

The National **CASA** Association
Volunteer Training E-Learning Curriculum
Series 2

Aging Out of the Foster Care System

RESOURCE GUIDE





National Court Appointed Special Advocate Association © 2008

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The National CASA Association, together with its state and local members, supports and promotes court appointed volunteer advocacy for abused and neglected children so that they can thrive in safe, permanent homes.

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1

Volunteer Guiding Principles

Working with Older Youth—Guiding Principles	1
Best Interest of the Child	
Role of the CASA/GAL Volunteer	
Responsibilities of the CASA/GAL Volunteer	
CASA/GAL Volunteer’s Relationship with the Child	
Relationship Boundaries with Children and Families	
Minimum Sufficient Level of Care	
Interdependence.	3

CHAPTER 2

Older Youth and the Law

Federal Laws	5
Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA)	
Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA)	
John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program	
McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act	
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	
Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act	
The Juvenile Court Process for Older Youth— Emancipation Hearings.	9

CHAPTER 3

Key Players and Programs

An Emancipating Youth’s Support Team—The Key Players.	11
Birth Family	
CASA/GAL Volunteer	
Clergy	
Coaches/Mentors	
Independent-Living Program Coordinator	
Medical/Mental Health Care Providers	
Relatives	
Social Worker	
Teachers/School Officials	
Youth’s Attorney	
An Emancipating Youth’s Support Team— Some Key National Programs	13
Foster Care Alumni of America	
FosterClub	
National Association of Counsel for Children	
National Center for Youth Law	
National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development	
Orphan Foundation of America	
Youth Law Center	



CHAPTER 4

Adolescent Development

Areas of Adolescent Development	17
Physical	
Emotional	
Intellectual/Cognitive	
Social	
Moral	

CHAPTER 5

The Role of Culture

Elements of the Cultural Perspective.	23
Cultural Memberships	24
A Youth’s View on the Importance of Culture	25
Cultural Transitions.	26
Characteristics of Culturally Skilled Practitioners	28
Culture and Relationship Building.	29

CHAPTER 6

Positive Youth Development

Defining Adulthood.	31
Defining Positive Youth Development	32
A Matrix of Positive Youth Development Outcomes	33
Belonging and Membership	
Safety and Structure	
Self-Worth	
Responsibility and Autonomy	
Spirituality and Self-Awareness	
Physical Health	
Mental Health	
Intellectual Ability	
Employment	
Civic and Social Ability	
Strengths-Based/Solution-Focused Questioning.	43
A Youth’s View on the Importance of Positive Youth Development	45
Transitioning	46
Working with Older Youth—Distinctions in the Advocacy Role	47
Case Planning	48

1

CHAPTER 1

Volunteer Guiding Principles

Working with Older Youth— Guiding Principles

The following principles guide your work as a CASA/GAL volunteer. As you advocate for adolescent youth who are making preparations to emancipate from the foster care system, keep in mind the specific ways these principles apply.

1. **Best Interest of the Child:** This standard continues to guide your work with older youth who are aging out of the system. For young children the focus is on achieving permanency in a home where adults will take care of children’s needs. However, for an older youth the goal shifts to creating a sense of permanence in which the youth is connected to at least one caring, committed adult who will be a long-term support person for the youth. When youth have a web of connections with significant adults, it is referred to as “interdependent living.” At age 18* a young person is legally an adult. However, being prepared to live successfully on one’s own as an adult does not magically occur at that precise age. As a CASA/GAL volunteer working with older youth, you will need to perform your duties always thinking about who will form the supportive network that the older youth will need.
2. **Role of the CASA/GAL Volunteer:** As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you carry out four primary activities on each case: assessment, facilitation, advocacy and monitoring. When working with an older youth, you partner with the youth to carry out these activities.

**The age of mandatory emancipation is 18 in most states. Ask your local CASA/GAL program staff about your state’s emancipation age and requirements.*



Older youth should be actively involved in their cases, partnering with and guiding you in your CASA/GAL volunteer work.

3. **Responsibilities of the CASA/GAL Volunteer:** When working with an older youth, your volunteer responsibilities are largely the same. You will still review records, interview the youth and other appropriate parties in the case, determine if a permanent plan has been created for the youth and ordered by the court, submit court reports with recommendations at each court hearing, maintain complete records about the youth and the case and return all case records to the CASA/GAL program when the case is closed. However, since the youth's permanent plan is independence, your focus shifts to ensuring that resources and services are in place to prepare the youth for successful independent living.
4. **CASA/GAL Volunteer's Relationship with the Child:** When advocating for an older youth, you might find that your relationship with the youth pushes against the boundaries established for younger children whose permanent plans revolve around finding a safe home where adults will be responsible for the care, nurturing and advocacy for the children. Older youth should be actively involved in their cases, partnering with and guiding you in your CASA/GAL volunteer work. The volunteer-youth relationship cannot be prescribed: some youth will need frequent contact with you; some youth will prefer to get to know and trust you on a social level before they will open up; some youth will be resistant to building a relationship with yet another adult for fear of being let down again.
5. **Relationship Boundaries with Children and Families:** Because older youth are preparing to live independently, their families may be less involved with the system than the families of younger children. Unless there are younger children in the family, parents of older youth will typically not be working to improve their parenting skills or housing or job situations. When working with younger children, your contact with the children typically ends when they are returned to (or placed in) a safe, permanent home. However, CASA/GAL volunteers have sometimes maintained long-term contact with older youth whom they were previously appointed to serve. As a CASA/GAL volunteer, your legal role and appointment ends when the youth ages out of the system and the youth is legally an adult. Once your formal volunteer role has ended, interactions with the youth are no longer under the auspices of the CASA/GAL program and are not protected by judicial immunity or state or federal volunteer protection laws.
6. **Minimum Sufficient Level of Care:** Youth aging out of the system may maintain a relationship with their birth families. However, they likely will not return to their care. When working with older youth, your focus shifts from the parents' abilities and skills to the youth's abilities, skills and resources.



Interdependence

Research demonstrates that young people need more than a set of living skills in order to thrive as adults; they need a web of connections in their lives. These connections should be with people they can call on for support and with whom they can actively relate. The following describes several qualities of interdependence:

- Interdependence is the adult form of attachment. Just as all children need healthy attachments, all young adults need connections with consistent adults who will be there for them no matter what.
- Interdependence is a network of relationships characterized by both giving and receiving. Each person brings both strengths and needs.
- Interdependence is a community of people who know each other and rely upon each other. They bring different skills, abilities, experiences and perceptions.
- Interdependence is strengthening, enhancing and flexible.
- Interdependence means holding someone without holding on.
- Interdependence exists in the intersection of independent-living skills and permanence.



2

CHAPTER 2

Older Youth and the Law

Federal Laws

As you advocate for adolescent youth preparing to emancipate from the foster care system, you will want to be familiar with the federal laws described in this section. Knowledge of these laws will make you more aware of legal timelines and potential support and services that may be available to the youth for whom you are advocating.

Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997 (Public Law 105-89):

During your core volunteer training, you studied the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA). Several provisions of ASFA speak directly to the needs of emancipating youth (noted in *italic* type below).

- Each child must have an individualized **case plan**. *For a child 16 or older, the plan must describe the services that will help the youth prepare for independence.*
- Congress specified four types of **permanent plans** that are acceptable: return to the parent, placement for adoption, legal guardianship or *another planned permanent living arrangement*. *The last option may be considered only when the agency has documented for the court the reasons for eliminating the other three permanent options. (CASA/GAL volunteers need to ensure that the court record contains this documentation.)*
- Even though ASFA mandates the conditions under which a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR) petition must be filed, it also delineates three **exceptions in which the agency may defer filing a TPR petition**: (1) the child is being cared for by a relative; (2) *a compelling reason supports a finding that termination would not be in the child's best interest*; or (3) the agency has not provided the parent



with the services listed in the case plan as necessary for the child's safe return home.

Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-169):

To more specifically address the needs of older youth in foster care, Congress passed the Foster Care Independence Act (FCIA). Targeted at youth who are “likely to remain in foster care until age 18” and those who have aged out of the foster care system, it allows states to serve youth up to age 21 regardless of whether or not they are eligible for the Title IV-E Foster Care Program. FCIA makes the following provisions for these young people transitioning out of the system:

- It increases federal funding to assist and serve young people transitioning from foster care.
- It establishes the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, which strongly supports the dependency system's capacity to help youth make a healthy transition into adulthood (see information below).
- It allows states to provide Medicaid to young people between the ages of 18 and 21 who were in foster care on their 18th birthday.
- It increases the youth-assets limit from \$1,000 to \$10,000 without jeopardizing the youth's eligibility for Title IV-E-funded foster care.
- It ensures that foster parents have adequate preparation to care for the children placed in their home. This provision can be used to strengthen the preparation of foster parents to care for adolescents.
- It provides additional funding for adoption incentive payments.
- It mandates that states use a portion (up to 30%) of their independent-living program funds to provide room and board for youth aged 18 to 21 who have left foster care.

John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program: Established by the Foster Care Independence Act, this program reinforces the importance of adoption and other permanency options for teens in foster care through the following provisions:

- It states explicitly that “enrollment in Independent Living Programs can occur concurrently with continued efforts to locate and achieve placement in adoptive families for older children in foster care,” thereby clarifying that independent-living services should not be seen as an alternative to adoption for teens.
- It requires states to train both foster and adoptive parents (as well as group-care workers and case managers) about the issues confronting adolescents preparing for independent living.
- It reinforces the importance of providing personal and emotional support for children aging out of foster care, through the promotion of interactions with mentors and other dedicated adults.
- It specifies that independent-living services may be provided to young people at “various ages” and various stages of achieving independence, “including children waiting for adoption or other permanent options.”



Each state has an independent-living/Chafee program coordinator who has up-to-date, specific information on state Chafee program services. To find your coordinator, go to the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development website (www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/state_pages.html) and click on your state.

McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act of 1997 (Public Law 100-77): Congress passed the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act in order to help youth and their families who are experiencing homelessness and to protect the right of homeless youth to attend school.

- The law targets all youth who do not have a fixed, regular and adequate residence. This includes youth who are staying with friends or relatives because they've lost their housing; youth who are awaiting foster care placement; and youth who are living in emergency or transitional shelters, motels, domestic violence shelters, campgrounds, inadequate trailer parks, cars, public spaces, abandoned buildings and bus or train stations.
- The law enables homeless youth (including those awaiting foster care placement) to remain in their school of origin if they wish, and it requires school districts to provide transportation to that school if needed. It attempts to remove any barriers to a homeless youth's enrollment, attendance or success in school, such as compulsory residency requirements. It also seeks to enable homeless youth to choose to attend the local school where they are living, the school they attended before they lost their housing or the school where they were last enrolled. The underlying intent is to give homeless youth access to the same free, appropriate K-12 public education and services that other youth receive.
- Child welfare professionals working with qualifying youth in out-of-home care may be able to use the provisions of McKinney-Vento to keep a particular youth in his or her home school. Each case should be explored individually with the state's McKinney-Vento coordinator. (To find the McKinney-Vento coordinator in your district, check with your local school district.)
- For general information about when and to what extent the education provisions of McKinney-Vento have been applied to youth awaiting foster care placement, contact the state coordinator for the education of homeless children and youth. For a list of state coordinators, contact the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty at (202) 638-2535 or www.nlchp.org.



2004 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (Public Law 108-446): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized in 2004 with a new focus on improving educational stability, opportunities and outcomes for special-needs children in foster care. The act ensures that:

- Children’s educational needs are considered by the judge and the child welfare system in making decisions.
- A specific individual is appointed to advocate for each child’s educational needs.
- The child welfare system, the school system and the judicial system communicate with each other about individual foster children.
- Delays are eliminated in enrolling children in new schools or transferring school records when students move because of a new placement. The new school should immediately enroll the child and honor the child’s existing Individualized Education Plan (IEP) until a new assessment can be conducted.

Safe and Timely Interstate Placement of Foster Children Act of 2006 (Public Law 109-239):

Among the mandates contained in this act is the requirement that agencies provide youth with their health and educational records when they are emancipated. The US Department of Health and Human Services website provides more information about this and several other laws that you may find helpful when advocating for older youth. Go to www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/ij_adopt/support.htm.



The Juvenile Court Process for Older Youth— Emancipation Hearings

The juvenile court process is the same for older foster youth as it is for younger children. The timelines, standards and exceptions outlined in the Adoption and Safe Families Act still apply. Upon a foster youth's 18th birthday, the youth will be required to attend an emancipation hearing. At this hearing the court could end its jurisdiction over the life of the young person, emancipating the youth from the system.

Even after a youth has been emancipated, many federal and state laws allow the state to continue to provide services to young adults until their 21st birthday—and even beyond in cases where they are in school. (Some states also have provisions for retaining legal custody of a youth beyond age 18. To find out more, go to the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development website (www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/state_pages.html) and click on your state.



3

CHAPTER 3

Key Players and Programs

An Emancipating Youth’s Support Team— The Key Players

In your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer, it will be important to work with the other people—both adults and youth—who play an integral part in the youth’s life. Some of these key players are outlined below.

Birth Family: Members of the birth family have a sense of connection to the youth; they can offer some strengths and resources to support the youth. They also have information about the youth’s family/personal medical history. Finally, family members know friends, teachers, former neighbors and relatives who might have an interest in supporting the youth.

CASA/GAL Volunteer: As a volunteer advocate with an understanding of the juvenile court system, you gather knowledge about the youth and the youth’s situation in order to ensure that the youth’s needs are presented to the court.

Clergy: Faith communities often have programs that provide support and services to their members.

Coaches/Mentors: Through their work with the youth in a particular sport or subject area, coaches and mentors typically know the youth and his or her abilities and special needs.

Independent-Living Program Coordinator: Your state’s independent-living coordinator can provide a list of local organizations or people who work with emancipating youth in your community. Go to the National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development website (www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/state_pages.html) to find your coordinator.



Medical/Mental Health Care Providers: Health professionals who have worked with the youth and the family can provide information about the youth's physical and emotional needs as well as resources to meet them.

Relatives: Relatives may have a sense of connection and commitment to the youth. They may also be able to provide information about other relatives and people close to the family who might be available to support the youth.

Social Worker: The youth's social worker often has a general sense of the youth's situation and may have access to additional resources or services. Keep in mind that social workers often have caseloads of dozens of children and families, so you may need to be persistent (and always professional) in establishing contact.

Teachers/School Officials: Teachers and other school personnel see the youth on a regular basis and can share information on the youth's academic progress, educational needs and peer relations.

Youth's Attorney: When youth express wishes that are seen to be in conflict with their best interests, they have a right to have an attorney appointed to represent those expressed wishes. The availability of this resource, however, varies from state to state and depends on the court's ability to pay for this service.



An Emancipating Youth's Support Team— Some Key National Programs

National organizations and their websites offer additional information and opportunities for youth to connect with others in similar situations.

Foster Care Alumni of America (www.fostercarealumni.org): Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA) is a national, independent nonprofit organization founded and led by alumni of the foster care system. Its mission is to connect the alumni community and to transform policy and practice to ensure opportunity for people in and from foster care. FCAA provides opportunities for alumni of foster care to join together and use their experiences and power to effect positive change.

FosterClub (www.fosterclub.com): FosterClub's mission is to provide to foster youth encouragement, motivation, information and education. At FosterClub's websites kids can send in questions and opinions about their foster care experience, discover other successful former foster youth through the Reach for the Stars program and more. FosterClub also offers publications and events aimed at helping youth grow and succeed. FosterClub's outreach tools provide child welfare professionals with effective ways to communicate with youth in care. In researching and developing new products for youth in care, FosterClub employs and consults with current and former foster kids. This collaboration ensures youth a voice in the foster care system. FosterClub has three websites:

- **www.fosterclub.com** serves as the primary communication tool with youth. The website is a hub of information relating to foster care, including articles written by young people, foster care questions and answers, message boards, contests and biographies of famous people who grew up in foster care. The website is youth-friendly and interactive.
- **www.fyi3.com** is a website designed for youth preparing to transition out of foster care. It is packed with resources, success stories, scholarship opportunities, discussion forums, youth boards and more. The website's name, *fyi3*, stands for "foster youth involved, informed and independent." Companion tools to the website include *The fyi3 Binder* and *It's T Time: The Transition Planning Toolkit*.
- **www.fosterclub.org** is a website designed for the adults who support and care about young people in foster care. Caseworkers, independent-living providers, foster parents and advocates can find resources, tools and articles.

National Association of Counsel for Children

(www.naccchildlaw.org): The National Association of Counsel for Children (NACC) is a nonprofit child advocacy and professional membership association. According to its website, the NACC is dedicated to providing high-quality legal representation for children. Its mission is to improve the lives of children and families through legal advocacy. The NACC provides training and technical assistance to attorneys and other professionals, serves as a public information and professional referral center and engages in public policy and legislative advocacy.



National Center for Youth Law (www.youthlaw.org): The National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) uses the law to protect children from the harms caused by poverty and to improve the lives of children living in poverty. It works to:

- Protect abused and neglected children through work with advocates, foster parents and others striving to reform state child welfare systems
- Expand access to health care for children and youth through advocacy on the state and federal levels
- Secure public benefits to meet the special needs of children and youth, including TANF welfare benefits, especially for teenagers, and SSI benefits for disabled children and youth
- Improve child support collection through a program of public information and advocacy
- Address the growing tendency to deal with youth behavior in a punitive fashion

National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development

(www.nrcys.ou.edu/yd/): The National Child Welfare Resource Center for Youth Development (NCWRCYD) works to increase the capacity and resources of states and tribes to help youth in care meet the goals of safety, permanence and well-being. The center can help states incorporate youth into all areas of programs and services, implement services that address legislative requirements and prepare for Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and Program Improvement Plan (PIP) development and implementation. The center bases its technical assistance and training around four core principles: youth development, collaboration, cultural competence and permanent connections.

Orphan Foundation of America (www.orphan.org): The goals of the Orphan Foundation of America (OFA) are to provide opportunities for America's foster youth to continue their education; raise awareness of the number and plight of older teens leaving the system; illustrate the bureaucratic maze of foster care that youth encounter; highlight the potential of America's foster youth and show the importance of supporting their dreams; and offer direct opportunities for citizens, business and civic organizations to assist older foster youth.

Youth Law Center (www.ylc.org): The Youth Law Center (YLC) works nationally to serve children, focusing particularly upon the problems of children living apart from their families in child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The YLC believes:

- Every child has a right to a permanent home and family.
- Every child has a right to remain at home as long as that home can be made safe and the child is not a danger to the community.
- Children in out-of-home care have the right to be free from abuse and to receive all the support and services they need to reach their potential as contributing members of society.



The YLC website provides access to guides, research and reports on youth rights, child welfare, education and juvenile justice. The website also provides links to legal advocacy services pertaining to child welfare and juvenile justice systems. A copy of “Legal Rights of Teens in Out-of-Home Care” can be found in the Resources section of the website. To access it, search under the category “Child Welfare,” the resource type “Publications and Presentations” and the topic “Youth Rights.”



4

CHAPTER 4

Adolescent Development

Areas of Adolescent Development

Adolescent development represents the period that bridges childhood to adulthood. In most states, a youth is legally considered an adult on his or her 18th birthday. Developmentally, a person is considered to be an adult when he or she reaches the state and responsibilities of a person who has attained maturity. Adolescence is often divided into early adolescence (approximately ages 11–14), mid-adolescence (about 15–17) and late adolescence (approximately ages 18–21). In addition to age, experts focus on the adolescent’s areas of development: physical, emotional, intellectual/cognitive, social and moral.

Foster care alumni have reported to Casey Family Programs that they experience “lopsided” development compared to the general population. This means that they might be “overdeveloped” in some areas and “underdeveloped” in other areas. Areas of lopsided development vary from youth to youth.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: PHYSICAL

Tasks/Attitudes/Behaviors

- Youth experiences sudden rapid increases in height, weight and strength.
- Acne appears.
- Youth is concerned with appearance.
- Secondary sexual characteristics develop.
- Voice changes may occur.



- Peer acceptance is linked to how the youth looks.
- The way a youth looks is considered more important than the way he or she feels.
- The youth is increasingly likely to act on sexual desires.

Impact of Foster Care on Development

- Abuse may have left scars or damage.
- Poverty may have contributed to poor diet, medical and dental care.
- Sexual abuse may have caused damage or eating disorders.
- Medical or physical problems may affect physical ability or energy to learn new skills.
- Chemical dependency may become a problem due to self-motivation, desire to fit in or heredity.

Helpful Responses

- Communicate clearly about physical maturation.
- Be sensitive and willing to discuss physical problems and sexual responsibility.
- Recognize and compliment physical maturity.
- Provide accurate information on consequences of sexual activity. Discuss birth control and STD/HIV prevention.
- Provide more food.
- Consider whether a special diet or medication is needed to treat acne.
- Provide information on substance abuse.
- Promote medical and dental care.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: EMOTIONAL

Tasks/Attitudes/Behaviors

- Youth may appear moody, angry, lonely, impulsive, self-centered, confused and stubborn.
- Youth worries about failure.
- Youth has conflicting feelings about independence/dependence.
- Youth develops awareness and ability to express multiple emotions.
- Youth commonly sulks, directs verbal anger at authority figure.
- Youth shows increased self-awareness.
- Peers take on primary importance.
- Youth may fear intimacy.
- Youth begins to establish sexual identity.



Impact of Foster Care on Development

- Abuse and neglect may result in low self-esteem, poor self-image and identity confusion.
- Poor self-concept affects willingness to take needed risks.
- Previous rejections affect ability to form relationships.
- Lack of trust in adults may prevent learning from adults.
- Feelings of hopelessness may diminish efforts.
- Youth may experience survival guilt.

Helpful Responses

- Be available to talk and listen.
- Accept feelings—don't overreact; jointly establish limits, but don't revert to childhood restrictions.
- Avoid ridicule of inconsistent behaviors. Accept need for separation.
- Demonstrate respect for youth as an emerging adult.
- Deliver appropriate positive and negative feedback.
- Offer assistance in labeling and managing feelings.
- Educate about the difference between feelings and behavior.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: INTELLECTUAL/COGNITIVE

Tasks/Attitudes/Behaviors

- Youth has capacity to assume responsibility and accomplish tasks.
- Youth shows industriousness.
- Youth develops an increased ability for abstract thinking and reasoning.
- Youth may be reluctant to accept advice or adult authority.
- Youth is seriously concerned about the future and begins to integrate knowledge leading to decisions about future.
- Youth thrives on argument and discussion.

Impact of Foster Care on Development

- Ability to trust is difficult.
- Abuse and family chaos may affect ability to think clearly.
- Academic learning problems may exist due to school moves, prenatal chemical dependency of birth mom, etc.
- Feelings of incompetence transfer to employment.
- Youth may have difficulty planning for the future.
- Poor school performance makes career planning difficult.
- Youth may have a poor record of school attendance due to school moves.



Helpful Responses

- Show patience and encouragement with academic problems.
- Advocate within the school for needed special services (remediation, tutoring, aptitude testing).
- Point to vocational and employment assistance.
- Don't let discussions become arguments; don't put down youth's ideas.
- Encourage exploration of thought and deed; provide books, library card, etc.
- Encourage talk about and planning for the future.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: SOCIAL

Tasks/Attitudes/Behaviors

- Youth pushes and tests limits.
- There is a movement from strong peer influence to greater autonomy.
- Youth develops intimate relationships.
- Youth may be strongly invested in a single, romantic relationship.
- Relationship with parents ranges from friendly to hostile.
- Youth searches for new people to love in addition to parents.
- Youth usually has many friends and few confidants, dates actively, varies greatly in level of maturity, enjoys activities with opposite sex.
- Youth moves from dependency on adults to friends and finally to self.
- Experimentation with alcohol and drugs to "fit in" is common.

Impact of Foster Care on Development

- Lack of connections with family affects formation of relationships.
- Family history/issues may result in poor decisions regarding alcohol, drugs and sexuality.
- Reliance on friends or gang involvement may result from lack of strong adult relationships.
- Previous rejections may affect ability to form new relationships.
- Lack of trust in adults may affect ability to connect with a caring adult.

Helpful Responses

- Be open to discussing and educating about sexuality, drugs and relationships.
- Set clear, consistent limits.
- Try to maintain good relationship; be respectful and friendly.
- Recognize and accept current level of interest in romantic relationships.



- Encourage experiences with a variety of people.
- Avoid showing disapproval; discuss the needs and expectations that get met in the relationship.
- Allow the youth more opportunities for independent social activities.
- Don't criticize youth's needs for friends or particular friends.
- Respect boundaries but continue to be affectionate.

ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT: MORAL

Tasks/Attitudes/Behaviors

- Stress is on personal dignity and self-esteem.
- Youth is capable of useful insight.
- Youth shows increased understanding and need for values.
- Youth has ability to question and show interest in the meaning of life.
- Youth's understanding of roles, fairness and personal responsibility increases.
- Youth is confused and disappointed about the discrepancies between stated values and actual behaviors of family and friends; experiences feelings of frustration, anger, sorrow and isolation.

Impact of Foster Care on Development

- Abusive background may have taught youth that life is cruel and unfair.
- Youth may feel that the world owes them something.
- Youth may have distorted moral development resulting in problems with remorse or guilt.
- Youth may have problems with personal understanding/conflicts around right and wrong and issues of justice.
- Youth may not have been taught how to take personal responsibility in relation to sexual behavior, school achievement or legal matters.

Helpful Resources

- Expose youth to positive role models.
- Expose youth to religion without impressing your own religious beliefs.
- Share your morals, values, conflicts and resolutions, but don't make decisions for youth.
- Discuss public and situational moral dilemmas.
- Don't moralize.
- Accept sexual experimentation as normal and healthy; discourage unprotected sex.



- Provide correct information on human sexuality, STDs, including HIV/AIDS, birth control, intimacy and safe types of sexual experimentation.
- Facilitate youth’s decision making.

Source: “Independent Living Core Curriculum,” New York State Office of Family and Children Services. Included in *Working with Youth: A Strength-Based Approach, Children First*, Fordham University, 2003.



5

CHAPTER 5

The Role of Culture

Elements of the Cultural Perspective

Two areas of cultural significance figure prominently in the lives of emancipating youth—cultural memberships and cultural transitions. To set the context for these issues, it's important first to focus on the elements of the cultural perspective.

- The cultural perspective defines culture as the shared values, norms, traditions, customs, arts, folklore and institutions of a group of people.
- It recognizes that a person's identity and behavior are guided by simultaneous membership in a variety of groups. A person's culture is the result of a combination the effects of all these simultaneous memberships. Consideration of race or ethnicity without consideration of gender, sexual orientation, nationality or social class is therefore limiting.
- It views culture in broad terms to include the values and beliefs that result from such group identities as “youth culture” or “professional culture” (e.g., the culture of teaching, medicine or the child welfare system).
- It understands that every person is a part of both the larger system of the dominant society and an individual system of racial, ethnic, religious or other kind of community membership. This dual perspective helps to evaluate disparate systems and determine both sources of strength and sources of stress.
- It requires an understanding of institutional racism, ageism, sexism, homophobia, class barriers and barriers to the physically challenged.
- It recognizes that there are many sources for cultural socialization.



Cultural Memberships

In your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer for an emancipating youth, it is critical that you understand the importance of the multiple cultural memberships of adolescents. A person's culture is the result of the effects of simultaneous membership in a number of groups. Cultural group membership can include:

- Social Class
- Race
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Religion
- Sexual orientation
- Generation/Age
- Gender
- Rural/Urban orientation
- Physical ability

We often overemphasize one or two of these membership categories, which can easily produce stereotyping. Stereotyping limits our understanding of an individual. People who share certain cultural memberships in common may have some general similarities, such as foods enjoyed or language, but they may also be very different because of other memberships. For example, two youths may share the same race (e.g., Asian), but they may hold very different values and views of the world based on their ethnicities (e.g., Chinese and Vietnamese) and religions (e.g., Buddhism and Roman Catholicism). Culture can also be based on class (e.g., poor, working-class, middle-class) or even position within the child welfare system (e.g., client, caseworker, CASA/GAL volunteer).

A Youth's View on the Importance of Culture

It is important for workers to pay close attention to cultural differences with youths they work with. It is hard when you're young and instead of the worker having some knowledge of your ethnic background, they treat you like you're from another planet and you're forced to educate them. Workers need to know the history and traditions of the cultures of the youths they work with. If a worker is assigned to an area where there is a lot of one ethnic group, then the worker should be required to learn about the people's culture and perhaps even the language. You are up against enough challenges without having to be the bridge between their cultural views and the worker. It is hard enough when you're young to be the bridge between yourself and the world (MC, 2001).

Source: "National Collaboration for Youth Members" (1998). Retrieved October 15, 2002, from www.nydic.org, website of the National Youth Development Information Center. Included in *Integrating a Youth Development Perspective into Transition Planning: A Curriculum for Child Welfare Outreach Workers*, Boston University School of Social Work in collaboration with Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2004.



Cultural Transitions

As part of typical development, youth experience cultural transitions. For example, they are moving from adolescence to adulthood. They may also be in transition from living in a group home to living with foster parents. Emancipating youth are moving from involvement with the child welfare system to independent living.

Here are several examples of broader cultural transitions:

- Moving from school culture to work culture
- Moving from one type of job culture (e.g., business) to another job culture (e.g., human services)
- Moving from one region of the country to another region of the country
- Moving from the United States to a foreign country
- Shifting from a gender-specific workplace to a gender-balanced workplace
- Moving from one parent's home to another parent's home
- Shifting from being able-bodied to living with a disability
- Moving from working class to middle class

Youth in foster care may experience many cultural transitions as they move from adolescence to adulthood.

Youth can have more than one response to a cultural transition. In fact, transitions are generally characterized by multiple responses and feelings. Sometimes a youth's responses may lead to negative outcomes. A youth should be able to assess when the responses are problematic or have gone on for too long. As a CASA/GAL volunteer advocating for adolescents, you will frequently be working with youth during times of transition. Helping them assess how they respond to cultural transitions can be of great assistance in achieving positive outcomes.

RESPONSES OFTEN ASSOCIATED WITH CULTURAL TRANSITIONS

Enthusiasm/Excitement

- Usually associated with a wanted or planned transition
- Can be experienced as a welcome "jolt"

Isolation/Disengagement

- Can be associated with an unwelcoming environment
- May experience feeling different because of language, religion, dress, lifestyle, etc.
- May experience a sense of loss
- May be unable to find points of connection in new cultural group



Conflict

- Associated with the demand to make adjustments or changes too rapidly
- Associated with criticism of the culture one is transitioning from or to
- May perceive no opportunity to be bicultural
- May feel disloyal or guilty

Confusion

- Associated with an inability to recognize or read new cultural cues
- May be happy about change but long for what is familiar

Source: *Integrating a Youth Development Perspective into Transition Planning: A Curriculum for Child Welfare Outreach Workers*, Boston University School of Social Work in collaboration with Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2004.



Characteristics of Culturally Skilled Practitioners

Culturally skilled practitioners demonstrate a willingness to explore and appreciate how their own cultural memberships influence their behavior by:

- Recognizing cross-cultural factors (differences and similarities) that affect the worker-youth relationship
- Communicating to youth an attitude that cultural differences are not better or worse, but legitimately diverse
- Admitting to youth a limited knowledge of their backgrounds and a desire for their help in understanding their issues, e.g., ways in which racism and homophobia may have created feelings of mistrust of both extended family and formal institutions
- Intervening in institutional settings on behalf of youth when settings demonstrate bias or lack of knowledge and skill in working with their cultural differences
- Understanding that youth develop adaptive strategies to overcome experiences of marginalization

Workers and advocates can assist youth as they make cultural transitions by:

- Serving as a cultural bridge (translator) in collaboration with the youth to new family, school, community
- Assisting with identifying community resources that are culturally familiar or provide bridges to the new culture
- Being available to listen, name and normalize what the youth may be experiencing
- Asking for permission to offer your ideas about the timing and amount of reconnection with cultural losses
- Helping youth to either bring to or find something culturally familiar in their new cultural experience

Source: Included in *Integrating a Youth Development Perspective into Transition Planning: A Curriculum for Child Welfare Outreach Workers*, Boston University School of Social Work in collaboration with Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2004.

Culture and Relationship Building

As a CASA/GAL volunteer for a youth, you may have cultural differences and similarities that influence your relationship. Cultural memberships affect each person's life experiences at personal, interpersonal and community levels.

PERSONAL LEVEL

- Identity formation
- Personal values and goals
- Personal sense of effectiveness, empowerment, hopefulness
- Attitudes and feelings about independence

INTERPERSONAL LEVEL

- Beliefs about the roles and responsibilities of parents
- Types of relationships between generations
- Communication patterns
- Manner in which feelings are expressed with others
- Gender relationships and gender expectations
- Types of help that are considered "acceptable"
- Involvement with both extended kin and nonbiological family

COMMUNITY LEVEL

- Sense of connection to a larger community
- Experiences of empowerment or disempowerment within larger systems
- Experiences with such systems as education, health care, criminal or civil justice
- Level of acculturation



6

CHAPTER 6

Positive Youth Development

Defining Adulthood

The term “adulthood” means seeing the world only from an adult perspective. By definition, adulthood minimizes the perspective of youth. The pervasiveness of adulthood in the child welfare system has meant that youth often have been excluded from decision making regarding their own lives and thus have had little impact on their own case outcomes. Adulthood teaches youth “learned helplessness” and instills a lack of motivation.

This cycle has been prevalent in the child welfare system. Adults who have power in a youth’s life view the world through an adult perspective; these adults create plans for youth without youth input; then these adults label youth as “unmotivated” for not being enthusiastic and successful in implementing the adults’ plans for their lives.

This cycle changes when professionals shift to a positive youth development approach.



Defining Positive Youth Development

Today, child welfare and juvenile court systems are making a transition away from adultism. Increasingly, a positive youth development approach is used. As Batavik (1997) describes, there are three possible approaches to working with youth:

- If youth are seen as needy, we provide them with things.
- If youth are seen as problems, we contain them.
- If youth are seen as a resource, we build on their strengths.

POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- Emphasizes the strengths and capacities of youth
- Views youth as a resource
- Involves youth in every aspect of their care
- Allows for opportunities for youth to take on leadership and decision-making roles
- Recognizes that adolescents are all in transition developmentally, whether they are in foster care or not

GOALS OF POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

- Create an environment and opportunities for youth to feel safe in practicing skills, learning about relationships and connecting to their community; give them a chance to develop and practice their competencies.
- Involve youth in every aspect of their care and in all phases of the independent-living program, including planning, development, delivery and evaluation of independent-living services.
- Establish collaborative partnerships between youth and adults (workers, foster parents, community).
- Facilitate youth empowerment; teach youth how to find their own voice, their own power, and how to advocate for themselves. Adults shed the role of “expert” and begin sharing knowledge and power.

Using a positive youth development approach means viewing youth as a resource not a problem.

Source: *Youth Transitioning from Foster Care: A Partnership for Success*, School of Social Welfare, University of Kansas, 2004.

A Matrix of Positive Youth Development Outcomes

1. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: *BELONGING AND MEMBERSHIP*

Youth feel included and motivated. They have meaningful roles as participants and leaders.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth identify with a group and join or volunteer in organizations or clubs	Placement considerations include common interests and familiar settings	Intimidating behaviors like bullying, name calling and physical harassment make youth feel unwelcome and excluded	Residential placement requires all residents to come together each Sunday evening for family meals and activities
Youth take advantage of available opportunities to develop a sense of belonging	Residential placement promotes group cohesion through shared experiences, open dialogue and consistent time together	Ceremonies and traditions stimulate group cohesion	Youth are invited to participate in a committee reviewing independent-living services and supports
Youth feel connected to at least one other pro-social person	Provide youth ongoing opportunities to participate in group activities, team events and gatherings	Some youth may be reluctant to join without an invitation or encouragement	Youth participate in birth-family events during holidays
Youth participate in groups at school and/or in the community	Encourage team sports, clubs, musical groups that promote membership and pride	Don't force youth if they aren't motivated by shared interests	Youth are involved in regular sports team or arts groups activity
Youth feel that they belong to family and community	Family and community members can help youth feel valued and included	Relationships and group dynamics can present challenges; support youth to express feelings and problem-solve situations	Youth have access to family and community members of their choosing
Youth have one or more close friends	Encourage youth to spend time with friends	Common interests bring people together	Youth are allowed sleepovers and outings with friends

2. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: SAFETY AND STRUCTURE

Youth live in safe and predictable environments that promote honesty, trust and respect among all youth and adults.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth are comfortable discussing interpersonal and intrapersonal issues	Support a youth-directed group to establish expectations around safety and respect	Intimidating behaviors like bullying, name calling and physical harassment make youth feel unsafe	A foster home assigns roles to youth to monitor safe and respectful interactions among youth
Youth have a sense of predictability in their daily lives	Allow youth to manage an area of daily living, such as making their own medical appointments	Expectations regarding respect are maintained by all, not just those in charge	Invite youth to orient new residents about daily routines and structure
Youth feel safe at home, at school and in the neighborhood	Various environments have clear rules, expectations and consequences that promote safety and respect for youth and adults	Public posting of expectations reinforces what everyone in the group has agreed to	Establish clear expectations about safety and respect with foster parents and other adults (i.e., no name calling, no raising voices)
Youth are able to express concerns about safety issues	Involve youth when discussing violations of expectations by youth and adults	Safety encompasses physical, psychological and emotional well-being	Youth identify key elements of safety and respect to incorporate in residential rules
Boundaries are clear and consistently supported	Engage youth in leadership roles to monitor and promote safe and predictable settings	Adults should be clear and consistent role models for youth	Safety means respectful interactions between everyone—youth and adults
Environments maintain safety and respect for all regardless of differences	Group members freely express when they feel ignored or insulted	Respectful environments are key to feeling safe	House rules support respectful interactions that promote healthy relationships

3. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: *SELF-WORTH*

Youth feel good about themselves and about their ability to make meaningful contributions.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth are able to articulate bad feelings about themselves	Support opportunities for youth to process negative feelings	Self-worth and personal power grow through service to others	Foster parents spend designated time with youth each week to discuss what went well and what did not feel good
Youth are able to identify three things that they like about themselves	Include youth in daily decisions and activities with clear roles and expectations	Group celebrations are important to acknowledge accomplishments and contributions	Establish a pre-breakfast routine for youth in care to identify what they hope to accomplish for the day
Youth are able to cite three accomplishments that they did not believe they could do	Provide opportunities for youth to be supported and challenged	Challenging opportunities promote self-doubt and self-growth	Invite youth to share what they have achieved
Youth feel liked and respected by others	Create an environment of open discussion focused on feelings, perceptions and experiences	Understanding and empathy come through service to others	Organize a group activity for youth to perform community services, such as cleaning graffiti, painting an elderly person's house, etc.
Youth take pride in their appearance	Promote opportunities where youth are expected to "dress up"	Remember that hair styles, clothes and accessories are matters of personal taste	Provide an opportunity for youth to visit hair stylists to create new looks
Youth demonstrate a healthy sense of humor	Provide more positive affirmations than negative feedback and reactions	Laughing at yourself is different from others laughing at you	Role-model a sense of humor by sharing personal stories about lessons learned



4. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: *RESPONSIBILITY AND AUTONOMY*

Youth feel accountable for their actions and consequences to others.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth feel they have some control over daily events	Communicate clear expectations and boundaries	Self-worth and mental health issues may interfere	Youth participate in expressive activities to process what they want to become
Youth are willing to accept new responsibilities	Increase responsibilities as youth develop	Frame responsibilities as “win/win” situations—not as burdens or additional work	Systematically extend curfew as youth demonstrate responsible behavior
Youth readily acknowledge personal contributions and responsibilities	Discuss with youth current and future responsibilities and contributions	Low self-esteem may cause youth to discount personal contributions	Invite youth to share in a group setting ways they are responsible and ways they need to grow
Youth demonstrate consistent follow-through on tasks	Assign developmentally appropriate tasks that engage and challenge youth	Responsibility is learned through accomplishments and failures	Process how youth are handling responsibilities
Youth solicit additional information about assigned tasks and expectations	Invite questions or further clarification about expectations and assigned roles and responsibilities	Communication is key in supporting youth to assume additional responsibilities	Adults spend time with youth to talk about increased responsibilities and necessary supports
Youth demonstrate respect for others	Role-model respect for what each person has to contribute	Youth learn to value others by watching the behavior modeled in their environments	Youth participate in experiences that expose them to different types of people
Youth appropriately express emotions	Provide consistent feedback with alternative suggestions	Appropriate emotional expressions are difficult	Youth are held accountable for actions and words
Youth understand differences between right and wrong	Surround youth with healthy, positive adults	Right and wrong may vary by experience and perception	Provide opportunities for youth to voice personal perspectives

5. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: *SPIRITUALITY AND SELF-AWARENESS*

Youth feel unique and intimately attached to extended families, cultural groups, communities, higher deities and/or principles.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth identify with family and cultural groups	Provide opportunities for youth to explore cultural connections	Family and cultural connections promote self-awareness	Youth interview elders from their cultural groups to understand their history
Youth identify unique personal qualities	Identify and point out unique qualities in youth	Youth may need assistance identifying personal qualities	Youth maintain scrapbooks of personal experiences and characteristics
Youth participate in some form of spiritual expression	Provide supports for youth to continue spiritual participation and expression	Youth should be able to explore various spiritual areas if interested	Youth have opportunities to participate in spiritual activities of their choice
Youth identify community connections	Provide access to community settings for spiritual practices	Personal supports can provide transportation and other logistics to meet spiritual needs and interests	Youth are part of groups with similar spiritual beliefs and practices
Youth understand, appreciate and reflect on their emotions	Process with youth emotional experiences that validate their feelings	Youth may not feel safe or comfortable expressing their emotions	Youth maintain journals for private reflections on emotions

6. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: *PHYSICAL HEALTH*

Youth act in ways that best protect and ensure current and future health for themselves and others.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth are able to perform daily health maintenance tasks	Provide youth with health maintenance information	Support systems promote regular health maintenance and care	Youth are responsible for daily health maintenance
Weight is proportionate to height	Discuss the range of healthy weight and height proportions	Fashion images can promote unrealistic body images	Set goals with youth to maintain healthy weight
Youth experience low incidence of illness	Teach youth how to recognize signs of illness	Youth need to know family medical history	Connect youth to people with strong health maintenance skills
Youth know how to access helping resources	Provide information and practice on accessing health resources	Health care systems have barriers that might inhibit access (e.g., attitudes, parental consent, paperwork)	Encourage youth to set and manage their own appointments and to complete related paperwork
Youth eat healthy diets	Provide dietary and nutrition information	Busy schedules may promote poor diet	Youth prepare menu and meals for household
Youth exercise regularly	Encourage and provide opportunities for physical activity in areas of interest	Exercise works when it is personally interesting	Organize team activities (field activities, volleyball game) for the group household
Youth abstain from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs	Provide opportunities to hear from addicts and cancer victims	Family histories and peer groups influence use	Youth self-disclose substance use or are monitored through testing
Youth abstain from sex or regularly use contraceptives	Discuss information regarding sexuality and health risks	Peer pressure may encourage sexual contacts before youth are ready	Openly discuss sexuality issues with youth and/or in peer group settings
Youth are aware of home safety issues	Expose youth to safety measures in the home	Youth may learn best with hands-on approaches	Youth assist in keeping homes safe

7. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: *MENTAL HEALTH*

Youth respond affirmatively and cope with positive and adverse situations. Youth reflect on their own emotions and surroundings and engage in leisure and fun.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth regularly engage in recreation	Help youth incorporate recreational activities into their lives	Low self-confidence and poor peer relations might inhibit participation	Physical activities occur regularly in school, home life and independent-living functions
Youth have hobbies	Support youth in identifying areas of interest	Hobbies and interests are discovered as we journey through life	Provide opportunities to explore hobbies and interests
Youth identify and pursue constructive alternatives to stressful situations	Provide opportunities for youth to discuss fears, worries, stress	Peer pressures may contribute to adolescent stress	Provide privacy for youth to deal with stress in productive ways
Youth demonstrate coping skills	Teach differences in healthy and unhealthy coping skills	Coping skills may vary by person and by situation	Role-play with youth how to deal with conflict and stress
Youth are able to identify personal mental health needs	Teach conflict-resolution skills	Supportive relationships are critical to maintaining positive mental health	Youth complete self-assessment of mental health status
Youth express a variety of personal emotions to caring adults	Provide opportunities to express issues in safe, supportive environment	Youth may be comfortable discussing issues with only specific person(s)	Provide youth weekly contacts with supportive people
Youth access helping resources	Have youth practice accessing services	Youth may be resistant to “counseling” activities and resources	Youth identify strategies to maintain positive mental health
Youth demonstrate emotional self-control	Obtain observations from schools and home life regarding self-control	Everyone needs emotional releases	Provide access to outlets (punching bag, journal, privacy) when needed

8. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: *INTELLECTUAL ABILITY*

Youth are able and motivated to learn in school and in other settings;
to gain the basic knowledge needed to graduate from high school;
to use critical thinking and creative, problem-solving and expressive skills;
to conduct independent study.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth consistently attend academic or vocational training	Assist youth in identifying academic and vocational interests and resources	Relationships can promote and support academic and vocational success	Identify key persons (coach, teacher, sibling) who will promote success
Youth read for pleasure as well as for school	Identify what youth enjoy reading	Low reading skills and inability to focus may interfere with reading interests	Provide access to appropriate reading materials (sports, news, fashion)
Youth communicate well orally	Provide safe settings to communicate to individuals and groups	Practice leads to competence	Youth regularly communicate feelings and ideas in house meetings
Youth communicate well in writing	Ask youth to write ideas, suggestions in areas of interest	Some find it easier to write their feelings than to verbalize them	Promote writing activities about interests and opinions
Youth are able to integrate knowledge into behaviors	Provide opportunities to practice new knowledge	Support is key to successful application of new knowledge	Youth practice budgeting skills by managing personal expenses
Youth demonstrate creativity	Provide opportunities for creative expression	Creative expression includes art, dance, sports, decorating, cooking, music, debate, leadership	Youth write a story or poem about their experiences in care
Youth lead and follow directions	Encourage youth to seek clarification when needed	Leadership opportunities promote self-growth and awareness	Incorporate youth as facilitators in life-skills classes and peer group
Youth demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills	Provide information about decision-making skills	Everyone can learn from missteps and mistakes	Discuss with youth how decisions lead to actions and alternative decisions

9. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: *EMPLOYMENT*

Youth gain the functional and organizational skills necessary for employment, including an understanding of careers and options and the steps necessary to reach goals.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth aspire to work and/or assume additional responsibilities	Assist youth in identification of natural skills and abilities	Some individuals prefer to work alone rather than in groups or teams	Role-play situations where youth request additional responsibilities
Youth are able to discuss personal experiences in the work world	Encourage career explorations through daily experiences	Introverted and extroverted persons perform at different levels depending on duties	Encourage support persons to regularly process work experiences with youth
Employers request youth to work additional hours	Support development of job readiness training and employment skills	Getting along with others is often learned on the job	Youth request overtime or altered work schedules on their own
Youth often choose employment above social opportunities	Teach youth how to work with job placement agencies and assist youth with job coaching	Processing work issues is important for youth	Youth balance work with personal lives
Youth identify with workplace through work peers and company functions	Help youth identify relationships that will assist in job acquisitions	Employers sometimes treat staff as objects, which can be a negative experience	Provide transportation or other supports for youth to attend company functions
Youth discuss how work experiences increase self-esteem and identity	Teach youth how to develop employment-based collaborations	Belonging and self-worth contribute to employment success	Invite youth to share how work contributes to their personal development
Youth are motivated to perform well at work and meet expectations	Provide opportunities for teamwork and cooperation with others	Responsibility increases with delegated tasks and trust	Ask youth to identify work accomplishments on a weekly basis
Youth organize daily lives to be punctual and productive at work	Discuss realistic logistics (schedules, transportation, child care) related to successful work experiences	Supports and logistics contribute to work success	Allow youth to self-manage their work attendance

10. YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OUTCOME: CIVIC AND SOCIAL ABILITY

Youth are motivated to work collaboratively with others for the common good and to build and sustain caring relationships with others.

Indicators	Strategies	Things to Consider	How It Works
Youth demonstrate ethical behaviors toward others	Build compassion in youth through exposure to persons who are different	Youth may be hesitant to initiate without encouragement	Immediately confront disrespectful attitudes and treatment of others
Youth obey laws	Provide youth opportunities for civic involvement	Mistakes in judgment can lead to law violations	Help youth participate in advocacy efforts to influence legislation
Youth listen to, respect and respond to ideas of others	Encourage youth to promote ideas and suggestions for improved situations	Observations and immediate feedback increase self-awareness	Set up a tour of homeless shelters or local city council meetings
Youth reflect on and refine their own values	Suggest expressive activities that youth might enjoy	Help youth identify their passions and concerns	Provide youth with supplies for writing, art, music and other means of self-expression
Youth are politically aware and active	Provide youth with opportunities to view and understand others	Youth form opinions from their experiences and their environments	Invite speakers to house meeting or independent-living group to inform and educate
Youth regularly make contributions to individuals and organizations in their communities	Encourage youth to participate in community-service activities	Youth may have difficulty viewing themselves as resources for the community	Initiate projects to clean up neighborhoods
Youth take responsibility for own actions and their consequences	Ask youth to reflect and process feelings and actions	Youth may need support in recognizing issues behind behaviors	Provide youth with timely feedback and observations

Source: Adapted From P. Almquist, et al. (2000, June). "Keys to Quality Youth Development." St. Paul, MN: University of Minnesota Extension Service. Included in *Interdependent Living Curriculum*, Jordan Institute for Families, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003.

Strengths-Based/Solution-Focused Questioning

Consistent with a positive youth development approach, strengths-based/solution-focused questioning is a useful tool for people working with youth. The questions that appear below were developed for use by social workers and are included in this training to give examples of six types of open questions that support rapport building between youth and adults. Strengths-based questioning offers the following advantages:

- These interviewing methods are used to assist in relationship building and information gathering.
- They serve as an assessment tool for identifying a youth's strengths.
- They help us see a youth as larger than his or her problems.

As youth respond to the questions, we hear how they view themselves, the world and the future. The questions have no right or wrong answer. It is important not to challenge the youth's thinking or offer alternative ways of thinking about the questions. If you are confused by the youth's responses, it is appropriate to ask clarifying questions, e.g., "I'm not sure I understand what you said about growing up in the Dominican Republic. Can you say more?"

The questions should not be used alone, but rather in conjunction with other ways of gathering information. The worker may need to provide some context for asking these questions since they should not appear to be pulled out of thin air. For example, a social worker might say, "Althea, it seems like our conversations always get around to ways you feel you've failed. These are important feelings and events for us to discuss, but I'd also like to keep us focused on ways you've succeeded," or "Roberto, I know you're really worried about trouble you've had on the job. You feel you really messed up there. Before we get into that, could you tell me about how you did at work before the trouble started. Could you tell me about times when you functioned well there and were proud of your job performance?"

Strengths-based/solution-focused questioning helps us see youth as larger than their problems.

ESTEEM QUESTIONS

- What activities do you enjoy in your leisure time?
- What do you enjoy about them?
- What other people do you enjoy being with?
- What are good times like for you when you're with those other people?
- If you had more free time, what would you most enjoy doing?

SUPPORT QUESTIONS

- What people have given you special understanding, support or guidance?
- Who are the special people on whom you can depend?
- How did you find them or how did they come to you?



- Have any particular organizations, agencies or groups been especially helpful to you or your family?

SURVIVAL QUESTIONS

- How have you been able to survive (or thrive) thus far given all the challenges you have had to contend with?
- What have you learned about yourself and the world during the struggles you have faced?
- Have any of the difficulties that you have faced given you special strength, insight or skill?

EXCEPTION QUESTIONS

- When things were going well in your life, what was different?
- When you are having a good day, what is different?

MIRACLE QUESTIONS

- Suppose one night there is a miracle while you are sleeping and the problem that brought you into care is solved. Since you are sleeping, you don't know that a miracle has happened or that your situation is solved. What do you suppose you will notice different the next morning that will tell you that the problem is solved?

Key elements that maximize the effectiveness of miracle questions

- Suppose (sets the stage for imagination)
- Miracle happened (sets the tone for playfulness)
- The problem is solved (for the moment, the “how” of the solution is de-emphasized)
- You don't know (because you are sleeping—emphasizes the future)
- What will be different to indicate that (focuses on details)
- Miracle happened and the problem is solved (future focus)

POSSIBILITY QUESTIONS

- What are your hopes, visions?
- What fantasies and dreams have given you special hope and guidance?
- What do you like to do?
- How can I help you achieve your goals or recover those special abilities and times that you had in the past?

Source: *Integrating a Youth Development Perspective into Transition Planning: A Curriculum for Child Welfare Outreach Workers*, Boston University School of Social Work in collaboration with Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2004.



A Youth's View on the Importance of Positive Youth Development

Positive youth development is an important basis for a social worker to use in dealing with adolescents. Many times at-risk teens and other adolescents fall victim to a negative self-identity by way of constantly having their problems pointed out to them and also always being reminded of what they're doing wrong. Another way adolescents develop a negative self-identity is by the way they are often classified as "problem youth" or "at-risk teens." The names alone can be very damaging to a potentially already damaged self-esteem. Sometimes the adolescent's only source of positive self-affirmation comes from his or her social worker. Positive youth development works to prevent against adolescents developing these negative feelings towards themselves. Also being a foster child or just a young adult in general can often feel very lonely. Positive youth development when used by workers helps kids to feel they have someone on their side and that they are not alone (MC, 2002).

Source: "National Collaboration for Youth Members" (1998). Retrieved October 15, 2002, from www.nydic.org, website of the National Youth Development Information Center. Included in *Integrating a Youth Development Perspective into Transition Planning: A Curriculum for Child Welfare Outreach Workers*, Boston University School of Social Work in collaboration with Department of Social Services, Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2004.



Transitioning

As a CASA/GAL volunteer, you play a vital role in ensuring that emancipating foster youth have the people, resources and supports they need as they transition from the system to interdependent living.

According to the Casey Family Programs publication *It's My Life: A Framework for Youth Transitioning from Foster Care to Successful Adulthood*, "Research shows that two critical factors play important roles in helping youth overcome the challenges put before them: a positive, trusting relationship with an adult, and an external support system, such as connections with school, religious organizations or youth groups."

SUPPORTS FOR DEVELOPMENT

According to the Center for Youth Development and Policy Research, supports are interpersonal relationships and accessible resources—people and information—that allow a young person to take advantage of existing services and opportunities. Although the three types of support—emotional, motivational and strategic—are equally important, they meet different needs.

- **Emotional support:** Fulfills the basic needs for nurturing and friendship
- **Motivational support:** Provides high expectations, standards and boundaries
- **Strategic support:** Helps young people understand the world and the options available

What does support look like?

Emotional	Motivational	Strategic
Nurturance	High expectations	Assessing options
Friendship	Boundaries	Coaching
Love	Encouragement	Providing feedback
Compassion	Incentives	Discussing
Empathy	Acknowledgment of strengths	Planning
Affirmation	Recognition	Informing
Caring relationships	Celebration of accomplishments	Teaching consequences

Supports can take many different forms but they must be:

- Affirming and respectful
- Ongoing
- Offered by a variety of people

Source: From S. Zeldin. (1996). *Advancing Youth Development Curriculum*. Washington, DC: Academy for Educational Development/Center for Youth Development and Policy Research. Included in *Interdependent Living Curriculum*, Jordan Institute for Families, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2003.



Working with Older Youth— Distinctions in the Advocacy Role

In Chapter 8 of the core volunteer training, you learned to plan and carry out investigations for cases that would typically reach permanence before the child reached adolescence. You planned an investigation that would lead you to know the facts of the case, the needs of the child and the resources that would meet the child's needs. You were taught to use the best interest of the child and the minimum sufficient level of care as your guiding standards. In the case examples in the core curriculum, permanency planning typically meant that the case would conclude when the child could return home safely or go to live in kinship care or an adoptive home. In these cases, your role was to act on the child's behalf and to give voice to the child's needs and wishes.

As a CASA/GAL volunteer for an older youth, you will still be advocating for permanency, but the youth's plan for permanence will reflect his or her transition into adulthood. The plan should include provisions for a long-term connection to at least one committed and caring adult. This is a youth-driven decision. From the beginning of your appointment as the CASA/GAL volunteer for a youth, you will need to be tenacious and persistent in looking for adults who might make a long-term commitment of support to the youth. It will be your role to evaluate everyone you meet in connection with the youth: might they make a long-term commitment to the youth? Foster parents, teachers, community leaders, relatives, neighbors, service providers and other advocates are just a few of the adults who might be capable and willing to take on this role. Helping youth create webs of support and interdependency will increase their success as they transition into adulthood.

Many people and services exist to support youth in foster care; however, in your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer, you have the unique opportunity to advocate for the youth in the court system. The research and recommendations in your court reports are taken seriously by the court. It is your responsibility to ensure that judges hear each youth's wishes and receive the information they need to make strong decisions about the youth's life and legal situation.

As a CASA/GAL volunteer for an older youth, you may have questions about your liability as you carry out your duties. As long as you carry out your duties without negligence, you are covered under the Volunteer Protection Act of 1997. Once your formal role has ended, your interactions with the youth are no longer under the auspices of the CASA/GAL program and they are not protected by judicial immunity or state or federal volunteer protection laws.

As a volunteer advocating for an older youth, you may at times feel concerned about your personal safety. Just as you did in Chapter 10 of your core training, you will want to plan for your personal safety. Talk with local program staff if you have any concerns about the youth with whom you are working, especially if the youth has a history of violent behavior. Staff will assist you with strategies to support your personal safety and well-being.

An older youth's plan for permanence should include provisions for a long-term connection to at least one committed and caring adult.



Case Planning

In your role as a CASA/GAL volunteer for an older youth, it is essential that you create a case plan to guide your work to help the youth create and sustain a healthy interdependent network. This section describes principles and practices for supporting youth transitioning to independent living.

Researchers at the Muskie School of Public Service at the University of Southern Maine and the National Resource Center for Youth Services at the University of Oklahoma's College of Continuing Education have identified four core principles that have emerged as essential for adolescent transitional living programs to be successful. From these four principles, thirteen best practices criteria have been identified.

FOUR CORE PRINCIPLES

1. Youth Development

A process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences that help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models, which focus solely on youth problems. (Source: National Collaboration of Youth Members)

2. Collaboration

The process by which several agencies or organizations make a formal, sustained commitment to work together to accomplish a common mission. (Source: *The Community Collaborations Manual*, National Assembly of Voluntary Health and Social Welfare Organizations)

3. Cultural Competence

Culture is difference in race, ethnicity, nationality, religion/spirituality, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, physical ability, language, beliefs, values, behavior patterns or customs among various groups within a community organization or nation. (Source: *A Guide to Enhancing Cultural Competency of Runaway Homeless Youth Programs*, HHS, ACF,ACYF)

Gaining cultural competence is a long-term process of expanding horizons, thinking critically about the issues of power and oppression and acting appropriately. Culturally competent individuals have a mixture of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge and skills that help them establish trust and communicate with others. (Source: Advocates for Youth)

4. Permanent Connections

Positive relationships that are intended to last a lifetime. They may be either formal (e.g., adoption or reunification with family) or informal (e.g., mentors or peer support groups). Very often they are identified by the youth. (Source: National Resource Center for Youth Services)



THIRTEEN SUGGESTED PRACTICE CRITERIA

1. A plan of transition for each youth that is . . .

- Based on an assessment of strengths and needs
- Developed with active youth involvement
- Reviewed on a periodic basis

2. A clearly defined life skills instruction component that provides youth with . . .

- Knowledge and understanding of a core set of life skills
- Opportunities to practice skills in a “real world” environment

3. Educational supports aimed at helping youth . . .

- Obtain a secondary education degree
- Increase literacy
- Select a career field and develop an educational/career plan
- Begin a post-secondary educational/vocational program
- Complete a post-secondary educational/vocational program

4. An employment component that . . .

- Provides opportunities for career exploration
- Provides assistance in developing an educational and career plan
- Provides career-related work experience
- Provides career role models
- Builds and manages partnerships with local educational institutions, industries and employment program

5. Established community linkages that . . .

- Connect youth with community resources
- Connect youth with adult mentors
- Create job/career opportunities for youth
- Create leadership opportunities for youth

6. A supervised independent-living component that allows youth to . . .

- Select their own housing
- Pay their own bills and maintain their own budget
- Work out landlord/roommate disputes
- Assume the lease or establish their own housing arrangement at the end of the program

7. Health services that . . .

- Prepare youth to manage their own medical/dental/mental health needs
- Connect youth with appropriate health resources in their own community
- Work on substance abuse issues

8. Emotional well-being and cultural identity services that help youth . . .

- “Make peace with the past” (e.g., trauma counseling)
- Work through the emotional stages of transition
- Promote cultural identity/development
- Identify and engage in appropriate leisure activities

9. Permanent connection activities that help youth . . .

- Reunite with family members
- Return to their home communities
- Consider and prepare for adoption and other permanent connections
- Develop/expand personal support systems

10. Youth developmental activities that provide opportunities for youth to . . .

- Increase their advocacy skills and exercise their leadership ability
- Participate in community services (e.g., peer tutoring, counseling and education)

11. Aftercare services that provide . . .

- Information and referral
- Temporary financial assistance
- Help in establishing and maintaining own living arrangements
- Peer support opportunities
- Opportunities to share personal transition experiences with younger youth and/or personal support for youth during the transition to self-sufficiency
- Encouragement to staff and care providers to develop new knowledge and skills
- Education to the community (e.g., schools, employers) about the needs of youth while in transition

12. Ongoing training component that . . .

- Orients new staff and care providers to independent-living/youth-development philosophy
- Provides continuing education for experienced staff and care providers

13. Ongoing evaluation components that measure . . .

- Immediate program outcomes (results at the end of the program)
- Short-term outcomes for youth (6–12 months after program completion) and long-term outcomes for youth (more than a year after program completion)

Source: *A Native Pathway to Adulthood: Training for Tribal and Non-Tribal Child Welfare Workers*, the University of Oklahoma National Resource Center for Youth Services, 2004.



