YOUR RIGHTS IN FOSTER CARE

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INTRODUCTION

How You Get Into Foster Care

It is not your fault that you are in foster care!

Young people are in foster care because their parents can’t take care of them and give them a safe home. Some parents don’t have a place to live. Some parents get sick, some parents hurt their kids, and some leave their kids.

When any of these things happen, children need to be protected. So a caseworker from ACS (the Administration for Children’s Services) will go to court to get kids placed in foster care. This is usually called an abuse or neglect case. Sometimes parents will fight having their children taken away from them, and sometimes they won’t. A judge decides where each child will live and for how long.

Some parents “sign their kids in” to foster care. This means that they agree with the caseworker that their child should go into foster care. This is usually called a voluntary placement. (It doesn’t mean that the child goes voluntarily! It means that the parent agreed to place the child, and there is no court case against the parent.)

Whichever way you came into the system, you have rights!

The person to help you protect your rights is your lawyer.

“How did I get in the system? A caseworker, Ms. Jones, came to my house. She asked my mother why she wanted me out. We argued for a while but then agreed that it was better for me to leave. Ms. Jones gave my mother some papers to sign, and told me to get some clothes and get in the car. That was it.”
What is a Foster Home?
A foster home is a family setting for kids whose parents can not take care of them. Most foster homes are good, safe places to live. Many kids are cared for and loved by their foster families. But a lot of young people have problems in foster homes. You should know what your legal rights are if you are in a foster home.

What is a Group Home?
Group homes:
- are for kids who are 10 years old or older
- usually have about 10 kids
- are in and out of New York City

Many young people like living in a group home. Some kids hate group home life. Either way, you should know the law and your legal rights.

Group homes are part of the foster care system. So even though you are not with a foster family, you are in foster care.

What Is a Treatment Center?
Residential Treatment Centers and Residential Treatment Facilities (RTCs and RTFs) have groups of kids living together, usually in cottages or houses. RTCs and RTFs are supposed to give a lot of help or services to the young people living there.

If you are placed in an RTC or RTF, you are in “foster care.” Even though you do not live with a family, it is still called foster care.

Why Am I In an RTC or RTF?
To get into an RTC or RTF, there has to be a reason you can’t stay at home and get the help you need.

You may know the reason you are in an RTC/RTF. If you don’t know, ask your social worker, psychologist, or lawyer why.

The law says you have the right to be placed in the “least restrictive setting.” This means that the City or agency has to first try to find you a foster home, then a group home, then an RTC, then an RTF, or hospital. To do this, your worker calls or writes to other agencies (makes referrals) and asks them if they have room for you. Your worker will tell them something about you. She or he gets that information from your records and from talking to you and your parents and other people who know you.

If the agency thinks you need more help than a foster home or group home can give you, they will refer you to an RTC or RTF where you are supposed to get a lot of attention and help.
Lawyers

Your lawyer will probably work for Lawyers For Children or the Legal Aid Society. Both of these offices represent kids but each office works differently.

The most important thing about your lawyer is that she or he works for YOU.

Your lawyer’s job is to represent you. At Lawyers For Children, this means that your lawyer has to find out what you want and try to get that to happen.

You get a lawyer when you go to court. Kids who are in court because of neglect or abuse always have the right to a lawyer. Kids on voluntary cases almost always get a lawyer, too.

Facts About Your Lawyer

Your lawyer will

- ask you where you want to live, and if you are having any problems where you are living now
- talk to your family, caseworker, social worker, and school if you choose
- meet you in person, at least once, in private
- probably work together with a social worker who will also talk to you
- let you know that everything you discuss is confidential. That means that your lawyer cannot tell other people anything you have said without your permission.
- probably work for Lawyers For Children or the Legal Aid Society
- represent you in court

The person to help you protect your rights is your lawyer.
Finding Your Lawyer

Ask your caseworker for your lawyer’s name and number. If you want to find out on your own, just make a few phone calls.

Your lawyer probably works for Lawyers For Children or the Legal Aid Society.

First call Lawyers For Children at (800) 244-2540 or (212) 966-6420. Tell the person who answers that you want to know who your lawyer and social worker are. Give your name and how to spell it. Allow the person some time to find it, and don’t hang up if you get put on hold! If you are represented by Lawyers For Children, you can also search for your attorney or social worker on LFC’s web site www.lawyersforchildren.org.

If Lawyers For Children says they don’t have your name in the files or computer, call Legal Aid. They have offices in each borough. Call the number in the borough where you lived before you came into foster care.

You might have to leave a message to give them time to check. You can leave your name and birthday and call back if you want. At some offices, they might ask you for the name of your oldest brother or sister who is in foster care. That is how they keep their files.

Lawyers For Children
1 (800) 244-2540 or (212) 966-6420
www.lawyersforchildren.org

Legal Aid
Manhattan (212) 577-3615
Bronx (718) 681-1700
Brooklyn (718) 237-3100
Queens (718) 291-1500
Staten Island (718) 981-0219
Your case is not in court because you have done anything wrong. Every child who lives in foster care has a case that goes into court. The judge's job is to listen to what is happening to each child in foster care.

Your case will be heard by a judge or referee in Family Court. The judge listens to someone from the City (usually a caseworker and a lawyer). The judge also listens to your family. The judge listens to you, too.

You might go into the courtroom and you might not. It depends on the judge.

Either way, your lawyer's job is to talk to you and then tell the judge what you want to do. So the judge listens to you, too.

After hearing everybody's side of the story, the judge decides where you should live and for how long.

**When Do You Go To Court?**

The law says that every child who is placed in foster care has a case that goes to court. In cases where kids are taken away from their parents, the case gets heard by a judge right away. But cases where children are voluntarily placed may take longer to be heard.

The law states that if you are placed voluntarily, your case must be filed with the court within 30 days of when you enter foster care. After that, your case is reviewed by a judge every six months. But some kids wait many months before their case goes to court and they get a lawyer.

- Call your caseworker and also call Lawyers For Children at 800-244-2540.
- You can also fill out a letter and mail it to Lawyers For Children.
PLACEMENTS

Temporary Placements

Sometimes kids go to a place in foster care for just a short time, until something else is worked out. This is called a temporary or emergency placement. Even though you are there for a little while, they must treat you well.

Sometimes kids stay in the system for years. Usually, kids go to more than one place. Some places are better than others.

Diagnostic Group Homes

A diagnostic group home or center is a place you go for about three months.

While you are there, you talk to social workers, psychologists, and doctors. They recommend what kind of place you should go to next, or if you should go home.

“First Ms. Jones took me to this group home that was real nasty. Then she moved me to a nicer place, but you can only stay there for three months. After I went home for a few weeks I came to this group home.”
Night-To-Night Placement
If you get moved from one place to another every night, call your lawyer. You have rights, and this is against the law!

Moving to Another Placement
If you want to leave your placement, tell your caseworker and social worker. Tell them why you want to be moved. If they say no, ask to speak to their supervisors and to the director of the agency. Tell them you want to submit a formal request to be moved. Send a letter to your lawyer or just call your lawyer.

Staying in Your Placement
First, talk to your social worker. Who wants you moved? Ask what their reasons are and see if you can work something out. If you can't, send a letter to your lawyer or call your lawyer for help.

“One girl I met in the group home got moved to a different place every night. She had to sit in the teen center during the day.”

WARNING
You are not suppose to be moved from place to place every night.
This is against the law!
If this is happening to you call your lawyer right away!
VISITS

You have the right to visit with your family and friends when you are in foster care. You also have the right to refuse visits. If visiting with your family upsets you, tell your social worker. If your social worker is not able to help you, call your lawyer or send a letter.

Visiting Your Family
According to ACS, you have the right to visit:
- at least every week with your parents or the person whom you will be discharged to
- more often if you are going home soon
- in private (except if a judge says the visits must be supervised, usually for the child's protection)
- The agency must give your family money to get to and from visits.

If you want to visit your family more often, call your lawyer or send your lawyer a letter.

Visiting Brothers and Sisters
You have the right to be placed with your brother or sister in foster care. But the agency doesn’t have to place you together if someone (like a psychologist, psychiatrist, doctor, or certified social worker) says it is not in your “best interests.”

You have the right to get phone calls from your brothers or sisters in

REMEMBER
An agency can not punish you by stopping you from visiting with your family. When you are adopted the family who adopts you decides if and when you can see your biological family.
your group home.

If you are placed apart from each other, you have the right to have visits or “communication” every other week. The agency must try to arrange this for you unless someone says it would not be good for your health or safety to communicate with your brother or sister, or if you and your brother/sister are too far away from each other. If you don’t agree with the agency, follow the directions below in the “What To Do” section.

**what to do**

if you do not agree with the agency, follow these directions:

- Call your brother’s or sister’s social worker to set up visits
- Arrange a place where you can visit
- Give you the telephone number of your brother’s or sister’s foster home or group home.

Visiting is different if your brother or sister lives at home. Then visiting is usually up to your parent(s). If you can talk to your family about it, do that first. Talk to your social worker about it too. If you can’t work it out, call your lawyer or send a letter.
Visiting With Friends

If you want your friend to visit you at your group home, just tell your caseworker. If you want to go to your friend's house to visit, your caseworker must go to his or her home to make sure that it is a safe place.

what to do

If your caseworker won't let you visit:

- Ask for a conference with your caseworker, your friend, and your worker’s supervisor.
- Call your lawyer. She or he can have a social worker go to the home where you want to visit. If that social worker says it is a good place for you to visit, your lawyer can go to court and ask the judge to send you there.
- Send a letter.
GETTING OUT OF FOSTER CARE: YOUR PERMANENCY PLAN

A lot of kids want to get out of foster care and go home to their families. A lot of kids leave foster care to live on their own. A lot of kids want to be adopted.

When you are in foster care, the agency has to have a plan for your future. This means that the agency has to have a plan for you about how and when you will leave foster care. These are the choices:
- return to your parent(s)
- live with another relative or friend
- be adopted
- live on your own (independent living)
- go to another residence, group home, residential treatment center or facility.

You have the right to know what your plan is. You should ask your social worker if you don't know. Your rights about visits, the services you get, and the money you get are different depending on your plan.

Return to Parent(s)

You are supposed to be returned to your family as soon as possible after you come into foster care.

But many kids stay in care for many years even when the plan is for them to return to their parent(s). When you want to go home but the agency or your family won't let you, you need to know why.

You have the right to know what the problem is and what is supposed to happen before you can go home. Call your lawyer if you want to go home but need help getting there sooner than the agency plans. Your family and social worker might not know about all the help available, like extra money for rent or therapy near your family's home. Your lawyer can help you solve these problems.
Living With Friends or Relatives

There are two ways you can go to live with a friend or relative:
1. You are discharged from foster care to the friend or relative.
2. The friend or relative becomes your foster parent, which means he or she gets money to support you.

There are rules about who can and who cannot be foster parents. Your agency worker can explain these rules to you.

If you want to live with a friend or relative, tell your caseworker. She or he will visit the home to see if it’s a safe place for you to live.

Whether you are going to be discharged to Lisa or you are just planning to visit with her, the social worker would still have to visit her house. The social worker has to make sure Lisa is a safe person to live with and also find out who else lives with Lisa.

You do not have to prove that someone is related to you in order to have them certified as your foster parent.

What if your worker says you can’t go there but you still want to?

- One thing to do is ask for a conference with your worker, your friend or relative, and your worker’s supervisor.
- Another thing to do is to ask your social worker to visit the friend or relative. If that social worker says it may be a good place for you, your lawyer can go to court and ask the judge to send you there.
- You can also mail a letter or call Lawyers For Children.
Independent Living

If the plan is for you to go out on your own when you leave your foster home, your goal is independent living. You can have this goal only if you are 14 or older.

Agencies have to make sure that kids get “independent living skills.” You must be in high school, a G.E.D. program, or vocational training. This means you are learning a job or a skill that will lead to a job.

You also must take group classes in independent living skills at least 2 days a year. (Most agencies give more classes than that.)

The classes should teach you things like how to:
- look for a job
- find an apartment
- budget your money
- shop, cook, and clean house.

If you have questions, ask your social worker to explain your independent living plan or to show you your agency’s policy manual about independent living.

Some agencies have group homes called independent living group homes. They are usually for older kids (16 and up) who are in school and/or work.

You should also get money every month if your goal is independent living and if you are participating in the agency's independent living program.

This money is called a stipend. You get it either once a month or spread out over the month. A stipend is different from allowance.

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<th>Age</th>
<th>Monthly Stipend</th>
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**Foster Care After You Are 18**

You are allowed to stay in foster care until you are 21. After you are 18, you can leave when you want. The agency is supposed to check out where you will be living once you leave.

This is what the agency has to do for you:
- identify people, services, or agencies that will help you maintain and support yourself.
- help you contact them and talk to you about them. The agency must help you contact your parents, old foster parents, or anyone else you think can help you once you leave foster care.
- notify you in writing at least 90 days before you will be discharged (leave the agency). They don't have to do this if you choose to leave the agency on your own and stay away for 60 days (2 months).
- find you a place to live. The agency cannot discharge you to independent living unless you have a place to go. That place cannot be a shelter. The agency has to believe that you will be able to stay in your new place for at least 1 year after discharge.
- keep you on trial-discharge status for 6 months, or longer, up to your 21st birthday. This is so that if you need to go back into foster care you can.
- work with you during the trial discharge.
- take you back into foster care if you become homeless.
- help pay for college. (Read the School section on College.)

At some agencies, you will go shopping with your caseworker for the things you need to buy with your discharge grant. Other agencies let you purchase the items you need and provide receipts for the money you spent.

It is up to you if you want your agency’s help after you turn 18. Some kids do and some never want to see the agency again. It's important to remember that even if you have had trouble in the past with the agency, they are supposed to help you, and you can and should take advantage of what they can do for you.
"Emancipation"

There is really no legal way to become an “emancipated minor” in New York, but young people often hear about being emancipated. This is what you can do to be on your own.

If you are at least 16 years old, it may be possible for you to live on your own and receive public assistance (home relief). You must be able to prove to a public assistance worker that you live apart from your family, that you have your own place to live, and that you are not receiving and do not need any foster care services.

If you have left foster care and you need to know more about how to live on your own and receive home relief, call The Door or your lawyer. The Door is a center for young people ages 12-21. The Door is open Monday-Friday from 2–8PM. You can contact The Door at 212-941-9090. All information and services at The Door are confidential between you and The Door staff.

The Door
555 Broome Street
Between 6th Avenue and Varick Street
Phone (212) 941-9090
Hours: Monday-Friday 2:00-8:00 PM or call

Adoption

If you want to stay with a foster family or someone else you are living with, you need to know what your agency’s plan is.

It can be:

- discharge to that family or person
- independent living. Independent living is usually for kids 14 and older. You can live with foster parents until you are 21 if your plan is independent living, and if you are in school.
- adoption by that person. Your foster parents become your legal parents. This process usually takes a long time. You and our foster parents have to think and talk about adoption a lot. It is a big step.

what to do If you want to be adopted:

- If you want to be adopted by a family and you don’t think that is the plan, or you think the plan is taking too long, call your lawyer!
- You can also fill out the “DON’T MOVE ME!” form letter and explain that you want to be adopted. Write down when you last saw your parents and how long you have been in foster care
AGING OUT OF FOSTER CARE

Your Basic Rights When Aging Out of Foster Care
Before you leave foster care, your agency should:
- notify you in writing 90 days before your last day in foster care
- find a place for you to live for at least a year, NOT A SHELTER
- identify people and services that can help you when you are on your own
- give you a discharge grant or take you shopping for furniture and clothing,
- keep you on a “trial discharge” for six months, or until you are 21, so that you can get help from the agency or return to foster care if you become homeless
- help you complete your education (GED, vocational or college program)
- help you find employment and get job experience

How Do I Leave Foster Care?
Before you leave foster care you will be either trial or final discharged.
TRIAL DISCHARGE

A trial discharge is a six-month period where you are technically in the custody of ACS, but are able to live on your own in the community. Your agency must get permission from the Family Court and explain to the Court why you should be trial discharged before they can discharge you. Your lawyer must also agree. Your lawyer is entitled to 10 days advance notice of the trial discharge. Before you are discharged, the agency must continue to assist you in finding services, and providing clothing allowances and Independent Living stipends. Your agency must help you find housing or take you back into a group or foster home if you become homeless during this period. A trial discharge is required for all young adults being discharged to independent living. After six months, trial discharge becomes a final discharge.

FINAL DISCHARGE

If you are final discharged, the agency no longer has legal custody or authority over you. When you reach age 21 and you do not wish any further contact from the agency, or when your trial discharge period ends without being extended you are considered to be final discharged. Before your 21st birthday, the agency must seek permission from the court, and must notify your lawyer 10 days in advance of you being final discharged. If you become homeless after a final discharged, the agency doesn’t have to put you back into care and doesn’t have to offer you services or referrals.
What do I need to do and have before leaving foster care?

It is very important that you get identification with a photograph (drivers license, non-driver ID or U.S. Passport) and if you are an immigrant, clarify your legal status, before you leave foster care.

- **Immigration status**: If you were born in the U.S., make sure you have your birth certificate and Social Security card. If you weren’t born in the U.S., you need to have a green card. If you do have a green card, you should apply for citizenship. To be eligible to apply, you must have lived in the U.S. while holding a green card for five years. If you don’t have legal status and aren’t in the process of applying for it, you should immediately contact the Lawyers For Children’s Immigration Rights Project at (212) 966-6420, The Door Legal Services at (212) 941-9090, or the Legal Aid Society, Immigration Unit at (212) 577-3300 for information on a SIJS order. LFC has created a handbook about immigration called *You Are Not Alone*. You can request a copy by phone and you can read and download it by visiting www.lawyersforchildren.org.

- **Birth certificate**: You should contact the ACS liaison to Office of Vital Records, at (212) 676-7304. The application is available online at www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/vr/vrbappl.shtml.

- **Social Security card**: You should call (800) 772-1213, or visit your local Social Security office to apply for a card. The application is available online at www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ss-5.html

- **Driver’s license or non-driver photo ID**: You should go to the nearest Department of Motor Vehicles. The application for a non-driver photo ID requires that you provide acceptable proofs of identity and date of birth. Acceptable proofs of identity are listed at http://www.nydmv.state.ny.us/idlicense.htm.

- **Legal name change**: If you want to change your name for any reason, you must file a name change petition in Civil Court. You will have to submit an original or certified copy of your birth certificate, a self-addressed envelope, an original and a copy of the name change order and petition, an original and two copies of the Request for Judicial Intervention form, and purchase an Index Number from the County Clerk for $210. You should call to verify the current cost for an Index Number. More information is available online at http://www.courts.state.ny.us/forms/name_change.shtml. You do not need a lawyer to file this form.
**Educational Assistance**

High school: While in foster care, you should still be attending high school. Your agency must pay for things like prom dresses, clothes for graduation, school uniforms, school expenses (including class rings and yearbooks), and certain extracurricular activities. If you need any of these things paid for, you should speak to your caseworker or your lawyer.

**GED Programs**

If you decide a regular high school isn’t for you, the agency should help you find a GED program to get your degree. There are many GED programs available in all five boroughs with different hours and different costs. There are even some attached to colleges, or to vocational programs. Your agency should assist you in finding a program that’s right for you, and in paying for it or finding financial aid for it if there’s a tuition fee.

**Vocational Schools**

The agency is obligated to assist you in finding employment and that includes finding you the right vocational or trade school. If that’s what you would like to do, the agency should help you find one, and should also help you find financial aid if you need it. Make sure that your caseworker knows that you want to find a vocational school, and that you get help filling out applications for admission and for financial aid.
FINANCIAL AID

Whether you decide to go on to college or a vocational school, the agency is responsible for helping you locate financial aid. Make sure when you’re filling out applications that you indicate you’re an “independent” or “ward of the state”. Because you’re in foster care, no one else’s income information counts—not your foster parents, and not your birth parents. Being independent may help you qualify for more financial aid.

ETVS:

ETV stands for Education and Training Voucher. The New York Education and Training Voucher Program offers funds to current and former foster children for college or vocational programs. You can qualify for up to $5,000 a year for four years of higher education. ETVs can be used for tuition, books or other qualified
**Discharge to Homelessness**

ACS should not discharge you to homelessness! The agency must find you other suitable housing that will last for at least one year. You should be aware that if you are not complying with the agency’s plan for you, they can ask the court to give them permission to discharge you without a housing plan! If you are finding it difficult to cooperate with your agency’s plan because you don’t like your caseworker, see if you can work with the Independent Living coordinator directly, or the caseworker’s supervisor.

**Housing Programs**

There are three main housing programs for youth aging out of foster care: New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), Section 8 and the ACS Housing Subsidy. There is a NYCHA priority for youth aging out of foster care. There are income requirements, and a criminal history may disqualify you from being eligible. Section 8 is reopened, on a limited basis, only for those who have already submitted applications, and it is not clear whether the program will continue. You can apply for an ACS Housing Subsidy through ACS that will pay $300 to your landlord towards your rent. This program may also pay part of your broker’s fee, security deposit, moving expenses, or other one-time expenses, up to $1,800, even if you have not located an ACS Housing Subsidy-qualified apartment. This larger sum of money for brokers fees, deposit, etc., is often referred to as the “one shot” grant. It is extremely important for you to understand that you cannot receive both the NYCHA priority and the ACS Housing Subsidy. You should apply for both and see which one is approved and is appropriate for your needs. If you need further information about housing resources, contact your caseworker, your lawyer, or the Administration for Children’s Services Office of Youth Development at (212) 361-1974.
Supportive Housing

Supportive housing is available to you if you have mental or physical disabilities, HIV/AIDS and/or addiction issues. There are different levels of support ranging from apartments to adult residential facilities. Supportive housing offers services on site. You must qualify for supportive housing through the Human Resources Administration (HRA). HRA and the Office of Mental Health (OMH) determine what level of supportive housing you qualify for, and there are often waiting lists for openings. If you think you may qualify for supportive housing but no one has discussed it with you, talk to your caseworker or your lawyer.

Furniture Assistance

You can get money for furniture either through ACS’ Day Program Services or the “one-shot” grant through the ACS Housing Subsidy program. Make sure you speak to your caseworker and find out whether you qualify for these funds and how the funds are given to you. You may have to pay first and then be reimbursed. Public assistance may also help with furniture costs, and with the security deposit and first months’ rent. Be sure to ask your case manager about these programs.

RENTAL AGREEMENT

This Rental Agreement and/or Lease shall evidence the complete terms and conditions under which the parties whose signatures appear below have agreed. Landlord/Lease/Agent, _____________________________, shall be referred to as “OWNER” and Tenant(s)/Lessee, _____________________________, shall be referred to as “RESIDENT.” As consideration for this agreement, OWNER agrees to rent/lease to RESIDENT and RESIDENT agrees to rent/lease from OWNER for use solely as a private residence, the premises located at _____________________________________________ in the city of ____________________________________.

1. TERMS: RESIDENT agrees to pay in advance $______ per month on the ____ day of each month. This agreement shall commence on _____,___ and continue (check one)
   A. __ until ______, ___ as a leasehold. Thereafter it shall become a month-to-month tenancy. If RESIDENT should move from the
   premises prior to the expiration of this time period, he shall be liable for all rent due until such time that the Residence is occupied by
   an OWNER approved paying RESIDENT and/or expiration of said time period, whichever is shorter.
   B. __ until ____________, ______ on a month-to-month tenancy until either party shall terminate this agreement by giving a written
   notice of intention to terminate at least 30 days prior to the date of termination.

2. PAYMENTS: Rent and/or other charges are to be paid at such place or method designated by the owner as follows

   OWNER acknowledges receipt of the First Month’s rent of $_________________________, and a Security Deposit of $_________________________, for a total payment of $_________________________.

3. SECURITY DEPOSITS: The total of the above security deposit shall be refundable to RESIDENT, less any
   charges/fees for ________________________________________________________________________, at the termination of the lease period, if the premises are
   returned in a condition to the satisfaction of the owner.
Discharge Grant

When you are discharged from care, you may be eligible for a discharge grant of up to $750 from ACS. You are eligible for this grant if:

- you were in foster care continuously for six months or more;
- you have a permanency goal of return to parent, discharge to a fit and willing relative, or independent living;
- your goal is approved by the ACS case manager or ordered by the court, and
- you haven’t received a discharge grant within two years before the current discharge.
Public Assistance, Food Stamps, Medicaid

In order to avoid a gap in benefits, the Human Resources Administration agreed to allow youth in foster care to submit applications for public assistance before they are discharged from foster care. You can submit an application 45 days before discharge for public assistance for single individuals, and 30 days before discharge for individuals with children. Go to the nearest NYC Job Center to apply. Food stamps are also included in the application for public assistance, or you can apply for them separately at a Food Stamp Benefits Office. Ask your caseworker for assistance if you feel you need help with the applications.

When you are in foster care, you have health insurance through Medicaid under the foster care agency and ACS. Your coverage should last for three months after you leave foster care. Once you’re on trial discharge or leave foster care, you should immediately reapply for yourself at a Medicaid office in any hospital.

Employment Programs and Referrals

There are a variety of federal, state, local and ACS programs that your agency can refer you to. The NYC Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) Out of School Youth Employment programs, NYC DYCD In School Youth Employment programs, and the ACS/HRA partnership are some of the programs. Your agency can even let you work in their offices to gain job experience.

If you have any questions or concerns about leaving foster care, or for more information on any of this, speak with your caseworker and call your lawyer!
PROBLEMS IN YOUR PLACEMENT

Some kids live in foster care and never have any problems.
Other kids are not treated well, and some are even hurt in their placements.
You have the right to be safe and to be treated fairly no matter where you live. The next sections talk about some of the problems that kids have in their foster homes, group homes, RTCs, RTFs and hospitals and what to do if you are having any of these problems.

Abuse
You have the right to be safe from physical and emotional abuse when you are in foster care.
This is against the law! Foster parents cannot hit children in foster care.
They are not allowed to use corporal punishment.

Emotional Abuse
This is against the law! Some people call this emotional abuse. That means that the bad treatment does not hurt your body, but it still hurts you.
If you are being hit, beaten, slapped, or touched in a way that you don’t like, tell someone you trust. If you don’t want to tell your family or caseworker, call your lawyer!
Sexual Abuse

This is against the law! Nobody has the right to touch or look at the private parts of your body in a sexual way. Nobody can make you look at or touch their body either. Private parts include the penis, vagina, breasts, backside, and mouth, too. If someone is touching you or asking you to touch him or her in a way that makes you unhappy, remember that you have rights!

Call the Child Abuse Hotline at 800-342-3720. Someone who works for the State of New York will talk to you and take down the information you provide. Then a caseworker or investigator will come to your house and talk to you and your foster parents about what happened. The worker will decide what to do about it.

You can also call the Children’s Rights Unit at Administration for Children’s Services. Their number is (212)676-9421. They will probably send out a worker to talk to you and everyone else there about your complaint.

You can always call your lawyer if you are not happy with what is done or if you would rather have your lawyer call the Child Abuse Hotline or Children’s Rights Unit for you.

Lawyers For Children has created a special project and a handbook for young people in foster care who have survived sexual abuse. If you would like to speak with a member of the project staff, or if you would like to receive a copy of our handbook, You Are Not Alone, please call us at 212-966-6420. In addition, you can read more about the project and read and download You Are Not Alone on our website, www.lawyersforchildren.org. The handbook is also available in Spanish, ¡Tu No Estás Solo!
Stolen Property

Stealing is a big problem in some group homes. The law says that the City has to replace clothing that is stolen or destroyed. But that doesn’t usually happen, especially if it is another kid who is stealing. And what about things like jewelry and radios?

The agency has to give you a safe place to keep your things. In most group homes kids keep their stuff in their rooms, but not locked up. Some group homes do have locks on the bedroom doors and closets, but most don’t. Some group homes have locked rooms or closets for jewelry and other valuables.

You should make a list of things that you bring into the group home. If any of those items get stolen, tell the group home staff and social worker right away. If they don’t help you get your things back or get you replacements, ask to speak to the director of the group home. Tell the director you want to file a police report.

Call your lawyer if you have questions or problems.

If you have had your things stolen in your group home, send a letter or just call your lawyer.

Other facts you may want to include:
- if you think you know who took your things (This is especially important if it is a staff person.)
- if there is a locked area in the group home to keep your things
- if your things were in that place
- suggestions on how to stop the stealing.
**Fights**

Fighting is a problem for a lot of kids in foster care. First ask yourself, what do you want to happen?

- Do you want the other person to stop bothering you?
- Do you want the other person to be moved from the group home?
- Do you want to be moved from the group home?

Know all your facts when you go to talk to staff or your lawyer about the problem and what you think should be done about it.

“One boy here is always bothering me, tries to start fights. I told the staff, but they won’t do anything about it.”
“I came home from school the other day and left my bookbag in the hall. The staff, Ms. Rich, told me to take it to my room. I was in a bad mood and didn’t feel like talking to her. She got mad at me and threw my books right at me.”

Problems With Staff

Staff cannot use physical force with the residents. If anyone does, you should report it to your social worker and the director of the group home or you can also call the Child Abuse Hotline, 800-342-3720 or the Children’s Rights Unit at ACS, (212)266-2500. You can call your lawyer or write a letter and send it to the director and your lawyer.

Restraint

Staff is supposed to touch you only if they need to restrain you from hurting yourself or someone else. Staff cannot touch you (hit, beat, or slap) or put you in solitary confinement, room isolation, or “time out” as a way to punish you.

The law says that these are the things staff can do if you are going to hurt yourself or someone else:

- hold you with their hands or bodies
- use handcuffs or footcuffs, but only if you are being taken in a car or van and you are a “clear danger to public safety or yourself.”
- use drugs or medication to control you. This is allowed only if a doctor who knows you and your medical history gives an order that medication should be used. This is very serious. The agency can do this only after trying other ways to restrain you.
- use room isolation. This means you are put in a room that is supposed to be used only when you are clearly going to hurt yourself or someone else. The room isn’t allowed to be used for anything else.

If you are hurt when restrained or touched by staff:

If you are injured when restraint is used, a doctor or nurse has to examine you immediately. She or he has to write a report that goes into your medical record.
The agency must:
- have a written policy about restraint
- give the staff at least 6 hours of training about how and when to use restraint
- keep a record of how many children a day are restrained.

If you think the staff is not following these regulations about restraint, you should ask to see the agency's written policy, or call your lawyer.

Other important facts about the use of restraint:
- Staff can never use restraint as punishment.
- Staff has to try to resolve the problem (calm you down) in other ways before using restraint.
- Staff can use restraint only if you clearly intend to hurt yourself or someone else or destroy property.
**Searches**

You have the right to privacy. The agency can search you or your room only if they have “reasonable cause.”

What does that mean? Whenever they feel like it? Not quite! They have to suspect that you have:
1. stolen property
2. weapons (including a gun, knife, baseball bat, Chinese stars, or kung fu equipment)
3. other things that they consider dangerous to you, other kids, staff, or dangerous to the building (like matches or a bomb)
4. drugs, alcohol, or marijuana.

They can search you only if they think you have one of these things and you or someone else is about to be hurt because you are going to use it (the weapon, bomb, or drug) or sell it. Strip searches are never allowed.
Punishment

The agency cannot stop you from seeing your family as a punishment. The law says you can’t be deprived of:

- meals or snacks
- mail
- visits by family as a way to discipline you.

Staff cannot touch you (hit, beat, or slap) or put you in solitary confinement or room isolation as a way to punish you.
Medication

A lot of kids take medication. Some think it is okay because it helps them feel better. But a lot of kids hate taking medication/drugs and some refuse it altogether.

It is important to ask these questions about any medication:
- What is it called?
- Why do they want you to take it?
- What is it for?
- Are there side effects?
- How long do you have to take it?
- Does your parent (or person you lived with before) know about this? Has he or she said it’s okay?
- Are there other things that can be done for you instead of medication, like more therapy or physical exercise or changing your diet?

Talk to your doctor and social worker and family about your feelings about taking medication.

If the agency or your doctor tells you that you have to take the medication, and you really don't want to, call your lawyer.

Your lawyer might be able to get another doctor to talk to your doctor.

Your lawyer also might be able to ask the judge to order the agency or your doctor to stop giving you medication.
Therapy/Counseling

You have the right to get help while you are in foster care. Help with your problems usually means counseling or therapy with a social worker, psychologist, or psychiatrist. Some kids don't like their therapist, some do and want more time. If you are unhappy with what is going on, talk to your therapist, social worker, and lawyer about it.

There is nothing wrong with you if you want or need counseling. A lot of times therapy is important to help you deal with things that are out of your control. Like if someone close to you dies, you may want help to get over the sadness.

**what to do**

- If you don't think you are getting the right kind of help:
  - You should complain. After all, one of the reasons you are in placement is to get help!
  - You can send a letter or call your lawyer.

“You know, I've been through a lot. It wasn’t easy leaving my mother, my friends, my school and my neighborhood.”
Phone Calls

You are allowed to call anyone you want. But, the agency can restrict the time, length, and cost of your calls. The agency must have a written policy about using the phone. You should ask to see the policy. It should say things like:

- You have the right to get (or refuse) any phone calls. The group home can set “reasonable hours” for you to get calls.
- The agency can’t let you use the phone for “illegal purposes.”
- You have a right to privacy during your phone calls. Staff can’t listen in unless you ask them.

“My social worker won’t let me call my mother except on Tuesdays at 4:00. She says I don’t have a right to talk to her whenever I feel like it. Is that true?”
Too Many Caseworkers

Having a lot of caseworkers is a problem for many kids. If you are lucky, you will get a counselor or staff person or social worker whom you like and can trust.

If you do not have anyone you can trust to talk to about problems, call your lawyer to find out about getting counseling.

"Since I have been in the system, I’ve had nine or ten caseworkers: Anna, Gina, Susan, Lenny, Andrea, Mike… They all want to know my story. I’m sick of talking to everyone."

Fair Treatment

That is how it’s supposed to be. But if you are in a foster home where you feel you get treated differently or worse than the other kids, you should report this to your caseworker or lawyer. You have the right to be on equal footing with the other kids—that means you get the same privileges and duties/responsibilities as they do.

"I love living at the Johnsons. They treat me just like one of their own kids."
SCHOOL

The Right School For You

You have the right to appropriate education and vocational training. That means it has to be the right kind of school for you. A lot of times kids are tested to see what kind of school is right for them.

Tell your caseworker, psychologist, and teachers that you don’t think you’re in the right school program. You can also put your reasons in writing, using the school form letter in the What To Do section.

You have the right to go to school in the neighborhood where your placement is located. You also have the right to go to your old school. But a lot of times the old school is really far away from placement home so the agency will try to get you to go to a school in the neighborhood.

If you are unhappy with changing schools or staying in your old school, tell your parents, foster parents, and social worker. They can help you change (or stay).

You have the right to start attending your new school right away. Even if your records aren’t there, you can go to the school with a caseworker and say you want to register and begin attending classes.

This might be more of a problem if you are in high school. Then, you may have to get papers from your last school saying that it is a travel hardship for you to continue going there. (It’s too far for you to get to everyday.) But most schools will let you start attending right away.

Call your lawyer if you are not in school!!!
Special Education

Kids are in special ed. because the school thinks they need extra attention. But if you don’t want to be in a special ed. class, you can fight against it.

Schools at Residential Treatment Centers and Residential

Treatment Facilities are special ed. schools. They have fewer kids in a class than regular schools, and you are supposed to get more help with your schoolwork.

To get in or out of special ed., you have to go through a CSE review. (CSE stands for Committee on Special Education.) The review is a meeting where school people and others decide what kind of school program you should be in.

You need to get your parent, foster parent, or social worker to help you get a CSE review. Talk to your teacher about it, too. If they don’t know what to do about it, you can call the people in the What To Do section below, or ask your social worker to call them.
what to do
If you are unhappy with your school situation:

- Your agency might have an educational specialist or school placement worker. Ask your social worker for the name of that worker or call the agency and ask they may be able to help you.
- Call Advocates for Children. They are lawyers who help kids get the right kind of schooling. Their phone number is (212)947-9779. Try to call between 9:00AM and 1:00PM. Explain that you need help. Tell them what kind of school problem you have. They may say you need to have your parent call. Tell them that you are in foster care. If they want your social worker to call, ask your social worker to call when you are there, so that you know what happens.
- You can also call your lawyer for help. And, you can mail your lawyer a letter.

Corporal punishment (physical force) is not allowed in New York State schools. But school staff people can use reasonable physical force to:

- protect themselves
- protect another person from physical injury
- protect school property
- restrain or remove a student whose behavior is interfering with the school if the student refuses to stop when asked.

You have the right to “appropriate” education and vocational training. That means it has to be the right kind of school for you. A lot of times kids are tested to see what kind of school is right for them.
College

You probably know that there are lots of colleges and universities. Some are in New York State and some are not. Some are State University or City University (SUNY or CUNY) schools, and some are private.

SUNY and CUNY schools cost the least. This doesn't mean that you have to go there. Many SUNY and CUNY schools are excellent. Some are in the city and some are outside the city.

Almost anyone in foster care can get financial aid from the state: The two big programs for New York schools are TAP (Tuition Assistance Program) and PELL (Federal Funding Grant).

Many agencies have scholarship programs: Check with your social worker, education specialist, or guidance counselor at school.

ACS may have money for you to go to college, but don't count on it. Your caseworker can find out more about money provided by ACS for your education.

If you don’t have an agency that has an education specialist or if you want more help, try calling the option centers below. Tell them you want to come in to get counseling for college.

You should also call your lawyer and ask about Educational Training Vouchers (cash grants used for education) and money for room and board (the City should pay for your room and board).

MANHATTAN, BROOKLYN, S.I.
The Door (212)941-9090

THE BRONX
The Girls Club (718)590-4050

QUEENS
Center for Children+Families (718)526-0722
**HIV/AIDS**

AIDS and HIV (the virus that can cause AIDS) affect a lot of families and kids in New York. If you or anyone you know has AIDS or is HIV-positive, you need to understand what this means.

**HIV/AIDS Testing**

You cannot be given an HIV test without your "consent" in writing. You can give consent no matter how old you are if you understand: what the HIV test is for, what the results mean, and what your options are for getting treatment.

Before you get an AIDS or HIV test, you should get counseling about:
- AIDS and HIV
- what the HIV test is for and what results mean
- information on how to prevent HIV and AIDS and how it is spread.

If you test positive, get counseling so you can learn facts about your rights, how to prevent exposing others to HIV, and confidentiality.

**Confidentiality**

You have the right to have HIV information kept confidential. That means private! But there are people who may need to know about it, in case you require medical help. Doctors, foster parents, and some caseworkers have to be told about HIV and AIDS information.

You have to say, in writing, that it is okay to tell these people about HIV/AIDS information. You must sign and date a release that says who you are allowing to get the information and for what purpose.

If you find out that you are HIV positive while you are in foster care, and then you are discharged to your parent, the agency cannot tell your parent about that without your written release.

People who learn confidential HIV/AIDS information are not allowed to pass it on to other people unless you say it is okay in writing, or if it is an emergency.
Places to call that specialize in helping young people with HIV/AIDS:

**BRONX**
Montefiore Risk Evaluation Program (718) 920-6612

**BROOKLYN**
Brooklyn Group Support Project (718) 270-2758
Pediatric Maternal Center of Kings County Hospital (718) 245-4485

**MANHATTAN**
Harlem Hospital (212) 939-2379
Hetrick Martin (212) 674-2400
Mt. Sinai Adolescent Health Center (212) 423-2999
The Door (212) 941-9090

**STATEN ISLAND**
Staten Island University Hospital (718) 226-2640

You have the right to have HIV information kept confidential.
HAVING A BABY IN FOSTER CARE

Teenage parents in foster care face special problems, not the least of which is actually supporting and caring for a child. Fortunately, there are special regulations and policies in place for services and support for pregnant and parenting teens.

Placements
Unless ACS files a case against you, you and your child should be placed in the same foster home or facility. Even if your caseworker suggests that you voluntarily place your child or give your child to someone else to take care of, you are not required to do so. Without a court case against you alleging child abuse or neglect, neither the agency nor ACS can take your child away from you, or make you give someone else custody. If they do file a case against you and remove your child from you, the agency must explore kinship resources for placement, so give the caseworker names of family and friends who you think would care for your child.

Extra Allowances
When your child is placed with you in a foster home, the foster parent will receive additional money from the agency for your child. The foster parent then has the choice to keep the money or give the money to you. Whoever has the money is responsible for paying for your child’s necessities. There is an additional diaper allowance of $47 per month until your baby is four years old, and a special payment from the agency is available for a crib, high chair, stroller and car seat, if necessary.
Programs and Child Care

As a teen parent in foster care, you are entitled to certain preventive services and child care services.

ACD

This program has technically been renamed the Division of Child Care, but everyone still refers to it as ACD. Through this program, you can apply for day care vouchers for your use at any approved provider. You can also use ACD vouchers to pay for a babysitter you locate, even if the babysitter is not already ACD-approved, as long as the babysitter is willing to be cleared. For information on how to apply, call 311.

HIGH SCHOOLS AND GED PROGRAMS

If you are pregnant or parenting, there are still educational options open for you! There are three schools for pregnant students only, one in the Bronx, one in Manhattan and one in Brooklyn. To enroll, you have to call the Brooklyn school at (718) 935-9457. Once you have the baby, you transfer back to your old school.

LYFE

The LYFE program provides free child care for infants up to two year old in 44 New York City high schools and alternative schools. You can call the LYFE information line at (212) 348-0608 to find out if your high school participates in the program.

There is also a GED program specifically geared to pregnant and parenting teens – New Beginning, located in Jamaica, Queens. You can call (718)739-0215 for more information.

If you leave foster care before your 20th birthday, you may also be able to access assistance through the Teen Age Services Act (TASA) Program. TASA programs work with pregnant or parenting adolescents who are receiving Public Assistance or Medicaid only, so you’re only eligible when you’re out of care. TASA can help you access health services, public benefits, housing, education, family planning, parenting skills classes, and vocational programs.
WOMEN IN NEED

Women In Need offers transitional shelters and permanent supported housing, supported housing for special populations of mothers with children, job training and placement, and child care for their clients. They often have a waiting list, and also require that you be certified as homeless, which means that you may have to spend some time in a shelter to qualify. However, if you do qualify, the services and aftercare they provide are extremely helpful.

Preventive Services

According to ACS policy and state law, you are entitled to preventive services if you request them from your agency. There are providers that will visit you at home before and after your baby is born, such as Healthy Families of New York City, Nurse-Family Partnership, Room to Grow, and the Visiting Nurse Program. You can also request parenting classes, housekeeping services, home management services, and parent aide services from your agency. Try to follow through with whatever is required of you in order to receive the services you ask for.

If you need additional assistance, speak to your caseworker or call your lawyer.
SEXUAL ORIENTATION—GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER, AND QUESTIONING YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

All young people in foster care have equal rights. If you feel that you are being treated unfairly because you are gay or lesbian you should contact your lawyer right away. Remember: all conversations with your lawyer are completely confidential.

There are foster care and school settings that have been designed to meet the needs of gay and lesbian youth. Your lawyer should be able to help you get in touch with them. If you prefer to find the information that you need on your own, call the Hetrick-Martin Institute at (212) 674-2400. Hetrick-Martin serves gay and lesbian youth from the ages of 12 to 21. Hetrick-Martin runs the Harvey Milk School, offers counseling, after-school and drop-in services, and runs Project First Step for homeless and runaway youth.

If you are a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning young person in foster care you can find information and support at Lawyers For Children’s GLBTQ Project at (212) 966-6420.

Hetrick-Martin Institute
(212) 674-2400

Lawyers For Children
(212)966-6420

Lawyers For Children has created a special project and a handbook for young people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or questioning their sexuality and living in foster care. If you would like to speak with a member of the project staff, or if you would like to receive a copy of our handbook for GLBTQ youth, You Are Not Alone, please call us at 212-966-6420. In addition, you can read more about the project and read and download You Are Not Alone on our website, www.lawyersforchildren.org. The handbook is also available in Spanish, ¡Tu No Estás Solo!
A LIST OF YOUR RIGHTS IN GROUP HOMES AND TREATMENT CENTERS (RTFS AND RTCS)

All placements must have:

- sanitary conditions, water, heat
- alternative exits on floors
- smoke detectors
- bedrooms with windows, drawers, and closet space
- no more than three children per bedroom
- good quality food
- no denial of meals
- appropriate clothing
- treatment services (counseling and therapy)
- proper medical and dental care.

Room isolation is prohibited: “No child shall be confined to a locked room for any reason.”

If you think the conditions in your group home do not meet the standards required by law, you can do something about it.
A LIST OF YOUR RIGHTS IN FOSTER HOMES

Foster parents must:

- arrange for kids to go to school
- not leave kids under 10 alone without a competent adult
- not care for more than 2 infants (under 2 years) except if the infants are siblings
- give good quality food, at regular hours, in sufficient quantity and size, letting kids eat at the table with the family
- keep clothing clean and repaired; get kids sufficient quantity of clothing, season appropriate, of style and quality not to distinguish them from other kids in the community
- give kids a brush, a comb, a toothbrush, towels, and storage space
- provide a lighted study area
- respect biological parents’ religious preference
- cooperate with agency about the discharge plan (e.g., visiting) and inform agency about child’s progress
- give child support, recognition, and attention in atmosphere of acceptance, kindness, and understanding
- let agency into home to investigate complaints
- tell agency about changes in foster family status
- cooperate with regular biweekly visit or communication with siblings or half siblings placed apart
- agree to redisclose HIV information only to approved people, accompanied with standard notice
- provide proper medical and dental care
PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS

Some kids go into psychiatric hospitals while they are in foster care. Sometimes this is for a short time and sometimes for months or even years. This section talks about some of your rights while you are in a hospital.

You can be in a psychiatric hospital only if you “are a danger to yourself or others.” Most young people are in hospitals because they tried to hurt themselves or somebody else.

You have the right to be somewhere other than the hospital if you are not a danger to yourself or others.

If you have been in the hospital for what you think is too long and you want to leave, call your lawyer or send the form on page 85 to Lawyers For Children.

When you are in the hospital, you need to find out what the plan is for you. Ask your doctors and social workers these questions:

- Why am I in the hospital?
- How long will I stay?
- Where will I go when I leave?
- What kind of place is it?
- Can I visit my family and friends? Can they visit me?
**Medication**

A lot of kids take medication. Some think it is okay because it helps them feel better. But a lot of kids hate taking medication/drugs and some refuse it altogether.

It is important to ask these questions about any medication:
- What is it called?
- Why do they want you to take it?
- What is it for?
- Are there side effects?
- How long do you have to take it?
- Does your parent (or person you lived with before) know about this? Has she or he said it's okay?
- Are there other things that can be done for you instead of medication, like more therapy or physical exercise or changing your diet?

Talk to your doctor and social worker and family about your feelings about taking medication.

If the agency or your doctor tells you that you have to take the medication, and you really don't want to, call your lawyer.

Your lawyer can get another doctor who can talk to your doctor. Your lawyer can also ask the judge to order the hospital to stop giving you medication.
School

Whether you are in a hospital for a long time or a short time, you have the right to go to school.

There is usually a school in the hospital.

You have the right to the same level of education that you would be getting if you were living at home and in school. You can’t be kept out of school as punishment. You have the right to attend school and you must attend school if you are 6 to 17 years old. Corporal punishment (physical force) is not allowed in New York State schools. Schools that are part of hospitals are part of the New York State school system.

You have the right to appropriate education and vocational training. That means it has to be the right kind of school for you. A lot of times kids are tested to see what kind of school is right for them.

You probably can’t go to school off the hospital grounds, but you may be able to get a special tutor or different books and materials.

You need to get your parent, former foster parent, social worker, or lawyer to help you with this. Talk to your teacher about it, too.
**Problems in a Psychiatric Hospital**

If you are in a psychiatric hospital and you don’t think you should be, call your lawyer. There is an office of attorneys called Mental Hygiene Legal Services. Their job is to help you get out of a psychiatric hospital or to help you get proper treatment while you are in the hospital.

If you have any of these problems, call MHLS:
- You want to get out of the hospital.
- You want to stay in the hospital.
- You are being hurt by staff in the hospital.
- You are not being allowed to practice your religion in the hospital.
- You do not like the medication you are given at the hospital.

You can reach MHLS at their main number: (212)889-6486. Tell the person at MHLS the name of the hospital where you are living. They will give you the phone number for the attorney who represents children at that hospital.

If you can’t get the help you need from MHLS, call Lawyers For Children or the Legal Aid Society. If you can’t reach your lawyer on the phone, send a letter to your lawyer.
The form letters that follow are all pre-addressed to Lawyers For Children. If your lawyer works for the Legal Aid Society, you need to send the letter to the Legal Aid office where your lawyer works. Here are the addresses in each borough of New York City:

The Legal Aid Society
Juvenile Rights Division
60 Lafayette Street
New York, NY 10013
Manhattan (212) 349-3200

The Legal Aid Society
Juvenile Rights Division
900 Sheridan Avenue, Rm. 6C12
Bronx, NY 10451
Bronx (718) 681-1700

The Legal Aid Society
Juvenile Rights Division
175 Remsen Street, 10th Fl.
Brooklyn, NY 11201
Brooklyn (718) 237-3100

The Legal Aid Society
Juvenile Rights Division
90-04 161st Street, Rm. 405
Queens, NY 11432
Queens (718) 291-1500

The Legal Aid Society
Juvenile Rights Division
25 Hyatt Street, 6th Floor
Staten Island, NY 10301
Staten Island (718) 981-0219
Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is_________________________. I am____ years old. Right now I live at __________________________. I have been in foster care since _____.
Before that I lived with ____________________________________________.
I have not gone to court yet. I do not have a lawyer. I want to talk to a lawyer because__________________________________________________________ ____________________________________________________________________  ____________________________________________________________________

You can contact me at______________________ .

Sincerely,

(Your name)
Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is ______________________. I am _____ years old. Right now I live at ______________________. I have been in foster care since ____.
I am requesting that I be moved to  ☐ a foster home  ☐ another group home (check one) because ______________________

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

It is important that I be moved as soon as possible because __________________________

________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________
________________________________________

(If it is a emergency, say why, and if it’s not you can leave it blank.)
My caseworker’s name is __________________________
The agency I am with is called __________________________
You can call me at this telephone number __________________________.

Sincerely,

(Your name)

Cut out on dotted line, fold in half and place a stamp on back to mail.
Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is ___________________. I am ___ years old. Right now I live at __________________________. I have been in foster care since _____.

I am requesting that I stay in this placement. I think the plan is to move me to [ ] an RTC [ ] another group home [ ] My parents’ home. The reasons I want to stay are:________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________

It would be unfair to move me because ______________________________________

________________________________________________________

My caseworker’s name is _______________________________________

The agency I am with is called ______________________________________

You can call me at this telephone number ____________________________.

Sincerely,

(Your name)
Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is __________________________. I am ___ years old. Right now I live at ____________________________ (placement name).

I want to stop visits with ____________________________ who is my

☐ parent ☐ relative ☐ friend ☐ godparent.

I don’t want to see them because ____________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

My caseworker’s name is ____________________________

The agency I am with is called ____________________________

You can call me at this telephone number _________________ to let me know how I can stop these visits.

Sincerely,

(Your name)
Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is ______________________. I am ____ years old. Right now I live at ________________________________ (placement name).

I am requesting visits with __________________________ who is my ☐ brother ☐ sister. (Check one.)

This person lives with ☐ a foster family, ☐ another agency, ☐ another person, ☐ my family, or ☐ on his ☐ on her own (Check one.)

My caseworker’s name is ________________________________
The agency I am with is called ________________________________
You can call me at this telephone number ___________________________ to let me know what you will be doing about setting up visits.

Sincerely,

(Your name)
Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is ___________________________. I am ____ years old. Right now I live at _______________________________ (placement name).

I am requesting □ visits with □ to go live with ___________________________.

who is my □ relative □ friend. (Check one.)

My caseworker’s name is ____________________________________________

The agency I am with is called ____________________________________________

You can call me at this telephone number ________________ to let me know

what you will be doing to explore these options.

Sincerely,

(Your name)
VISIT FORM

Lawyers For Children, Inc.
110 Lafayette Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10013

Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is ____________________________ . I am ___ years old. Right now I live at ____________________________ (placement name).

I am requesting more visits with ____________________________ who is my □ relative □ friend.

(Check one.)

My caseworker’s name is ____________________________ 

The agency I am with is called ____________________________ 

You can call me at this telephone number _________________ to let me know what you will be doing to explore these options.

Sincerely,

(Your name)
Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is _____________________ . I am ___ years old. Right now I live at ______________________________ (placement name).

My caseworker or social worker’s name is ________________________ .

The agency I am with is ________________________________ .

I am writing because my property was stolen. This is a list of things that are missing:

_____________________________________________________

I kept these things in _________________ (closet, bedroom drawer, or wherever they were). I found out they were missing on __________________ (date).

I think it would be fair if the agency did these things (check more than one)

☐ replaced my property

☐ gave me money to replace what was stolen

☐ put locks on the closets/drawers/bedrooms

☐ other

Please call me at this telephone number _________________ to let me know how you are going to correct this matter.

Sincerely,

(Your name)
SERVICES/ HELP FORM

Lawyers For Children, Inc.
110 Lafayette Street, 8th Floor
New York, NY 10013

Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is _______________________. I am ___ years old. Right now I live at
________________________________________________________ (placement name).

I am requesting:
☐ therapy/counseling
☐ a different therapist
☐ more counseling
☐ other ____________________________________________

My caseworker’s name is _________________________________.
The agency I am with is called _________________________________.
Please call me at this telephone number _________________ to let me know
what will happen next.

Sincerely,

(Your name)

Cut out on dotted line, fold in half and place a stamp on back to mail.
Dear Lawyers For Children:

My name is ___________________________. I am ____ years old. Right now I live at ________________________________ (placement name) at ___________________________

________________________ (address). I go to ____________________________ school. I am in _______ grade. __I am __ I am not in special ed. (Check one.) The problem I have with school is

that: ______________________________________

The school where I did best was _____________________________.
I would like to _________________________________________________.

My caseworker’s name is _________________________________.
The agency I am with is called _________________________________.
Please call me at this telephone number _____________ to let me know how you are going to correct this matter.

Sincerely,

(Your name)