

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
Child and Family Services Agency



Administrative Issuance: CFSA-10-6

TO: All CFSA and Contracted Agency Staff

FROM: Roque R. Gerald, Psy.D.
Director

DATE: September 3, 2010

RE: Bill of Rights for Youth in Care

As a basic tenet of the Child and Family Services Agency's (CFSA) [Practice Model](#), teaming with youth is one of CFSA's priority commitments. To this end, the Agency incorporates the suggestions and recommendations of youth into program development and planning for the future direction of the Agency.

CFSA acknowledges its role as "surrogate parents" for the youth in its care, and further commits to providing youth with the necessary resources to develop their natural talents, skill sets, and personality strengths such that they may develop into confident, happy, and self-sustaining adult citizens of the District of Columbia. As is the case with all citizens, the youth in CFSA's care have certain inherent rights that are protected throughout the duration of their experience in the District's child welfare system. These rights are set forth in the attached *Bill of Rights for Youth in Care* (hereafter referred to as the *Youth Bill of Rights* or the *Bill*).

This administrative issuance provides guidance for the use and enforcement of the *Youth Bill of Rights*.

If you have any questions regarding this issuance, please contact the Office of the Director.

General Considerations

Drafted by representatives of the Director's Youth Advisory Board, the *Youth Bill of Rights* ultimately serves to protect the rights of safety, permanency, and well-being for each youth in care. All CFSA and private agency social workers are responsible for reviewing and familiarizing themselves with the document. The rights set forth in the *Bill* shall be considered applicable "in spirit" to every child on a social worker's caseload, regardless of the child's age or level of comprehension.

Procedures

1. Every CFSA and private agency social worker assigned to a case involving youth aged 13 to 21 shall download a copy of the *Youth Bill of Rights* from either the Intra- or Internet, and provide a copy to the youth at their initial meeting, and when applicable, the youth's parent, foster parent or provider.
2. The youth shall have the option of discussing the document with the social worker alone, with other individuals of interest, or in a team meeting.
3. The social worker shall be responsible for answering any questions or concerns.
4. Upon the initial review with the social worker and any other team member chosen by the youth, all parties selected by the youth shall sign the *Bill*, and commit to its enforcement.

5. The youth shall have the option throughout the life of his or her case to openly discuss the *Youth Bill of Rights* (e.g., during a team meeting) for the purpose of modifying, amending, and/or adding to the list of existing rights. In such cases, all relevant parties shall sign the amended *Bill*.
6. In the event that a youth experiences *any real or perceived* violation of his or her rights as set forth in the document, that youth shall have the right to address the violation in a team meeting, or in private with his or her social worker.
7. The youth shall have the option of requesting that all team members participate in a mediation-style meeting to resolve the circumstances that led to the violation.
8. If appropriate and as determined by the team, the individual responsible for the violation shall be required to verbally apologize to the youth, to review the *Youth Bill of Rights* in community with the other team members, and to make a “statement of reassurance” that the violation will not reoccur.
9. Team members shall reinforce the integrity of the *Youth Bill of Rights* with one another and with the youth.

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Bill of Rights for Youth in Care

Created by the CFSA Director's Youth Advisory Board

As a youth in the foster care system, I am guaranteed the following general rights:

- I. To have my social worker, guardian *ad litem* (GAL), or other child welfare professional discuss my rights with me and ensure I understand.
- II. To be respected, heard, and cherished during my time in foster care. I also have the responsibility to listen to, hear, and respect the members of my support team.
- III. To have daily access to adequate food, shelter, clothing, and hygienic resources.
- IV. To know and understand why I came into foster care and why I am still in foster care.
- V. To express my beliefs, customs, and values with the people where I live. I have the right to have my caregiver listen to and respect my beliefs, customs, and values.
- VI. To protect my personal space and privacy in any foster care placement when doing so does not threaten the personal safety and well-being of my caregiver, others, or myself.
- VII. To access medical services that support my health and well-being. I also have the right to participate in making decisions about my health, including choosing which services and providers will best meet my health needs and goals.

I am guaranteed the following rights that support information sharing and promote my personal growth:

- I. To seek information and resources to support my personal growth and development and to have opportunities to demonstrate that I am responsible, self-directed, and engaged.
- II. To have access to information about myself and to get timely, respectful answers to questions about choices or services from my social worker, caregiver, GAL, or other members of the support team involved in my life.
- III. To have my social worker communicate with me in a way that is consistently supportive and to have my social worker return my phone calls and check in with me regularly.
- IV. To have a social worker who asks me about and listens to my needs and goals and who acts proactively to address my needs and support my goals.
- V. To engage in opportunities that promote my growth and overall well-being, including educational, sports, and other extra-curricular activities.

- VI. To have my support team help me create a learning plan to ensure I learn basic skills.
- VII. To have access to comprehensive skill development opportunities, including quality life skills training and educational and vocational programs.
- VIII. To be included in real-time planning for and decision making about my life regardless of my permanency goal and to attend all meetings and court hearings about me.
- IX. To request meetings that include all members of my support team, to have assistance in setting up these meetings, and to make decisions during these meetings.
- X. To attend and lead my own team meetings and transition planning meetings.
- XI. To have professional support for finding housing and referrals to community resources that will support my stability.
- XII. To have access to current contact information for all child welfare staff who may answer my questions and support my personal development.
- XIII. To have access to resources that support successful transition to a new placement and/or opportunity, such as college.
- XIV. To have support from adults on my team in planning for independence and preparing to succeed after I leave foster care.
- XV. To be treated, and to have my belongings treated, with dignity and respect when I move from one placement to another.

I am guaranteed the following rights that support positive relationships:

- I. To have as much assistance as I need in developing relationships and resources that support me during and after foster care. This includes the right to support from my team in identifying and developing mentoring and life-long supportive relationships.
- II. To have support and assistance in building relationships with my relatives, foster parents, and others that could lead to legal permanence or life-long connections.
- III. To maintain or develop healthy relationships with my siblings, biological family, and extended kin while I am in care.
- IV. To honest conversations about changes in or the end of key relationships, including those with my biological and foster families, GAL, social worker, mentor, and others important to me.
- V. To have my support team treat me with respect and dignity while I am in and as I prepare to leave foster care.
- VI. To communicate directly with my social worker's supervisor and to ask for assistance if I think my rights, as stated in this document, have been violated.

Signature and Attestation

We agree to respect and enforce the integrity of this document, and to guarantee each of the stated rights.

Signature of the Social Worker

Signature of the Parent or Caregiver

Signature of the Foster Parent (if applicable)

Signature of the Youth

Signature of any other team member selected by the youth

Date