



**TEXAS**  
Department of Family  
and Protective Services



**Child  
Protective Services**

**Texas  
Foster Care  
Handbook  
for Children,  
Youth,  
& Young Adults**

**May 2024**

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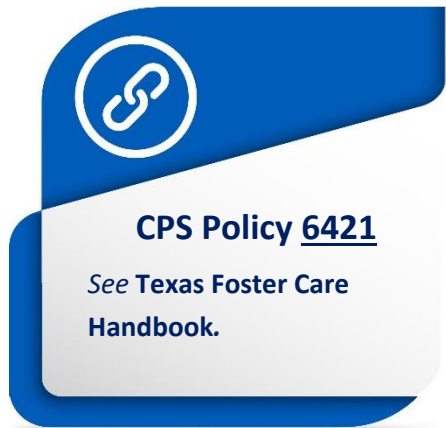
## Staff Instructions

The *Texas Foster Care Handbook* gives an overview of foster care for children age 10 and older who are in the foster care system (in DFPS conservatorship). It also provides information for older youth and young adults currently or formerly in foster care. Staff, children, youth, and young adults may use this document as a reference for resources and information. If you have any trouble accessing the information in this document, email [CPS@dfps.texas.gov](mailto:CPS@dfps.texas.gov).

### Staff Requirements

DFPS Child Protective Services (CPS) and Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC) staff must give a copy of the *Texas Foster Care Handbook* to children who enter DFPS conservatorship at age 10 or older or who turn 10 while in foster care.

Staff may provide an electronic version or a physical/printed-out version. If only an electronic pdf is sent directly to the youth, staff must verify receipt by the youth. For example, if the *Texas Foster Care Handbook* is sent by email, staff must follow up to ensure the email was received.



### PAL Staff Responsibilities

For youth already in foster care Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) or SSCC equivalent, staff must review the *Texas Foster Care Handbook* details with the youth when the youth is between the ages of 15 and one-half and 16.

If a youth enters conservatorship at age 16 or older, PAL staff review the *Texas Foster Care Handbook* within 60 days of the youth being placed on the PAL staff member's workload.

PAL staff must conduct the review in person unless the youth is placed outside of their legal region. Best practice for out-of-region youth is to do a virtual review according to the youth's preferred virtual platform (i.e., using Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, Zoom, etc.). If the out-of-region youth prefers the review by phone, that is also acceptable. The PAL staff member should allow the youth to choose whenever possible.

# 1. CPS Mission, Vision, & Values

## Mission

We partner with families and communities to address child abuse and neglect by practicing in a way that ensures safety, permanency, and wellbeing for the children and youth we serve.

## Vision

Children First: Protected and Connected

## Values

Our values represent the ideals we share and serve as broad guidelines for every situation. Our practice is built on our values.

- **Respect:** We show respect to the children, youth, and families we serve by demonstrating our understanding that they are more than the reason that brought them to us, and by seeking ways for them to guide the help they receive.
- **Commitment:** We display our commitment through pursuit of the best outcome for each of the children, youth, and families we serve, knowing our interventions have important implications for them.
- **Integrity:** We demonstrate integrity by communicating to the children, youth, and families we serve about our purpose and how we make decisions in a way that is easily understood, and when we follow through on our words and obligations to them.
- **Equity:** We achieve equity in outcomes by applying our methods fairly and consistently and customizing our interventions to the unique cultural and community context of the children, youth, and families we serve.
- **Urgency:** We work with a sense of urgency to reach safety, permanency, and well-being concurrently for every child and youth we serve, and this is reflected in each of our interventions.



## 2. Information for Children & Youth of All Ages

### What Does It Mean to Be Placed in Foster Care?

If you are not safe at home, a judge can place you in foster care under the custody known as **conservatorship** of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). If that happens, the judge will pick an attorney who will talk to you about your case. It means you must move away from your parents to protect you from abuse or neglect.

*Foster care is like life.  
It gets hard,  
but it also gets better.*

– Ardetra L.

This new home may be with another member of your family, a foster home, or another setting. You should talk to your foster parents, caregiver, or caseworker if you have questions about new rules and routines where you are living.

### Separation and Loss, the Right to Feel Sad

Now that you have been removed from your home, we know you may feel scared, nervous, sad, alone, mad, and maybe hopeful. While you may feel no one knows what you are going through, we encourage you to be honest about your feelings and talk to someone you trust about these feelings.

This could be your caseworker, parents, a relative, a close family friend, foster parents or caregiver, a teacher, your attorney, a counselor, or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA).

Please tell us if we can do things differently to make you happier while you are in foster care. Your feelings matter to us. We can only help you if we know what you are feeling and thinking.







# Things to Remember

## Grieve for Your Family

It is okay to be sad. No matter what has happened to you, we understand you will miss your family. Talk to your caseworker about your scheduled visits with your parents.

If you are not allowed to see your parents, you have the right to know why.

If you have brothers or sisters and are not living with them, you have the right to see them at least once a week and talk to them by phone unless a judge decides it is not best for you.

It is your caseworker's job to work hard to find a home for you to live with your siblings. Talk to your caseworker, attorney, CASA, or the judge in your case about wanting to live with them.

## Respect for Your Family

While you are in foster care, there will be times you will want to talk about your family. It is important no one speak negatively about your family.

Although it may be hard to talk about what has happened, your caseworker may need to discuss what those things are to help your parents learn how to make good changes and your home safe so you can go home.

## Be Angry or Upset

It is okay to cry because you miss your family or be angry that you cannot see them every day.

We want you to use your words. Tell us how you feel rather than running away or hurting yourself or someone else.

If you feel like hurting yourself, you must tell an adult right away.

If you are thinking about running away, we want to know why so we can try to make things better where you are living.

We are here to keep you safe.

## Know Your Feelings

You will have good days while in foster care and some not so good days.

If you feel you cannot talk to someone, we want you to try other ways to express your feelings – write them down in a diary or journal, draw them out in artwork, write poems or listen to music, play sports, or find other positive, healthy ways to express and learn to deal with your emotions and feelings.

Remember, the adults who care about you can only help if you tell us what is wrong.

## 3. Rights of Children & Youth in Foster Care

As a child or youth in foster care, you have the rights explained below. These rights should be shared with you by your caseworker and caregiver.

### Safety & Care

1. Be told:
  - Why I am in foster care.
  - What will happen to me.
  - What is happening to my family (including brothers and sisters).
  - How CPS is planning for my future.
2. Have good care and treatment that meets my needs in the most family-like setting possible. This means I have the right to live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable place. I am protected from getting hurt, treated with respect, and given privacy for personal needs.
3. Be told the rules by a person at the place where I am living.
4. Be free from abuse, neglect, exploitation, and harassment from any person in the household or facility where I live.
5. Be kept informed about any investigations that involve me.
6. Be treated fairly.

### Family & Other Contacts

1. Live with my siblings who are in foster care, if possible. If I am not living with my siblings, I have the right to know why. If there are no safety or other compelling reasons why I cannot live with my siblings, it is my caseworker's job to try and find a home where I can live with my siblings.
2. Visit and have regular contact with my family, including my brothers and sisters unless a court order or case plan does not allow it, and have my caseworker explain any restrictions to me and write them in my record. I have the right to file a court petition to request access to my siblings if I am separated from my siblings because of a DFPS action.
3. Visit and have contact with persons outside the foster care system. These visitors can be, but are not limited to, teachers, church members, mentors, and friends.



# A Normal Life

1. Speak and be spoken to in my own language. This includes Braille if I am blind or sign language if I am deaf. If my foster parents or caregiver does not know my language, CPS will give me a plan to meet my needs to communicate.
2. Go to school and get an education that fits my age and individual needs.
3. Have my religious needs met.
4. Participate in childhood activities appropriate for my age and maturity, including youth leadership development, foster family activities, and unsupervised childhood and extracurricular activities such as playing sports, playing in the band, going on field trips, spending time with friends, etc.
5. Privacy, including sending and receiving unopened mail, making and receiving private phone calls, and keeping a personal journal, unless an appropriate professional or court says restrictions are needed for my best interest.
6. Personal care, hygiene, and grooming products, and training on how to use them.
7. Comfortable clothing for my age and size, similar to clothing worn by other children in my community, as well as clothing that protects me against the weather. If I am a teenager, I should have the reasonable opportunity to select my clothing.
8. Have my personal items and gifts at my home and to get more things within reasonable limits as planned for and discussed by my caregiver and caseworker and based on my caregiver's ability.
9. Have my personal belongings transported in luggage, like a suitcase, duffel bag, backpack, or similar container, when being placed in foster care or changing placements. The luggage is my personal property.
10. Personal space in my bedroom to store my clothes and belongings.
11. Be told of search policies (going through my personal items). I have the right to be told if certain items are forbidden or if I am not allowed to have them and why. If my belongings are removed, it must be documented.
12. Healthy foods in healthy portions for my age and activity level.
13. Look for a job, get paid for work done at my placement except for routine chores or work assigned as fair and reasonable discipline, keep my own money, and have my own bank account in my own name, depending on my age or level of maturity.
14. Give my permission in writing before taking part in any publicity or fund-raising activity for the place where I live, including the use of my photograph.
15. Refuse to make public statements showing my gratitude to a foster home, child-placing agency, or operation.
16. Not get pressured to get an abortion, give up my child for adoption, or parent my child, if this applies to me.

## Discipline

1. Be free of any harsh, cruel, unusual, unnecessary, demeaning, or humiliating punishment. This means I should never be:
  - Shaken, hit, spanked, or threatened with being shaken, hit, or spanked.
  - Forced to do unproductive work.
  - Denied food, sleep, access to a bathroom, mail, or family visits.
  - Made fun of, including my family.
  - Threatened with losing my placement or shelter.
  - Treated in a way meant to embarrass, control, harm, intimidate, or isolate me by use of physical force, rumors, threats, or inappropriate comments.
2. Be disciplined in a manner appropriate for how mature I am, my developmental level, and my medical condition. I must be told why I was disciplined. Discipline does not include the use of restraint, seclusion (forced to be alone), corporal punishment (such as spanking), or threat of corporal punishment.
3. Be informed of emergency behavioral intervention policies in writing. I have the right to know how staff will control me if I cannot control my behavior, and how they will keep me and those around me safe.

## Plans for Me While in Care

1. See my caseworker at least once a month and in private.
2. Receive a complete plan that addresses my needs and services, including transition activities when I am 14 or older that plan for my life as an adult. The plan includes a career, college, or help enrolling in an educational or vocational job training program. I also have the right to a copy or summary of my plan and the right to review it.
3. Actively participate in creating my plan for services and permanent living arrangements. I have the right to ask someone to act for me or support me in my participation. At age 14, I have the right to invite two or more additional people of my choosing, who are not my foster parent or caseworker, to participate in my case planning meetings.

### **If I Am An Older Youth**

If I am age 14 or older, I have the right to:

4. One or more Circle of Support Conferences.
5. Be told about services, programs, and benefits available to me when I leave care – PAL, Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program, College Tuition and Fee Waiver, STAR Health-Medicaid, Extended Foster Care, and others.

If I am age 16 or older, I have the right to:

1. Attend PAL classes and other state and regional activities as required, or suitable, for my plan for services.
2. Help in getting a place to live and information on the cost of housing when aging out of care so I can plan for my future independence.

## Medical

1. Good medical, dental, and vision care, and mental health and developmental services that adequately meet my needs. Also, I have the right to ask that the care or services be separate from adults (other than young adults) who are receiving services.
2. Not be forced to take unnecessary or too much medication.
3. Be involved in decisions about my medical care:
  - I may consent to my own treatment in some cases if allowed by the health care provider. For example, the law allows me to consent to my own counseling for suicide prevention, drug or alcohol issues, or sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. Also, I can agree to be treated for serious contagious or communicable diseases.
  - If I am pregnant and unmarried, I can agree to hospital, medical, or surgical treatment, other than abortion, related to the pregnancy. If I have a child who is in my legal care, I can consent to all medical care for my child.
  - If I am 16 years old or older, I have the right to ask a judge to legally authorize me to make some or all of my own medical decisions, like the kinds of medications I should take.

## Records

1. Expect my records and personal information to be kept private and discussed only when it is about my care.
2. Have a copy of the CPS Rights of Children and Youth in Foster Care and these rights explained to me in my primary language or in any means that successfully explains it to me.
3. Have a credit report run annually beginning at age 14, be informed of the results and receive assistance in interpreting the report and disputing any inaccuracies.
4. Receive help with getting my birth certificate, Social Security card, and personal identification card, like a state ID card or when suitable driver license, before I turn 16.
5. Get necessary personal information within 30 days of leaving care, including my immunization records, proof of Medicaid enrollment, information about how to set up a medical power of attorney, and information contained in my education portfolio and health passport.

## Complaints

1. Make calls, reports, or complaints without being punished, threatened with punishment, or retaliated against. I have the right to make any of these calls privately and anonymously if I choose and if the call center permits it. Depending on the nature of the complaint, I have the right to call:

[Texas Abuse Hotline](#)

**1-800-252-5400**

[Foster Care Ombudsman](#)

**1-844-286-0769**

[DFPS Office of Consumer Affairs](#)

**1-800-720-7777**

[Disability Rights Texas](#)

**1-800-252-9108**

2. To get information from my caseworker, attorney, CASA, or any other person in my case about where I can make my complaint if I have one.
3. Be kept informed about the outcomes of any complaints made to the [Foster Care Ombudsman](#).

## Legal & The Courts

1. Contact and speak privately to my caseworker, attorneys, ad litem, probation officer, CASA, and Disability Rights Texas.
2. Go to court hearings and speak to the judge about where I am living and what I would like to see happen to me and my family.

## 4. Responsibilities While In Foster Care

You, your caregiver, and your caseworker each have certain responsibilities while you are in foster care. These are listed below.

### My Responsibilities

- Work with your caseworker on your case plan.
- Work with your caseworker and caregiver to address your needs and case plan issues.
- Work with your caseworker and caregiver about following placement rules.
- Tell your caseworker when you do and do not want visits with your parents.
- Tell your caseworker, CASA, or attorney if there are relatives or friends who you would like to live with or visit.
- Talk with your caseworker. If you do not feel safe in your home or have problems where you live, tell your caseworker as soon as possible.
- Not run away, no matter how bad things may seem. If you run away, you could spend the night in juvenile detention, seriously hurt, or worse.
- Take issues up the caseworker's chain of command. Start with your caseworker, then the caseworker's supervisor (boss), but you may always directly contact the [Foster Care Ombudsman](#).



*Foster care allows for you to have a chance for opportunity, something that was hard to achieve before I entered. It's helped me to see that dreams can truly become reality.*

– Caroline N.

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# My Caregiver's Responsibilities

- Keep you safe and give you food, clothing, and shelter.
- Treat you with dignity and respect.
- Keep information about you and your family confidential and share it only with people who need to know, such as your caseworker.
- Show understanding and give guidance and unconditional acceptance.
- Support you in maintaining connections to your family and siblings.
- Respect your rights.
- Participate in meetings about your case plan and other case-related meetings.
- Get you ready for your next move in life whether that means going home, going to another placement, or living on your own.
- Support your growth by encouraging your success in school and everyday life.
- Teach you basic life skills.
- Allow you to participate in everyday activities and events, including getting you to these activities.
- Make sure you get medical and dental care and understand your treatment and services. Work with you and your caseworker to make sure your case plan is developed and carried out.
- Schedule and arrange for a ride to visits between you and your family (parents, siblings, and relatives) or anyone else you want to contact unless a judge or DFPS does not allow it.
- Help you deal with your thoughts and feelings about being in foster care.
- Get enough training to provide care for youth who have been abused or neglected.
- Make their home ready to welcome you.
- Help you learn about your culture and heritage.
- Do their best to make you happy while in foster care.



# My Caseworker's Responsibilities

- See you regularly and talk to you alone at least once a month face-to-face, not by phone.
- Give you their cell and office phone number and return your calls as soon as possible.
- Tell you about court hearings and major points in your case.
- Keep your family updated on how you are doing.
- Learn what you are interested in so you can do things you like.
- Build a relationship with you to represent your best interests.
- Help you transition out of foster care successfully.
- Make sure you get at least one Circle of Support after turning age 14, if you want one.
- Make sure you have your personal documents before ages 16 and 18.
- Help you understand what services, supports, and benefits you get.
- Arrange visits between you and your family (parents, siblings, and relatives) or anyone else you would like to contact unless a judge or DFPS does not allow it.
- Keep your attorney and CASA updated on how you are doing and help you contact your attorney or court advocate.
- Make recommendations in your best interest to the court.
- Make sure you feel safe in your home.

## 5. You Can Have a Normal Life in Foster Care

Foster care is not meant to keep you away from everyone or prevent you from having a normal life. DFPS wants you to have friends, visit with them, and participate in social activities important to you. You may do activities other children or youth your age get to do, such as play sports or be in the band, go to the mall, and spend time with your friends.

Please talk to your caregiver if you want to do something. Your caregiver does not need to ask DFPS for permission. DFPS is not required to do background checks on your friends before you visit with them. It is important that you talk to your caregiver so they can know you better, make good decisions, and help your social life.

If your caregiver is not allowing you to do something you want, please talk to your caseworker, CASA, attorney, or the judge on your case. There may be good reasons why your caregiver is saying no. If everyone is talking to each other, we may be able to figure out another solution. Everyone wants you to live a normal life as much as possible and for you to be happy.



## Permanency Planning

Planning for permanency which is how you will exit foster care starts the moment you enter foster care. It ends only when you leave foster care.

DFPS must have a **permanency plan** for you because a court has said it is unsafe for you to live with your parents. Your permanency plan includes the specific steps to meet your permanency goals.



These goals could include returning to your family, being adopted by a relative or another family member, or making someone else you trust legally responsible for you.

If you are over the age of 16, your goal could be staying in foster care until you are ready to live successfully on your own. Your permanency plan is contained in the Family Plan of Service and Child's Plan of Service.

## Family Plan of Service

Sometimes called a family plan, family service plan, or FPOS, the **Family Plan of Service** is an agreement between DFPS, the court, and your parents. Together, they will decide what changes or goals need to be made by your parents or sometimes with other relatives for you to safely return home and set up a plan for making these changes.

## Child's Plan of Service

Sometimes called a plan of service, case plan, child plan, or CPOS, the **Child's Plan of Service** is a plan to give you safe and good care while you're away from home.

The plan outlines your needs while in foster care and the services you will get. Your health, education, recreation, religion, and other things important to you, including visiting with your parents and siblings, are covered in the plan.

The first goal is usually for you to return home. If you cannot go home, other goals are explored. If you are in care at the age of 14, plans for your successful transition to adulthood will be developed, including services to prepare you for being an adult.

*Transitioning out of foster care leaves room for growth, perseverance, opportunities, and most of all independence. This is your time to show others and prove to yourself that you're capable and that you will succeed.*  
– Krizia R.

## Relative and Kinship Care



If a relative or close family friend is interested in providing a safe home for you while you are in foster care, encourage the relative to contact your caseworker as soon as possible or give your caseworker their name and contact information. Relatives and close family friends will have to participate in a home assessment process and be approved to provide care for you.



## 6. Kinds of Foster Care Placements

### Foster Family Home

A family who cares for you or other children removed from their homes and is licensed by Texas as a foster home.

### Kinship Care

A relative or someone not related who you consider to be like family or have an important relationship with who will care for you in their home. This person could be an aunt or uncle, grandparent, godparent, teacher, coach, or pastor.



### General Residential Operation

A medium-to-large, licensed facility for children in a group setting that provides treatment or basic care based on the needs of each child. An example is cottage style group homes.

## Residential Treatment Center

A licensed facility that provides care for a large number of children or youth with higher needs and treatment.

## Emergency Shelter

A facility that provides care for children on a short-term basis, typically up to four weeks, and is licensed to provide care for 13 or more youth.

## Transitional Living Program

Less restrictive residential services designed to serve children 14 years or older for whom the service or treatment goal is basic life skills development toward independent living. A transitional living program (TLP) includes basic life skills training and practice. See [Transitional Living Services](#).



## Supervised Independent Living

Living arrangements offered through the [Extended Foster Care](#) program which allow young adults to reside in a less restrictive, non-traditional foster care setting while receiving casework and support services to become independent and self-sufficient. See [Supervised Independent Living](#) (SIL) for housing setting types.



## 7. Healthcare

Your health and well-being are important. DFPS wants to make sure you get well and stay well while in foster care.

### STAR Health

You will receive medical and mental health services through **STAR Health**, the statewide Medicaid managed care program, if you are in certain groups.



### Benefits Under STAR Health

#### STAR Health Recipients

- Children in DFPS conservatorship (under 18).
- Children in the Adoption Assistance or Permanency Care Assistance program who are transitioning from STAR Health to STAR or STAR Kids.
- Youth with voluntary extended foster care placement agreements.
- Youth who are Former Foster Care Children (FFCC).

STAR Health provides a full-range of Medicaid covered medical and behavioral health services for children in DFPS conservatorship and young adults in DFPS paid placements.

#### STAR Health Benefits

- Regular checkups at the doctor and dentist.
- Prescription drugs and vaccines.
- Hospital care and services.
- X-rays and lab tests.
- Vision and hearing care.
- Access to medical specialists and mental health care.
- Treatment of special health needs and pre-existing conditions.
- A 24/7 nurse hotline.
- Access to the Health Passport, an internet-based electronic health record.

## Medical Health Passport

The **Health Passport** is a computer-based system that stores your health information while you are in foster care. The information is shared with your doctors or other medical providers who treat you, your caregiver, CASA, and caseworker.

You will get a copy of the information in your Health Passport when you leave foster care at age 18 or if you are adopted. This will help you make informed decisions about your medical care.

You may ask your caseworker at any time about your Health Passport.



## Medical Consent

If you are at least 16 years old, you may have the right to make your own medical decisions. A judge will decide if you are ready to consent to medical care. The caregiver and your caseworker are required to advise you of this right to become your own **medical consenter**.



## Medical Power of Attorney

Within 90 days before you turn 18, your caseworker provides you with information on the importance of selecting a **medical power of attorney** who would make healthcare treatment decisions for you if you became incapacitated and unable to participate in these decisions. See [Services for Older Youth & Youth Adults](#).

# Healthcare Benefits After Age 18

## Former Foster Care Children Program

The **FFCC program** gives you healthcare coverage through age 25. This also includes young adults who aged out of foster care in another state on or after January 1, 2023, and were receiving Medicaid when they aged out.

### FFCC Eligibility Criteria

- Age 18 through 25.
- In foster care or other DFPS custody on your 18th birthday.
- Received Medicaid when you aged out of foster care.

## Medicaid for Transitioning Foster Care Youth

**Medicaid for Transitioning Foster Care Youth** (MTFCY) is another healthcare coverage available to certain young adults.

### MTFCY Eligibility Criteria

- Age 18 to 20.
- In foster care on your 18th birthday or older.
- Have no other health coverage.
- Meet program rules for your income (the amount of money you get).



### When You Move

*You must report a change of address to Texas Medicaid, or you may lose your benefits and must reapply.*



### Your Texas Benefits

*To **renew or reapply for Texas Medicaid**, visit [www.YourTexasBenefits.org](http://www.YourTexasBenefits.org) or call 2-1-1.*

*Learn more about **the app** at <https://www.yourtexasbenefits.com/Learn/Home>.*

*For **more healthcare information**, visit [www.dfps.texas.gov](http://www.dfps.texas.gov) or [www.fostercaretx.com](http://www.fostercaretx.com).*

If you are age 18 to 20, you get Medicaid through STAR Health, but can switch to STAR upon request.

If you are age 21 to 25, you get Medicaid through the STAR plan of your choice.

## 8. Education

### Kindergarten Through 12th Grade

DFPS wants to make sure you have everything you need to be successful in school. We know children, youth, and young adults who get a good education and earn a high school diploma are more successful as adults, earn more money, have better health, and enjoy stronger relationships. Your caseworker will work with you, the school, and your foster family to help you earn a high school diploma and plan for your future.

*Foster care was a gift and a curse. I struggled but I also conquered my fears. Achieved financial and educational goals! Keep pushing, never give up.*

*--Ignacio M.*

If possible, we want to keep you in the same school you were attending before you lived with a foster family. But, if staying at the same school is not good for you or possible, your caseworker or foster parent will enroll you in a new school that can meet your educational needs and goals within two days. Your foster family, the school, and your caseworker will make sure you have a way to get to your new school.

Your caseworker is interested in your progress at school and will ask you about school during monthly visits. Your caseworker will encourage you to participate in school activities and join clubs or sports.



## School Foster Care Liaison

Sometimes students need some help. Your school district has a [foster care liaison](#) to help students in foster care. Tell your caregiver, your caseworker, one of your teachers, or a school counselor if you need some help understanding math or reading gets too hard.

## Personal Graduation Plan



You, your caseworker, and your high school counselor will start creating your **personal graduation plan** in the ninth grade. This plan describes each subject you will take to earn your high school diploma. DFPS will help you set goals for after high school, such as college, training, or a career.

## Education Portfolio or “Green Binder”

The **Education Portfolio** is a green binder with many of your educational records. Your caseworker and caregivers add copies of your report cards, school records, transcripts, personal graduation plan, school pictures, and important tests. It also shows all the classes you completed in high school and should include a copy of your birth certificate.

It belongs to you. You can add special things to it and take it with you when you leave foster care. It can be a good reminder of all the things you accomplished in school.



# College Benefits

## Education and Training Voucher Program

The **ETV program** provides federal grants up to \$5,000 annually to help you meet your educational goals. ETV grants are available beginning at age 16 up to ages 21 or 23, depending on your situation.

Receiving this grant is based on enrollment in college, university, or a vocational/technical program and other sources of financial aid you may receive. Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is a condition when enrolling in the ETV program.

### Who is Eligible for ETV?

- Youth in DFPS foster care who are at least 16 and likely to remain in foster care until turning 18.
- Youth who age out of DFPS foster care, but have not yet turned 21.
- Youth who are adopted from DFPS foster care after turning age 16, but not yet 21.
- Youth who enter permanency care assistance after turning age 16, but who are not yet 21.

### Do I Qualify for ETV?

- You qualify if you have a high school diploma or equivalent and are taking classes part time (at least six hours) at an accredited or pre-accredited public, private, or non-profit program that provides a bachelor's degree or a two-year or longer program that provides credit toward a degree or certification.
- You also qualify if you are at least age 18 and enrolled part-time (at least 6 hours) in an accredited or pre-accredited program that provides training toward gainful employment.
- If you enroll in a dual credit course or other course in which you earn joint high school and college credits, you may also receive assistance from the ETV program. You must be in foster care on the day you enroll.



### ETV Program

To **enroll**, visit [DFPS - Education and Training Voucher Program \(ETV\)](https://www.dfps.gov/education-and-training-voucher-program) ([texas.gov](https://www.texas.gov))

or call **1-877-268-4063** to talk to ETV staff.

You may also contact PAL staff to discuss and verify eligibility requirements.



## College Tuition and Fee Waiver Texas Law

You may be eligible to have tuition and fees waived at Texas colleges if you were in foster care, were adopted from DFPS or a court gave someone who is not your parent custody, or you return to the legal responsibility of a parent.

This **College Tuition and Fee Waiver** is good for life, but you must enroll in a qualifying program before your 25th birthday.

It covers most courses offered at a state university, community college, vocational or technical college, certificate programs, or dual credit courses. However, some vocational or certificate courses may not be exempt from tuition and fees, so make sure you check with the school.



### Enroll Before Age 25

*You must enroll in any Texas state college by **age 25** to activate the tuition and fee waiver, or you will lose this benefit.*

### Who is Eligible for College Tuition and Fee Waivers?

- You were in DFPS conservatorship on the day before your 18th birthday.
- You were in DFPS conservatorship on or after the day of your 14th birthday, and you were eligible for adoption on or after that day.
- You were in DFPS conservatorship on the day you graduated from high school or received the equivalent of a high school diploma.
- You were adopted from DFPS conservatorship on or after September 1, 2009.
- You returned to the legal responsibility of a parent at age 14 and older on or after June 1, 2016, and were in DFPS permanent managing conservatorship.
- You returned to the legal responsibility of a parent at age 16 and older on or after June 1, 2016, and were in DFPS temporary managing conservatorship.
- If permanent managing conservatorship of you was granted to a non-parent on or after September 1, 2009.
- While in DFPS conservatorship, you may have tuition waived if you are enrolled in dual credit course(s) in which you earn joint high school and college credits.

While U.S. citizenship or qualified alien status is not required, without such status you will have trouble getting any federal financial assistance for college.

# DFPS Scholarships

## CPS Freshman and Sophomore Success Scholarship

The **CPS Freshmen and Sophomore Success Scholarship** is for young adults formerly in DFPS foster care attending a Texas state-funded institution of higher education. This includes community colleges, colleges, universities, and Texas State Technical College.

Scholarships are \$1,000 per semester or academic term or \$2,000 for two semesters or academic terms. Only students awarded the scholarship both semesters as a freshman may apply for the scholarship as a *sophomore or second year student* at a Texas state-funded institution of higher education.



### CPS Success Scholarship

Download the [Freshman and Sophomore Success Scholarship Letter and Application](#), or ask your PAL staff about how to apply for these scholarships.



# Other Help for College

## Financial Aid

### Free Application for Federal Student Aid Application

To get **federal financial aid** such as a PELL Grant, you must complete the FAFSA each year you attend college.

### Texas Application for State Financial Aid Application

Youth who are undocumented qualify for **state financial aid** through the Texas Application for State Financial Aid (TASFA). The online application is not in Spanish, but you can download the paper version in Spanish.



#### Financial Aid

To complete the federal **FAFSA application**, visit <https://studentaid.gov/h/apply-for-aid/fafsa>.

Visit <https://www.highered.texas.gov/our-work/empowering-our-students/tasfa/> to complete the Texas **TASFA application**.

## College Foster Care Student Liaisons

Each state-supported college in Texas has a designated **foster care student liaison**. Liaisons help foster care students with enrollment, provide or refer students to campus support services or groups, and help students navigate the school system.

Ask your caseworker or PAL staff if there are college partnerships in the area where you live.



#### College Foster Care Student Liaisons

Find out more about College Foster Care liaisons by visiting [DFPS - College Partnerships \(texas.gov\)](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/CollegePartnerships/).

## Housing Between Academic Terms

Texas colleges are required to help you locate temporary housing between academic terms, such as Christmas and summer breaks, if you are a full-time student formerly in foster care. You may request housing assistance either at the financial aid offices, student affairs offices, admissions offices, or other residential living offices. Also see [Housing Plan](#).

## College Resource Links

<b>finaid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides information on financial aid for college and tips on how to help ease the burden of college expenses.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://www.finaid.org">www.finaid.org</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>College for All Texans</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides information, resources, and tools for students on financial aid and college planning.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://www.CollegeforAllTexans.com">www.CollegeforAllTexans.com</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Apply Texas</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A one-stop shop for applying to a public university or community college in Texas.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://www.applytexas.org">www.applytexas.org</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Fast Web</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A free search platform that connects students to college and trade school scholarships and financial aid tools.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://www.fastweb.com">www.fastweb.com</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>College Board</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Helps students navigate the path from high school to college and career.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://www.collegeboard.org">www.collegeboard.org</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>Accuplacer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A testing system used to assess student readiness for college-level courses.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://www.accuplacer.collegeboard.org/students">www.accuplacer.collegeboard.org/students</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>THECB</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A state agency helping students navigate enrolling in and completing a post-secondary program.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="http://www.highered.texas.gov/our-work/empowering-our-students/">www.highered.texas.gov/our-work/empowering-our-students/</a>.</li> </ul>
<b>DFPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational resources for youth and youth adults.</li> <li>• Visit <a href="#">DFPS - Other Educational Resources for Older Foster Youth (texas.gov)</a>.</li> </ul>

## 9. Where to Turn for Help

### Start with Your Caseworker

If you have a problem or complaint, please talk with your caseworker first. If for some reason your caseworker cannot meet your needs, please contact the caseworker's supervisor (boss). You may always contact the Foster Care Ombudsman.

Start Here



**Foster Care Ombudsman**

**1-844-286-0769**

If you feel your rights are being violated while in foster care and under age 18, call the [Foster Care Ombudsman](tel:1-844-286-0769). The ombudsman will investigate your complaints and see if your rights were violated.

The ombudsman is a neutral person who takes complaints and addresses concerns you have about foster care. Your complaints are kept private, and no one is allowed to punish or retaliate against you for filing a complaint. Retaliation of any kind is not allowed while in foster care. The Foster Care Ombudsman will talk with you and make sure your voice is heard while in foster care.





## Texas Abuse Hotline

**1-800-252-5400**

Physical discipline is not allowed while in foster care. If someone hits you or uses other physical discipline or you feel you have been abused or neglected, report it to the [Texas Abuse Hotline](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Child_Care_Services/Child_Abuse_Hotline.asp). Your name is confidential by law, and your report will be investigated.



## Texas Youth Helpline

**1-800-989-6884**

The [Texas Youth Helpline](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/Child_Care/Child_Care_Services/Youth_Helpline.asp) is a resource to help find local services for youth and young adults who are under age 21, including those who have aged out of the foster care system. You may contact the statewide hotline by phone or text for phone counseling, information, and referrals.

## Youth Specialists

**Youth specialists** are DFPS employees who are former foster care youth who aged out of care. Youth specialists play a key role in the development and support of local youth leadership councils. A voice for youth in CPS program development, youth specialists are in some areas of the state. You may contact your PAL staff for information about your local council.





## 10. Services for Older Youth & Young Adults

### Transitional Living Services for Ages 14 to 23

#### Life Skills Trainings

While you are in foster care, you will receive hands-on learning from your caregiver to fit your skills and abilities. Life skills training starts at age 14. This includes grocery shopping, cooking meals, nutrition, use of public transportation, and learning basic household tasks.

It also includes financial training – such as financial management, balancing a bank account, and personal finances. Your caregiver can help you open a savings or checking account if you have a job or other source of income.



#### Credit Reports

DFPS will request a credit report for you each year you are in foster care beginning at age 14. We will tell you if a credit report exists on you and work with the credit reporting agencies to correct your credit history, if needed. Your caseworker will notify you when a credit report is run and the results. If you are a young adult and in [Extended Foster Care](#), we will help you request your own report.

## Circle of Support

DFPS uses a meeting called a Circle of Support to help you with your plans for a successful transition to adulthood. You will be offered a Circle of Support meeting starting at age 14.

This is your meeting, and you are in the driver's seat. You can call a meeting with people you identify as **caring adults** in your support system. These adults can be foster care providers, teachers, parents, siblings, relatives, church members, mentors, etc.



You and your caring adults meet with a person called a **facilitator** who will keep the meeting focused on you as you develop and review your plans. This meeting covers topics such as your hopes and dreams, goals, strengths, concerns, education, employment, health and mental health, a long-term housing plan, personal and community connections, and PAL services.

Your plans will address special needs if you have a disability. Each caring adult identifies a way they can personally help support your successful transition to adulthood so you can reach your short- and long-term goals. These plans are signed by everyone who participates and put into your Child's Plan of Service.

## Driver License or State Identification Card Fee Waiver

We encourage you to talk to your caregiver and your caseworker to get permission if you want to get a driver license while in foster care. You must have access to an insured vehicle when getting a driver license.

Once you get your driver license, the Texas Department of Public Safety will waive the driver license fee if you are living in paid foster care, including [Extended Foster Care](#). The fee waiver also covers a state identification card.

Request a fee waiver form from your caseworker or PAL staff.

## Youth Transition Portfolio

Before you turn age 18 and are ready to leave care, you will get all your personal materials, documents, and information in a [Youth Transition Portfolio](#) from your caseworker to help you transition to adulthood.

Included in the portfolio is an [Almost 18? Letter](#) explaining services, benefits, documents, and contact information you need before leaving care at age 18. The letter briefly provides information about the [Extended Foster Care](#) program and your options if you are interested in extending care after age 18.



### Youth Transition Portfolio

*The [Almost 18 Letter](#) is included in your Youth Transition Portfolio from your caseworker.*



# Getting Your Personal Documents Before Ages 16 and 18

## Before Age 16

On or before turning age 16, you get the originals and photocopies of these personal documents.

### Personal Documents You Get Before Age 16

- Your birth certificate.
- Your original or replacement Social Security card.
- A personal identification card issue by the Texas Department of Public Safety or a driver license, if approved.

## Before Age 18

Within 30 days before you turn age 18 and leave care, you also get copies of these personal documents.

### Personal Documents You Get Before Age 18

- Immunization records.
- Health Passport records.
- Medicaid card, other proof of your enrollment in Medicaid, or an insurance card from a health plan that provides youth health coverage.
- Information on a medical power of attorney.
- Most recent credit report.
- Savings account information.
- Transition Portfolio.



You may also contact your caseworker or your caseworker's supervisor to make sure you have your personal documents.



## Lost Documents

### While in Foster Care

If you lose any of your original or certified documents at any time before leaving foster care, your caseworker or PAL staff can help you.

You may always directly contact the [Foster Care Ombudsman](#) if you do not get your documents before turning 18.

### After Foster Care

If you lose or misplace your personal documents after you leave foster care, you may contact DFPS Records Management or fill out Form 4884 requesting missing documents.



#### Records Requests After Foster Care

Visit [DFPS - Requesting Your Case Record \(texas.gov\)](#) or call  
**DFPS Records Management**  
**1-877-764-7230.**



# Preparation for Adult Living

The PAL program helps older youth in foster care prepare for their transition to a successful adulthood. PAL provides supportive services and benefits to youth ages 14 to 21 to increase their self-sufficiency and productivity.

The PAL program consists of the following elements.

<b>Life Skills Assessment</b>	To find out your strengths and needs.
<b>Life Skills Training</b>	In the core areas of health and safety, housing and transportation, job readiness, financial management, life decisions and responsibility, and personal and social relationships.
<b>Educational and Vocational Services</b>	Career development and education supports.
<b>Supportive Services</b>	Based on need and funding. may include vocational assessment and training, GED, college prep, driver's education, high school expenses, counseling, personal documents, and volunteer mentoring.
<b>Transitional Living Allowance</b>	Up to \$1,000 (distributed in portions up to \$500 per month) to help with start-up costs in living as an adult. You must take PAL Life Skills training to get this allowance.
<b>Room and Board Assistance</b>	After leaving foster care (based on emergency or need) up to \$500 per month for rent, utilities, utility deposits, food, etc. You may receive up to \$3,000.
<b>Pre and Post Transition and Financial Support</b>	Services to help you plan to become self-sufficient and manage resources.



# PAL Featured Events

## PAL Experiential Camp

A camp for youth and young adults ages 16 to 21 in care is usually held once a year. An adult, preferably the youth's caseworker, attends with the youth. Activities may include rope courses, canoeing, expressive arts, swimming, nature hikes, and journal writing. The camps focus on increasing self-esteem, improving communication and problem-solving skills, and building leadership skills.

1

## Statewide Teen Conference

The Statewide Teen Conference is held on a college campus for youth and young adults ages 16 to 21 in care. Youth and their adult sponsors attend a three-day conference with motivational speakers and workshops on becoming a successful adult.

2

## Statewide PAL College Conferences

College conferences on a college or university campus are usually held once a year for youth and young adults ages 16 to 21 in care. Youth and their adult sponsors take part in two days of workshops, campus tours, and speakers on attending college or a vocational or technical program. Workshops include information on financial aid, what a college class is like, dorm life, and life skills.

3

## Regional Conferences or Events

Regions provide teen conferences and other age-appropriate activities and events such as college conferences, back to school events, prom events, and graduation or holiday celebrations.

4

## Aging-Out Seminars

These are regional seminars for youth at age 17 before they leave care. Seminars include topics identified by youth to reinforce their knowledge and skills about services, benefits, and resources, and other topics such as nutrition and human trafficking. These seminars build on information from PAL Life Skills Training classes.

5

## Statewide Youth Leadership Council

The Statewide Youth Leadership Council consists of two youth or young adults ages 16 to 21 currently or formerly in foster care from each region. They provide a youth or young adult perspective on developing CPS policy and best practices and make recommendations to improve services for children, youth, and young adults.

6

## Regional Youth Leadership Council

Youth Leadership Councils exist in each region. They meet at times and locations most convenient to the council members to accommodate school and work schedules. They are intended to cultivate advocacy skills, provide input to improve services and establish activities to encourage community service and personal growth.

7

## Transition Centers

Located throughout Texas, **Transition Centers** are one-stop shops that serve many needs of young people ages 15 and one-half to 25 who are aging out or have aged out of foster care.

They are a central place to get services such as PAL, help with job hunting, college enrollment, housing referrals, and mentoring. Partners offer services like career counseling, substance use and mental health counseling, housing assistance, and leadership training.

Transition Centers employ a workforce advocate who can connect you to workforce services, such as Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Also see **[Employment Assistance](#)**.



### Transition Centers

*To find a **Transition Center** in your area, visit [DFPS - Transition Centers \(texas.gov\)](https://www.dfps.gov/transition-centers) or ask your caseworker or PAL staff.*



## 11. Services and Resources for Age 18 & Older

You leave DFPS legal custody when you turn 18 years old, but you do not have to leave foster care. If you are not yet ready to be on your own, you can remain in care after age 18 while you work to achieve your educational goals or at a job to save money for when you are ready to leave foster care.

### Trial Independence Period

Once you leave foster care, you are in a six-month **trial independence period**. A judge can extend this trial period up to 12 months (extended court jurisdiction). You may live independently and receive DFPS benefits such as PAL, ETV, and Texas Medicaid coverage. There is no case activity, and you do not have to go to court during this trial period.

*When we first came into foster care we came in with our clothes on our back, but when we leave we leave with a future.*  
– Shawn H.

### Extended Foster Care

Are you interested in extending your time in foster care to work on your career, educational, or housing goals? You can.

You may stay in paid foster care until your 21st birthday through the **Extended Foster Care program**. To do this, you must voluntarily decide to enter the program and sign an agreement between you and DFPS.

You would agree to do one of the following activities unless you cannot do any of them due to a documented medical condition.

#### Activity Conditions to be in Extended Foster Care

- Attend an institution of higher education or a post-secondary, vocational, or technical program a minimum of six hours a semester.
- Engage in a program or activity that prepares you for employment a minimum of 15 hours a week.
- Be employed for at least 80 hours a month.
- Regularly attend high school or a General Education Development (GED) program from 18 up to 22 years of age while in extended care.

Also, you must agree to fulfill certain responsibilities, including working with your caseworker and caregiver to follow through with addressing your needs and case plan, following placement rules, and seeing your caseworker at least once a month.

Talk to your caseworker or PAL staff about the extended care options available to you.

## Return to Extended Care

Extended care is here to help you achieve your career, educational, and housing goals while living in a foster home or another type of DFPS living arrangement.

You can return to Extended Foster Care until you turn 21, if a paid placement is available.

You may return to care temporarily from one to three months during college breaks as long as you are enrolled in college or a higher education program at the time.

Contact PAL staff to discuss this program.

## Supervised Independent Living

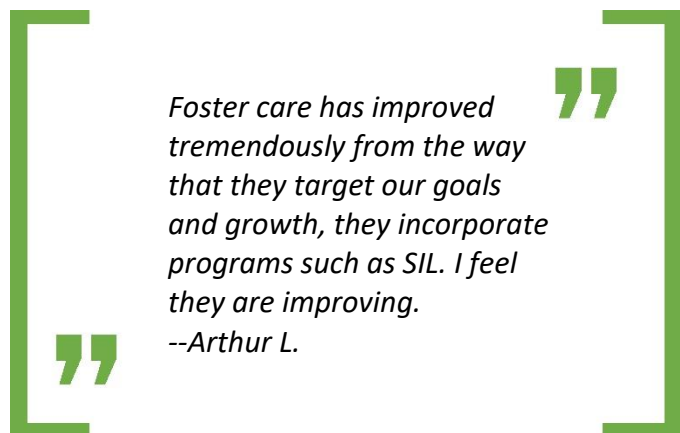
Are you ready to make your own decisions, manage your finances, and learn to be fully independent and self-sufficient?

**SIL** is a part of the Extended Foster Care program and may be another option, if you decide to stay in care after age 18 or return to care before age 21.

Young adults can live on their own under a SIL setting, while still receiving case management and support services provided by a DFPS-contracted provider to help them become independent and self-sufficient.

SIL with enhanced case management is an available service to young adults with complex needs who require additional case management to successfully adjust to a SIL placement.

Types of SIL settings include apartments, non-college dorms or college dorms, shared housing, or host homes.



A young adult in SIL is not supervised 24 hours a day by an adult and has increased responsibilities.

### SIL Requirements

- Meet the Extended Foster Care requirements.
- Sign a voluntary agreement.
- Complete an application.
- Agree to the SIL provider's program requirements.

SIL is not available in all areas of the state, so you may have to move to join the program. Talk to your caregiver, caseworker, or a PAL staff for more information.

## Out-of-Care Housing Resources

You have options for housing when you transition out of foster care. There are housing resources and programs available to help you prepare and plan for your successful transition to adult living.

The three rental assistance programs for you to consider are:

1. **Foster Youth to Independence (FYI)** is the primary program for youth and young adults. There is at least one FYI program in every region.
2. **Family Unification Program (FUP)** serves certain families and youth. These programs are similar to FYI, but an alternative option.
3. **Section 811 Program** is for youth and young adults with foster care involvement and a disability. Section 811 is statewide and provides a permanent housing option.

### General Housing Eligibility

- Age 18 to 24 years.
- Left or transitioning out of foster care.
- At risk or homeless.



## Housing Plan

Completed at age 17, the **Housing Plan** is a resource tool to help you prepare and plan for housing. You may review it again six months prior to turning 18.

You can review all the available housing options, learn about the requirements and expectations, determine eligibility, and prepare for applying to them. You can get help with housing and the housing plan by contacting the DFPS State Office housing program specialist or the regional housing liaison in your area.



### Youth Housing Program

*Learn more about housing, options, and supporting by visiting [DFPS - Youth Housing Program \(texas.gov\)](https://www.texas.gov/DFPS-Youth-Housing-Program).*

## Employment Assistance

### Texas Workforce Solutions

**Texas Workforce Solutions** will help you prepare for work and find a job. Each workforce center has a designated person to help you.

You can ask the PAL staff for a referral or have your caregiver help you get workforce services.

### Employment Preference for Jobs with the State of Texas

If you are applying for a state job, each state agency is required to give youth who age out of DFPS custody preference over other applicants for the same position – if each applicant is equally qualified. This applies until the day before your 26th birthday.

Ask PAL staff for an employment preference letter if you apply for a job with the State of Texas.



### Texas Workforce Solutions

*Learn more about workforce centers and find an office near you by visiting [www.WorkInTexas.com](http://www.WorkInTexas.com).*



## 12. Help Improve Foster Care

How can you:

- Get involved?
- Leave a legacy for your brothers and sisters in foster care?
- Improve your community?
- Use your experiences to really make a difference?

It is as easy as answering questions in an online survey when you are selected. Your responses will be used to improve the quality of life for Texas youth.

You can make a difference for yourself and others! If you are selected to be part of the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) survey, take the survey! This is your chance to help improve services and outcomes for youth in Texas. Those chosen to take the survey will be notified by PAL staff.

### What is NYTD?

The NYTD is a data collection system created to track independent living services and learn how successful states are in preparing youth to move from state care to a successful adulthood.

Texas surveys youth who are in foster care when they are age 17 with a follow-up survey of some youth at age 19 and the same youth again at age 21.

## 13. Common Terms and Phrases

### Attorney Ad Litem

A lawyer assigned by a judge to represent the interests of children, youth, or young adults in a civil abuse and neglect case that determines who has managing conservatorship. Your attorney ad litem must advocate for your wishes.

### Biological or Birth Family

Your birth mother and father, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.

### Caring Adult

A caring adult is a significant person in a youth or young adult's life who remains consistent and provides a long-term connection. Caring adults are people who would be available to youth in emergencies, for help with making decisions, or just someone to talk to – someone a youth or young adult can count on. Caring adults are not necessarily placement options for youth in foster care, but can be.

### Caseworker

A DFPS or Single Source Continuum Contractor employee who works with you and your family while you are in foster care.

### Court Appointed Special Advocate

A volunteer who works with you, your caseworker, and the courts to advocate and help you while you are in foster care.

### Guardianship

A legal role given to a person appointed by the judge for a young adult age 18 or older with serious disabilities and who needs someone to make decisions for them. The young adult must be severely incapacitated (not able to take care of themselves) before this would happen.

### Kinship Care

A placement approved by DFPS and provided by a relative or close family friend, sometimes called **fictive kin**.

## **Managing Conservator or Guardian**

The adult or adults appointed by the judge to be managing conservator with the right to make decisions about you and your life. When you are younger than 18, the common term used by Texas is **managing conservator**. If you are 18 or older, the common term is **guardian**.

## **Medical Power of Attorney**

A person you choose when you turn age 18 to make healthcare treatment decisions for you if you are incapacitated and unable to participate in these decisions.

## **Mentor**

A volunteer friend, consultant, and guide to help you navigate life.

## **Permanency Plan**

A plan developed by DFPS and approved by the judge to arrange for the most permanent living situation possible for you, while considering your safety and best interests. This plan tells where and with whom a youth in foster care will live, and the proposed legal relationship between the child and the permanent caregiver or caregivers.

## **Plan of Service (Case Plan)**

A plan including your needs and goals developed with your caseworker, caregiver, and other helpful adults. You should be actively involved in developing your plan of service. The official name of your case plan is the Child's Plan of Service.

## **Plans for Successfully Transitioning to Adulthood**

The plans for your successful transition to adulthood are developed starting at age 14. They are documented in your Child's Plan of Service and are needed no matter what your permanency plan is, because everyone will be an adult one day. You will review these plans during regular reviews of your Child's Plan of Service and during Circles of Support.

## **Preparation for Adult Living Program**

A program that helps you develop the skills and resources you need for adult life after foster care. You can also get financial help with housing, education, and other needs for a limited time after leaving foster care.

## **Service Levels**

Service levels describe the needs of each youth so that DFPS can provide the right services. The service levels are basic, moderate, specialized, and intense, depending on the type and number of services needed.

## **Sibling Visits**

Right to visits with your brothers or sisters while you are in foster care.

## **Substitute Care**

Care provided to youth when they are removed from their birth family and are placed in the state's care. Examples are foster homes, emergency shelters, kinship homes, and residential treatment centers.

## **Termination of Parental Rights**

In some cases, DFPS may request your biological or birth parents no longer have any legal rights to you. A judge can terminate parental rights if it is in your best interests and necessary for your safety.

DFPS works closely with parents to try to avoid this step. But, parents can lose their parental rights if they do not make changes to provide a safe home or have serious problems that make it too difficult for them to take care of children.

If the court terminates all parental rights, it means you are free for adoption. Your parents no longer have access to information about you. Your caseworker will work with your parents to identify and locate other family members or family friends who may be willing to adopt you. DFPS will work to find another adoptive home for you if no family member is available.

## **Voluntary Extended Foster Care Agreement**

A written agreement between you and DFPS about you participating in the extended care program beyond your 18th birthday. This also applies if you return to foster care.

## **List of Acronyms**

<b>Acronym</b>	<b>Full Name</b>
CASA	Court Appointed Special Advocate
CPOS	Child's Plan of Service
CPS	Child Protective Services
DFPS	Department of Family and Protective Services
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid
FFCC	Former Foster Care Children
FPOS	Family Plan of Service
FUP	Family Unification Program
FYI	Foster Youth to Independence
GED	General Education Development
MTFCY	Medicaid for Transitioning Foster Care Youth
NYTD	National Youth in Transition Database
PAL	Preparation for Adult Living
SIL	Supervised Independent Living
SSCC	Single Source Continuum Contractor
TASFA	Texas Application for State Financial Aid
THECB	Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
TLP	Transitional Living Program