

NAVIGATING FOSTER CARE AS AN OLDER YOUTH

A YAB WELCOME GUIDE



YAB
PA
YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD


HELLO,

Your fellow peers want you to know we have traveled this road before you. We know what it's like to experience foster care. We want you to know that you are not alone, and many of us share your story. Don't give up; the beginning is always the hardest.

SINCERELY,

THE PENNSYLVANIA YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD





“No matter what age you are, you deserve a loving family and permanency. Everyone needs the love and support of family.”

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- **What to Expect While in Care**
- **Independent Living Services**
- **Know Your Rights Reference Guide**
- **PA Youth Advisory Board (YAB)**
- **Important Words and Terminology**
- **Important Resources**

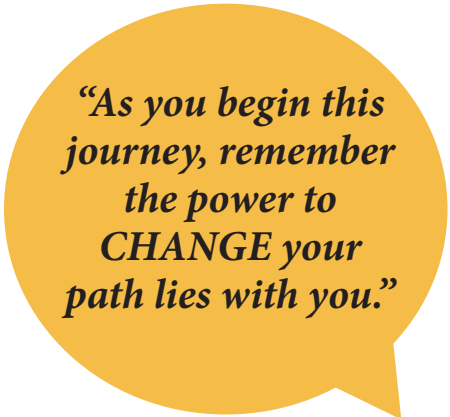


WHAT TO EXPECT WHILE IN CARE:

When first entering foster care, it can be overwhelming and somewhat of a culture shock. Here are some insights that will help you throughout your journey. Don't be afraid to advocate for yourself!

MEETING WITH YOUR LAWYER

- You SHOULD meet with your lawyer (Guardian Ad Litem) and express your preferences on with whom you want to live with, where you want to live, and your plans after you leave foster care.
- It's important to communicate with your caseworker and the courts which individuals are your support system and are important to you. That person could be a teacher, coach, mentor, or anyone that you rely on for support.



*“As you begin this journey, remember the power to **CHANGE** your path lies with you.”*

GRIEVANCE POLICY

A Grievance Policy is a formal way that an individual can raise a problem, complaint, or concerns about their treatment, rights, or experiences within the system.

- Every youth in care MUST receive a grievance policy of both the County Children & Youth Agency and the private provider agency. This policy MUST be explained to you in a manner that is easily understandable.

DIGNITY AND RESPECT

- You MUST be treated with dignity and respect, without facing discrimination based on race, religion, disability, national origin, or gender. It's also important to be placed in a safe and protective environment with people who care about you.

If you feel that you are treated unfairly, PLEASE talk to your Guardian Ad Litem, judge, caseworker, or a trusted adult.

EDUCATION

Getting a good education is important to your future! Sometimes when you are in foster care, you face barriers to educational success. Remember that:

- You have a right to stay in the school you attended before you entered placement or changed your living placement.
- You have the right to participate in age-appropriate activities to the same extent as your peers who are not in foster care.
- The school does NOT need to know why you are in foster care. Whether or not you want to share more information about your circumstances and who you share it with is up to you.
- You don't have to attend an on-grounds school if you are placed at a group home or any residential facility, with the exception of:
 - a judge requiring you to go to the on-ground school or
 - you are placed in the on-grounds school based on your Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

“Good things come to those who believe, better things come to those who are patient, and the best things comes to those who don't give up.”

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES (IL)

IL services provide essential tools, resources, and funding to help you achieve your DREAMS! Some key IL services you can receive are help with career and education planning, budgeting, or daily living skills. While all youth in foster care 14 or older are eligible for IL services, these services are voluntary.

The PA Youth Advisory Board STRONGLY recommends that youth take advantage of all IL services available to them.



KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

One of the most important things to know about coming into care is that you have rights! Knowing your rights helps you to increase your knowledge of the system and increases your ability to advocate for yourself. While this is not the full Know Your Rights manual (which you will receive), this is a quick reference guide to the rights your peers believe are important for you to know.



PENNSYLVANIA YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD (YAB)

The Youth Advisory Board (YAB) provides older youth ages 14 – 23 a platform to share their lived experience helping to improve services and policies for their peers. For more information about YAB, please follow the link to find your nearest Youth Advisory Board.

“At the end of your journey, your story is one you can use to change the future of the foster system. Your struggles will become your triumph. Just know through the journey ahead you are never alone.”

“This isn’t the end of your story! Nurture your dreams, learn from challenges, and embrace newfound skills. Every experience is a chance for growth and self-discovery. Your unfolding story offers opportunities for exploration and success. Consider this chapter in your life a steppingstone to a fulfilling future.”

IMPORTANT WORDS AND TERMINOLOGY

Below is a brief list of important terms to know. Having this knowledge will allow you to have meaningful conversations that you understand with your caseworkers, advocates, and Guardian Ad Litem.

Guardian Ad Litem: Sometimes called or worded GAL, this is the lawyer whose job it is to represent and support you in court. Even though they speak on your behalf, remember that you also have the right to speak in court.

Advocate: This person helps to fight for and support you to ensure your best interests are taken into account.

Foster Parent/Family: An adult or family that provides a temporary and supportive home for youth who cannot live with their biological parents.

Kinship care: This term means a friend or family member who takes the place of a foster parent.

Independent Living Services (IL): Services designed for youth ages 14 – 23 to help educate them on life skills such as employment, higher education, daily life skills, and more. The overall goal is to help you become a successful adult as you transition out of foster care.

Permanency: The place you call home. It does not have to be with your parents, but a place you choose that is supportive of you and safe.

Transition plan: Lays out and defines the goals that will allow you to successfully exit out of care.

Reunification: This should always be the first goal. It means going and staying home with your birth parents, or family you were removed from.

YAB: The Youth Advisory Board is youth-led and staff-supported. These youth push for change by advocating for what they feel is right by sharing their lived experiences.

IMPORTANT RESOURCES

The Juvenile Law Center has a detailed guide called “Know Your Rights,” which explains the rights you have while you’re in the Foster Care System. Check out the complete Know Your Rights Guide provided by the Juvenile Law Center below.

- <https://jlc.org/resources/know-your-rights-guide-chapter-1-rights-related-family-and-permanency>

Explore the Pennsylvania Youth Advisory website for a wealth of resources to support you. Whether you need assistance with strategic sharing, money management, understanding your rights, or navigating permanency issues, this website offers a range of valuable resources to help you on your journey to becoming a successful adult.



- <https://www.payab.pitt.edu/>

**REMEMBER: YOUR VOICE MATTERS,
AND YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO HAVE
YOUR VOICE HEARD.**



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