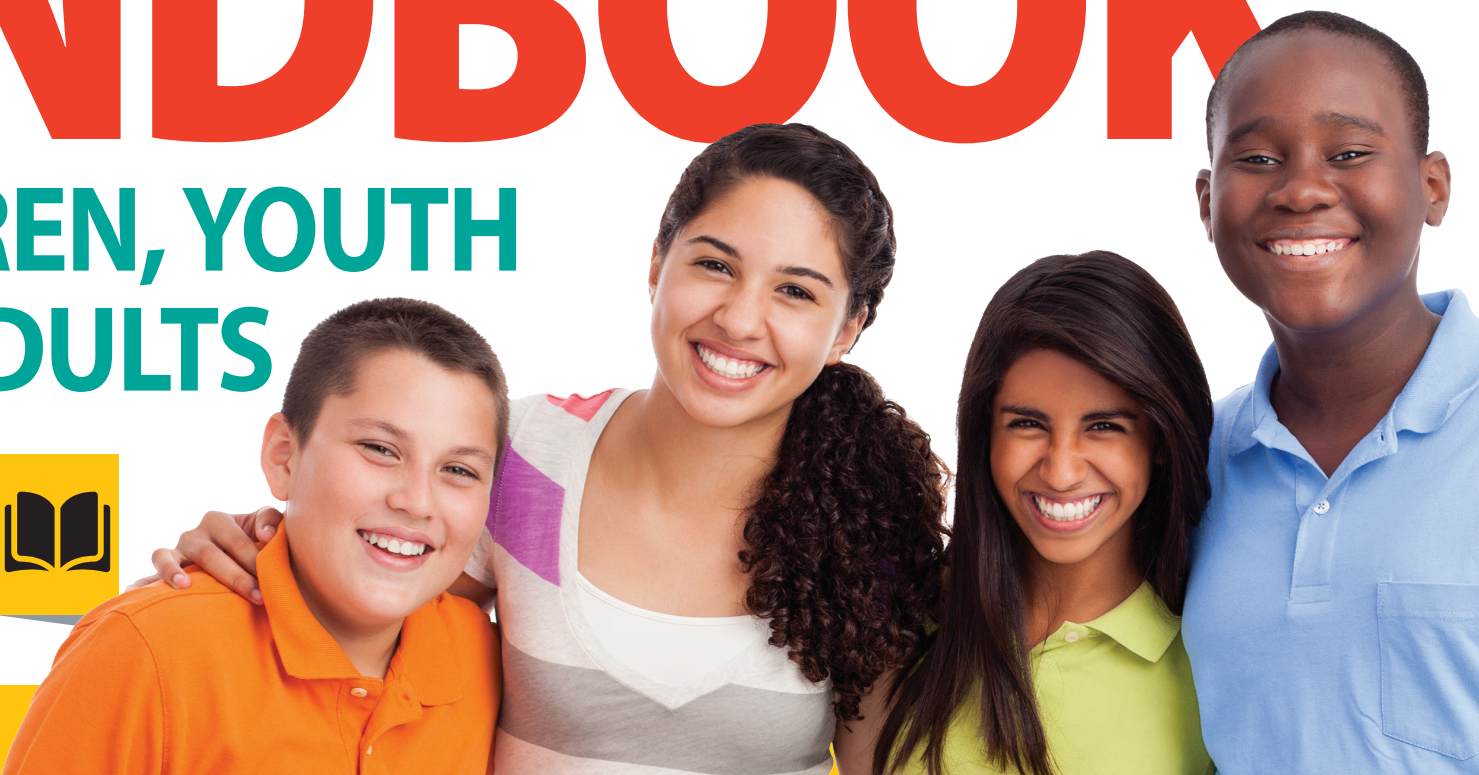




**TEXAS FOSTER CARE**

# **HANDBOOK**

**FOR CHILDREN, YOUTH  
& YOUNG ADULTS**





**TEXAS**

Health and Human Services

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**Texas Department of Family  
and Protective Services**

# MISSION, VISION & VALUES

## › Mission

**THE MISSION OF THE TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES (DFPS) IS TO PROTECT CHILDREN, THE ELDERLY AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES FROM ABUSE, NEGLECT, AND EXPLOITATION BY INVOLVING CLIENTS, FAMILIES, AND COMMUNITIES.**

## › Vision

**THE DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY AND PROTECTIVE SERVICES**

- Is recognized for innovative, effective services
- Builds strong, effective partnerships with clients, communities and state leaders
- Provides effective leadership that is accountable for its actions and communicates openly with clients and stakeholders, and
- Supports staff who are highly motivated, diverse, ethical, well trained, and professional

## › Values

- We protect the unprotected
- We involve clients, families and communities in decision making
- We provide quality services
- We are innovative and strive for excellence
- We are ethical and accountable
- We promote diversity
- We value our staff



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# INFORMATION

## FOR CHILDREN & YOUTH OF ALL AGES



### What Does It Mean to Be Placed in Foster Care?

If you cannot be safe at home, a judge can place you in foster care under the custody of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. | If that happens, the judge will pick an attorney who will talk to you about your case. | It means you must move away from your parents to protect you from abuse or neglect. | This new home may be with another member of your family or a foster home or in another setting. | You should talk to your foster parents, caregiver, or caseworker if you have questions about new rules and routines where you're living.



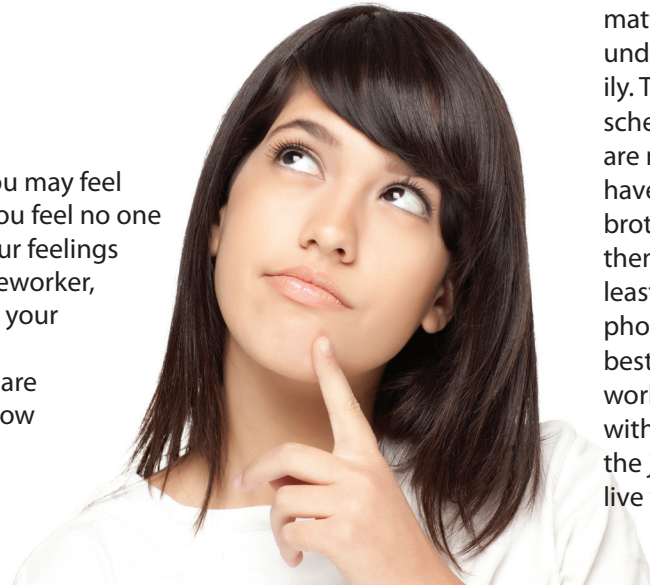
### Separation and Loss, the Right to Feel Sad

Now that you have been removed from your home, we know you may feel scared, nervous, sad, alone, mad, and maybe hopeful. | While you feel no one knows what you're going through, we encourage you to be honest about your feelings and talk to someone you trust about these feelings. | This could be your caseworker, parents, a relative, a close family friend, foster parents or caregiver, a teacher, your attorney, a counselor, or CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) worker. | Please tell us if we can do things differently to make you happier while you are in foster care. | Your feelings matter to us, and we can only help you if we know what you are feeling and thinking.



### Remember the Following:

› **YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO GRIEVE FOR YOUR FAMILY.** It's okay to be sad. No matter what has happened to you, we understand that you will miss your family. Talk to your caseworker about your scheduled visits with your parents. If you are not allowed to see your parents, you have the right to know why. If you have brothers or sisters and are not living with them, you have the right to see them at least once a month and talk to them by phone unless a judge decides it's not best for you. It is your caseworker's job to work hard to find a home for you to live with them. Talk to your attorney, CASA, or the judge on your case about wanting to live with your siblings.



**YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE ANGRY OR UPSET.** It is okay to cry because you miss your family, or because you are angry that you cannot see them every day, but we want you to use your words. Tell us how you feel rather than running away or hurting yourself or someone else. If you feel like hurting yourself, you must tell an adult immediately. If you are thinking about running away, we want to know why so we can try and make things better where you're living. We are here to keep you safe.

**YOU HAVE A RIGHT TO HAVE YOUR FAMILY RESPECTED AT ALL TIMES.** During your time in foster care, there will be times you want to talk about your family. It is important that no one speak negatively about your family. Although it may be hard to talk about the things that have happened, your caseworker may

need to discuss what those things are in order to find ways to help your parents learn how to make good changes and how to make your home safe so you can go home.

**WE ENCOURAGE YOU TO KNOW YOUR EMOTIONS OR FEELINGS AND LEARN HEALTHY WAYS TO DEAL WITH THEM.**

You will have happy days while in foster care and some days that are not so good. If you feel that you cannot talk to someone, we want you to try other ways to express them – write down your feelings in a diary or journal, draw out your feelings in art work, write poems or listen to music, play sports, or find other positive ways to express and learn to deal with your feelings. Remember, the only way the adults who care about you can help you is if you tell us what is wrong.

## WHAT YOUTH THINK ABOUT FOSTER CARE

**These statements are from youth who have been in foster care system**

*"Foster care allows for one to have a chance for opportunity, something that was hard to achieve before I entered. It's helped me to see that dreams can truly become reality."*

— Caroline N.

*"Good times and bad times come and go, so go make the best out of the good times you have in care. I mean, it's not that bad, they save us a step to begin beating the real world like...free college! So hang in there for the ride, it may just be the one that make you a better person."*

— Clemit W

*"Foster care is like life. It gets hard, but it also gets better."*

— Ardetra L

*"When we first came into foster care we came in with our clothes on our back, but when we leave we leave with a future."*

— Shawn H

*"When I came into care at age 12 I thought my life was over, but now I am 17, and now I think about how my life has just begun."*

— Tiffany R

*"Transitioning out of foster care leaves room for growth, perseverance, opportunities, and most of all independence. This is your time to show others and prove to yourself that you're capable and that you will succeed."*

— Krizia R

# CPS RIGHTS

## OF CHILDREN & YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

**As a child or youth in foster care you have the rights listed below and these rights should be shared with you by your caseworker and caregiver.**



### Safety and Care

#### AS A CHILD OR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

1. Be told:
  - Why am I in foster care?
  - What will happen to me?
  - What is happening to my family (including brothers and sisters)?
  - How is CPS planning for my future?
2. Good care and treatment that meets my needs in the most family-like setting possible. This means I have the right to live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable place. I am protected from getting hurt, treated with respect, and have some privacy for personal needs.
3. Be told the rules by a person at the place where I am living.
4. Be free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harassment from any person in the household or facility where I live.
5. Be treated fairly.



### Family and Other Contacts

#### AS A CHILD OR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

6. Live with my siblings who are in foster care, if possible. If I am not living with my siblings, I have the right to know why. It is my caseworker's job to try and find a home where I can live with my siblings unless there are safety reasons or other compelling reasons why I cannot live with my siblings.
7. Visit and have regular contact with my family, including my brothers and sisters (unless a court order or case plan doesn't allow it) and to have my worker explain any restrictions to me and write them in my record. I have the right to file a court petition to request access to my sibling(s) if I have been separated from my sibling(s) because of an action by DFPS.
8. Visit and have contact with persons outside the foster care system. These visitors can be, but are not limited to teachers, church members, mentors, and friends.





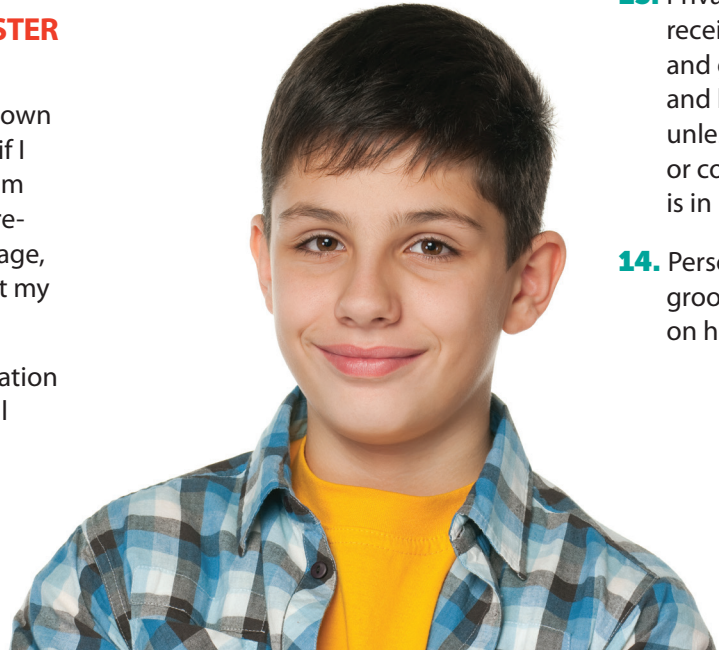
# Notes



## Have a Normal Life

### AS A CHILD OR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- 9. Speak and be spoken to in my own language. This includes Braille if I am blind or sign language if I am deaf. If my foster parents or caregiver does not know my language, CPS will give me a plan to meet my needs to communicate.
- 10. Go to school and get an education that fits my age and individual needs.
- 11. Have my religious needs met.



- 12. Childhood activities that are appropriate for my age and maturity, including youth leadership development, foster family activities, and unsupervised childhood and

extracurricular activities (including playing sports, playing in the band, going on field trips, spending time with friends, etc.).

- 13. Privacy, including sending and receiving unopened mail, making and getting private phone calls, and keeping a personal journal, unless an appropriate professional or court says that restricting these is in my best interest.
- 14. Personal care, hygiene, and grooming products, and training on how to use them.

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15. Comfortable clothing similar to clothing other children in my community wear. I also have the right to clothing that protects me against the weather. If I am a teenager, I should have the reasonable opportunity to select my clothing.
16. Have my personal items and gifts at my home and to get additional things within reasonable limits as planned for and discussed by my caregiver and caseworker and based on my caregiver's ability.
17. Personal space in my bedroom to store my clothes and belongings.
18. Be told of search policies (going through my personal items). I have the right to be told if certain items are forbidden (or if I am not allowed to have them) and why. If my belongings are removed, it must be documented.
19. Healthy foods in healthy portions for my age and activity level.
20. Look for a job, get paid for work done at my placement (except for routine chores or work assigned as fair and reasonable discipline),

keep my own money and have my own bank account in my own name, depending on my age or level of maturity.

21. Give my permission in writing before taking part in any publicity or fund raising activity for the place where I live, including the use of my photograph.
22. Refuse to make public statements showing my gratitude to a foster home, child-placing agency, or operation.
23. Not get pressured to get an abortion, give up my child for adoption, or to parent my child.



## Discipline

### AS A CHILD OR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

24. Be free of any harsh, cruel, unusual, unnecessary, demeaning, or

humiliating punishment. This means I should never:

- Be shaken, hit, spanked, or threatened with being shaken, hit, or spanked.
- Be forced to do unproductive work.
- Be denied food, sleep, access to a bathroom, mail, or family visits.
- Have myself or my family made fun of.
- Be threatened with losing my placement or shelter.
- Be treated in a way meant to embarrass, control, harm, intimidate, or isolate me by use of physical force, rumors, threats, or inappropriate comments.

25. Be disciplined in a manner that is appropriate to how mature I am, my developmental level, and my medical condition. I must be told why I was disciplined. Discipline does not include the use of restraint, seclusion (forced to be alone), corporal

punishment (such as spanking), or threat of corporal punishment.

26. Be informed of emergency behavioral intervention policies in writing. I have the right to know how they will control me if I cannot control my behavior, and to know how they will keep me and those around me safe.





# Definitions Of Different Kinds Of Foster Care Placements

**FAMILY FOSTER HOME:** A family that cares for you or other children who have been removed from their home.

**KINSHIP CARE:** A relative or someone not related who you consider to be like family or someone you have an important relationship with who will care for you in their home. This person could be an aunt or uncle, grandparent, godparent, teacher, coach, or pastor.

**FOSTER GROUP HOME:** This is a large foster home or licensed facility that provides care for 12 or fewer youth. Foster group homes provide treatment based on the needs of each youth.

**RESIDENTIAL TREATMENT CENTER (RTC):** Similar to the foster group home or licensed facility, except that it provides care for 13 or more youth.

**EMERGENCY SHELTER:** A facility that provides care for youth in crisis on a short-term basis, typically as long as four weeks. The shelter is licensed to provide care for 13 or more youth.

- 36.** Be involved in decisions about my medical care:
- I may consent to my own treatment in some cases if allowed by the health care provider. For example, the law allows me to consent to my own counseling for suicide prevention, drug or alcohol problems, or sexual, physical or emotional abuse, and I can agree to be treated for serious contagious or communicable diseases.
  - If I am pregnant and unmarried, I can agree to hospital, medical or surgical treatment, other than abortion, related to the pregnancy. If I have a child who is in my legal care, I can consent to all medical care for my child.
  - If I am 16 years old or older, I have the right to ask a judge to legally authorize me to make some or all of my own medical decisions, such as which kinds of medications I should take.



## Legal/ Courts

### AS A CHILD OR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- 37.** Contact and speak privately to my caseworker, attorneys, ad litem, probation officer, court appointed special advocate (CASA), and Disability Rights of Texas at any time.
- 38.** Go to court hearings and speak to the judge, including talking to the judge about where I am living and what I would like to see happen to me and my family.



## Records

### AS A CHILD OR YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE I HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- 39.** Expect that my records and personal information will be kept private and will be discussed only when it is about my care.

- 40.** A copy of the CPS Rights of Children and Youth in Foster Care and that they be explained to me in my primary language or in any means that successfully explains it to me.
- 41.** Have a credit report run annually beginning at age 14, be informed of the results, and receive assistance in interpreting the report and disputing any inaccuracies.
- 42.** Receive help with getting my driver's license, social security card, birth certificate, and state ID card if I am age 16 or older.
- 43.** Get necessary personal information 30 days before leaving care, including my immunization records, proof of Medicaid enrollment, information about how to set up a Medical Power of Attorney, and information contained in my education portfolio and health passport.



# YOU CAN

## HAVE A NORMAL LIFE IN FOSTER CARE



Foster care is not meant to keep you away from everyone, or keep you from having a normal life. | CPS wants you to have friends, visit with them, and participate in social activities that are important to you. | You may do other activities that other children or youth your age get to do such as play sports or in the band, go to the mall, and spend time with your friends.

Please talk to your caregiver if you want to do something. | In most cases, they don't need to ask CPS for permission. | CPS is not required to do background checks on your friends before you visit with them. | It is important that you talk to your caregiver so he or she knows you better and can make good decisions and help your social life.

If your caregiver is not allowing you do something you want, please talk to your CPS Caseworker, CASA worker, or the Judge on your case. | There may be good reasons why your caregiver is saying no. | If everyone is talking to each other, we may be able to figure out another solution. | Everyone wants you to live a normal life as much as possible and for you to be happy.



### Transition/ Permanency Planning

Planning for permanency starts the moment you enter foster care. It ends only when you leave foster care. CPS must have a permanency or transition plan for you because a court has said that it is unsafe for you to live with your parents. Your permanency or transition plan includes the specific steps to meet your permanency or transition goals. These goals could include returning to your family, being adopted by a relative or another family member, or making someone else you trust legally responsible for you. If you are over the age of 16, your goal could be staying in foster care until you are ready to live successfully on your own. Your permanency or transition plan is contained

in the Family Service and Child Service Plan. You can read more about it the sections specific to those plans.



## Family Service Plan

The Family Service Plan (sometimes called a family plan of service) is an agreement between CPS, caregivers, the courts and your parents. Together, they will decide what changes or goals need to be made by your parents (or sometimes with other relatives) for you to safely return home and set up a plan for making these changes.



## Child Service Plan

The Child Service Plan (sometimes called a plan of service or case plan) is a plan to give you safe and good care while you're away from your parents. The plan outlines your needs while in foster care and the services you will get. Your health, education, recreation, religion, and other things that are important to you, including visiting with your parents and siblings, are covered in the plan. The first goal is usually for you to return home. If you cannot go home, other goals are explored. If you are in care at the age of 14, a transition plan will be developed to include services to prepare you to care for yourself.



## Medical Health Passport

The Health Passport is a computer-based system that stores your health information while you are in foster care. The information is shared with your doctors or other medical providers who treat you, your caregiver, and caseworker. You will get a copy of the information in your Health Passport when you leave foster care at age 18 or if you are adopted. This will help you make informed decisions about your medical care. You may ask your caseworker at any time about your Health Passport. More about the Health Passport can be found at [www.fostercaretx.com](http://www.fostercaretx.com)



## Medical Consent

If you are at least 16 years old, you may have the right to make your own medical decisions. A judge will decide if you are ready to consent to medical care. The caregiver is required to advise you of this right to become your own medical consenter.

# WHILE IN FOSTER CARE

## You Have a Responsibility to:

- › Work with your caseworker on your permanent case plan.
- › Work with your caseworker and caregiver to address your needs and case plan issues.
- › Work with your caseworker and caregiver about following placement rules.
- › Tell your caseworker when you do and don't want visits with your parents.
- › Tell your caseworker, CASA or attorney if there are relatives or friends that you would like to visit or live with.
- › Talk with your caseworker. If you do not feel safe in your home or have problems where you live, tell your caseworker as soon as possible.

- › Not runaway, no matter how bad things may seem. If you runaway you could spend the night in juvenile detention, or you could be seriously hurt or worse.
- › Take issues up the CPS chain of command. Start with your caseworker, then the caseworker's supervisor (boss), but you may always directly contact the Foster Care Ombudsman.

## Caregivers Have the Responsibility to:

- › Keep you safe and give you food, clothing, and shelter.
- › Treat you with dignity and respect.
- › Keep information about you and your family confidential and share it only with people who need to know, such as your caseworker.

- › Show understanding, give guidance and unconditional acceptance.
- › Support you in maintaining connections to your family and siblings.
- › Respect your rights.
- › Participate in meetings about your case plan and other case-related meetings.
- › Get you ready for your next move in life – whether that means going home, to another placement, or to live on your own.
- › Support your growth by encouraging your success in school and in everyday life.
- › Teach you basic life skills.
- › Allow you to participate in everyday activities and events, which includes getting you to these activities.

- › Make sure you get medical and dental care and make sure you understand your treatment and services.
- › Work with you and your caseworker to make sure your case plan is developed and carried out.
- › Schedule and arrange for a ride to visits between you and your family (parents, siblings and relatives) or anyone else you want to contact unless a judge does not allow it.
- › Help you deal with your thoughts and feelings about being in foster care.
- › Get enough training to be able to provide care for youth who have been abused or neglected.
- › Make their home ready to welcome you.
- › Help you learn about your culture and heritage.
- › Do their best to make you happy while in foster care.

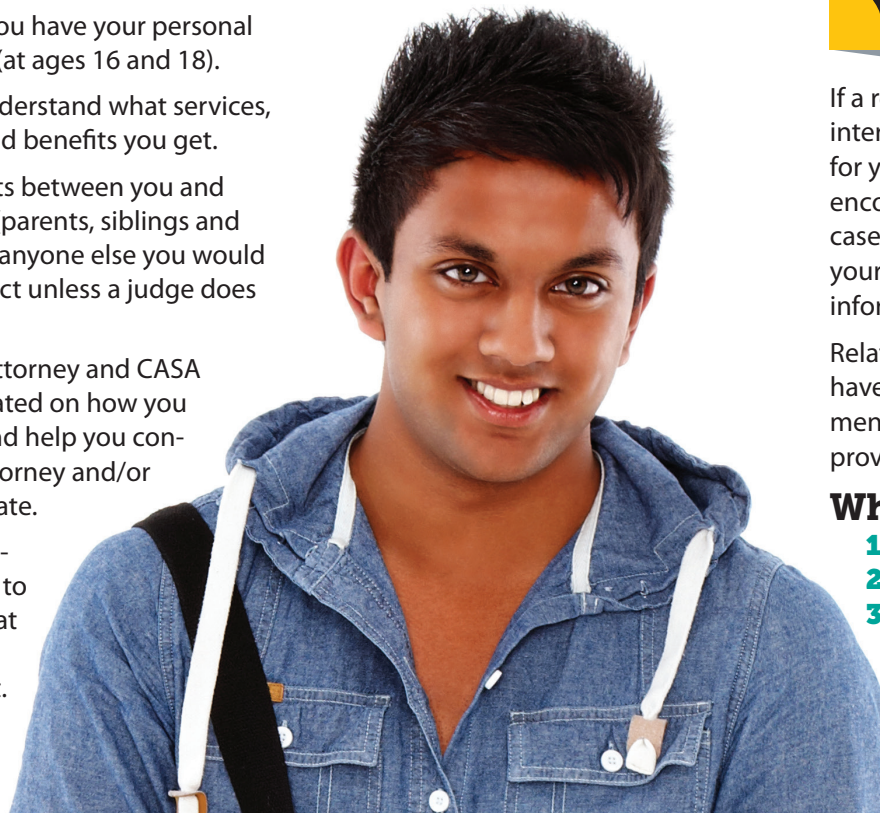


## Caseworkers Have the Responsibility to:

- › See you regularly and talk to you alone at least once a month (face to face, not by phone).
- › Give you their cell and office phone number and return your calls as soon as possible.
- › Tell you about court hearings and major points in your case.
- › Keep your family updated on how you are doing.
- › Learn what you're interested in so you can do things that you want to do.
- › Build a relationship with you to represent your best interests.
- › Help you transition out of foster care successfully.

- › Make sure you get at least one Circle of Support after turning 16, if you want one.
- › Make sure you have your personal documents (at ages 16 and 18).
- › Help you understand what services, supports, and benefits you get.
- › Arrange visits between you and your family (parents, siblings and relatives) or anyone else you would like to contact unless a judge does not allow it.
- › Keep your attorney and CASA worker updated on how you are doing and help you contact your attorney and/or court advocate.
- › Make recommendations to the court that are in your best interest.

- › Make sure that you feel safe in your home.



## Relative and Kinship Care

If a relative or close family friend is interested in providing a safe home for you while you are in CPS care, encourage the relative to contact your caseworker as soon as possible or give your caseworker the name and contact information of that person.

Relatives and close family friends will have to participate in a home assessment process and be approved to provide care for you.

### Where to Turn for Help:

1. Caseworker (start here)
2. Supervisor (or regional director)
3. Foster Care Ombudsman

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If you have a problem or complaint, please talk with your caseworker first. If for some reason your caseworker cannot meet your needs, please contact their supervisor. You may always contact the Foster Care Ombudsman.

If you feel that your rights are being violated while in foster care (under age 18) call the **Foster Care Ombudsman at 1-844-286-0769**.

The ombudsman will investigate your complaints and see if your rights were violated. The ombudsman is a neutral person who takes complaints and addresses concerns you have about foster care. Your complaints are kept private and no one is allowed to punish or retaliate against you for filing a complaint. The Foster Care Ombudsman will talk with you and make sure that your voice is heard while in foster care.

Physical discipline is not allowed while in foster care. If someone hits you or uses other physical discipline or you feel you have been abused or neglected, report it to the Texas Abuse Hotline

at 1-800-252-5400. Your name is confidential by law and your report will be investigated.

Retaliation of any kind is not allowed while in foster care.



## Education

CPS wants to make sure that you have everything you need to be successful in school. We know children, youth and young adults who get a good education and earn a high school diploma are more successful as adults, earn more money, have better health, and enjoy stronger relationships. Your caseworker will work with you, the school, and your foster family to help you earn a high school diploma and plan for your future.

If possible, we want to keep you in the same school you were attending before you lived with a foster family. But, if staying at the same school isn't good for you or is not possible,

your caseworker or foster parent will enroll you in a new school within two days that can meet your educational needs and goals. Your foster family, the school, and your caseworker will make sure you have a way to get to your new school.

Sometimes students need some help. Your school district has a foster care liaison to help students in foster care. Tell your caregiver, your caseworker, one of your teachers, or a school counselor if you need some help understanding math or if reading gets too hard. The caseworker also has several people she can ask if you need some help in school.

Your caseworker is interested in your progress at school and will ask you about school during monthly visits. Your caseworker will encourage you to participate in school activities and join clubs or sports. You and your caseworker will start planning which subjects to take to get your high school diploma. CPS staff will help you set goals for after high school, such as college, training, or a career.

## EDUCATION PORTFOLIO OR "GREEN BINDER"

The Education Portfolio is in a green binder that has many of your educational records and it belongs to you. Since you entered foster care and school, your caseworker and caregivers add copies of your report cards, school records, transcripts, school pictures, and important tests. It also shows all the classes you completed in high school and should include a copy of your birth certificate.

You can add special things to it and take it with you when you leave foster care. It can be a good reminder of all the things you have accomplished in school.

# SERVICES

## FOR OLDER YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS

### Transitional Living Services (ages 14-23)



#### Life Skills Trainings

While you are in foster care you will receive hands-on learning from your caregiver to fit your skills and abilities. Life skills training starts at age 14. This includes grocery shopping, cooking meals, nutrition, use of public transportation, and learning basic household tasks. It also includes financial training such as money management, balancing a checkbook, and personal finances. Your caregiver can help you open a savings or checking account if you have a job or other source of income.



#### Permanency & Transition Planning

You will help create your transition plan when you participate in a permanency planning meeting such as a Permanency Conference, Circles of Support or Transition Plan Meeting. The transition planning process begins at age 14 and helps prepare you to leave foster care and become a successful adult or reach your permanency goal. This is part of your service plan and helps ensure you get all necessary services.



#### Credit Reports

CPS will request a credit report for you each year you are in foster care beginning at age 14. We will tell you if a credit report exists on you and will work with the credit reporting agencies to correct your credit history if needed. If you are in extended foster care, we will help you request your own report. Your caseworker will notify you that a credit report was run and the results.

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# Receiving Your Personal Documents at Age 16 and 18

## ON OR BEFORE TURNING AGE 16, YOU WILL RECEIVE THE ORIGINALS AND COPIES OF:

- Your birth certificate.
- A Social Security card or replacement Social Security card.
- A personal identification card issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS).

## 30 DAYS BEFORE YOU TURN AGE 18 AND LEAVE CARE, YOU WILL RECEIVE COPIES OF ANY OF THE DOCUMENTS YOU GOT AT AGE 16 IF YOU DON'T ALREADY HAVE THEM, AS WELL AS THESE DOCUMENTS:

- Immunization records
- Health Passport records
- Proof of Medicaid enrollment
- Information on a Medical Power of Attorney

- Most recent credit report
- Transition Portfolio

Your caseworker will make sure you get these documents or let you know they are being obtained. Please keep all of your documents in a safe and secure place.

The PAL staff can help you if any documents are lost. If you lose or misplace your personal documents after you leave foster care, you can contact DFPS Record Management at **1-877-764-7230** or fill out Form 4884 requesting missing documents.

It is important that you get your personal documents before you turn 18. Contact your caseworker or the caseworker's supervisor to make sure you have your personal documents. You may always directly contact the Foster Care Ombudsman at **1-844-286-0769** if you don't get your documents before turning 18.



## Circles of Support

CPS uses a meeting called Circles of Support to help you with your transition planning. A Circle of Support is a meeting driven by you. It is based on another CPS process called Family Group Decision Making and it will be offered to you starting at age 16. You can call a meeting with people you identify as “caring adults” in your support system. These adults can be foster care providers, teachers, parents, siblings, relatives, church members, mentors, etc. You and your caring adults meet with a person (called a “facilitator”) who will keep the meeting focused on you as you develop and review your transition plan. This meeting covers topics such as your hopes and dreams, goals, strengths, concerns, education, employment, health and mental health, a long-term housing plan, personal and community connections, and PAL services. Your transition plan will address special needs if

you have a disability. Each caring adult identifies a way they can personally help support your transition so you can reach your short-and long-term goals to become self-sufficient. Then, everyone signs the transition plan.



## Driver License Fee Waiver

We encourage you to talk to your caregiver and your caseworker to get permission if you want to get a driver license while in foster care. You must have access to an insured vehicle when getting a driver's license. Once you get your driver's license, the Texas Department of Public Safety will waive the driver license fee if you are living in paid foster care, including extended foster care. Request a fee waiver letter from your caseworker.

# Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Services & Benefits

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program helps older foster youth prepare for their transition to a successful adulthood. PAL provides supportive services and benefits to youth ages 16- 21 (in some cases to youth ages 14-15 if funding is available) to increase their self-sufficiency and productivity.

## THE PAL PROGRAM CONSISTS OF THE FOLLOWING:

- › Life skills assessment to find out your strengths and needs
  - Counseling
  - Documents
  - Volunteer mentoring
- › Life skills training in the following core areas:
  - Health and safety
  - Housing and transportation
  - Job readiness
  - Financial management
  - Life decisions and responsibility
  - Personal and social relationships
- › Educational and vocational services
- › Supportive services (based on need and funding), that may include:
  - Vocational assessment and/or training
  - GED
  - Prep for college entrance
  - Driver's education
  - High school expenses
- › Transitional living allowance up to \$1,000 (distributed in portions up to \$500 per month) to help you with start-up costs in living as an adult. You must take PAL Life Skills training to get this allowance
- › Room and board assistance after leaving foster care (based on emergency or need) up to \$500 per month for rent, utilities, utility deposits, food, etc. You may receive up to \$3,000.
- › Case management to help you plan to become self-sufficient and manage resources

**CONTINUED ON  
NEXT PAGE**



# PAL Featured Events



## **PAL Experiential Camp:**

- › A camp for youth ages 16-21 in care. This is usually held once a year. An adult, preferably the youth's caseworker, attends with the youth. Activities may include rope courses, canoeing, expressive arts, swimming, nature hikes, and journal writing. The camps focus on increasing self-esteem, improving communication and problem solving skills, and building leadership skills.



## **Statewide Teen Conference:**

- › The Statewide Teen Conference is held on a college campus. Youth and their adult sponsors attend a

three-day conference with motivational speakers and workshops on becoming a successful adult.



## **PAL College Conferences:**

- › Texas A&M University at Commerce and Lone Star College each host a college conference every year. Youth and their adult sponsors take part in two days of workshops, campus tours, and speakers on attending college or a vocational or technical program. Workshops include information on financial aid, what a college class is like, dorm life, and life skills.



## **Regional Conferences or Events:**

- › Regions provide teen conferences and other age-appropriate activities and events such as college conferences, back to school events, prom events, and graduation or holiday celebrations.



## **Aging-Out Seminars:**

- › These are regional seminars for youth at age 17 before they leave care. Seminars include topics identified by youth to reinforce their

knowledge and skills about services, benefits and resources, and other topics such as nutrition and human trafficking. These seminars build on information from PAL Life Skills Training classes.

## **Other Youth Involvement:**



## **Statewide Youth Leadership Council:**

- › The Statewide Youth Leadership Council consists of two current or former foster care youth from each region. They provide a youth perspective on developing CPS policy and best practices and make recommendations to improve services for children, youth and young adults.

**Ask your caseworker for more details  
about these exciting events!**



## Transition Centers

Transition centers are “one stop shops” that serve many needs of young people ages 15½ to 25 who are aging out or have aged out of foster care. They’re a central place to get services such as PAL, help with getting a job, college enrollment, housing referrals, and mentoring. Partners offer services like career counseling, substance abuse and mental health counseling, housing assistance, and leadership training. Transition centers are located throughout Texas.

A list of current Transition Centers with their locations and contact information is available through your caseworker, PAL staff or at [www.texasyouthconnection.org](http://www.texasyouthconnection.org)

# Age 18 and Older

You leave DFPS’ legal custody when you turn 18 years old, but you don’t have to leave foster care. If you are not yet ready to be on your own, you can remain in care after age 18 while you work to achieve your educational goals or go to work and save money for when you are ready to leave.



## Trial Independence Period

Once you leave foster care, you are in a trial independence period of 6 months. A judge can extend this trial period up to 12 months (extended court jurisdiction). You may live independently and receive CPS benefits such as PAL, ETV, and Texas Medicaid coverage. There is no case activity and you don’t have to go to court during this trial period.



## Extended Foster Care

Are you interested in extending your time in foster care to work on your career, educational, or housing goals? You can. You may stay in paid foster care until your 21<sup>st</sup> birthday through the Extended Foster Care program.

To do this, you must voluntarily decide to enter the program and sign an agreement between you and DFPS. You would agree to do one of the following activities (unless you cannot do any of them due to a documented medical condition):

- Attend an institution of higher education, post-secondary,

vocational, or technical program (minimum 6 hours a semester)

- Engage in a program or activity that prepares you for employment (minimum 15 hours a week)
- Be employed for at least 80 hours a month

You may also regularly attend high school or a GED program from 18 up to 22 years of age while in extended care.

You would also be agreeing to fulfill certain responsibilities including working with your caseworker and caregiver to follow through with addressing your needs and case plan issues, following placement rules, and seeing your caseworker at least once a month.

Talk to your caseworker or PAL staff about the extended care options available to you.

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NEXT PAGE**

WISDOM

Determination

★ POWER

Happiness

Accomplishment

STRENGTH



## Supervised Independent Living (SIL)

Are you ready to make your own decisions, manage your finances, and learn to be fully independent and self-sufficient?

Supervised Independent Living is a part of the Extended Foster Care program and may be another option for you if you decide to stay in care after age 18 or return to care before age 21.

Types of SIL settings include apartments, non-college dorms or college dorms, shared housing or host homes

You must meet the extended foster care requirements, sign a voluntary agreement, fill out an application, and agree to the requirements of the SIL provider's program. SIL is not available in all areas of the state, so you may have to move. Talk to your caregiver, caseworker, or a PAL staff for more information.



## Return to Extended Care

You can return to extended foster care until you turn 21 if a paid placement is available. Extended care is here to help you achieve your career, educational, and housing goals while living in a foster home or another type of CPS living arrangement.

You may return to care temporarily from 1 to 3 months during college breaks as long as you are enrolled in college or a higher education program at the time.

Contact a PAL staff to discuss this program.





# College Benefits Available to You

## Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program

The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) provides federal grants of up to \$5,000 annually to help you meet your educational goals. ETV grants are available beginning at age 16 up to ages 21 or 23, depending on your circumstances. Receiving this grant is based on enrollment in college, university, or a vocational/technical program and other sources of financial aid you may receive.

### WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

- ▶ Youth in DFPS foster care who are at least 16 and who are likely to remain in foster care until turning 18.
- ▶ Youth who age out of DFPS foster care but have not yet turned 21.
- ▶ Youth who are adopted from DFPS foster care after turning age 16 but not yet 21.

- ▶ Youth who enter permanency care assistance after turning age 16 but who are not yet 21.

Young adults in the ETV program prior to their 21st birthday can stay eligible until 23 as long as they are enrolled and making satisfactory progress toward completing their college education or vocational program. This is based on your school's enrollment policies.

### DO I QUALIFY?

- ▶ You qualify if you have a high school diploma or equivalent and are taking classes part time (at least six hours) at an accredited or pre-accredited public, private, or non-profit program that provides a bachelor's degree or a 2-year or longer program that provides credit toward a degree or certification.
- ▶ You also qualify if you are at least age 18 and enrolled at least part-time (6 hours) in an accredited

or pre-accredited program that provides training toward gainful employment.

If you enroll in a dual credit course or other course in which you earn joint high school and college credits you may also receive assistance from the ETV program. You must be in foster care on the day you enroll.

For more on enrolling in the ETV program, go to: <http://www.texasetv.com> or call 1-877-268-4063 and talk to an ETV staff. You may also contact PAL staff to discuss and verify eligibility requirements.



# College Tuition and Fee Waiver-Texas Law as of June 1, 2016

You may be eligible to have tuition and fees waived at Texas colleges if you were in foster care, were adopted from DFPS or a court gave someone who is not your parent custody, or you return to the legal responsibility of a parent. This tuition and fee waiver is good for life, but it must be activated (college enrollment) before your 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.

While U.S. citizenship or qualified alien status is not required, without such status you will have trouble getting any federal financial assistance for college.

## WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

- ▶ You are exempt from paying tuition and fees if any of the following apply:
  - You were in DFPS Conservatorship on the day before your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday;
  - You were in DFPS Conservatorship on or after the day of your 14<sup>th</sup> birthday, and you were eligible for adoption on or after that day;
  - You were in DFPS Conservatorship on the day you graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma;
  - You were adopted from DFPS conservatorship on or after Sept. 1, 2009;
  - You returned to the legal responsibility of a parent at age 14 and older on or after June 1,

2016 and were in DFPS's permanent managing conservatorship;

- You returned to the legal responsibility of a parent at age 16 and older on or after June 1, 2016 and were in DFPS's temporary managing conservatorship; or
- If permanent managing conservatorship of you was granted to a non-parent on or after Sept. 1, 2009.

While in DFPS conservatorship you may have tuition waived if you are enrolled in *dual credit course(s)* in which you earn joint high school and college credits.

Some vocational/certificate courses may not be exempt from tuition and fees so make sure you check with the school.

## YOU MUST ENROLL IN ANY TEXAS STATE COLLEGE BY AGE 25 TO ACTIVATE THE TUITION AND FEE WAIVER OR YOU WILL LOSE THIS BENEFIT.

The tuition waiver covers most courses offered at a state university, community college, vocational or technical college, certificate programs, or dual credit courses.

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## CPS College Scholarships

### THE FRESHMEN SUCCESS FUND

is a grant for first time college freshmen who aged out of DFPS foster care. It is a one-time grant of \$1,000 to cover basic non-tuition related expenses such as books and supplies, computers and software, tools or other related expenses.

### THE ED DAVIS-PAL SCHOLARSHIP

is a \$1,000 scholarship for basic non-tuition needs for former foster youth who are majoring in government, political science, history or other pre-law courses. These scholarships are available to sophomore, junior, and senior students.

### ASK YOUR PAL STAFF ABOUT HOW TO APPLY FOR THESE SCHOLARSHIPS.

## Other Help for College

To get federal financial aid such as a PELL Grant, you must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for each year that you attend college. Visit <https://fafsa.ed.gov/index.htm> Completing the FAFSA is also condition when enrolling in the ETV program.

## Other Helpful Information:

- [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)
- [CollegeforallTexans.com](http://CollegeforallTexans.com)
- **GENERATION TEXAS**  
<http://gentx.org/>
- [www.fastweb.com](http://www.fastweb.com)
- [www.collegeboard.org](http://www.collegeboard.org)
- **ACCUPLACER**  
<https://accuplacer.collegeboard.org/students>
- [www.thecb.state.tx.us](http://www.thecb.state.tx.us)

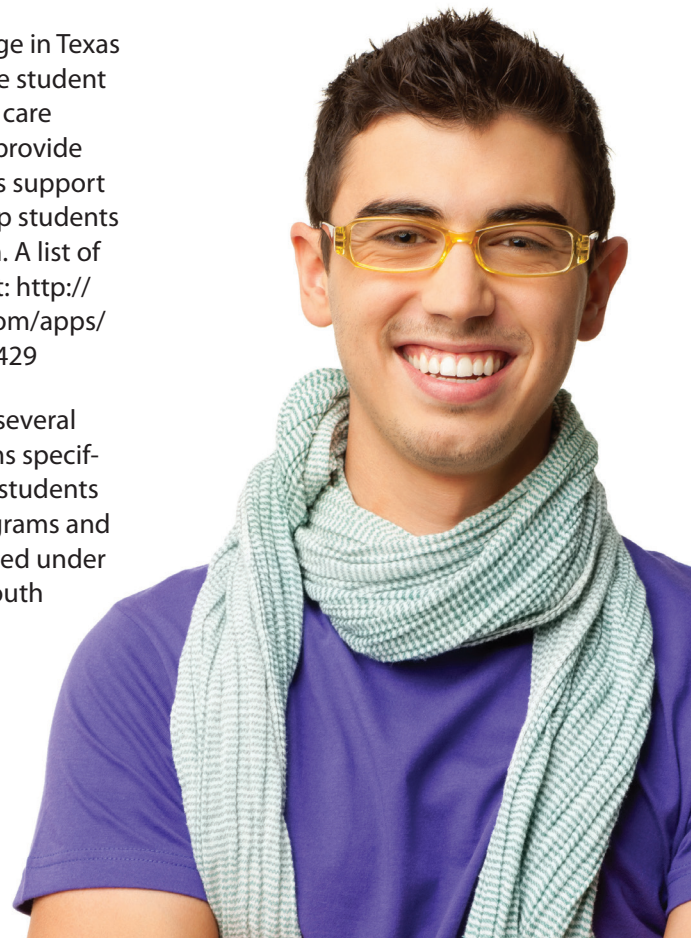
For more information, go to [www.TexasYouthConnection.org](http://www.TexasYouthConnection.org)

## College Foster Care Student Liaisons

Each state supported college in Texas has a designated foster care student liaison. Liaisons help foster care students with enrollment, provide or refer students to campus support services or groups, and help students navigate the school system. A list of these liaisons is available at: <http://www.collegeforalltexans.com/apps/financialaid/tofa2.cfm?ID=429>

CPS has partnerships with several colleges that have programs specifically to help former foster students in their schools. These programs and contact information are listed under "Education" on the Texas Youth Connection website.

Ask your caseworker or PAL staff if there are other college partnerships in the area where you live.







## Other Resources for You

### Texas Youth Hotline

The Texas Youth Hotline is a resource for youth and young adults who are under age 21, including those who have aged out of the foster care system. You may contact the statewide hotline at 1-800-210-2278 for phone counseling, information, and referrals. The hotline can help you locate local services.

### Texas Youth Connection

Texas Youth Connection website is a resource for youth in Texas foster care, alumni of foster care, or any youth seeking general tips and information. It covers topics such as education, safety, records, diversity, health, job

resources, food, Extended Foster Care, and housing resources [www.Texas-YouthConnection.org](http://www.Texas-YouthConnection.org)

### Youth Specialists

Youth specialists are CPS employees who are former foster care youth who aged out of care. Youth specialists play a key role in the development and support of local youth leadership councils. They are located around the state and are a voice for youth in CPS program development.

# The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

## YOU CAN IMPROVE FOSTER CARE

### HOW CAN YOU:

- › Get Involved?
- › Leave a Legacy for Your Brothers and Sisters in Foster Care?
- › Improve Your Community?
- › Use Your Experiences to Really Make a Difference?

**IT'S AS EASY AS ANSWERING QUESTIONS IN AN ONLINE SURVEY WHEN YOU ARE SELECTED. YOUR RESPONSES WILL BE USED TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR TEXAS YOUTH. YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE FOR YOURSELF AND OTHERS!**

### What is NYTD?

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) is a data collection system created to track independent living services and learn how successful states are in preparing youth to move from state care to adulthood. Texas surveys youth who are in foster care when they are age 17 and does follow-up surveys of some youth at age 19 and the same youth again at age 21.

### How Can You Get Involved?

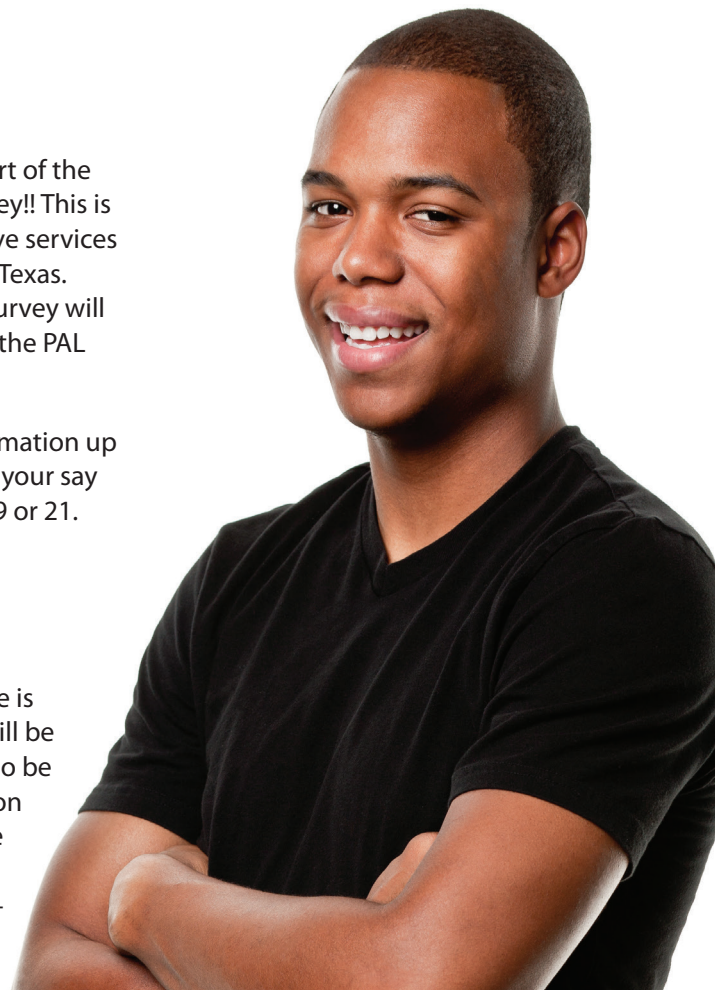
All youth that are or were in Texas foster care at age 16 or older are invited to register with the NYTD: Access Granted website. Make sure your contact information is kept up-to-date!

If you are selected to be part of the NYTD survey, take the survey!! This is your chance to help improve services and outcomes for youth in Texas. Those chosen to take the survey will be notified by e-mail or by the PAL staff.

So, keep your contact information up to date if you want to have your say when selected at age 17, 19 or 21.

### Where Do I Go Next?

The Access Granted website is where the NYTD Surveys will be posted. The website will also be a great source of information on what's happening in the Texas Youth community. Go to [www.texasyouthconnection.org](http://www.texasyouthconnection.org)



# COMMON TERMS AND PHRASES

**ATTORNEY AD LITEM:** A lawyer assigned by a judge to represent the interests of children, youth or young adults in a civil abuse and neglect case that determines who has managing conservatorship. The attorney ad litem must advocate for the youth's wishes.

**GUARDIANSHIP:** If a youth with serious disabilities turns age 18 or older and needs someone to make decisions for him or her, a court can appoint a guardian for the youth. The youth must be severely incapacitated (not able to take care of himself or herself) before this would happen.

**BIOLOGICAL/BIRTH FAMILY:** Your birth mother and father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.

**CASA WORKER:** A court appointed special advocate (CASA) is a volunteer who works with you, your caseworker, and the courts to advocate and help you while you are in foster care.

**CASEWORKER:** A Child Protective Services employee who works with you and your family while you are in foster care.

**KINSHIP CARE:** A placement approved by CPS and provided by a relative or close family friend.

**MANAGING CONSERVATOR/ GUARDIAN:** The adult or adults who the judge has decided has the right to make decisions about you and your life. When you are younger than 18, the common term used by the Texas courts is "managing conservator." If you are 18 or older, the common term is "guardian."

**MENTOR:** A volunteer friend, consultant, and guide to help you prepare for adult living.

**PERMANENCY PLAN:** A plan that is developed by Child Protective Services and a judge to arrange for the most permanent living situation possible for you, while considering your best in-

terests. This plan tells where and with whom a youth in foster care will live, and the proposed legal relationship between the child and the permanent caregiver or caregivers.

**PLAN OF SERVICE (CASE PLAN):** A plan that is developed with your CPS caseworker and caregiver and sometimes other helpful adults. This plan includes your needs and goals. You should be actively involved in developing your plan of service.

**PREPARATION FOR ADULT LIVING (PAL) PROGRAM:** A program that helps youth develop the skills and resources they need for adult life after foster care. Youth can also get financial











RESPONSIBILITY  
 Commitment  
 INDEPENDENCE  
 Security



**TEXAS**  
 Health and Human  
 Services

Texas Department of Family  
 and Protective Services