



Guide for Teens in Out-of-Home Care

HELPFUL INFORMATION
AND
ANSWERS
TO FREQUENTLY
ASKED QUESTIONS



Rhode Island Department of
Children, Youth & Families

If you need an interpreter because you don't speak the same language as your caseworker, you can request one for free.

If you have a disability, your caseworker must ensure reasonable accommodations are made to help you participate in DCYF services.

Si necesitas un intérprete porque no hablas el mismo idioma que tu trabajador social, puedes solicitarlo de forma gratuita.

Si tu identificas que tienes una discapacidad, tu trabajador social debe asegurarse de que se hagan adaptaciones razonables para ayudarte a participar en los servicios del DCYF.

What is DCYF?

DCYF stands for the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families. DCYF is a state agency responsible for helping you and your family when there are concerns for your safety at home. With your help, DCYF workers will find out what you and your family need to be safe and healthy and connect you and your family to the help you need to become safe and healthy. DCYF workers must treat you and your family with respect. DCYF workers help families from all backgrounds, and value you and your opinions about what will make your family safe and healthy.

We understand this is a stressful time for you. The purpose of this booklet is to answer some of your questions, give you information about what to expect while you are involved with DCYF, and provide you with important contact information. If you have any additional questions, don't hesitate to talk to the caseworker assigned to you and your family.

CONTACT INFORMATION

DCYF Family Services Unit (FSU)

Caseworker's Name: _____

Phone: _____

Supervisor's Name: _____

Phone: _____

Office Address: _____

Hours: Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. – 4 p.m.

Phone: _____

24 Hour Hotline: 1 (800) RI CHILD
1 (800) 742-4453

What is out-of-home care?

Out-of-home care is a living situation made necessary when a youth is temporarily removed from home and placed outside of their family's home. Placement in a foster home, kinship care home, group home or in a residential treatment facility are considered out-of-home care.

Why am I in out-of-home care?

Youth are placed outside of their homes for many reasons. It could be due to physical, emotional, or sexual abuse; neglect; a parent(s) not able to care for their youth or keep them safe; a family crisis; or a conflict between a youth and their parent(s), or sibling(s). Other reasons could include a parent(s) voluntarily placing their youth in out-of-home care because they cannot meet their youth's needs; or a judge deciding a youth needs to be placed out-of-home to give the family time to make the changes needed for a youth to return home safely.

Where will I go to school?

If it is best for you to stay in the school you attended before you were placed in out-of-home care, DCYF works with school leaders to make every effort to make sure you can stay in the same school. Some of the things they consider are:

- Do you want to stay in your old school?
- Are there any safety issues?
- Do you have brothers or sisters in the school?
- How far away is the old school from your new placement?
- How long have you been going to the school?
- Are you involved in school activities?
- Are you close with teachers, staff, and other students?
- Can a new school provide the services you need?

Are you familiar with FosterClub?

It is a national network for young people in foster care, and was created for – and is driven by – young people who experience foster care.

www.fosterclub.org

What can I expect from DCYF?

You and your family will be assigned a caseworker who will be your “go-to” person while you are involved with DCYF.

Your caseworker:

- makes every effort to keep you connected to family by placing you with your sibling(s) (if you have any) whenever it is possible, safe, and appropriate. And if not possible, you can expect to see your sibling(s) at least once a month, unless a judge says you cannot.
- is professionally trained to help you and your family make decisions for your protection and safety.
- interacts with you, your parent(s), and other people in your life.
- meets with you privately, monthly and in-person, to discuss:
 - how you are doing in placement, and at school
 - how/if family visits are going
 - case progress
 - any concerns you may have
 - and provide you with any necessary information, and
 - recent and up-coming medical, dental, and counseling appointments.
- is available to you by phone and in-person. You can always call your caseworker!
- is in regular contact with your out-of-home placement provider, at least monthly.
- arranges contact between you and your family, including your siblings. Contact may include “family time,” phone calls, and letters.
- connects you with services to help you meet your needs.
- provides fair treatment, whatever your gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religion, national origin, disability, or medical needs.

What can my family expect?

Your family can expect regular visitation, called “family time,” which is decided by your caseworker and your family, unless a Family Court judge determines your visitation plan. If you have sibling(s), a sibling visitation plan is also created, considering any safety concerns. Phone calls, letters, and e-mail may also be considered part of the plan.

Your parent(s) can attend medical appointments, school meetings and any other meetings about you, unless a judge feels it is not safe. Your caseworker has regular contact with your parent(s), and they are involved in service planning (*see page 5.*)

What can I expect in out-of-home placement?

You can expect to live in a safe place, such as a DCYF licensed foster home, group home, or residential treatment facility. Foster parents, group home staff and residential staff are trained to meet the needs of youth in out-of-home care, to make sure you receive the best care.

You can expect to live free of physical or verbal punishment in a home where you will not get into trouble for telling people that your rights or safety are not being protected or that you do not feel safe.

You can expect to live in a place where your personal needs are met such as being provided with clean clothes, nutritious food, safe transportation, and an allowance.

You can expect to live with caretakers who keep you safe and are respectful of your thoughts and feelings. They make sure you get necessary medical, dental, and mental health care and help make sure you keep connected to your family, culture, and heritage.

You can expect to be able to do things other kids do like have a quiet place to do your homework, participate in school events, extracurricular and recreational opportunities, visit with friends, get haircuts, pursue your own interests, have safe and age-appropriate employment, etc.

If you ever have any concerns about your living situation, be sure to let your caseworker know!

How long will I have to live in out-of-home placement?

This is something that cannot be predicted because every youth and family's situation is different. DCYF will work with you and your family to get you back home as soon as you can return home safely. This will start by creating a service plan.

A service plan is a plan of action with a goal. This plan of action lists the tasks/behavior changes needing to happen to achieve the goal.

The goal for your first plan will probably be "reunification." The tasks/behavior changes in your service plan will center on activities and services that when completed, will help your family make the necessary changes so you can go back home safely. The services address the reason why you came into out-of-home care, and maybe other concerns.

Your caseworker will speak with you, your family, and service providers. Two supportive adults *of your choice* (if you would like, approved by your caseworker) may be involved. If it is possible, your caseworker may hold a "team meeting" to get your "team" together to talk about what family issues need to be addressed, and what services are available in your community to help your family address them. Based on that, your team creates your service plan. Your input is needed as you may have choices as to services or service providers. Your plan considers your culture, identity, and ethnicity.

DCYF offers case management services and connects you to services directly or through community agencies. The types of services often received by families include individual counseling, family counseling, mental health treatment, and substance use treatment. Your caseworker will go over the plan with you to make sure you understand everything in it and will ask you to sign it. Signing your plan does not mean you agree with everything in it, it means you had the chance to be involved in creating it and you received a copy.

Anyone who asks you to fill out or sign any paper should explain it to you first, so you understand what you are signing and why you are being asked to sign it.

What is the Transition to Adulthood Plan (TAP)?

When you turn 14, your caseworker will start having conversations with you about your future – transitioning from foster care to living independently as an adult. You should start thinking about the skills you already have and what you need to learn. Can you cook a basic meal? Go grocery shopping with a budget? Manage money? Other things to start thinking about might be what your next step in life will be: whether you want to join the workforce, continue your education, learn a trade, join the military, or whatever it is you think you might want to do with your life. Whatever your goal is, your caseworker will help you plan activities for your plan to help you prepare to achieve your goal. You may choose two adults from your service planning team to work with you on your Transition to Adulthood Plan (TAP.) The TAP will become part of your service plan.

There is quite a lot to know to become an independent person, and your caseworker will be there to guide you. The Youth Development Program can help you with independent living skills, (*see pages 8-9*) such as job training, how to become employed, how to manage and save money, finding a place to live, taking charge of your health care, and many other things.

Can I disagree with my service plan?

Yes. You have the right to appeal the plan being put into action. Your caseworker assists you with starting the appeal process by providing at a minimum: DCYF form #016, formal Request for Hearing; instructions for completing the form; and guidance as your appeal goes through the appeal process.



Me and my brother are over age 14. What do we need to know?

You will need to know basic information and have the basic tools to live in the world as an adult. You will also need basic information to be able to live as a healthy adult. Physically, you are in the process of developing into an adult, and you need to know how to take care of your health.

You need to have the basic tools to live successfully as an adult. Your caseworker provides you with info on how to:

- obtain a Social Security card
- obtain job skills
- obtain a work permit
- look for a job
- use public transportation (if necessary)
- request a mentor
- learn independent living skills
- manage your money
- how to find housing
- find info on PSAT/SAT prep
- apply to college
- register to vote, and
- register with the Selective Service (for males only)

See page 8 for information on the Youth Development Program.

Your caseworker provides you with basic information on these health and wellness topics, and more. Be sure to ask questions!

- sex education
- safe & healthy relationships
- STD testing
- birth control
- family planning
- gynecological services and options
- pregnancy and parenting
- reproductive care
- mental health
- smoking cessation
- substance use
- nutrition
- exercise

If you need additional information or need to schedule an appointment with a doctor, contact your caseworker.



What is the Youth Development Program?

Services offered through the Youth Development Program help youth prepare to live life as adults and out of DCYF care by offering services in life skills. Participation in these services is recommended and is voluntary.

Mentor Program, for youth ages 16-20

The goal of mentoring is to provide youth with a mentor, a permanent adult connection, by matching youth with an adult from the community. Mentors meet with youth regularly and hopefully will develop a trusting long-term relationship with the youth.

Mentors

- listen to your concerns
- provide you with support and encouragement
- advise you on life issues
- help you develop problem solving skills
- encourage you to advocate for yourself
- encourage you to rely on yourself, and
- are interested in seeing you become a successful adult



Teen Grant Program

This program pays activities. Program goals are to promote a “normal” life for you while living in out-of-home care; increase self-esteem; and to help you grow towards independence. All types of activities are considered. The most you can receive is \$300 in a 12-month period. Speak to your caseworker for an application.

Financial Literacy and Vocational Training

You will learn how to:

- manage money and increase savings
- use financial resources to build financial security
- explore careers and prepare for a career
- search for a job
- present yourself in a job interview

Matched Savings Program

The matched savings program can help you save for things needed in the short term, and help you learn the importance of saving for the long term. Completion of a financial literacy program is required to take part in the matched savings program.

You will learn how to open a bank account and the importance of saving. For every dollar you save, the program will match your savings dollar for dollar. That means if you save \$1, the program will add \$1 to your account. If you save \$1,000, the program will add \$1,000. Your savings can help you pay for approved purchases like a car, home goods, job training, and school expenses.

SPEAK Advisory Board, for youth ages 16-24

Joining the state-wide SPEAK Advisory Board is a chance for you to provide feedback about your experiences in foster care, to help make improvements in the DCYF system. This is also a chance for personal development, to learn public speaking skills, advocacy skills, social skills, and learn how organizations work. Board members receive payment for their time and expertise.

When will my case close?

Your caseworker discusses case closing with you and your family during the service planning process as positive changes are being made and case plan goals are being achieved. Planning for case closing involves your caseworker, you, family members, and other supportive people.

Family Court also has a role to play. A judge looks at progress made and checks to see if the necessary changes have been made so you can return to a safe home. A judge ultimately decides when the case closes. Cases also close when other permanency goals, like guardianship and adoption, are achieved.

For youth aged 18 and older: If you are leaving foster care because you are turning 18 years of age, (or up to age 21 if having emotional or developmental challenges; or you're enrolled in VEC) you must receive the following documents upon discharge from DCYF (unless you have been in care for less than six-months)

- ❑ an official or certified copy of your United States birth certificate
- ❑ a Social Security card, issued by the Commissioner of Social Security
- ❑ health insurance information
- ❑ a copy of your education records
- ❑ proof of foster care form
- ❑ a driver's license or state issued identification card that meets the requirements of the REAL ID Act of 2005



How do I advocate for myself?

DO's

- ✓ Know that you have a right to ask for help!
- ✓ Ask for help from an adult who you trust, like a teacher, foster parent, mentor, or friend.
- ✓ Know you have a voice in decisions made about you even though it does not always seem like it. Don't be afraid to SPEAK UP!
- ✓ Be straightforward.
- ✓ Be clear about what is happening, what you need, and how you feel.
- ✓ Brainstorm different solutions and back-up plans.
- ✓ Be ready to NEGOTIATE.

DON'Ts

- ✗ Don't think you don't have a voice.
- ✗ Don't hesitate to ask for help.
- ✗ Don't feel like you are bothering people.
- ✗ Don't think you have to go through this by yourself.
- ✗ Don't think that it's too late.
- ✗ Don't start without thinking things through.
- ✗ Don't use sarcasm, degrading language, swear, or call people names.
- ✗ Don't prejudge others.
- ✗ Don't give up.
- ✗ NEVER GIVE UP!

"Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time."

Thomas Edison

Other Important Contacts

<i>Attorney or GAL</i>	
Name	
Phone Number	
E-mail	
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Notes

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Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth & Families, 2024

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