



Understanding Foster Care - A Handbook for Youth



State of North Carolina • Pat McCrory, Governor
Department of Health and Human Services
Rick Brajer, Secretary
Division of Social Services • www.dhhs.state.nc.us

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Acknowledgements

About this Handbook

This handbook was developed by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services; Division of Social Services for youth ages 12-17 entering foster care through county child welfare agencies (typically called the Departments of Social Services). This handbook includes input from youth currently and formerly in foster care in North Carolina, adult staff and youth board members of Strong Able Youth Speaking Out (SAYSO), and staff of the North Carolina Division of Social Services. It is our hope that this handbook will not only be useful to those entering foster care for the first time, but also for those who may have been placed in foster care in the past and are reentering the system. We believe that by providing youth in foster care with honest and understandable answers to complicated questions during a difficult transition, that they will feel safer, more empowered, and better informed.

The North Carolina Division of Social Services would like to thank the following people and agencies for their help with this handbook:

- SAYSO, for assisting with the coordination of feedback directly from youth currently and formerly in care, and for sharing the guidebook developed by their youth;
- Staff at the North Carolina Division of Social Services that were so supportive of this project, and provided feedback;
- All of the youth that contributed feedback to this handbook and allowed their words to be used to guide and educate their peers;
- Foster Club, whose “Foster Care 411” guide provided endless insight and information;
- New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), who’s Handbook for Youth in Foster Care provided a valuable framework for this handbook; and
- Erin Conner, who spent many hours writing, researching, and coordinating feedback for this handbook.

For Quick Reference: IMPORTANT CONTACTS

Your Child Welfare Worker:

Phone Number: _____ | **Email Address:** _____

County Child Welfare Agency Address: _____

Supervisor's Name: _____ | **Phone Number:** _____

Placement Agency Worker or Group Home Contact: _____

Phone Number: _____ | **Email Address:** _____

Address: _____

Foster Parent(s): _____

Phone Number: _____ | **Email Address:** _____

Address: _____

Guardian ad Litem (GAL): _____

Phone Number: _____ | **Email Address:** _____

Address: _____

Doctor or other Health Care Provider: _____

Phone Number: _____ | **Email Address:** _____

Address: _____ | **Website:** _____

Dentist: _____

Phone Number: _____ | **Email Address:** _____

Address: _____ | **Website:** _____

Counselor or Therapist: _____

Phone Number: _____ | **Email Address:** _____

Address: _____ | **Website:** _____

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Forward: Foster Youth Advice to Child Welfare Workers

My fellow child welfare workers,

You may have been provided this handbook by your agency or you may have accessed it yourself online as a resource for communicating important information to youth ages 12-17 years when they enter foster care. I recommend that you read it thoroughly. I recommend this because, not only will it make you aware of what issues are important to the youth, but it also might help you have an important dialogue with them when they first enter or are planning to exit foster care.

In order to develop ourselves as professionals, and as people that are concerned with the safety and well-being of youth involved in the child welfare system in North Carolina, it is imperative that we give the youth a voice and that we listen to what is important to them. To that end, I want you to carefully consider the feedback I received directly from youth in foster care when I presented a draft of this handbook to them at a conference in the autumn of 2012.

I posed the following question to the youth during the workshop:

“What advice would you give to child welfare workers about how they treat and interact with youth when they come into foster care?”

I received the following responses:

“Answer your phone.”

“Return your calls. Call me back if I leave you a message.”

“Be more involved and active with the youth. Stay in regular contact.”

“Show that you care. Help the young person understand why they are there (in care).”

“Set boundaries.”

“Be patient.”

“Don’t just call when something bad happens, or when the young person makes a mistake. Call when something good happens, like when the young person gets a good grade, or accomplishes something important.”

“Try to understand the young person’s situation and take it slow.”

I believe at times it might be easy for us, as adults, to dismiss the youth too quickly; especially if they are getting into trouble or making mistakes. We must resist the urge to label them as “bad” or problematic. It is important for their future that we provide them with patience and understanding. Most of all, we cannot be afraid to have these types of conversations among our peers and colleagues; especially if we desire to improve our practice, our relationships with the young persons we serve, and ourselves as people.

I hope you find this advice to be helpful, and that you sincerely take to heart the words of the youth. You might even flip this handbook open to read this note from time to time as a reminder.

Sincerely,

Erin Conner, MSW
Handbook Author and NCDSS Social Services Program Consultant

Introduction

If you are a young person age 12 to 17 years old and have recently entered the foster care system in North Carolina, or if you are a youth that has been in foster care for some time and you are approaching your 18th birthday you will want to read this handbook. This handbook was created for you, with input from youth just like you. It was written to give you answers to many important questions that you might have about what it means to be in foster care and what might happen in your future. If you still have questions after you read this handbook, we encourage you to talk to your child welfare worker. Your child welfare worker will be able to answer most questions for you.

Handbook Receipt:

I, _____, have received a copy of *Understanding Foster Care – A Handbook for Youth*.
Print.

The North Carolina Division of Social Services wants to make sure that you have received a copy of this handbook. Please write your name on the line above, then sign and date the line below. Your child welfare worker can copy this page and place it in your case file.

Youth Signature

Date

Staff Witness/Child Welfare Worker Signature

Date

Workers - You can have youth sign this receipt and make a photo copy of this page for your record

Foster Youth Organizations

SAYSO

What is SAYSO?

“**SAYSO**, Strong Able Youth Speaking Out, is a statewide association of youth aged 14 to 24 who are or have been in the out-of-home care system that is based in North Carolina. This includes all types of substitute care, including foster care, group homes, and mental health placements. The association’s mission is to work to improve the substitute care system by educating the community, speaking out about needed changes, and providing support to youth who are or have been in substitute care.”

SAYSO is involved in advocacy and policy development for young people who are in substitute care. SAYSO has events going on all year. Check out their website for more information on their history, development, activities, and leadership. www.saysoinc.org

For up to the minute information, SAYSO can be found on Facebook at facebook.com/sayso.out or on Twitter at @SAYSOINC.

Current and former foster youth participated in the development of this handbook and provided insight about their experiences and advice to other young people who have recently entered foster care.

NOTE: When you see quotes “ ”, you will know that the words came directly from a youth.



“Read this handbook!”

What, Why, Where, Who, & How:

○ What is Foster Care?

Foster care is a safe place for you to live while you and your family receive services to help work out problems. Foster care is meant to provide safe and stable care for you if your parents cannot.

○ Why am I in Foster Care?

Children under 18 years old come into foster care for many different reasons. Sometimes children come into foster care because they have been abused or neglected by their parents. Other times children come into foster care because their parents are not able to care for them. Your worker will be able to help you understand why you are in foster care.

○ Where am I going to stay?

Your worker will collaborate with their supervisor, the court system, and other professionals to determine what the best placement is for you. Your parents may also have some input and may be asked to provide information about people that know you who may be able to take care of you. Remember, your worker is concerned with your safety and well-being. If you have any questions or concerns about your placement, talk to your worker. There are different kinds of foster care placement. Your placement depends on the needs of you and your family.

- You may be placed in a foster home or kinship setting with someone that you know or who is related to you.
- You may be placed into a foster home with licensed (approved) foster parents who you do not know. This is a family setting and there may be other foster children there or your foster parents might have their own children.
- You may be placed into a group home. A group home is a place for children who need more services and supervision than a foster home or kinship placement could provide.
- You may be placed into a therapeutic foster home. This is a special home in which the foster parents are trained to care for children with emotional, behavioral, or medical needs.

If you come into foster care just before you turn 18 and you are not able to go home or to another permanent arrangement by the time you turn 18, you may enter a Supervised Independent Living placement. Your worker will help you plan for this option if necessary.

○ How do Foster Parents get Approved?

Foster parents are approved by your county child welfare agency and the state of North Carolina. Foster parents receive training on how to care for children. They are also trained to handle special situations with children who may have been abused or neglected. Every foster home must pass a fire and building safety inspection every two years, have a telephone, smoke detectors, and fire extinguishers. The home will have enough room for you to live and play safely.

Words and People to Know:

Foster Care – A safe place for you to live while you and your family receive services to help work out problems. Foster care is meant to provide safe and stable care for you if your parents cannot.

County Child Welfare Agency (often referred to as “DSS”) – The county child welfare agency is an agency that provides a variety of services to children and families in the county where you live. One job that this agency has is to make sure that children are safe and taken care of. Sometimes this means placing children outside of their home when their safety and well-being cannot be ensured in their own homes. There are 100 Counties in North Carolina; each county has its own child welfare agency. The child welfare agency in the county where you live is responsible for making sure that you are provided for and protected.

Child Welfare Worker (referred to in this handbook as “your worker”) – The child welfare worker is an employee of the county child welfare agency. They are assigned by the child welfare agency in your county to provide services to and have regular contact with you and your family while you are in foster care. Your child welfare worker’s role is to help you, to know you and your family, protect your safety, protect your rights, answer questions, make service arrangements, make a visitation plan for you and your family, help you and your family work out issues, and help you make plans for your future. The child welfare worker will also communicate with your Guardian ad Litem (GAL) and service providers to ensure your needs are met. Your child welfare worker may also present information to the court either in writing or in spoken testimony.

Guardian ad Litem (GAL) – The Guardian ad Litem or GAL is a trained volunteer that is appointed by the court to look after your best interests. Your GAL may share with the Judge, the child welfare worker, and your attorney what they find out about your needs. Your GAL may visit you or your family members or may make contact with people important to your case over the telephone.

Judge – The Judge is the person that will hear your family’s case when your child welfare worker, your parents, (and maybe even you) go to court hearings. The Judge is ultimately responsible for making decisions about you and your family’s case. Part of the Judge’s responsibility is to make sure that all your needs are being met.

Attorney – There may be many attorneys involved in your case. The attorney represents particular people in court, presents information to the Judge, and may ask questions of those who are asked to testify in your case. You too will have an attorney advocate that is assigned to look out for your best interests and represent you in court. Your parents will have an attorney and so will the county child welfare agency.

Foster Parent – The foster parent or foster parents are people that are approved by the child welfare agency to provide care for children and youth that are in foster care. You may be placed in an approved foster home or in another type of out-of-home setting.

Kinship – A placement arrangement that is identified by your parents and approved by the child welfare agency. If you are in foster care or in the custody of the state of North Carolina, the court also has to approve this placement. In this type of placement, you live with someone that may be close to you or your family (such as an aunt, uncle, other relative) or even with a family friend.

Kinship Provider/Placement – A kinship provider or placement resource is someone that knows you or your family and is willing to provide care to you. These types of placements have to be approved by the county child welfare agency and/or the court.

Concurrent Plan – While you are in foster care there will be more than one permanent plan that you, your parents, your worker, and the court are working on at the same time in order to provide for your future safety and permanence. A concurrent plan may include both adoption and reunification, guardianship and reunification, or some other plan and reunification. Your primary plan will likely be reunification with your family.

Adoption – A permanent legal placement for children who are not able to return to their families. You may be adopted by your foster parents or another family that you are not related to, or you may be adopted by a family member. In North Carolina, if you are 12 years of age or older, you must agree (give consent) to be adopted.

Legal Guardianship or Custody– A placement arrangement in which someone other than your birth parents (possibly a friend or family member) is given the legal responsibility of providing care for you. Your worker, the court, or others involved in your case may work towards legal guardianship as a permanent plan for your safety and well-being.

Reunification – Reunification means that you are reunited with your family. It means that it is safe for you to go home with your family. The mission of the child welfare agency is for you to be in a permanent, safe home as quickly as possible. The child welfare agency, your parents, and other people that are involved in your case will work towards reunification with your family in order to achieve a permanent home for you. Sometimes other permanent options are needed if it is not safe for you to return home.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) – Sometimes it is not safe for children and youth to return home to their families. If you will not be safe returning to your family, your parent’s legal right to you must be stopped or “terminated” so that the court can move forward with an alternative permanent plan, such as adoption. Your parents have the right to appeal a court decision to terminate their rights. In some cases it may be possible for their rights to be given back or “reinstated.” If you have any questions about what termination of parental rights is, talk to your worker.

Know Your Rights:

Just because you are a young person doesn't mean you don't have rights. It is important for you to understand your rights so that you can stand up for yourself if you are being mistreated or taken advantage of.

You have the right to...

- A safe environment (in your parents home or with any other caretakers)
- A home where you are loved
- Visit with your parents while you are in foster care (unless a Judge says you cannot)
- Expect your parents to show up for visits
- A permanent home
- A trusting relationship with your parents
- NOT to be abused, neglected, or dependant
- Receive services from the child welfare agency while you are in foster care

Know Your Parent's Rights:

It is also important to know that your parents have rights. Your parents' rights are important too. Just like you, they need to understand their rights in order to stand up for themselves and for you.

Your parent's have the right to...

- Visit with you (unless a Judge says they cannot)
- Be told if and when you have to be moved to another home or placement
- Be told how you are getting along
- Have their concerns heard and addressed
- Approve any surgery or serious medical care you need unless it is an emergency and they cannot be reached
- Be told as soon as possible if any emergency procedures are performed
- Consent to your marriage
- Have input on the Out of Home Family Services Agreement or other aspects of case planning as appropriate
- Attend agency reviews of your case
- Have an attorney to represent them in court
- Receive notice of and attend any court action held about you and their rights to you as your parent (unless the court acts in an emergency)

Foster Youth Bill of Rights

During the development of this handbook, the SAYSO organization (with support from the North Carolina Division of Social Services) drafted the Foster Care Bill of Rights and the Sibling Bill of Rights. SAYSO is sought to have these documents endorsed by the North Carolina General Assembly.

The Youth Bill of Rights, which is called the Foster Care Children's Bill of Rights (Session Law 2013-326, House Bill 510), passed the house and senate and was signed by Governor McCrory on July 23rd, 2013.

Many of the rights that have already been mentioned in this handbook were included in this law. However, some of the rights that were included in the law are a little more detailed.

Your rights, as stated in the Foster Care Children's Bill of Rights are...

- A safe foster home free of violence, abuse, neglect, and danger;
- First priority for placement in a home with your siblings;
- The ability to communicate with the assigned worker and have calls made to the assigned worker returned within a reasonable amount of time;
- Remain enrolled in the school you attended before being placed in foster care, if at all possible;
- When you enter foster care, to have your worker immediately begin conducting an investigation to identify and locate all grandparents, adult siblings, and other adult relatives to provide those persons with specific information and explanation of options to participate in your placement;
- Participate in school extracurricular activities, community events, and religious practices;
- Communication with your biological parents if you receive any immunizations and whether any additional immunizations are needed if you will be going back to your biological parents;
- Have access to a bank or savings account in accordance with State laws and federal regulations;
- Obtain identification and permanent documents, including a birth certificate, Social Security card, and health records by the age of 16, to the extent allowed by federal and State law;
- The use of appropriate communication measures to maintain contact with siblings if you are placed in foster care and separated from your siblings; and
- Meaningful participation in a transition plan if you are phasing out of foster care, including participation in family team, treatment team, court, and school meetings.

To view the full text of the Foster Care Children's Bill of Rights, visit:
<http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2013/Bills/House/PDF/H510v5.pdf>

NORTH CAROLINA DIVISION OF SOCIAL SERVICES

FOSTER CARE RIGHTS ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

According to Federal and State Laws (including P.L. 113-183, P.L. 110-351, P.L. 100-77, S.L. 2013-326, et cetera), all children and youth in foster care in the state of North Carolina have the following rights.

1. Right to stay safe and avoid exploitation

All children and youth in foster care have the right to be safe and have the right not to be abused, neglected, or exploited.

2. Education

All children and youth in foster care have the right to participate in a fitting educational program. All children and youth in foster care have the right to:

- Remain in the school they were attending when they entered foster care, if it is safe to do so;
- Be provided with transportation to remain in the school they were attending at the time they entered foster care; and,
- Be immediately enrolled in a new school and have their educational records provided to the school;

3. Health

All children and youth in foster care have the right to receive adequate medical care.

4. Visitation

All children and youth in foster care have the right to visit and communicate with family members, including brothers and sisters, according to their case plans or court orders.

5. Court participation

All children and youth in foster care have the right to have their opinions heard and to be included, as much as possible, when any decisions are being made effecting their lives. This includes participation in court hearings and case planning.

6. Certain documents when Exiting Foster Care

If a young person has been in foster care for 6 months or more and the young person is leaving foster care when turning 18, or is leaving foster care at an age over 18 chosen by the State, the young person has the right to be provided with the following documents:

- Official or Certified copy of their United States birth certificate;
- A Social Security card;
- Health insurance information;
- A copy of their medical records; and,
- A driver's license or identification card issued by the State

I, _____, have read or have had read to me and understand the rights described above and I have received a copy of these rights for my records.

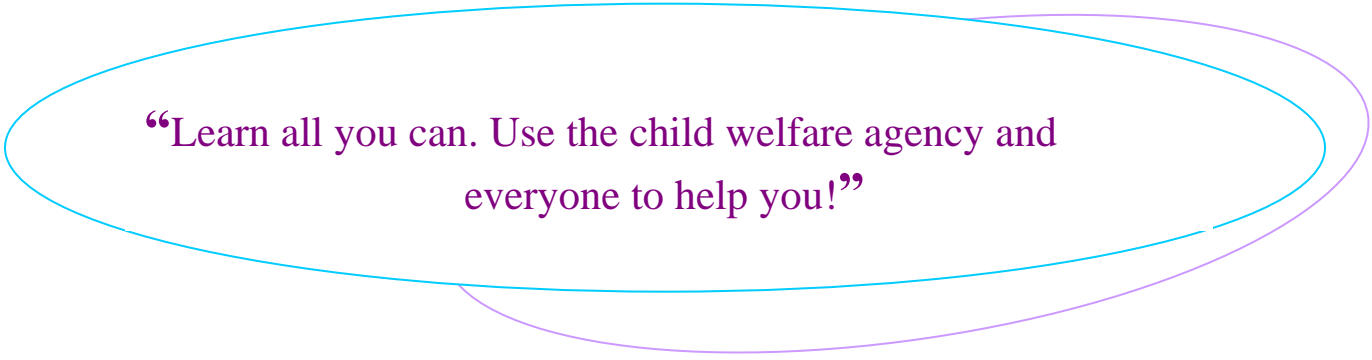
Youth Signature

Date

Your Child Welfare Worker & You

When you enter foster care you will have a child welfare worker assigned to your case. It may be the same worker your family had before you came into foster care, or you may get a new worker. It is important that you are able to talk with your worker about your experiences. Your worker is there to help you and to make sure you are safe. Building a positive relationship with your worker will help you build trust. It is okay to tell your worker not to make promises they cannot keep.

Your worker is required to visit you face-to-face at least once a month while you are in foster care. Rules in North Carolina recommend for your worker to see you within the first 24 hours you are in foster care, but this is not required. It is required, however, that your worker sees you within the first week that you are placed foster care, or within the first week of being moved from one placement to another. It is important that your worker visits and communicates with you in order to make sure you are safe and are getting the care you need. It is important for you to know who your worker is and how to contact them. Write their phone number down in this book, or keep it in a place where you can get to it easily. If you have questions or concerns that have not been answered, call your worker. If you are having difficulty contacting your worker, or you are concerned about how often you are or are not being visited or contacted by your worker, call their supervisor.



“Learn all you can. Use the child welfare agency and everyone to help you!”

First Days in Care

When you get to your new placement you should be introduced to your foster parents, or whoever is taking care of you, and anyone else that lives in the home. You should find out what the rules are and things like where your room is, where you will take a shower, and what to expect day-to-day. Make sure you know the address and telephone number where you are staying and that you know who to contact in case of an emergency.

Visiting Your Family

You have the right to visit with your family unless a Judge says it is not safe. Your worker is responsible for arranging these visits. The visits may take place at the county child welfare agency, or somewhere else. These visits may be supervised by your worker, another employee with the county child welfare agency, or someone like a family member that the agency has decided is suitable.

Your worker, with the help of other people that are important to your case, will develop a Visitation and Contact Plan as a part of your family's overall case plan. The plan will state at least how often and where you will visit with your family. Sometimes your visitation plan may change, depending on your needs and best interest. If you have any questions about your visitation plan, discuss them with your worker.

Your Siblings

You may or may not be placed in the same foster home or out-of-home setting as your brothers or sisters. This can be very difficult for many youth and may be even more difficult if your siblings are younger than you. It is very important to maintain family connections whenever you can. You and your siblings can be important supports for each other while you are getting used to this new situation. Just like visiting your parents, you also have the right to visit your siblings, unless a Judge says it is not safe. Sometimes the Judge might decide that it is not safe to visit your siblings. This might happen if you or your siblings hurt or abused each other in the past.

If you are allowed to visit your siblings, but for some reason these visits are not scheduled as often as you would like, talk with your worker and foster parents. As long as it is appropriate, your foster parents and your sibling's foster parents might be able to arrange regular visits. If you have access to your own transportation, or someone you know is able to give you a ride – you might be able to see your siblings quite often without having to worry about everyone else's schedules. **REMEMBER** – even if you have access to transportation and the freedom to see your siblings as often as you like, you must still tell your foster parents where you will be, how you plan to get there and back, and what you will be doing. They are responsible for your safety and need to have a reasonable idea of where you are and when you will return. It will also be important to talk to your sibling's foster parents to make sure it is okay that you visit.

If you are in a group home it might be hard to see your siblings more often than your scheduled or court ordered visits. However, there are other ways to keep in touch. Ask your worker or the employees at the group home about calling, writing letters, or keeping in touch online (if you have access to a computer).

Everyday Life

Daily Stuff

Privacy – Everyone has the right to privacy, including you. You also have the right to be given a space where you can store your things safely and securely. You have the right to privacy with any journals or diaries you might keep, with your mail or email, phone calls, and other personal belongings. However, if your caregivers have a reasonable cause to

believe that you have something that is dangerous, illegal, or stolen; they are required to contact your worker. You do not have the right to get into other people's things without permission.

Permission – There may be some things you want to do that require getting permission from your foster parents or caregivers.

These are some things you should ask permission to do:

- Attending school events like sports games, dances, and club meetings
- Having friends over or spending the night with a friend
- Going somewhere with a friend's family
- Going to the mall, the movies, or other outings
- Playing sports

If you live in a group home or other facility, you should check the rules of that facility.

You may need to ask your worker for permission to do some things, like:

- Playing certain team sports, such as football;
- Target practice with a gun, bow and arrow, or crossbow at either a formal range or on private property; and,
- Traveling when you will be away for more than 72 hours;

If your worker says “no,” ask why. Try to understand the reason they said “no.” The worker has to consider your safety and well-being. This is probably why they have said “no,” not just to make you upset. If you do not agree or still do not understand, contact your worker and ask to meet with them, their supervisor, and possibly your GAL. For permission to participate in some activities your worker will have to talk with your parents and may have to get permission from the court.

Clothes – You may or may not have been able to bring all of the clothes you needed from home when you came into foster care. You may not have had everything you needed at home, or you may have outgrown some items. Your foster parents receive money every month from the child welfare agency that is meant to provide for your needs, including clothing. You have the right to help pick out your own clothing, but it should be appropriate for school, weekends, and dressing up. You have the right to clothing that is appropriate to the season (such as a winter coat), clean, and in good condition. So that you can take care of your own clothing, ask your foster parents or caretakers for help learning to do the laundry.

Hygiene – Keeping clean is important for staying healthy. You have the right to shower or bathe every day. You have the right to be provided with certain hygiene products specific to your needs such as shampoo, soap, deodorant, toothpaste, toothbrush, dental floss, and so on. Make sure you ask for products that are specific to your needs if you do

not have them. You may not always get the brand that you like, but you should be provided with what you need. Talk to your worker if you are not getting needed supplies.

Hair – Your foster parents and your worker do not have the right to change the length, style, or color of your hair without your parent’s permission. If you want to cut, style, or color your hair, you may need to talk to your worker and your parents. Keep in mind your school might have rules about certain hair colors that are considered unnatural, like blue or pink.

Piercings and Tattoos – You must talk with your worker before getting a piercing on any part of your body. Under North Carolina law, you will have to get permission from your parents or the child welfare agency before you can get piercings anywhere on your body other than your ears. Talk to your worker if you want to get your ears pierced, it is likely that they will want to check with your parents before you do this. It is against the law for you to get a tattoo if you are under the age of 18 years, regardless of consent or permission from your parents or the agency.

Going Places/Seeing Friends – Your foster parents and your worker are responsible for your safety. It is important that you communicate with your foster parents or other caretakers about where you are, who you are with, and what you are doing. Remember, you may need to get permission for participating in certain activities or going places with your friends. Your foster parents may want to meet your friends and their parents. Your foster parents may restrict your activities if they have a reason to be concerned about your safety. Your worker may need to give permission for you to spend time with old friends. Talk to your foster parents and your worker about their rules for visiting with old and new friends.

Using the Telephone and Computer – You have the right to privacy during telephone calls. This means that your foster parents or other caregivers should not listen to your calls. However, your foster parents might have rules about when you can use the telephone. If you are in a group home or other facility, there will be rules about what time you can receive or make phone calls.

You have the right to call your worker, attorney, counselor, or GAL whenever you need to. Your worker will determine when you may have telephone contact with your parents, sibling, or other friends and family. This is for your safety. If you need to make a long distance call, be sure to ask about the rules first. If you do not have an email account and you would like to start using email, try to work out with your foster parents the best way to do this. There are many free email services. Keep in mind that your foster parents might have rules about how much time you spend on the computer.

Wheels

In North Carolina you must be at least 14 ½ years old to take a driver’s education course. Driver’s education courses may be offered through your high school or a local driving school in your community. You will probably need the permission of your worker, the

child welfare agency, foster parents, birth parents, GAL, or some combination, in order to sign up for the class. Once you have completed and passed the course, you will receive a Driver Education Certificate from the instructor. You can apply for a learner's permit once you reach age 15 years old. You must pass a written test and a driving test in order to receive your permit. Check with your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to find out what you need to bring with you on test day. There will be certain restrictions while you have your learner's permit, check with the DMV to learn about these restrictions.

You will have your learner's permit for 12 months. Once the 12 months is over and if you have had no accidents or traffic violations, you may receive your provisional license. This means you can drive without an adult in the car. However, like your learner's permit your provisional license will also have some restrictions. The DMV and your driver's education instructor can provide you with a copy of all of the rules for new drivers, and the levels of permits and licensing required before you are able to drive on your own at any time of the day or night.

If you are interested in obtaining your own vehicle, or having access to a vehicle in some way, talk to your child welfare worker about the rules in your county. Your worker and your foster parent must consider issues such as your driving skills and dependability. If you are going to drive your own or someone else's vehicle, you, your worker, and your foster parents must also ensure that you are covered by auto insurance. Under North Carolina law, you may be able to obtain your own auto insurance policy if you are 16 years of age or older and the court approves. You would be responsible for paying the costs and you would also be responsible for any damage if you are at fault in an accident or you drive the car in a careless way that causes damage.

Money

You may have access to money from a job, an agency stipend, or some other fund. You may choose how to spend or save your own money. You have the right to a savings account, if you decide to open one. You may only open an account in your own name. Talk with your worker about setting up an account. Whatever bank you choose will tell you the rules for opening an account.

Remember, your foster parents receive an allotment of money from the child welfare agency to help provide for your care. This includes things that you need, such as food and clothing. There may be additional funding available through your county child welfare agency to help provide for your needs, or your parents may help support you in some way financially while you are in foster care. You may decide there is something that you want that is different from the usual things that are provided to you for your care and education. Wanting something does not make it a need. You should talk with your worker and your foster parents about things that you want and things you feel you need. Things you want may include something like an mp3 player or other electronics. You may decide to save your own money in order to get these items, but you may still need to get permission before making large purchases.

Working

If you are 14 years old or older, you may be able to have a part-time job outside of school hours. Talk to your worker and your foster parents if you are interested in getting a part time job. They can help you decide what type of job to look for, or whether now is a good time for you to be working.

There are some jobs you will not be legally permitted to do because of safety concerns. These jobs may involve working around dangerous or heavy equipment or other machinery, chemicals, or other things that may be hazardous to your health.

You may be able to work in the following types of jobs:

- In an office/clerical setting
- In a grocery store
- In a restaurant
- In a retail store

There are rules for how many hours you can work, what time of day you can work, and how often you are supposed to take breaks. Talk with your worker about what these rules are. Your worker can also help you get a Worker's Permit. Your parents might need to give permission for you to get a job.

You will need to work with your foster parents and your worker to plan transportation to and from your job. Be prepared to talk about your behavior and your grades. Your work may have an effect on your education and your personal relationships. Talk to your worker and your foster parents about how you would recognize if your job is interfering with other parts of your life, and what you would do about it.

Chores

Your foster parents, or whoever is providing care for you, may ask you to do various household chores such as cleaning your room or taking out the trash. This is a part of family life. Chores like these will help you develop a sense of responsibility. Chores also help you develop skills and learn how to take care of yourself. You should not expect pay or an allowance for completing your chores.

If you feel that you are being asked to do too much, talk it over with your caregivers. Your caregivers may not agree. If they don't, talk it over with your worker. If you feel that you are being asked to do something that is too difficult or dangerous, talk it over with your worker.

“Stay strong. Be respectful. Ask questions; keep asking”

Changing Placements

Sometimes youth may encounter a situation that requires them to move from one foster home to another. It is important for youth to know that there's always the possibility of being moved at least once while in foster care. Moving from one placement to another can be stressful and there may be many reasons why a move is necessary. If you are being moved from one placement to another or if you have any questions about reasons you might be moved from one placement to another, talk to your worker. Also, it might be helpful to talk to your worker, counselor, or your GAL about how to handle the stress of changing placements.

Here are some of the reasons you may change placements:

- Conflict between a biological family member and your foster parent(s),
- A Court order,
- Change in status of foster parent's license,
- A request by your foster parent(s), or
- Conflict between you and your foster parent(s)

Problems in Your Foster Care Setting

Following the Rules & What to do if You are Mistreated

Your worker is concerned with your safety and well-being. This means that if you think you are not being treated right, talk to your worker. It is your worker's job to help you figure things out, especially if there is a problem in your foster home.

There will be rules in your foster home or foster care setting. If you break those rules or do something wrong, there will be consequences. Your worker may feel that these consequences are suitable. If you don't agree your worker and your foster parents may talk about making a plan or a change to address this. In some situations this may mean you are moved to another foster home. Part of your worker's job is to limit the number of foster homes you are placed into. This is to help you make a smoother transition, feel safer, and prevent further stress or pain that you may feel. Sometimes, though, children and youth are moved to other foster homes. There are many different reasons for this. If you are being moved and you have questions, talk to your worker.

Sometimes kids get punished for no reason. **It is NOT OKAY for you to be mistreated or hurt** and **YOU HAVE THE RIGHT NOT TO BE ABUSED OR NEGLECTED** (hit, deprived of meals, deprived of visits, locked in a room). If you are being mistreated, tell someone you trust and tell your worker. The child welfare agency where your worker is employed has staff on-call 24 hours a day 7 days a week to help you and other kids that might be hurt. If your worker will not be available to you all the time, ask about the agency's on-call information. If you are being hurt and it is an emergency or you need immediate medical attention, **call 911**.

Running away

If there is a problem in your foster care setting, **DON'T RUN AWAY**. It is better to find and talk to an adult who can help you than it is to run away. If you cannot talk to your worker, talk to their supervisor. There are other people you can talk to also. If you cannot reach your worker or their supervisor, call your GAL.

The effects of running away may include having to move to another foster home or going to juvenile detention. Running away is also unsafe - you could even get hurt or killed. If your foster parents suspect that you have run away they will have to call your worker. Your worker will have to call the police. Remember to communicate with your foster parents. Tell your foster parents where you will be.



“Everything will be fine.”

Big Questions

Health

Your worker, the child welfare agency and your foster parents will work together to provide for your health and wellness. When you enter foster care your worker will gather information about your health history and any current conditions you may have. Sometime within the first seven days of entering foster care, you will see a doctor for a check-up. You may also see a dentist, therapist, optometrist (eye doctor), or some other type of doctor or specialist. These check-ups are meant to understand more about you, to make sure you are being properly treated for any medical needs, and to provide for your physical and emotional well being.

Below you will find answers to some general questions that you might have about your health, your rights, access to health care, and coverage of your medical costs. However, make sure you talk to your worker or foster parents if you have any specific questions.

○ **Who is responsible for my medical costs?**

The county child welfare agency that is responsible for overseeing your case will provide you with medical insurance to cover the cost of your medical and dental needs. Your foster parents or kinship provider are responsible for making sure that you get proper medical treatment. It will be necessary for your foster parents, your doctors, and you to communicate with your worker about your medical needs.

○ **How often should I go to the doctor or dentist?**

You may go to the doctor or dentist if there is a problem that needs treatment or if you are sick. You may also go to the doctor or dentist for a check up. Regular doctor check-ups or physicals are usually done once a year. Regular dental check-ups and cleanings are usually done every six months. If you have pain in your teeth or gums, or you suspect that you have a cavity, talk to your foster parents or your worker about making an appointment to go to the dentist. If you think you need to go to the doctor, talk to your foster parents and your worker about making an appointment.

○ **What if I need glasses or contacts?**

Your county child welfare agency and the insurance they provide will cover the cost of glasses or contacts if you need them. As part of your check-ups when you enter foster care, you may be taken to have an eye exam. You might find out that you need glasses or contacts even if you have never worn them before. If you previously wore glasses or contacts tell your foster parents and your worker. If you need some type of corrective eye wear and you decide to use contacts, it is a good idea to have a back up pair of glasses. Contacts can be easily lost or damaged.

○ **What are immunizations?**

Immunizations are shots that protect against certain harmful or deadly diseases. Immunizations are given for diseases like measles, mumps, rubella, pertussis, and chickenpox. Many children start to receive immunizations when they are young, sometimes as early as six months old. There is a set schedule for when children receive certain immunizations. Certain immunizations are required before children start kindergarten, some for middle school, and some for those youth that go on to college. Sometimes foster youth have not seen a doctor regularly before they entered care and have to catch up on immunizations. Your worker can get your doctor's records to find out if you have had all of your shots. If you and your parents have certain religious beliefs in opposition to receiving immunizations, make sure your worker knows. Under North Carolina law you are able to be exempt from receiving immunizations if they are against your religion. If you have questions about how receive this exemption, talk to your worker and your doctor.

○ **Why am I seeing a therapist?**

As a foster youth you may have experienced many difficult, frightening, or sad things. Your worker, your foster parents, and many others involved in your case are concerned with your safety and well-being. This means both your physical *and* mental health is important. Sometimes

it can help to talk to someone that is trained to understand your emotions and to help you understand them too.

○ **Am I crazy? Is there something wrong with me?**

No. Talking to a therapist does not mean that you are “crazy” or that something is “wrong” with you. In fact, talking to a therapist shows your strength and ability to deal with difficult things. Many foster youth have experienced many painful things and need someone objective to talk to. Objective means that they are there to listen to you and to not take sides. In other words, their personal feelings or beliefs are not supposed to interfere. A therapist is objective and can offer you support as well as a new view point.

○ **Will my therapist keep my secrets?**

Yes, for the most part. Your therapist has a professional code of rules that they have to follow. These rules include guidance about what personal information your therapist can release and to whom they can release it. Unless you tell your therapist that you have been harmed, have abused a child, or that you are thinking about harming yourself or someone else, they will keep your secrets.

○ **Will my medical doctor keep my secrets?**

Your medical doctor also has rules for keeping your secrets, similar to your therapist. Generally speaking, doctors honor the privacy of youth patients unless the youth is engaging in dangerous activities. Additionally, doctors are bound to break confidentiality under the same circumstances as therapists. If your doctor suspects that you are being abused or neglected or that you have abused or neglected another child, or that you are thinking about harming yourself or someone else, he/she may not be able to keep your secrets in the interest of your safety and well-being. Your doctor will have to report these types of concerns to people such as your worker.

○ **What if I don't like my therapist?**

Many foster youth don't like their therapist at first. Therapists ask a lot of questions. Sometimes these questions are too personal. Sometimes you might not be ready to answer certain questions. Sometimes your therapist might take notes while they are talking to you. This might make you distracted or uncomfortable. The notes that your therapist is writing are not going to be held against you later. They take notes to help them remember important things that you say. They take notes to help plan for your future sessions. It might take a few sessions before you begin to get comfortable talking to your therapist. It may take a few times before you start to like them and that is okay.

○ **Do I have to take medication if I don't want to?**

There might be some medicine you are required to take under the care of a doctor. Some medication may be essential if you have a particular medical condition that could make you very sick if it is not treated. Some medication is prescribed for you to help manage your emotions or your behavior. If you do not want to take a certain medication it is important that you talk about this. Discuss your medications with your worker, therapist, foster parents, and doctor. It is important to know the consequences if you refuse medication. You might have to be moved to a strict treatment facility. Refusing medication might disrupt your life at school or in your foster home. Make sure you understand what could happen if you do not take your medication.

○ **Can I consent to my own medical treatment?**

There are certain situations in which minors in North Carolina may consent to medical treatment without consent of their parents or guardian. It is important that you understand that according to North Carolina law that you are considered a minor (any person who has not reached the age of 18 years).

If you are a minor in North Carolina you may consent to the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of the following:

- Sexually transmitted infections
- Pregnancy
- Abuse of alcohol or drugs, and
- Emotional disturbance.

If you are a minor in North Carolina the written consent of a parent or guardian is required before you are able to receive an abortion.

There are certain circumstances under which a youth might be able to consent to any medical procedures. These circumstances include, a youth that is under age 18 years and is married, a member of the military, or if you have been emancipated by the court, meaning you are at least 16 years of age and have successfully petitioned the court to be emancipated. Becoming emancipated means that you are a minor who is allowed to conduct business on his or her own behalf or for their own account outside the influence of a parent or guardian.

Talk to your doctor if you have any concerns about your medical treatment or medical circumstances that require written consent of a legal guardian.

○ **How do I get help if I have a problem with drugs or alcohol?**

Your worker and your foster parents can help you find a treatment program. You can also try calling a drug help line like 1-800-662-HELP (4357) to talk to someone. There are also support groups such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Check on the internet or in the phone book to find a meeting for your age group. You might be afraid to tell this to your worker or your foster parents, which is understandable. Remember, your worker and your foster parents want to help you; they want to make sure you are safe. It is not your worker's job to judge you, just to make sure you are taken care of. They will be glad you were honest with them and want you to get well.

Nutrition & Fitness

Nutrition and fitness may not be something that is on the mind of youth as they enter foster care. But nutrition and fitness are important for your physical and mental health and well-being. Foster care is stressful. Sometimes you might feel sad or overwhelmed. You may go days or weeks at a time without seeing your family. It could be very easy to forget about the importance of taking care of yourself. The following is a quote from a former foster youth about taking care of your physical health through eating well and exercising regularly:

“When I moved to a group home I became overweight due to a lack of healthy eating and exercise habits. Like most group home settings, everything has to be monitored. So, going for an evening jog or even a walk was out of the question. A 25 minute workout in your room can help in these situations. At the group home, food was something we never went without and had plenty left over for seconds. At one point in my life I was without food, so wasting food was something I tried not to do. I carried that thought with me through my placements and at the group home, which caused me to gain an extra 56 pounds. So, you can see that eating healthy and keeping up with your health is important. If you don’t care, who will?”

Consider talking to your worker, foster parents, or doctor if you have any questions or concerns about your level of physical activity or what you eat, they may be able to help you come up with a routine to keep you healthy and on-track. It is also important to remember that you have the right to healthy food that is specific to your needs. If you observe a specific diet (vegetarian, veganism, or others specific to your religious affiliation) or you have certain dietary needs due to allergies or intolerances (gluten, lactose, etc.), talk to your worker, your foster parents, and your doctor to make sure you are getting what you need.

Sexuality

Your sexuality and sexual health is an important topic. You may not yet feel ready to have this conversation with a trusted adult. You may not know where to find out this information. You may not have even received accurate information in the past.

The following are some important, common questions about sexual health, sexual orientation, the answers to these questions, and further resources on these topics. Also, consider talking to your therapist, worker, or other trusted adult.

○ Do I need my parents’ permission to get birth control?

No. In North Carolina you do not need your parent’s permission to get a prescription for birth control. However, it is probably a good idea to talk to your worker, foster parents, counselor, parents, or doctor if you are thinking of getting on birth control. There are a lot of important things to think about if you might become sexually active, such as pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections. Some forms of birth control only protect against pregnancy, and even then it cannot be guaranteed with 100% certainty that you will not become pregnant. Also, as with any medication or medical device, there could be side effects that you should be aware of.

○ What do I do if I’m pregnant?

There are many people that want to help you. Your worker, your counselor or therapist, your foster parents, your GAL all want to make sure that you are okay. Don’t try to handle your pregnancy alone. You can talk to your worker, doctor, therapist, preacher or priest, foster parent, a trusted teacher or friend. If you suspect you are pregnant it is important for you to get prompt medical attention. This is a time to get lots of information and support. You can call your county health department or Planned Parenthood clinic for support, or to find health and education services near you, and to get answers to your questions.

Here are some materials that might be useful to you at this time:

About prevention, your rights to medical care and contraception, and links to other resources such as locating support and health services if you are pregnant: <http://www.appcnc.org/>

For information about caring for yourself if you are pregnant, and other important health topics such as sexual health, food, fitness, drugs & alcohol, and staying safe: <http://teenshealth.org/teen/>

If you want to know what the federal government is doing about teen pregnancy, reproductive health, and a wide range of other health topics visit: <http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/>

It is also recommended that you check your local library, or online resources such as search engines, online book stores, and so on to find information particular to your situation and other detailed reading materials about teen pregnancy and health.

The North Carolina Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention campaign has a text service, called BrdsNBz, that might also be useful. This service can answer many of the questions you may have about sex and relationships.

To use BrdsNBz text service:

- Text ncteen to 66746 to opt-in to the service. You only need to opt in the first time you use the service.
- Text your question to 66746.
- You will receive your answer within 24 hours.

Message & Data Rates May Apply. Text STOP to 66746 to opt-out. Text HELP to 66746 for help. For more information about this campaign and text service, visit <http://www.appcnc.org>

○ **I think I might have a sexually transmitted infection (STI), what do I do?**

If you think you have an STI it is important that you talk to an adult that you trust and receive medical attention as soon as possible. Consider talking with your foster parent, worker, or other adult you trust. You could ask your school nurse about how to get help, or call your doctor. You could also talk with your county public health department or Planned Parenthood Clinic. Remember, a doctor, health department, or Planned Parenthood Clinic cannot diagnose you over a telephone call. To know for sure whether you have an STI you will have to get tested.

○ **What about dating?**

Dating can be difficult for many youth. Being in foster care can complicate dating even more and may add pressure to your family life or your emotional well-being. Youth in foster care can feel like they are “losing” many things (for example, their parents, maybe even their siblings, or old friends). It is not uncommon for youth to want to fill this space with a romantic relationship. Unfortunately, if this relationship involves sex, things could become problematic. There are unhealthy reasons to be in a sexual relationship, which include: trying to cure loneliness or unhappiness, wanting to become more popular, using poor judgment because you have used

alcohol or drugs, getting back at your parents or others, and using sex to avoid caring relationships. These are just a few of the reasons.

Remember, you do not belong to anyone else. You belong only to yourself. Sometimes young people may feel pressured to make decisions in a relationship that they are not ready to make. These young people may feel desperate to hold onto these relationships that may be unhealthy or even abusive as a way to fill a need that is missing. Finding someone to talk to about these feelings may be helpful - whether that person is a counselor or therapist, your worker or foster parent, a teacher, or even a close friend that won't judge you or pressure you to engage in behavior that might be unhealthy or unsafe. It's not impossible to be in a healthy relationship as a young person, but being in foster care may present difficulties. Use the resources that you have to help you make sure that your decisions are safe and in your best interest.

○ **My foster parents won't let me see my boyfriend or girlfriend. Why don't they trust me?**

Your foster parents may be concerned that you might get in trouble or that your behavior with your significant other will not be appropriate. Your foster parents are there to keep you safe and protect you. If you are in a romantic relationship, this might add even more pressure to your family circumstances. Try asking your foster parents if your boyfriend or girlfriend can come over for dinner or spend time with you and your foster parents together somehow. After your foster parents meet your boyfriend or girlfriend and see you acting appropriately with each other, their trust may grow. This is a normal part of building a trusting relationship with your foster parents *and* your biological parents. If you are not willing to visit with your boyfriend or girlfriend in a supervised setting it is possible that the real reason you want to spend time together is not what your foster parents would consider "appropriate" behavior. With your foster parents permission you may try keeping in touch with your boyfriend or girlfriend by phone, letters, or email.

○ **How do I know if I am in an abusive relationship?**

If you were abused physically, sexually, or emotionally by a parent or trusted adult it might be hard to figure out if your current relationship is abusive. Sometimes abusive behavior may appear "normal" to someone that has experienced abuse in the past.

If you suspect you are in an abusive relationship, remember that this is serious. Don't forget that you are not alone; there are many people that care about you and want to help. Talk to your therapist, counselor, or your worker. They are there to make sure you are safe.

It might also help to look up these resources:

<http://lovegoodbadugly.com/relationship-affecting-me/>

<http://mynextgf.uncc.edu/>

<http://www.loveisrespect.org> <http://www.thatsnotcool.com/>

Also, it is also helpful to know what some signs of abuse might be. Some signs of an abusive relationship include if your boyfriend or girlfriend has ever...

Withheld affection or approval as punishment

- Continually criticized you, called you names, or yelled at you
- Insulted your beliefs or opinions, your religion, your race, class, or sexual preference
- Manipulated you, lied to you
- Driven away your friends or family
- Humiliated you in public or private
- Taken your keys or money
- Thrown objects at you
- Abused a pet to hurt you
- Slapped, punched, shoved, bit, kicked, choked, or hit you
- Raped you or subjected you to other violent nonconsensual sexual acts
- Threatened to commit suicide if you leave

○ **I was sexually abused by someone of my same gender, does this mean I will turn out gay?**

Most experts agree that sexual abuse or sexual trauma does not cause a person to “turn gay.”

Human sexuality and sexual orientation is complex. Like most human behavior, sexuality develops as a result of the interaction between your biological make-up and the environment in which you are raised. You should speak to a counselor or therapist about past sexual abuse as such abuse may cause confusion about sexual identity.

○ **I have questions about my sexuality/sexual orientation. Who can I talk to about this?**

Everyone has their own “sexual orientation.” This basically means who you are attracted to. Some people are heterosexual or “straight,” which means they are attracted to a person of the opposite sex. Some people are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or questioning their sexual identity. Gay is usually used as a term to refer to males that are attracted to other males, and the term lesbian is usually used as a term to refer to females that are attracted to other females. Bisexual refers to those that are attracted to both sexes.

People who identify themselves as transgender may feel that they don’t fit into the “accepted” definitions of male or female gender. Sometimes those that identify as transgender may want to be like the opposite sex. Some people wear clothes of the opposite sex. There are many other ways in which people identify or express themselves, their sexual orientation, or their gender. Sometimes these issues can be difficult to talk about and it is your choice to tell someone about your sexual or gender identity. It’s a good idea to talk with your worker about confidentiality and your rights before sharing this information. If you feel that you have questions about your sexual or gender identity and you would like to talk about it, consider talking with your therapist, counselor, or worker. They may be able to offer support and listen if you have any concerns.

School

When you enter foster care you will certainly have a lot of questions. You might be concerned about what will happen at school. Depending on your case, your safety, and with whom you are placed, you may or may not be able to stay at the same school. It’s scary to have to leave your family, even if they have hurt you. It can make things scarier if you have to leave your school, your friends, and your teachers too.

You may also have concerns about what will happen in the future. Will you go to college? What if you don't even want to go to school? What about your grades? Reading the following sections may help you answer some of those difficult questions. Talk to your worker, your foster parents, or your school counselor about planning for your educational future.

- **Changing Schools**

This handbook previously mentioned that your worker and the child welfare agency will try to place you with a foster parent or kinship provider that lives somewhere close by so that you don't have to change schools. However, changing schools is a possibility and a reality for some foster youth. If you are moving within the same school district, sometimes it is possible to arrange transportation. Tell your worker if you want to stay in your same school, or if you want to switch schools. They will try to accommodate your wishes. Remember, sometimes it is not possible to stay in the same school.

- **Will they know I am in foster care? What will my friends think?**

There may be certain adults at your school that know you are in foster care. This is because there are particular people that your worker shares information with regarding your case in order to ensure your well being, plan for your needs, plan for your future, to make sure that the school knows who is responsible for your care, and sometimes who is and is not allowed to pick you up from school.

There are some people at your school that are not supposed to know that you are in foster care because of confidentiality (for example, your class mates). You don't have to tell anyone about your situation unless you want to. If you feel you are being pressured to give information that you are not comfortable discussing, consider using a quick response like "I am not comfortable talking about it" or even "I am not supposed to discuss the details of my situation because of confidentiality."

If you decide to talk about your situation with your friends, they will likely look at it in different ways from one another. People are different and have their own thoughts and feelings about things. You might find that some of your friends are very supportive. This might strengthen your friendship during this difficult time. Other friends might not be as supportive and may back away from the situation because they don't understand. The best thing to do in that situation is to remember that it isn't your fault if your friends react that way; you are the same person you've always been.

- **I am constantly made fun of by the kids at school. How can I make them stop?**

Sometimes jokes can go too far. It might hurt to be made fun of, especially about something that you have no control over, such as being in foster care. Sometimes people might make fun of others even more if it seems like it is really bothering them. It may be difficult to ignore, but practice not reacting. Tell them in a calm, clear voice to stop, and then walk away. Or, laugh with them – it may catch them off guard. When they see it isn't bothering you, they might get bored and find something else to do. If they don't stop

teasing you, and things get worse, especially if they start to push you, hurt you, or threaten you, you should get help immediately from a teacher, counselor, foster parent, worker, or other adult.

You might have to ask more than one person for help. If the teasing is so bad that it starts to affect how you feel about yourself, or you are considering hurting yourself in response, it is important to get help immediately. Find an adult you trust, talk to your counselor or therapist. Sometimes teasing and bullying can get serious, so it is very important for you to be safe by getting help.

○ **Staying in School**

You may feel that you do not wish to stay in school. You may have also been told that finishing school is important to your success in the future. There are always exceptions, but generally it is very difficult to get a job if you drop out of high school. If you finish high school and decide to go on to college, you may have access to financial aid that is meant specifically for former foster and adoptive youth. You won't be able to qualify for this assistance unless you finish high school. Talk to your worker about eligibility and your plans for your educational and professional future.

○ **Grades**

If you are concerned about your grades, talk to your worker, your teachers, and other people that can help you figure out where you are right now, and where you need to be. Also, don't be too hard on yourself. Many students who do really well in school have had parents that have helped them with their homework since they were very young. Their parents have also given lots of support so they can concentrate on school. Your situation may be quite different. In fact, the situation is very different for many foster children whose grades have fallen for reasons they cannot control.

It can be frustrating to try to catch up if you have fallen behind, even if you have lots of support now. Talk to your worker and your foster parents about setting up a meeting with your teachers to help decide the best way for you to catch up. Your school counselor may also be able to help you set goals and stay on track.

○ **Getting a Tutor**

If you are trying to catch up, or you want to improve your grades in specific subjects, getting a tutor may be helpful. You might have access to a tutor through your school after regular hours or you might not. Private tutors can be expensive, but your county child welfare agency can help find the educational support and resources you need. You might have to ask more than once to get the help you need. Keep trying.

○ **Educational Records**

There are many reasons that you will need to know how to access your educational records. Applying for jobs, college, or the military may be a few of those reasons. Talk to

your school counselor about obtaining copies of your educational records. Your worker may have additional records if you have attended more than one school.

○ **Getting in Trouble: Expulsion, Suspension**

You have the right to know why you have been suspended or expelled. You also have the right to defend yourself against claims made against you. If you are expelled from school it could be very hard for you to return.

If you are suspended or expelled it is important for you to do whatever you can to get back into school.

It is important for you to know what behaviors may result in getting in trouble at school. Some behaviors that may result in your suspension or expulsion from school include the following:

- Damaging or destroying school property
- Fighting with or physically injuring a class mate or teacher
- Breaking school rules
- Possessing or using a weapon on school grounds
- Possessing alcohol, drugs, or other illegal substances on school grounds

It is also important for you to know whether or not your school district allows the use of physical force or discipline. Under North Carolina Law, each local board of education may determine whether corporal punishment (physical force/physical discipline) may be permitted in its schools. To find out your school's policies, talk to your school counselor or worker.

Be aware that school staff can use "reasonable force" to control behavior or to remove a person from the scene when necessary for any of the following reasons...

- To correct students
- To stop a disturbance threatening injury to others
- To obtain possession of weapons or other dangerous objects on the student, or within the control of a student
- For self-defense
- For the protection of persons or property
- To maintain order on educational property, in the classroom, or at a school-related activity on or off educational property

○ **What is a learning disability and how can I get help?**

Youth in foster care might get behind on their school work due to certain life circumstances. Sometimes youth might enter foster care already behind on school work and need help to catch up. However, some youth have special learning needs that go beyond just being behind in their work. In fact, some foster youth might have what is

called a learning disability. A learning disability is when you have difficulty learning certain, very specific, types of information. If you have a learning disability, it does not mean that you are not able to learn, it just means you might need extra support to learn certain topics. Signs of a possible learning disability might be if a youth has difficulty speaking, reading, writing, figuring out a math problem, communicating with a parent, or paying attention in class. Sometimes learning disabilities are recognized in elementary school when parents or teachers notice that a child can't follow directions or is struggling to do work he or she should be able to do easily. It can be scary, but there is help. Talk to your worker, your teacher, or your foster parents if you feel that you need extra support in school. Your school will have a process to evaluate you for learning disabilities and for making an educational plan after they find out the results. Your school can, and should, work closely with you, your foster parents, and your worker to determine the best plan for you.

Self Control & Communication

Even if you had some experiences with your parents or other family members that were scary, or harmful, it can be even scarier to leave the home you know. Many youth in foster care have experienced some form of trauma in their home, only to have to go through being removed from people they care about. Sometimes this can impact behavior. One former foster youth said this...

“Once we’re removed from our biological families, we tend to have a mean streak and have our emotions bottled up. When that occurs, it causes conflicts at our placements, with our workers, and even with other youth. The best way to get it all out is to talk it over with a trusted adult or a neutral person, such as your therapist or counselor. Communication is very important. You can get more accomplished if you are able to communicate effectively. It is important to understand that you have a voice. Getting out ideas, feelings, needs and wants can be difficult and they may go unheard when delivered through displays of anger or other forms of ineffective communication. One way to learn more about effective communication and advocating for yourself is by engaging with other youth who are in similar situations, or getting involved in organizations that are designed to help youth in foster care. If you feel that your voice is not heard, you can become a member of SAYSO.”

If you feel angry or like you are losing control, even if you can't explain why, talk to your worker or counselor/therapist about ways to address your anger and learn communication skills. It may save you from having to move from one placement to another, or from many other consequences that may be even more unpleasant.

Religion & Culture

You have the right to preserve your own cultural heritage and faith. You also have the right to attend a place of worship that you choose (should you choose to attend any type of worship at all). Your foster parents cannot force you to adopt their values. Talk to your foster parents or caregivers about the things you do to express your culture – such as eating or not eating specific foods, or celebrating specific holidays. Even if your foster parents have different beliefs, they should support your choice to continue your traditions and practice your religion.

If you feel that your choices, your culture, or your religion are not being respected, talk to your worker. If your worker provides more training or information to your foster parents, it might help them learn how to support you. If your foster parents are still not supportive, talk to your worker about changing placements.

What Happens Next?

Court

Your case will be reviewed regularly in court so that the Judge can hear from your worker, your GAL, your family and their attorney, and anyone else that is important to your case. Sometimes you might go to court too. It is important to make sure that you are appropriately dressed if you do go to court. Each court jurisdiction will have its own guidelines for what is considered appropriate court attire. Talk to your worker to find out what the guidelines are in your area.

Here are some general guidelines about appropriate attire and grooming for court...

<u>Ladies</u>	<u>Guys</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash and comb your hair ● Iron your clothes ● Wear slacks or loose fitted jeans ● Wear a blouse that is not too low cut and that does not show too much skin ● Don't chew gum ● Don't speak out of turn ● TURN OFF ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Wash and comb your hair ● Iron your clothes ● Wear khaki pants or slacks, pulled up/with a belt ● Wear a polo or other collard shirt ● Don't chew gum ● Don't speak out of turn ● TURN OFF ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

A youth that is too young to understand the court process (usually under 12 years old) will *not* be asked to speak in an open court room, though sometimes the Judge may ask to speak with the youth directly to try to find out what they want. If a judge sees that a youth is old enough to understand the court process and what is happening, they may ask the youth to speak openly to the court. This can be an emotionally difficult situation, so your worker or your GAL should be asked whether or not it is a good idea for you to speak openly to the court. If you are asked to speak in court it is important that you are *honest*. Tell the Judge how you feel and what *you believe* is in your best interest.

For a timeline of what happens after youth enter foster care visit the SAYSO website at <http://www.saysoinc.org> and click on "Did You Know?...". This will take you to several resources, one of which is the For You Guidebook. The For You Guidebook contains the foster care timeline. Talk to your worker if you have any questions about the court process.

Permanency Planning Hearings and Permanency Planning Meetings

Permanency Planning Hearings are *court hearings* that are required by law to take place within one year of the day that you came into foster care. These hearings are also required to take place every six months after the initial Permanency Planning Hearing. The child welfare agency is asked to have a clear permanency plan that is based on shared-decision making. Shared-decision making is a process by which many people that are important in your case have conversations and work together to plan for your future. Key partners in this process include the agency, the courts, your GAL, and your family (even extended family members and kin). You are important in this process too – remember everyone involved wants to make sure you are safe and that these decisions are made in your best interest. Talking to your worker, your GAL, or even the Judge about what you think is best for you is important.

Permanency Planning Meetings or Permanency Planning Action Team Meetings are *meetings* that are often held at the child welfare agency that is responsible for your case. These meetings include more people than just the agency and your worker. Other participants may include, but are not limited to: your parents, you, your foster parents/caregivers/adoptive parents, community resource persons (such as someone who provides you or your family with a service or case management – like a therapist or counselor), and/or your GAL. These meetings are held in order for all of these people to collaborate and work closely together to ensure that you are safe and that the decisions that are made about your care are in your best interest.

Lifebooks

A lifebook is a book about you. It is sort of like a scrapbook. It might have pictures of you or your siblings, your friends, your biological family or your foster family. It might also have facts about you, what you like, how you've grown, or what you want to be when you are older. Lifebooks can be a helpful tool for you to remember your past while looking towards the future. They can be helpful for you to work through difficult times, but also to help you understand and celebrate what makes you strong. Some agencies may help you start a lifebook as soon as you come into foster care, but not all agencies do this. If you think you might be interested in having a lifebook, talk to your worker.

Your Future in Foster Care

There are many different reasons that children and youth come into foster care. Those reasons were explained a little bit earlier in this handbook. Now it is time to talk about what happens next. You might have more questions about what is supposed to happen while you are in foster care or after you exit care than you have about why you came into foster care in the first place. All of the planning meetings, court hearings, case plans, visits with your family, and the visits your worker makes with you at your placement are meant to help you and your family heal and learn how to be safe and healthy together. These meetings, hearings, visits, and case plans are also to help you, your family, and your worker plan for your future.

The child welfare agency believes that children should be safe, but they also believe that it is important for you to be with your family. The agency works hard to reunite youth with their

families, but sometimes this is not safe or appropriate. The Judge will ultimately decide, based on information from you, your family, your worker, your GAL, and the attorneys what is in your best interest. In the next section you will learn about the different options of plans for your future in foster care and after you leave foster care.

Your parents will have a lot to do with what your plan is. Which means, in order to reunite with you, they will have to work with the child welfare agency, the court, and other people to make sure that they can keep you safe in the future and provide for your needs. However, in order for you to accomplish your own goals while you are in foster care, and in the future, it is important for you to be involved in the process. If you have questions, ask your worker. If you need extra support to deal with being in foster care, or to make sure you are getting an education and other services you need it is okay to ask for help – and keep asking until you get it! There is also a lot of information and support online and through other information sources and organizations - for example, SAYSO, and Foster Club (<http://www.fosterclub.com>).



“Do what is asked and everything will go just fine.”

Leaving Foster Care

Planning for Your Future

While you are in foster care your worker, GAL, the Judge, you, and other people involved in your case will continue to work on a plan for your future. This plan will have what is called a “permanency plan”, which means a permanent plan of where you will live after you leave foster care.

There are different goals. You, your family, your worker, and the court might work on some of these goals at the same time. Sometimes it helps to have multiple plans just in case one plan does not work out.

These different plans might include a combination of the following...

- Returning home with your family.

- Living with a relative or friend.
- Being adopted.
- Some kind of independent or transitional living arrangement.
- Living in an adult group home, or other residential treatment facility.

OR

- Your parent's rights being reinstated (if their rights have been terminated)

You have the right at all times to know your permanency plan. If you have any questions or concerns about your permanency plan or what your future will look like after foster care, talk with your worker.

Life Skills Services/ LINKS

For youth in foster care, life skills and future planning services are different from state to state. In North Carolina, life skills and independent living services are called LINKS. In order for you to receive LINKS services or funding, you must be willing to take an active role in the process of assessment, planning, and service implementation of your case.

The NC LINKS program has several building blocks or components. These include:

- An assessment of your strengths, as well as your needs.
- A plan that is based on the assessment, and which also includes your interests, goals, and responsibility for fulfilling your plan.
- Services, outlined in the plan, which are meant to help you achieve your goals and positive outcomes for your future.

Sometimes it might feel like everyone else is making decisions for you. Playing an active role in planning for your future not only helps everyone else better understand your needs, but also may help you feel less like your future is being decided without your input.

It is important for you to know that not every foster youth qualifies for LINKS funding. If you are interested in the LINKS program or are wondering if you are eligible for funding, talk to your worker, their supervisor, or the LINKS coordinator at your county child welfare agency for more information.

If you have just entered foster care recently, LINKS services may not enter your plan until later. Remember, your initial plan might be to return home with your parents, or live with other relatives or friends until you are 18 years old.

If you do not return home to your parents, there are other plans for your future that might be more appropriate for you depending on your situation. Some of these plans are talked about next...

Another Permanent Planned Living Arrangement (APPLA)

APPLA is a placement arrangement for youth ages 16 – 18 years old. The following information about APPLA comes from the North Carolina Division of Social Services.

APPLA is:

- A permanent living arrangement for a youth age 16 or over who resides in a family setting which has been maintained for at least the previous six consecutive months; and
- in which the youth and caregiver have made a mutual commitment of emotional support and the youth has been integrated into the family; and
- the youth and caregiver are requesting that the placement be made permanent; and
- other permanency options, including adoption, guardianship, and custody have been determined to be inappropriate for the situation due to the youth's long-term needs.

APPLA must be approved by the court and the Permanency Planning Action Team/ Child and Family Team prior to the change in the permanency plan and regularly reviewed by the court. The youth will participate actively in court decisions regarding APPLA either through direct testimony (talking openly in court) or in writing so that the youth's preferences are heard and respected.

APPLA may be appropriate for relative or non-relative placements in licensed or court-approved non-licensed homes when the above conditions are met. The agency still has legal custody of the youth for the period of the APPLA. If the family is a licensed caregiver or becomes licensed, they will receive payments to help support the youth. If they are not a licensed foster care facility, they will be informed of and given the opportunity to become licensed.

The agency is required to provide and document services as follows:

- Child Placement Services to ensure the youth's ongoing safety and well-being needs are met;
- Provision of relevant LINKS services based on a plan developed with the youth;
- Access to resources for the youth through the LINKS program and other resources;
- Diligent efforts to help the youth to establish a strong personal support network; and
- Post-placement support for the caregiver in order to avoid placement disruption.

APPLA must be reviewed at least every six months, or more often as needed, at a facilitated Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting, which includes the youth and caregiver, and their supports, as well as the agency LINKS liaison. The CFT shall review the plan and the agency's effort to maintain the stability of the placement and to assist the youth in their transition to independence. Permanency planning hearings will be conducted at required intervals and will review agency recommendations and reports of the placement.

Contractual Agreement for Residential Support (CARS)

CARS is a transitional program for youth in foster care that will age out of foster care. This is a voluntary program in which the youth can request to remain in placement responsibility of their county child welfare agency and receive foster care services beyond age 18.

In order to enter into the CARS program you must:

- Be enrolled in a full-time program of academic or vocational training, or
- Accepted for full-time enrollment for the next term in an academic or vocational program

IMPORTANT: THE CARS PROGRAM WILL AUTOMATICALLY END ON YOUR 21ST BIRTHDAY!

Make sure you plan ahead so that you are able to take care of yourself, or have other supports in place when your CARS program ends!

Reinstatement of Parental Rights

If the court decides it is not in your best interest for you to return home to your parents, your parent's legal rights might be terminated (removed or ended). If this happens, another plan might be made for your permanency (such as adoption or guardianship). However, in some cases it might be possible for a parent's rights to be reinstated (given back). This might be an option for youth who are not yet 18 years old and may not have another permanent plan. There are certain criteria that have to be met in order for the court to make this decision.

The criteria for Reinstatement of Parental Rights is as follows...

- The youth is at least 12 years of age or, if the youth is under 12 years of age, there is a special situation that requires reinstatement be considered.
- The youth does not have a legal parent, is not in an adoptive placement, and is not likely to be adopted within a reasonable period of time.
- The parent's rights were terminated at least three years before the agency requests reinstatement, unless the youth's permanent plan is no longer adoption.

Obtaining Your Personal Information and Documentation

When you are planning for your life after foster care you will need to make sure you know how to access your personal information and documentation including your birth certificate, Social Security card, educational records, medical records, and so forth. Some of these documents will be important as you apply for college, jobs, housing, or a marriage license.

Federal law requires that any young person leaving foster care after turning 18 years old, unless the young person has been in foster care less than 6 months, be provided an official or certified copy of their United States birth certificate, a Social Security card issued by the Commissioner of Social Security, health insurance information, a copy of their medical records, and a driver's license or other identification card issued by the State.

You have the right to your personal records. Even though you are entitled to certain documents when you leave foster care, it is important to know how to access these documents for yourself in the future. Once you are living independently you will need to know how to access these documents for many reasons, such as if you move, if you change health care providers, if you attend community college, a university, or other educational institution, if you apply for jobs, if you get married or join the military, or for other reasons. Below you will find some detailed information about the steps you can take to obtain your personal information and documents.

●Your Birth Certificate

Talk to your worker about obtaining your birth certificate, they will most likely have some form of it on file. If you are not able to get the original or a certified copy of your birth certificate from your worker or your biological family you will need to do the following:

- a) If you were born in North Carolina you will need to travel to the county in which you were born and go to their Vital Records department. Once you are there you will need to fill out an Application for a Copy of a North Carolina Birth Certificate. You can also order your birth certificate via telephone by calling 1-800-669-8310, by walk-in at the Raleigh office, or online at <http://www.vitalchek.com>. It may cost you about \$24 to order your birth certificate, maybe more if you want to speed up the process. It could take up to three weeks for your birth certificate to be delivered. If you are in the LINKS program, talk to your worker to find out if LINKS can cover the cost.
- b) If you were not born in North Carolina, you may try searching <http://www.vitalchek.com> to see if they provide records for the state in which you were born. If not, talk to your worker or foster parent about how you can find the information OR try searching the internet.

●Your Social Security Card

Your worker or foster parents may also have your original Social Security card. If you are transitioning out of foster care to live on your own, go away to college, or you are otherwise not planning to live in your foster setting any longer, you should be given your original Social Security card or a means to obtain a new Social Security card if your original is missing. You will need your Social Security card to apply for jobs, college, the military, a marriage license, or a bank account.

It is very important that you keep your original Social Security card and that you do not share your social security number with anyone, UNLESS:

- You are applying for a job and they need your Social Security number to conduct a background check or for wage and tax reporting purposes
- You are opening a bank account
- You are filing your taxes with the IRS
- You are applying for student loans or other financial aid
- You are applying for college
- You are applying for a driver's license
- You are applying for various types of public assistance or other benefits such as TANF, Food and Nutrition (Food Stamps), Medicaid, Child Support, Unemployment Compensation, etc.

If you need to get a new Social Security card you will need to go to your local Social Security office and fill out form SS-5: Application for a Social Security Card, or visit <http://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/> download and fill out a copy of form SS-5 and take a copy of it (and other necessary documentation) to the Social Security office, or mail it in. To find a Social Security office near you, visit <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/regions/>

● Your Educational Records

If your biological family has moved several times or you have moved foster homes and schools several times it might be difficult to track down all of your educational records. Talk to your worker about what they can provide to you or how they can help you obtain your own copies of your educational records. The most important part of your educational records, if you are applying for college or a job, will most likely be your high school transcripts, high school diploma, or high school equivalency, such as the General Educational Development (GED) diploma. However, if you have had any tutoring or special services, or an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), it might be important to obtain more detailed records from before high school.

In order to obtain your educational records it may be helpful to contact the board of education in the county where you received most of your education and/or graduated from high school. Try calling the school directly or talk to your guidance counselor. If you are having trouble locating or obtaining your records, talk with your worker and foster parents or call the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction at 919-807-3300.

●Your Medical Records

Your educational and medical records are about you. You have the right to access, review, and retain your own copies. Talk to your worker to find out if have questions about your age, the law, and accessing or transferring your medical records. If you decide to move after you leave foster care it will be important for your new health care providers to know your history, including any medications you are currently taking, so that they can determine the best treatments for you if you get sick or hurt.

Talk to your health care providers about their specific procedures for accessing your medical records. Your health care provider may require you to fill out a form or put your request for medical records in writing. If your provider does not have a specific form, ask what information they may require. In general, when you ask for your medical records, your request should include.

- Your name, address, telephone number where you can be reached or other contact information
- Your date of birth or medical record number
- Dates of service or treatment
- A description of the information you are attempting to access – to review or copy, such as: whether you want the entire record or only a specific piece, specific test results, medical condition for which you are requesting information, x-ray records or results from other devices
- Whether you want to see your record, copy your record, or both

Your provider may require you to include your Social Security number on the form or request and may ask for some form of identification (such as your driver's license). This is to ensure that you are the person who has the right to access the information.

●Your Credit Report

Identity theft is a form of fraud or theft in which someone's personal information is taken by someone else (usually without that person's knowledge or permission) and is used to access resources like credit or other benefits. Federal law requires that any young person in foster care age 14 and over should have a credit report every year while they are in foster care. Why? Because youth in foster care are at such a high risk of identify theft, they may encounter problems when it comes time for them to transition into another living situation.

Companies may run a credit check on you before you can rent an apartment, get a car, get cable, open a cell phone account, and in some cases even to get a job! If you have bad credit you could be denied for any these things.

Your credit report will tell you any time your information was used to open an account. This may include things like credit cards, cell phone accounts, and student or personal loans. When you look at your credit report, make sure the information is correct and that

there are no accounts listed that are not supposed to be there. Talk to your worker for help understanding your credit report.

Visit the Federal Trade Commission's website for a list of frequently asked questions at the following link: <http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/articles/0155-free-credit-reports>

In order to obtain a free copy of your credit report through online systems you have to be 18 years old or older. A minor cannot access their credit reports online, it must be done in writing. Your agency may need to provide proof of custody to get your credit report.

Here are the steps to access your credit report:

1. Go to www.AnnualCreditReport.com
2. Select State and click "Request Report"
3. Fill out the form - including your Social Security number, date of birth, and so on...
4. Click "Continue"
5. You are then taken to a page that lists **all three reporting agencies** (Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion)- click the check box for all three names
6. You will be led through each agency
7. You will be able to see, save, and/or print the reports
8. You can only get a FREE credit report ONCE per year (or it will cost you) so figure out a good time to do this annually – such as your birthday.

These reports will also help you figure out what to do to resolve any inconsistencies.

- Other Information about You

If there is other information about you that you might need in planning for your future, changing service providers, or applying for jobs or college, consider talking to your worker about how to access the information. You may want a copy of your records from your counselor or therapist in addition to your medical doctor. Talk with those providers about your rights and their process for accessing this information. It is important to keep accurate and detailed records about yourself so that you can plan for your future, access services, and apply for school, vocational training, or employment.

Going to College

When planning for your future while you are in foster care it is important for you to decide whether or not you want to go to college. No matter your age, you can have a goal of going to college. Being in foster care does not mean you cannot go to college. You should not change that goal if that is a goal you have. Make sure you tell your worker you want to go to college so that they can help you plan. Staying in school and seeking more opportunities to further your education and gain skills will help you achieve self-sufficiency and success in the future.

There are many different kinds of post-secondary schools and colleges in North Carolina. There is a large network of Community Colleges and Technical Schools, as well as Public and Private

Universities. Some of these schools are large, some are small. It is important to consider what type of experience you might like to have at college. Are you interested in a large, diverse student body? Is it important to you to have a small faculty to student ratio? What are you interested in studying, and which schools have that program?

There are many important things to think about when you want to go to college. Some of these things might include your grades. Different colleges will have different requirements for admittance. Universities may require a certain grade point average. Community Colleges may only require documentation that you have completed high school or a GED, and you might be asked to take a placement test in specific subjects like math or English.

Talk to your worker about applying for college. They can help you plan how you will pay for college, and can help you with your applications. Be sure to ask about any funding that might be available to you as a foster youth. The following web resources may help you with researching schools and majors, as well as planning for, applying to, and paying for college:

<http://www.cfnc.org> <http://www.studentaid.ed.gov> <http://www.collegeboard.org>

<http://www.gocollge.com> <http://www.collegemajors101.com>

You may be able to get some financial help for college because of your status as a youth in foster care. Talk to your worker to find out if there is anything specifically offered by North Carolina or the federal government and consider visiting these websites:

Casey Family Scholars and Orphan Foundation Scholarships: <http://www.fc2success.org/>

National Foster Parent Association Scholarship: <http://www.nfpainc.org>

Horatio Alger Scholarship: <http://www.horatioalger.com/scholarship>

Chafee Education and Training Vouchers: <http://www.statevoucher.org>

State Tuition Wavers: <http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/etv/tuition-waiver>

There are even more resources out there, including websites where you can search scholarships! Consider asking your school guidance counselor for tips. Your foster parents might also be able to help.

NC Reach

NC Reach is a state funded scholarship offered for up to 4 years (including fall, spring, and summer terms). This program funds up to the full cost of attendance after other public funds or scholarships have been applied.

You may be eligible for NC Reach if you...

- Are a legal resident of North Carolina and eligible for in-state tuition
- Were adopted from the North Carolina foster care system after age 12, or aged out of foster care at age 18
- Are enrolled in one of the 74 North Carolina public colleges, universities, or community colleges
- Have not yet reached age 26

For more information about NC Reach contact the NC Reach Coordinator at 1-800-585-6112, email the program at ncreach@orphan.org, or visit the website <http://www.ncreach.org>.

Joining the Military

If you are 18 years of age or older and you are interested in joining the military, you do not need the consent of your parents or legal guardian. If you are 17 years old and are interested in joining the military you will need the consent of both of your parents or your legal guardian.

Joining the military may provide many opportunities to learn and grow. There are many things that you could receive training on and learn how to do in any branch of the military, some of these things might even translate into a civilian job after you leave the service. Some people choose to make military service their career; this could provide many benefits as well. Other than pay, health benefits, and assistance in paying for college, joining the military could provide you with structure and self discipline. Both of these things are important as you enter adulthood and begin to take care of yourself.

Joining the military is an important decision. It may be a difficult decision, because there are a lot of things to consider. You might end up traveling to parts of the world that are dangerous or unstable. If you are thinking about military service, make sure you get all of the information you can so that you can make the decision that is right for you. Consider talking to your worker, your parents, foster parents, friends, or other people that you trust and who support you before you make this decision.

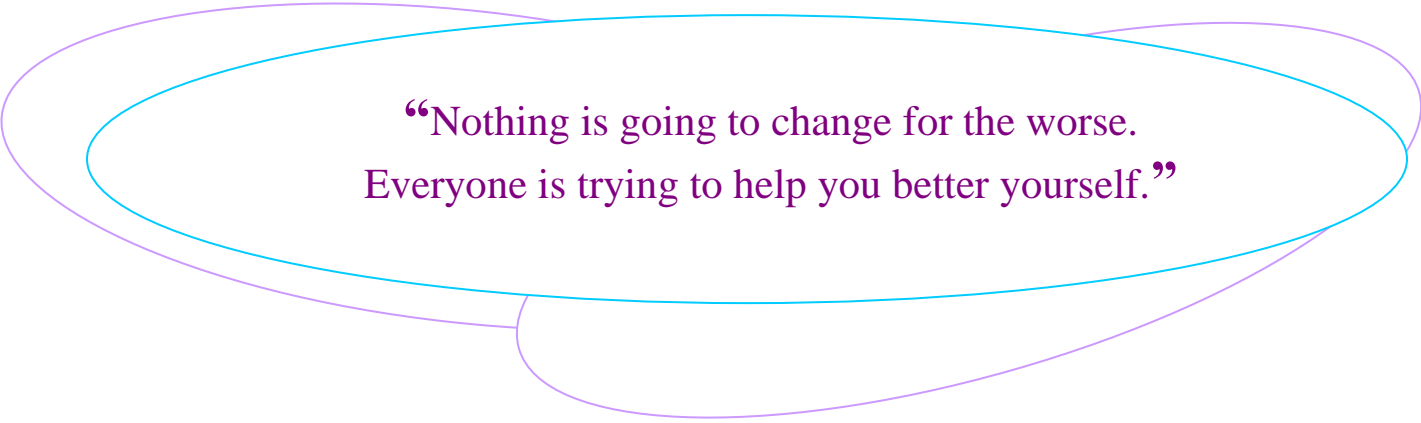
IMPORTANT: If you are a U.S. Citizen and a male between the ages of 18 and 25 years old, you are required to register with the Selective Service. See <http://www.sss.gov> for more information about the Selective Service.

Going Home to your Family

If you are turning 18 years old and are still in foster care, this is called “aging out”. All the time you have been in foster care your worker and others have been planning for what will happen in your future. If you are close to 18 years old when you entered foster care, this planning may have included teaching you about what would happen after you turn 18, as well as teaching you independent living skills or how to live on your own after foster care.

If, for some reason, you were not able to return home to your family before you turned 18 years old, or if another plan for you was not achieved (adoption, guardianship, or another plan) you may be concerned about “aging out” of foster care.

If you are aging out of foster care it is still important to consider your safety. Returning to your family after you have turned 18 may or may not be in your best interest. It is good to have a conversation about this with your foster parents, your worker, biological family, and maybe a counselor or therapist.



“Nothing is going to change for the worse.
Everyone is trying to help you better yourself.”

Resources

Here you will find a complete list of the resources provided in this handbook, and a few extras – go forth and learn!

College Planning and Financial Aid Resources

Casey Family Scholars and Orphan Foundation Sponsored Scholarships

Foster Care to Success and Scholarship Programs

21351 Gentry Drive

Suite 130

Sterling, VA 20166

Phone: 571-203-0270; Fax: 571-203-0273

<http://www.fc2success.org/>

Chafee Education and Training Vouchers

Send an email to the North Carolina ETV Coordinator at northcarolina@statevoucher.org or

visit: <http://www.statevoucher.org>

College Foundation of North Carolina

Phone: 1-866-866-CFNC(2362)

from 8:00 a.m. - 8:00 p.m. (ET) Monday - Thursday

and 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (ET) Friday.

<http://www.cfnc.org>

Horatio Alger Scholarship

Horatio Alger Association

99 Canal Center Plaza

Suite 320

Alexandria, VA 22314

Scholarship Application Questions please call 1-866-763-9228

<http://www.horatioalger.com/scholarship>

National Foster Parent Association Scholarship

National Foster Parent Association

2021 E Hennepin Ave #320

Minneapolis, MN 55413-1769

Phone: 1-800-557-5238

info@NFPAonline.org

<http://www.nfpainc.org>

College Planning and Financial Aid Resources Continued

NC Reach

<http://www.ncreach.org>

State Tuition Waivers

<http://www.nrcyd.ou.edu/etv/tuition-waiver>

Additional Resources – Financial Aid and College Majors Information

<http://www.studentaid.ed.gov>

<http://www.collegeboard.org>

<http://www.gocollege.com>

<http://www.collegemajors101.com>

Driver's Education

North Carolina Driver Education Program

NC Public Schools

Driver Education

Phone: 919-807-3485

<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/curriculum/driver-ed/>

Foster Youth Bill of Rights & Sibling Bill of Rights

SAYSO – Foster Youth Bill of Rights and Sibling Bill of Rights Drafts

http://www.saysoinc.org/do_you_know/laws_rights_and_advocacy/bill_of_rights/

Foster Care Children's Bill of Rights passed by the North Carolina General Assembly
Session Law 2013-326

<http://www.ncleg.net/Sessions/2013/Bills/House/PDF/H510v2.pdf>

Foster Youth Organizations

Foster Club

<http://www.fosterclub.com>

North Carolina Families United

<http://www.ncfamiliesunited.org>

SAYSO (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out)

411 Andrews Rd. Suite 140

Durham, NC 27705

Local Phone: 919-384-1457

Toll Free: 1-800-820-0001

<http://www.saysoinc.org>

Health

Teen Health from Nemours

<http://teenshealth.org/teen/>

Talk to your doctor or local health department if you have specific questions about your health.

Healthy Relationships

Love: The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly – Advice and Stories

<http://lovegoodbadugly.com/relationship-affecting-me/>

Love is Respect from Break the Cycle and the National Dating Abuse Helpline

<http://www.loverisrespect.org>

My Next Girlfriend

<http://mynextgf.uncc.edu/>

<https://www.facebook.com/MyNextGirlfriend>

National Dating Abuse Helpline

Phone: 1-866-331-9474

That's Not Cool

This website has lots of information about communication and harassment, especially related to technology (text, picture messaging, other cyber harassment).

<http://www.thatsnotcool.com/>

Pregnancy

Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Campaign of North Carolina

3708 Mayfair St., Suite 310

Durham, NC 27707

Phone: 919-226-1880

<http://www.appnc.org/>

Teen Health from Nemours

<http://teenshealth.org/teen/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services- Office of Adolescent Health

1101 Wootton Parkway, Suite 700

Rockville, MD 20852

Phone: 240-453-2846

<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah>

Military and Selective Service Information

Selective Service System

<http://www.sss.gov>

You can also locate recruiters at...

<http://www.goarmy.com>

<http://www.navy.com/locator>

<http://www.airforce.com/contact-us/recruiter-locator>

<http://www.marines.com/request-information>

<http://www.gocoastguard.com>

<http://www.nationalguard.com/recruiter>

<http://www.goang.com/>

Nutrition & Fitness

Teen Health by Nemours

<http://www.teenshealth.org/teen>

A safe place to learn and play – Educational subjects like art, math, health, and safety

<http://www.kids.gov>

Special topics in girl's health

<http://www.girlshealth.gov>

Obtaining Records & Identification

Birth Certificates and Vital Records

<http://www.vitalchek.com>

Credit Reports

<http://www.annualcreditreport.com>

North Carolina Vital Records – (birth certificates, death certificates, marriage licenses, etc...)

NC Vital Records (Cooper Memorial Health Building)

225 N. McDowell St.

Raleigh, NC 27603

Phone: 919-733-3000

Social Security Card

U.S. Social Security Administration

Phone: 1-800-772-1213

To obtain an SS-5 form: <http://www.ssa.gov/ssnumber/>

To locate an office near you: <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/regions/>

Work Permits

Call your county Department of Social Services...

OR visit

North Carolina Department of Labor

http://www.nclabor.com/wh/youth_instructions.htm

OR call

North Carolina Department of Labor

Phone: 919-807-2796 (Raleigh) or toll-free (N.C. only) 1-800-NC-LABOR (1-800-625-2267)

Month: _____

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday

Basic Department of Social Services Organizational Chart: Children's Services

