

How do I get my ideas heard?

Talk to your foster parents, caseworkers, guardian ad litem or group home staff. Be vocal and ask for guidance — different people can help you with different things. Do not be afraid to say what is on your mind



How can I be included in decision making?

You are a key part of your team, which includes your foster parents, caseworker and guardian ad litem. Ask to be included in decision making. Remember they are there to help you. It is your life.



Can I speak in Family Court?

Let your guardian ad litem and caseworker know you want to be included. Each family court judge will make the final decision about who can speak in court.



Who can I turn to when I need to talk?

Try to talk to your foster parents or caseworker or someone else you trust. Your concerns are important. What you are feeling is important. The people around you want to get to know you and help you feel safe and happy. Part of that is to allow you to talk about all you are feeling — especially when you are mad, sad and/or afraid, as well as when you are happy.



★ Who are all of the people and how will they be involved in the decision making in my life?

★ **Guardian ad litem:** Speaks for your best interest in Family Court. Your guardian will talk to you about your family and what you need.

★ **Attorney for the guardian:** Will make sure that the guardian tells you what is important and what the guardian believes would be best for your health, safety and well-being.

★ **DSS attorney:** Will make sure the judge knows why DSS believes you need to live in foster care and what needs to be different for your family so that you can go home.

★ **Parent's attorney:** Will make sure that your parent's ideas about what should happen are told. This attorney will make sure DSS knows the things that your family is doing to make you safe and secure at home.

★ **Family Court Judge:** The person who thinks about what laws apply to your life right now and what needs to happen to make sure the law is keeping you safe and helping your family grow stronger.

★ **Foster parents:** Those adults who will take care of you.

★ **Group Home staff:** Includes counselors, clinical staff, coordinators and lots of other titles for the people working there. These people will work together to take care of all the things you need, such as food, someone to talk to, activities to enjoy and supports you can use.

★ **Caseworker:** The DSS person who will meet with you to learn what is happening in your life and what you want and need. This person also works with your family and all the other people listed here to make sure that you can go home as soon as possible, whenever returning home is possible.

★ **Caseworker supervisor:** The person at DSS you can talk to for decisions, if your caseworker is gone or is not able to talk with you when you call.

Prepared for you by youth on the **Go Out And Learn Life** Committee.

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If you are reading this, then you have just entered into foster care in the state of South Carolina. Now, because of this, you may not know your options or what decisions that you can make. This brochure is designed to let you know what options you have and what you need to know.



If you are coming from your family, then you must be wondering, "Why am I here?" "What about my family?" "What options do I have?" "What's going to happen to me?" These are normal questions and there are answers.

Foster Care

What It's All About

How do I go about getting in contact with the people who know the most about what is going on?

Removal Worker's Name

Office Telephone Ext.

Removal Supervisor's Name

Office Telephone Ext.

Foster Care Worker's Name

Office Telephone Ext.

Foster Care Supervisor's Name

Office Telephone Ext.

1-888-722-2580 (24-Hour Helpline)



Worker: Please fill out and give to foster child

★
This brochure
was written
for you ★
by other children
★ in foster care.
1-888-722-2580
This 24-Hour Helpline
is an emergency
contact number
available to you
seven days a week ★
★ if you are
having problems. ★

★ *Why am I here?*

Reasons for placement in foster care vary. Sometimes it is because of abuse and neglect and sometimes it is because of family problems. No matter what the reason, remember it is not your fault and not in your immediate control.

★ *What about my family?*

If you would like to see your family, talk to your caseworker and visitation will be discussed.

You can also talk to your caseworker about calling family and friends. Remember, you can always write letters to them. Your caseworker or foster parents will help you mail the letters. You can talk to your caseworker about arranging family and sibling visitations.

★ *When will I be reunited with my family (get to go home)?*

While you live in foster care, your family works on goals that will help them make a safe home for you. So when you go home depends on what has to change and how quickly the changes happen. The caseworker will be able to talk with you about what changes are needed and what is being done.

★ *Who are the people I am staying with?*

There are two options for the kind of place you will stay. One is with a family in their home. This is a foster family. The other is a group home placement where adults care for a lot of children in a building that is usually larger than a house.

★ *How will I get clothes and things I need in order to live a normal life?*

Emergency money is provided for personal care items that you need when you enter into care. Let the adults in your life know what you need. The foster parent or group home caretakers are there to help you get what you need. If you are not getting what you need, be sure to talk to your caseworker about it.

★ *What rights do I have?*

You should have a court appointed guardian ad litem who will speak for your best interest. You should let him or her know what you are concerned about and what changes you think need to be made. Ask your worker for a copy of the Foster Child's Bill of Rights. Also, ask your worker to keep you informed of other rights and options you have while in foster care.

Foster parents and group home caretakers are not mean and heartless. They are trained to take care of you. Rules and schedules may be different from those you are used to. Give yourself some time to get comfortable with the new things and always remember you can ask questions about anything that you want to know. Remember, you can also call Helpline, especially if you are being abused or harmed.

★ *Do I have any say-so in where I'm going to stay (placement)?*

If you have any objections to staying in a certain home or group home, talk to your caseworker. If he or she does not listen, talk to the supervisor. You can also call the Helpline for support. Remember, making a change is not always the right answer to a problem. It is important that you understand that being moved to another placement doesn't mean you will return home.

★ *Do I need to see a doctor or a counselor?*

State law requires that you have a medical screening by a doctor or a nurse 24 hours after you come into foster care. You will also be seeing a counselor or a therapist within the first few days. This is only because you came into foster care and everyone knows how scary and upsetting that might be. It is not because anyone thinks there is anything wrong with you.

