

10 Facts Every Foster Youth Should Know

1. **Go to Your Court Hearings!**

You have the right to attend your court hearings and talk to the judge. Court hearings are your chance to let the judge know what you need. The judge wants to hear from you and will take what you say seriously. All foster youth need to play an active part in making decisions about their life. Also, make sure you get copies of all of your court reports.

2. **Health Insurance to 21!**

Foster youth who emancipated from foster care on their 18th birthday can have Medi-Cal health insurance until they turn 21, regardless of how much money they have or whether they are working or not. Contact your case worker to find out what you need to do to get coverage. For more information, click on [Health](#).

3. **Money Available for Emancipated Foster Youth!**

The Governor has budgeted money for emancipated foster youth to help cover the cost of housing, college, transportation, or other needs. There is also money available for providing housing for former foster youth.

4. **See Your Case Plan and Your Court Report!**

You have the right to see your case file, case plan, and court reports if you are 12 or over. Make sure you see your case plan. If it doesn't include everything you need, let your social worker know. It is important that you be your own advocate and speak up for what you need. Go to [Dealing with the Courts](#) for more information.

5. **Get Your Driver's License!**

While you are in foster care, you can get your driver's license if your guardian or biological parent signs the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) form. DMV will also accept the signature of a foster parent, grandparent, adult sibling, aunt or uncle who is living with you. If you get your own auto liability insurance, you can have your social worker or probation officer sign that form. Click on [Drivers Licenses](#) to learn more.

6. **Participate in ILP!**

Make sure you participate in the Independent Living Program, and take advantage of all the services such as the [Transitional Housing Placement Program](#). Twenty-two counties have this program which allows some foster youth 17 or older to learn self sufficiency skills while living in an apartment in the community and being supervised by the youth's case worker and a care provider. In ILP, you can learn valuable skills that you will need when you emancipate. You will also have access to many financial incentives and special programs. If you don't participate in ILP, you may miss out on services that can help you get a computer, earn money, find jobs and housing, or take advantage of scholarship opportunities for school.

7. **Get Involved! Get Involved in the California Youth Connection.**

The California Youth Connection is an organization that advocates for current and former foster youth ages 14-24 with chapters in many counties throughout California. See if your county has a chapter and go to the meetings. If you don't have a chapter, contact the CYC statewide office at 1-800-397-8236 to find out about starting one. CYC is a great way to find out about the new changes in foster care programs that affect you. By getting involved with CYC, you can develop leadership and public speaking skills while helping make the foster care system better. You will also meet other foster teens with goals similar to yours.

Medi-Cal coverage until 21 years for foster youth

All foster youth are eligible for Medi-Cal. Youth have the right to receive needed medical and dental care while in foster care and after they emancipate ([see All County Information Notice No. I-117-00](#) accessible from the Home Page). Through the Extended Medi-Cal Program for Emancipated Foster Youth, young people whose dependency terminated at 18 or later can continue to receive Medi-Cal until their 21st birthday. It is important to take care of yourself and stay healthy, and there are services that can help you do that. If you are going to emancipate from foster care or you have already emancipated from foster care, contact your Independent Living Coordinator or your social worker to sign-up for the Extended Medi-Cal Program for Emancipated Foster Youth.

Medi-Cal Hot-Line

If you already have Medi-Cal and have questions about bills for medical care or pharmacy costs, you can contact the Medi-Cal Hotline at 916-636-1980. (You must have a current Medi-Cal card when you call this number.)

Office of the Ombudsman, Medi-Cal Managed Care Office

Staff at this office can help resolve problems with Medi-Cal coverage. They can be reached at 1-800-430-4263 from 8 a.m.-5

p.m. Monday through Friday or at the [Medi-Cal Ombudsman](#) website under "Resource & Information". This same site also has a link to Foster Care/Managed Care Resource Guide with important information on finding health care and related resources for foster children, especially those children who have been placed outside their county of responsibility.

Teenage Health Resource Line

The Teenage Health Resource Line is a toll-free number where nurses answer confidential health questions. The hours are noon to 8 p.m. during the week and 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekends. The number is 1-888-711-TEEN (711-8336).

Public Health Nurses

The Health Care Program for Children in Foster Care was created to improve healthcare for foster children and youth. In this program, county public health nurses work with children's social workers to coordinate services needed by foster youth to resolve physical, mental, dental and developmental problems. For more information, go to the [Public Health Nurse](#) website.

Mental Health Services

If you are under 21 years of age and experiencing serious or severe emotional problems, there are mental health services available. They are called Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment ([EPSDT](#)) services and include Therapeutic Behavioral Services for certain stressful transitions. The services need to part of your overall plan of care.

Ombudsman for Medi-Cal Mental Health Services

The office of the Ombudsman for Medi-Cal Mental Health Services was created to help caregivers, youth and others find their way through the mental health system. Staff in this office can provide information, explain rights and choices, help solve problems, assist in communication, request information, and make referrals to others. This office can be reached during weekdays at 1-800-896-4042 or for TTY at 1-800-896-2512. You can also send an email to: Ombudsmn@dmhmq.state.ca.us.

If you need help with a health related issue, or want more information about keeping your Medi-Cal until 21, call the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman at 1-877-846-1602

Go to Your Court Hearings!!!

It is very important that you attend your court hearings. You have the right to go to your court hearings and address your wants and needs to the judge and to get copies of all of your court reports. Court hearings are your chance to let the judge know what you need. The judge wants to hear from you and will take what you say seriously. All foster youth need to play an active part in making decisions about their life. Also, make sure you get copies of all of your court reports. You have the right to see your case file, case plan, and court reports if you are 12 or over. Make sure you see your case plan. If it doesn't include everything you need, let your social worker or probation officer know. It is important that you be your own advocate and speak up for what you need.

Talk to Your Attorney!

Make sure you communicate with your attorney about your needs and wishes. It is your attorney's job to represent you in court and to tell the judge what you want. If you don't know who your attorney is or have a problem contacting them, contact the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman, and we can help you.

Talk to Your Social Worker or Probation Officer!

All youth in foster care have a social worker or probation officer. Make sure to communicate your needs and wishes to your social worker or probation officer because they make reports to the court and make important decisions about where you live, who you live with, and your visits with others.

See Your Case Plan and Court Reports!

If you are 12 or over, you have the right to see our case file, your case plan and your court reports. If it doesn't include everything you need, let your caseworker know. It is important that you be your own advocate and speak up for what you need while you are in placement.

Seal Your Records When You Turn 18!

When you turn 18, you have the right to go to court and ask that your case file be sealed. This is important, because if you don't seal your records, they will remain open for five years. This must be done after you turn 18 but before you turn 19. If you have a delinquency record and you do not have it sealed, it will always remain open. This could make it hard for you to get a job, since any employer could know about your record.

To have your records sealed, ask your social worker or probation officer for help. You could also ask your attorney or your CASA for help with this.

Get a CASA!

A person who can help you with the court process is the Court Appointed Special Advocate, or CASA. The CASA spends time to get to know you and finds out what you need and want. The CASA will go to court with or for you and makes sure the judge and others who are working on your case know your needs and your perspective. Having another adult who is YOUR advocate is always valuable. www.californiacasa.org/

**To locate a CASA, or for more information about court, call
the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman
at 1-877-846-1602.**