

State of Connecticut
Adolescents in Care Bill of Rights and Expectations

Preamble: The Department of Children and Families (DCF) recognizes the importance of honoring and upholding the rights of youth in the foster care system. This Bill of Rights and Expectations is intended to guide the Department, foster parents and care providers as well as ensure that the permanency, safety, well-being and basic needs of adolescent youth in the foster care system are consistently met. Youth in care must be supported to develop and maintain their own values, hopes, plans, goals, religion, spirituality and identity (including their sexuality and gender identity with support of the LGBTQ* community if desired) in a safe and caring environment. The content of this Bill was formulated by members of DCF Youth Advisory Board with a goal of improving the foster care system for current and future youth in care.

Whereas: youth in foster care should be afforded stability, to the extent possible, while moving toward legal and/or relational permanency;

Whereas: youth in foster care should have their basic needs met regardless of placement setting;

Whereas: consistent and outlined expectations of foster parents may facilitate improved outcomes for youth in care;

Every youth in care, absent extraordinary circumstances related to safety or unless otherwise noted in the youth's case plan, shall be able to expect that:

1. **Foster parents and social workers shall maintain a good relationship with youth in care as evidenced by trust, understanding, empathy and open lines of communication** (*Examples of this type of communication include, but are not limited to: Asking about and keeping up with youth's daily routines; making compromises; using proper reasoning and taking a youth's trauma history into account when using discipline; creating both positive and negative consequences for actions*)
2. **Foster parents will set appropriate boundaries around curfews, homework, household responsibilities etc. in an attempt to provide normalcy for youth in care** (*It is expected that foster parents and youth work together to create house rules and that foster parents create a safe environment for youth in their homes to openly express their opinions*)
3. **Foster parents will be supportive of the need of youth in care to build life skills in the home.** (*e.g. Youth often would like to gain experience grocery shopping, cooking, opening a bank account, budgeting and paying bills, washing laundry etc. Foster parents are encouraged to make trips to the store together with youth in their care and allow them to purchase their own items of necessity*)
4. **Foster parents will offer encouragement and assistance with obtaining a State ID, Driver's Permit and Driver's License at the appropriate time(s).** (*Foster parents may be asked to assist with obtaining and securing youth's other important documents such as birth certificates, social security cards, etc.*)
5. **Foster parents will assist youth with gaining job readiness skills, networking and searching for employment opportunities, and support youth desires for extracurricular activities.** (*Many adolescent youth in care express the importance of working or playing sports as contributors to a positive foster care experience. Youth in care also advocated they do not expect to be given anything free of responsibility, but would appreciate normal opportunities to complete regular chores or tasks around the home as a means of contributing to the household and earning money to spend and save*)

6. **Foster parents exhibit no differential treatment between youth in care and biological children in their home.** *(It is expected that the same age-appropriate house rules apply to all minors in the home, that all youth in a home have the same opportunities to participate in activities, that all youth are invited on family vacations, that similarly aged children have equal access to cell phones for communication purposes, and that one-on-one parental attention be made equally available to all youth in the home)*
7. **Foster parents are willing and encouraged to participate in joint family therapy sessions when appropriate or when asked by the youth they are caring for.** *(Youth in care acknowledged the critical role that foster parents play in the provision of successful therapeutic services for youth. As such they have invited foster parents to not only be aware of their clinical progress but also to actively participate in therapy sessions when requested)*
8. **Foster parents are willing and expected to cooperate with interactive refresher foster care trainings.** *(Youth in care stated they would like foster parents to be adequately prepared to understand a youth's trauma history, to be trained in communication and problem solving skills, and how to cope with transitions in an adolescent's life such as reuniting or reconnecting with biological family or going away to college)*
9. **Foster parents will allow youth in care to keep their personal belongings with them and to honor age appropriate privacy** *(Youth in care specified their expectation of privacy in relation to their personal items, journals, diaries, letters, emails, and telephone calls)*
10. **Foster parents will promote and support youth in care to participate in extracurricular and personal enrichment activities** *(Youth in care will be permitted to engage in activities consistent with age and ability, unrestricted from any experience simply due to their status in foster care or their particular type of placement)*

Additionally, every youth in care, absent extraordinary circumstances related to safety or unless otherwise noted in the youth's case plan, shall have the right to:

1. **Visitation or ongoing contact with their parents, siblings, extended family and friends; and expect and receive help in reconnecting with their birth family if desired.**
2. **Be placed in their home communities, live in a safe environment and be entitled to pre-placement visits when possible.**
3. **Have meaningful participation in the development of their case plan, permanency plan, postsecondary education plan, and to have family members or other supportive people of their choice participate in Individual, Joint and Large Team meetings as part of the Child and Family Permanency Teaming (CF-PT) process.**
4. **Have purposeful and regular in person contact with their assigned social worker and have their phone calls and other correspondence responded to in a timely manner (youth in care stated they would like regular contact or communication with their social workers on a weekly basis).**
5. **Have educational stability with all available supports (including Educational Surrogate Parents when eligible) and postsecondary education preparation and planning).**