



Essentials for Youth Entering Foster Care

Entering foster care can be a challenging experience, but understanding your rights and available resources can help ease the transition. This section outlines information about what to expect, including establishing a safety support plan, managing personal belongings, and advocating for your physical and educational needs. It also highlights the importance of legal rights, mental health resources, and support networks, as well as opportunities for stipends and family connections. With these tools, you'll be empowered to navigate the foster care system and advocate for yourself as you move toward independence.

Emergency Contacts and Personal Documentation

It's essential to establish a safety support plan that includes key contacts and emergency phone numbers for caseworkers and foster parents. This plan should outline steps to take in an emergency and be coordinated with the guardian or caseworker to ensure clear guidance and a quick response. In addition, make sure to keep track of important documents and personal items, as well as maintain a sense of identity throughout your journey in foster care.

Managing Personal Belongings and Identity

Managing your personal belongings and understanding your identity is important for maintaining a sense of stability and self-esteem during your time in foster care. Ensure that your personal items are properly cared for and that you have a way to store or keep items that are meaningful to you.

- [Managing Personal Belongings and Identity](#)



Educational Support

You have the right to remain in the school you attended before entering foster care or any change in your living situation. The court must ensure your education remains stable by keeping you enrolled in your original school unless it is determined that remaining there is not in your best interests.

- [More about educational rights](#)

Prevention and Wellness Resources

Accessing mental health resources is vital for your well-being while in foster care. These resources can provide the support and tools necessary to thrive. Available options include counseling services, coping strategies, and healthy lifestyle resources. You should also be equipped to advocate for your own healthcare and understand your patient rights. Connect with essential services like community health centers and STD testing facilities.

For additional information on mental health and wellness for youth:

- [Prevention and Wellness Resources](#)
- **National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-8255**
Entering foster care can bring up difficult emotions. The National Suicide Prevention Hotline offers free, confidential support 24/7 for anyone feeling overwhelmed, hopeless, or in crisis. It's a safe place to talk to someone who can help you navigate tough feelings and provide resources to support your mental health.

Legal Rights and Advocacy

You have the right to have your rights explained to you, including a Bill of Rights. If you feel mistreated or that your rights are being violated, you can file a grievance or complaint with the placement or child welfare agency. It is also important for youth to attend all court hearings to stay informed and advocate for themselves.

- [Know your rights](#)
- [Bill of Rights and Grievances](#)
- [How to conduct yourself in court](#)
- [Teen Success Agreement](#)

How to Conduct Yourself in Court

This workshop is essential because it helps youth gain the skills and knowledge they need to navigate the courtroom confidently. They'll learn how to prepare, dress appropriately, and understand the court process. The workshop also teaches them about the roles of different people in the courtroom, such as judges and lawyers, and helps them know what support they are entitled to. It also gives youth the tools to advocate for themselves and understand the pros and cons of the decisions they may face during their court experience.

- [How to conduct yourself in court](#)

Support Groups and Peer Connections

Building connections with peers in similar situations is key to personal growth and resilience. The Pennsylvania Youth Advisory Board (YAB) offers valuable opportunities to engage with others who understand your experiences, helping foster a sense of belonging and empowerment as you navigate your journey in foster care.

- [Find Support Groups and Peer Networks](#)

Stipend Policy

You may be eligible to earn stipends! These stipend policy recommendations were created by the PA Youth Advisory Board to address the common needs of older youth, the specific services in each county, and the importance of consistent support. This initiative is aimed at benefiting young adults receiving Independent Living (IL) services throughout Pennsylvania.

- [Common Stipend Policy](#)

Family Connections

You have the right to services that help you stay with or reunite with your family. You also have the right to be in the least restrictive, most family-like setting possible. Efforts should be made to keep you together with your siblings. If you aren't placed with your siblings, you have the right to visit them (if they are also in care) at least once every two weeks.



The SWAN Voluntary Post-Adoption Contact Agreements (VPA) are essential to Family Connections as they help maintain relationships between adopted children and their biological families, particularly siblings. These agreements support the right of children to stay connected with family, even if they are not placed together, by formalizing post-adoption contact. This aligns with the goal of keeping children in the least restrictive, most family-like setting, promoting emotional well-being and stability, and ensuring family connections are preserved after adoption.

- [SWAN's Voluntary Post-Adoption Contact Agreements](#)
- [Know Your Rights Brochure](#)

National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

The **National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)** gives youth a voice in how **Independent Living Programs** are run. This survey tracks how well PA has served older youth in care and helps measure how PA is helping foster youth prepare for adulthood. Make sure to complete the NYTD survey when contacted. You may be notified by email, phone call, or regular mail. Youth who complete the survey will receive a gift card for their participation!

- [More about NYTD](#)

Teen Parents in Care

If you are a teen parent in foster care, additional support is available. Efforts should be made to keep you and your child with your family or place you in the most family-like setting possible. As a teen parent, you are entitled to receive both Independent Living (IL) services and parenting support to help you care for your child. This includes parenting instruction, financial support, guidance on child development, and assistance in finding childcare so you can attend school, work, or engage in other necessary activities.

- [Teen Parents Support Information](#)

