



DISTRICT of COLUMBIA

BILL of RIGHTS

for Children and Youth in Foster Care





This is an explanation of your rights while you are in foster care in the District of Columbia. The District has laws that say you have these rights. Under these laws, the DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) must make sure you get a copy of these rights. If you lose this copy and want another one, ask your social worker or guardian *ad litem*. To see this version of your rights and the actual laws online, go to cfsa.dc.gov and click on the For Youth tab at the top of the home page.

HOW I'M TREATED

You have a right to fair treatment and respect. No one may scare, bully, or abuse you. No one may punish you with hitting or other violence. No one may refuse to help you or disrespect you because of your race, color, religion, appearance, sexual orientation, or disability.

Adults must take good care of you. They need to watch out for you and help you think and act in positive ways. They should support you in doing things you like to do. They need to talk to you in language you understand.

You have a right to speak up any time you are upset about where you live, how people treat you, or the help you're getting. You have a right to know how to voice your concerns to the agency serving you. When you bring up a concern, people on your team and at the agency must listen. They must work to take care of your concern as soon as possible. No one is allowed to punish you for speaking up.

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UNHAPPY WITH CHILD WELFARE SERVICES OR DECISIONS? HERE'S WHAT TO DO . . .

TALK TO YOUR SERVICE TEAM FIRST

- ▶ Talk to your social worker. Be clear about your concerns.
- ▶ Talk to others in the chain of command: your social worker's supervisor, program manager, or administrator. (When you call a CFSA social worker and get voicemail, you can find out the supervisor's name and telephone number from the voicemail message.)
- ▶ Talk to your guardian *ad litem* or others on your service team. Be clear about your concerns. Ask for their help in speaking up.

TALK TO 'YO BUD'

- ▶ If you are at least 14 years old and have taken all the steps above without success, the CFSA Youth Ombudsman (a.k.a. Yo Bud) can help. Living arrangements, rights, and fair treatment are some of the concerns Yo Bud can look into.
- ▶ To reach Yo Bud, call 1-855-874-3273, email yo.bud@dc.gov, or text 202-246-9364.

MY TEAM

Your service team includes all the people working on your case. You have a right to know how to reach your social worker, guardian *ad litem*, and others on your team.

Your social worker should visit you regularly. You should be able to count on your social worker to answer your calls and other messages within a reasonable time.

Your team needs to tell you when the court has a hearing about you. They need to support you in going to your court hearings if you want to.

MY PERSONAL INFORMATION AND PRIVACY

You have a right to know why you are in foster care. You should know the agency and people in charge of your case (your team). They need to tell you what choices they're making for you. When you are old enough, they should invite you to meetings so you can help make the choices. Information about you is private. People on your team must not share what they know about you with outsiders.

As long as you follow the rules where you live, you can keep your personal belongings private. You can also make phone calls and use a computer in private.

Thirty days before you leave foster care at age 18 or older, you get important personal papers:

- ▶ Social security card,
- ▶ Identification card,
- ▶ Birth certificate,
- ▶ Immigration records (if you have any),
- ▶ Health records and medical insurance information, and
- ▶ Education records.

If you leave before age 18, your social worker gives these papers to your guardian *ad litem* or legal guardian.

WHERE I LIVE WHILE I'M IN CARE

While in foster care, you have a right to live in a safe, clean place. You should be able to keep going to the same school (unless you have a special situation). Your team must make sure you have a safe way to get to and from places you need to go, such as:

- ▶ School,
- ▶ Activities after school,
- ▶ Seeing a doctor,
- ▶ Your job,
- ▶ Visiting your family, and
- ▶ Other events you want or need to attend.

You have a right to your own religious beliefs. You may go to religious services you want to attend. You don't have to go to religious services against your beliefs.

Your foster family should help you feel comfortable. Including you in family activities is one way for them to do that.

MY FAMILY

You have the right to stay in touch with your family and other people important to you. You should have regular visits and be able to talk by phone or email. Whenever possible, you should live with your brothers and/or sisters while in care.

No one may punish you by keeping you from staying in touch with your family, other people important to you, or your service team. If you live in a group home, your family can get permission to talk to the group home staff. They may ask questions, and the group home staff should answer as soon as possible.

You will have these rights regarding your family unless your service team believes certain contacts are unsafe or harmful. Then you will have to stay within some limits. Keeping you safe has to come first.

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MY HEALTH

You have a right to good, regular care from a doctor, dentist, and eye doctor. Your team must make sure you get counseling or help for alcohol or drug use if you need it. You should speak up about what you need to stay healthy. You can ask doctors treating you to explain about your health—and you can talk to them about what you want.

You have a right to healthy food. If you don't eat some foods for religious, health, or other reasons, adults should make meals you can eat. Adults should make sure you always have your own soap, toothpaste, and other personal-care items to stay clean and healthy.

MY BELONGINGS AND MONEY

You have a right to bring clothes and other personal belongings into foster care. You can take all your belongings if you move around and when you leave care.

While in care, adults must make sure you have enough clothes and shoes for each season. This includes uniforms for school or work if you need them. You have the right to make some choices about what you wear.

Knowing how to handle money is important. Your team will help you open a savings account and learn how to use it. When you reach age 14, the team will help you check your personal credit report once a year. The risk of identity theft is real, so you want to make sure your credit report is right. The team will help you fix any problems you find.



MY FUTURE

An important part of growing up is getting ready for adulthood. You need a basic education, kindergarten through high school. Your team must make sure you're enrolled in school. They should help you with anything you need to go to school, learn, and graduate. They should support you in taking part in sports, clubs, or other school activities if you want to. Your social worker should help you get a driver's license or state ID card.

If you are going to age out of care, your team will work with you to write a transition plan. In it, you build a picture of how you will take care of yourself after foster care. You'll spell out what you have to do now to get ready and how your team will help.

For example, you'll choose what to do after high school—maybe college, special training, or a job. Your team should make every effort to help you meet your goals.

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LEGAL CITATIONS

This Bill of Rights is based on amendments to the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations, Title 29, PUBLIC WELFARE:

- ▶ Chapter 60, FOSTER HOMES, Section 6004.1
- ▶ Chapter 62, LICENSING OF YOUTH SHELTERS, RUNAWAY SHELTERS, EMERGENCY CARE FACILITIES, AND YOUTH GROUP HOMES, Section 6203
- ▶ Chapter 63, INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS, Section 6303.1





DC Child and Family Services Agency
200 I St SE, Washington, DC 20003



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fosterdckids.org | adoptdckids.org



202.442.6100



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