



FOSTER YOUTH  
**Mental Health**  
RESOURCE



### **About MHSOAC**

In enacting Proposition 63, the Mental Health Services Act, California voters in 2004 created and charged the Mental Health Services Oversight and Accountability Commission with the responsibility of driving transformational change in public and private mental health systems to achieve the vision that everyone who needs mental health care has access to and receives effective and culturally competent care. The Commission was designed to empower community partners, with members representing consumers and their families, service providers, law enforcement, educators, and employers. The Commission puts consumers and families at the center of decision-making. The Commission promotes community collaboration, cultural competency, and integrated service delivery. The Commission is committed to wellness and recovery, using its authorities, resources, and passion to reduce the negative outcomes of mental illness and promote the mental health and wellbeing of all Californians.

### **About iFoster**

iFoster is a 501c3 national non-profit with the largest and most inclusive online community of youth, caregivers, and organizations in foster care; with over 75,000 members in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Guam. iFoster's mission is to ensure that every child growing up outside their biological home has the resources and opportunities they need to become successful. Through its members, iFoster supports over 175,000 children and youth in foster care and aging out every year, connecting them to over \$195 Million in resources and supportive services.

### **Acknowledgments**

This piece could not have been produced without the work of the foster youth who pulled the content together:

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## FOSTER YOUTH **Mental Health** RESOURCE

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This Mental Health kit was created by TAY Americorps to provide information on **Everything Foster Youth Need to Know About Mental Health** and advance Mental Health Awareness, specifically among current or former foster youth. Below are 8 sections that contain valuable information and resources regarding Foster Youth's Mental Health.

**iFoster:** iFoster's mission is to ensure that every child growing up outside of their biological home has the resources and opportunities they need to become successful, independent adults. We provide a free platform of resources for foster care youth, caregivers, and organizations.

We create solutions that drive collaboration and efficiencies across the child welfare system and engage the community outside of child welfare to support our nation's most vulnerable children.

Learn more about the resources for foster care youth available through iFoster at [iFoster.org](https://iFoster.org).



### IMPORTANT!!!

**iFoster is not a crisis center.** If you're thinking about suicide, are worried about a friend or loved one, or would like emotional support, the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline is available 24/7.

You can call or text 988 or use their chat service. Here is the link to their website: <https://988lifeline.org/>



Post-It

Mental Health resources

City Ideas TO jobs II

Better Education

Self love



Support Groups → restorative justice

Better City Jobs

equity

Victims' Foundation

Free health care

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Free dental

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No borders

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Food for all

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# Mental Health Tips & Advice





## Mental Health Tips & Advice

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Mental health consists of psychological, emotional and social welfare, to the extent of how we feel inside, to how we handle stress, not just disabilities and disorders. Mental health is a necessity to lead a good life. No one is okay all the time, and that's okay. Having a dramatic change in life

No one is okay all the time, and that's okay. Having a dramatic change in life can cause changes in the way we eat and the way we sleep, and it can start with things we usually would not notice.

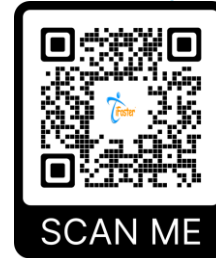
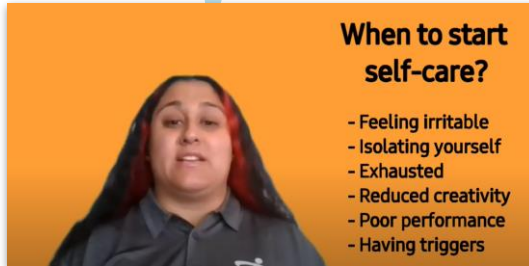
Below, you will find some tips on how to handle different times of feeling low:

- 🌸 **Take a walk outside-** Walking outside and taking in some fresh air can be beneficial when experiencing overwhelming emotions. Additionally, it relieves tension and pressure.
- 🌸 **Practice Deep Breathing-** At times, life can become overwhelmingly stressful, causing us to overlook something as basic as breathing. Despite our bodies being naturally equipped to breathe on their own, dedicating a few minutes to practicing deep breathing can offer valuable insights into our bodily functions. Take a pause and contemplate the mechanics of breathing; feel the sensation of each breath.
- 🌸 **Having a heart-to-heart** with a trusted individual can prove to be an empowering measure for breaking free from the clutches of stress. Letting our emotions out to a confidant can render moral support and motivation. Alternatively, documenting our thoughts and feelings in writing, such as in a diary or journal, can serve as a safe haven for unburdening ourselves.
- 🌸 **Exercise-** Science has demonstrated that exercise helps our brains release chemicals that reduce stress. You don't need to follow an elaborate exercise plan to achieve this; you can take a brisk 10-minute walk, dance to your favorite music, or engage in your favorite sport. These activities will improve your physical and mental well-being, and you'll feel more comfortable in your own body.
- 🌸 **Do things you enjoy-** We frequently become disinterested in the things we enjoy doing when we are stressed out or depressed. Engaging in recreational activities or finding a new hobby can benefit our mental health.





**Self-care-** Occasionally, we become so engrossed in the present that we forget to pause and attend to our needs. Treating yourself to a favorite snack, taking a hot shower or bath, writing a love letter to yourself, cuddling with your pets, taking a nap, and saying thank you to someone who has helped you recently are a few self-care ideas.



**Using Your Available Resources -** There are MANY resources out there; here are a few of the ones we think are helpful:



**Warmline Directory:** Opening up about our mental well-being can bring solace, but finding a trusted person may not always be possible. Warmlines provide dedicated support via helplines during challenging times. They offer a listening ear and valuable assistance, whether in crisis or not. For a comprehensive directory of local and nationwide warmlines in the United States, visit [warmline.org](http://warmline.org).




**Wysa App: Life Coaching AI Bot:** Wysa is an AI-enabled Life Coach for mental and emotional wellness. Launched in 2017, it provides early intervention to high-risk groups through an AI chatbot, evidence-based self-help tools, and messaging-based support from human psychologists. It's anonymous, empathetic, and available 24x7. Visit [Wysa](http://Wysa) for more details download the app on [iOS](#) or [Android](#).



**Soluna:** Is an app designed to provide confidential support for individuals aged 13 to 25 in California. The app is free, with no need for insurance or dealing with annoying ads or in-app purchases. It offers complete anonymity and allows users to chat with professional coaches, access interactive tools for stress relief, explore quizzes, videos, forums, and more. For more details download the app on [iOS](#) or [Android](#).

Suppose these resources feel like you need something else. In that case, the numbers below will allow you to talk to a professional and get guidance on what to do next. They will offer resources and professional advice.

 **National Suicide Prevention Lifeline | 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)** is a crisis hotline that can help with many issues. Callers are connected with a nearby professional who will talk with them about their feelings or concerns for other family and friends. Call the toll-free Lifeline, 24 hours/day, seven days/week.



**Lifeline Crisis Chat:** If you're in need of emotional support, whether you're considering suicide, concerned about someone you know, or simply seeking someone to talk to, the 988 Lifeline network is available around the clock throughout the United States. Through 988 Lifeline Chat and Text, you can connect with compassionate crisis counselors who provide free and confidential conversations for emotional support. You can access this service at their <https://988lifeline.org/chat/>.

It's acceptable to be down, not to know, and not to have the answers. We want to support you in learning how to manage those feelings so that you can quickly get back up the next time they arise and remember that you can achieve anything you want.



# iFoster Experiences & Testimonials



# iFoster Experiences & Testimonials

We at iFoster recognize the difficulties of being a foster youth experiencing a challenging time. A few of the young ambassadors for Tay AmeriCorps consented to discuss their personal experiences briefly. It is hoped that their testimonies resonate with you and give you some comfort in knowing that you are not alone.



**Marcellus**

"So far—working with iFoster has been a good working experience. I was lucky enough to be working with one of my old managers. The professional development meetings we do help us get a better understanding of what's required from us. Such as "How to make a Professional email" or "How to make a resume". These are simple but great things to teach us to help prepare us for the workforce.

On top of that, they also help us look for job opportunities; I would know since they helped me get a job with a program focused on Mental Health. This helped me a lot cause it helped me feel like I was doing something productive instead of playing games all day. I met new and very kind people."



**Rianna**

iFoster has been a fantastic resource that I discovered a few years ago, and they are once again demonstrating that they are a fantastic advocate for youth in foster care, both past and present. iFoster is an organization that provides hundreds of accessible resources to youth, ultimately closing the gap between resources and youth. Because I lived in a different city, I felt isolated from the rest of ACS for a while, but I lost out on a lot of opportunities because the information never got to me in a timely manner. Since I was raised in foster care, everything matters. Being able to connect with these resources through iFoster has allowed me to better serve others, and it is crucial to know how to advocate for yourself."

## More Testimonials



**When to start self-care?**

- Feeling irritable
- Isolating yourself
- Exhausted
- Reduced creativity
- Poor performance
- Having triggers

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Hopefully, these testimonies will strike a chord with you in some way. You can browse the [Stories of Hope and Recovery - 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline](#) if you'd like to read other stories about mental health. It could be helpful to read the various testimonies from people who chose to share their own experiences of overcoming and figuring out how to deal with similar challenges. If you have any non-emergent needs, **iFoster** is here to support. You can request resources from iFoster by completing the [Need Request – iFoster form](#). After completing the form, You will receive a follow-up email, text, or call.

### Section Links, Sources and Resources:

[988 Lifeline- Stories of Hope & Recovery:](#)



[iFoster- Need Request Form:](#)



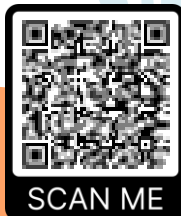
# Identifying Mental Health Signs



# Identifying Mental Health Signs

Recognizing signs of mental health behaviors is crucial for understanding and addressing mental health well-being. These signs can manifest in various ways, encompassing emotional, cognitive and behavioral aspects. Emotionally, individuals may experience persistent feelings of sadness, anxiety, or mood swings that disrupt their daily lives. Cognitive signs may include difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts, or detachment from reality. Behavioral changes can range from social withdrawal and changes in sleep patterns to increased irritability or impulsiveness. Attention to sudden shifts in these domains is essential, as they may indicate underlying mental health concerns.

Furthermore, changes in appetite, energy levels or engagement in previously enjoyed activities can also signify potential issues. Being attuned to these signs allows for early intervention and support, promoting overall mental well-being. If you or someone you know is exhibiting such signs, seeking professional guidance is crucial for a comprehensive assessment and appropriate assistance.



Being aware of unhealthy symptoms or behaviors related to mental health is crucial for all aspects of life. Understanding the causes and gaining knowledge to address unsupportive patterns is essential. Mental health is as important as physical health; seeking professional support can make a significant difference.

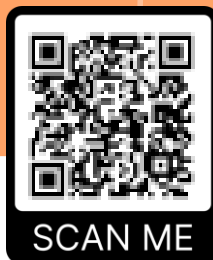
Gathering information about our mental well-being allows us to identify behavior patterns and maintain a positive character. For more information on mental health, substance use, and co-occurring disorders, you can [click here](#).



Mental health and wellness are interconnected and can quickly impact each other. Analyzing and identifying unhealthy behavior patterns is crucial to prevent harmful effects. This source provides helpful information about mental health and wellness.

A clear understanding of mental health can enable you to lead a healthy and positive life, effectively managing your day-to-day tasks. For more information on the relationship between mental and physical health, [click here](#).

## What is Mental Health





# Mental Health Plan & Prevention





## Mental Health Plan & Prevention

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Having a plan to deal with these issues is crucial for your overall well-being. People experience anxiety, feeling down, or burnout in different ways – it's like everyone has their version of these feelings. Knowing the signs helps you recognize what you're going through and find the proper support. Creating a personal plan involves things like taking care of yourself, getting help from professionals if needed, talking to someone you trust, finding healthy ways to cope with stress, and having supportive friends or family around.

Preventing mental health problems means doing things to stay mentally strong, like regular exercise, finding activities you enjoy, and managing stress by taking breaks when needed. Taking steps to manage your mental health is a journey, and it's okay to ask for help along the way. You're not alone in this; having a good plan can improve life. The links below are helpful in understanding and seeking help for different signs of mental health issues:

Below, you will find some tips on how to handle different times of feeling low:



**Cal FURS:** Provides a free 24/7/365 hotline for current or former foster youth and their caregivers. You can call to get immediate help for any issues you may be facing. The hotline connects you with trained counselors or peers who will listen to you in a safe and judgment-free environment. [Cal FURS](#)



**Suicide Prevention Resource Center (SPRC):** Dedicated to preventing suicide and offering resources, training, and information. You can contact them by completing a request form with your question and contact information. No personal documents are required. Someone from the center will reach out to you. [SPRC](#)



**Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health:** Suicide Prevention Resources: Provides tailored information and support for the Los Angeles County community. They offer local suicide prevention resources, crisis helplines, and mental health services. To access these resources, visit the provided link and click on "Get help now" for further contact information. [Suicide Prevention Resources](#)



**iPrevail:** Offers free live chats with support coaches, interactive lessons, and topic-based community support groups for anyone in LA County. You can connect with them by visiting their website. [iPrevail](#)

- **Crisis Text Line:** Provides free and confidential support via text messaging for people in crisis. To reach out, simply text "HELLO" to 741741 (US/Canada). They offer immediate assistance and a safe space to talk.

Remember, even small changes can make a big difference, and it's okay to take things one step at a time.



# Foster Youth-Specific Resources

A stylized illustration of a man with a black beard and hair, wearing an orange sweater. He is holding a black pot containing a plant with blue and orange leaves. The background is white with blue water droplets and a blue wavy border at the top.

*Mental  
Health*

# Foster Youth-Specific Resources

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Here is a list of resources that can be useful for foster youth. These resources can be helpful regarding tools for foster youth regarding mental health support, career goals, and education. Here is a list of resources that are specifically for foster youth:



**Pathways** is a comprehensive resource that offers support in foster care, adoption, child care, and behavioral health. They provide various behavioral health services such as therapy, crisis intervention, and psychiatry. You must complete a service request and provide your personal information to access their services. You can find more information and get started by visiting their [website](#). Once you've completed the request, a staff member will contact you.



**Guardian Scholar** is a supportive organization for foster youth with their education. It provides great education Improvements and personalized accommodations for each youth. This program supports former or current foster youth in gaining a university, community college, or trade school education. To participate in the Guardian Scholars Program—complete the [Guardian Scholars Program Application](#). Provide a Court Dependency Letter (ward of the court letter for foster/probation youth).



**The California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR)** is a very supportive source regarding educational goals and career plans. It supports educational or job clothing costs. They partner with consumers and other stakeholders to provide services and advocacy, resulting in employment, independent living, and equality for individuals with disabilities. To get started, [go here](#) and click on "I am Interested," scroll, and then click "Get Started." You will need to provide additional information about yourself to request services. You will click on the service you are interested in and provide your personal information.



**Youth Villages** is a valuable resource for children and young people across the United States with emotional and behavioral challenges. They offer effective treatment models that strengthen families and support systems to improve long-term success. Youth Villages helps tens of thousands of individuals and their families annually through partnerships and advocacy. They provide various services, including residential care, foster care, crisis support, and programs focused on helping young people succeed. For more information, visit their [website](#) and complete the referral form to receive confidential assistance from their team.

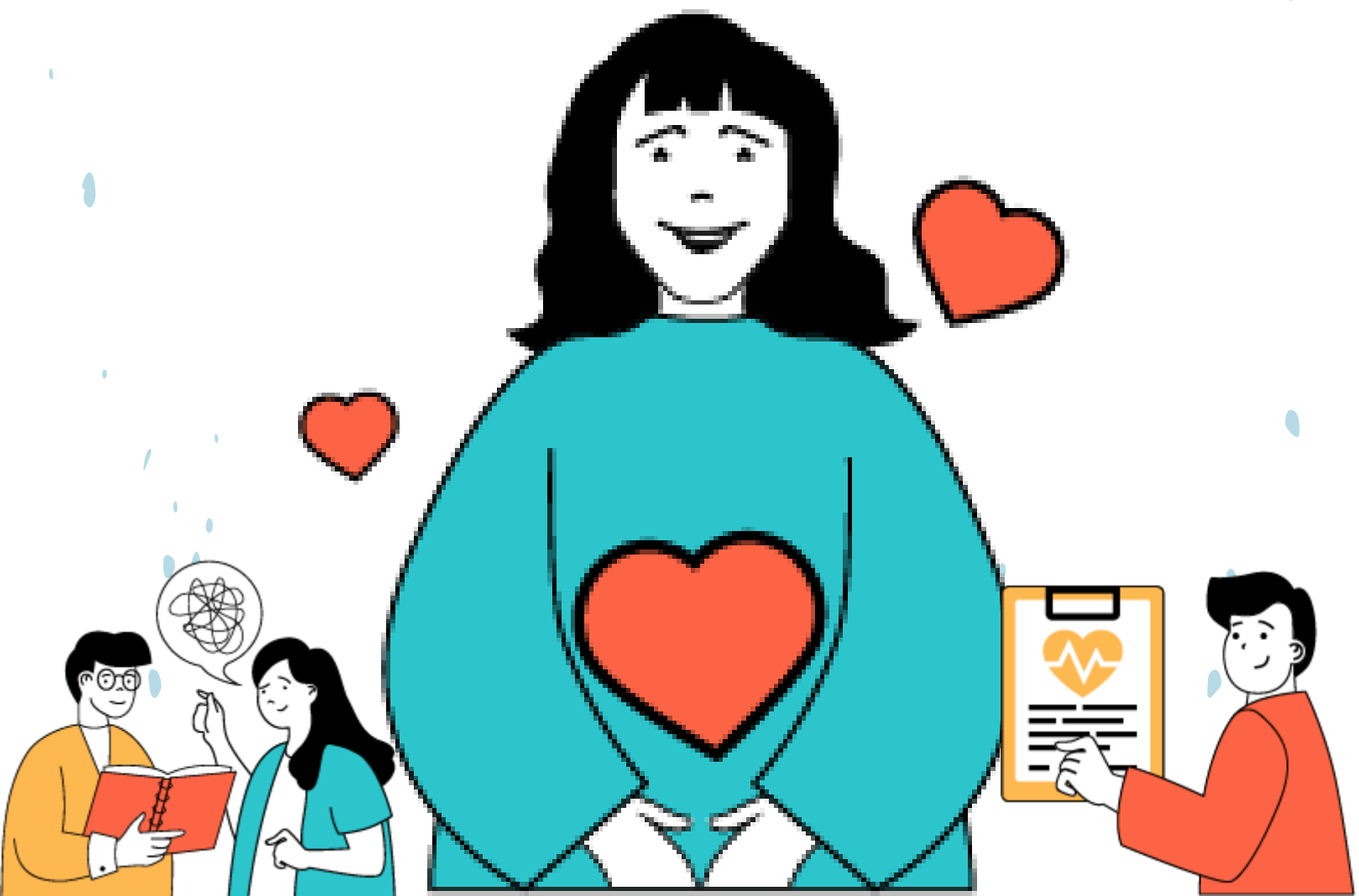


**The Independent Living Program (ILP)** strives to support transition age youth (TAY) in their journey towards self-sufficiency by offering various resources and services. These resources are designed to help foster youth achieve independence before and after leaving the system. ILP's services include financial aid for education, daily living skills, money management, decision-making, employment assistance, and housing options such as transitional housing. More information about the Independent Living Program can be found on their [website](#).

### **Steps to Get Started**

1. To begin working with ILP, there are three steps you should take. Firstly, if you have an open DCFS or Probation case, ask your CSW or DPO for the name and contact details of your assigned ILP/Transition Coordinator. Alternatively, you can check out their roster. If your case is closed, contact the nearest ILP/Transition Coordinator whose office location can be found on the roster.
2. Secondly, complete the Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) form, which helps identify goals to be achieved in the next six months, steps to take to reach them, and the support required. This is where you request ILP services.
3. Request services by consulting your ILP/Transition Coordinator. You will be advised on which services you are eligible for and informed of the required documents to be submitted. Once you have provided the relevant documents, an ILP worker will contact you via phone or email to provide services as soon as possible.

# Peer Support & Navigation



## Peer Support & Navigation



Peer support is invaluable for maintaining mental well-being as it provides the much-needed comfort during periods of isolation. Having others to rely on can greatly enhance emotional stability. If you find yourself in a mental health crisis, there are several resources available to support you.

Here is a collection of helpful peer support links:



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**California Youth Connection (CYC)** is a youth-led organization that supports individuals in the foster care system through peer support. Their goal is to empower youth and communities in making transformative changes in foster care through legislative, policy, and practice initiatives. If you're interested in joining CYC and would like more information, you can find the membership interest form on their website under the "Youth Membership" section. Once you fill out the form, a Community Advocacy Coordinator will reach out to provide further details and guide you through the next steps. For more information, visit the California Youth Connection website: [California Youth Connection – Our Voices, Our Future](#).



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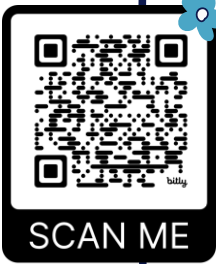
**California Youth Empowerment Network (CAYEN)** empowers Transitional Age Youth (TAY) to lead the transformation of mental health policies and systems. They focus on promoting culturally appropriate supports and services to enhance and sustain the behavioral health of California's TAY. To stay updated and participate in events, you can complete the Contact CAYEN and Join CAYEN forms available on their website: [CAYEN](#)



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**NAMI California** is a leading organization that aims to support and promote mental health for individuals affected by serious mental illness. They focus on providing help, hope, and solutions to mend both broken hearts and the broken system. For more information, visit [ResourcesNAMI California](#) (For Emergency crisis just click on "crisis support")





**Children's Action Network** is a resource dedicated to foster youth that works to increase awareness about children's issues by collaborating with the entertainment community. They offer opportunities for foster youth to share their voices and receive support, making them realize they are not alone. To connect with Children's Action Network, visit their website and go to the "Contact Us" section. Fill out all relevant fields and express, and a staff member will contact you by email or phone number. Here is the link: [Children's Action](#)



**FosterMore** is an excellent resource for foster youth and transitioning youths. There are so many great ways to support foster youth regarding Online hubs for foster youth connecting, Motivating stories, and Bringing Together Change-Makers—much more regarding the Foster system. Spread awareness in the foster youth system. Your words matter! Here is the link: [FosterMore](#)

If you are interested in sharing your awareness, click "Take action" and click "Spread awareness." It will take you to a section named "Donate your small talk," where you'll find different foster care facts to share on social media.



# Mental Health First Aid





## Mental Health First Aid

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A mental health challenge can seem intimidating at first; you may be nervous about how to start talking to the person experiencing the challenge. That's where the ALGEE action plan comes into the equation:

- A:** Approach, assess for risk of suicide or harm and assist.
- L:** Listen non-judgmentally.
- G:** Give reassurance and information.
- E:** Encourage appropriate professional help.
- E:** Encourage self-help and other support strategies.

It is important to remember that while giving mental health first aid, it is not your place to diagnose or treat yourself or others. You can offer a nonjudgemental listening ear, observe changes in behavior, and serve as a vital link to early intervention. Remember to respect the privacy of the person and to respect and honor their culture. Different cultures have different norms about health, which can impact what people think about mental health and how it is treated.

Using Person-first language is crucial when applying mental health first aid. So what is Person-first language? Person-first language honors a person's individuality and humanity first. It recognizes that a diagnosis is not who a person is but rather a part of them. Using Person-first language allows us to have meaningful conversations focused on the person rather than making it all about their diagnosis or the behaviors they are exhibiting.



## Section Links, Sources and Resources:

[Mental health resources and MHFA course information](#)



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[TAY Mental Health Services](#)



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*TAY Mental Health Services has offices in Alameda, Fresno, Los Angeles, Orange, Merced, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, Santa Clara, Stanislaus counties, and the Central Valley.*

[Wind Youth Services](#)



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*In Sacramento, Wind Youth Services provides Case Management, Crisis prevention services and a mental health respite.*



# Understanding Your Rights as a Foster Youth



# Understanding Your Rights as a Foster Youth

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The purpose of these rights is to inform foster children and caregivers about their rights within the child welfare system.

In the context of foster care, rights serve as a guide to assist children and parents. These rights are particularly important because children in foster care are often separated from their families for varying lengths of time.

Given the significance of this issue, it is crucial to have specific rules, assistance, and care in place to support and protect every child in foster care.

At the federal level, here is a brief overview of foster care rights:

1. **Provision of Necessities:** Foster children can access sufficient food, clothing, and shelter to promote their well-being and overall development.
2. **Protection from Harm:** Foster children are entitled to be free from physical, sexual, or emotional harm or exploitation. It is crucial to provide a safe and protective environment for foster children, safeguarding them from abuse or mistreatment.
3. **Opportunities for Development:** Foster children have the right to develop physically, mentally, and emotionally to their fullest potential. It emphasizes the importance of providing an environment supporting their growth and well-being.
4. **Safe and Stable Family Environment:** Foster children have the right to reside in a safe, secure, and stable home environment that prioritizes their safety, provides a sense of security, and maintains stability for healthy development.
5. **Individualized Education:** Foster children have the right to meet their educational needs. Tailoring educational support to each foster child's unique requirements is crucial, ensuring access to resources and opportunities that facilitate their learning and academic growth.

6. **Continuity in Education:** Whenever possible, foster children have the right to stay in the same educational setting they were in before being placed in foster care. This aims to provide stability in their academic environment despite changes in their living situation.
7. **Least Restrictive Placement:** Foster children have the right to be placed in the least restrictive setting that meets their needs and serves their best interests, ideally close to their home, provided such placement is available.
8. **Access to Information:** Foster children have the right to access information regarding the circumstances necessitating their initial and ongoing placement, ensuring transparency and understanding.
9. **Participation in Decision-Making:** Foster children have the right to be notified, attended to, and consulted in developing case plans during regular reviews. They should be actively involved in decisions impacting their life and well-being.
10. **Involvement in Court Hearings:** Foster children have the right to receive notice of and participate in court hearings determining their placement and well-being.
11. **Notifications and Explanations:** Foster children have the right to receive notice of and an explanation for any changes in placement or visitation agreements, ensuring transparency and understanding during transitions.
12. **Family Connections:** Foster children can visit their family, receive visits from family and friends, and have telephone conversations with family members unless contraindicated by the case plan or court order.
13. **Extracurricular and Enrichment Activities:** Foster children can participate in extracurricular, social, cultural, and enrichment activities, fostering personal and social development.
14. **Expressing Opinions:** Foster children have the right to express their opinions on their placement, care, or treatment matters.

For children aged fourteen (14) years or older, additional rights include the ability to designate two (2) individuals for participation in case planning conferences or reviews, receive a written description of programs and services for successful adulthood transition, and receive certain important documents when preparing to exit foster care.

Examples of rights violations in the foster care system include **neglect, abuse, educational neglect, restriction of communication, privacy invasion, religious discrimination, and interference with personal belongings.**

It is important to acknowledge that certain restrictions implemented by foster parents, such as limitations on attendance at events or confiscation of drugs or harmful substances, are in line with their responsibility to maintain a safe environment for the child.

**If you believe your rights are being violated**, there are several actions you can take:

- 1) Contact your social worker or their supervisor to discuss your concerns,
- 2) Notify your Guardian Ad Litem if you have one,
- 3) File a service complaint, or reach out to your local ombudsman

Remember, your voice matters, and you have the right to address concerns and seek resolution if you believe your rights are not being respected. It can be challenging to ensure your voice is heard correctly, but persisting in making your concerns known will eventually lead you to someone who can assist and support you.

## Understanding Your Rights

