

YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE:

These are the rights and goals for all children in foster care between the ages of 14 and 17 years old who are placed with a caregiver or in a group home.



RIGHTS AND GOALS

When Should I Get this Brochure?

When you come into foster care, you can expect that your case manager will provide you with a copy of this Youth in Foster Care Rights and Goals brochure and explain it to you. You can ask questions so that you can better understand what is happening. After any placement change or every six months, whichever comes first, you will be reminded about and explained these rights and goals, provided with the document, and able to share any concerns or questions. You can expect to be provided an opportunity to participate in developing your case plan (if appropriate).



Where Do these Rights Come From?

The rights listed in this document come from the US Constitution, the Florida Constitution, and Florida Statutes. Florida statutes (laws) and federal statutes also outline and direct your rights and the services that should be provided to you. Everyone in the United States shares the same rights, which includes rights to education, healthcare, visitation, and court participation.

Where Do the Goals Come From?

The goals included in this brochure represent those goals established by the Florida Legislature for children in foster care.

THE DEPARTMENT'S COMMITMENT TO YOU



The Department of Children and Families is committed to making sure that everyone responsible for providing care and services to children in foster care will work collaboratively toward meeting the goals listed here.

The Department would like to thank Florida Youth Leadership Academy, Youth Committee, Florida Youth SHINE, Selfless Love Foundation, Guardian ad Litem Champions, and One Voice IMPACT for all their hard work to update this brochure.



YOU HAVE THE RIGHT...

General

- ✓ To not be discriminated against, or denied placement or services, based on your race, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, or any other characteristic
- ✓ To review and receive a copy of your records for free (this also applies to your caregiver, and your attorney, if assigned one)

Education

- ✓ To receive a free education in the best available educational setting that would meet your needs
- ✓ To have access to age appropriate extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities
- ✓ To ensure you have educational stability, including minimal school changes and a mandatory individualized educational transition plan each time you experience a school change
- ✓ To be able to stay at your original school even during placement changes, if it's possible. If that can't happen, you will be provided immediate and appropriate enrollment in a new school (Every Student Succeeds Act) and have an educational transition plan that discusses how moving schools will impact your education, extracurricular activities, transportation and decision making
- ✓ To participate in a meeting when educational decisions are being made and it is decided where you will attend school and be explained what options you have and what was considered in that decision

Health

- ✓ To receive healthcare regularly (includes, but not limited to, medical, dental, and immunizations) and receive age or ability appropriate explanations
- ✓ To receive Medicaid (up to age 26), as long as you meet eligibility criteria

Visitation

- ✓ To be able to visit your parents and siblings if you have been separated from them, if it's appropriate and in your best interest
- ✓ To have the court's decision about visitation explained to you
- ✓ To not have sibling visits used as a reward for good behavior or withheld as a form of punishment
- ✓ To communicate with your judge if visitation and contact is not happening

Court Participation

- ✓ To be appointed attorney ad litem if there are certain special circumstances in your case, or if a judge decides you need one
- ✓ To go to court and talk to the judge about decisions being made about your case, but know you may be asked by the judge to leave for certain parts of the hearing if it is not in your best interest to remain
- ✓ If you are not present at a hearing, the judge will determine if it is important for you to be there, and, if so, you will be given the opportunity to be at the hearing

Planning

- ✓ If you move placements, to be notified 14 days before the scheduled move unless there is an emergency
- ✓ Beginning at age 13, to start receiving additional support and coordination to help you develop skills to help you after you turn 18
- ✓ Beginning at age 14, have your credit history evaluated and checked for accuracy annually
- ✓ Beginning at age 16, to start formally planning your transition to adulthood and be formally assessed on the skills you have developed
- ✓ Beginning at age 17, to have written confirmation given to the judge that you have received information on the Post-Secondary Education Services and Support, Extended Foster Care, and Aftercare programs, access to banking and budgeting skills, how to apply for public assistance (if needed), a clear understanding of where you will be living when you turn 18, a process for accessing your case file, and a letter for the dates in which you were in care
- ✓ If you age out of care at 18, to receive a copy of your birth certificate, Social Security card, health insurance information, copy of medical and education records, and a driver's license or other state-issued identification card



OUR GOAL IS TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU...

Are informed with verbal and written instructions about your rights on how to identify and report abuse, abandonment, or neglect.

Safety

General

- ✓ Receive care, and protection from physical and mental abuse, neglect, and abandonment
- ✓ Live in an environment that supports your development
- ✓ Are treated with respect

The Assistance of Your Case Manager

- ✓ Have regular contact with your case manager by phone and in person
- ✓ Meet with your caregiver and case manager every month at the place you live (you may also choose to meet with your case manager in private, if you want)
- ✓ Receive your case manager's phone number and be able to ask for that information if you lose it
- ✓ Are able to call your case manager with any questions and get answers within a reasonable amount of time
- ✓ Are told if you get a new case manager and provided their phone number within a reasonable amount of time

Safety Plan

- ✓ Participate in writing your safety plan, if age-appropriate, and be explained the plan and what's in place to help keep you and others safe

Be Heard in Court and at Meetings

- ✓ Receive information about court dates and are asked and encouraged to attend all hearings
- ✓ Can ask that court be scheduled during a time that you can attend so that it does not overlap with your school schedule
- ✓ Are provided transportation to court and then back to school, if during school hours
- ✓ Are assigned a Guardian ad Litem and can contact them as needed
- ✓ Are assigned an attorney to represent you under specific circumstances

Trained Staff

- ✓ Are provided support and services by trained staff

Services

Health

- ✓ Can be a part of health planning if you take psychotropic medication and be able to express concerns or ask any questions

Have a case plan that addresses your needs

- ✓ Have a plan and all its services explained to you in an age and ability appropriate way
- ✓ Have a plan that respects your race and culture, religion, and other identities
- ✓ Can give your opinion about anything in the plan you do not like
- ✓ Have a case plan with a description of your parents' visitation rights and obligations and a plan for sibling visitation if you are separated from a sibling(s)
- ✓ If reunified, you have the right to remain in contact with your case manager and Guardian ad Litem for six months past reunification date

Records-Keeping

- ✓ Have a case file that is complete, accurate, and kept up to date
- ✓ Have a case plan that documents your health, education, and visitation arrangements
- ✓ Have your photograph and fingerprints taken when you come into foster care



OUR GOAL IS TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU...

- ✓ Have your photograph and fingerprints kept in your file, and explained why and how they will be used
- ✓ Have your birth certificate and health insurance information kept in your file and provided to you when you need it
- ✓ Are able to request your records and have that information be kept secure through the age of 30
- ✓ At age 17 1/2, can request to receive case file documents, and at age 18, will receive all documents in your case file

Counseling/Therapy

- ✓ Can go to therapy to help you better understand your thoughts and feelings about past experiences and what is currently happening in your life
- ✓ Have a therapist, or can request a therapist, who is open and understands your needs
- ✓ Can request a therapist by talking with your case manager, if helpful and beneficial to you

Government Benefits

- ✓ Can get help from your case manager with applying for all state and federal benefit programs that you are eligible for and need (including Medicaid, Supplemental Security Income, disability benefits, medical, and other programs)
- ✓ Can talk with your case manager about other benefits you could receive based on your parents' status

Living Situation

Brothers & Sisters (Siblings)

- ✓ Can live in the same home with your brothers and sisters, or if it is not possible for you to live with them, to be able to talk to your siblings at least once a week, unless the judge says you cannot, and, if so, to be told why this is not possible
- ✓ Are able to tell your judge if visitation and contact is not happening
- ✓ Will not have sibling visits used as a reward for good behavior or withheld as a form of punishment

Moving

- ✓ Have the services and things you need to be comfortable during the move and in your new placement
- ✓ Are able to receive information about your next placement
- ✓ Receive information on why you may be moving and have the opportunity to speak with individuals in your current placement
- ✓ Are able to get your belongings when you move placements within a reasonable amount of time

People Who Know You

- ✓ Have a home in which the caregiver knows and understands your personal history and needs
- ✓ Are able to keep talking to important individuals in your life so long as your case manager determines it is in your best interest

Placements

- ✓ Are in a placement that meets your needs, where you are not abused, neglected, or maltreated by anyone in the home
- ✓ Receive every effort to place you with a relative or non-relative before placing you in a foster or group home

Basic Needs

- ✓ Receive personal hygiene items, school supplies, clothing, and other necessities from your caregiver and not be expected to use your own money on these necessities
- ✓ Receive age-appropriate needed items based on your preference/choice
- ✓ Receive hygiene and care products that fit your cultural and specific needs
- ✓ Receive healthy and nutritious food that respects your religious/cultural/dietary needs
- ✓ Will not have food withheld as a form of punishment
- ✓ Receive your own belongings and a safe place to keep it



OUR GOAL IS TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU...



Permanency

Visiting Your Parents or Legal Caregivers

- ✓ Receive at least one visit each month with your parents or legal caregivers, unless the judge says you cannot visit with them
- ✓ If sexually abused, the court must hold a hearing and consider factors before deciding whether the person(s) accused of abusing you will be allowed to visit with you
- ✓ Can speak with your case manager, attorney, or judge about whether you want to visit your parents or legal caregivers

Reunification Case Plan

- ✓ Will have your case plan help you to be reunified (put back) with your parents, family, or caregivers as soon as it is safe to do so and as soon as the judge allows you to, if possible
- ✓ Receive age appropriate information about what is happening with your case plan and why it is safe or not safe to return home

Permanent Home and Family

- ✓ Will be provided every effort to find a permanent home and family if reunification is not possible

Education

General

- ✓ Receive a free education that includes as few disruptions as possible
- ✓ Have a referral to an educational evaluation team if you are not making progress in school
- ✓ Receive special education services, if needed
- ✓ Have your school records shared with the Department to make sure the Department knows you are attending and making progress in school
- ✓ Have a quiet place to do homework
- ✓ Have the option to participate in school activities
- ✓ Have the option to stay at school after hours, and, if needed, receive a tutor to help you in classes you may be struggling in
- ✓ Have someone advocate for your educational needs

Normalcy

Activities

- ✓ Have the opportunity to participate in activities you want to do, such as extracurricular, enrichment, and social activities, so long as they are age-appropriate and based on your emotional and developmental readiness
- ✓ Can participate in activities that provide life skills and opportunities that will help you become independent when you become an adult
- ✓ Are provided transportation by caregivers to these activities, if possible

Money

- ✓ Have allowance that will not be tied to your behavior or completion of chores, or withheld as a punishment
- ✓ Have regular conversations about your allowance that will be discussed with your caregiver and case manager to ensure you can manage your allowance
- ✓ Will not have to spend your allowance on basic needs, hygiene items, and necessities, as those should already be provided by your caregiver
- ✓ Will know if you have a master trust including what it is, how much is in it, what it is spent on, and what the request process is for you to use the money on various activities



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- ✓ Will not have to spend your allowance on basic needs, hygiene items, and necessities, as those should already be provided by your caregiver
- ✓ Will know if you have a master trust including what it is, how much is in it, what it is spent on, and what the request process is for you to use the money on various activities

Foster Youth Organizations

- ✓ Have communication with other youth in foster care for the purpose of organizing as a group to advocate for better services and living conditions, working toward improvements in the child welfare system, and providing support for one another

Transitional Services for Youth 13 and Older

- ✓ Are given and explained information by your case manager about Extended Foster Care, Postsecondary Education Services and Support, and Aftercare
- ✓ Receive support from your case manager on how to reach your educational, career, and independence goals
- ✓ Receive information that you may qualify for a tuition exemption and that the tuition exemption is free tuition to colleges, universities, and vocational programs through age 28

At Age 15 and if Eligible

- ✓ Participate in the Keys to Independence program, which includes receiving assistance to obtain your driver's permit and license, participate in driver's education, and get car insurance
- ✓ Receive and be explained information on how to enroll in other vocational programs, if desired
- ✓ Receive and be explained information on how to get Medicaid and when to apply for Medicaid

At Age 16

- ✓ Can participate in making your My Pathways to Success Plan
- ✓ Can participate in financial literacy classes

At age 17

- ✓ Can open your own bank account
- ✓ Can work if your job does not interfere with your schoolwork



OMBUDSMAN

You have the right to be able to contact your case manager or the Ombudsman regarding violations of rights, to speak to the Ombudsman confidentially, and to be free from threats or punishment for making complaints. An Ombudsman is a government employee who investigates and tries to resolve complaints.

If you're a youth or young adult in Florida's child welfare system, we know that you've likely been through a lot. Because of this, we want to make sure that you're in a place –physically, emotionally, and spiritually–where you can recover, grow, and feel the love that you deserve. If for any reason you aren't in that place, please contact your case manager or the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman will protect the confidentiality of your identity to the extent allowed under the law. Additionally, the Ombudsman will let you know that your identity may be revealed by the Ombudsman, if deemed necessary to make sure you're safe.

Ombudsman
850-717-4505
kidsfla@myflfamilies.com
1-844-KIDS-FLA
(1-844-543-7352)



What the Ombudsman Can Do

- ✓ Listen and be a voice for children and youth
- ✓ Take complaints about placement, care, or services from youth without youth fearing retribution for the complaints
- ✓ Serve as a resource to identify and explain relevant policies or procedures
- ✓ Work to solve problems and address your concerns

What the Ombudsman Cannot Do

- ✓ Respond to emergencies or investigate allegations of abuse or neglect
- ✓ Investigate, challenge, or overturn court-ordered decisions or provide legal advice
- ✓ Investigate complaints about a Guardian ad Litem

Office of Continuing Care

The Office of Continuing Care (OCC), part of Hope Florida - A Pathway to Prosperity, offers free one-on-one help for young people who are about to or have recently transitioned out of foster care, aiming to make the leap into adulthood a positive experience.

The OCC provides the following services:

- ✓ Connects you to existing resources in your area to help you thrive as an independent young adult
- ✓ Guides you in accessing special services available to former foster youth
- ✓ Gives you a support system to help you with the next steps on your path to adulthood

Call 850-300-HOPE (4673)
Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. (EST)