



Answers...

A HANDBOOK

*for youth
by youth
in foster care*

This handbook was created by the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT).

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The Project is a collaborative program of the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine and the Maine Department of Health and Human Services

How to use this book

This handbook was originally written for you by a team of 22 youths in foster care who came together for a two-day summit (fancy name for a big meeting). The purpose of the summit was to provide youth in foster care with a way to help other youth in foster care understand the system. This group of youth became the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT). This handbook has been continually updated and revised by the Youth Leadership Advisory Team.

This handbook addresses many of the issues and questions that you may have about the foster care system. It is meant to be a guide and source of information.

The book can be used in many different ways. You can read the whole book, or you can look up the answers to questions you have right now. Jumping around in the book to read about things that interest you is okay too. The Table of Contents will help get you started.

If you have any questions or need additional information, please talk to your caseworker, Youth Transition Specialist, care provider, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), Guardian Ad Litem, mentor, or another adult you trust.

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What is foster care?



Foster care is when you are removed from your family's home because it is not safe for you to be there anymore. A Judge of the District Court can place you in the custody of the Department of Health and Human Services (foster care). The reason you are placed in foster care is to keep you safe while your family has an opportunity to make positive changes.

Youth come into care for many reasons:

- Physical, sexual, and/or emotional abuse or neglect
- Family crisis or conflict
- Voluntary placement by parents or care providers
- Parents or care providers are not able to keep you safe
- Parents or care providers cannot control a youth's behavior

Always remember that you were not removed from your home because of something you did.

Being in foster care doesn't mean you have to live in a foster home, although that is an option. Other placements include a relative's home, friend's home, residential placement, or shelter.

You may have many questions about the rules and routines of your placement. Ask your care provider to go over them with you. If you have more questions or concerns or are uncomfortable, be sure to speak with a person you trust.

Being removed from your home and placed somewhere new can bring up a lot of feelings. You may feel angry, confused, sad, afraid, relieved and/or glad. It is important to talk to a person you trust about your feelings. All of your feelings are okay.

It's OK to be mad and sad. It's how you deal with it that counts."

Muriel G., age 17



**Sitting in the corner alone and afraid
trying to hold to hope for the life I've made.
It's so hard to smile while holding back tears.**

**But if you dig down deep somewhere in your soul,
you will find the strength to fill in the empty hole.**

**It might take time, long hours of pain
But nothing to lose, and everything to gain.**

Chanthy L., age 17

What is Confidentiality?

Confidentiality means that information about you and your situation is private.



Some confidential information may be shared with your care provider, family team, and the court.

You can talk to your caseworker about what information is being shared. All professionals, including your care provider, must keep the information that is given to them confidential.

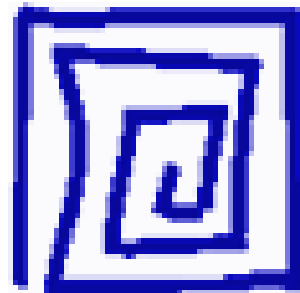
If you are over 18, your consent is needed to release any information about you. If consent forms are confusing, ask your worker or someone else whom you trust to help explain them.

Friends or other people may ask why you are no longer living with your family. Remember, it is your decision whether or not to share this information. These questions may be difficult to answer.

“When things aren’t working the way you want them to, don’t give up and run away. Reach for something better.”

Lizz M., age 17

It may help to talk with your caseworker, care provider, resource parent, or other adults you trust so you can answer questions in a way that helps you feel comfortable and safe.



...Answers for youth in care, by youth in care

Where will I live?

Here are a few descriptions of different kinds of placements where youth in foster care might live. Talk with your caseworker, Guardian ad Litem (GAL) or another person that you trust about any questions, hopes or concerns that you might have with placement options that are being considered for you.



Family Foster Home

A private home in which a youth resides. This home is the most family-like setting available to you when you are removed from your biological home. The home is limited to a total of six children under the age of 16, including the host family's legal children. Exceptions to the number of allowed children can be made in order to allow siblings to be placed together.

Kinship Care

Sometimes your foster home can be with a relative, which is called kinship care. Kinship care is grandparents, aunts, uncles, or other relatives and relative-like adults raising their grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or another relative's child. This can also include "fictive kin," which are people you or your family may be close to who are not related to you by blood.

Therapeutic Foster Home

This foster home gives special care to youth with behavioral or emotional challenges. The foster family gets special training and support. This foster home is limited to two youth with therapeutic needs. A third slot is reserved for a child/youth who, at the time of placement, needed therapeutic level of care, but who has made improvements and no longer needs that level of care.

Group Home/Residential Facility

This is a licensed facility with 24-hour staff which provides residential care for twelve or fewer youth. This placement provides individualized treatment for youth, such as psychiatric consultation, group work, and individual work. This type of care is used only when it is medically needed.

Transitional Living Program

This program teaches life skills and helps you set and follow goals for your education, work, relationships, etc. As you do well in these areas, you'll prepare for your own place. It's not as easy as it sounds, but these programs have helped youth who are ready for bigger responsibilities.



**"Foster care doesn't make you less of a person,
it makes you a stronger person."**

Nichole C., age 17

Who are the people who can help me?

Caseworker Name _____

Address _____

Office Phone # _____ Toll Free # _____

E-Mail _____ Cell Phone # _____

Caseworker's Supervisor Name _____

Address _____

Office Phone # _____ Toll Free # _____

E-Mail _____ Cell Phone # _____

Youth Transition Specialist's Name _____

Address _____

Office Phone # _____ Toll Free # _____

E-Mail _____ Cell Phone # _____

Therapist(s) Name _____

Address _____

Office Phone # _____ Toll Free # _____

E-Mail _____ Cell Phone # _____

Doctor's Name _____

Address _____

Office Phone # _____ Toll Free # _____

E-Mail _____ Cell Phone # _____

Dentist's Name _____

Address _____

Office Phone # _____ Toll Free # _____

E-Mail _____ Cell Phone # _____

Ask your caseworker for the names and numbers of these people. When you need help, contact your caseworker first, and then work up from there.

DHHS Commissioner

Name: _____

Number: _____ Email: _____

OCFS Director

Name: _____

Number: _____ Email: _____

District Office Program Administrator

Name: _____

Number: _____ Email: _____

Supervisor

Name: _____

Number: _____ Email: _____

Caseworker

Name: _____

Number: _____ Email: _____

**Child Welfare
Ombudsman Program
Call: 866-621-0758**

An Ombudsman (pronounced: om-budz-man) helps people when they have concerns about DHHS involvement in families' lives. Anyone who has a concern has the right to call the Ombudsman and tell him/her about it. If you make a complaint, you can ask that your name be kept private. The Ombudsman will check out complaints and see if he/she can help get more information, notify DHHS of problems, work with people to find out what is wrong and try to fix the problem at no cost to you!



“We have a voice and we aren’t afraid to speak up.” John R., age 17

How do I contact the Department of Health and Human Services Offices?

Augusta DHHS
35 Anthony Avenue
Augusta, ME 04330
207-624-8000 or
1-800-452-1926
augusta.dhhs@maine.gov

Bangor DHHS
19 Maine Avenue
Bangor, ME 04401
207-561-4100 or
1-800-432-7825
bangor.dhhs@maine.gov

Biddeford DHHS
457 Alfred Street
Biddeford, ME 04005
207-286-2400 or
1-800-322-1919
biddeford.dhhs@maine.gov

Calais DHHS
338 North Street, STE1
Calais, ME 04619
207-454-2417

Caribou DHHS
30 Skyway Drive,
Unit 100
Caribou, ME 04736
207-493-4000 or
1-800-432-7366
caribou.dhhs@maine.gov

Ellsworth DHHS
17 Eastward Lane
Ellsworth, ME 04605
207-664-1400 or
1-800-432-7823
ellsworth.dhhs@maine.gov

Farmington DHHS
114 Corn Shop Lane
Farmington, ME 04938
207-778-8400 or
1-800-442-6382
farmington.dhhs@maine.gov

Fort Kent DHHS
137 Market Street,
Suite 109
Fort Kent, ME 04743
207-834-1000 or
1-800-442-6382
fortkent.dhhs@maine.gov

Houlton
11 High Street
Houlton, ME 04730
207-532-5000 or
1-800-432-7338
houlton.dhhs@maine.gov

Lewiston DHHS
200 Main Street
Lewiston, ME 04240
207-795-4300 or
1-800-482-7517
lewiston.dhhs@maine.gov

Machias DHHS
38 Prescott Drive,
Suite 3
Machias, ME 04654
207-255-2000 or
1-800-432-7846
machias.dhhs@maine.gov

Portland DHHS
151 Jetport Boulevard
(South) Portland, ME 04102
207-822-2000
1-800-482-7520
portland.dhhs@maine.gov

Rockland DHHS
91 Camden Street,
Suite 103
Rockland, ME 04841
207-596-4200 or
1-800-432-7802
rockland.dhhs@maine.gov

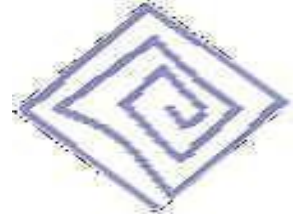
Sanford DHHS
890 Main Street,
Suite 208
Sanford, ME 04073
207-490-5400 or
1-800-482-0790
sanford.dhhs@maine.gov

Skowhegan DHHS
98 North Avenue,
Suite 10
Skowhegan, ME 04976
207-474-4800 or
1-800-452-4602
skowhegan.dhhs@maine.gov

South Paris DHHS
243 Main Street,
Suite 6
S. Paris, ME 04281
207-744-1200 or
1-888-593-9775
southparis.dhhs@maine.gov

How will I get the clothes I need?

The Department of Health and Human Services, as your legal guardian, wants to help you get the clothes you need. There are a couple of different ways this works.



Monthly Clothing Allowance

Every youth in care or with a signed extended care agreement receives a clothing allowance. This clothing allowance is around \$100 each month. Twice a month, about \$50.00 is sent to your care provider (that means foster parent, group home staff, or someone like that). This money should be saved and used **ONLY** for clothes and footwear for you.

Note: if you are placed in an emergency shelter or in a hospital, you are not eligible to receive the clothing allowance, but you can receive purchase orders.

Purchase Orders

Sometimes, your caseworker can supplement your clothing allowance with a purchase order for specific needs. A purchase order is a letter that allows you to buy specific items for a specific amount of money. At many stores you have to go to the customer service desk to buy items with a purchase order.

Some specific needs that a purchase order may be given for are:

- If you gain or lose weight
- If your clothes were destroyed or lost
- If you had to move to a new place to live without enough or the right clothes
- If there is a special medical reason
- If you need money for food or personal hygiene items
- If you are placed in an emergency shelter or hospital

...Answers for youth in care, by youth in care

What are Family Team Meetings?

All young people in care have the right to have their voices included in case planning with a team of people that advocates with them and for them. Youth are encouraged to participate in their family team meetings.

“Life in foster care is challenging. Success is derived from challenges.”

Jesse R., age 19



What is a family team meeting (FTM)?

A family team meeting is a meeting that is focused on your safety, well-being, and family connections. Family team meetings are typically 1-2 hours. They are scheduled at a time and place that is convenient and accessible for all members of the team.

Meetings happen at least every 6 months, although any team member can bring together the team on request. **Remember**, you have the right and the power to ask your caseworker for a family team meeting when you feel it is necessary.

Who attends a family team meeting?

You get to help decide who attends your family team meeting, and you have the right to invite up to two **informal supports** to your family team meeting. *An informal support person is someone who is not part of your professional team (i.e. not a caseworker), and is someone who you have a connection with in your every day life (i.e. a friend or coach).* Examples of people who may be at the meeting include your biological family members, caseworker, supervisors, transition specialist, friends, coaches, teachers, church members, treatment agency staff, doctors, and others.

Remember, conflicts are a natural part of any group process. If you are having a hard time with one of your supports, a family team meeting is a great place to work out these issues. Even though it may seem easier to ask that person to not attend, you may miss out on an important part of your planning.

The person who runs the meeting (the facilitator) is responsible for making sure that meetings feel safe and are productive for you and for all members of the team. You have the option to lead your family team meetings as well; connect with your caseworker if you are interested in this.

Why should you attend your family team meeting?

The purpose of the family team meeting is to support you in achieving your goals.

When you participate in your family team meeting, you have the opportunity to use your voice and to share what goals you are setting for your family connections, education, employment, health, and other areas. You also get to ask questions, share and learn information, and to celebrate your achievements.

During family team meetings, you may be a part of making important decisions for your current situation and future.

How do I prepare for my FTM?

Preparing for these meetings is very important. Think about who will be at your meeting and how each person can help you to reach your goals. Ask your caseworker or a caring adult to help you plan what kinds of information, stories, and opinions that you want to share with the group. Write them down or have someone help you record these thoughts on paper.

You may want to use an outline to help you get your thoughts together. Include your ideas, preferences, and goals about school, family and friend connections as well as jobs, health, and life in general. A helpful tool to help you prepare can be found at <https://www.ylat.org/advocating-for-yourself>, titled “Family Team Meeting Prep Tool”.

Making a Choice

One helpful tool for discussions about medications in your family team meetings is, “Making a choice: A guide to making a decision about using antipsychotic medication”, which can be found at <https://www.ylat.org/advocating-for-yourself>, under the title “Making a Choice”.

This is a guide developed by young people in partnership with adult providers. It is a guide to make sure you are provided with the information you need in order to have ‘informed consent’ when making decisions about your medications.



Should I go to Court? (While in foster care)

While you are in care, you will be invited and encouraged to go to court for your Judicial Review. If you haven't heard about your court dates, talk with your caseworker to make sure that you know about them in advance. Work with your family team meeting members, your caseworker, or your GAL/CASA to plan what and how you want to talk about your life.

By going to court, you:

- Provide important information about your situation.
- Hear what is actually said in court and take part in the decision-making process.
- Share your feelings, ideas and needs.
- Advocate for yourself.
- Gain a sense of control over your life.

The Judge really wants to hear from you. Your Judicial Review is a great time for you to speak for yourself about what you need and to participate in decisions being made on your behalf. In fact, the Judge may offer to talk with you privately in his/her office in order to learn more about your wishes.

The Judicial Review happens every 6 months and usually takes 15-30 minutes. There will be a Judge, DHHS caseworker, Assistant Attorney General (AAG) who represents the state, your

parents' attorney(s), maybe your parents, and a Guardian ad litem (GAL) or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) there to represent your best interests. Sometimes a foster parent may attend. There will also be a Bailiff, or law enforcement officer who maintains order and security in the courtroom, assisting the Judge, but not participating in your review.

The Judge will read the GAL Report and review the DHHS proposed court order. The Judge will allow anyone present to speak about what has gone on since the last review. It's important to remember that you do have control over some things, even though it feels like everyone else has control. You can:

- Brainstorm different solutions and back up plans.
- Be straightforward and truthful.
- Ask questions and avoid making assumptions.
- Be ready to listen and negotiate.

You should know that going to court can be exciting, empowering and sometimes a little scary...but with preparation, it can be GREAT!

Here are some things to remember for court:

- Speak only when you are called on to speak. If you wish to speak, make sure that your caseworker, GAL/CASA or AAG know.
- Speak clearly and calmly. Never yell or use swear words.
- Do not chew gum.
- Look your best. Wear clean clothes without words and holes.
- Treat everyone with respect.

...Answers for youth in care, by youth in care

Who's Who in the Court Room?

While you are in care, you will work with many adults. Knowing the roles and responsibilities of the different people will help you.

As a youth in care, you are represented by a Guardian ad litem (GAL) or a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) who is appointed by the court.

Guardian ad litem (GAL): A lawyer or a trained adult volunteer, assigned by the court to study and protect the best interests of a youth in a civil or criminal abuse or neglect case.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA): A CASA is like a GAL. A CASA is a trained community volunteer that speaks in court for the best interest of the child.

Remember to keep track of the contact information for your GAL or CASA.

GAL/CASA Name _____

Address _____

Office Phone # _____ Toll Free # _____

E-Mail _____ Cell Phone # _____

Who else will be in court?

The Judge: The Judge decides what is best for the youth. The Judge reads reports, hears arguments, decides whether the youth should be placed in the custody of the state, and issues court orders.

Maine Office of the Attorney General: Your DHHS caseworker is represented by an Assistant Attorney General (AAG). The Child Protection Division of the Office of the Maine Attorney General represents the state in civil child abuse and neglect proceedings throughout Maine.

Attorneys: Biological parents have the right to be represented by attorneys in court hearings.

Bailiff: The Bailiff is an officer of the court who helps out the Judge.

Court Clerk: The clerk sits next to the Judge and takes notes about what happens in court.

Foster parents: Depending on your situation, your foster parents may attend.

Birth Parents: Depending on your situation, your birth parents may be a part of the child protection case and may be at most case hearings.

YOU: You have the right to be heard during court. Remember...The members of your family team meeting can help you prepare for this day. If you don't feel comfortable speaking in front of everyone, you can request through your caseworker, GAL/CASA to speak privately with the judge. You can also write up something for the judge to read if that feels more comfortable to you.

...Answers for youth in care, by youth in care

What are all these legal terms??

When a child/youth is placed in the custody of the State of Maine, there is a meeting at court, or a **hearing**. Here are some legal terms that you may hear while you are talking with adults about court.

Appeals: Someone asks for a hearing to change the court's decision. Any court decision is subject to an appeal. Appeals can take several months to resolve.

Cease Reunification: The court decides that since the biological parents did not do what was required of them for the child to go home, the Department is no longer required to provide services for the purpose of the child returning to their biological parent's home.

Disposition: This is the decision about the youth custody status (such as in state custody), as well as what the parents, DHHS and the youth must do to change the problems.

Judicial Review: A court review that looks at the progress of the parents and the youth in order to decide the safest place for the youth to live. There must be a Judicial Review at least every 6 months. At least every 12 months, the Judicial Review must identify your permanent plan.

Notice of Hearings: Everyone involved in the case (the "Parties") must be served with a notice telling them when and where there's going to be a court hearing. "Parties" include people like the youth, parents, attorneys, GALs and the caseworker.

Termination of Parental Rights: If family reunification has been ruled out and adoption is a possibility for the child, the Department may petition (request) for termination of parental rights to the child. If the court terminates parental rights, it means the child is free for adoption. It also means that your biological parents have no legal rights pertaining to you anymore. (They don't have access to information about you; they don't work with your caseworker anymore, etc.)

Remember to ask questions if you do not understand what is going on.



...Answers for youth in care, by youth in care

What? Even more legal terms?

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) assigns codes to represent the legal status of children in care. You may hear some of these codes while you are in court.

Children who are in the state's custody under the Child and Family Services and Child Protection Act:

- **C-1** The Superior Court, District Court or probate court has made a preliminary protection order giving temporary custody to the DHHS because it has decided that the child or youth is at immediate risk of serious harm. A hearing on the child protection petition (the papers the judge first signs) must be held within ten days of the time the judge gives temporary custody to DHHS in an emergency situation.
- **C-2** A hearing is held on the child protection petition and the court has ruled that the child is in jeopardy (put in danger). The child is then placed in full custody of DHHS by a District Court. (Unless you have come into custody through the Juvenile Court, you probably fit into this category.) At the C-2 hearing the judge may also decide that the child is not unsafe and can go home.
- **C-3** The court has terminated the rights of the child's parents and the child is available for adoption.
- **C-5** Children are placed in the custody of DHHS by a juvenile court because they have committed a crime and it would not be in their best interest to stay at home.

Children who are in the state's custody under the Divorce Laws:

- **C-6** Children are placed in the custody of DHHS until a divorce is final.
- **C-7** Children are placed in the custody of the Department of Health & Human Services in a divorce judgment by the Superior or District Court.

Children who are in the state's custody by the Probate Court's Acceptance of the Parents' Surrender and Release of a Child:

- **V-5** Children are placed in DHHS' custody because they have been voluntarily surrendered and released by their parents for the purpose of adoption in probate court.

Children who are on Child Welfare Voluntary Status:

- **V-2** Children are placed in DHHS' care through a voluntary agreement between DHHS and the parent; parents keep custody.
- **Voluntary Extended Care Agreement:** Young adults between 18 and 23 agree to be in DHHS' extended care program and are provided services to continue their education.



Please understand that sometimes court hearings are continued and changed to another date for various reasons. For instance, someone may not show up, or everyone at the court may feel it's a good idea.

What is the Youth Leadership Advisory Team? (YLAT)

Maine's YLAT is a dynamic group of young people and adult partners from across the state working together to make sure that youth in care have the best possible experience. YLAT is a team effort involving young people, the Catherine Cutler Institute at the University of Southern Maine, the Department of Health and Human Services, and the wider community.



Who can participate in YLAT activities?

- Youth, ages 14-23, who have experienced foster care, either currently or in the past
- Alumni who have been in care, aged 24+
- Adult Partners who are committed to supporting young people

“I’m very proud to be a part of YLAT, I am very proud to say that I was a youth in care because I know that the things that I have done with YLAT have impacted somebody else’s life in a good way”.

How can young people join YLAT?

- Visit the YLAT webpage, www.ylat.org to find a meeting near you, or to get more information and stories about what happens at YLAT
- Contact Ahmen Cabral at 207-228-8548 or toll-free at 1-877-792-YLAT or at ahmen.cabral@maine.edu
- Follow YLAT on Facebook at: www.facebook.com/MaineYLAT, [instagram](#), or [youtube](#) or download their APP at: www.ylat.goodbarber.com

What happens in YLAT?

- **District YLAT meetings.** Youth, Alumni, and Adult Partners gather for monthly meetings statewide to build connections, develop leadership and advocacy skills and address critical issues youth in care face.
- **Alumni Co-Facilitators.** Dedicated YLAT Alumni may serve as co-facilitators. They are community leaders and serve as role models for YLAT youth, encourage positive relationships between group members, and foster an environment that promotes learning.
- **Panel presentations and speaking engagements.** Youth leaders share their experiences to train, educate, and inform audiences including: foster parents, OCFS caseworkers and staff, GALs/CASA’s, and other committed community partners.
- **Advisory groups and committee work.** Through other youth initiatives, YLAT members work with adult partners and state agencies to help create and improve policies and practices that impact youth and families.
- **Teen Conference.** An Annual Statewide conference for all youth in care. A day full of connection, skill building and resource sharing.

- **Statewide training.** Youth are invited to attend statewide trainings that will deepen their skills and confidence around leadership, advocacy and public speaking.

What are the benefits to young people?

- Connect with other youth in care and caring adults in a supportive, safe environment.
- Help to change the child welfare system.
- Make a difference in the community by speaking out and participating.
- Learn new skills in leadership, communication, advocacy, public speaking, and teamwork, while building confidence and gaining resume experience.
- Connect with additional programs, advanced leadership opportunities, and statewide resources.
- Get a stipend for speaking engagements and project work.



What is the Teen Conference?

Every summer since 1991, Maine has held a statewide conference for teens in foster care. The Teen Conference Planning Committee (TCPC) composed of YLAT staff from the Catherine Cutler Institute, youth and alumni of foster care, and OCFS staff plan the Teen Conference. Participants include youth in care, foster and adoptive parents, OCFS staff, and agency staff. This day is a great chance for youth to get together, play, learn, and talk about their experiences in the foster care system.

The Teen Conference offers a keynote speaker, large group activities, and exciting workshops that cover topics such as creative arts, movement and dance, planning for your future, financial tips, and well-being.

“Regardless of your beginnings, we can change”

- Youth participant at a Teen Conference

During the Teen Conference, youth and adults celebrate their personal achievements for the year and honor those who have made significant contributions to systems-change through a variety of leadership awards.

Brad Levesque Youth Leadership Award: Since 2000, The Brad Levesque Youth Leadership Award is given to a young person in care who demonstrates great leadership and meets the other criteria that Brad helped to develop.

Foster Care Alumni Award: Each year, we recognize an alumnus of foster care for their ongoing commitment to making positive change in the child welfare system.

Friend of Youth in Care Award: Contributions can be small or large, public or private. This award started in 1994 and is given to someone or an agency that is doing great things on behalf of youth in foster care. This award is nominated and determined in YLAT meetings.

What’s the Teen Conference Planning Committee?

The Teen Conference Planning Committee (TCPC) offers the chance for young people and adults to come together and plan the Teen Conference. The TCPC meets every other month on zoom to discuss important aspects of the conference such as: theme, t-shirt design, workshops, keynote speaker, and other parts of the day to ensure that it is youth friendly and fun! If you would like to be involved with the TCPC please connect with your transition worker or Lily Maass at maineylat@gmail.com

If you’d like to attend the Teen Conference, talk with your caseworker or transition worker. You can also visit www.ylat.org or www.facebook.com/MaineYLAT for more information.

How do I visit with my family?

All children and youth in foster care have the right to have lifelong family connections, with siblings, grandparents and extended family. You have a right to visits, ongoing contact with and/or knowledge of your parents, siblings, extended family, and friends who are safe for you to be around and connected to.

When you enter foster care, the Department of Health and Human Services will work with you and your family with the goal of returning you home safely.

Visits with family, siblings, and relatives are an important part of this process to maintain and to strengthen your relationships.

“A little hope is all you need.”

Lizz M., age 17

Let your caseworker and/or family team know your wishes regarding visitation. It is the caseworker’s role to schedule all visits and to provide support to you and your family so that visits are successful. Visits should be relaxed and in a normal setting.

**If you’re scared, it’s OK.
You’re not the only one.”**

Muriel G., age 17

Your caseworker will want to hear from you about how visits are going. Please talk with your caseworker if you are not comfortable with visitation at any time. You have the right to choose whether or not to participate in a visit.





Sibling Policy

In 2001, youth in care met with the Office of Child and Family Services Director to express their concerns about how often siblings (brothers and sisters) become separated in the foster care system. The Director asked them to help develop the first ever DHHS policy for siblings in care. They did, and it became formal policy in 2002! Some of the guidelines in the policy include:

- Respecting the importance of sibling relationship
- Making placement of siblings together a priority and making sure that each child gets to express their opinion about this
- Placing siblings near one another when they cannot live together
- Maintaining contact between siblings through visitations, phone contact, letter writing, and e-mail

These guidelines apply to preparing a child to be adopted, too.

Sibling Visitation Law

In 2005, YLAT member Kala Clark succeeded in getting sibling visitation legislation passed. The law allows judges to order sibling visitation when one child comes into foster care and another remains at home, requires DHHS to work hard to make sure that siblings can visit when one has been adopted, and allows a child's wishes for sibling visits to be included in court hearings. You can find the law at this website link - www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/22/title22sec4068.html.

Camp To Belong Maine

Camp To Belong Maine (CTBM) is an organization that connects and reunites siblings who have been separated because of foster care or other out-of-home care. CTBM has been hosted at various summer camps in Maine since 2004. Check out <https://www.camptobelongme.org/> to see what is going on!

Maine Youth in Care Bill of Rights

YLAT members created a Bill of Rights for youth in care in 2009. It identifies the rights of siblings.. In 2012, YLAT enacted a Sibling Bill of Rights, and in 2016 a Normalcy Bill of Rights. You can find these documents at <https://www.ylat.org/youth-rights>

Maine State Adoption Reunion Registry

The Maine Adoption Reunion Registry assists siblings, parents, grandparents or other relatives separated by adoption when they want to be in contact with one another. For more information call Vital Records: (207) 287-3181



“Siblings can bring support to each other, especially during trauma.”

Kala C., age 15

What is “permanency”?

You might hear the word “permanency” from your caseworker, your transition worker, your GAL or CASA, or during your family team meeting.

Your voice is very important in developing what you want permanency to look like for you. You are the best source of information in knowing who you want in your life and who you can rely on.

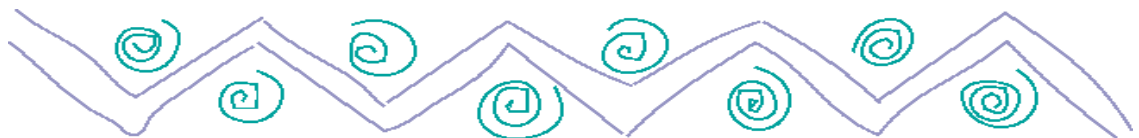
Young people have written this definition to help other young people and adults understand what permanency can mean and look like for each individual person.

Permanency is a safe, committed, loving relationship that is intended to last forever between a young person and an adult. This can include birth family, extended kin, friends, foster and adoptive parents and/or other caring adults identified by the youth.

This is a relationship where the young person receives:

- Consistent emotional support,
- Nurture and acceptance based on trust and respect,
- Access to physical, emotional and spiritual well-being,
- Legal rights and social status of full family membership.

A permanency plan includes supporting lifelong connections with a young person’s extended family, siblings and other significant relationships in their life. Please work with your support team to talk about the people in your life who are important to you and who you want as part of your permanency plan.



FosterClub, the national network for young people in foster care, has a ‘Permanency Pact’ that has helpful resources and questions that may help you in creating your plan. https://www.fosterclub.com/sites/default/files/Permanency%20Pact_0.pdf

Remember... Permanency is not just a process, a plan, a foster care placement or a family relationship that lasts only until you turn age 18, but should be about finding and supporting **life-long family connections**.

What are the rights and responsibilities ...Of youth?

Listed below are some of your rights and responsibilities while in foster care:

- To be protected from physical, emotional and sexual abuse and/or neglect.
- To be placed in a substitute care setting that can best meet your needs.
- To be told why you came into foster care and why you're still in foster care.
- To be placed with siblings, if at all possible, unless it's not safe.
- To visit and talk with biological parents, siblings, relatives, and other individuals important to you unless restricted by the court and/or DHHS, or if you don't want to do so. Many factors are taken into consideration about visits.
- To learn about and participate in court reviews and case planning conferences. You can attend these reviews/conferences or you can have input by writing or calling your caseworker.
- To receive honest information about the decisions DHHS is making that affect your life.
- To be listened to, respected and heard; and to listen to, respect and hear others.
- To have visits and talk privately with your caseworker at least once every month.
- To be able to talk with an adult you trust about any type of abuse or neglect by your biological parents, foster parents, other caregivers or any other person.
- To work with your social worker and care provider to make rules and to responsibly follow them.
- To help make a visitation plan.
- To keep scheduled appointments or if you need to cancel, call ahead of time.
- To get regular medical, dental and eye exams.
- To be placed in the least restrictive setting that will meet your needs.
- To participate in religious, cultural and other activities you desire.
- To have information in your individual and family case kept confidential.
- To go to school.
- To have privacy and to respect others' privacy.
- To write a formal complaint to DHHS about any services with which you are unhappy.
- To have a plan for a permanent family within twelve months of coming into custody and to take part in developing and committing yourself to this plan.

What are the rights and responsibilities ...Of your care providers?

Listed below are some of the rights and responsibilities of your care providers while you're in foster care:

- To keep you safe and provide for your day-to-day care.
- To treat you with dignity and respect.
- To keep information about you and your family confidential, sharing only what is in your best interest to professionals who work with you.
- To show understanding, to give guidance and to provide unconditional acceptance.
- To prepare you for moving to your next placement whether it be going home, to another placement, or to independent living.
- To help you in your growth and development by encouraging your success in areas such as school and developing day-to-day life skills (not only things like cooking and laundry, but also good communication skills and “hanging in there” through difficult times).
- To make sure you get medical, dental and eye care.
- To help you, or provide access to help in dealing with your thoughts and feelings about being in foster care.
- To get enough training to be a care provider for youth who have been abused and/or neglected.
- To make their home ready to welcome you.
- To help you in continuing to learn about your culture and heritage.
- To support your contact and visits with your family (including parents, siblings, and other relatives).



What are the rights and responsibilities ...Of your caseworker?

Your caseworker will work with you, your biological parents, your care providers and other individuals involved in your life. Listed below are some of the rights and responsibilities of your caseworker:

- To tell your parents what changes need to occur so you can go home.
- To set up visits between you, your family and/or other individuals important to you, unless it's not safe for you.
- To give or find services to meet you and your family's needs.
- To keep information about you and your family confidential, unless sharing the information helps to meet you and/or your family's needs. For instance, giving some background information to a therapist is important.
- To provide services to help your care providers meet your needs.
- To meet with you to talk face-to-face at least once every month (you can still call and/or email as often as needed).
- To tell the court of you and your family's progress, and to make recommendations to the court regarding reunification with your family.
- To get you independent living services if you are 16 years of age or older.
- To work with you on choosing the least restrictive placement that is best able to care for you. Your caseworker can explain your placement options so you can help choose.
- To keep you and siblings in care together, unless it's not safe.

Remember...

If you feel your needs are not being met,
review the page called "*What if I Can't Get What I Need?*" in the
DHHS Connections and Resources section of [Answers](#)
and start working your way up the chain.

What are the rights and responsibilities ...Of your biological family?

Listed below are some of the rights and responsibilities of your biological family while you're in foster care:

- To tell you why you're in foster care and what changes need to be made so you can go home. If your family does not do this, your caseworker can explain things to you.
- To be informed and take part in court reviews and case planning meetings.
- To keep scheduled visits with you and contact you through phone calls and letters, unless restricted by court, DHHS, or you.
- To work with DHHS and you to develop a permanent plan.
- To tell DHHS of their address, telephone number, living arrangements and any other changes that may affect your case.
- To give financial support to the state for your care, depending on their ability to pay.
- To be part of your life through activities, such as school meetings, as long as it is safe for you.
- To make a written formal complaint to the Department about services they are unhappy about.
- To be informed of your health, education and placement.
- To terminate their parental rights if they are not able or willing to make it safe for you to return home.
- To support visits between siblings when they do not live together.

“No one better knows oneself than oneself.”

Nate P., age 17

What are my community resources?



Maine Resources

MAINE 2-1-1: This is a statewide directory of over 1000 Health and Human Services, staffed by trained 2-1-1 specialists, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. To call, dial 2-1-1 or visit online, www.211maine.org

Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Child and Family Services: DHHS provides help when applying for MaineCare, Food stamps, TANF, Aspire, and other support. Visit www.maine.gov/dhs/ocfs/index.shtml

Adoptive and Foster Families of Maine: AFFM provides support and services for adoptive, foster parents and kinship providers as well as training, guidance, knowledge and resources needed to handle complex issues. www.affm.net/

Camp To Belong Maine (CTBM): CTBM is dedicated to reuniting brothers and sisters separated in foster care, adoption, or any other out-of-home care. <https://www.camptobelongme.org/>

Job's for Maine's Graduates (JMG): JMG identifies students who face barriers to education, and guides each one to a successful path toward continued education, a meaningful career and productive adulthood. You can also sign up for Opportunity Passport™. www.jmg.org

Pine Tree Legal: This agency provides free legal services to people with low incomes. www.ptla.org



National Resources

Foster Club: This is a social networking site for youth in care, www.fosterclub.com

National Resources Center for Youth Services: This is a national organization that helps youth in care to improve child welfare through media resources. www.nrcys.ou.edu

Congressional Coalition for Adoption Institute Foster Youth Interns: This is an opportunity to work in Washington D.C. on behalf of issues facing youth in foster care. Read more at <http://www.ccainstitute.org/programs/view/foster-youth-internship-about>

Foster Care Alumni of America: This is a national organization that works to connect the foster care alumni community and to transform policy and practice, ensuring opportunity for people in and from foster care. www.fostercarealumni.org

What are my volunteer opportunities?



AmeriCorps – AmeriCorps addresses critical needs in communities nationwide, and there is an opportunity to get financial assistance for college, in return for your service. You can learn more at www.americorps.gov

There are three different programs offered through AmeriCorps:

- **AmeriCorps State & AmeriCorps National:** Members of this program help local service programs.
- **AmeriCorps VISTA:** Members work in community organizations and public agencies with the mission of creating and expanding programs to bring individuals out of poverty.
- **AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps):** Members of this program must be men and women between the ages of 18-24 who develop leadership through direct and team-based national and community service.

Habitat for Humanity (HFH) – This is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide every person with a decent, safe and affordable place to live. Volunteers build houses with people in need. Whenever possible, HFH chooses to build sustainable, energy efficient, healthy housing. They have great programs for youth including the Collegiate Challenge which is an alternative spring break; youth 16+ are eligible to participate.

Learn more at: www.habitat.org

United Way – The United Way has a strong focus on education, income, and health as well as advancing the common good in communities nationwide. United Way strives to promote and create positive change with lasting results. There are opportunities for both groups and individuals to volunteer, and they also have advocacy work by helping to improve education, income and health through changing public policies.

- United Way of Kennebec Valley, Augusta: 207-626-3400
- United Way of Eastern Maine, Bangor: 207-941-2800
- United Way of Androscoggin County, Lewiston: 207-795-4000
- United Way of Mid Coast Maine, Bath: 207-443-9752
- United Way of the Tri-Valley Area, Farmington: 207-778-5048
- United Way of Greater Portland, Portland: 207-874-1000
- United Way of Aroostook, Presque Isle: 207-764-5197
- United Way of York County, Kennebunk: 207-985-3359
- United Way of Oxford County, Inc., South Paris: 207-743-5833
- United Way of Mid-Maine, Waterville: 207-873-0686

Volunteer Maine – This is a site devoted to volunteer opportunities in the state of Maine. There are also possibilities to participate in special trainings and in emergency response teams across the state. Learn more at www.volunteermaine.org.

Who are the Youth Transition Specialists?

Transitioning to adulthood is a big deal, whether you're in state custody, or not.

Family, foster/adoptive parents, counselors, teachers, adult friends and caseworkers are some of the people who can help you. In addition to all of these people, there are Youth Transition Specialists for every region of the state. Their job is to be part of the team to help you to navigate family and community connections and to gain the knowledge and skills you need as you become an adult. Youth Transition Specialists can help you to identify and meet your goals in areas such as family connections, housing, employment, relationships, school, health, money, getting to and paying for college, and making good decisions. Your Youth Transition Specialist is an additional support person and member of your family team.

Dulcey Laberge

Youth Transition Program Manager
DHHS Central Office, Augusta 207-446-4227

Dulcey.laberge@maine.gov

Mariah Knight

Youth Transition Specialist
DHHS Biddeford/Sanford
District 1 – Southern Maine YLAT
207-391-0345

mariah.knight@maine.gov

Pamela Goodwin

Youth Transition Specialist
DHHS Portland
District 2 – Southern Maine YLAT
207-557-4247 OR 1-800-482-7520

Pamela.goodwin@Maine.gov

Ryan Weaver

Youth Transition Specialist
DHHS Lewiston
District 3 – Lewiston YLAT
207-795-4633 OR 207-740-6790

ryan.weaver@maine.gov

Paula Lindsey

Youth Transition Specialist
DHHS Rockland
District 4 – Mid Coast YLAT
207-557-1719 OR 1-800-432-7802

paula.lindsey@maine.gov

Elise Hamblett

Youth Transition Specialist
DHHS Augusta
District 5 – Waterville YLAT
207-592-0131

elise.hamblett@maine.gov

Colton Almodovar

Youth Transition Specialist DHHS
Bangor & Machias Downeast
District 6 and 7 – Bangor YLAT
207-951-3721

colton.almodovar@maine.gov

Angela DeLong

Youth Transition Specialist
DHHS Houlton
District 8 – Aroostook/ Houlton YLAT
207-532-5105 OR 1-800-452-1926

Angela.delong@Maine.gov

What is the Voluntary Extended Care Agreement?

The Voluntary Extended Care Agreement

This is a voluntary agreement between you and DHHS that allows you to stay in DHHS care and receive supportive services past your 18th birthday.

Generally, this agreement is created to help young people continue with their education or to help care for youth with extreme health issues.



“Trust someone. You have to start somewhere.” Muriel G., age 17

Being in the care of DHHS through the Voluntary Extended Care Agreement does not mean that you stay in the custody of DHHS. It does mean that you may continue to get services or financial support up to your 23rd birthday.

One agreement can look very different from another. It is a negotiation between you and DHHS for things like how much financial support DHHS will provide, how much financial support you will provide, where you will live, your education/training goals, and your overall life plans.

You may choose to sign the Voluntary Extended Care Agreement *before* your 18th birthday.

If you have a plan, it is possible to get a Voluntary Extended Care Agreement open if it has been closed.

Ask your caseworker or a transition worker for more information.

So, you will need to talk with your caseworker *before* your 18th birthday about signing the Agreement. If you do not sign the Agreement, your DHHS case will be closed on your 18th birthday. *If you decide after* your 18th birthday that you want to sign the Agreement, you may be able to do so by connecting with your caseworker or Transition Specialist.



A Voluntary Extended Care Agreement is a very individualized Agreement between you and your caseworker. It is a completely voluntary program and can be ended by you or by DHHS at any time.

If your Agreement ends, you can request to reopen and negotiate a new Agreement anytime, up to age 23.

Ask your caseworker for more information.



If you are 14 or older, read this page!

If you are 14 years old or older...

You can get the help of the Youth Transition Specialist in your area. Talk to your caseworker about meeting this person who specializes in supporting older youth in care.

Here are some things you may want to talk with your caseworker about doing:

- Get ready to use the youth transition planning tool with your caseworker to look at what you may need and how your strengths can help you achieve your goals.
- Know about your rights as a youth in foster care by receiving a copy of the Youth in Care Bill of Rights.
- Find out the schedule for meetings of the Youth Leadership Advisory Team (YLAT) in your area. Visit their website: www.ylat.org
- Ask about having a Lifebook so you can keep information about your life, family and events that are important to you.
- Review the “[Making a Choice](#)” document so you can understand how you can be involved in your medication management.
- Get a State of Maine identification card (A “State ID”).
- Explore driver’s education with your caseworker and in your family team meeting.
- Learn about resources and opportunities in your community.
- Talk with your caseworker about the Voluntary Extended Care Agreement.
- Discuss permanency and different options available
- Ask about post-secondary options available including financial resources
- Explore career options and pathways
- Become familiar with financial literacy and opportunities passport.
- Participate in age and developmentally appropriate life skills activities and complete NYTD Surveys.



If you are turning 18, read this page!

At 18, you become a legal adult. You will then have all of the legal responsibilities of an adult, including making your own decisions and being responsible for them.

Voting: You can register at the Department of Motor Vehicles, your city or town hall, or by mail, once you turn 18. If you change your address, you will need to reregister.

Selective Services: All males between the ages of 18-25 are legally required to register for the selective service (the draft). You can do this at your local post office. You cannot receive financial aid for college unless you register.

Personal Records: You have the right to obtain your own copies of these items:

- 1) Your birth certificate (from the town hall where you were born or from Vital Records, 244 Water Street SHS #11, Augusta 04333-0011)
- 2) your Social Security Card (Social Security Office)
- 3) a photo ID (Department of Motor Vehicles)

MaineCare: MaineCare is health insurance for all youth in custody who do not have other medical coverage. Youth who age out of foster care are eligible for MaineCare up to their 26th birthday. You must reapply for MaineCare each year or you may be closed out! If your income is under a certain amount, you can continue to receive MaineCare. Ask your caseworker for help. You can apply for MaineCare at your local DHHS office, or you may call the member services toll-free number, 1-800-977-6740 (TTY 1-800-977-6741).

Driver's License: If you are under 18, you will need permission from DHHS to get your driver's license. Your caseworker and care provider must agree that you are ready for this huge responsibility. Maine requires that everyone under 18 take Driver's Education before getting a permit or license. You will need to obtain your driving hours with your foster family or other qualified adults. When you send in for your license date, you will need to have your caseworkers Program Administrator sign your log before you send it in. You must be covered by insurance on the car you will be driving, and this is your responsibility. If you are under 18 and in custody, you may not own a car, motorcycle, snowmobile, or other off-road vehicle.

Free Credit Report: It is important to know if you have good credit. By state and federal law, you can access your free credit report by calling 1-877-322-8228 or online at www.AnnualCreditReport.com, or by sending your request by mail to: Annual Credit Report Request Service, PO Box 105283, Atlanta, GA 30348-5281.

Here is a checklist of things you may want to do:

- Sign the Voluntary Extended Care Agreement or talk with your caseworker about it.
- Get a copy of your Social Security Card.
- Get a copy of your birth certificate.
- Register for the Selective Service (if you are a male).
- Ask your caseworker if you are eligible for social security/disability.
- Apply for MaineCare or other health insurance.
- Apply for SSI and other benefits.
- Get a picture ID.
- Register to vote.
- Check your free credit report.
- Make a list of important phone numbers and addresses (doctors, friends, family).
- Think about designating a Health Care Proxy by visiting the website: www.caringinfo.

How do I take care of my Health?



It's important for you to take an active role in your good health.

Medical Providers: You should be sure to schedule a physical exam each year with your primary care provider (doctor). Ask your caseworker for help. If you choose, you may invite an adult to be there for all or part of the exam. Make a list of your concerns and questions before going to see your doctor for a routine check-up so you don't forget to ask something. Be sure to follow through on the suggestions of the doctor regarding diet, exercise, and additional tests.

Be sure to schedule a dental appointment every six months. Under MaineCare, youth under age 21 are covered for preventive, routine, and some specialized dental services. If you need braces or other orthodontic treatment, there is additional paperwork.

You can get help with arranging transportation, setting up medical and dental appointments, finding a physician or a dentist, and answering questions about MaineCare benefits by calling MaineCare Member Services at 1-800-977-6740. Ask your caseworker for help.

Your local family planning clinic can help you get answers about your sexual health, birth control, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted diseases. You do not need parental or DHHS permission to receive services, information, or condoms from family planning clinics. Your records will be confidential. However, if you are facing a life-threatening situation or are in physical or emotional danger from abuse, the staff will need to share your information to make sure you are safe. For a clinic listing, call 207-622-7524 or visit <https://mainefamilyplanning.org/for-patients/find-a-clinic/>.

Health Records: You may get a copy of your immunization (shots) record from your doctor or caseworker. All schools, even colleges, require you to have this and you should keep track of when you need to schedule your next set of shots.

Health Care Proxy: When you turn 18, it is important to consider choosing someone in your life (a trusted individual) who could make health care treatment decisions on your behalf if you should ever become unable to make decisions for yourself.

You can choose a *health care proxy* or *healthcare power of attorney*, by completing an **advance directive document**. You can create one by visiting the following website when you turn 18: www.maine.gov/ag/dynld/documents/AHCD_Form_July20_2004.pdf

Remember to take good care of yourself!

...Answers for youth in care, by youth in care

How do I take good care of my mental health?

Difficult times

Sometimes it's really hard to ask for help, especially if you're already not feeling so strong. Talking with your caseworker, family team members, or a supportive adult can help.

Here are some resources to call if you are in crisis.

2-1-1 Maine, for all services and resources Dial 2-1-1 or visit www.211maine.org

Maine Crisis Helpline
1-888-568-1112

Teen Text Support Line
207-515-8398 12pm-10pm

National Teen Dating Abuse Helpline
1-866-331-9474, 1-866-331-8453 (TTY)

Maine Suicide Prevention Lifeline-
24 hours, Dial 9-888
call, text or chat at 988lifeline.org

Statewide Domestic Violence Helpline, 1-866-834-HELP (4357)

If you are in school, your guidance counselor or school social worker may help you to get connected to services. If you are in college, your campus may have many resources that can help you through difficult times. Look through your directory for offices that offer counseling or ones that support student success.

Sometimes, you may become worried about a friend or family member. You may use the above resources to get help for the people you care about, too.

Mental Health Services

When you choose to have a counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist involved in your life, decisions about your mental health treatment are very important. You have the right to know all your treatment and support options. You, your doctors, and your caregiver should discuss all your treatment options and create a plan that works for you.

There are two documents created by youth for youth that may help you as you navigate the mental health system.

[Making a Choice](#): A guide to making a decision about using antipsychotic medication, This guide offers helpful questions to ask when you are working with your team and you are making choices about your mental health care.

[The Maine Youth in Care Bill of Rights](#)

This document lists important things for you to know about your rights in the mental health care system.

Your caseworker and the people involved in your family team meetings can support you as you move through the mental health care system. Talk about your concerns and questions with your caseworker or during your family team meeting.

Here is an excerpt from **Maine's Youth in Care Bill of Rights**, specific to mental health:

- You have the right to have an informed choice in the types of physical, dental and mental health care you receive.
- You have the right to have a choice and options when a treatment provider is being assigned to them.
- You have the right to see and understand your treatment plans, to be informed about and to have a say in treatment decisions being made.
- You have a right to be informed about medications, medication options and to have a voice in decisions about prescription of medication.
- You have a right to not be overmedicated, to not be punished for refusal to take medications, and to be made aware of the possible risks that come from refusing to take medication.
- You should be able to have visitation with people that are important to you while receiving treatment.
- You should be able to receive care and services that are fair, respectful, safe, confidential and free from discrimination.
- You have a right to access your medical records.



If you feel your rights have been violated, you should speak up to your caseworker and say that your rights have been violated. Tell them which one(s).

If you are still having trouble, you can speak to your caseworker's supervisor, your Guardian ad litem (GAL) or a trusted adult. Be specific and provide examples.

If you don't have success there, you can contact the Ombudsman's office. The Ombudsman will try to get more information, notify DHHS of problems and work with people to help fix the problems. Call the Ombudsman's Office at (866) 621-0758 OR (207) 213-4773 and visit: www.cwombudsman.org/

What information should I keep safe?

Here is a checklist of important documents, information and items that can help you in a lot of ways.

Keep the following documents with you in your wallet or purse.

- MaineCare Card
- Driver's Permit or License
- Photo Identification

Keep these personal documents in a safe place, such as a lockable drawer or cabinet at your house. Do not keep these important documents in your wallet or purse!

- Birth Certificate
- Social Security Card
- At 18, Official letter stating the dates you were in foster care signed by an OCFS supervisor
- Family Tree
- Life Book
- Family medical history
- Immunization/Shot Records
- Address Book with contact information for important people (family, friends, others).
- Resume
- Certificates, Awards, and Letters of reference
- Portfolio
- Educational Transcripts
- Photos

Copy or scan these documents before you submit them. Be sure to record the date when these applications are submitted. Keep a copy in your safe place.

- MaineCare application
- FAFSA or scholarship application
- College applications

Electronic records should be saved on a computer AND backed up on an external hard drive.

Remember to keep these documents in a safe place.

...Answers for youth in care, by youth in care

What supports & services are available to help me in high school?

Every youth has the right to be in school and to be learning! Sometimes youth benefit from additional support during high school. You may need to do an assessment at school to set you up with a school program that will help you succeed.

You should attend your IEP meetings and let them know what is important for you to succeed in your educational program!

If you qualify for special education services, the school will set up meetings called **Individual Evaluation Plan (IEP)** meetings. These meetings include teachers, foster parents, social workers, your caseworker and others who want to help you succeed in high school. You can learn more about Maine's Special Services in schools [here](#).

If you receive special education services, you will be assigned a "Surrogate Parent"—someone designated by the Department to advocate for you and your education plans—this is usually your foster parent.

To view DHHS's Education Policy visit: <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cw/policy/v-d-5-education-policy.html>

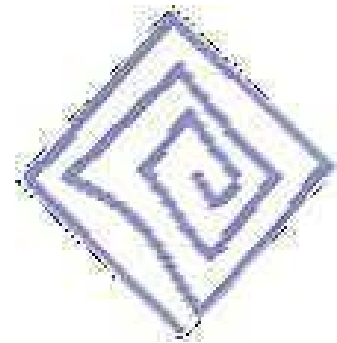
Maine also has policies and laws in place to help you get your high school diploma if your experience has been considerably disrupted by homelessness, hospitalization, foster care, out-of-district placement, or youth development center placement. Learn more at this site:

www.maine.gov/education/disruption/index.shtml

You might be able to get additional help with tutors, special education classes, social workers' support, modified work load, and classes that better meet your needs. Remember, it is very important that you talk with your caseworker, foster parents, teachers, or other trusted adults if you are struggling in school.

"Every kid in care who has graduated from high school has worked just as hard, if not harder to succeed. We all deserve the same opportunity as any other kid, and we need the help of the state to make this happen."

Josh B.



What happens if I have to change schools?

Do I have to change schools if I move?

Education Stability—Maine passed a law in 2010 that allows a youth who enters foster care, or changes placement while in foster care, to attend either the school where they resided prior to the placement or to attend the school where they resided during the placement, based on the youth's best interests. DHHS will determine the school that meets your best interests, and will notify the school in writing. When it is in your best interest to attend the school where you previously resided, your caseworker will arrange and pay for your transportation to and from the school. For more information on this law visit: <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/20-A/title20-Asec5205.html>

Moving to a New School

If you move to a new school, you can connect with your caseworker or Transition Specialist to create a checklist about topics to ask school staff. This could include everything from class credits to teachers to your new lunchroom.

School Records

If you transfer to a different school while in foster care, the school must send your records to the new school no later than 5 days after you enroll. For more information visit: <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/statutes/20-A/title20-Asec6001-B.html>

Homelessness

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act protects the educational rights of youth who are homeless by allowing you to remain in your school, help with transportation, or to enroll in a new school where you are living. Each school district has a Homeless Liaison. You can ask your school social worker or guidance counselor for help connecting with this person, or you can learn more at http://www.maine.gov/education/homeless_ed/liaisoncontacts.htm#liaison

Department of Education Diploma

The Commissioner of the Department of Education (DOE) can issue you a Department of Education diploma if you are unable to obtain a diploma from a high school due to disruptions in your education and a shortage of credits. You will still be required to complete all the diploma requirements that every other student in Maine must meet, but the Department of Education will work with you and support the process. You can get additional information from DOE at the following website: <http://www.maine.gov/education/disruption/process.html>

If you are heading to a new school...

This is a list of things that may help you as you transition to your new school.

School Work/Credits

- Records Transferred: A member of school staff has received my previous school records/transcripts, progress reports.
- Confirm Acceptance: A member of school staff has talked with me about my previous school work and/or credits/credit equivalency.
- Review Academic Expectations: A member of school staff has talked with me about academic expectations and my credit status.
- Previous School Contact: I have shared the name of someone from my old school who helped me.

Who's Who at School

I have been introduced to school staff:

Principal and/or Assistant Principal _____

Guidance Counselor or Social Worker _____

School Nurse and/or School Health Coordinator _____

Classroom teacher(s) _____

Attendance Secretary _____

Coaches, players, and afterschool activity leaders _____

Homeless Liaison _____

Other _____

Schedule and Tour

- I have received a class schedule and someone has gone over it with me
- I have received a tour of the school:
 - Bathroom(s) Nurse's Office Trash and Recycling Classrooms
 - Gym Outdoor Areas Cafeteria Lunch Lines
- My lunch time is _____
- My locker is _____
- My bus number is _____
- School starts: _____ AM
- School ends: _____ PM
- Late bus leaves at _____

...Answers for youth in care, by youth in care

If you are thinking about college

This timeline can help you plan and prepare for college. Remember to work with your guidance counselor and youth transition worker about getting the help you'll need to choose a school and go through the college application process.

Your Junior Year

- Explore college/career options with your supportive adults.
- Take a career interest inventory.
- Attend a college fair and/or visit with college recruiters at your high school.
- Take a Practice SAT exam (PSAT).
- Send away for college catalogs or research options on the internet.
- Make a tentative top 5 or top 10 choices list for your favorite colleges.
- Arrange for a college tour.
- Register to take the SAT your senior year.
- Sign up at your local adult education office for a Financial Aid workshop.

Your Senior Year

September

- Register to take the SAT, if you haven't already.
- Review your transcripts with your guidance counselor.
- Visit with college representatives at your school and tour prospective colleges.

October

- Begin your applications and essay.
- Ask your guidance counselor and teachers for letters of recommendation.
- Let your caseworker and youth transition worker know you are planning to go to college to talk about DHHS financial assistance
- Complete the FAFSA application: <http://www.fafsa.gov>. **The earlier the better—aim for January 1st!** Financial Aid is awarded on a first-come-first-served basis. You can also ask questions by calling: 1-800-433-3243. You cannot apply for the tuition waiver (see March) without completing this step.

November

- Get your FAFSA ID that is required to complete the FAFSA. You can apply for a ID here: <https://fsaid.ed.gov/npas/index.htm>
- Take the SAT exams
- Complete your applications and essays and check application deadlines.

December

- Get your W2 or any income information in order to complete the FAFSA (you can use last year's and update the info later).
- Fill out a FAFSA Worksheet: <http://www.fafsa.gov>.
- Submit your college applications for processing.

January

- Complete your scholarship search. www.famemaine.com and www.orphan.org are very helpful resources.

If you are thinking about college

February

- Complete additional scholarship applications

March

- Applications for the Tuition Waiver are available on March 1st. You must complete the Tuition Waiver paperwork. (See “How do I apply for the Tuition Waiver” or <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/ocfs/cw/post.htm>) This process is very competitive. Your application must be mailed. The application can be downloaded directly from the Finance Authority of Maine’s [website](#).
- When you receive the Student Aid Report (SAR), make sure to read through it and follow the instructions if corrections need to be made

April

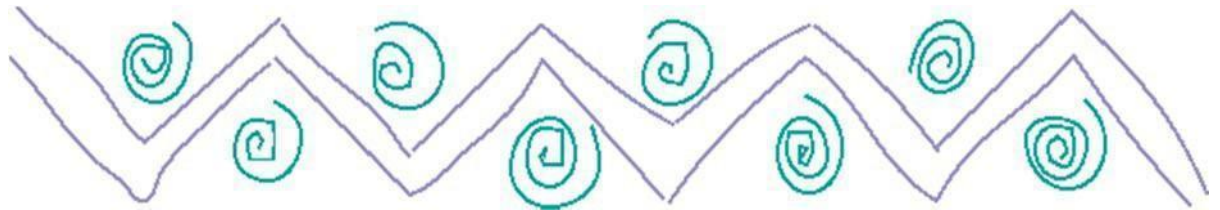
- College acceptance letters, along with financial aid award letters, start to arrive. Be sure to go over any paperwork you receive from the college with your transition worker and return all necessary forms in a timely fashion! It is likely that you will need to fill out additional forms for housing and financial aid. This is very important!!
- Review your options to make your final decision
- Send in deposits to hold your spot in the college of your choice (request funding from your DHHS Caseworker if needed)
- Make sure the youth transition worker knows you will be attending a college or training program (funds are limited—there may not be money for you if the youth transition worker does not know you will need financial help).

May

- Start your summer job hunt so that you will have money for college expenses and other things.
- Take pre-placement tests, if required

June

- Attend college orientation. You will likely register for classes at the orientation—so going will help you get the courses you want at the time that best meets your schedule. Ask a trusted adult, your caseworker, or Youth Transition Worker to help you get there.



And remember....Everyone wants you to succeed!

How do I apply for the Tuition Waiver?

Remember to talk with your caseworker and transition worker about your plans to attend college.

The Tuition Waiver program is for youth who were in foster care when they graduated from high school or obtained their GED, who were adopted from foster care or entered permanent guardianship through DHHS and whose parent or guardian currently receives an adoption or permanent guardianship subsidy with DHHS.

There are 30 waivers available and these are competitive awards through the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). This means that the cost of the tuition for State of Maine System schools and the Maine Maritime Academy will be waived, meaning entirely taken care of.

To receive the tuition waiver, you must be a resident of Maine and must have been accepted into the school at the time of application.

After you are a freshman year, you re-apply by submitting:

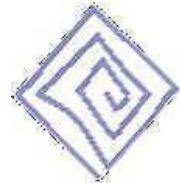
- A re-application form to the Finance Authority of Maine
- A copy of a letter from the Registrar's Office of the college you are attending indicating that you are a student in good academic standing
- A letter from the college's financial aid office indicating that you have applied for federal financial aid (FAFSA form) or a copy of your FAFSA award letter

Whom do I call for an application?

Any questions that you have about applying for the tuition waiver should be directed to the Financial Authority of Maine at 1-800-228-3734.

Remember...

You can apply for the Tuition Waiver next year if you are attending an eligible college or university. Remember that applications are available on March 1st and the process is very competitive. Get your application in as early as possible.



“I hope to represent Maine’s youth in foster care by showing that Maine’s youth who are in care are able to go to college, to show that we can do anything that we want to in life as long as we believe in it.”

Maria G, age 20

What if I am not eligible for the tuition waiver?

What if there are more than 30 new students?

If there are more than 30 “new students” (freshmen) in an academic year who are planning to attend one of the schools covered by the tuition waiver, DHHS will provide financial assistance for those students, if the following conditions are met:

- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) for each academic year.
- Remain in good academic standing (i.e. not failing courses, or on academic probation).
- Complete the DHHS application for college financial assistance. (This form may be obtained through your DHHS caseworker or Transition Worker).

What if I am attending a college that is not covered by the tuition waiver?

If you are attending a college that is not covered by the tuition waiver, the Department of Health and Human Services will continue to provide post-secondary education financial assistance if you meet the conditions described above. Please also see the page, “What are additional ways to pay for college?”

What are the Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) funds?

The Office of Child and Family Services is provided with Federal Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) funds to assist eligible youth in paying for accredited college and training programs. ETV funds are made available to youth from foster care who:

- were adopted or entered permanent guardianship from care at age 16, or older
- are on a Voluntary Extended Care (V-9) Agreement with DHHS.

Youth must complete their FAFSA and must be attending an accredited college or training program to receive ETV funds—in state or out-of-state. Youth must also be making satisfactory progress toward completing their program (as determined by the institution—usually that means a minimum GPA of 2.0)

Youth who are receiving ETV funds at age 21 are eligible to continue to receive funds until age 26 if they continue to make satisfactory progress in an accredited program. ETV regulations allow for a maximum of \$5000 per academic year (that includes fall, spring, and summer) after all other financial aid (except loans) is applied. The amount available to each student will depend on available funds and the number of students each year, and could be less than \$5000 in a given year.

Remember...

If you plan to spend a semester of college abroad as an exchange student, talk with your worker in advance in order to make financial plans!

Financial Supports For College, An overview

Adoption	Permanent Guardianship	V9 Agreement
<p>FAFSA—must be completed to access other funds. Financial Aid given on a first come/first served basis. Must be completed every year. Must get a PIN before or during the application process. Can apply beginning in October for the following year. (http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/)</p> <p>Independent Student Status (FAFSA)—through the College Costs Reduction Act, any youth adopted on or after their 13th birthday is considered “independent” on the FAFSA and does not have to provide parent info (income) or signatures.</p> <p>ETV Funds— for youth adopted through Maine DHHS on or after their 16th birthday. Must complete FAFSA. College or training programs must be accredited. Students must be in good academic standing. Some restrictions apply. Awards vary depending on available funds & student need after other financial aid scholarships and student refunds are applied--up to \$5000 per academic year. There is a maximum lifetime limit of ETV for 5 years. Youth who receive ETV funds at age 21 can receive them until age 26. Contact Dulcey Laberge 624-7928, Dulcey.laberge@maine.gov</p> <p>Tuition Waiver—youth who were adopted from Maine’s foster care AND whose parents are receiving an adoption subsidy from Maine DHHS at the time of graduation can apply for one of 30 waivers that can be used at State of Maine Universities, Community Colleges, or Maine Maritime. Awarded on a first come, first served basis—apply early. Must be a Maine resident. Must renew each year. Available for undergraduate degrees only, up to 5 years. Application available March 1. Administered through FAME (www.famemaine.com)</p> <p>Revised 2.20.20</p>	<p>FAFSA—must be completed to access other funds. Financial Aid given on a first come/first served basis. Must be completed every year. Must get a PIN before or during the application process. Can apply beginning in October for the following year. (http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/)</p> <p>Independent Student Status (FAFSA) —through the College Costs Reduction Act, any youth in Permanent Guardianship on or after their 13th birthday is considered “independent” on the FAFSA and do not have to provide parent info (income) or signatures.</p> <p>ETV Funds—available through DHHS for youth who enter permanent guardianship on or after their 16th birthday. Must complete FAFSA. College or training programs must be accredited. Students must be in good academic standing. Some restrictions apply. Awards vary depending on available funds & student need after other financial aid scholarships and student refunds are applied--up to \$5000 per academic year. There is a maximum lifetime limit of ETV for 5 years. Youth who receive ETV funds at age 21 can receive them until age 26. Contact Dulcey Laberge 624-7928, Dulcey.laberge@maine.gov</p> <p>Tuition Waiver—youth who entered Permanency Guardianship from Maine’s foster care system AND whose guardian received a Permanency Guardianship subsidy from Maine DHHS at the time of graduation or GED/HiSet can apply for one of 30 waivers that can be used at State of Maine Universities, Community Colleges, or Maine Maritime. Awarded on a first come, first served basis—apply early. Must be a Maine resident. Must renew each year. Available for undergraduate degrees only, up to 5 years. Application available March 1. Administered through FAME (www.famemaine.com)</p>	<p>FAFSA—must be completed to access other funds. Financial Aid given on a first come/first served basis. Must be completed every year. Must get a PIN before or during the application process. Can apply beginning in October for the following year. (http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/)</p> <p>Independent Student Status (FAFSA) —through the College Costs Reduction Act, any youth in foster care on or after their 13th birthday is considered “independent” on the FAFSA.</p> <p>ETV Funds—for youth on a V9 through Maine DHHS. Must complete FAFSA. College or training programs must be accredited. Students must be in good academic standing. Some restrictions apply. Awards vary depending on available funds & student need after other financial aid scholarships and student refunds are applied--up to \$5000 per academic year. There is a maximum lifetime limit of ETV for 5 years. Youth who receive ETV funds at age 21 can receive them until age 26. Contact your local youth Transition Specialist or Caseworker.</p> <p>Tuition Waiver— youth who were in Maine’s foster care at the time of graduation or GED/HiSet can apply for one of 30 waivers that can be used at State of Maine Universities, Community Colleges, or Maine Maritime. Awarded on a first come, first served basis—apply early. Must be a Maine resident. Must renew each year. Available for undergraduate degrees only, up to 5 years. Application available March 1. Administered through FAME (www.famemaine.com)</p> <p>Alumni Transition Grant Program (ATGP) - provide financial assistance and support to eligible young people who have aged out of foster care to complete their postsecondary education (Associates Degree, Bachelor Degree, Accredited Job Training Program).</p>

What are additional ways to pay for college?

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)

This application must be completed every year. The FAFSA application is available on or about October 1 each year. You can find out more at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>. Effective July 1, 2009, *The College Costs Reduction Act* allows young adults who aged out of foster care, who were adopted after the age of 13, or who entered permanent guardianship after the age of 13 to claim themselves as an "independent student" on their FAFSA form, without having to claim the income of a parent or guardian.

Scholarships

Scholarships are awarded on various criteria usually reflecting the values and purposes of the donor or the founder of the award. There are many different types of scholarships from merit and need-based, to student- and career-specific. Scholarships do not need to be paid back. For more information on how to apply for scholarships, check out the links below or talk to your guidance counselor.

Maine Community Foundation (MCF) at <https://www.mainecef.org/find-a-scholarship/> lists scholarships available to Maine students, by county. The College Board at http://apps.collegeboard.com/cbsearch_ss/welcome.jsp lists scholarships available, as well resources dedicated to helping you through the process of applying for scholarships.

Grants

Grants, much like scholarships, do not need to be repaid. However, grants are usually awarded from the federal government and not from a private donor. To be eligible for grants, you must fill out the application form for the FAFSA. You may find these grant listed at the federal grant site, <http://www.grants.gov>

Work-Study

Work-study helps students earn funding through a part-time work program. The work- study program is federally funded and the money earned does not need to be paid back.

Student Loans

Student loans allow students to borrow money to help cover the costs of tuition, room and board, and books at a reduced interest rate. Student loans don't usually have to be repaid until after you have graduated from school. Some loans are available from the federal government. To be eligible for these loans you must apply for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

Alumni Transition Grant Program (ATGP)

This program can provide financial assistance and support to eligible young people who aged out of foster care at 21 to complete their postsecondary education (Associates Degree, Bachelor Degree, Accredited Job Training Program). You can fill out an application for the ATGP [here](#).

Questions?

If you have any questions about college financial assistance from DHHS, contact your Youth Transition Specialist or Dulcey Laberge, at (207) 624-7928, or email her at Dulcey.laberge@maine.gov

What if I am unsure about what I want to do?

If you are unsure about what you want to do with your future, there are resources in Maine that can help you to discover your strengths, interests, and skills. You can talk with your caseworker, youth transition specialist, foster parent, guidance counselor, or other trusted adults to search for the program that best meets your needs and interests.

Maine Career Centers

Staff can help with career planning, resume writing, job skills development and job searches. (www.mainecareercenter.com). Some youth are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services through the Career Center. These services help people who have physical, mental, or emotional challenges to get and keep a job.