if they have a work permit showing they have permission.

Many things are taken into consideration when deciding if it would be age-appropriate for you to take on some of these responsibilities. Communicate with your resource caregiver and caseworker if you would like to work and if you need documents to obtain a work permit. If you are not provided this information, you should express concerns with your resource caregiver, caseworker, or other trusted adult.

### Getting a Job

Figuring out how to get a job can be confusing. To get help, you can visit **OhioMeansJobs.com** or your county's OhioMeansJobs center. Either through the website or in person, you can get help writing a resume, finding out about job-training programs, and finding a job.

If you'd like in-person help—including the help of a free career coach—visit your local OhioMeansJobs center and ask about CCMEP, which stands for "Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program." If you're age 14 to 24 or currently or formerly in foster care, a CCMEP career coach can help you access a variety of free services including, paid work experience, career planning, goal planning, internships, dropout recovery/GED services, training, mentoring, drug and alcohol support, child care, transportation, and much more. You just have to commit to spending at least 20 hours a week working toward your goals. To learn more, email **CCMEPQNA@jfs.ohio.gov**.



Choosing career-wear at a Fostering Pathways Conference.

# 6.

## The right to visitation and communication with family.

You have the right to visit and communicate with your family, including:

- Parents
- Siblings
- Other family members such as grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.
- Non-related kin
- Friends and significant others who don't live with you

Visits between you, your parents, and/or your siblings are a required part of most out-of-home placements. Once you are placed in foster care, a visitation plan should be developed, and you should be given a copy. This document states how often visits will happen, how long they can be, and who they can be with. Usually, your caseworker or support staff will supervise the visits. Family visits cannot be withheld as a form of discipline or a threat.

Your agency is required to ensure that you have additional forms of contact with your family, if you would like. Unless restricted in the case plan, you have the right to communicate with family members in private.

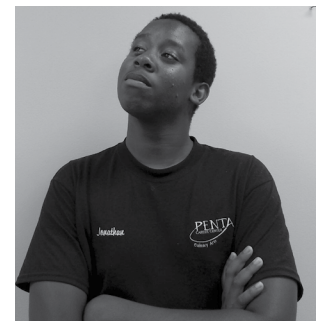
The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services is responsible for ensuring that all county children service agencies comply with state rules. If you feel your rights are being violated, you may call your Youth Ombudsman. For more information regarding the Youth Ombudsman, please see page 22 of this handbook.

### Communication

The way that I was removed from my home was very rough. Initially, we were treated like criminals instead of kids. We were upset with the rules and regulations of our foster parents, such as no Facebook, cell phones or iPods, and no talking to parents except at visits and supervised phone calls. Though I have stayed in care long enough to see things start to change, it was still upsetting in the beginning. As teenagers, we are naturally pulled toward social networking, and when that is deprived you start to feel upset and out of control.

When my siblings went home, I was no longer allowed to have visits with them unless they were supervised, which nobody wanted to do, because going back to supervised visits meant things wouldn't be different than if we were all still in foster care.

I guess it hasn't been all bad. Having trips to Cedar Point was pretty cool. I went two years in a row. It is also nice to have counseling, but not every week. And the foster parents are cool, some of them, though it's hard not being able to get your license. Those are pretty much my main feelings about being in foster care.



Jonathan, Wood County



# 7.

## Contact with professional involved with your case.

The right to contact your...

- Attorney
- Caseworker
- Custodial Agency Worker
- Probation Officer
- Court Appointed Special Guardian (CASA)
- Guardian Ad Litem (GAL)
- Other professionals

You have the right to communicate with these individuals in private, within 24 hours of the request.

Your caseworker should provide you with the phone numbers for the individuals listed above. In addition, you are required to have access to your recommending and custodial agency phone numbers. Someone should explain the roles of these agencies to you. You can keep their phone numbers in the Personal Resources section of this handbook.

### Types of Meetings

When you first come into care, you and your family will meet with a caseworker to talk about a case plan and a **VISITATION PLAN**. This is your chance to give your opinion about the goals established and services provided to your family, so the court and PCSA can consider reunification or other **PERMANENCY GOALS** for you. Your opinion is important!

Other meetings may be held to review your placement and the details of your case plan. The meetings may have different names, depending on what county you live in. Some of these meetings may include initial **FAMILY TEAM MEETINGS**, **CASE PLAN MEETINGS**, **SEMI-ANNUAL REVIEWS**, **TREATMENT TEAM MEETINGS**, and **YOUTH-CENTERED PERMANENCY ROUNDTABLES**. If you are invited to a meeting and you're not sure why, ask your caseworker. If you find out that you were not invited to a meeting about you or your family, talk to your caseworker or your caseworker's supervisor. Your input is essential to your success.

### Tips from Youth

- **Do NOT blame yourself.** No matter what the situation is, you need to remember that you are the child.
- **Always look forward.** If you keep worrying about the past, you will miss out on positive experiences in the present. The longer you hold on to what you can't change, the longer it will take to build healthy relationships between yourself and others.
- **Accept what you can—and can't—control.** You can't change others, including how they feel, what they've done, or what they may or may not decide to do. You can only change yourself and your attitude.
- **Be open to new situations.** To mend your family, your parent or parents have to comply with your family's case plan and the **JUDGE's** orders. This may take some time. Only they can do that. If they work hard, you will see the change. Please embrace the family that welcomed you into their home. Yes, it is different from what you're used to, but different may be OK.

# 8.

## The right to have your opinions heard and be included when any decisions are being made affecting your life.

As age or developmentally appropriate, this includes the right to be invited to and prepared for meetings and court hearings, including information about permanency options.

- Case Planning – Case plans are meant to provide a clear and specific guide to how you and your family can grow and/or address behaviors and conditions to ensure you and your family's success.
- Visitation – This should be outlined in your case plan. Visitation is the agreement for how often you, your parents, and/or your siblings will get to see each other, how long you can see each other, and where the visits will be held.
- Semi-Annual Review (SAR) – These reviews should occur twice a year. They are an opportunity to review your placement fit, any concerns identified in your case plan, and any progress made toward your permanency goals.
- 90-day Review – These are very similar to the SAR but occur every 90 days.
- Treatment Team Meeting – These bring together all your supports together to create, edit, and monitor your specific care plan. Participants include your caseworker, your resource caregivers, yourself, a representative from both your custodial agency and your school, your parents, and your guardian ad litem or court-appointed special advocate.
- Youth-Centered Round Tables – Also referred to as YCPRT or PRT meetings, these occur if you are 12 or older and have been in foster care for at least 12 months. They are an opportunity for a team of professionals and supporters to understand about your permanency preferences.

Ask your caseworker when the case planning meetings and semi-annual reviews are scheduled, plan to attend and help develop your case plan and share the goals you are working toward. You have the option to invite two individuals to support you at these meetings. You may choose one of the supporters to be designated as your advisor and advocate regarding the application of the "prudent parent standard." Prudent parent standard is a standard of decision making that allows your resource caregiver to make while you are in their care regarding participating in age and developmentally appropriate childhood activities. These activities are listed on page 19.

If the PCSA has good cause to believe the supporters you selected will not act in your best interest, they may reject your suggestion. If that happens, they should include the reason in the activity log.

- The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services is responsible for ensuring that all county children service agencies comply with state rules. If you feel your rights are being violated, you may call your Youth Ombudsman. For more information regarding the Youth Ombudsman, please see page 22 of this handbook.

If you feel you were entitled to services that were not provided, you may also file a complaint with the Youth Ombudsman. Please see page 22 for more information.

### Get Involved

Take part in your case plan, independent living plan and final transition plan. You can help shape your experience in care if you let others know how they can help you. Know your rights, and don't be afraid to ask questions if you feel those rights are not being met. There are appropriate ways to address any concerns through a proper complaint process.

# 9.

## The right to receive timely, adequate, and appropriate medical care, dental services, vision care, and mental health services.

This includes the right to have appointments scheduled and be transported to these appointments.

- You should receive annual physical, hearing, and vision exams and see your dentist twice a year.
- When you leave care, you're entitled to a copy of your medical records, and you should make sure that you get them.

It is important to openly communicate with your caseworker and caregiver regarding medical conditions and/or concerns. Actively participate in decisions about your medical care.

If you are prescribed medications, ask your doctor questions about why they are prescribed and what their side effects might be.

If something about your body doesn't feel right, be sure to tell your caregiver and caseworker.

You will be given the opportunity to speak to your medical provider in private. All healthcare professionals are mandated reporters of child abuse and neglect. They are required by law to report if they suspect or know that you are being abused.

### Medicaid Coverage

You may be eligible for free health coverage through Medicaid if you are 18 to 26, if you were in foster care at age 18, and if you received independent living services. Before you leave foster care, you and your caseworker should complete the Medicaid application. If approved, you will receive Medicaid services through a managed care plan. It is very important to keep your contact information current with your local Medicaid office.

Be sure to read all the email, or other messages you get from Medicaid or your managed care plan and return all the required forms, or your benefits will be stopped. Your Medicaid eligibility will be reviewed every 12 months. If you have changes that might affect your eligibility, you must notify your caseworker within 10 days of the change. For more information, go to **Medicaid.ohio.gov**, call 1-800-324-8680, or visit **benefits.ohio.gov**.

### Medication

If you ever feel that you don't understand or agree with the medications you have been prescribed, discuss your concerns with your caseworker and/or doctor. You may ask them to explore alternative options. It's important to have enough information about any medication you are taking. Ask questions, because you have a right to know.

# 10.

## The right to enjoy freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or to abstain from the practice of religion.

Communicate your religious preferences to your caseworker and resource caregiver. You might be at an age where you are exploring, and that's OK. You can ask to attend a religious institution of your choice. The faith-based community can be a strong support system when you enter foster care, and you have the right to maintain those relationships. You cannot be punished for expressing religious beliefs or thoughts.

Your caseworker and resource caregiver should acknowledge and respect your religious choices. Your caseworker or resource caregiver cannot try to restrict your behavior, relationships, or participation in events because of their own religious or moral beliefs. You also can choose to abstain from religious meetings or events. You cannot be forced to attend a religious service.

### Caregiver Responsibilities

Your caregivers have gone through many hours of training to learn how best to care for you. They have learned the many rules explaining what foster parents can and cannot do. These rules are spelled out in the Ohio Administrative Code. Here are a few of them:

- Discipline should stress praise, not punishment.
- Rules and expectations should be age-appropriate and explained before punishment.
- Caregivers should teach the children in their care tasks and skills required for life in the community.

Some rules prevent resource caregivers from using certain types of punishment. For example, caregivers cannot do the following:

- Use any form of PHYSICAL ABUSE or CORPORAL PUNISHMENT, including spanking, paddling, or rough handling.
- Punish you by denying you opportunities to visit or communicate with family.
- Make negative remarks about you, your family, or foster children in general; threats to remove you from their home; or threats of physical harm.
- Use physical restraints – unless you are in danger of hurting yourself or others and only if they have been trained in proper physical restraining procedures.
- Use mechanical restraints.
- Restrict your access to food.
- Commit abuse or neglect.

# 11.

## The right to receive appropriate and reasonable guidance, support, and supervision from adults in your life.

You have the right to receive appropriate and reasonable guidance, support, and supervision from:

- Parents
- Resource caregivers
- Agency staff
- Mentors
- Youth advisory boards
- Others as applicable

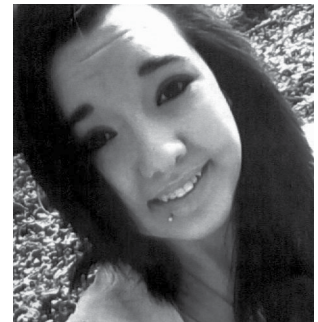
It is important that you let others know how to best support you. Open and honest communication with your resource caregiver and/or caseworker will help you succeed. If you feel you cannot have this conversation with your caseworker or resource caregiver, try asking another adult who you trust to sit in on your meetings.

### Real Hope

Entering foster care is different for each of us. Some of us are prepared, while others struggle with the abrupt changes. There are and will be many ups and downs, but in the long run you'll find that the move was in your best interest. As I know now, being removed from the home is because of one or both crucial problems: abuse and/or neglect. Being in the system saves many lives (as it has mine), and I hope it will help to save you.

I was removed from my home due to lack of supervision and guidance from my parents. I was placed on probation for a multitude of things, and the underlying factor was that the dysfunction within my family caused a world of problems for my siblings and me. It was several months and moves later before I understood that I was responsible for my actions. Would I take it back? Absolutely not! If I hadn't been through the courts and placed in a wonderful home, I would not be getting the love and support I've always needed. It's hard being away from my biological family, but until they are able to fix their own problems, I am better where I am now.

I will leave you with this: **"Foster parents don't just foster children. They foster hope."**



Brianna, Licking County

# 12.

## The right to participate in an appropriate educational program.

You have the right to participate in educational programs, including:

- The right to provide your input regarding where you go to school, consistent with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA 2015).
- The right to participate in educational and school-related activities without any barriers to access.
- The right to have access to information regarding vocational and post-secondary education programs and financial assistance with post-secondary education.

ESSA allows you to remain in the original school you attended prior to entering foster care unless it is determined to be not in your best interest. School is a place for learning and building social relationships. It's OK to say that you would like to stay in a school because it has people who support you.

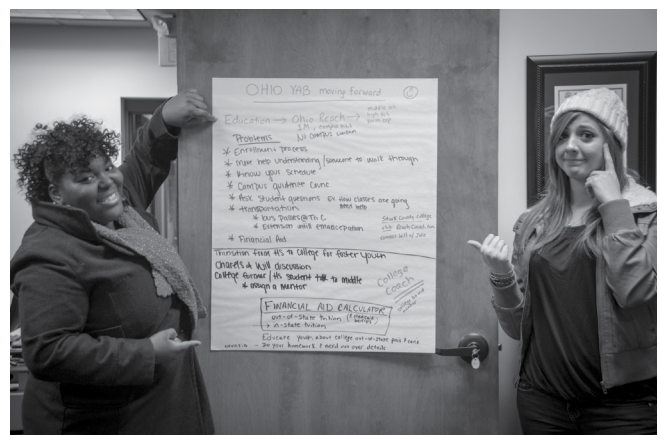
If you choose to stay in your original school, transportation will be provided by the school district or the PCSA. It is important that you communicate your educational needs. "If you have an Individual Education Plan or a 504 Plan, tell your resource caregivers, caseworker, and educational providers."

You should go to school every day and participate in all your classes. You also should try to participate in after-school activities. You are allowed to participate extracurricular activities – such as school sports, clubs, band, choir, plays, etc. – to experience the same normal youth experience as your friends. Your resource caregiver and/or caseworker can sign the activity forms, and the children services agency will pay for any cost to participate.

A high school diploma, GED, vocational training, and/or college are important to your future to become self-sufficient when you leave foster care. Ask your teacher, guidance counselor, caseworker, resource caregiver, or adult supporters if you feel your current educational plans are not meeting your needs.

### Changing Schools

Ideally, you should not have to move often while in care. This is not always a reality, but there are laws in place to minimize educational gaps for youth in foster care. If you have to move, your caseworker and your school administrators will try to keep you in the same school district. You should voice your opinions about where you'd like to go to school. School is a place for learning and for building social relationships, so it's OK to say you'd like to stay in a school because you have people who support you there. However, the availability of a placement may determine which school you attend. If you change schools, your caseworker and your new school administrators will make sure that your records transfer properly. ESSA allows caseworkers to access your educational records, making it easier for you to get enrolled in a new school.



Proposals to improve education from OHIO YAB.

# 13.

## The right to life skills preparation.

You have the right to life skills preparation, including:

- Academic support
- Post-secondary educational support
- Career preparation
- Employment programs and vocational training
- Budget and financial management
- Housing and home education
- Health education and risk prevention
- Family support and healthy marriage education
- Mentoring
- Supervised independent living
- Transition plans
- After foster care, you have a right to postemancipation services

Life skills preparation is a part of the independent living training that you should receive while in foster care, to help you transition to independence and self-sufficiency. You should have opportunities to receive the independent living services listed above and to be supported with those services. They can be provided by your agency or another social service organization. Your caseworker, resource caregiver, or other trusted adult can help you master important life skills. If you feel that you are not being given these opportunities, please let them know your concerns.

### Exit Interview

When you leave a foster placement, your caseworker will schedule an **EXIT INTERVIEW** with you. This is a time for you to talk to your caseworker about your experience in your foster home. The interview should happen in private within seven days of your leaving a placement. It cannot be done before you leave the placement, and it cannot include your former foster parents. This interview is very important, as it helps the PCSA improve the experiences of other young people who will someday be placed in that home. Be sure to tell your caseworker everything openly and honestly. If this interview doesn't happen, be sure to ask your caseworker about it.



Two youth try on suits in the Suits for Success room at the Fostering Pathways to Success Conference.

# 14.

## The right to participate in age-appropriate, extra-curricular enrichment and social activities.

You have the right to participate in extra-curricular activities, examples of these include:

- Participating in sports, clubs, or school-sanctioned activities.
- Participating in school dances.
- Spending time with positive peers.
- Participating in activities to obtain your driver's license.

You should have access to the same experiences as your peers; this is called Normalcy. Ask your caseworker what their normalcy policies are. Normalcy policies provide guidance for “normal and beneficial” activities you can participate in, just like youth not in foster care. Be sure to communicate with your caseworker and resource caregiver about your interests and activities you would like to participate in. Your resource caregiver or your agency can approve your participation. There may be times when due to circumstances you are not be able to participate in one of these activities. Talk to your resource caregiver to understand these circumstances.



OHIOYAB members enjoy a team-building exercise.

### What is Normalcy?

Normalcy is a term you'll hear often from your agency and caseworkers. It means the ability for children to easily participate in age-appropriate social, scholastic, and enrichment activities. These activities are important because they prepare children for life as an adult.

When making decisions about whether to allow youth in their care to participate in “normalcy activities” – such as being on a sports team or spending the night at a friend's house – foster parents must apply something called the “reasonable and prudent parent standard.” This is the “standard characterized by careful and sensible parental decisions that maintain a child's health, safety, and best interests while, at the same time, encouraging the child's emotional and developmental growth.”



You have the right to protection against discrimination or harassment, on the basis of the following:

- Race
- Sex
- Gender
- Gender Identity
- National origin
- Sexual Orientation
- Disability
- Religion
- Color

When someone is being discriminated against, it means they're being treated badly or unfairly based on a personal characteristic. Common reasons that people are discriminated against are their race, sex, gender, gender identity, disability, or religion.

Ohio has laws and policies to protect foster youth from discrimination. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration on Children has called on those who work with youth in foster care to do better, stressing, "every child and youth who is unable to live with his or her parents is entitled to a safe, loving, and affirming foster care placement."

It is important that you communicate with your resource caregiver, caseworker, or trusted adult if you ever feel that you are being discriminated against.

### Self-Confidence

I was 15 when I was placed into foster care. Before placement, I felt like I was coming into my own as a gay teen. I had friends and family who supported me for who I was and seemed to be at ease with the fact that I might be gay. Coming out of the closet didn't seem like it would be much of a challenge.

Then I was placed with a religious family, and my life changed completely. My first morning in my new home was one of the most challenging mornings I faced there. As we ate breakfast, they filled me in on the house rules and asked questions to get a better understanding of who I was. Everything seemed fine until my foster mom asked, "Do you live an alternative lifestyle? Because in your paperwork we read that you do." I sat in disbelief and finally said, "No, I do not." I was hurt that someone at the agency would assume that I was gay and include it in my paperwork like I was already out of the closet.

They asked one other time about my sexual orientation, when an openly gay male was taken into the home. They said they needed to know, to avoid any conflicting situations that may occur. That time, I felt pressured to reveal the truth because my foster dad asked me repeatedly. So I told him, and he said, "I wish that you weren't gay, and you know how God feels about you being gay." He then left my room, slamming the door on his way out. I felt so scared and alone. The next day I called my caseworker, and she told me that she would talk to my foster parents because they were completely out of place to question me and to state such a harsh opinion. After she spoke with them, they apologized to me. After that, I didn't face any problems concerning my sexual orientation. If any other problems would have occurred, **I knew I had rights as a foster youth.**



Philip, Montgomery County

# What is Advocacy?

Another way you can advocate for yourself and others is through a youth advisory board. As a youth in foster care, your input is very valuable. All young people in foster care share some things in common, but your own experience is unique, and others could benefit from hearing about it. The Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIOYAB) is a statewide organization of young people (aged 14-24) who have experienced foster care. The OHIOYAB exists to be the knowledgeable statewide voice that influences policies and practices that impact youth who have or will experience out-of-home care. This includes foster care, kinship care, group homes, and residential facilities. Many Ohio counties and regions have established local Youth Advisory Boards as well.

OHIOYAB youth leaders focus much of their efforts on working with leaders in Congress and private and public agency staff across the state and even the nation. They even hold trainings for agency staff so they can learn how to better interact with youth and empower them for success. They also train youth on how to share their stories. Your story is part of your private life, and if you decide to share it, OHIOYAB wants to make sure you have the tools to do so in a way that protects you and gets your message heard.

OHIOYAB recognizes that advocating for better policies, participating in trainings and sharing experiences isn't for everyone. There are many other ways to get involved with your local youth advisory board. You could help plan events for foster youth to come together and get a sense of community and belonging. Some county youth advisory boards have planned rallies, marathons, and car washes. Some have even participated in national events to help raise awareness about foster youth.

The only way to create change is by empowering foster youth to speak out. Your county may already have a youth advisory board. If not, you can start one! If you'd like more information on what advisory boards do or how you can join, visit <https://fosteractionohio.org/yab/> or ask your caseworker.

# Youth Ombudsman

## What is an Ombudsman?

An ombudsman is a person who works independently from children services agencies to help you solve problems and advocate for your rights to be protected while in foster care. The ombudsman conducts investigations in a fair and neutral manner.

## What does the Youth Ombudsman do?

The Youth Ombudsman provides the following services:

- Receives complaints from any youth via a phone call or online complaint form. You can remain anonymous, but this may limit what help the Youth Ombudsman can provide. All complaints are confidential.
- Reviews your complaints and questions – for example, about services you are receiving or should be receiving, if you believe your rights are being violated or ignored, or if you have concerns about your living conditions – and discusses any other issues or concerns you may have.
- Investigate and attempt to resolve complaints received by the Youth and Family Ombudsman Office. The Youth Ombudsman will explain how decisions were made on your case.

## What should you do before reaching out to the Youth Ombudsman?

Prior to reaching out to the Youth Ombudsman, you should first talk to a trusted adult who can try to help you resolve your problem. This could be your parent, kinship caregiver, foster parent, caseworker, foster care worker, the caseworker or foster care worker's supervisor, your CASA or GAL, or other professional working with you.

**Youth have the right to file a complaint and receive help without being retaliated against. Examples of retaliation might include, but aren't limited to, threats, punishment, or denial of privileges. If you believe your rights have been violated, you can reach out to the Youth Ombudsman.**

## How to contact your Ombudsman

Call **1-877-649-6884** or **1-877-OH-YOUTH** Monday – Friday between the hours of 8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Online: Complete and submit the online complaint form at **YouthOmbudsman.ohio.gov**.

## What can't the Ombudsman do?

**The Ombudsman cannot change court-ordered decisions, respond to emergencies, or provide legal advice. In Ohio, only public children services agencies and peace officers have the authority to investigate allegations of child abuse or neglect.**

**To report child abuse or neglect at any time of the day or night call:**

**1-855-642-4453 or 1-855-O-H-CHILD**

This automated line will link you directly to a children services or law enforcement office in your county. Reports can be anonymous.

You have the right to be free from physical, verbal, and emotional abuse and inhumane treatment and the right to be protected from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.

If you believe these or any other of your rights are being violated or ignored, reach out to the Youth Ombudsman for assistance.



# Preparing to Live on Your Own

You can leave foster care in one of several ways: by being reunified with your family, by entering the legal custody of a friend or relative, by being adopted, or by emancipating from your agency's custody on or after your 18th birthday. If a court or PCSA determines that you will not be reunified with your biological family, the PCSA can receive **PERMANENT CUSTODY** of you and then try to find you an adoptive family.

You may have fears and questions about adoption, especially if you have siblings. You should know that adoption can be a great choice for both you and your siblings. You may even be able to set conditions for your adoption, such as allowing sibling contact. When you are making these decisions, be sure to ask as many questions as you can.

If you are 16 or older, another option is a **PLANNED PERMANENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT (PPLA)**. This means the agency will have custody of you, but your parents will maintain their parental rights.

Regardless of the permanency determination, all youth 14 and older are entitled to receive an **INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS ASSESSMENT**, to participate in the development of an **INDEPENDENT LIVING PLAN** and to receive **INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES**. See pages 23-26 for more details. You can and should be an active participant in all of these.

If you turn 18 when you're in foster care, when you leave foster care, it is called **EMANCIPATION**. You may be able to emancipate after age 18 if you are working toward a high school diploma or GED, or if you qualify for certain developmental disability services.

Many services are available before and after you emancipate to help you live on your own. The services before you emancipate are called **INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES**. The services after you emancipate are provided either through the **BRIDGES** program or through your county agency's **YOUNG ADULT SERVICES**.

## Independent Living Services

In Ohio, county public children services agencies and courts are required to provide independent living services to all youth ages 14 and older who are in foster care, to help prepare them for future self-sufficiency. These services include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Academic support.
- Post-secondary educational support.
- Career preparation.
- Employment programs or vocational training.
- Budget and financial management.
- Housing education and home management.
- Health education and risk prevention.
- Family support and healthy marriage education.
- Mentoring.
- Supervised independent living.
- Room and board financial assistance.

## BRIDGES

Bridges is a voluntary program for young adults who leave foster care between the ages of 18-20 and who are in school, working, participating in an employment program, or have a medical condition that prevents them from going to school or working.

If you participate in Bridges, you will be matched with a representative who will meet with you at least once a month and help you set goals and access services. Among other things, your Bridges representative can:

- Help you find and pay for a place to live.
- Help you find a job.
- Help you identify individuals and resources that can be permanent connections for you even after you complete the program.
- Teach you skills like money management, how to do laundry, how to grocery shop, etc.
- Help you enroll in college or a vocational program.
- Help you find a doctor or access other physical or mental health care.
- Connect you with community resources to help you become more self-sufficient.
- Provide guidance and be a positive adult supporter you can depend on.

For more info, visit [bridgestosuccess.jfs.ohio.gov](http://bridgestosuccess.jfs.ohio.gov).

# Preparing to Live on Your Own, CONT.

## Young Adult Services

If you do not qualify for or do not want to enroll in Bridges, you still may be able to receive young adult services from your county agency after you turn 18. These are very similar to the independent living services offered to those 14 and older. Each public children services agency in Ohio is required to provide them to 18, 19, and 20-year-olds who age out of foster care and who request help. Young adult services are meant to complement your own efforts to be self-sufficient. Ideally, they will help you become eligible for Bridges so you can get additional supports toward independence.

## Housing

While you are in foster care, your custodial agency is responsible for providing appropriate and stable housing for you. It's important that you tell your caseworker your thoughts about your placement at visits and reviews. Also remember that you can call your caseworker at any time if you have concerns about your placement. If you permanently move placements during your time in foster care, your caseworker must complete an exit interview with you within seven days of the placement change. This exit interview will be documented in both your case record and the foster family's placement record.

If you emancipate from foster care, your housing plan will be part of the **FINAL TRANSITION PLAN** that you create with your caseworker at least 90 days before you emancipate. Your county agency will help you locate, secure and maintain safe, affordable and stable housing. The agency also can help you pay rent and utility deposits and help you purchase household items, such as furniture, linens, and kitchen necessities.

Here are some things to consider when making a housing choice:

- Based on your budget and income, can you afford it?
- Is the neighborhood safe?
- Is it convenient to the things you'll need, such as a grocery store, gas station, etc.?
- Is it close to public transportation for getting to work or school?
- Is it close to your support team (adult supporters, friends, family, etc.)?

If you participate in the Bridges program, your Bridges representative can help you find housing that's safe and affordable, whether that means an apartment, low-income housing, a college dorm room, housing with a supportive adult or other community-based housing. Bridges also may be able to help you pay for rent, utilities, food, clothing and other personal incidentals. Your Bridges representative can give you tips for managing a household, from cooking and cleaning to paying bills and budgeting. He/she also can connect you to resources in your community that can help you live on your own. For more information, see page 23.

## National Youth in Transition Database

The **NATIONAL YOUTH IN TRANSITION DATABASE (NYTD)** stores information from a series of surveys that are given to randomly selected youth who have received independent living services. If you are selected to participate, you will receive the first survey when you are 17. You'll be asked to complete follow-up surveys at ages 19 and 21.

These surveys and the NYTD are important to improving services for future foster youth. It helps caseworkers identify and fix problems with the system, which in turn helps more youth make a successful transition to independent living and adulthood. If you are selected to participate, please do so. Your input is important!

## Independent Living Timeline

### AGE 14

- Within 60 days of turning 14—or within 60 days of entering foster care if you are 14 or older—you will complete your **INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS ASSESSMENT**. Within 30 days of completing the assessment, you, your caregiver, your caseworker, and anyone else you want to involve (such as a teacher or mentor) will use the assessment to develop an **INDEPENDENT LIVING PLAN**. This will be in addition to your family's case plan. It will be unique to you and will state your goals. At least every 90 days, you will have a **READINESS REVIEW** to update your plan. You should always have a copy of your most recent plan.
- You will begin receiving an annual copy of your **CREDIT REPORT** from your custodial agency. This shows your credit history and will be important if you want to apply for a car loan or rent an apartment someday. If you see something on your report that looks incorrect, your custodial agency should contact the Ohio Attorney General's office for assistance.
- Your caregiver and caseworker will help you learn and practice the **INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS** that you identified in your assessment and that are included in your plan.

### AGE 15-16

- Your independent living plan will continue to be reviewed every 90 days, usually when you have a case review or a semi-annual review.
- You will continue to receive copies of your credit reports annually until you emancipate from the agency's custody.
- Based on the services and/or skills identified in your assessment and added to your plan, you will be eligible to receive **INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES**.
- Your caregiver and caseworker will continue to help you learn and practice the independent living skills that you identified in your assessment and that are included in your plan.

## AGE 17

- You may be asked to complete a **NATIONAL YOUTH IN TRANSITION DATABASE** survey. (See page 24.)
  - At least 180 days before your 18th birthday, your caseworker will talk to you about BRIDGES, a voluntary program for young adults who leave foster care between the ages of 18 and 20 and who are in school, working, participating in an employment program, or have a medical condition that prevents them from going to school or working.
  - At least 90 days before your emancipation, your caseworker will talk to you again about Bridges and how you can meet the eligibility requirements. If you're interested, your caseworker will introduce you to a Bridges representative and work with the Bridges representative until you emancipate.
  - At least 90 days before your emancipation, your caseworker will work with you to develop a final transition plan. You are the primary driver of this plan. It can include as much detail as you'd like. At a minimum, it must include information about the following:
    - Your eligibility for **YOUNG ADULT SERVICES**
    - Your health care options
    - Employment services
    - Secondary and post-secondary education and training
    - Obtaining and paying for housing
    - Budgeting for living expenses
    - Obtaining a credit report
    - Obtaining a driver's license
    - Registering for selective service
    - Any court fees associated with your name
    - Any benefits you're receiving and how to continue them
  - 14 days before your emancipation, your caseworker will ensure that you have all the required documentation to enroll in the Bridges program.
  - If you do not qualify for or do not want to enroll in Bridges, you still may be able to receive young adult **SERVICES** from your county agency after you turn 18. (See page 19.) These **SERVICES** are meant to complement your own efforts to be self-sufficient. Ideally, they will help you become eligible for Bridges so you can get additional supports toward independence.
- You will receive a copy of your final transition plan, along with the following documents:
- Your birth certificate
  - Your Social Security card
  - Your state ID and information about obtaining a driver's license
  - Your health and education records
  - A letter verifying that you emancipated from agency custody

## AGE 18-21

If you emancipate from foster care, you can receive post-emancipation services. There are two options: Bridges or Young Adult Services. The chart below explains the differences.

	Young Adult Services	Bridges
Eligibility Requirements	<p>You must have emancipated from the custody of a public children services agency—in Ohio or any other state—at age 18, 19 or 20.</p> <p>You must be younger than 21.</p>	<p>You must have emancipated from the custody of an Ohio Public Children Services Agency, Title IV-E Juvenile Court, or in some cases DYS at age 18, 19, or 20.</p> <p>You must be younger than 21.</p> <p>You must be enrolled and participating in school, working at least 80 hours per month, participating in an employment program at least 80 hours per month, or have a documented medical condition that prevents you from going to school or working.</p>
Voluntary Participation Agreement	No. You must request services, but you don't have to sign a voluntary participation agreement.	Yes. You must sign a voluntary participation agreement indicating your willingness to participate and fulfill certain responsibilities.
Court Involvement	No	Yes. A court must determine that participating in Bridges would be in your best interest and ensure that Bridges staff make reasonable efforts to provide care and services.
Housing	Your county agency may be able to help pay for a variety of housing options, including college room and board.	Bridges can help pay for a variety of housing options, including college room and board.
Case Management	Young adult services are administered by county public children services agencies.	Bridges is administered by the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services through a contracted vendor.
Services	<p>The following services may be available if you request assistance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic support</li> <li>• Post-secondary educational support</li> <li>• Career preparation</li> <li>• Employment programs or vocational training</li> <li>• Budget and financial management</li> <li>• Housing education and home management</li> <li>• Health education and risk prevention</li> <li>• Mentoring, including being matched with a screened and trained adult</li> <li>• Supervised independent living</li> <li>• Education financial assistance</li> </ul> <p>These services are meant to complement your own efforts to be self-sufficient. Ideally, they will help you become eligible for Bridges so you can get additional supports toward independence.</p>	<p>Bridges can provide a wide range of financial and supportive services tailored to your unique needs. Through regular meetings with a Bridges representative, you can develop goals, learn skills and access services related to everything from employment and education to health care and household maintenance. All services are designed to help you become a successful, self-sufficient adult. Most of these services fall into one of the following categories: housing, education, employment and well-being.</p> <p>Bridges is a voluntary program, so you can opt out at any time. As long as, you are meeting at least one of the five eligibility criteria, you can reengage in services up to the age of 21.</p>
More Information	Ask your county public children services agency.	Visit <a href="http://BridgesToSuccess.jfs.ohio.gov">BridgesToSuccess.jfs.ohio.gov</a> .



# Education after Foster Care

## Wait, More School?

Continuing your education after high school can help you get a good job, build a career, become financially independent, grow intellectually, and build important social networks. It can mean freedom from the past and a future rich with possibilities. It may be your most important pathway to a career and personal success.

Talk to your caseworker, school guidance counselor and others about your plans for after high school. You may also want to ask your caseworker about Ohio Reach, an organization with liaisons at various college campuses across Ohio who can help you enroll and stay in school. Whether you are interested in vocational training, a community college, a two-year certificate program or a four-year degree program, a higher education option is available for you. Aim high, and take advantage of it!

As a current or former foster youth, you may be eligible for financial assistance. Be sure to ask about and complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). When you fill out the FAFSA, be sure to mark if any of the following applies to you:

- You were an orphan, a ward of the court or in foster care any time after your 13th birthday.
- You are an emancipated minor or in legal guardianship, as determined by the court in the state where you legally live.
- You are a verified, unaccompanied youth who is homeless or at risk of homelessness and self-reporting.

Find important dates and deadlines at [studentaid.gov](https://studentaid.gov).

The **EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV) PROGRAM** also provides federal financial assistance for youth who aged out of foster care or who were adopted after age 16. Up to \$5,000 is available to eligible youth each year until they reach age 26. To qualify, you must enroll in a full-time post-secondary education or training program by age 20, continue to be enrolled, and make satisfactory progress. You can use the funding to pay for tuition, room and board, student loan repayment, books and supplies, transportation, and other related expenses. For more information, visit [fc2sprograms.org/ohio](https://fc2sprograms.org/ohio).

Of course, college isn't the only pathway to a successful career. Ohio ranks second in the nation in the number of apprentices. Apprentices earn while they learn, and when they graduate, they can earn as much as \$60,000 a year, all without incurring student loan debt. Ohio has apprenticeships in more than 200 occupations, in fields as diverse as aerospace, construction, energy, health care, manufacturing and computer programming. For more information, talk to your caseworker or visit [Apprentice.Ohio.gov](https://Apprentice.Ohio.gov).

Other educational resources that can assist you are:

<https://www.ohiohighered.org/students/prepare-for-college/foster-care-youth>

<https://ohioreach.org/>



The Cuyahoga County Division of Children and Family Services honored seven graduating seniors who received full academic and room-and-board scholarships to Cleveland State University.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## Can I have a social life?

You are encouraged to maintain relationships with your friends and family members while in care. However, there may be restrictions about how you can contact them while you are in custody. These restrictions are in place to protect you and should be outlined in your case plan. Your caseworker should work with you and your resource caregiver to create a list of people who are approved to have contact with you.

Your caregiver is required to know where you are and who you are with at all times. It is important to talk to your caregiver about your desires and plans for your social life. As part of the agency's normalcy policy, your resource caregiver also should help you be involved in community, school, recreational, and cultural activities with your peers, if you want to be involved in them. This includes providing transportation for you.

## Can I get a driver's license while in care? Who can help me with my driver's ed?

Each county PCSA has its own policies and procedures about whether a youth in its custody may receive driver's education and/or a driver's license. If you do not know the policies for your PCSA, please ask your caregiver and/or caseworker.

## Will I receive an allowance while in care?

If you receive independent living services or may soon be emancipated, you may receive a **STIPEND**. Your county agency can offer you a stipend or a cash incentive as a reward for meeting one of your independent living goals.

## Can I work while I am in foster care?

You are allowed to work if your caregiver and/or PCSA gives you permission. In Ohio, young people ages 14 to 18 may work with certain restrictions and if they have a work permit showing that they have permission.

To apply for a work permit, you will need your birth certificate, Social Security card and a letter from a doctor saying you are healthy enough to work. Ask your caseworker or caregiver how to apply for a work permit.

## Overcoming Obstacles

Where would I lay my head down every night?

Will my biological family be OK without me?

Will I be treated the same as everyone else living in the foster home?

What will happen to me in the future?

Foster care could be a good support or a bad experience. It all depends on what you make of it. Think or say what you want, but it is a good system if you let it be good.



Tricity, Tuscarawas County

# Frequently Asked Questions, CONT.

## What is permanency planning?

Your caseworker is required to develop a case plan with you and your biological family that outlines how your case may be closed or how you may be reunified. This is known as permanency planning. One aspect of permanency planning is called concurrent planning. Concurrent planning means that while the agency works toward reunification for you and your family, it also must explore other permanency options, in case your family can't complete the activities needed for reunification. This could include kinship placement, adoption or a **PLANNED PERMANENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT**. Life-long connections should also be considered as a part of your permanency planning. If you are 16 or older, you may request a planned permanent living arrangement if you don't want the court to end your parents' parental rights. If the court agrees, you will emancipate from foster care when you turn 18. Permanency planning is important because it can help you know what to expect for the future.

## What happens if I run away?

Running away is sometimes called being absent without leave, or AWOL. It usually is defined as leaving your placement without permission for an extended period of time, without letting your caregiver or caseworker know where you will be. If you are AWOL, your county agency is required to immediately report it to law enforcement and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. When you also miss school without an excuse, this is known as **TRUANCY**.

If you run away, you may not be able to return to your placement. After running away, you may be placed in a more restrictive living environment, such as a locked facility. In addition, the local juvenile court could issue a warrant for your arrest. If this happens, you may be placed in a juvenile **DETENTION CENTER** and considered an "unruly delinquent." In addition to these consequences, running away puts you at greater risk for human trafficking, sexual or physical abuse, or even death. If you feel like running away, tell someone you trust instead. This type of honest communication will benefit you in the long run.

## Do I have health insurance?

Yes. All youth in foster care and all young adults who emancipate from foster care receive their health insurance services through Medicaid managed care plans. Your county agency will make sure you have coverage while in custody. If you were in custody at age 18, you remain eligible for coverage until you are 26, and you can choose the managed care plan that best fits your needs. Your county agency will help you complete your enrollment information before you emancipate. Your eligibility will be reviewed every 12 months. If you have changes that may affect your eligibility during that 12-month period, you must notify your caseworker within 10 days of the change.

### I don't know if I have healthcare or how to apply:

Call the Medicaid Consumer Hotline at (800) 324-8680. Visit this link if you need to reapply: <https://benefits.ohio.gov/>

### Why is staying in touch with Ohio Medicaid important?

If you don't notify Ohio Medicaid whenever your address, phone number and email address change, this can lead to loss of benefits.

## What documents should I have when I turn 18?

Prior to emancipation, your caseworker should make sure you have the following documents:

- Your birth certificate
- Your Social Security card
- Your state ID and information about obtaining a driver's license
- Your health and education records
- A letter verifying that you emancipated from agency custody

In the future, if you need additional copies of your birth certificate for Social Security card, you can contact your local health department vital statistics department to get a copy of your birth certificate. For your Social Security card, you can contact your local Social Security office. You also should make sure you have your lifebook, information about post-emancipation services, and information about the Bridges program.

# Frequently Asked Questions, CONT.

## What if I have problems with my caseworker or resource caregiver?

It's always best to first try to talk about any concerns directly with the person you're having the problem with, whether it's your caseworker or resource caregiver. If you've tried that and still feel like the problem hasn't been solved, follow the chain of command for resolving your issue. If you do not know the chain of command, ask your caseworker and they can provide you with that information. See "What is Advocacy" on page 21 for more information, as well as, the role of the Youth Ombudsman and what they can do for you on page 22.

## Does my PCSA pay for college?

If you plan to go to college or any post-secondary education program, discuss this with your caseworker and your resource caregiver, so they can assist you in applying for FASFA and the Ohio Education Training Voucher program (see page 28). If there is a gap between what those cover and what you can afford, they might be able to help. Student aid can be used to purchase books, fees, supplies and dorm/household items, as well as any needed technology, such as a smart phone, laptop or printer. Your county agency may be able to pay you a stipend, or a reward for achieving goals.

## Transitions

The transition from high school to college can be exciting, scary, overwhelming and so much more. My transition incorporated many of these emotions. A few days after I graduated, the cousin who had taken guardianship of me when I was 14 put me out of the house. I had already decided to attend Wright State in the fall and live on campus. I stayed with my biological sister until move-in day. The moving around made my transition to college quite stressful.

I was ecstatic when move-in day arrived. It was the most exciting day of my life. I was moving into my OWN dorm! No one could tell me to leave or make me feel as if they did not want me there. My foster mother (who also was my former adoption recruiter) moved me in and got me settled. I decided to get a single dorm room because I wanted my own space. This decision had its pros and cons, but I still think it was the best decision for me personally.

Being on campus and attending college classes was very confusing for me at first. I had to get used to the flow of things and to being one little person surrounded by such a big campus and so many other students. One of my greatest issues in college was watching students go home on the weekends and over breaks. I knew that going home was not the same in their eyes as it was in mine. Most of these students went home to their old bedrooms and their forever families. It was quite different for me. My dorm was my home. Everything I owned was in my dorm, and this was the only place I could call mine. This was not an easy transition, but it was the best transition I have experienced so far.



Brianna, Montgomery County

# Resources for Youth

## Finding Resources

One of the biggest challenges you will face as a youth in foster care is finding resources. Because resources change quickly, and because you may or may not have this handbook when you emancipate, we'll start by telling you how to locate resources yourself. Then we'll provide specific phone numbers and web links. Whether you have this guide or not, if you remember these four things, you will be successful:

- Visit your local OhioMeansJobs center and/or county department of job and family services. You can find these local agencies at [jfs.ohio.gov/county](http://jfs.ohio.gov/county).
- Talk to your caseworker or independent living worker. All 88 county PCSAs provide Young Adult Services to youth ages 18 to 21. This does not mean you must come back into custody. It simply means that if you need help while living on your own, you can contact your local PCSA and request services and supports through Young Adult Services. The PCSA can also help you link with Bridges.
- You may need a "referral" from a county agency for some resources.
- Different parts of Ohio offer different resources.

Your local OhioMeansJobs center or county department of job and family services can help you with things like financial assistance, job training, finding a job, Medicaid, food assistance, and more. Be sure to talk about these things with your caseworker before you leave care.

You may have to fight to get the resources you need. Asking more than one person for help or information is OK. If you know you are eligible for something but are having trouble getting it, it's OK to refuse to take "no" for an answer, as long as you do it in a polite and nonconfrontational manner. Remember that chain of command and persistence are key. See "What is Advocacy" on page 21 for more guidance on this.

## Hotlines

CrisisText Line

Text "HOME" to 741741

Free, trained counselors available 24/7

GLBT National Help Center Youth Talkline  
800 246-PRIDE (246-7743)

Ohio Child Abuse Reporting Hotline  
855 OH-CHILD (642-4453)

Medicaid Consumer Hotline  
800 324-8680 or [www.ohiomh.com](http://www.ohiomh.com)

National Runaway Hotline  
800 RUNAWAY (786-2929)

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline  
800 273-TALK (8255) or 988

National Sexual Assault Hotline  
800 656-HOPE (4673)

The Trevor Project – 24-hour hotline for LGBT youth  
Text "START" to 678-678  
866 4-U-TREVOR (488-7386)

**For all emergencies, please dial 911.**

## Human Trafficking Help

National Human Trafficking Resource Center  
[polarisproject.org](http://polarisproject.org)  
888 373-7888; text "Help" or "Info" to  
BeFree (233733)

**Central Ohio:** Central Ohio Rescue and Restore  
[centralohiorescueandrestore.org](http://centralohiorescueandrestore.org)  
614 437-2149 or 888 3737-888

**Northeast Ohio:** Northern Tier Anti-Human  
Trafficking Consortium International Services Center  
[iibuff.org](http://iibuff.org)  
716 883-1900

**Northwest Ohio:** Crime Victim Services  
[CrimeVictimServices.org](http://CrimeVictimServices.org)  
Allen County: 877 867-7273  
Putnam County: 877 867-7273

**Southwest Ohio:** Salvation Army of Southwest  
Ohio and Northeast Kentucky  
[endslaverycincinnati.org](http://endslaverycincinnati.org)  
513 800-1863

# Resources for Youth, CONT.

## Miscellaneous Web Links

### **BridgesToSuccess.jfs.ohio.gov**

A voluntary program for young adults who leave foster care in Ohio between the ages of 18 and 20 and who are in school, working, participating in an employment program, or have a medical condition that prevents them from going to school or working.

### **Studentaid.gov**

Website for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). See page 28.

### **FosterActionOhio.org**

Alumni of Care Together Improving Outcomes Now Ohio (ACTION Ohio) is a statewide organization of former foster youth. Their initiatives include hosting early Thanksgiving reunions for foster care teens and alumni and traveling to Washington, D.C. for national advocacy and supporting the Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board (OHIOYAB).

### **FosterActionOhio.org/yab**

This is the website for (OHIOYAB), an organization for youth ages 14 to 24 who have experienced foster care.

### **FosterClub.com**

FosterClub is the national network for young people in foster care. This site has many resources for young people, including internships, advocacy opportunities, and a forum to connect to other young adults who are or were in foster care.

### **FosterFocusMag.com**

An in-depth, monthly look at the foster care industry, with stories written by doctors, attorneys, authors, and former foster youth.

### **ItGetsBetter.org**

The It Gets Better Project's website offers a variety of resources for LGBTQ youth.

### **Jfs.ohio.gov/owd/CCMEP**

CCMEP is an innovative program that can help low-income 14- to 24-year-olds build career paths, find employment, and break the cycle of poverty.

### **MHA.Ohio.gov/Supports/Crisis-Text-Line**

Throughout Ohio, individuals can text "4hope" to 741 741 to be connected to a trained crisis counselor within five minutes.

### **Making Healthy Choices**

This is a guide for youth in foster care to help them understand psychotropic medications. Visit [youth.gov/feature-article/making-healthy-choices-guide-psychotropic-medications-youth-foster-care](http://youth.gov/feature-article/making-healthy-choices-guide-psychotropic-medications-youth-foster-care) to download a copy.

### **Benefits.ohio.gov**

This website connects to the Ohio Benefit Bank (OBB). Here you can apply for benefits (including Medicaid), keep track of important documents, and file your income taxes.

### **OhioHigherEd.org**

Visit this website to learn more about the Ohio College Opportunity Grant program, which offers grant money to eligible low-income students to help them pay for college.

### **OhioMeansJobs.com**

Online employment and career center, where you can look for jobs, create and post a resume, and explore careers. You can even practice interviewing and take free online trainings. From the home page, click on the image of the cardinal in a graduation cap.

### **OhioReach.org**

Ohio Reach is a network of professionals, advocates, and students across the State of Ohio determined to support former foster youth on their higher education journey. They provide resources to institutions of higher education, child welfare agencies, and foster care alumni enrolled in higher education to support their academic success.

### **RepresentMag.org**

A monthly magazine for youth in foster care, written and edited by youth.

### **RhondaSciortino.com**

Rhonda Sciortino is a former foster youth, business owner, and a child welfare advocate.

### **Statevoucher.org**

This website provides information about the federal Education and Training Voucher Program, which offers up to \$5,000 a year for eligible former foster youth enrolled in full-time post-secondary education or training programs.

### **YouthOmbudsman.ohio.gov**

Please see page 22 of this handbook for more information.

OHIO ADMINISTRATIVE CODE  
**5101:2-5-35 FOSTER YOUTH BILL OF RIGHTS**

Youth Have:

- (1) The right to be free from physical, verbal, and emotional abuse and inhumane treatment.
- (2) The right to be protected from all forms of sexual abuse and exploitation.
- (3) The right to receive timely and consistent access to:
  - (a) Housing that is a clean and safe living environment, free of infestation and contaminants. This includes the right to enter their housing at any time during their placement.
  - (b) Food in accordance to rule 5101:2-7-06 or 5101:2-9-20 of the Administrative Code. This includes the right to have other special considerations regarding food as a result of trauma included in their service and/or case plan.
  - (c) Clothing appropriate to the child's age and gender identity. This includes the right to participate and provide input regarding the selection of their clothing.
- (4) The right to privacy and personal belongings.
- (5) The right to their own money. As age and developmentally appropriate, the right to earn their own money, open a bank account, and be provided guidance on how to save and spend money. For youth age fourteen and older, this is to be addressed as a part of the youth independent living plan pursuant to rule 5101:2-42-19 of the Administrative Code.
- (6) The right to visitation and communication with parents, siblings, other family members, non-related kin, friends and significant others from whom they are living apart, in accordance with the child's service or case plan. Unless restricted in the case plan or in accordance to paragraph (E) of this rule, the youth has the right to communicate with these persons in private.
- (7) The right to contact their attorney, caseworker, custodial agency worker, probation officer, court appointed special advocate (CASA) and guardian ad litem (GAL) as well as other professionals involved with the youth in private, within twenty-four hours of the request. Each of the phone numbers for these individuals and the recommending and custodial agency hotline is to be accessible to the youth.
- (8) The right to have their opinions heard and be included when any decisions are being made affecting their lives. As age or developmentally appropriate, this includes the right to be invited to and prepared for meetings and court hearings including information about their permanency options.

- (9) The right to receive timely, adequate, and appropriate medical care, dental services, vision care, and mental health services. This includes the right to have appointments scheduled and be transported to these appointments.
- (10) The right to enjoy freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or to abstain from the practice of religion.
- (11) The right to receive appropriate and reasonable guidance, support, and supervision from adults in their lives including parents, resource caregivers, agency staff, mentors, youth advisory boards, and others, as applicable.
- (12) The right to participate in an appropriate educational program including the following:
- (a) The right to provide their input regarding selection of schools consistent with the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) 2015.
  - (b) The right to participate in educational and school related activities, without any barriers to access.
  - (c) For youth aged fourteen and older, the right to have access to information regarding vocational and post-secondary educational programs and financial assistance for post-secondary education.
- (13) The right to life skills preparation pursuant to rule 5101:2-42-19 of the Administrative Code.
- (14) The right to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities per section 2151.315 of the Ohio Revised Code.
- (15) The right to protection against being discriminated against or harassed on the basis of race, sex, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, color or national origin.



# Glossary/Definitions

**ABUSE:** When someone is directly and intentionally harmed. Types of abuse include the following:

- **Physical abuse:** Any non-accidental incident that results in marks, bruises or injuries. This includes injuries resulting from excessive corporal punishment.
- **Sexual abuse:** When sexual contact occurs through coercion, pressure, or force, including by family member, person of authority, or stranger.
- **Emotional abuse:** Any kind of mental injury. An example would be a youth who experiences repeated negative comments about himself or herself, or is blamed for a family's problems.

**ADOPTION:** When a court grants parental rights for a child to a new parent or parents. This can occur only if the birth parents agree to give up their parental rights or if their rights have been terminated by a court.

**ADVOCACY:** The support or promotion of a person or cause. Many people involved in the child welfare system advocate for children and their families. Self-advocacy is when someone advocates for his or her own rights

**AGE OUT/AGING OUT:** When a youth reaches an age where he or she can leave foster care and live as a legal adult. This age is typically 18. However, some PCSAs may maintain custody beyond age 18 if the youth has not earned a high school diploma or GED or under other special circumstances.

**BIOLOGICAL FAMILY:** Sometimes called "birth family," this is the group of people a youth is related to by blood. It includes the mother who gave birth to the youth, the man who fathered the youth, and any brothers or sisters born to the youth's mother and/or father.

**BRIDGES:** A voluntary program for young adults who leave foster care in Ohio at ages 18, 19, or 20 and who are in school, working, participating in an employment program, or have a medical condition that prevents them from going to school or working.

**CCMEP:** Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program; an innovative program that can help low-income 14- to 24-year-olds build career paths, find employment, and break the cycle of poverty.

**CASE PLAN:** A written document that outlines the goals that must be achieved in order for a youth in foster care to be returned home and for the family's case to close.

**CASE PLANNING:** Case plans are meant to provide a clear and specific guide to how you and your family can grow and/or address behaviors and conditions to ensure you and your family's success.

**CASEWORKER:** An individual who is employed by a public agency to provide supportive or protective services to children, families and substitute caregivers.

**CORPORAL PUNISHMENT:** The use of physical discipline such as spanking, hitting, whipping or beating. Ohio law forbids foster caregivers from using corporal punishment.

**COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADVOCATE (CASA):** A volunteer who a court assigns to a youth to represent the youth's best interests. A CASA researches the youth's case and speaks at court hearings, case plan reviews and other important events. He or she should ask for the youth's opinions, but their opinions may differ.

**CREDIT REPORT:** The results of a credit review, also known as a financial rating, from one of the three main credit reporting bureaus: Experian, TransUnion or Equifax. This information is important if you want to apply for a car loan or rent an apartment.

**DEFENSE ATTORNEY:** A lawyer who represents the defending party in a court case. The defending party is the side with charges brought against it. In many child welfare cases, the biological parent(s) is (are) the defending party.

**DELINQUENCY:** When a youth has broken a law or laws; including truancy.

**DEPENDENCY:** When a parent is unable to care for a child through no fault of their own. Reasons for dependency could include mental illness or alcohol or drug addiction.

**DETENTION CENTER:** A secured facility where a youth may await a hearing if he or she has been arrested and accused of a crime.

# Glossary/Definitions, CONT.

**EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV)**

**PROGRAM:** A federally funded, state-administered program for youth who have aged out of foster care or who were adopted after the age of 16. It provides financial assistance for higher education or vocational training.

**EMANCIPATION:** When a youth ages out of foster care and gains the legal rights of an adult. In Ohio, there is no legal process for any youth under the age of 18 to be emancipated.

**EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA):** A new federal law that allows caseworkers to access educational records, making it easier for youth in foster care to change schools.

**EXIT INTERVIEW:** The interview between a youth and the youth's caseworker, which must occur within seven days of the youth leaving a foster care placement. The interview evaluates the placement to ensure it will be safe for future youth in care.

**FAMILY TEAM MEETING:** A meeting between the youth in foster care, the caseworker, and the foster family at the beginning of a placement.

**FINAL TRANSITION PLAN:** A written document that includes a young adult's proposals for housing, education, employment, health care and financial management after foster care

**FOSTER PARENT:** An adult who has completed training and been issued a certificate by ODJFS allowing them to provide substitute care for youth.

**FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA):** A form used to apply for federal financial aid to attend college and/or vocational schools.

**GUARDIAN AD LITEM (GAL):** A lawyer appointed by a court to represent and protect the best interests of a youth.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING CASEWORKER:** A caseworker who helps foster youth age 14 and older prepare for independent living.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING PLAN:** A plan outlining how a youth in foster care will learn the skills needed before emancipation. The plan is based on the youth's life skills assessment and what the youth wants to do after emancipation, such as find a job or attend college or vocational school.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES:** Services to help youth 14 and older in foster care prepare for self-sufficiency.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS:** Knowledge and abilities needed to be self-sufficient.

**INDEPENDENT LIVING SKILLS ASSESSMENT:** A questionnaire that youth in foster care complete at age 14 to determine which life skills they have and the skills that they need to develop. Two common assessments are the Annie E. Casey and Daniel Memorial tools.

**INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP):** A plan developed through a school for a youth who receives special education services.

**JUDGE:** A public officer who hears and makes decisions on cases in a court of law; also known as a magistrate.

**LAWYER:** Someone who represents a person in a court of law; also called an attorney.

**LIFEBOOK:** A book maintained by a youth in foster care and his or her substitute caregiver(s). A lifebook may contain pictures, stories and mementos about the youth, his or her biological and/or foster family, and life in general. This book stays with the youth between placements and after emancipation.

**MANAGED CARE PLANS:** A type of health insurance provided through contracts with health care organizations

**MEDICAID:** A public health insurance program that pays medical bills of certain groups of people, including youth in foster care. See page 14.

**MENTOR:** A trusted adult who can provide guidance, support and help when needed. A mentor can help teach professional, educational and/or life skills. A mentor could be a trained professional, or the relationship could be more informal. Youth advisory board members often serve as mentors to other youth in foster care.

**NATIONAL YOUTH IN TRANSITION DATABASE (NYTD):** A survey given to randomly selected youth in care at age 17 to evaluate the effectiveness of independent living services. Those chosen are asked to take follow-up surveys at ages 19 and 21.

**NEGLECT:** When a parent is able to care for a child but does not; for example, when a parent fails to provide proper food, shelter, clothing, medical care

# Glossary/Definitions, CONT.

**NORMALCY POLICIES:** An agency's guidelines for foster parents regarding "normal and beneficial" activities that youth in their care may participate in.

**OHIO DEPARTMENT OF JOB AND FAMILY SERVICES (ODJFS):** The state agency that supervises county agencies serving youth in foster care, including agencies that operate residential or group homes, residential centers and other programs.

**PERMANENCY GOAL:** The optimal future living situation for a youth in foster care, as outlined in the case plan. The permanency goal often is reunification. When reunification isn't possible, the goal may be adoption or emancipation.

**PERMANENCY ROUNDTABLE:** Group of people working together to help find permanent homes for youth in foster care. The youth themselves are participants.

**PERMANENT CUSTODY:** When a PCSA is given custody of a youth in foster care, after a court determines that he or she should not return to his or her biological family. A youth can remain in PCSA custody until being adopted or emancipating.

**PLANNED PERMANENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT (PPLA):** When a PCSA is granted custody of a youth 16 or older, but parents' rights still are maintained.

**POST-EMANCIPATION SERVICES:** Services provided to young adults who have emancipated from foster care to help support their own efforts at self-sufficiency.

**PROBATION:** An alternative to detention in a detention center if a youth has been found guilty of a crime if a judge sentences a youth to probation, he or she will be required to do certain things and have ongoing contact with a probation officer.

**PROSECUTOR:** A lawyer who represents the prosecuting party in a court case. The prosecuting party is the side bringing charges. In many child welfare cases, a county agency is the prosecutor.

**PUBLIC CHILDREN SERVICES AGENCY (PCSA):** An agency that administers a county's child welfare services, including foster care and adoption. A PCSA holds legal custody of a youth while he or she is in foster care. A PCSA also investigates allegations of abuse, neglect and dependency.

**PUBLIC DEFENDER:** A defense lawyer appointed to represent someone who can't afford to hire his or her own lawyer.

**READINESS REVIEW:** A meeting between a youth in care and his or her caseworker to assess independent living skills.

**RESOURCE CAREGIVER:** A foster caregiver or a kinship caregiver.

**RESPIRE:** When youth in foster care briefly stay in an alternative foster care setting before returning to their regular foster home; this is sometimes called "going to respite."

**REUNIFICATION:** The return of a youth in PCSA custody back to his or her biological family.

**SEMI-ANNUAL REVIEW (SAR):** A meeting held every six months to review a family's case plan. The youth, his or her biological family, caseworker, substitute caregiver(s), CASA, GAL, and others are invited.

**SOCIAL SECURITY CARD:** A card with an identifying number assigned by the federal government to U.S. citizens who apply for them so that any wages earned can be recorded. Social Security numbers are needed to get a job, to collect Social Security benefits and to receive some other government services.

**SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES:** Additional services provided by schools to help eligible students with their academic work.

**STIPEND:** Money youth in care may receive as an incentive or reward if they participate in an independent living activity or attain a goal.

**SUBSTANCE ABUSE:** Addiction or overuse of alcohol and/or legal or illegal drugs.

**SUBSTITUTE CAREGIVER:** A person or facility caring for a youth in PCSA custody. Can be a foster parent, kinship caregiver or group home.

**SUBSTITUTE CARE SETTING:** A living arrangement where youth are placed when they cannot safely remain with their biological families. Sometimes called a "placement." Types of substitute care include the following:

- **Kinship care:** When a relative or close family friend assumes the full-time care of a child. The kinship caregiver must meet certain requirements and be approved by the PCSA.

# Glossary/Definitions, CONT.

- **Foster care:** Care in a family home setting with parents who have completed training and been certified by ODJFS.
- **Treatment foster home:** A type of foster home for youth with special needs, in which the parents have completed specialized training.
- **Residential or group home:** A supervised living arrangement for multiple youth in care when individual placements cannot be found.
- **Transitional living:** When several older youth in care live together with adult support to prepare for independent living.
- **Independent living:** When a youth ages out of foster care and lives in his or her own residence as a legal adult.

**TEMPORARY CUSTODY:** When a PCSA assumes responsibility for youth who cannot safely remain with their biological families. Youth in temporary custody are placed in substitute care settings.

**THERAPIST:** A person licensed to help others address mental health or substance abuse issues; sometimes called a counselor.

**TREATMENT PLAN:** A written strategy developed by a therapist or clinician to address a youth's mental health or substance abuse issues; sometimes called a service plan.

**TREATMENT TEAM MEETING:** A discussion to address a youth's treatment plan for mental health or substance abuse issues; may include the youth, the caseworker, the substitute caregiver and one or more health care professionals.

**TRUANCY:** Leaving school without permission or not attending school as required.

**VISITATION PLAN:** Parameters developed by the youth and his or her caseworker, biological family and juvenile court, outlining how often the youth can visit his or her biological family, how long the visits can be, where the visits can be held, who may visit, and if the visits need to be supervised or restricted.

**YOUNG ADULT SERVICES:** Post-emancipation services provided by county public children services agencies to young adults who have emancipated from foster care and are not yet 21.

## **YOUTH-CENTERED PERMANENCY ROUNDTABLE:**

Group of people working together to help find permanent homes for youth in foster care, the youth themselves are participants.

# Notes



Use this space to jot down notes.

Goals for the future

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## YOUTH COPY

Each youth age 14 and older will receive a Foster Youth Rights Handbook. The youth should be given the opportunity to ask questions about the handbook during the caseworker's or probation officer's visit.

I have received the handbook.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Youth Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date **RECEIVED**

I have reviewed the handbook with my caseworker or probation officer.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Youth Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date **REVIEWED**

Youth refused or was unable to sign.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Resource Caregiver Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date **SIGNED**

----- (Detach here.)

## CASE PLAN COPY

Each youth age 14 and older will receive a Foster Youth Rights Handbook. The youth should be given the opportunity to ask questions about the handbook during the caseworker's or probation officer's visit. This page is to be detached and attached to the case plan.

I have received the handbook.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Youth Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date **RECEIVED**

I have reviewed the handbook with my caseworker or probation officer.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Youth Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date **REVIEWED**

Youth refused or was unable to sign.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Resource Caregiver Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date **SIGNED**







**Ohio** | **Department of  
Job and Family Services**

Mike DeWine, Governor  
State of Ohio

Matt Damschroder, Director  
Department of Job and Family Services

JFS 01677 (Rev. 5/2022)

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