

TALKING TO FOSTER YOUTH ABOUT SCHOOL

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Prepared by Texas Foster Youth Justice Project

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The Texas Foster Youth Justice Project provides free legal advice, assistance and representation to current and former foster youth and those that work with foster youth.

Below are some sample questions, developed by the Texas Foster Youth Justice Project and alumni of foster care, to help you elicit information from foster youth about their school experience. Many youth won't quickly volunteer information; they may not even realize that there is a concern or matter that needs to be addressed. Often they may assume that you, no matter what your role, can't or won't do anything about concerns. By asking these questions, you can begin to gain more insight about what is going on at school and with their education.

If you do find out about problems – do your best to try to address it quickly. While weeks pass with phone tag between teachers, caseworkers, CASAs, administrators and ad litems the youth continues to suffer a negative school experience. Insist on quick resolution when possible.

Elementary School Age Foster Youth:

- School

- Can you tell me about where you go to school?
- Do you bring your own lunch to school or do you eat school meals? Do you receive free/reduced lunch? Are there any issues?
 - Do you use your free/reduced breakfast at school?
- How many schools have you attended so far?
- Do you feel like you fit in at school? Are you able to be “current” with haircuts, clothes, shoes, etc.? Why or why not? How do you feel about it?
- Are there ever times when you leave school without permission? What are the reasons you would leave and what do you do?
- Are you taken out of school a lot for appointments, etc.? What is being scheduled during school hours that you must attend? Is it something that can be rescheduled?
- Do you take a bus to school, walk, or does someone take you? If not, how do you get to school? If you walk, how long is the walk and who walks with you? What about for after school activities?
- Do you have all the books, materials and supplies you need for school?
- Do you feel you are treated differently or unfairly sometimes because you are in foster care?
- If you could change something about school, what would it be?
- Do you feel that you have a problem or concern about school that nobody is listening to or doing anything about?

- Classes

- Which subject do you like the most? The least? Why?
- If you have switched schools more than once, do you feel that you are ahead or behind the others in your class?

- Is there anything you think that might be making it harder for you to learn? (Can you see the board, are you sleepy, do you feel there are too many distractions, do you have trouble writing down your thoughts, do your feelings interfere with what is going on in class?)
 - Are there subjects you have where you feel you need some extra help with that you are not getting?
 - How do you feel you are you doing in school?
 - If doing well – what do you think is helping you do well? If not doing well – what are some of the things causing you to not do as well as you want?
 - Have you received comments from teachers or adults about how you are doing in school? What did they say?
 - Who is your teacher? What is s/he like? Do you like him/her? What about other teachers you have?
 - Is there a teacher or someone at school that is especially nice or helpful to you?
- **Friends and School Activities**
 - Do you have any good friends at school? Who are they?
 - Are you able to talk to or visit with your friends from school outside of school? If not, why not?
 - Is the foster home preventing contact? -if so find out why.
 - Do you get to attend events the school has after school, in the evenings and on weekends? If not, why not?
 - Do you get to participate in clubs, sports and other activities, in or out of school?
 - Why not? Tell me about them.
 - When there is a performance or activity where families and friends come watch the students, do you go and does anybody come watch you?
 - Are you able to go on field trips - if not why not?
 - Are there things you can't participate in or do because of money?

- Are you being told you can't participate in activities/sports because you are new to the school?

- **After school**
 - Do you have someone who can tutor you if you need help with your homework and studies?
 - Can you stay after school if you need to for help with homework and studies?
 - Do you have problems doing work at home because you don't have computer/internet access?
 - Are there other issues or distractions that cause you to have problems doing your homework at home?

- **Future and other questions**
 - What do you want to be when you grow up? Do you know what you need to do to be that person?
 - Has someone talked to you about college or what options you have after high school? Who are those people?
 - Is there someone who encourages and supports you in what you want to do when you grow up? Who?
 - Do you know who to talk to when you have questions about what you want to be?
 - Do you know who to talk to when you need help with emotions you are having?
 - Do you know who to talk to when you are having miscellaneous questions, just things you want to know?
 - Do you know who to talk to when the person who is supposed to be helping you isn't?
 - Have you been in trouble at school in the last year? What happened?

- If you get in trouble in school, is someone from your home coming to school to meet with the principals/teachers?
- Did you have to go to Court for getting in trouble?

Middle School Age Foster Children:

- **School**

- Can you tell me about where you go to school?
- How many schools have you attended so far?
- What type of transportation do you have to and from school? What about for afterschool activities?
 - If you walk to school, how long is the walk? What is the route like?
- Do you bring your own lunch to school or do you eat school meals? Do you receive free/reduced lunch? Are there any issues?
 - Do you use your free/reduced breakfast at school?
- Do you feel like you fit in at school? Are you able to be “current” with haircuts, clothes, shoes, etc.? Why or why not? How do you feel about it?
- Do you miss a lot of classes voluntarily (skipping)? What causes you to want to skip school?
- Do you miss a lot of classes involuntarily? (Taken out for appointments, etc.) What is being scheduled during school that you must attend? Is it something that can be rescheduled or done differently?
- Do you have all the books, materials and supplies you need for school?
- Who are your teachers?
- Is there a teacher or someone at school that is especially nice or helpful to you?
- Is there a teacher or someone at school that you have issues with?
- Do you feel you are treated differently or unfairly sometimes because you are in foster care?
- If you could change something about school what would it be?
- Do you feel that you have a problem or concern about school that nobody is listening to or doing anything about?

- **Classes**

- What classes are you taking?
- Are you able to take the classes you want to take?
- Which class/ subject do you like the most? The least? Why?
- How do you feel you are you doing in school?
- How do others view you are doing in school? Have you received comments from teachers or adults about how you are doing in school?
- If doing well – what do you think is helping you do well? If not doing well – what are some of the things causing you to not do as well as you want?
- Is there anything you think that might be making it harder for you to learn? (Can you see the board, are you sleepy, do you feel there are too many distractions, do you have trouble writing down your thoughts, do your feelings interfere with what is going on in class?)
- Do you feel like you are in the right class? (Are you taking classes you already have taken or classes for which you have not had adequate preparation?)
- Are there classes/subjects where you feel you need some extra help that you are not getting?

- **Friends and school activities**

- Do you have any good friends at school? Who are they?
- Do you get to attend events the school has after school, in the evenings and on weekends? If not, why not?
- Do you get to participate in clubs, sports and other activities, in or out of school?
 - Why not or tell me about them.
- When there is a performance or activity where families and friends come watch the students, do you go and does anybody come watch you?
- Are you able to talk to or visit with your friends from school outside of school? If not, why not?

- Is the foster home preventing contact? -if so find out why.
 - Are you able to go on field trips - if not why not?
 - Are there things you can't participate in or do because of money?
 - Are you being told you can't participate in activities/sports because you are new to the school?

- **After school**
 - Do you have someone who can tutor you if you need help with your homework and studies?
 - Can you stay after school if you need to for help with homework and studies?
 - Do you have problems doing work at home because you don't have computer/internet access?
 - Are there other issues or distractions that cause you to have problems doing your homework at home?

- **Future and other questions**
 - What do you want to do as a career? Do you know what kind of education you need to do that?
 - Has someone talked to you about what options you have after high school? Who are those people?
 - Are you being encouraged and supported in your educational goals?
 - Do you know who to talk to when you have career/ educational questions?
 - Do you know who to talk to when you are having emotional concerns?
 - Do you know who to talk to when you are having miscellaneous questions, just things you want to know?
 - Do you know who to talk to when the person who is supposed to be helping you isn't?

- Have you been in trouble at school in the last year? What happened?
 - If you get in trouble in school, is someone from your home coming to school to meet with the principals/teachers?
 - Did you have to go to Court for getting in trouble?

High School Age Foster Youth:

- School

- Can you tell me about where you go to school?
- How many schools have you attended so far?
- Do you know what grade level you are considered? Is that where you should be – think you should be?
- If you are behind in credits/classes, have you been offered credit recovery? Have you talked to your counselor about what you can do to catch up – if so – what is the plan and how is it going?
- What type of transportation do you have to and from school? If someone drives you, who? What about for afterschool activities?
 - If you walk to school, how long is the walk?
- Do you have all the books, materials and supplies you need for school?
- Do you feel like you fit in at school? Are you able to be “current” with haircuts, clothes, shoes, etc.? Why or why not? How do you feel about it?
- Do you bring your own lunch to school or do you eat school meals? Do you receive free/reduced lunch? Are there any issues?
 - Do you use your free/reduced breakfast at school?
- Do you miss a lot of classes voluntarily (skipping)? What causes you to want to skip school?
- Do you miss a lot of classes involuntarily? (Taken out for appointments, etc.) What is being scheduled during school that you must attend? Is it something that can be rescheduled or done differently?
- Who are your teachers?
- Is there a teacher or someone at school that is especially nice or helpful to you?
- Is there a teacher or someone at school that you have issues with?
- Do you feel you are treated differently or unfairly sometimes because you are in foster care?

- If you could change something about school what would it be?
- Do you feel that you have a problem or concern about school that nobody is listening to or doing anything about?

- **Classes**
 - What classes are you taking?
 - Are you able to take the classes you want to take?
 - Which class/ subject do you like the most? The least? Why?
 - How do you feel you are you doing in school?
 - How do others view you are doing in school? Have you received comments from teachers or adults about how you are doing in school?
 - If doing well – what do you think is helping you do well? If not doing well – what are some of the things causing you to not do as well as you want?
 - Is there anything you think that might be making it harder for you to learn? (Can you see the board, are you sleepy, do you feel there are too many distractions, do you have trouble writing down your thoughts, do your feelings interfere with what is going on in class?)
 - Do you feel like you are in the right class (are you taking classes you already have taken or classes for which you have not had adequate preparation)?
 - Are there classes/subjects where you feel you need some extra help that you are not getting?

- **Friends and school activities**
 - Do you have any good friends at school? Who are they?
 - Do you get to attend events the school has after school, in the evenings and on weekends? If not, why not?
 - Do you get to participate in clubs, sports and other activities, in our out of school?

- Why not or tell me about them.
 - When there is a performance or activity where families and friends come watch the students, do you go and does anybody come watch you?
 - Are you able to talk to or visit with your friends from school outside of school? If not, why not?
 - Is the foster home preventing contact? -if so find out why.
 - Are you able to go on field trips - if not why not?
 - Are there things you can't participate in or do because of money?
 - Are you being told you can't participate in activities/sports because you are new to the school?
- **After School**
 - Do you have someone who can tutor you if you need help with your homework and studies?
 - Can you stay after school if you need to for help with homework and studies?
 - Do you have problems doing work at home because you don't have computer/internet access?
 - Are there other issues or distractions that cause you to have problems doing your homework at home?
- **Future and other questions**
 - What do you want to do as a career? Do you know what kind of education you need to do that?
 - Has someone talked to you about what options you have after high school? Who are those people?
 - Has someone talked to you about the benefits you receive when you transition out of foster care or about the option of staying in extended care?

- Are you being encouraged and supported in your educational goals?
- Do you know who to talk to when you have career/ educational questions?
- Do you know who to talk to when you are having emotional concerns?
- Do you know who to talk to when you are having miscellaneous questions, just things you want to know?
- Do you know who to talk to when the person who is supposed to be helping you isn't?
- Are you getting guidance about planning for your education after high school?
- For juniors and seniors – is someone helping you pick out and apply for college, fill out financial aid and ETV forms, register for ACT/SAT , look into housing at colleges, etc.?
- For seniors – are you getting to do the things other seniors do – class pictures, graduation gown, prom, graduation party? If not – who have you talked to about it and what have they said?
- Have you been in trouble at school in the last year? What happened?
 - If you get in trouble in school, is someone from your home coming to school to meet with the principals/teachers?
 - Did you have to go to Court for getting in trouble?