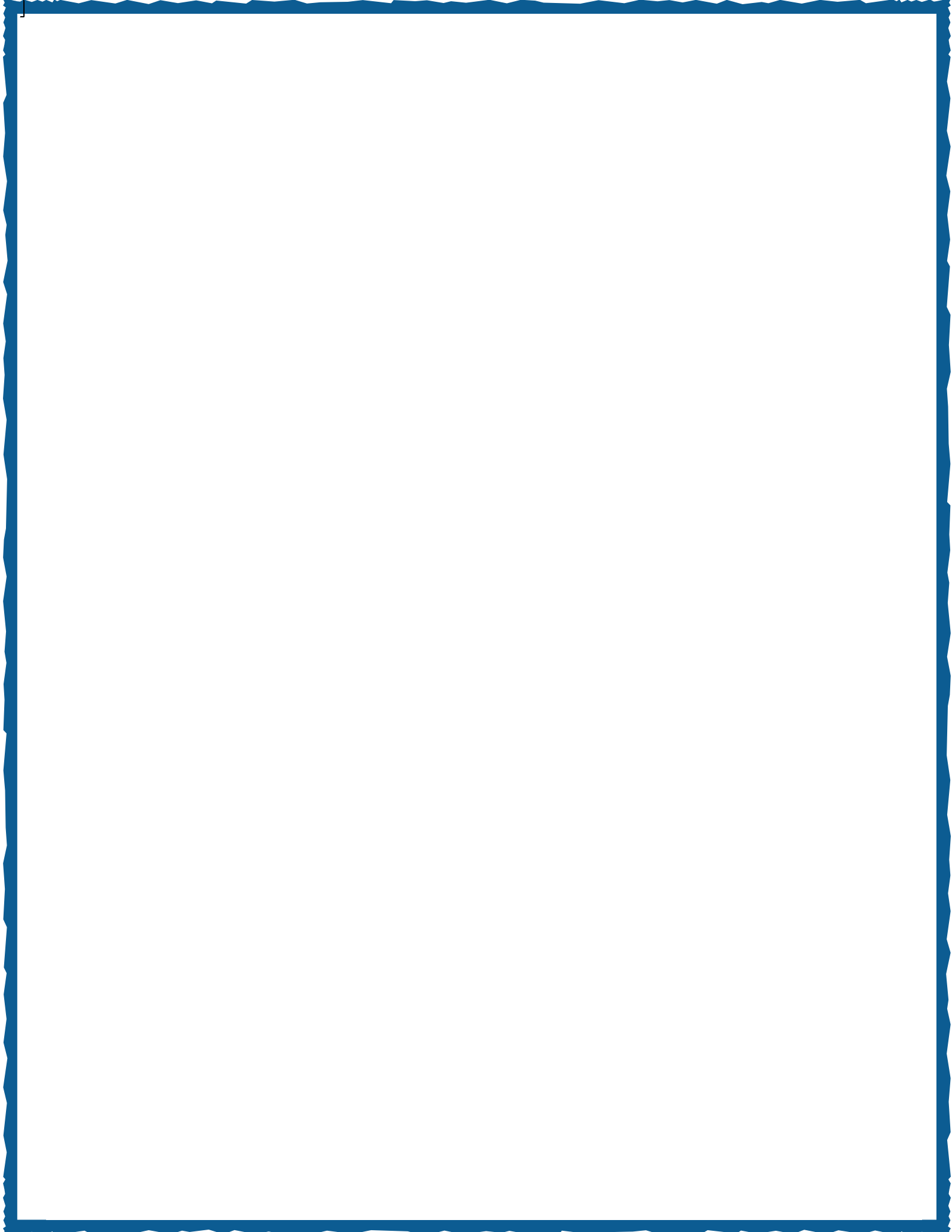


Know Your Rights

A Guide for Youth in Substitute Care
in Pennsylvania

Juvenile
Law Center advancing the rights and
well-being of children in jeopardy


KidsVoice
Protecting Children's Rights



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In Pennsylvania

Juvenile Law Center
KidsVoice

Prepared by Juvenile Law Center and KidsVoice

With special thanks to the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (including Constance Krebs, Zakiyyah Nu-man, Miguel Melendez, Sheila Givens, and Adam Young), Youth Fostering Change (including Faron Brinkley, Grace Clarke, Montae Johnson, Quintale Massey, Antonio McCaskill, and Aadam Muhammad), FosterClub for permitting the reproduction of their Problem/Complaint form found in Appendix D (for more great resources visit their website at www.fosterclub.com), Rena Kreimer, Pam Winkler, Jessica Sones, Jon Wall, Eleanor Bush, Edwin Turner, Justin Lee and Steve Eidson. We also wish to thank the Dolfinger-McMahon Foundation for its generous financial support of the printing of this manual.

Juvenile Law Center is a non-profit, public interest law firm that advances the rights and well-being of children in jeopardy. Juvenile Law Center ensures that the child welfare, juvenile justice and other public systems provide vulnerable children with the protection and services they need to become happy, healthy and productive adults. Founded in 1975, JLC is the oldest public interest law firm for children in the United States.

KidsVoice is a non-profit, public interest law firm that provides advocacy and legal representation for youth in the child welfare system in Allegheny County. Through a multi-disciplinary approach to representation, KidsVoice ensures that the emotional, physical, and educational needs of their clients are addressed. KidsVoice's advocacy includes educating youth on their rights, providing them a voice in court and improving outcomes for older youth who are transitioning from foster care. Please visit the KidsVoice website at www.kidsvoice.org/il.aspx to find helpful information and resources for foster youth in Allegheny County.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction | 1 |
| Important Terms and People..... | 2 |
| The Rights of Youth in Care..... | 6 |
| General Rights as a youth in substitute care..... | 6 |
| When you are in a placement (group home, foster home) | 7 |
| Regarding medical care | 8 |
| Regarding access to records..... | 8 |
| Regarding planning for your future..... | 9 |
| In legal proceedings..... | 9 |
| If you think that your rights have been violated | 10 |
| Entering and Exiting the Child Welfare System, and Being in Placement | 11 |
| Entering the Child Welfare System | 11 |
| What is substitute care? | 11 |
| Why am I in substitute care?..... | 11 |
| What help can the substitute care system offer youth and their families? | 12 |
| Will someone tell my relatives if I come into care? | 12 |
| If I have brothers or sisters in care, can I be placed with them? | 12 |
| When I get into a placement, should I be told my rights?..... | 12 |
| What is a grievance and how do I file one? | 12 |
| Visiting Your Family..... | 13 |
| How often can I visit with my parents? | 13 |
| How often can I visit my siblings? | 13 |
| Is visitation the same thing as a home pass? | 13 |
| How often can I visit my siblings (sisters and brothers) if they still live at home with my parents or they have been adopted? | 13 |
| Can visits be taken away from me as a punishment?..... | 14 |
| Can I visit an aunt, godparent, mentor, or other adult? | 14 |
| Can I refuse to visit with my family?..... | 14 |
| Can I talk to my parents or family on the phone?..... | 14 |
| Can I have a cell phone when I am in care?..... | 15 |
| Placements and Rules in Placements | 15 |
| Where can I be placed when I am in substitute care?..... | 15 |
| Do I get a say about where I am placed?..... | 15 |
| What can I do if I want my placement to change?..... | 15 |
| What does it take to be a foster parent? | 16 |

| | |
|---|----|
| Are there requirements for group homes, institutions, and transitional living facilities? | 17 |
| How much money should be spent on clothing for me? | 17 |
| If foster parents get paid to take care of me, how come I do not get any of the money? | 17 |
| What happens to my money when I am in placement? | 18 |
| Can I be punished or disciplined in my placement? | 18 |
| Can I sleep over at friends' houses? | 18 |
| Can I go on trips out of Pennsylvania with my foster family or with my school? | 19 |
| Can I go out on dates while I am in care? | 19 |
| Can I get my driver's license? | 19 |
| Can I own a car? | 20 |
| How do I get car insurance? | 20 |
| Confidentiality of Records and Property | 21 |
| Who can see my child welfare records? | 21 |
| Who can see my medical records? | 21 |
| If I was adopted, can I see the adoption records? | 22 |
| Is the mail I send and receive confidential? | 22 |
| Can my room and belongings be searched? | 22 |
| Independent Living Services | 23 |
| What are Independent Living services? | 23 |
| Is there a special IL Educational Grant to help pay for my post-secondary education or training? | 23 |
| At what age should I begin receiving IL services? | 24 |
| Who is eligible for IL services? | 24 |
| Can I still get IL services if I move to another county? | 24 |
| Am I eligible for IL services if I have been discharged from care? | 25 |
| Getting Out of Substitute Care: Your Permanency Plan | 25 |
| What is permanency? | 25 |
| What kinds of permanency plans are there? | 26 |
| • Return to Parents—Reunification | 26 |
| • Adoption | 26 |
| • Permanent Legal Custodianship | 27 |
| • Placement with a Relative | 28 |
| • Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) with a Permanency Resource | 28 |
| Staying in Care Past Age 18 | 29 |
| How long can I stay in substitute care? | 29 |
| What is a program of treatment or instruction? | 29 |
| What should I do if I want to stay in care past age 18 but am being told I have to leave because of my age? | 29 |

| | |
|---|----|
| What should I do if I want to stay in care past age 18 but am being told I have to leave because of my age? | 29 |
| Why would I want to stay in care past age 18? | 29 |
| Teen Parents in Care | 31 |
| Can I keep my baby if I am in substitute care? | 31 |
| Should I be placed with my baby? | 31 |
| Should the court find my baby dependent just because I am dependent? | 31 |
| What types of services can my child and I receive? | 31 |
| How do I get child care? | 31 |
| What are my rights as a teen father? | 32 |
| What is child support and how do I apply for it? | 32 |
| Can I be asked to pay child support when I am in care? | 32 |
| Lawyers and Court | 33 |
| Do I have a lawyer? | 33 |
| What is my lawyer supposed to do? | 33 |
| What should I tell my lawyer? | 34 |
| How do I find out who my lawyer is? | 34 |
| What do I do if I think my lawyer isn't doing his or her job? | 34 |
| Why do I go to court every three to six months? | 35 |
| Should I go to court for my permanency review hearings? | 35 |
| What are some ways that I can advocate for myself? | 36 |
| Tips for advocating for yourself | 37 |
| Planning for After You Leave Care | 38 |
| What is an independent living (IL) plan? | 38 |
| What is a transition plan? | 39 |
| What cash assistance is available when I leave substitute care? | 40 |
| Are there other public benefits that can help make ends meet? | 40 |
| What is Supplemental Security Income (SSI)? | 42 |
| Will I receive SSI once I am out of care if I received it while in care? | 42 |
| When should I apply for SSI? | 42 |
| If I have a disability, why is it important to apply for SSI before I leave care? | 43 |
| Health Care and Health Insurance | 43 |
| What medical insurance do I have while I am in substitute care? | 43 |
| What types of health insurance can I get once I am discharged from foster care? | 43 |
| What is AdultBasic Health Insurance? | 44 |
| What if I am not eligible for any Medical Assistance programs? Are there any places that I can get free or low cost medical care? | 44 |

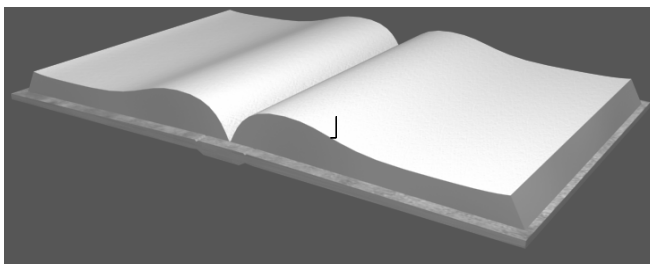
| | |
|---|--------|
| Can I receive confidential STD and HIV/AIDS testing and services? | 44 |
| How can I get drug and alcohol treatment? | 45 |
| Can I consent to mental health and substance abuse treatment on my own without an adult? | 45 |
| Who makes the decision if I receive psychotropic medication, what kind of medication and how much? | 45 |
| What other health care services can I get and decisions can I make on my own when I am still under 18? | 45 |
| If I need counseling about reproductive health and family planning, where can I get help? | 46 |
| Can I get birth control on my own while I am in care? | 46 |
| Getting an Education | 47 |
| Where do I go to school when I enter placement? | 47 |
| Do I have to go to school on the grounds of my placement if they have a school? | 47 |
| What is required for me to be enrolled in school? | 47 |
| Does the school need to know that I am in placement and why? | 48 |
| If I have submitted all the documents listed above, how long should it take for me to be enrolled in school? | 48 |
| What do I do if I am having trouble with enrollment? | 48 |
| Who is qualified for special education services? | 48 |
| How can students be placed in an alternative school? | 49 |
| Do I have any rights if I am expelled? | 49 |
| How do I get back in school if I dropped out for a period of time? | 50 |
| Can I enroll in high school even if I have a GED? | 50 |
| What is a General Equivalency Diploma (GED)? | 50 |
| How can I find out the location of GED preparation classes and GED testing sites? | 51 |
| What should I bring with me when I take the GED test? | 51 |
| How can I get into post-secondary education? | 51 |
| How do I pay for college or a training school? | 53 |
| How do I fill out question 55 on the FAFSA? | 53 |
| Are there grants and scholarships for youth in care or who have been in care? | 53 |
| Can I enroll in vocational training? | 56 |
| Getting a Job and Job Training | 57 |
| Who needs a work permit? | 57 |
| How do I get a work permit? | 57 |
| What programs help prepare me to get a job? | 58 |

| | |
|---|--------|
| Finding a Place to Live..... | 60 |
| What things should I be thinking of when I am looking for my own apartment?..... | 60 |
| Are there places I can live while I get an education or vocational training? | 61 |
| Where do I go if I become homeless? | 61 |
| What is public housing? | 61 |
| How easy is it to get into public housing? | 62 |
| Are there other subsidized housing programs other than project-based public housing and Section 8? | 62 |
| What is room and board assistance? | 62 |
| Are there any other resources to help in finding affordable housing? ... | 63 |
| Are there any housing resources for individuals with disabilities?..... | 63 |
| Immigration Issues | 64 |
| What should I do if I am not a U.S. citizen or do not have valid immigration documents? | 64 |
| Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System..... | 65 |
| What should I do if I am arrested?..... | 65 |
| If I am arrested, do I automatically have to leave the foster care system and be placed in the juvenile justice system?..... | 65 |
| Getting Your Juvenile Record Expunged | 66 |
| I have a juvenile record. What can I do?..... | 66 |
| What is expungement?..... | 66 |
| Are juvenile records automatically expunged after some period of time? | 66 |
| Am I eligible to have my juvenile records expunged?..... | 66 |
| Things to Have and to Do Before You Leave Care..... | 67 |
| Before You Leave Substitute Care, You Should..... | 70 |
| Appendix A..... | 71 |
| Appendix B..... | 86 |
| Appendix C..... | 88 |
| Appendix D..... | 90 |

Introduction

This is a guide for dependent youth in out-of-home care in Pennsylvania. Youth in care have all the same wants, needs, and hopes for the future that all youth have. If you are a youth in care you have rights to assistance and protection. This guide will provide you with information about your rights while you are in care.

This guide will also provide you with tips on how to advocate for yourself so that you can get what you need and meet your goals for your future. You are your own best advocate. It is up to you to make sure that your voice is heard. Being in out of home care can be very frustrating. It may feel like no one cares and no one is listening to you. **YOU CANNOT GIVE UP.** We put this guide together so you can educate yourself and be heard. **WE NEED YOU** to be an advocate for yourself and all youth in care in Pennsylvania. Advocating for yourself is hard work and a big responsibility. We know you are up to the challenge. We hope this guide helps.



Important Terms and People

Adoption: If the parental rights of your biological parents have been terminated, you can be adopted. If you are adopted, your adopted parents have all the rights of a parent. You can be adopted at any age.

Behavioral Health Care: Behavioral health care involves care and treatment for mental health issues as well as substance abuse issues.

Board Extension: Some counties use the term “board extension” to describe when youth stay in care after the age of 18. Under PA law, youth are entitled to stay in care until age 21 if they are in a course or program of treatment or instruction. See pp. 29-30.

Caseworker: You may have more than one caseworker. Your county child welfare agency will assign you a caseworker (a [County Children and Youth Caseworker](#)) and a private provider agency (for example, a foster care agency, group home, or other residential facility) may also assign you a caseworker (a [Private Provider Caseworker](#)). Once you turn 16 you should also have an Independent Living caseworker.

Child Advocate: All youth in the dependency system have [lawyers](#) who represent them in court at no cost. Sometimes, this lawyer will be called a child advocate or a [guardian ad litem \(GAL\)](#). For more information about the role of your lawyer, see pp. 34-36.

Child Permanency Plan (CPP): The Child Permanency Plan (CPP) lists the goals for you and your family (usually either going home to your biological parent(s), being placed for adoption or being placed with a relative), as well as the services that must be provided to achieve the goals. In some counties, this plan is called the Family Service Plan or FSP. By the time you are 16, your CPP should also include your Independent Living Plan. No matter what age you are, you should not be discharged from the system unless you are leaving to go to a permanent and stable place. See pp. 25-29.

Child Welfare System: The child welfare system is the government system that is responsible for taking care of children who are abused or neglected, or whose parents are not able to take care of them. In Pennsylvania, the state child welfare agency is called the Office of Children, Youth, and Families. Each county has a child welfare agency.

County Child Welfare Agency: The county child welfare agency is the agency that is responsible for providing care and assistance to children when their families are not able to care for them, they are abused, or they are neglected. In most counties, it is known as the county children and youth agency (In Philadelphia, this is called the Department of Human Services (DHS)).

County Children and Youth Caseworker: The county children and youth caseworker is the person assigned to your case by the county child welfare agency. The caseworker provides reports to court and must come and see you at least once every 6 months if you are placed through a private provider, and more if you are supervised directly by the county child welfare agency. Your caseworker must make sure you are safe and that your needs are met. Because of a new law that takes effect on October 1, 2010, caseworkers are required to visit their youth at least once per month.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA): This is a person who is appointed by the court to look at all aspects of your case and to report to the judge how you are doing. Not all youth have a CASA.

Delinquency: When the Juvenile Court finds that a youth has committed a crime, the court finds the youth delinquent.

Department of Human Services (DHS): The name of the [county child welfare agency](#) in Philadelphia.

Dependency: When the court finds that a youth requires some care or supervision by the county children and youth agency because: the youth has been abused or neglected; does not have someone to care for them; is habitually truant from school; or is determined to be ungovernable. This may mean that the youth is put in a foster or group home placement, or it may mean that the youth stays at home and the children and youth agency monitors them.

Discharge Plan: Another term for a [transition plan](#).

Emancipation: Judicial emancipation is a court order that says an individual under 18 years of age has some of the rights of an adult. In most counties in Pennsylvania, you have to show that you are living on your own and are able to financially support yourself to be judicially emancipated. See *p. 29 for more information*.

Family Service Plan (FSP): A plan where you and your family set goals for dealing with the problems that brought you into the system. The plan also lists what the child welfare agency is going to do to help you achieve the goals you set.

General Equivalency Diploma (GED): The GED is a diploma you receive after taking a GED examination. Most post-secondary schools and employers treat a GED the same as a high school diploma. See *pp. 51-52*.

Grievance: A grievance is another name for a complaint. If you are having problems with your county child welfare agency or private provider agency, they will have policies that instruct you how to file a grievance. See *p. 12 for more information and Appendix D for a sample grievance form*.

Guardian ad Litem (GAL): A [lawyer](#) who is appointed to represent you in dependency court. The GAL must tell the judge what you want and also what he or she thinks is in your best interest. Your GAL can be a great advocate for you. If you come into the system because of truancy or ungovernability, your lawyer should only tell the court what it is you want and should act in a traditional lawyer's role. See *p. 34*.

Independent Living Coordinator: This is the person in your county who makes sure youth who are 16 and older are receiving [independent living services](#).

Independent Living Plan: A plan that sets out your goals for learning the skills you need to be independent and able to support yourself when you leave the system and the [independent living services](#) you will need to make that happen. Your [independent living coordinator](#) will help you work on your plan. This plan should be part of your [Child Permanency Plan \(CPP\)](#).

Independent Living Services: These are the services all youth in care who are 16 and older should receive to become independent and productive adults. These services include: educational planning and support, vocational training, job readiness, job placement, budgeting, apartment searching and financial management. You can continue to receive these services until you are age 21, even if you are no longer in care. See pp. 23-25.

Individualized Service Plan (ISP): This is a goal plan for you and your family that is created by the agency that is directly providing your care.

Lawyer: All youth in the dependency system have lawyers who represent them in court at no cost. Sometimes, this lawyer is called a **child advocate** or a **guardian ad litem (GAL)**. When you go to court, there will also be other lawyers at hearings. Your parent(s) may be represented by lawyers, and the county child welfare agency is represented by a lawyer who is often called the **solicitor**.

Permanency Plan: This is another term for a **Child Permanency Plan**.

Permanency Review Hearings: At these hearings, which occur at least once every three to six months, the court reviews your case. You can and should be present at these hearings so you can tell the judge how you feel about your goals and your placement. See pp. 36-37.

Permanent Legal Custodianship (PLC): A permanent legal custodian is someone who agrees to care for you and assumes custody of you until you become an adult. This may be a foster parent, relative or someone else. If placed with a permanent legal custodian, your case would be discharged from the child welfare system. Unlike with adoption, the rights of your biological parents do not need to be terminated for PLC to be granted. See pp. 26-27.

Placement: Many youth in the foster care system are put into placement. If you cannot return to your home, you are entitled to be placed in the most family-like setting available. You may be placed with a relative, a foster family, or an adoptive family. You also may be placed in a group home or institution. As you get older, you may also be placed in a transitional living placement or a supervised independent living placement.

Private Provider Agency: Many county child welfare agencies enter into contracts with private agencies so they will provide placement and services to youth in the child welfare system. A private agency might provide foster family care for youth, group care, or supervised independent living. The staff of the private agency provides you with more direct supervision than your county child welfare agency. Your county caseworker is still involved in the case, but the private agency works with you day-to-day.

Solicitor: The attorney who represents the county child welfare agency at permanency review hearings. This lawyer works with your county child welfare caseworker to make recommendations to the court about your case.

Substitute Care System: Substitute care means that youth are living in placements other than with their biological parents. This could include living with foster families, living in group homes, living with relatives,

or living in a SIL placement. People use the terms foster care system or child welfare system to describe the substitute care system. It is important to remember that there are a lot of kinds of placements other than foster care for children in substitute care. Also, a lot of children in the child welfare system remain with their biological parents and are never placed in substitute care at all.

Supervised Independent Living (SIL) Placement: A placement in which a youth 16 years of age or older who is still in the care of the county child welfare agency lives in an apartment and receives services from the county or private provider agency. These placements help prepare older youth for handling the responsibilities of being an adult. In this guide, when we use the term SIL, we are talking about a type of placement.

Termination of Parental Rights: Before a youth can be adopted, the county child welfare agency must ask the court to terminate the rights of the biological parents. If the court terminates the parents' rights, the child can be adopted. A parent whose rights have been terminated does not have a right to any information regarding the child, a right to make decisions about the youth's education or medical treatment, or a right to visit the youth.

Transition Plan: Before you are discharged from care, you should have a discharge plan that includes a safe and stable place to live, a job, financial aid for education, health insurance, medical and/or mental health treatment providers, emergency contacts, your health records, and your school records. While you should be working on your transition plan as early as a year or two before you plan to leave the system, the law now requires that this plan be made at least 90 days before you leave care. *A sample transition plan is included in Appendix A.*

Transitional Living Placement (TLP): A placement in which youth 16 years of age and older live with no more than four other youth. In a TLP placement youth are given more responsibility and have less supervision. TLP programs prepare youth for taking on the responsibilities of adults. Your county child welfare agency can provide these placements for you while you are still in care.

Treatment or Instruction: In Pennsylvania, youth can stay in foster care until age 21 if they are in a course of treatment or instruction. This can include high school, college, community college, a training or vocation program, a GED preparation program, or mental health or other treatment. See pp. 29-30.

Youth Advisory Board (YAB): The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board is a group of youth who are, or were, in the substitute care system. The YAB works to educate and advocate for change in the substitute care system. If you want to help make changes in the system, you should check out the YAB. Ask your IL coordinator for more information about the state and regional YABs. You can also check out the YAB website at www.independentlivingpa.org for more information about the YAB and your regional representatives.

Quick Facts: The Rights of Youth in Care

RIGHTS are things that are guaranteed to you by the law. The rights of youth in care in Pennsylvania come from several sources of law. These include: The United State and Pennsylvania Constitutions, Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, The Adoption and Safe Families Act, The Foster Care Independence Act, The Juvenile Act, and state and federal regulations. Rights are things that can be enforced by a judge. Your rights are also tools to help you advocate for yourself.

As a youth in substitute care, you have the right:

- To be represented by a lawyer at all court proceedings
- To services that will help you stay with your family
- To the most family-like setting available, even if you cannot be placed with parents or relatives
- For reasonable efforts to be made so you can be placed with your siblings or have frequent visitation with them
- To visit with your parents at least once every two weeks
- To be free of physical and verbal abuse
- To be free from discrimination based on race, religion, disability, national origin, or gender
- To an appropriate placement that meets your needs, where you are **safe** and **protected**
- To **Independent Living Services** and an Independent Living Plan beginning at least at age 16 and continuing until you are age 21 (even if you are no longer in care)
- To continue in the school you went to before you were placed or changed placements
- If you are a teen parent, to be placed with your own child unless a court has said that you cannot
- To stay in care until you are age 21 if you are in a program of treatment or instruction
- To a detailed **transition plan** at least 90 days before you leave care (at age 18 or older) that is personalized at your discretion and includes specific options on **housing, health insurance, education**, local opportunities for **mentors** and **continuing support services**, and **work force supports** and **employment services**

You have a right to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.

Unless the judge says otherwise, when you are in a placement (group home, transitional living program, or residential facility) you have the right:

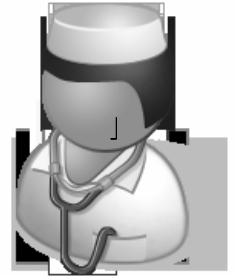
- To save any money you have earned and have it returned to you when you leave placement
- To talk on the phone (reasonable rules may apply)
- To not have family visits used as a reward or punishment for your behavior
- To send mail
- To receive mail and not have it opened by the county child welfare agency or private provider staff unless they have reason to believe that you have been sent something that will be harmful or that you are not allowed to have (in that case, the mail must be opened in front of you)
- To communicate and visit privately with your lawyer and clergy
- To practice or not practice any religion
- To appropriate medical, dental, and behavioral health care
- To be free from excessive medication
- To appropriate clothing and nutritious food
- To be free from corporal punishment (punishment that uses physical force), threats or abuse
- To file a grievance or complaint with the placement agency or the child welfare agency when you feel you have been mistreated or have a concern that is not being addressed
- **To independent living services** if you are age 16 or older **until you turn 21**. These services may include:
 - Life skills instruction
 - Participation in activities and retreats
 - Help to finish school and get your diploma



- Help in applying for grants to pay for college or training
- Help getting a job
- Help finding a mentor
- Assistance with room and board costs once you leave care

Regarding medical care, you have the right:

- To prompt and appropriate medical care and mental health treatment
- To consent to your own medical, dental, and health care if you are age 18 or older
- To consent to all mental health treatment and medication if you are age 14 or older
- To consent to treatment for a substance abuse problem at any age
- To obtain contraception at any age
- To obtain testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases at any age
- To consent to testing and treatment of HIV at any age
- To consent to medical care related to pregnancy, except abortion (To obtain an abortion, a minor needs the consent of a parent or legal guardian, or a court order, called a “judicial bypass”. For more information on this process check <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/ppsp/judicial-bypass-pa-18389.htm> or call CHOICE at 800-848-3367)
- To consent to all medical care, except an abortion, if you are a minor and have been pregnant, married or have already graduated from high school



Regarding access to records, you have the right:

- To control the release of any mental health treatment records when you are age 14 and older
- To control the release of records of substance abuse treatment or treatment for a sexually transmitted disease.
- To control the release of any HIV-related records

- To have access to your family case records if you are 14 years of age or older, unless the county agency can show that releasing information would be harmful to you
- To have access to your health care records, unless the doctor says it would be harmful for you to see them
- To permanent documents, such as birth certificate, immunization and health records, educational records and legal documents related to custody when you are discharged from care at age 18 or older
- To petition the court for access to information from your adoption file if you are age 18 or older

Regarding planning for your future, you have the right:

- To an Individual Service Plan (ISP) and Child Permanency Plan (CPP) that explain your goals and needs and what is being done to meet them, including your responsibilities
- To be present and participate in all the meetings where these plans are created
- To an Independent Living Plan if you are age 16 or older
- To a Transition Plan when you are leaving care at age 18 or older



In legal proceedings, you have the right:

- To attend all court hearings where your case is reviewed
- To be consulted by the judge about your permanency and transition plans
- To meet with your lawyer before court hearings
- To tell your lawyer where you want to live and what services you think you need to meet your goals
- To have your lawyer do what is needed to help you get an appropriate placement and make sure your needs are met
- To have your lawyer call witnesses to testify for you or present evidence to the court
- To have your lawyer ask questions of (cross examine) people who speak about you in court

- To tell the judge what you think about your placement and any needs that you have
- To have the information shared in court be kept confidential and discussed only with people who need to know about it to provide you with care and service
- To ask the judge to appoint another lawyer for you if you do not think your lawyer is doing their job (the judge will then make the decision if a new lawyer is appointed)

If you think that your rights have been violated you should:

- Talk with your caseworker, and then the caseworker's supervisor if you get no response
- File a grievance or complaint with the private provider agency or the county child welfare agency. This can just be a short and simple letter explaining your complaint
- Contact your lawyer by phone and letter
- Contact the regional office of the Department of Public Welfare (**see Appendix C for these numbers**)
- Make sure you go to court for your review hearings so you can talk to the judge about your concerns

If you have questions about your rights or need help contacting your lawyer, call **Juvenile Law Center** for help. You can reach Juvenile Law Center from anywhere in Pennsylvania at **1-800-875-8887**. In Allegheny County, you can call **KidsVoice** at **412-391-3100** or email info@kidsvoice.org.

Entering and Exiting the Child Welfare System, and Being in Placement

Entering the child welfare system can be scary. It is hard to be taken away from the place you call home and people you care about. Even though the goal of the system is to protect you and help you live safely with your family, being placed and going to court is upsetting, especially if no one explains to you what is going on. This section provides you information about how the child welfare system works and the court process.

ENTERING THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

What is substitute care?

The substitute care system provides youth a place to live when it is not safe for youth to live in their own home or there is no one able to take care of the youth. There are two ways that a youth may enter substitute care: (1) The children and youth agency can petition the court for a youth to come into care. A juvenile court judge can give permission for a youth to be removed from his or her family and placed in the care of the county child welfare agency; (2) A parent can voluntarily agree to place their child in care and enter a 30 day voluntary placement agreement (VPA). The substitute care system includes emergency shelters, foster homes, kinship care homes, adoptive homes, group homes, and residential treatment facilities. It can also include Supervised Independent Living Placements (SILs) or Transitional Living Placements (TLPs).

Why am I in substitute care?

Youth are placed in substitute care to keep them safe and to make sure their needs are met. **Youth are not placed in substitute care as punishment.** Youth enter substitute care for many reasons. Some reasons include:

1. Parents are not able to keep the youth safe
2. Parents have physically, sexually, or emotionally abused the youth
3. Parents voluntarily place the youth
4. There is a crisis or conflict in the family that makes it hard to provide for the youth
5. Parents are not able to control the youth's behavior
6. A youth runs away from home because they are scared or do not feel safe
7. A youth is truant from school

8. A youth will not listen to their parent's direction and the parents are not able to keep the youth safe

What help can the substitute care system offer youth and their families?

Once a youth is placed in substitute care, the county child welfare agency should provide services to the youth and his or her family so the youth can safely return home. The kind of help they provide will depend on the needs of each family.

Will someone tell my relatives if I come into care?

A law passed in 2008 called **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act**. This law requires that the county child welfare agency identify and give notice to your relatives to let them know that you are in care and explain to them any opportunities for taking care of you or being in your life. **Your relatives must be notified within 30 days of you coming into care.** If you know of any family members or people that you consider kin, you should tell your county child welfare agency worker.

If I have brothers and sisters in care, can I be placed with them?

A new law, *Fostering Connections*, requires that reasonable efforts be made to place siblings together when they are in substitute care. That means that the county child welfare agency should work hard to find a relative, foster home, or other placement where you can be with your brothers and sisters. There are only a few very limited exceptions to this rule.

When I get into a placement, should I be told my rights?

YES. When you are first placed in a foster home, group home, or residential treatment center, you should be informed of your rights and your right to file a grievance, which is a complaint. If you are confused about what your rights are you should ask your lawyer.

What is a grievance and how do I file one?

A grievance is like a complaint. *The law requires that county child welfare agency and private agencies have a written policy for you to file a grievance if you feel something is wrong or you are being treated unfairly.* You should be given a written copy of the grievance policy. You cannot be punished for filing a grievance. Ask your lawyer if you have questions about filing a grievance. *See Appendix D for a sample grievance form.*

VISITING YOUR FAMILY

You have a right to visit with your family at least every other week. Your county child welfare agency **must** help you and your parents get to the location where the visit can occur, and should help make visits convenient for you and your parents. **Make sure that there is a visitation schedule and that visitation is listed in the Child Permanency Plan and Individualized Service Plan.** Even when you are placed out of state, you still have the right to visit your parents. Scheduling these visits can be difficult, but they should still occur.

If you are not receiving your visits, contact your case worker and lawyer.

How often can I visit with my parents?

You have a right to visit with your parents *at least* once every two weeks unless the judge says otherwise. A judge could limit visitation if you were being harmed by the visits. Visitation with your parents may decrease if your permanency goal is changed to adoption. Once your parents' rights are terminated, they no longer have any legal right to visit you. While you are in placement, the agency can allow you to have visits. After you are adopted, visiting will be up to your adoptive parents.

How often can I visit my siblings (sisters and brothers) if they are also in care?

A new law was enacted in 2008, **The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act**, which requires that the county child welfare agency do more to keep siblings together. The county child welfare agency should make reasonable efforts to place you with your siblings if all of you are in substitute care. If you are not placed with your siblings, you should be provided with frequent opportunities for visitation and contact.



Is visitation the same thing as a “home pass”?

Not necessarily. Visitation just means that you get to see your family. Visitation can occur at your placement, at the children and youth agency, or at a location in the community (like a restaurant or park). When you go to the home of your parents or relatives and get to sleep there, it is often called a “home pass” or an overnight visit.

How often can I visit my siblings (sisters and brothers) if they still live at home with my parents or they have been adopted?

If your siblings are still living with your parents, it is generally up to your parents to decide when

and if you can see them. Sometimes the agency may have input into whether you visit if they have concerns about your safety at these visits. If your siblings have been adopted, it is up to their adoptive parents to decide when and if you can see them. Let your caseworker, your lawyer, and the judge in court know if you have questions about visiting with your siblings and want help to make these visits occur. They may be able to help you work things out.

Can visits be taken away from me as a punishment for my behavior?

NO. It is against the law to have your visits taken away from you as a punishment or given to you as a reward for your behavior. In some cases, your placement can restrict where your visits occur. You may have to have your visits at your placement rather than being permitted to go home on a “home pass.” If there are restrictions placed on your visits, you should be told the reason why. Please call your lawyer if you think your visits have been taken away as punishment or if you have not been receiving your visits for a reason that does not seem right. **YOUR VISITS CAN ONLY BE RESTRICTED BY A JUDGE’S COURT ORDER.**

Contact with your family is a right that cannot be taken away unless the court finds that there is a really good reason why visits are harmful to you.

Can I visit an aunt, godparent, mentor, or other adult?

In most cases, visits with extended family members and other adults who support you should be allowed. Your caseworker will need to check out the home before you can go for an overnight visit. If there are adults who you care about and want to visit with, let everyone know who they are and try to get visitation with them included in your Child Permanency Plan or court order. Be persistent and tell your lawyer if you are having problems getting these visits.

Can I refuse to visit with my family?

If visiting with your family upsets you, tell your caseworker and your lawyer. Visits are usually court ordered. If visiting is upsetting you or you are being hurt at the visits, you need to let people know. The visitation order can be changed. Make sure that you tell your lawyer right away if there is something upsetting you about visits even if your hearing is not coming up. Your lawyer can request a hearing at any time and ask the judge to change the visitation order.

Can I talk to my parents or family on the phone?

You have a right to communicate with your family by phone. The placement can set rules about the time and frequency of your telephone calls. You also are allowed to call your lawyer or caseworker.

Can I have a cell phone when I am in care?

There is no law that says you have a right to cell phone while you are in care or a law that would prohibit you from having a cell phone while you are in care. Placements can have reasonable rules and some may not allow you to have a cell phone until you reach a certain age and are able to show that you have the money to pay the bills and use the phone responsibly.



PLACEMENTS AND RULES IN PLACEMENTS

Where can I be placed when I am in substitute care?

All efforts should be made to help you return home to your parent. If you cannot return home, you are entitled to be placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting available. This means that you should be placed with a family (your extended family, a foster family, or an adoptive family) or in a family-like home rather than a group home or institution. This also means that if you are placed in a group home or institution, the county child welfare agency should look for a placement for you that is more family-like for the future. The county child welfare agency should also help you to connect with adults who can provide support even if they cannot provide a home. This could include a mentor, former foster parent, or favorite teacher.

As you get older, you may be placed in a *Transitional Living Placement (TLP)* or a *Supervised Independent Living (SIL) placement*. In these placements you get more responsibility and freedom and a greater chance to practice your independent living skills. If you are 16 or older, you should ask your caseworker and your lawyer about these types of placements to see if they are right for you.

Do I get a say about where I am placed?

YES. You should always let your caseworker, lawyer and judge know what type of placement you think is best for you and why. You should tell your caseworker if there is anyone you can identify—family members, a family friend, an old teacher, a pastor—who may be able to provide you a place to live. These people may be able to become foster parents and your social worker can explain to them how to do that.

YOU are going to have to make sure your voice is heard.

to

What can I do if I want my placement to change?

If you feel like the placement you are in is not right for you or that you are not being treated well, you should let someone know. It is important for you to explain why you think one placement is not good for you and why another would be better. Sometimes your placement can be changed. You should always be in the least restrictive, most family-like placement possible.

For example, if you are in a group home and feel that you are ready to be placed with a family, you should ask your caseworker and lawyer. As you get older, you may become eligible for a supervised independent living or transitional living placement. These placements help prepare you for being on your own once you leave care. You can check with your county caseworker and lawyer to see if these programs exist in your county and if you can be referred.

If you are being mistreated in your placement, you should let someone know immediately. Wherever you are placed, you should always be treated with respect and you should always feel safe. If you are not, you must let someone know so that you can be safe and so that things can change for the better.

GOOD WAYS TO HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD:

- Attending and participating in your Child Permanency Plan and Independent Living Plan
- Attending and participating in your permanency review hearing
- Calling AND writing a letter to your caseworker, judge, and lawyer
- Filing a grievance with the county agency or private provider
- Making a complaint with a DPW Regional Office
- Becoming part of the local and state Youth Advisory Board

What does it

take to be a foster parent?

There are many requirements to be a foster parent. Here are some, but not all, of the basic requirements in Pennsylvania law: To be a foster parent, a person must be at least age 21 and pass medical checks to show that they are physically able to care for youth. The foster parent and any other adults living in the household must also have a child abuse and criminal background check done to show that they do not have a history of harming children or of committing specific crimes that may put a child at risk. The foster home must also meet requirements so that it is safe and clean.

Foster parents must be able to provide a caring and nurturing environment for youth. They must work with the county child welfare agency and private provider to make sure the youth's health, mental health, independent living, and educational needs are met. They also must provide supervision of the youth in their care.

Foster parents cannot punish or discipline a foster child with physical force. They should try to use positive reinforcement to encourage good behavior. Foster parents are only permitted to use "passive physical restraint" to prevent immediate harm to the youth or others—this is the least amount of direct physical contact required to prevent immediate harm to the child or others.

Foster parents are licensed and then are re-evaluated each year. The re-evaluation includes a home inspection. Foster parents are required to attend at least six hours of training per year. To receive financial assistance from the children and youth system, a kinship care provider also needs to get licensed just like a foster parent does.

Are there requirements for group homes, institutions, and transitional living facilities?

Yes. Group homes, institutions, and transitional living facilities must be licensed and have to follow

state regulations. To be licensed, these facilities need to have enough qualified staff to safely take care of youth and provide supervision. Staff must meet some educational requirements and must have child abuse and criminal background checks completed. Group homes, institutions, and transitional living placements must also meet requirements about safety. These facilities are inspected once a year.

Staff at these facilities must work with the county child welfare agency and private provider to make sure the youth's health, mental health, independent living, and educational needs are met. They also must make sure the youth's rights are respected. A facility can set reasonable rules, but staff must follow rules about how youth can be disciplined or punished. Positive reinforcement should be used rather than focusing on negative behavior. A youth can only be restrained in very limited circumstances—to prevent the youth from injuring himself or others.

How much money should be spent on clothing for me when I am in placement?

The law says that youth in care are entitled to “seasonal clothing that is age and gender appropriate.” The law does not set a dollar amount for how much should be spent on clothing. County child welfare agencies should have a policy on how much money should be spent for clothing and the process by which youth can get clothes. The county or private provider gives the foster family or group home a certain amount of money to take care of you. Sometimes your clothing should be purchased out of this amount. You should ask your caseworker about the county's policy.



If foster parents get paid to take care of me, how come I do not get any of the money?

Foster parents are paid by the county child welfare agency to take care of children in their homes. How much they get paid depends on what part of the state you live in and the needs of the foster child. For example, a foster family may receive more money if they are taking care of a child who

has a lot of medical needs and needs more attention from the foster parent. The money that is paid to a foster family is to be used to take care of the youth in the home -- it pays for your housing, food, clothes, and any activities you are involved in. Some of the money may also be used to pay allowance to you, but that is up to the county and the private provider. Having an allowance is a good way to learn to manage your money so ask your agency about its allowance policy.

If you need clothes and no one is answering your questions about clothing allowances, you should contact your lawyer and raise this issue in court and at your Child Permanency Plan or Individualized Service Plan meeting.

What happens to my money when I am in placement?

Your money (money earned, given to you as a gift or as allowance) is your personal property. But the placement or foster parents can have reasonable rules about the amount of money that you can take out and use. You should be told what these rules are. When you leave the placement, all of your unspent money should be returned to you.

Can I be punished or disciplined in my placement?

Just like in any home, a foster home, group home or institution will have some rules and consequences if those rules are not followed. The law makes clear that you cannot be punished in some ways. See the blue circle for this information.

Please see pp. 16-17 for information about the rules that placements must follow about restraining youth.

Can I sleep over at friends' houses when I am in a foster or group home?

The law is not clear on what kind of checks or authorizations need to occur so that you can sleep over at a friend's house. The law does not require that the county child welfare agency do criminal background checks on your friends and the people who live in their homes. Check with your caseworker to see what the county policy is on sleeping over at friends' houses. Like any good parent or caretaker, it is always a good idea for the people taking care of you to make sure the

FOSTER PARENTS AND CARETAKERS CANNOT

- ✗ Use physical punishment (no hitting, slapping, etc.)
- ✗ Verbally abuse or use derogatory comments
- ✗ Threaten to have you removed from placement
- ✗ Deny meals, clothing or shelter
- ✗ Deny visits or communication with your family

places you are going are safe and that you will have adult supervision.

Can I go on trips out of Pennsylvania with my foster family or with my school when I am in placement?

Yes. The county child welfare agency, as well as your biological parents if their rights have not been terminated, should be provided notice of this trip. Getting consent for emergency medical treatment should not be a barrier to an out-of-state trip because, under the law of most states, parental consent is not required to receive emergency medical care.

Can I go out on dates while I am in care?

When you are in placement, you should get many of the same opportunities that youth still living with their families do. You should ask your county child welfare agency if they have a policy on dating. If they do not, you should ask your caseworker. Also if you do not agree with the rules, you should talk with your regional and state YAB about how to get the county to change its policy.

Can I get my driver's license while I am in care?

There is not an easy yes or no answer to this question. Nothing in the law prohibits you from getting a driver's license while you are in substitute care. Some counties do have rules about whether youth can get their license while in care. Some counties will address the question on a case-by-case basis so you should talk to your caseworker.



For anyone to get a license, you must meet the requirements that all youth must meet to get a license. There are three different stages that a new driver in Pennsylvania must go through:

1. Learner's Permit: To obtain a Learner's Permit you must be at least 16 years of age. To complete this process you are required to have a physical exam at a doctor's office, a vision screen that is completed at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), and pass a written skills test. This test will evaluate your knowledge of street signs and Pennsylvania driving laws. A study guide for this test can be found at any DMV location or at www.dmv.state.pa.us/drivers_manual/index.shtml.

When going for the test, you must bring proof of your date of birth, proof of your identity and social security card (or proof of your social security number). The fee for the initial permit and four-year license must be paid at the time the permit is issued. The fee is \$31. If you are under 18 years of age, there is a six-month period for skills building between

obtaining the permit and taking the road test. In that time you must complete 50 hours of behind-the-wheel skills building. Your parent or guardian must certify that this has been completed. In most cases, the DMV will allow a caseworker or adult with a driver's license who is working with you to make this certification. A licensed driver 21 years of age or older must accompany you when you have your learner's permit and are driving. You will not be able to operate a vehicle between the hours of 11:00 pm and 5:00 am.

2. Junior License: You will get a junior license once you have completed all the requirements of the Learner's Permit and have passed the road test. You still cannot drive after 11:00 p.m. unless you have documentation that you have employment, volunteer work, or a school-related activity during that time.

3. Unrestricted License: You are usually eligible for an unrestricted driver's license at age 18. It provides unlimited driving privileges. There are some situations where you can apply for an unrestricted license before turning age 18. This is possible if you have been crash and conviction free for 12 months and have completed an approved driver's education course.

More information on obtaining a driver's license in Pennsylvania is available at www.dmv.state.pa.us

Can I own a car while I am in care?



There is nothing in the law that prohibits youth in care from owning cars. There are, however, obstacles to owning your own car while you are in care. First, cars are expensive and it may be hard to afford a reliable car while you are still in care. Second, you will need to find an adult who is willing to put you on their car insurance policy. Third, some placements or programs will not allow you to have a car. You should talk to your caseworker, IL worker, and lawyer if you think that you have the ability and funds to have a car and car insurance.

How do I get car insurance?

State law requires that you have car insurance or are on someone else's insurance policy to drive a car. Minors cannot purchase car insurance on their own and need an adult to put them on their car insurance policy. (This is because you cannot sign a contract until you are age 18). Putting a youth on a family's car insurance policy can be expensive because young adults are among the most expensive drivers to insure. Without car insurance you cannot legally drive a car. You should talk to your foster parent or biological parents about car insurance.

CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS AND PROPERTY

Who can see my child welfare records?

Information in your family case record that is kept at the county child welfare agency can only be released to a few people. [Parents, the lawyers of children and parents, the court \(the judge and court staff\), county executives, and youth 14 years of age and older can request to see information in the family case file.](#) If you are 14 or older, and request to see your file, your request can only be refused when the county child welfare agency thinks it would be harmful to you to see the file. To request to see your family case record, you should contact your county child welfare agency. If you run into problems, you should let your lawyer know.



There are two other situations when your caseworker can release information from your family case record without your permission: (1) To a health care provider. Some information can be released when it is needed for your treatment; (2) To a foster parent. The Resource Family Care Act allows some medical, behavioral, familial, and educational history from your family file to be released to your foster family so that they can take care of you.

Even with these two situations, records of specific types of medical treatment that are in your file can only be released with your consent. See the next section about medical records.

Who can see my medical records?

There are many laws that protect the confidentiality of medical records and medical information. It is important to ask your lawyer and anyone providing treatment to you about the confidentiality of your records. There are some general principles about the confidentiality of medical records that you should know.

If you are under age 18, generally your parent or guardian must provide consent for anyone else to see your medical records. There is some treatment that a youth can consent to without a parent or guardian no matter what age they are. In these situations, [when the youth consents to the treatment, the youth controls who gets to see the medical records.](#)

Youth can consent to some treatments no matter how old they are.

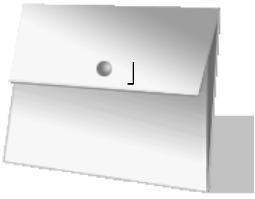
The following are the types of treatment that a minor can consent to on their own:

1. Mental health treatment if you are 14 or older
2. Substance abuse treatment

3. Birth control
4. Treatment and testing for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)
5. Treatment and testing for HIV
6. Treatment related to pregnancy (except abortion)

If you are being told that you have to share any medical information you think is confidential, call your lawyer or Juvenile Law Center at 1-800-875-8887.

If I was adopted, can I see the adoption records?



Records related to an adoption are “sealed” and are very hard to see. If you were adopted and are under age 18, your adoptive parents can petition the court to see some parts of the adoption record. If you are age 18 or older, you can petition the court to see parts of the record. If you are requesting information about the identity or current location of your biological parents, the court will need to get their permission first to give that information to you. If you have questions about looking for your biological parents, you can call the Statewide Adoption Network warmline at 1-888-793-2512 ext. 5376. When you call this number you will probably have to leave a message, but they will call you back.

Is the mail I send and receive confidential?

Yes. You have a right to send and receive mail. The mail you send cannot be read or opened without your permission. The mail you receive is confidential and should not be opened. There is only one exception to this rule: If the county children and youth agency has reason to believe that you are being sent something that is harmful to you or others or that you are being sent something that you are not allowed to have (contraband), they can open your mail in front of you. In this situation, you should be told why your mail is being opened. If you do not understand or agree with what is going on, let your caseworker and lawyer know.

Can my room and belongings be searched?

The law says that you have a right to be protected from “unreasonable search and seizure” when you are in a placement facility. This means that facilities can conduct searches when they have a concrete reason to suspect something harmful is in your room or belongings or that there is something in your room or belongings that you are not allowed to have (contraband). Searches of your room and belongings cannot occur for no reason at all. Every placement facility should have a search and seizure policy. You should ask to see that policy so you understand your rights.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

What are Independent Living services?

Independent Living services—often referred to as **IL services**— are the services you need to help you handle the responsibilities of being an adult. These services can include:

- instruction in daily living skills
- home management
- budgeting
- career planning and support
- educational planning
- support services to enter post-secondary education and training
- assistance in finding housing and/or financial assistance with rent
- mentoring



Most independent living programs provide money, called stipends, to youth who participate in IL classes or achieve certain goals. Sometimes IL services are provided in a class. Sometimes you may receive one-on-one instruction so you can really practice your skills. You should also be taught independent living skills in your placement whether it is a foster home, group home, or residential treatment center.

Your Independent Living services should be listed in an Independent Living Plan. Some counties include this in your Child Permanency Plan (CPP). Each county has an Independent Living Coordinator who can tell you who provides IL Services in your county. Please see the 411 section of the YAB website, www.independentlivingpa.org, to find a list of IL coordinators. If you live in Allegheny County, check out KidsVoice's website for information and resources: www.kidsvoice.org/il.aspx

Is there a special IL Educational Grant to help pay for my post-secondary education or training?

YES. Pennsylvania offers an Education and Training Grant (ETG). This grant is also referred to as the Chafee Grant or Education and Training Vouchers. You can apply for the grant if you are or were receiving IL services and are under 21 years of age. You may also be eligible if you were adopted from care or entered a guardianship arrangement when you were age 16 or older. If you were receiving the ETG before you turned 21, you may be able to receive it until age 23. A youth may be eligible for up to \$5000 per academic year in addition to any federal and state financial aid. Please see the Getting an Education Section of this guide for more information about the ETG grant.

At what age should I begin receiving IL services?

You should begin receiving IL services when you reach age 16. Some counties will allow you to receive IL services when you are 14, so check with your IL Coordinator.

Who is eligible for IL services?

All youth who are 16 years of age and older and are connected with the child welfare system should receive services that prepare them for being an adult. Counties can decide to provide IL services to youth under age 16, and some already do. If IL services will help you achieve your permanency goal and help prepare you for adulthood, you should receive them.

Tell your caseworker and lawyer if you are interested in receiving IL services.

There is a special law called the [Foster Care Independence Act \(FCIA\)](#). This law provides money to Pennsylvania and to all states to provide IL services to youth. Pennsylvania also allows counties to request funds from the state to provide IL services to youth so they can expand the number of youth who can be served. While a county can decide to provide IL services to any youth connected with the child welfare system, it must provide IL services to FCIA eligible youth. FCIA eligible youth are:

- ◆ Youth who are age 16 or older, are in substitute care, and are dependent or dependent and delinquent;
- ◆ Youth who entered into an adoption or a kinship guardianship arrangement at age 16 or older and are still under age 21; and
- ◆ Youth who were in substitute care at age 16 or older, have been discharged from care, and are under age 21.

If you are a teenager, check with your county's IL coordinator or caseworker to find out what IL services you may be able to receive.

Can I still get IL services if I move to another county?

YES. If you are still in care and move to another county, your home county children and youth agency is responsible for providing IL services. If you have left care and were eligible for FCIA services, the county in Pennsylvania or new state where you currently live must provide the aftercare IL services if you are under age 21. For example, if you were in care at age 16 in Delaware County and discharged from the system at age 19, and are now 20 years of age and living in Erie county, you can get IL services from Erie county.



Am I eligible for IL services if I have been discharged from care?

YES. If you are under age 21 you are still eligible for IL services. Sometimes this is referred to as aftercare or aftercare IL service.

LEAVING SUBSTITUTE CARE: YOUR PERMANENCY PLAN

The philosophy of the child welfare system and the juvenile court is that a family, not a system, should raise a child. That means your stay in care should be temporary. All efforts should be made so you can safely go home with your family. If you cannot go home, all efforts should be made to place you with other family members, a permanent guardian, or an adoptive home. You should always let your caseworker, your lawyer, and the judge know where and with whom you want to live with so your voice can be taken into account when decisions are being made.

While you stay in substitute care, you should be placed in the most family-like and least restrictive setting. The placement should provide you with all the services you need to meet your needs. When you leave substitute care, it should be to a place where you are stable and safe, where all your needs are met, and where you are cared for, or have the skills and resources to take care of yourself. This is true even if you leave the system to live on your own as an adult.

What is permanency?

People describe permanency in different ways, but the traditional model of permanency is being part of a family that provides you nurturing and support as you grow up and you can rely on even when you are an adult. In the child welfare system, permanency may mean reunifying with your family or being adopted by another family. However, youth can find permanency in less traditional ways through a combination of stable and supportive relationships that you can rely on as you grow up. In the end, permanency should be characterized by unconditional love and commitment. As long as you are in care, all efforts should be made to achieve permanency for you whether you are age 2 or age 20.

The National Foster Youth Advisory Council believes that all young people in foster care need:

- Compassionate, committed adults who are willing to be life long connections
- A safe and stable place to call home
- Opportunities to develop partnerships with their social worker and/or case manager to develop an effective transition plan that includes permanency
- Access to resources, services and financial supports to promote permanency connections.

NFYAC, *Ensuring Permanency for Youth People in the foster Care System*, located at <http://www.fosterclub.com/article/ensuring-permanency-young-people-foster-care-system>
<http://www.cwla.org/programs/ositiveyouth/>

What kind of *permanency plans* are there?

1. Return to Parents—Reunification

The first goal of juvenile court is to reunify each family. The county children and youth agency should provide your family with all the services that are needed so that you can safely return home. Such services could include:
help getting appropriate housing, counseling for the parent, family, or child, parenting classes, and mental health or drug and alcohol treatment. People's situations change over time. A parent who was not able to take care of you when you were younger may have gotten themselves together and now be able to care for you. Reunification can always be an option if it will provide you with a safe and nurturing place to live where your needs are met.

You should be informed of what needs to happen within your family before you can return. You should ask your caseworker or lawyer if you do not know. If the plan is reunification, you should be visiting with your parents frequently, usually more than every other week. Sometimes, however, reunification is not a possible option. This is often because it is not safe for you to return home to your family.

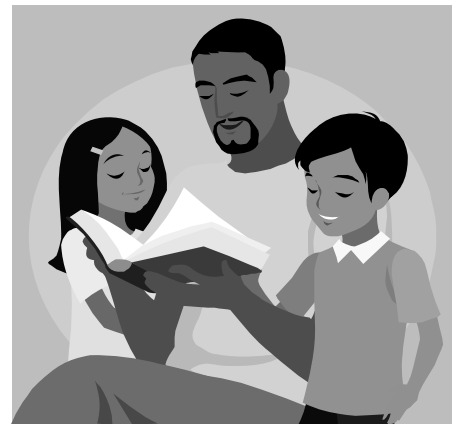
2. Adoption

If the rights of your parents have been terminated, you can be adopted. When a court terminates your biological parents' rights that means they no longer have a right to see you and do not have an obligation to provide you any support. When you are adopted, your case with the county child welfare agency is closed and you are discharged to a family who will raise you and provide for you. Your adoptive parents have all the rights of a parent who gave birth to you. Your adoptive parents can let you see your biological parents and relatives if they want to. If you want to be adopted, but also want to keep in touch with your biological family, talk about this with your caseworker, adoptive family, and the judge at court so you can make arrangements that will make this continuing contact possible, but also respect your adoptive family. You can be adopted by a family member or by someone you are not related to.

Sometimes teenagers think they are too old to be adopted. This is not true. You can be adopted

Permanency is ...

- Lifelong relationships that extend beyond foster care
- Unconditional love and acceptance
- Someone to spend holidays with
- Someone who checks up on you "just because"
- Someone to walk you down the aisle when you get married
- Having a place to call home
- Someone who is there for you no matter what mistakes you make
- A safety net of love and support



at any age (even after you turn 18). If you are 12 years of age or older, you have to give consent to be adopted for the adoption to be finalized. If you want to be adopted let your caseworker, lawyer, and the judge know so that efforts can be made to find an adoptive family for you. You may have said you did not want to be adopted when you were younger. As you get older, you may change your mind. It is okay to change your mind, just let everyone know what you want!

When you are adopted, your adoptive family can receive financial help to help take care of you. This is called an *adoption subsidy*. It can last until you are 18 years old. When you are adopted you can also receive Medical Assistance. If you are adopted at age 16 or older, you are also eligible for Independent Living services, including the Foster Care Independence Act Education and Training Grant (ETG).

WERE YOU ADOPTED? YOU MAY BE ELIGIBLE FOR MORE FINANCIAL AID THAN YOU THINK:

If you were adopted when you were age 13 or older, you can be considered Independent for the purposes of the **FAFSA** (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), which is the form that is used to determine how much federal and state financial aid you are eligible for college or trade school. When a student is considered Independent only the income of the student—not the income of the adoptive parents—is used to determine how much aid you are eligible for. Usually, in this situation, you are eligible for the maximum aid available.

3. Permanent Legal Custodianship—subsidized and unsubsidized

A permanent legal custodian (PLC) is someone who agrees to care for you and assume legal and physical custody of you until you become an adult. The PLC can be a foster parent, relative, or another person approved by the county child welfare agency. In this case, you would be discharged from the system to the PLC. *The rights of your biological parents do not need to be terminated for PLC to be granted. In most cases, a visitation plan with your parents can be agreed to when PLC is awarded.*

If the PLC meets the qualifications for financial help, the PLC will receive a subsidy to help take care of you. The qualifications to be a PLC are similar to those for licensed foster parents. The subsidy will continue until you are age 18. You will not have a caseworker and will not go to court once permanent legal custodianship has been given to that person.

Youth in care have a right to be prepared for adulthood AND to find permanency through a family.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PENNSYLVANIA UNDER FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

At the time this manual was printed, the adoption and permanent legal custodianship subsidies last only until a youth turns age 18. The Fostering Connections to Success Act allows states to extend these subsidies until a youth is age 21. At the time this guide was printed Pennsylvania has not decided whether it will take this option. If you are considering adoption or permanent legal custodianship, you should check with your social worker and lawyer to see whether the adoption subsidy ends when you turn age 18 or 21.

4. Placement with Relatives

Placement with a fit and willing relative is another permanency plan. Often this is referred to as kinship care. If the kinship care provider meets all the same licensing requirements as a foster care provider, they can receive financial help to take care of you. If your relative is receiving kinship care payments, your case will stay open, you will continue to go to court, and your case can stay open until age 21 if you are in a program of instruction, like school, college, or training, or are in treatment.

5. Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) with a Permanency Resource

If the plan for you is to live on your own when you leave care at age 18 or after, APPLA may be your permanency goal. If this is your permanency plan, you should be receiving independent living instruction in the following areas: budgeting, household management and maintenance, job readiness, job search skills, educational support (completion of high school and entrance into post-secondary education or training programs), locating housing, accessing community resources, and obtaining health care. Independent living services can also include mentoring, particularly for those youth who do not have supportive relatives in their life.

At the same time, you should also be receiving services to help you find individuals that you are able to establish a consistent and supportive relationship with. This can mean finally finding an adoptive home or a kinship care placement. It could also mean establishing a relationship with a mentor who is committed to being involved in your life. Preparing for adulthood and living on your own should go hand in hand with establishing supportive, family-like relationships that will continue as you become an adult.

You can stay in substitute care until age 21 if you are in a program of treatment or instruction. **You should only be discharged to independence or emancipated when you are able to live on your own and support yourself financially. Youth should never be discharged to homelessness.**

STAYING IN CARE PAST AGE 18

How long can I stay in substitute care?

Under the Juvenile Act, a Pennsylvania state law, a youth can stay in care until age 21 if he or she came into the system before age 18, and if he or she is in a program of treatment or instruction. If you stay in substitute care, the county child welfare agency can help you with placement (living arrangements). This could mean staying in your foster home or group home, or moving to a supervised independent living (SIL) or transitional living placement (TLP). You should also continue to receive Independent Living Services and services to help you find permanency.

Many older teens want to leave the system as soon as possible. Just remember that you are entitled to receive help until age 21. You should take advantage of this option if you don't have another plan for living independently.

What is a program of treatment or instruction?

A course of instruction can include high school, college, community college, training or vocational program, a GED preparation program, or any other educational program. Treatment can include mental health or other treatment to meet your specific needs. The terms instruction and treatment should be interpreted broadly to meet each individual youth's needs. If you are in a program and are receiving training or instruction that you think will help you prepare for being on your own, it is probably a program of treatment or instruction that will allow you to stay in care.



What should I do if I want to stay in care past age 18 but am being told I have to leave because of my age?

You should talk to your lawyer and tell him/her that you would like to stay in care and why. You should also appear in court so you can make sure the judge in your case knows that you want to stay in care. *Ultimately, it is the judge's decision whether you can stay in care past age 18.*

Why would I want to stay in care past age 18?

If you stay in care, you can continue to receive placement and case management services through your county child welfare agency. For example, you could stay in your foster home, transition to a Supervised Independent Living Program (SIL), and have your placement paid for by the county child welfare agency. Sometimes staying in care past age 18 can give you the support you need so you

can finish school or continue your education or training. If you are not financially ready to be on your own, or want to focus on your education and training, or treatment, you should consider this option. We asked members of the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board why a youth would want to stay in care past age 18. See the circle below for YAB members' answers.

It is true that staying in care limits your freedom. Many youth look forward to turning 18 so they can sign themselves out of care. Just think about it before you leave and make sure you have a realistic plan — a place to live (that will last) and an income that will cover your expenses and medical insurance – before you sign yourself out. *Everyone wants to be on their own at age 18, but most people need some help to really be able to handle the responsibilities and expenses of being on their own as an adult.*

STAYING IN FOSTER CARE PAST AGE 18 AND COLLEGE

Research shows that youth who remain in care past age 18 are three times more likely to be enrolled in college than those youth who exit care at age 18.

-Chapin Hall, Midwest Study

STAYING IN CARE PAST AGE 18 CAN PROVIDE:

- ✓ A free place to live
- ✓ Stability
- ✓ Support and guidance from staff
- ✓ Health insurance
- ✓ Permanency services
- ✓ Ability to stay in your foster home.
- ✓ Access to an attorney
- ✓ Access to supervised independent living and apartment programs
- ✓ Free food, clothes, and essentials
- ✓ An opportunity to finish high school, go to college or training, and get a better education
- ✓ Involvement of the court to make sure things are going ok and you are getting what you need.

TEEN PARENTS IN CARE

Can I keep my baby if I am in substitute care?

Yes. As a parent, you have full rights to your child even when you are in care. That means that your baby should remain in your physical and legal custody and you keep all rights to make educational and medical decisions for your child. As a parent who is in care, you should be given the same chance to parent your child as any other parent would have.

Should I be placed with my baby?

All efforts must be made to place you with your child. This could be in a mother/baby foster or group home, or a mother/baby Supervised Independent Living (SIL) placement. Fathers also have this right. You should let your lawyer know if you are not placed with your child.

Should the court find my baby dependent just because I am dependent (in care)?

NO. Young parents who are in care must be given the chance to parent. The Superior Court of Pennsylvania has ruled that a baby cannot be found dependent and placed in the county child welfare agency's legal custody just because the mother is in care. If the county child welfare agency does file a petition to have your baby found dependent by the court, as a parent, you are entitled to representation by an attorney to protect your rights as a parent.

What types of services can my child and I receive?

You should receive services that meet your individual needs and help you reach your permanency goals. If you are a parent, services should be provided that meet your needs as a parent and include your child. Like any other youth, all efforts should be made to keep you with your family or place you in the most family-like setting. You should also receive any Independent Living (IL) services your county provides. Because you are now a parent, you should also receive parenting support, instruction, and assistance in getting child care.

How do I get child care?

While you are in substitute care, the county child welfare agency or private provider agency should help you apply for or provide child care for your child.

Many teen parents will qualify for subsidized child care. You can apply for this through your county. To qualify for these services you must work at least 25 hours a week, make at least minimum wage or attend an educational program. If you are attending high school full time, there

may be some exceptions to the work requirement. To determine if you are eligible, contact 1-877-4-PA-KIDS or 1-800-392-3131. You can also apply for this child care subsidy when you leave care. You can find more information at <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/servicesprograms/childcareearlyed/>.

If you are out of care and receiving cash assistance (TANF) or food stamps, you may be eligible for child care assistance through your local welfare office. Ask your welfare case worker if you are eligible.

What are my rights as a teen father?

Teen fathers in care have the same parental rights as teen mothers. Teen fathers who are in care can:

- Ask to be placed with their children
- Ask for parenting services and supports
- Have visitation with their child

Sometimes teen fathers
are forgotten.
Don't let this
happen to you!

If you have questions about your rights to visitation and other parenting services, ask your caseworker and attorney.

What is child support and how do I apply for it?

Child support is money paid by the non-custodial parent (the parent who does not live with the child) to the custodial parent (the parent who lives with the child) to help meet the needs of the child.

If you are out of care and receiving cash assistance (TANF), you may not receive the child support directly. It may go to the welfare department to pay them back for paying you the cash assistance. Sometimes, you will get what is called \$50 "passed through" to you if the child support payment is over a certain amount.

You can file for child support at your county's domestic relations court or office. Your caseworker, lawyer, or TANF caseworker can help you file for child support.

Can I be asked to pay child support when I am in care?

YES. A non-custodial parent, even one under age 18, in placement, and/or still in high school can be required by the court to pay child support. Just like teen parents have many of the rights of older parents, they also have some of the same responsibilities, like child support.

LAWYERS AND COURT

Do I have a lawyer?

YES. All youth in the dependency and delinquency systems have lawyers who are appointed to represent them in court at no cost. Sometimes your lawyer is called a *Guardian ad Litem* (GAL) or child advocate.

Your lawyer works for you. Your lawyer does not work for the county child welfare agency or for your parent(s). Your lawyer is focused on your needs and making sure you are safe and well cared for. The job of your lawyer is to find out what you need and try to make it happen.



Your lawyer may represent you in one of two ways. This depends on why you came into care. Your lawyer must always tell the court what you want to have happen. However, if you came into care because of something that your parents did—like abuse or neglect—then your lawyer must also tell the court what he/she feels is in your best interest. When your lawyer acts in this way, he/she is called your *Guardian ad Litem* (GAL). What the lawyer believes is in your best interest may not always be what you want.

If you came into care because of your actions, like not attending school, then your lawyer should only tell the judge what you want. In this case the recommendations that your lawyer makes in court should be what you ask for. If you are not sure how your lawyer represents you, call your lawyer and ask.

What is my lawyer supposed to do?

Your lawyer's job is to represent you and help you get what you need. **Ultimately, though, you are your own best advocate.** You should find out the name of your lawyer, his/her telephone number, address, and email address so you have a few ways to communicate with your lawyer. You should call your lawyer and make sure that he/she knows what is going on in your case, particularly if you are having problems. **You should also be prepared to speak for yourself in court so that you can make sure the judge understands how you feel about things and what you want.** You may choose to come to court with a written statement of what you want the judge to know. Your IL worker can help you prepare to talk to the judge.

Your lawyer should come and see you as soon as possible after he or she is appointed to be your lawyer and should continue to meet with you on a regular basis. Your lawyer should interview other people who are involved in your case and who may be witnesses in your case. Your lawyer should participate in any hearings in court that involve you. Your lawyer should also explain to you what is happening in court. When your lawyer is a GAL, she must tell the judge what she thinks is in your best interest *and* what you want.

What should I tell my lawyer?

You should tell your lawyer how you are doing in your placement and what kind of placement you want for the future—if you want to go home, be placed with a relative, or be adopted. You should tell your lawyer how things are going for you, if things are going well in school, if you are in need of medical care or counseling, if you are visiting with you sibling and parents, and anything else that is important to you.

Almost everything you tell your lawyer is confidential. Your lawyer will tell you when he or she cannot keep things confidential—like when he or she thinks you may hurt yourself or someone else. Some lawyers believe they must tell the children and youth agency if you report to them that you have been neglected or abused.

You should meet with your lawyer before court if you have questions or if something is wrong. You can also call your lawyer. You can also write letters to your lawyer to let him/her know how you are doing.



How do I find out who my lawyer is?

Ask your county child welfare agency case worker if you do not know who your child advocate is. If you are not able to find this information, you can call Juvenile Law Center at 1-800-875-8887. If you live in Allegheny County, you can call KidsVoice at 412-391-3100.

What do I do if I think my lawyer isn't doing his or her job?

If you do not think your lawyer is doing his or her job, you should try to talk to him or her about your concerns. Make sure you leave messages and write letters to your lawyer to give him or her a chance to respond. If you still feel your lawyer is not doing his or her job, you should then contact his/her supervisor or boss. You can also tell the judge when you go to court. You should let them know what you think your lawyer is doing wrong, such as if your lawyer is not returning your calls or talking to you, or not telling the judge what you want. Then the supervisor or judge can decide what to do next to make sure your lawyer represents you adequately. **Your lawyer**

is appointed to help you and work for you. If you do not think your lawyer is doing his/her job, don't be afraid to let someone know.

Why do I go to court every three to six months?

Because the child welfare agency is involved in your life and responsible for you, everyone goes to court every three to six months to make sure you are doing okay and that all your needs are being met. *These court hearings are called permanency review hearings.*

You go to court to make sure that everyone—the child welfare agency, the people caring for you, and your lawyer—is doing everything they are supposed to do. You also go so that the court can check that the child welfare agency is making all efforts to help you go home to your family, to relatives, or to a place that is as family-like as possible.

You do not go to court because you are being punished. You go to make sure your needs are being met and all laws are being followed. *The judge can make sure that visits are happening, you are in a placement that meets your needs, and that you are getting the services that you need. If things aren't happening, the judge can issue orders so they do.*



Should I go to court for my permanency review hearings?

YES. Everyone is meeting at court to talk about you and how you are doing. If you are not there, things may be said that you do not agree with or important things about your situation may not be heard. If you are not there, you will not be able to give input or correct mistakes.

Court can be boring and you may have to wait for a long time for your case to be heard. Even so, it is important for you to go. Your views and your voice may not be heard if you are not there. Court only happens once every three to six months. *It is worth going to court to make sure you get what you need and so that decisions about you are not made without your involvement.*

Our court rules requires that youth be at their court hearings unless the judge excused them. The judge should only excuse you from court if there is an important reason that would make it very hard for you to attend. Your caseworker, parents, or anyone else involved in your case should not tell you not to go to court. If you want to make sure you are present for all hearings, contact your lawyer before the hearing. Your lawyer will be able to ask the court to order your placement to transport you to the hearing. The judge will make the ruling as to whether you should be transported or not.

Does the judge have to listen to me in court?

The law requires that the judge consult with you about your permanency plan throughout your case and about your transition plan when you are leaving care. It is important for you to be in court so you can let the judge know how you feel about things so that it is taken into consideration in any decision that is made at court.

TOP 5 REASONS TO GO TO YOUR PERMANENCY REVIEW HEARINGS

1. Your voice matters.
2. You have a right to be there and speak.
3. The hearing is about *you*, so you want to make sure everyone gets information correct.
4. It is a place where you are able to tell people about what is going well in your life or what is going wrong and what you want to change.
5. The judge has the final word on what happens in your case. The judge can make sure things happen and that problems are fixed.

What are some ways that I can advocate for myself?

The best way to advocate for yourself is to ask questions and speak up. Talk to the adults in your life who you feel that you can trust, including your caseworker, IL worker, lawyer, counselor, mentor, advocate, foster parent, friend, parent or teacher. You can also talk to the judge when you go to court. Sometimes you need to make many phone calls to accomplish your goal. For example, if your caseworker is not calling you back, you should call his or her supervisor and try to get help. This is called going up the chain of command. Writing letters is also a good way to advocate for yourself. Putting your thoughts in writing is a good way to be heard. Concerns or requests that you put in writing are hard to ignore. See *Appendix B* for a chart listing the people and agencies in the "chain of command."

It is easy to feel helpless and out of control, but there are a few things which you can control. If you speak truthfully and straightforward, without using sarcasm, derogatory language, swearing, or name calling, you will be better able to get your point across. Most importantly if there is something you need, or something that you want others to know, don't give up.

TIPS FOR ADVOCATING FOR YOURSELF

When something is wrong or you want something to change you should:

- **Call your caseworker and IL worker.** Call your caseworker, IL worker, and his/her supervisors. Leave messages if they do not pick up their phone. You should keep a record of the calls you have made.
- **Call your lawyer.** The job of your lawyer/GAL is to help you get what you want and need.
- **Go up the chain of command.** If you make several attempts to call and leave messages for your caseworker, IL worker, and lawyer and no one calls you back, you should go up the chain of command to reach someone. See Appendix B for a chart listing the people and agencies in the “chain of command.”
- **Write letters.** It is always important to make a record of your complaints or what you want to achieve. Writing letters to your caseworker, GAL, and even the judge in your case shows you are serious and taking time to explain what is important to you.
- **Plan for your court review hearing and ATTEND it.** Court is one of the places you can go to make sure you are heard. You can come with a statement or outline to read to the judge if that makes it easier. You can call your lawyer to help you prepare. You should take the opportunity to let the judge know how you feel.
- **File a grievance/complaint.** You can file a grievance, which is a complaint, with the private provider, the county child welfare agency, and the State Office of Children, Youth, and Families. See Appendix D for an example of a complaint.
- **Start a media campaign.** A media campaign uses the press, television, speaking engagements, and protests, for example, to let the general public know what problems youth in care deal with and what recommendations for change exist. You can start small by writing a letter in your school or local newspaper or calling into a radio show.
- **Know how to effectively get your message across.** To make your message effective, it is not just about what you say, but how you say it. As angry as you might be about your situation, you are more likely to succeed in getting your message across if you are calm and clear when you speak to your caseworker, supervisors, and the judge. The calm presentation of your complaint or request will help show your maturity.
- **Join the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board.** The mission of the State Youth Advisory Board is to create positive change in the substitute care system by giving youth in care a voice, educating youth and adults about the system and the need for change, and proposing solutions for change. Youth who are in care or have been in care can become part of the regional or state YAB. Please see the YAB website at www.independentlivingpa.org for more information on contacts and meeting dates and times.

Planning for After You Leave Care

The goal is for you to stay in substitute care for only a short period of time. Hopefully, you can return home or find another family who can care and provide you with what you need to grow up. For many different reasons, some youth do stay in care until they are 18 or older. In these situations, older youth should be prepared to be able to live on their own and care for themselves. One of the most important skills youth need to acquire to live on their own is the ability to financially support themselves. The best way to acquire this skill is to get work experience, save money, and continue your education or vocational training past high school. Education and training increase your chances of getting higher paying jobs.

You should only be discharged from care if you are able to live safely and support yourself, but in some cases, you may need some help to make ends meet. You may be eligible for some of the benefits and services below.

What is an Independent Living Plan (ILP)?

An Independent Living Plan (ILP) is the plan that you create with your caseworker and IL worker that lists the skills you need to be successful as an adult when you leave care. The ILP must also include a description of what activities, services, or instruction you are going to receive to achieve the established goals.

You should continue updating your ILP and building on the goals you achieve so that by the time you exit from care you are able to live in a stable and affordable living situation that you can maintain, and be a productive adult, able to meet your own needs and navigate in the community. Getting to this place takes a lot of work— your ILP can help you break down the steps to achieve your goals into concrete activities that you can attack one by one. At the very least your ILP should include goals in the areas of: daily living skills (like budgeting, cooking, problem solving), education, vocation and career, physical and behavioral health, housing, knowledge and access to community resources, and connections to committed and caring adults.

The law requires that you have an ILP at least by the time you turn age 16, but you can create one sooner if you want. The law also requires that the judge in your case document on the court order the services you need to meet your IL goals. This helps in making sure you are on track. Also, your ILP should be made part of your Permanency Plan so that the work you are doing to become more independent is done at the same time you are getting help to find a family.

GOING TO COLLEGE PAYS

Research shows that, on average, college graduates earn about **\$20,000 more a year** than those who have only a high school diploma. Taking into account inflation and other factors, college graduates will earn around **\$300,000 more in their lifetimes** than those with a high school degree only.

-Research for College Board by
Sandy Baum, Economist

What is a Transition Plan?

A transition is a bridge or passage from one place to another. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, which was enacted in 2008, created a requirement for a new type of plan called a Transition Plan. The transition this plan refers to is the one from the foster care system to life outside of the system as an adult. The Transition Plan should be an extension of your ILP—if you have been on track with your ILP and getting all the services you need to meet the goals of your ILP, you will have no problem creating a Transition Plan that describes how you are going to live outside of the system.

Federal law requires that a transition plan be developed at least 90 days before you discharge from care—whether that is when you are age 18 or older. The child welfare agency should work with you to develop the plan, but you should be the one leading the process. The transition plan must be individualized based on your needs and must include specific options on **housing, health insurance, education, local opportunities for mentors and continuing support services, and work force supports and employment services**. In Pennsylvania, it is also required that it is documented on your Transition Plan that you have been informed of your right to request to remain in care until age 21 if you are in a course of treatment or instruction.

Your Transition Plan should contain as much detail as you want to ensure that you are prepared when you leave care. In addition, it is also recommended that your Transition Plan includes assurances that you will have the following before you leave care:

- Copy of your credit report
- Your Social security card
- Information about the process for accessing your child welfare file
- Original or certified copy of your birth certificate,
- Driver's license or state ID card
- Documentation of the dates that you were in care (which will be needed to determine your eligibility for federal financial aid for college or training)
- Your education records
- Your health and mental health records and any information about treatment that will continue after you leave care
- Proof of your citizenship or legal residence (if you were born in another country)
- Information about how to get health insurance and local health care centers for the uninsured
- Termination of Parental Rights orders, if applicable

See Appendix A for an example of a Transition Plan you can use.

What cash assistance is available when I leave substitute care?

When you leave care you should have the skills to either be employed and support yourself or to have other assistance, such as financial aid for school, that helps meet your needs. If you find that you are not able to support yourself, you should be aware of the cash assistance benefits that exist in Pennsylvania. You are usually not able to receive cash assistance while you are in substitute care, but you may be eligible after you leave care. Cash assistance programs are for people who fit into a particular eligibility category and have a very low income. You can apply for cash assistance at your local county assistance office. Eligibility for cash assistance is determined based on a number of factors including your income, citizenship, residency, and many others. TANF and General Assistance are the most common forms of cash assistance. To apply for cash assistance, contact your local county assistance office, call the statewide hotline at 1-800-692-7462, or apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us. When you apply for cash assistance, you can also apply for Medical Assistance, Food Stamps, and Energy Assistance.

Are there other public benefits that can help me make ends meet?

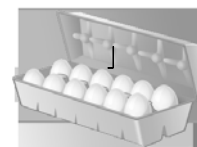
General Assistance (GA). Most GA recipients are individuals who have temporary or permanent disabilities that prevent their employment. If you are between 18 and 20 years of age and are still in high school, you may be eligible for GA. In addition, in some cases when you are in a residential drug treatment program, you may also be eligible for GA. When you receive GA, you will also receive Medical Assistance (MA).

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). TANF provides money for dependent children and their parents (or other relatives with whom they live) and pregnant women. The TANF program has many rules, including work requirements, and has a five-year time limit. When you get TANF you will also get Medical Assistance (MA). You may also be eligible for child care assistance.

There are many reasons a person may not be eligible for cash assistance, BUT you may still be eligible for other public benefits that will help you meet your needs. Examples of some of these benefits include Food Stamps, Medical Assistance (MA), Energy Assistance (LIHEAP), Women Infants and Children (WIC), and child care subsidies.

Food Stamps

More people are eligible for food stamps than actually apply. Food stamps are funds that you can use for food. They are issued on a card that looks like a credit card (an EBT card). This card can be used for food at most grocery stores and supermarkets.



Medical Assistance

For more information on Medical Assistance (MA) see the section on health insurance on page 44.

Low Income Home and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

If you need help paying your heating bills, you may be eligible for the Low Income Home and Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). You can also apply for emergency assistance if you are in danger of losing your utility services. Sometimes you can apply at the local county assistance office, but some counties have separate energy assistance offices where you can make the application. Check with your local county assistance office to find out where you can apply for LIHEAP.

You can apply for food stamps, MA, and LIHEAP at your local county assistance office or online at www.compass.state.pa.us.

WIC (Women, Infants and Children) Program

The WIC program provides healthy food like milk, eggs, and fruit, and nutrition programs for pregnant women, women who have recently given birth or are breastfeeding, and for children up to age 5. For more information on applying for WIC for yourself or your child, you can visit www.pawic.com, call 1-800-WIC-WINS or visit your local WIC program office.

Child Care Subsidy

If you have a child, you may be eligible for a child care subsidy even if you are not receiving cash assistance. You apply for this through your county. To qualify for a subsidy you must:

1. Meet income guidelines
2. Work at least 25 hours a week

OR

- Work at least 10 hours a week and go to school or training for at least 10 hours a week
3. Have a job, or a promise of a job, that will begin within 30 days of your application

If you are a teen parent, you may be eligible for the subsidy if you attend only an education program.

To determine if you are eligible, contact [1-877-4-PA-KIDS](tel:1-877-4-PA-KIDS) or [1-800-392-3131](tel:1-800-392-3131). You can also apply for this child care subsidy when you leave care. You can find more information at <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/servicesprograms/childcareearlyed/>

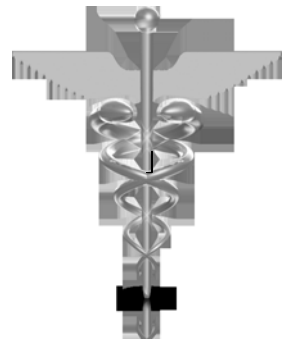
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Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

SSI is a cash assistance benefit for children who are disabled and adults who have a disability that prevents them from working. You apply for SSI through the Social Security Administration. The process can take a long time. The Social Security office must review your medical or mental health records (depending on your disability) and get information on how you function. You can call 1-800-772-1213 to begin an application and find out the location of the closest Social Security office. You can also find out more about the process on the Social Security Administration's website at www.ssa.gov.

Will I receive SSI once I am out of care if I received it while in care?

Even if you receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) as a minor, you are not guaranteed to receive it as an adult when you leave care. Each youth who receives SSI must go through what is called "Age 18 Redetermination." The Social Security Administration reviews medical and/or mental health treatment information to determine if you meet the criteria of adult eligibility for SSI payments. If you are determined to be ineligible for SSI at this redetermination and you do not agree with the decision, you have to appeal the decision. Individuals found ineligible during the redetermination process are able to continue to receive SSI benefits if they begin to receive state vocational rehabilitation agency services prior to their 18th birthday. See p. 59 for more information on the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR). SSI benefits will continue as long as the young adult is participating in an OVR program. [Youth who continue to attend high school and receive special education services through an Individual Education Plan \(IEP\) will also continue to receive SSI until they complete high school.](#)



If you receive SSI it is important to be prepared for the Redetermination process. Talk to your lawyer and caseworker as well as your school's Transition or Special Education Coordinator and any other teacher or counselor who knows about the Redetermination process. Continuing or applying for SSI should be part of your discharge plan if you have a disability.

When should I apply for SSI?

1. Application Preparation

You should work with your social worker to prepare your application for SSI at least 6 months before your plan to leave care. This means completing the application and providing any records or documents that prove that you have a disability.

2. Application Submission

You should submit your application for SSI and all of the supporting material, like medical records, **90 days before you plan to discharge from care.** Before January of 2010, you had to wait until you were discharged to submit your application. Now you can submit the application 90 days before discharge so that you can plan better for your transition.



If I have a disability, why is it important to apply for SSI before I leave care?

The eligibility determination process for SSI is more complicated than most people think. To prove that you are eligible you must present medical and other treatment records with your application. When you are still in care it will be easier for you to work with your social worker and lawyer to collect and submit those records. If you leave care before you get a decision on your application for SSI, make sure you stay in contact with the Social Security Administration and provide them updated contact information so that you do not miss a notice or call that is important in your case.

Physical and Mental Health Care and Health Insurance

What medical insurance do I have while I am in substitute care?

Most youth in care are eligible for Medical Assistance (MA). This is comprehensive health insurance that covers all your physical health and mental health care needs. Any youth who is eligible for MA must be provided with all services that a doctor says are “medically necessary,” including behavioral health services—this is called the Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) requirement. Depending on what part of the state you live in, you may be covered by a managed care program—Access Plus or Health Choices. When you join one of these programs, you will be enrolled in a health plan which is also known as an MCO. The health plan will help you find doctors and service providers who are covered under your plan.

What types of health insurance can I get once I am discharged from foster care?

When you are discharged from care, your MA case will be closed through the substitute care system so you will need to re-apply for medical assistance. You can apply for Medical Assistance at your local county assistance office or apply online at www.compass.state.pa.us. Some youth will still be eligible for MA. Some will not be eligible because the income limits are very low (that means that even if you make a small amount of money from work, you may be over the income limits). It is worth applying to see if you are eligible.

If you are employed, you should check to see if health insurance is provided or if you can purchase it. If you are attending college, you should also check if they have an insurance policy that you can purchase. Often these policies are affordable and you may be able to pay for them with funds from your financial aid package.

After you leave care, you may be eligible for MA if you are:

- receiving SSI when you leave care
- pregnant or have a child
- disabled, but can work (Medical Assistance for Workers with Disabilities)
- prescribed health-sustaining medications (medications that you need in order to be employable)
- temporarily disabled and receiving General Assistance
- a victim of domestic violence

See www.dpw.state.pa.us/ServicesPrograms/MedicalAssistance/003670296.htm for more information on MA eligibility.

What is Adult Basic Health Insurance?

A youth may be able to purchase affordable insurance that is called Adult Basic Coverage from the Department of Public Welfare. This program costs \$30 a month. It does not cover prescriptions or mental health treatment. AdultBasic coverage is based on income guidelines. To determine if you are eligible and to apply call 1-800-GO-BASIC or go to www.insurance.state.pa.us. There is a waiting list for AdultBasic. It is still good to apply to get your name on the list.

What if I am not eligible for any of the above Medical Assistance programs? Are there any places that I can get free or low cost medical care?

Most counties have local health care centers. Please see the 411 section of the YAB website, www.independentlivingpa.org, for the location and addresses of free or low cost clinics near you.

Can I receive confidential STD and HIV/AIDS testing and services?

YES. There are many places where you can get free and confidential STD and HIV/AIDS testing. Please see www.safeteens.org/clinics.aspx for locations and contact information for clinics in your area.

How can I get drug and alcohol treatment?

Medical assistance will cover drug and alcohol treatment. Most counties reserve some funding for drug and alcohol treatment for those who do not have health insurance. Call your county office of mental health to find out what resources exist in your county. You can also find out about services in your area from the State Office of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services at: <http://www.dpw.state.pa.us/ServicesPrograms/MentalHealthSubstanceAbuse/>

Can I consent to mental health and substance abuse treatment on my own without an adult?

YES. You can consent to mental health treatment without the consent of a parent, guardian or custodian when you are age 14 or older. You can consent to substance abuse treatment on your own at any age.

Who makes the decision if I receive psychotropic medication, what kind of medication and how much?

In most cases, even when you are in care, your parents make most of the decisions about your medical and mental health treatment while you are under age 18. However, as mentioned in the above question, at age 14 a youth gets to make his or her own decisions about mental health care. The law does not state clearly if this also means at age 14 the youth gets to consent to any medication prescribed for mental health treatment. In Juvenile Law Center's interpretation of the law, at age 14 you are the one who makes the decision about taking prescribed medications.

What other health care services can I get and decisions can I make on my own while I am still under age 18?

You can consent to testing and treatment related to sexual health and family planning (except abortion). This includes obtaining contraceptives, testing for pregnancy, STDs, and HIV, and counseling for pregnancy, STDs and HIV.

Questions to ask when you are prescribed psychotropic medication:

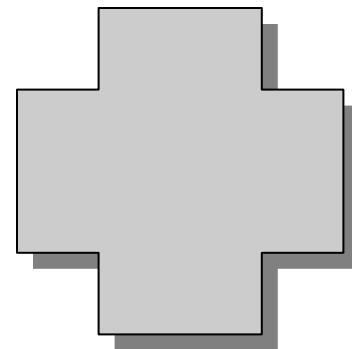
1. Why am I being prescribed this medication?
2. What is this medication supposed to do?
3. How will this medication make me feel?
4. How long will I be taking this medication?
5. What are the side effects?
6. How and when do I take this medication?
7. Are there other treatments besides medication, like therapy, nutrition changes, athletic or artistic activities that could help me instead of medication?

Psychotropic Drug, Fosterclub, Drau
<http://www.fosterclub.com/>

To obtain an abortion you must have the consent of your parent, guardian, or legal custodian. You may also get a judicial bypass, which is a court order that will allow you to proceed with an abortion without the consent of your parent, guardian, or legal custodian. For more information call the CHOICE hotline at 1-800-84-TEENS or the Women's Law Project at 215-928-9801 (Philadelphia office) or 412-227-0301 (Pittsburg office).

If I need counseling about reproductive health and family planning where can I get help?

There are many hotlines and centers that provide counseling about reproductive health and family planning. You can start by calling Planned Parenthood of Pennsylvania at 1-800-230-PLAN. They will connect you to the Planned Parenthood that is close to where you live. Please see www.safeteens.org/clinics.aspx for locations and contact information for clinics in your area.



Can I get birth control on my own while I am in care?

YES. You can get birth control on your own without the permission of a parent, guardian, or social worker no matter what age you are.

Getting an Education

Where do I go to school when I enter placement?



There are two laws that help youth in foster care maintain educational stability—the **McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act** and the **Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act**. Because of these two laws, all efforts should be made to help you stay in the school you were in before placement, or when your placement changes. If you are in a temporary placement, **you have a right to attend the school where your placement is located OR to go back to the school you attended before placement.**

If you are placed in a group home or residential facility with an on-grounds school, you have a right to attend the neighborhood public school unless a judge has specifically required you to go to the on-grounds school or you are placed in the on-grounds school based on your Individualized Education Plan (IEP). For placement in the on-grounds school to be in your IEP, all members of your IEP team, including you, need to agree that the school meets your educational needs.

There are only a few situations where you may be required to attend a school that is not a neighborhood public school. For example, you may be transferred to an alternative education school for a short time after having an informal hearing or the court may require you to go to a specific school or your IEP team may decide that you need to attend a special school that meets your needs. If you have questions about your education placement and other options such as charter schools, call Education Law Center at 215-238-6970.

Do I have to go to school on the grounds of my placement if they have a school?

Not necessarily. Where you are placed by the county child welfare agency and where you go to school are two separate issues. You would have to go to school at any school other than a regular public school where you live if:

1. your IEP says so, or
2. you have gone through the process above to be transferred to an alternative school, or
3. the court has ordered you to go to a specific school

What is required for me to be enrolled in school?

To enroll in school you need the following documents:

- Proof of your date of birth

- Immunization record or assurance from former school district or doctor that immunizations are up to date and are being sent
- Proof of residency (this can be a letter from your caretaker or case manager)
- Parent Registration Form (this form can be filled out by your case manager)

The following documents ARE NOT REQUIRED for enrollment:

- Social Security number
- Picture I.D.
- Reason for youth's placement or placement history
- Visa or immigration documents
- Mental health evaluations

Does the school need to know that I am in placement and why?

NO. The school does not need to know that you are in care or why you are in care to enroll you in school.

If I have submitted all the documents listed above, how long should it take for me to be enrolled in school?

It should take no more than *five days*.

What do I do if I am having trouble with enrollment?

If you are having trouble enrolling in school contact your caseworker and lawyer. If they are not able to help you, you can file a **complaint** with the **School Services Unit at the Pennsylvania Department of Education**. You can call them at (717) 787-4869 and fax them your complaint at (717) 783-6802. You can also visit the Pennsylvania Department of Education online at www.pde.state.pa.us. You can also call the **Education Law Center at 215-238-6970** or visit them online at www.elc-pa.org. They can help you even if you do not live in Philadelphia.

Who may be eligible for special education services?

Youth are eligible for special education if they have one of a list of identified disabilities *and*, as a result of the disability, require specially designed instruction. If you think you need special education services, you should request that the school evaluate you. If you are eligible for special education services, you will have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) that describes the type of instruction you need and any other services that will allow you to receive a Free and Appropriate

Public Education (FAPE).

You should receive these services in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This means that you should be placed in regular education classes to the greatest extent possible.

You should use the informal hearing to tell your side of things and to explain what was going on in school that led to your being transferred.

If you are receiving special education services, you have special appeal rights and special rights within the discipline system. Please contact the Education Law Center at 215-238-6970 or visit their website www.elc-pa.org for more information about your rights within the special education system.

How can students be placed in an alternative school?

No student should automatically be placed in an alternative school. If a school wants to transfer a student to a disciplinary school they have to hold an informal hearing. At that hearing they would have to show that you are a “disruptive student.” The Pennsylvania Department of Education defines disruptive students as students who pose a threat to the safety of the staff or other students, or whose behavior seriously interferes with the learning process. It also defines disruptive as a student who is habitually truant. The school must notify the student’s parent or guardian in writing about the hearing. You can have your parents, your guardian, or anyone you want to speak on your behalf to attend the hearing. You should also inform your lawyer, as they may be able to attend.

At the hearing, you should try to present as much positive information as you can about your behavior and anything else that you think may show that you are able to stay in your community school safely.

If you end up being transferred to an alternative school, your progress should be reviewed at least every semester. Ask to be part of the review and advocate for yourself. If you think you have made progress and should be transferred back to your home school make sure the school knows you are making improvements and that your situation is being reviewed.

Do I have any rights if I am expelled?

YES. An expulsion is when you are removed from school for 10 days or longer. The school must hold a formal hearing before an expulsion. You have a right to bring your own witnesses to the hearing and bring a lawyer if you want. If you are expelled, you can appeal the school's decision to the courts (the Court of Common Pleas).

There are special rules about expulsions that result from possessing a weapon on school grounds, at a school activity or even going to and from school. School law defines weapons very broadly (for example, it can include box cutters and pen knives). There are also different rules about the expulsion of students who are in special educational classes. Please contact a lawyer at Education Law Center at 215-238-6970 if you have specific questions about an expulsion. The law is very complicated in this area and you should know your rights.

How do I get back in school if I dropped out for a period of time?

You have a right to enroll or re-enroll at the public school in your district until you are age 21 or you graduate from high school. If you have dropped out of high school and are interested in receiving a high school diploma, or a high school student having difficulty with traditional education, there are some different options you have for non-traditional schooling. These options include getting a General Equivalency Diploma (GED) or attending an alternative high school program.

Can I enroll in high school even if I have a GED?

Yes. If you are under 21 and have not graduated you can enroll.

What is a General Equivalency Diploma (GED)?

The GED is a diploma that is viewed by most post-secondary educators and employers as an equivalent to a high school diploma.

This diploma is obtained by taking a written test. The GED test is comprised of five sections:

1. Language Arts – Writing
2. Language Arts – Reading
3. Math
4. Social Studies
5. Science

To pass the GED test, you must receive a combined score of 2250 for all five sections. This means that you must average 450 points out of a total 800 points in each section. You also have to score a 410 or higher in each individual section. This means that you must answer between 60% and 65% of the questions correctly. There is also an essay section. In this section you must show that you can write a clear, convincing essay.

Passing the GED test is very difficult. Only 60% of the people who take the GED test pass it on their first try. It is very helpful to take a GED preparation class. In order to obtain a GED certificate, you must pass all 5 sections of the test. If you pass some sections but not all, you can take just those sections that you did not pass again.

How can I find out the location of GED preparation classes and GED testing sites?

Check out www.education.state.pa.us/, the Pennsylvania Department of Education website, for information on GED preparation classes and testing sites.

What should I bring with me when I take the GED test?

If you are over 18 years of age you must provide all of the following:

- A driver's license or state issued ID card
- Proof of residency (utility bill, library card, letter from caseworker stating current residence, etc.)
- A fee (fees vary depending on testing site)

If you are under 18 you must **also** provide the following information:

- Withdrawal letter from your home school district
- Court order or letter of employment

If you take the GED before you are 18 or before your high school class graduates, you will not receive your official certificate. You will receive the certificate once you turn 18, or when your high school class graduates (which ever happens first). You can get your scores before you are 18 if you need to show someone that you passed.

Almost all colleges and universities accept the GED diploma as an equivalent to a traditional high school diploma for admissions purposes. Often times, colleges will accept GED scores instead of a detailed high school transcript when reviewing an application.

How can I get into post-secondary education?

Applying for post-secondary education is a long and detailed process. It is important to be in touch with your high school guidance counselor so that they can help walk you through all the steps of applying. Your IL worker can also help with this.

Step One: Taking the SAT test

You should first look into the colleges and technical schools you are interested in attending to find



out what, if any, standardized tests they require. Community colleges typically do not require that you take any standardized tests. Plan on taking any standardized tests between the end of your junior year of high school and the beginning of your senior year. This will give you enough time to receive your scores and retake the test if you wish. Most four year colleges require that applicants submit their SAT test scores.

To register for the SAT test there is a \$41.50 fee. You may not have to pay this fee if you meet income guidelines or are in substitute care—in that case, your fee would be waived. To determine if you are eligible for a fee waiver contact your school’s guidance counselor or your caseworker. The fee waiver will also allow you to get application fees waived at participating colleges and universities. [You may also qualify for funding from the State Independent Living Program to pay for the test.](#) You can check with your IL worker and the Youth Advisory Board website at www.independentlivingpa.org for the application to apply for this funding.

The SAT test is given about six times a year. Your high school guidance counselor can help you sign up for the test. If you are no longer in high school, you can still sign up to take the SAT test. You should contact the guidance counselor at the last high school you attended to get information on how to sign up. You can also check www.collegeboard.com to find out how to sign up for the test, the testing schedule, and locations. You can also call 1-800-927-4302.

Some schools require that you take another standardized test called the ACT test. This test is similar to the SAT but has a different format and different scoring guidelines. Information on the ACT test is available at www.act.org.



There are review classes and study guides for the SAT and ACT tests. Check with your school guidance counselor to find out if there are resources in your area.

Step Two: Completing Applications

Each college and university has a different application process. Some require an essay, standardized test scores, and letters of recommendation. Others do not.

All require that students submit their high school transcripts or GED scores. Once you complete the application, talk to your high school guidance counselor about obtaining your transcripts.

Many schools have an application fee. You may be able to get the application fees waived. Talk to your guidance counselor, and call the school’s admissions office to find out how to apply for a fee waiver.

If you want, you can provide the school with documentation that you are or were in the substitute

care system. This will allow the school to understand your background and your life experiences. It will also help explain to the admissions officers why you were transferred to different schools. It may also determine your eligibility for different scholarships and grants.

Make sure that you determine the application deadline, and send your application in before the deadline.

How do I pay for college or a training school?

The first step in applying for financial aid is to complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form. Filling out this form will allow you to apply for all federal financial aid including both grants (money you do not have to pay back) and loans (money that you will have to pay back). Many colleges use the FAFSA to determine eligibility for their own scholarships and grants.

The FAFSA can be completed on paper or online. You can get a paper copy of the FAFSA in your guidance counselor's office or at any college admission or financial aid office. To apply online go to www.fafsa.ed.gov. If you need assistance filling out the application contact 1-800-4-FED-AID.

While you are in college, you must resubmit a FAFSA form every year. If you completed your form over the Internet, you can sign on with your password to renew your FAFSA each year. If you completed a paper FAFSA, then a renewal FAFSA will be sent to you at the mailing address listed on the original. [Make sure you report any changes in your mailing address so that you do not miss any deadlines.](#) The FAFSA is made available on January 1st for the school year beginning the next fall. Deadlines for completion vary depending on which schools you are applying to. Try to get your FAFSA in as soon as you can, so that you do not miss any deadlines.

How do I fill out question 55 on the FAFSA?

When you are filling out the FAFSA form, [be sure to answer YES to question 55.](#) This question asks if "at any time since you turned age 13were you in foster care or were you a dependent or ward of the court". By answering Yes to this question you can skip the section where you must report your parent's income. [In this situation only your own income and savings will be used to determine eligibility for federal student aid. In most cases, this means that you will be eligible for the maximum student aid available.](#) You will need to provide a letter from the county child welfare agency that shows that you are still in care or were in care. Contact your caseworker or your lawyer for this information if you do not have it.

Are there grants and scholarships for youth in care or who have been in care?

YES. There are some scholarships that are for youth who are, or have been in substitute care.

Below is a list of some scholarships you may be eligible for:

Casey Family Scholarship

This scholarship is administered by the Orphan Foundation of America. It offers up to \$10,000 in scholarships to youth under age 25 who resided in foster care for at least 12 months and were not adopted. Scholarships are awarded to youth in pursuit of post-secondary education including college, career schools, and vocational training programs. The application can be found at www.orphan.org/casey_scholarship.html. The online portion of the application is due March 31 and the written and supporting materials are due by April 15.

Chafee Education and Training Grant (ETG)

This grant is administered by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Association (PHEAA). To apply for the Chafee Grant, you must be eligible for services under the State's Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. That is, you must have been adopted after attaining age 16, or be a youth who is 16 or older and in care, or under 21 and you were in care at age 16 or older. Eligible youth can receive the grant up until turning age 21 (23 if you were receiving the ETG at age 21).

This grant provides up to \$5,000 per academic year to meet unmet costs for post-secondary education and training.

To apply you must complete the FAFSA and the Pennsylvania Chafee Education and Training Grant Program Application. To obtain this application call 1-800-831-0797 or go online at www.pheaa.org or www.independentlivingpa.org.

In order to be awarded this grant you must be enrolled at least half time in an approved career school or college, and you must "maintain satisfactory academic progress."

Pennsylvania State Resource Family Association Scholarship

This program (formerly known as the Pennsylvania State Foster Parent Association) offers scholarships to youth who are in substitute care in Pennsylvania and the children of foster families. Youth who are applying for college or post-secondary training may be eligible. The deadline for the application is usually in early March. Check out the website for more information: www.psrfa.org/.

National Foster Parent Association Youth Scholarship

This program offers scholarships to foster youth for college, vocational training schools, correspondence courses and even GED prep programs. They award five scholarships of \$1,000

each. Three are awarded to foster youth and two are awarded to birth or adoptive children residing in a foster home. See www.nfpainc.org/content/?page=YOUTHSCHOLARSHIP for more information.

Horatio Alger Scholarship Programs

This program offers scholarships for youth who are seniors in high school, have maintained a 2.0 GPA and would like to pursue a bachelor's degree. Student must be considered in "critical financial need." The application is generally due in October of your senior year. You can find out more information at www.horatioalger.org/scholarships/.

Stewardship Foundation Scholarship

This foundation offers scholarships for youth who have been in foster or out-of-home care placements who remain unadopted. Applicants must be between the ages of 17 and 23 and must be unmarried and without children. For more information about the scholarship and application requirements, visit www.stewardshipforkids.org.

Fostering a Future Scholarship

This program provides youth who were adopted from foster care with financial assistance in pursuing a college, vocational, or technical education. Applicants must have been adopted from the foster care system at or after age 13, and must demonstrate financial need. The program offers \$5,000 and \$10,000 scholarships. For more information or to download an application visit www.childrensactionnetwork.org/scholarship.htm.

First Chance Scholarship

This program offers 50 full tuition scholarships to youth currently in foster care or former foster youth who plan to attend any University of Phoenix campus. University of Phoenix has over 200 campuses worldwide (including an online campus) and offers over 100 different degree programs. For more information or to download an application visit www.nfpaonline.org/content/?page=145.

Other Scholarship Opportunities

Many other scholarships are available to students based on their experiences in foster care as well as their gender, race, chosen course of study, or other distinguishing factors. To find information on different scholarship opportunities visit:

www.collegeboard.com: College Board scholarship search asks detailed questions about the applicant and then matches them to scholarships for those in similar situations.

www.independentlivingpa.org: Lists scholarships available for youth in care.

www.needld.org: Negro Education Emergency Drive offers scholarships to African Americans who are pursuing post-secondary education.

www.pittsburghfoundation.org: This website contains a database of 190 individual scholarships to students. Look for this database under the "Grantmaking" tab.

www.thesalliemaefund.org: The Sallie Mae Fund provides several scholarships that youth in care may be eligible for.

www.uncf.org: United Negro College Fund provides scholarships to African American students who attend United Negro College Fund member colleges and non-member colleges. Search the database of UNCF and non-UNCF scholarships at the site.

Can I enroll in vocational training?

Vocational training can be a great opportunity. Learning a trade can help you get a good paying job. **BE CAREFUL!** Get advice before you enroll at a trade school that is very expensive, requires that you take out a lot of loans, and makes promises that seem too good to be true. Make sure the school you want to enroll in is accredited. If it is not, it may not accept any state or federal financial aid. If the school does not accept financial aid, you will have to pay for the school through scholarships and loans. Ask your IL worker, caseworker or guidance counselor for help in finding a program that meets your needs and does not put you in debt.

Vocational training for individuals with physical disabilities:

The **Hiram G. Andrews Center** in Johnstown, PA offers post-secondary education for individuals with disabilities. In addition to education and training, the program also offers support services including vocational services and independent living skills. HGAC accepts either a high school diploma or GED. Tuition can often be paid for through the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation. They have a number of different types of degree programs. You can find more information by typing in your search engine: **Hiram G. Andrews**

Vocational training scholarship opportunity:

The **Thaddeus Stevens College of Technology** in Lancaster, PA offers programs in over 20 areas of study, including business administration, architectural technology, automotive, business administration, and electrical technology. Most foster youth are eligible for **full scholarships**. It is a great opportunity for a college experience that will prepare you for good paying job. For more information on this school visit www.stevenstech.org



Getting a Job and Job Training

This section contains some basic information about getting a job and job training. Please check your county resource section for more programs in your area.

In addition to furthering your education, getting work experience, Building your resume, and saving money from work are among the best ways to prepare for independence and self-sufficiency after you leave care. You may also be interested in pursuing post-secondary vocational training. If you are interested in a specific trade or occupation that does not require a college degree but does require some specific training, this may be right for you. Also remember that many colleges and community colleges provide classes that will prepare you for a trade.

Who needs a work permit?

Anyone between the ages of 14 and 17 who has not graduated from high school or obtained a GED must have a work permit in order to be legally employed in Pennsylvania.



A youth under the age of 14 may not work legally in Pennsylvania. A youth 14 or 15 years old can obtain a work permit that is specific to one place of employment. A youth 16 or 17 years old may obtain a work permit that is valid until his/her 18th birthday. A 17 year old who has already graduated from high school or gotten a GED does not need a work permit.

How do I get a work permit?

Work permits are issued through the school district in which a student lives. To obtain a work permit, contact your school's guidance counselor for an application. Your parent or legal guardian will have to come to the school to sign the application in front of the school counselor. If your parents are not able to sign the application, your caseworker may be able to sign the form. If you are having trouble finding someone to sign the form, contact your caseworker and lawyer. If you are under 16 you will also need to have the place of employment fill out a section on the application. Your guidance counselor will review that application and will issue your work permit. The application can usually be found on your school district's website.

What programs help prepare me to get a job?

There are many programs that can help you find a job and get job training. Below are some of the programs you may want to check out:

- **Careerlink** has offices throughout the state. They help individuals train for and obtain employment. They provide job search skills, and employment-related training at their regional offices. They also offer an internet-based job search site that connects individuals with many jobs in their region. To find your local Careerlink Office visit their website at www.pacareerlink.state.pa.us.
- **Job Corps** is a federally funded program that provides youth age 16-24 with the opportunity for educational advancement and vocational training. Job Corps has residential sites where you would live and also attend job training. Job Corps also has a few sites where you receive training during the day and are responsible for your own housing. Job Corps is free to all participants. It provides a monthly living allowance. Each center has different vocational and educational opportunities. Job Corps operates on a Zero Tolerance policy for violence and drug use. This means that any incidents involving drug use or violent actions will result in immediate removal from the program.

You can apply to go to Job Corps sites that are in other parts of the state if they have the training you are looking for. Find a list of the Job Corps sites in your county on the 411 Section of the YAB website—www.independentlivingpa.org. You should also check the national Job Corps website at www.jobcorps.gov or call (800) 733-JOBS or (800) 733-5627.

- **Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR)** offers services to help individuals with disabilities to prepare for, start, and maintain employment. The services provided are designed to meet each individual's personal needs. Often this includes Diagnostic Services used to understand fully the individual's disability, vocational evaluation used to determine his/her interests and abilities, counseling, training, and job placement assistance. OVR may provide additional support services based on the individual needs of each client. To find out the contact information for your local OVR Office, see www.independentlivingpa.org.
- **Union apprentice programs** are a combination of job training and related classroom instruction in which workers learn the practical and theoretical aspects of a highly skilled occupation. These programs are offered through employers and unions. Most trades require a 4-5 year apprenticeship program. During this time, apprentices earn a wage, which increases as the participants advance through the program. When the apprenticeship is complete, the students are tested. If they pass the test they are admitted into the union as Journeymen. Each union has

different requirements for participation in the program, however all require a GED or high school diploma and that the applicant be of working age. Consult www.apprentice.org to find out more information about apprentice programs and look at your county appendix for contact names and phone numbers.

• **Armed Forces** If you are interested in joining the armed forces you can contact the local recruiting stations in your county. In most cases, you will receive training in a trade while you are enlisted in the armed forces. To find recruiters in your area, check out the following websites:

- Army: www.goarmy.com/FindARecruiterContact.do
- Air Force: www.airforce.com/contact-us/recruiter-locator/
- Navy: www.navy.com/findarecruiter/
- Marines: www.marines.com/rmi

Finding a Place to Live

When you leave care, one of the biggest challenges is finding a safe and affordable place to live. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of affordable housing in Pennsylvania and across the country. For example, in Philadelphia, the average rent for a one bedroom apartment is \$721. In York County, the average rent for a one bedroom apartment is \$474. This is hard to afford for someone starting out on their own.

Before you decide to leave care, you should look at apartments in your area and know how much the rent is. That way you can figure out how much you need to save and how much money you will need to make each month to be able to keep your housing and pay your other bills. If you are under age 21 and still in an education or treatment program you may want to stay in care so that you will be better prepared to afford housing.

What things should I be thinking about when I am looking for my own apartment?

- Can you realistically afford the rent and all your expenses (like the security deposit, utilities, furniture, transportation, food, clothing, money for recreation, renters insurance...and more)?
- Will you need a co-signer for your lease?
- Do you feel safe and secure in the area in the daytime and nighttime?
- Is it near public transportation?
- Is it near a grocery store?
- Is there a written lease? (it can be hard to enforce promises that are not in writing)
- How long does the lease last (month to month, one year)?
- Are the refrigerator and appliances included in the rent?
- Are utilities included in the rent?

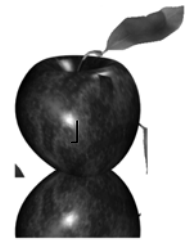


- Do the plumbing and appliances work?
- Do the doors lock securely?
- Are there programs in your area that help pay security deposit or help with furniture?

Are there places I can live while I get an education or vocational training?

Yes. If you are going to college or a training school, check if your school has **on-campus housing**. Sometimes on-campus housing is dormitory style and sometimes it includes apartments that the college or school owns. Usually on-campus housing is easier to afford than renting your own place. In many cases, your financial aid package for school can include the cost of on-campus housing. Because on-campus housing is close to all your classes, this arrangement can also help you save money on transportation.

Job Corps is an educational and vocational program that provides housing for its students. Having your housing provided for you while you attend Job Corps will help you save money for your future and will give you a safe place to stay. See the Getting a Job section for more information on Job Corps.



Remember that you can stay in care until age 21 if you are in an educational program, such as college or vocational training. You can go away to college and stay in care. Your case can remain open while you go away to school so that when you come back for holiday and summer breaks you can stay in a foster home or another placement. Some youth have found this option helpful so that they do not have to worry about where they are going to live when school is not in session.

Where do I go if I become homeless?

Every county has a shelter for the homeless. The shelter staff can provide you some help in getting back on your feet and finding a place to live. Please check the county resource pages on the 411 Section of the YAB website www.independentlivingpa.org for contact information about shelters in your area.

What is public housing?

When people talk about public housing they usually mean two things: **project-based public housing** and the **Section 8 voucher program**, which is now called the **Housing Choice Voucher program**.

1. In **project-based public housing**, the subsidy is tied to a particular apartment in a building or property. Residents usually pay no more than 30% of their income in rent. Utilities are usually included in the rent.

2. **Section 8** is a rental assistance that is tenant based. The rental subsidy belongs to the individual or family. It can be used to rent an apartment or home from a landlord who accepts section 8 vouchers. This means that once you are granted a Section 8 voucher, you may use it anywhere that accepts the voucher. An individual or family can take the rental subsidy with them to another unit even if they move to a different county or state. Renters pay between 30% and 40% of their income in rent and the housing authority or agency pays the rest of the rent.

How easy is it to get into public housing?

Usually, it is not very easy to get into public housing. Eligibility for subsidized housing is based on income. **In most counties, there is a very, very long waiting list for project-based and Section 8 housing. In some counties, the waiting lists are closed. Because it is very hard to get into public housing, make sure this is not your only plan for housing!**

Usually, you apply for public housing at the local housing authority and/or the individual buildings where project-based assistance is offered. It may differ by county. To find out where your local housing authority is located see the 411 section of the YAB website at www.independentlivingpa.org.

Are there other subsidized housing programs other than project-based public housing and Section 8?

Most counties do have some programs that offer subsidized housing. Subsidized housing is housing that is low cost in which a program or agency helps you pay your rent. Sometimes these programs are run by non-profit organizations. Sometimes these programs are offered through the county's homeless prevention program and are called **transitional or supportive housing**. Please see the 411 Section of the YAB website, www.independentlivingpa.org, to find out more information about housing options in your county.

What is room and board assistance?

Each county can use a portion of its Independent Living funds to provide assistance in paying for rent and other costs associated with housing for youth who have left care and are still under age 21. Counties can provide help with short-term housing crises and can also provide more long-term rental assistance. Each county has a **room and board policy** that explains the type of room and board assistance your county provides and what you need to do to request this assistance. If you are under age 21 and out of care, you should contact the IL coordinator for the county where you are living in to find out about room and board assistance.

Are there any other resources to help in finding affordable housing?

The Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency has an affordable housing locator on their website: www.phfa.org/pal/. You can look for affordable housing in your area by using this locator. It is a great place to start when you are looking for housing. You can also try Columbia Property Management Home Finder: www.cpmhomefinder.org

Are there any housing resources for individuals with disabilities?

In addition to checking out any opportunities for public housing or vouchers which are reserved for individuals with disabilities in your county, you may also want to consider the following options:

- **Domiciliary Care (“dom care”)** is for individuals who are 18 or older who have a disability, and who need some help with activities of daily living, but do not need 24 hour care. In dom care you live in someone’s home and the homeowner provides you some support and care as well as meals. You create House Rules with the dom care provider to make sure there is agreement about things such as going in and out of the house, having visitors, etc. You have rights in the dom care program that have to be respected and you are able to file grievances if you feel you are not being treated well. The cost of dom care is usually provided by your SSI benefit and a state supplement. There is a dom care program in every county; for more information about your local dom care program, check with your local Office of the Aging.

- **Supportive Housing through the Office of Behavioral Health and/or Your HMO:** If you have a behavioral health impairment that prevents you from living completely on your own, you may be eligible for a supportive housing arrangement either through the county office of behavioral health or through your HMO. The options may be different in each county so it is good to do a little investigation as you get close to 18 or 21.

Monthly rent (fair market rent) for a 1-bedroom apartment in Pennsylvania (in 2010):

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| Philadelphia..... | \$915 |
| Pittsburgh..... | \$610 |
| Allentown/Bethlehem..... | \$726 |
| Harrisburg..... | \$651 |
| Lancaster..... | \$630 |
| State College..... | \$710 |

For information on fair market rents in other counties, visit www.huduser.org/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2010_code/select_Geography.odb

Immigration Issues

What should I do if I am not a U.S. citizen or do not have valid immigration documents?

Making sure you have valid citizenship or alien status is one of the most important things a young adult can do before they leave substitute care. Without documentation of your immigration status, it will be hard for you to work or be eligible for financial aid and medical benefits.

You need to speak with your lawyer and caseworker immediately if you are not sure if you have valid immigration status or if you are not sure if your documents are expired. If you are still in substitute care you may be eligible for Special Immigrant Juvenile Status. If you are eligible for this status, you will be able to get a green card, and eventually apply for citizenship.

If you need help finding a lawyer who can help with immigration issues contact:

- HIAS and Council Migration Service of Philadelphia at 215-832-0900 (you can call them even if you do not live in Philadelphia) or,
- KidsVoice of Pittsburgh at (412) 391-3100



Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System

What should I do if I am arrested?

If you are arrested, you should follow the arresting officer's directions even if you think they are arresting you for something you did not do or you think there is a misunderstanding. If you have been arrested, it is best to keep silent and wait until you can speak to an attorney. Because anything you say can be used against you, you want to protect your rights and make sure you do not say anything that could hurt you in the long run. You have a right to a lawyer and you can tell your lawyer your side of things as well as anything important about the circumstances of the arrest.

If I am arrested, do I automatically have to leave the foster care system and be placed in the juvenile justice system?

No. First, after you are arrested a lot needs to happen before your case is resolved. Your case can go in many different directions, including being dismissed, diverted, or go to trial. You may be able to stay in your current foster care placement while this happens.

Second, even if you have been found delinquent (guilty) by a judge, the court may still decide that it is best for you to stay in your current placement. You can have a case open with both the dependency and delinquency systems. You should make sure your lawyer in delinquency court knows you are in foster care and talks with your lawyer for your foster care case to ensure that they work to get you the best result. Third, even if you are found delinquent and sent to a delinquency placement, the court can decide to leave your foster care case open. This can be important because you may need help—a place to live and other services—when you are released from your delinquency placement if you are still under age 21.

Getting Your Juvenile Record Expunged

I have a juvenile record. What can I do?

As you may know, having a juvenile record can make it harder to get a job and can create barriers to your future plans. Some people think that juvenile records are sealed and no one can see them. This is not exactly true. If you have been involved in the delinquency system, you should try to **expunge** (erase) your record before you leave care so that your record won't get in the way of your future.

What is expungement?

Expungement means that your juvenile record is erased and no one can see it. If you want to ask the court for an expungement, you have to file a motion. You can do this with a lawyer's help or on your own. For help filing a motion for expungement, contact your public defender or probation officer.

Are juvenile records automatically expunged after some period of time?

No. To have juvenile records destroyed, the subject of the record or any other concerned party must petition the court for its expungement.

Am I eligible to have my juvenile records expunged?

The court will expunge your records if it finds any of the following:

- The complaint is not substantiated (has no basis) or is dismissed
- Six months have passed since your final discharge from supervision under a consent decree and no juvenile or criminal charges are pending
- Five years have passed since your final discharge from commitment, placement, or any other disposition and no further charges have been filed or are pending
- You are 18 or older, the prosecutor has agreed to the expungement, and the court has considered:
 - the type of offense
 - your age
 - history of employment
 - criminal activity
 - drug or alcohol problems
 - problems you might experience if the records are not expunged
 - whether keeping a record will help protect public safety

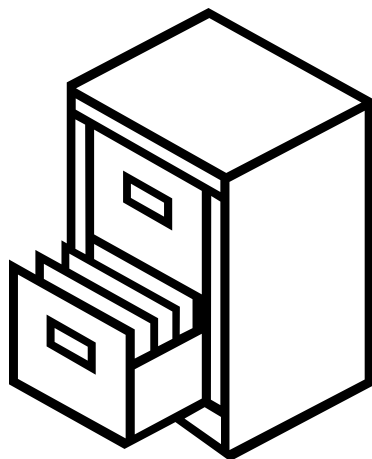
Who can file the petition for expungement?

- Your attorney when you are still in the delinquency system, or
- You or your parent (filing on your own is called “pro se”) or
- A private attorney hired by you or your parents.
- Some public juvenile defenders will file a petition for you. Call your county public defender’s office to find out if you may be eligible for an expungement and if their office will file the petition for you.

For more information on expungement see [Juvenile Records: A Know Your Rights Guide for Youth in Pennsylvania](http://www.jlc.org/publications/11/juvenile-records/), located at www.jlc.org/publications/11/juvenile-records/

Can I get the record of my dependency case (adjudication) expunged?

Although having a child welfare record doesn’t carry the same consequences as a juvenile delinquency record, you may decide you want to have your child welfare record expunged for a variety of reasons. If you wish to have the record of your dependency adjudication expunged, you can petition the court after you are 21 years old. You may need the help of a lawyer to fill out the petition. Talk to your GAL or child advocate about helping you before you leave care.



Things to Have and to Do Before You Leave Care

Before you discharge from care, make sure you have a transition/discharge plan that includes:

- A stable and safe place to live that you can afford
- A job
- Financial aid if you are continuing your education or training
- Health insurance
- Medical or mental health treatment providers if you need them
- Contact information for siblings who are still in care
- Phone numbers for people you can call in an emergency
- Your health and school records
- Information about what aftercare services you are eligible for

Before you leave care, you should also :

1. Register to Vote

In order to vote in any local, state, or national election, you must register 30 days prior to Election Day. However, you can register at any time after your 18th birthday. Registration requirements are that:

- You must be a citizen of the United States for one month prior to Election Day,
- You must be a resident of Pennsylvania and your election district for 30 days prior to the next election, and
- You must be 18 years of age by Election Day.

Voter registration forms are available at libraries, post offices, state and local office buildings, party headquarters, and many other local businesses. You can also request a Voter Registration Form by calling 412-350-4510 or online at www.votespa.com. Once you have registered, you will never need to do it again, *unless* you change your address or party affiliation.

2. Request a copy of your Birth Certificate

To receive a copy of your own birth certificate you must be 18 years of age or older. If you are younger, a family member (including siblings, parents, step-parents, and grandparents) or legal representative may request one for you. There is a \$10 fee that must accompany the completed application. You must include a valid government issued photo ID of the person requesting the record, not the person whose certificate is being requested. For youth born in Pennsylvania, send completed application to:

Division of Vital Records
101 South Mercer Street Rm 401
P.O. Box 1528
New Castle, PA 16101

3. Get a State Identification Card (Non-driver photo identification card)

If you are 16 or 17 years of age, you will need to submit one form of identification (birth certificate, valid US passport, or Military Photo ID) and a Social Security Card. If you are 18 or older you will need to submit one form of identification (same as above), two forms of proof of residency (utility bills, tax records, lease agreements, etc.), and your Social Security Card.



4. Obtain a Social Security Card

Complete an application for a Social Security Card and present a recently issued document to show your identity. These documents can include a driver's license, passport, employer or school ID card, adoption record, military ID card, or other document that establishes your identity. You may bring your application with you in person, or send the application with identifying documents to your local Social Security office. There is no fee for obtaining a replacement Social Security card. To find the Social Security office nearest you call 1-800-772-1213.

5. Apply for SSI (Social Security Income) if you have a disability

SSI is a cash assistance benefit for children who are disabled and adults who have a disability that prevents them from working. Youth in foster care are now able to submit their applications for SSI 90 days before leaving care. *For more information on SSI or how to apply, see pp. 43-44 of this guide.*

6. Get a Copy of Your Credit Report and Resolve any Credit Problems

A credit score is something that shows how good you are at paying your bills. It affects your ability to get loans and credit cards. Your credit score, which you can find out by requesting your credit

score, is important to you as you become an adult and start to make bigger purchases like a car, a house, or tuition for your education. A good credit score means that it will be easier for you to get a loan to pay for those big purchases and that your interest rate will be lower. Your credit report also makes a difference when you are trying to rent an apartment. The landlord can request that you submit your credit report as part of your rental application. If your score is low (meaning you do not have good credit), the landlord may not want to rent to you because he or she may believe that you will not be reliable in paying your rent.

You can request one free credit report every year. You can mail in the request for a free credit report by going to the following link and printing out the form: <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/cra/order?mail>. You should request your credit report well before you leave care. If you notice anything on the report that is not yours (for example, an account that you did not open or a bill for a time period when you were under 18), it is important to tell someone about this and get help to resolve the problem. You should talk to your IL worker, caseworker, or lawyer. Let them know that you think there is something on your credit report that you do not think you are responsible for and that you need help clearing it up.

REMEMBER

YOU CAN STAY IN CARE UNTIL YOU'RE 21 YEARS OLD
YOU SHOULD GO TO YOUR LAST COURT HEARING

BEFORE YOU LEAVE SUBSTITUTE CARE, YOU SHOULD...

- ◆ Make sure you have a realistic and concrete transition/discharge plan
- ◆ Get a copy of your Social Security card
- ◆ Decide if you want to continue in care until you are 21
- ◆ Get a copy of your Social Security card
- ◆ Get a copy of your birth certificate
- ◆ Obtain a picture ID
- ◆ Make sure you have the information you need to apply for health insurance
- ◆ Find out where your local health, mental health, and family planning clinic is located
- ◆ Apply for SSI if you have a disability
- ◆ Complete your FAFSA form and apply for any financial aid if you are going to college or a training school
- ◆ Register to vote
- ◆ Register for selective service (if you are a male)
- ◆ Get contact information for your sisters and brothers if they are still in care
- ◆ Locate stable and affordable housing
- ◆ Get a job or stable source of income
- ◆ Find out what IL/aftercare services are available to you after you leave care, including room and board assistance
- ◆ Go to your last permanency review hearing and have the judge review your Transition Plan.

Appendix A

TRANSITION/DISCHARGE PLAN

| | | | |
|---|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|--|
| Name of Youth: | | Youth's Date of Birth: | |
| Case Number: | Anticipated Discharge Date: | Court Review Date: | |
| Is the youth leaving care before the age of 21? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | | | |
| If yes, was the youth informed of his/her right to request to remain in placement and care until age 21 if he/she is in a course of treatment and/or instruction? | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date notified: _____ | | | |
| If youth did not request to remain in care until age 21, what reason(s) did he/she provide? | | | |

IDENTIFICATION/KEY DOCUMENTS:

| | |
|--|------------------|
| Youth has: | |
| Social Security Card | Date received: |
| Birth Certificate | Date received: |
| State issued photo ID/Driver's License | Date received: |
| Passport | Date received: |
| Immunization/pertinent medical records | Date received: |
| Health insurance card | Date received: |
| Pertinent education records | Date received: |
| Immigration documents (if applicable) | Date received: |
| Registered to vote | Date registered: |
| Registered for selective service (if male) | Date registered: |

ANTICIPATED BUDGET

Before a youth is discharged from care, he or she should have a projected income that is adequate to meet his or her basic expenses. See Appendix A for a Budgeting Worksheet.

| | | |
|--|----|---|
| Projected Monthly Income | \$ | |
| Projected Monthly Expenses | \$ | |
| Total Monthly Surplus/Monthly Shortfall | \$ | <i>Check One:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly Surplus <input type="checkbox"/> Monthly Shortfall |

HOUSING

Preferred Plan: Where does youth plan to live upon leaving care?
Address:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Type of housing:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Home of relative (specify relative: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Supervised Independent Living (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School-provided housing/dorm</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Group home (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Housing provided by job/military (specify: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Public housing</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Domiciliary care home</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transitional Living Program/Supportive Housing Program for homeless individuals (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Supportive Housing Program for individuals with physical or behavioral health impairments</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Privately rented housing (alone)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Privately rented housing (with roommates)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Shelter (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify: _____)</p> |
|--|--|

| | |
|--|---|
| Monthly cost (include any rent, utilities, etc.): | Projected monthly income (from chart on page 1): |
|--|---|

Contingency Plan 1: Where will youth live if the preferred plan falls through?
Address:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Type of housing:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Home of relative (specify relative: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Supervised Independent Living (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School-provided housing/dorm</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Group home (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Housing provided by job/military (specify: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Public housing</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Domiciliary care home</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transitional Living Program/Supportive Housing Program for homeless individuals (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Supportive Housing Program for individuals with physical or behavioral health impairments</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Privately rented housing (alone)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Privately rented housing (with roommates)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Shelter (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify: _____)</p> |
|--|--|

| | |
|--|---|
| Monthly cost (include any rent, utilities, etc.): | Projected monthly income (from chart on page 1): |
|--|---|

Contingency Plan 2: Where will youth live if the above plans fall through?
Address:

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Type of housing:</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Home of relative (specify relative: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Supervised Independent Living (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> School-provided housing/dorm</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Group home (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Housing provided by job/military (specify: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Public housing</p> | <p><input type="checkbox"/> Domiciliary care home</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Transitional Living Program/Supportive Housing Program for homeless individuals (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Supportive Housing Program for individuals with physical or behavioral health impairments</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Privately rented housing (alone)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Privately rented housing (with roommates)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Shelter (specify agency: _____)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify: _____)</p> |
|--|--|

| | |
|--|---|
| Monthly cost (include any rent, utilities, etc.): | Projected monthly income (from chart on page 1): |
|--|---|

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

| HIGH SCHOOL/GED PROGRAM | |
|---|--|
| High School/GED Program (if youth is currently enrolled): | Phone number |
| Key School Contacts (where applicable) | Phone number |
| Guidance Counselor: | |
| Special Education/IEP Coordinator: | |
| Local Transition Coordinating Council Contact: | |
| Other: | |
| POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION/TRAINING | |
| Post-Secondary Institution/Training Program Youth Plans to Attend: | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Currently enrolled <input type="checkbox"/> Applying for enrollment | |
| Applications for Admission Submitted | Date Submitted |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| Scholarship/Grant Applications Submitted | Date Submitted |
| Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) | |
| Chafee Education and Training Grant | |
| | |
| | |
| Where will youth live while in school/training program?* | Where will youth live during summers/vacations?* |
| <i>*Be sure to include the cost of these housing options in the youth's projected monthly expenses.</i> | |

| |
|--|
| Youth's highest level of academic achievement (at discharge): <input type="checkbox"/> 8th Grade <input type="checkbox"/> 9th Grade <input type="checkbox"/> 10th Grade <input type="checkbox"/> 11th Grade <input type="checkbox"/> 12th Grade (but no diploma) <input type="checkbox"/> High School diploma <input type="checkbox"/> GED <input type="checkbox"/> Some post-secondary education |
|--|

| Future Plans/Goals for Education & Training |
|--|
| Education and training goals for 5-10 years after discharge (i.e., community college, four-year college, military service, police academy, medical school, nursing school, teaching certificate, business school, social work school, law school, or other graduate/licensing program): |

EMPLOYMENT

| | | | |
|---|--------------|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Is youth currently employed? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | | | |
| Name/Address of Employer(s) | Phone | Type of Work | Salary/Hourly Rate |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Is youth currently seeking employment? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | | | |
| Job Application Submitted (Name/Address) | Phone | Type of Work | Date Application Submitted |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Employment Resource/Service Provided to Youth (i.e., interviewing skills, job shadowing, etc.) | | | Date Provided |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Does youth have a paper and electronic copy of his/her resume? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If no, when will youth have a copy of his or her updated resume? | | | |
| | | | |
| Future Plans/Goals for Employment/Career | | | |
| Employment and career goals for 5-10 years after discharge (i.e., teacher, business owner, lawyer, nurse, doctor, military service, social worker, food services, child care worker, retail management, etc.): | | | |
| | | | |

BANK ACCOUNT INFORMATION

| | |
|--|---------------|
| Does youth have a checking or savings account (check all that apply): | |
| Checking account | Name of bank: |
| Savings account | Name of bank: |
| Other bank account (specify: _____) | Name of bank: |
| No bank account | |
| Approximate amount of money in bank accounts as of _____ date | \$ |

HEALTH CARE

| | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Name/Address/Phone of Health Insurance Provider (after discharge) | | Health Insurance Policy Number: | |
| Name, address, and phone number of all medical providers: | | Name, address, and phone number of local health clinic for the uninsured: | |
| | | | |
| | | Name, address, and phone number of local family planning clinic: | |
| | | | |
| Name, address, and phone number of mental health clinic for the uninsured: | | | |
| | | | |
| PHYSICAL/REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH | | | |
| Date of last physical exam: | Date of last dental exam: | Date of last vision exam: | |
| Date of next physical exam: | Date of next dental exam: | Date of next vision exam: | |
| Has youth received comprehensive reproductive/ sexual health information? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | Name/phone of provider: | Date of last class/ appointment: | |
| | | Date of next class/ appointment: | |
| Is youth receiving reproductive/ sexual health care or treatment? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | Name/phone of provider: | Date of last exam: | |
| | | Date of next exam | |
| Is youth currently pregnant? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | Name/phone of provider: | Date of last appointment: | |
| | | Date of next appointment: | |
| Does the youth have any specific physical/reproductive health care needs that require continued treatment (including any prescribed medications) after discharge? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO (If yes, describe plans for follow-up care and resources provided) | | | |

INDEPENDENT LIVING INSTRUCTION YOUTH HAS COMPLETED

| Category of Instruction (check if completed) | Title of Course/Name of Provider | Date completed |
|--|----------------------------------|----------------|
| Instruction related to housing search (including public & subsidized housing and MH/MR group homes, if appropriate) | | |
| Instruction in maintaining stable housing | | |
| Financial management/budgeting | | |
| Daily living skills | | |
| Employment readiness | | |
| Educational planning and support | | |
| Healthy social and dating relationships | | |
| Prevention (drug & alcohol, pregnancy, STD, etc.) | | |
| Nutrition/health | | |
| Driver's Education | | |
| Other: | | |
| Other: | | |

AFTERCARE SERVICES

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| Is youth eligible for Chafee Independent Living Aftercare Services? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | | |
| If YES, complete the following information: | | |
| Is the youth receiving Chafee Independent Living Aftercare Services? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <i>If yes, list the services below. If no, explain why.</i> | | |
| Date(s) when youth was informed that he/she was eligible for aftercare services until age 21: | Date(s) when Chafee-funded room and board policy was explained to youth: | Date(s) when stipend policy was explained to youth: |
| Please list any Chafee or non-Chafee aftercare services provided to youth | | |
| Service Provided | Person/Agency Responsible for Providing Service | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

EMERGENCY CONTACTS:

List at least three people the youth can call if the youth unexpectedly loses housing and **needs a safe place to stay temporarily** as well as any other people, who are not agency workers, who the youth can rely on for support after discharge from care. Indicate the date this contact information was verified.

| Name/Address | Phone numbers/email addresses | Relationship to Youth | Date Verified |
|--------------|---|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. | Home: Work: Cell: Email: | | |
| 2. | Home: Work: Cell: Email: | | |
| 3. | Home: Work: Cell: Email: | | |

FAMILY RESOURCES (In addition to any of the contacts listed above, provide contact information for any siblings or other relatives with whom youth is in contact)

| Name/Address | Contact information | Relationship to youth | Contact with youth (how recent/ frequent) |
|--------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| | Phone: Email: | | |
| | Phone: Email: | | |
| | Phone: Email: | | |
| | Phone: Email: | | |
| | Phone: Email: | | |

OTHER KEY CONTACT NUMBERS:

| Position/Title | Name/Address | Phone numbers |
|-------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------|
| Youth's Caseworker | | Phone: Email: |
| Youth's IL Worker | | Phone: Email: |
| Youth's Attorney/ Child Advocate | | Phone: Email: |
| | | Phone: Email: |
| | | Phone: Email: |
| | | Phone: Email: |

COMMUNITY RESOURCES PROVIDED TO YOUTH*

| Description of Resource | Date Provided |
|--|---------------|
| Review with youth the "411" section of www.independentlivingpa.org which includes links regarding employment and vocational training, education, grants & financial aid, independent living resources, housing, health insurance, public benefits, etc. | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |

*i.e., resource booklets, list of emergency numbers, mentoring programs, etc.

OTHER INFORMATION

| | |
|---|--------------------------------|
| Does youth have disabilities/special needs? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | If YES, see APPENDIX B. |
| Does youth have behavioral health needs? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | If YES, see APPENDIX B. |
| Does youth have children? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | If YES, see APPENDIX C. |
| Has youth been involved in the juvenile justice system? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | If YES, see APPENDIX D. |
| Is youth a U.S. citizen? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | If NO, see APPENDIX E. |

SIGNATURES OF DISCHARGE PLANNING TEAM

| Name | Title/Role | Phone Number | Signature/Date |
|------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

YOUTH VERIFICATION

Please check all that apply:

I have been informed that, if I am dependent, I may request to remain in care after age 18 (until age 21) if I am in a program of instruction or treatment.

I have participated in the development of this plan and reviewed the plan with _____ (name/title).

I had the opportunity to address my own specific needs related to my discharge and have them considered as part of this discharge plan.

I received a copy of all of the resources & documents listed in this plan. (For example, if the plan says you received a copy of your birth certificate, a community resource booklet or your resume, you have actually received a copy.)

I understand this plan and believe that the information in the plan is accurate.

I believe this discharge plan will help me achieve the long-term goals I have set for my life.

I do NOT understand this plan, and/or I request further assistance in the planning process.

I received a copy of this plan on _____ (date).

Youth's Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX A: BUDGETING WORKSHEET

Projected Monthly Income (include employment, public benefits, scholarships, stipends, grants, etc.)

| Source of Income (if job, specify employer) | Hourly rate and Expected Hours per Month (for hourly jobs only) | Projected monthly income |
|---|---|--------------------------|
| | | \$ |
| | | \$ |
| | | \$ |
| | | \$ |
| | | \$ |
| | | \$ |
| | | \$ |
| Total Projected Monthly Income: | | \$ |

Projected Monthly Expenses Include housing expenses based on youth's preferred plan on page 1, as well as all of youth's likely expenses - utilities, cell/home phone, Internet, cable, food, clothing, school books/supplies, transportation, medical care, laundry, child care, movies tickets, concert tickets, travel, cigarettes, entertainment expenses, etc.

| Type of Expense | Projected monthly expense | |
|--|---------------------------|----|
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| | \$ | |
| Total Projected Monthly Expenses: | | \$ |

APPENDIX B: SPECIAL NEEDS & DISABILITIES/BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

| SPECIAL NEEDS & DISABILITIES | |
|--|--|
| Does the youth have a physical disability that will prevent him/her from working? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | If yes, has an application for Social Security Income (SSI) been submitted? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date submitted: _____ *applications should be submitted 90 days prior to discharge. |
| If the youth has a significant developmental or physical disability that will require long term care to help the youth with activities of daily living, has all the required information been submitted to determine eligibility for waivers (i.e., Attendant Care, Independence, OBRA, AIDS, Michael Dallas (technology dependent), COMMCARE (traumatic brain injury))? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date of submission: _____ | |
| Does the youth meet the criteria for mental retardation? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | |
| If yes, has he or she registered with the Office of Mental Retardation? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date registered: _____ | |
| Has a Prioritization of Urgency of Need for Services (PUNS) been completed? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date completed: _____ | |
| Has a supports coordinator been assigned? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Name: _____ Phone number: _____ | |
| Has all the required information been submitted to determine eligibility for the MR waiver or other appropriate waivers? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date of submission: _____ | |
| Does the youth meet the diagnostic criteria for autism? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | |
| If yes, has the Bureau of Autism been contacted? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date contacted: _____ | |

| BEHAVIORAL HEALTH CARE | |
|---|---|
| Does the youth have any specific behavior health care needs (including treatment for drug and/or alcohol abuse) that require continued treatment (including any prescribed medication) after discharge? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO (If yes, describe plans for follow-up care and resources provided) | |
| Does the youth have a behavioral health impairment that will prevent him/her from working? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | If yes, has an application for SSI been submitted? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date submitted: _____ *applications should be submitted 90 days prior to discharge. |
| If yes, has a referral for a case manager been made to the county office of behavioral health? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date of referral: _____ | |

APPENDIX C: YOUTH WHO ARE PARENTS

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| Does youth have any children? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | | | |
| Child's Name | Date of Birth | Where Child Resides | Youth's contact with the child |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| Has youth taken/completed any parenting classes? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | | Name of provider: | Date(s) taken/completed: |
| Does youth have child(ren)'s SSN & Social Security card (s)? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Date(s) received: _____ | | Does youth have child(ren)'s birth certificate(s)? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Date(s) received: _____ | Does youth have child(ren)'s immunization records? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Date(s) received: _____ |
| Name & phone number of child(ren)'s primary care physician: | Date(s) of last appointment (s): | Are child's immunizations up-to-date? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No | |
| | Date(s) of next appointment (s): | | |
| Name & phone number of child(ren)'s specialist: Physician's area of specialization: _____ | Date(s) of last appointment(s): | | |
| | Date(s) of next appointment(s): | | |
| Name & phone number of child(ren)'s dentist: | Date(s) of last appointment(s): | | |
| | Date(s) of next appointment(s): | | |
| Has youth applied for child care subsidies? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Date applied: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Not eligible (specify why not eligible): _____ | | Has youth applied for food stamps? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Date applied: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Not eligible (specify why not eligible): _____ | |
| Does youth intend to apply for TANF? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Anticipated date of application: _____ | | Has youth applied for WIC (Women, Infants, & Children) benefits? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No Date applied: _____ | |
| Briefly describe youth's plans/goals for contact with his/her children after discharge. (Will the children live with the youth? Does the youth need/have child care? If the children are not residing with the youth, does the youth have as a goal that the children live with him/her?) | | | |

APPENDIX D: JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

| | |
|--|--|
| Has youth been arrested, adjudicated delinquent or had a consent decree/deferred adjudication? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | |
| If YES, complete the following information: | |
| Name of youth's public defender/private attorney: | Phone number of youth's attorney: |
| Is the youth currently on probation? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If yes, anticipated date of discharge from probation: _____ | |
| Name of probation officer: | Phone number of probation officer: |
| Name of probation officer's supervisor: | Phone number of probation officer's supervisor: |
| CONDITIONS OF PROBATION List or attach youth's conditions of probation, as well as youth's plans to meet each condition and any services provided | |
| Condition of Probation | Plans/Services to Comply with this Condition |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| RECORD EXPUNGEMENT | |
| Is youth eligible to apply to have his or her record expunged? <input type="checkbox"/> Youth's charge was dismissed OR <input type="checkbox"/> It has been 6 months since youth was discharged from consent decree supervision OR <input type="checkbox"/> Youth was discharged from probation 5 years ago and has never been charged with another crime OR <input type="checkbox"/> Youth is over 18 years old and the DA has consented to expunge record | |
| If eligible, has youth spoken with his or her attorney or probation officer about expungement? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date contacted: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Record has been expunged (date of order of expungement: _____) | |
| Has youth received a copy of "Juvenile Record: A Know Your Rights Guide for Youth in Pennsylvania" available at http://www.jlc.org/files/publications/Youth%20Expungement%20FINAL.pdf? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date Received: _____ | |

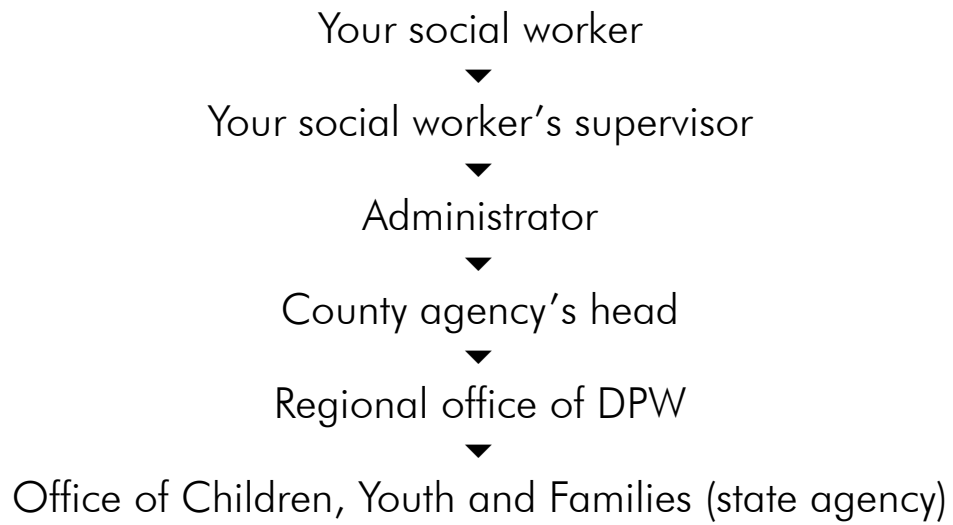
APPENDIX E: IMMIGRATION

| | |
|---|---------------------------|
| Is youth United States citizen? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | Country of origin: |
| If not a U.S. citizen, is youth eligible for Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS)? <input type="checkbox"/> Youth is unmarried <input type="checkbox"/> Youth is in foster care, appointed a guardian, or adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Youth is under 21 years of age <input type="checkbox"/> Family Court has found youth "eligible for long term foster care" | |
| If eligible for SIJS, has youth been referred to an immigration attorney? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | |
| Name of Attorney/Law Office: | |
| Phone number: | Date of referral: |
| SIJS application has been completed/submitted: <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date: | |
| Interview with immigration officer has been scheduled: <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date: | |
| Medical appointments for SIJS have been arranged: <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO Date: | |
| SIJS filing fee payments have been arranged: <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO | |
| Briefly explain: | |

]

Appendix B

Chain of Command at the child welfare agency:



Appendix C

Department of Public Welfare Regional Offices

If you are in substitute care and feel that your rights have been violated, you may wish to contact the Regional Office of the Department of Public Welfare to express your concerns and make a complaint. *For more information and additional ideas for getting your voice heard, see page 10 of this guide.*

Western Regional Office: 412-565-2339

Serving the following counties: Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, Cameron, Clarion, Crawford, Elk, Erie, Fayette, Forest, Greene, Indiana, Jefferson, Lawrence, McKean, Mercer, Potter, Venango, Warren, Washington, Westmoreland

Central Regional Office: 717-772-7702

Serving the following counties: Adams, Bedford, Blair, Cambria, Centre, Clearfield, Clinton, Columbia, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Huntingdon, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Lycoming, Mifflin, Montour, Northumberland, Perry, Snyder, Somerset, Union, York

Northeast Regional Office: 570-963-4376

Serving the following counties: Berks, Bradford, Carbon, Lackawanna, Lehigh, Luzerne, Monroe, Northampton, Pike, Schuylkill, Sullivan, Susquehanna, Tioga, Wayne, Wyoming

Southeast Regional Office: 215-560-2249

Serving the following counties: Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, Philadelphia

Appendix D

Problem/Complaint

Request by a foster youth for assistance

To: _____ Date: _____

This is an official complaint or problem that I am requesting your assistance with.

My name: _____

My foster parent/guardian: _____

My phone: _____

My caseworker: _____

This is my problem/complaint:

This is how I would rate my problem:

- Urgent (I fear for myself or someone else's life)
- Very Important (This requires attention within the next 72 hours)
- Important
- Get to it when you have some available time
- Just a suggestion, something I want recorded in my casefile

How to reach me: I would prefer that you contact me in the following way (check all that apply):

- Call me at home
- Come to school _____
- Come to my home
- Write me back
- Other: _____

Confidentiality It is important to me that this problem not be discussed with:

Check any of the following that apply:

- Please refer me to someone to help me deal with this problem
- I am feeling so depressed that I have had thoughts of suicide
- This problem is so bad that I have thought of running away or dropping out of school
- I feel that I am in danger or that this problem is affecting my health

Delivery of this form: Check the list below to indicate who you have delivered this form to and who you wish a copy of it to be delivered to.

- Foster parent or guardian
- Caseworker
- Caseworker's supervisor
- Attorney
- Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) or CASA
- Counselor or therapist
- Teacher _____
- Other: _____

Signature

I promise that the information I have provided on this form is true to the best of my knowledge.

Signed _____ Date _____

If you have a problem figuring out how to deliver this form to the right person, talk to your foster parent, guardian, caseworker, teacher or a counselor and ask them to help you. Remember to keep a copy of this form for your own records.

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foster youth
informed, involved, independent

