

Supporting Older Foster Youth: A Guide for CASAs & GALs

Young people ages 14-23 should be partners and active participants in their own case planning, including permanency planning. Older Youth should also participate in planning that addresses their goals for education, employment, health care, and housing.

Preparing for Court (What the CASA/GAL can do)

Ensuring Older Youth participate in their own court hearings is a foundation of authentic youth engagement. Small steps to assist young people in preparing for court can reap huge benefits.

Some suggested practices include:

- Explain the hearing (including who will be there and what their roles are)
- What topics will be discussed
- What reports the Court considers
- What questions the Judge will likely ask
- Explain how to conduct yourself in the courtroom (etiquette for speaking to a judge)
- Explain what role the young person plays i.e. what questions they can ask, when to ask questions, and their rights.

Make sure that all of this information is provided to young people in a way they can understand. Use age appropriate language and avoid using acronyms.

After Court (What the CASA/GAL can do)

- Debrief and explain what happened in the courtroom. This can be done quickly after court, but if the young person has more questions then take more time at your next meeting. (take time to help them write down their questions during or immediately after court so they don't forget)
- Reiterate that a young person can request for a private meeting with their judge.
- Remind them of when you have your next meeting. If it's not scheduled, take the time to schedule it then.
- Take time to help young people decompress. Check in after and make sure they know they aren't in trouble/the problem. If they are enrolled in therapy, remind them that they can discuss what they felt in court during that time.

Supporting young people in the Courtroom setting starts with getting the Young Person in the room. Attempt to schedule Hearing with Older Youth at times that do not interfere with school or employment obligations.

**If you can't find a time to meet and prepare outside of court, utilize the wait times while you are there.*

Older Youth in Court Per DCS Policy:

6.14 Children Attending Court Proceedings

"Youth 14 years of age and older shall participate in all court proceedings unless granted an exception by the court due to a physical, mental, emotional, or intellectual disability. If the youth is unable to attend the court hearing, the youth should have a Youth Report to the Court completed and submitted to the court. It may be appropriate for youth to attend only a portion of a hearing. Attendance in court is mandatory for youth in Collaborative Care.

If it is determined the child will not be attending a court proceeding, efforts should be made to allow the child's voice to be heard by participation through alternative means (e.g., video/teleconference or writing a letter), which would include the Youth Report to the Court."



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Real Feedback from Older Youth:

Older Youth with lived experience in the child welfare system were asked to provide concrete feedback on their experiences. The following feedback provides CASAs/GALs critical insight into practices to implement, improve, and/or expand:

"Get to know the young person you are working with and make sure their strengths get brought into court. You can help elevate what is going well!"

"Be consistent. I met my CASA one time. She asked me questions and what I wanted but then went into the courtroom and said the opposite of what I wanted. I was 12 or 13 and very confused. I never saw her again."

"Try not to be pushy about your own opinions. You may have opinions but this is my life and you have to be careful because you hold lots of power over it."

"Ask and really get to know the young person and what they want. Then be an advocate for what they want. Even if you don't agree, make sure their wants are heard in court."

"My GAL and attorney took the time to ask me what my plans were for the future and where I saw myself. I think it really helped them build a case that was in my best interest."

"A good CASA/GAL is one who is confident in the courtroom."

"Face vs file- Don't assume things about us based on our case files. It doesn't have the whole story."

"CASA/GALs really need to get to know the young person. If you don't it's pointless."
"I think if they don't take that time to get to know the youth's goals, then they can't represent the child. They only see/know the surface level."

"Explain who you are and your role every time we meet until you are absolutely sure we know who you are and how you will influence our lives. Young people meet a lot of people while care. Tell us what you plan to do, what you can do and what to expect in court."

"Make young people aware of who else they can contact if they can't get ahold of their CASA."

"I wish I had someone to explain the acronyms and terms they were using when addressing me, such as APPLA. I left feeling like although I talked to my Judge, I did not understand a word."

"Knowing that the CASA are volunteers made me have more respect for the work being put in. Communicate what kind of training you receive and how it relates to your role."

"Answer when we call."

"Do little acts of kindness - take us out to eat and talk if you can."

"We just want to be like any normal kid. Foster Care puts a lot of pressure on us. Advocate for age appropriate behaviors and experiences."

Indiana Older Youth Services Guide:

Older Youth Services: Older Youth Services (OYS) was formerly known as Chafee Independent Living Services. OYS helps Older Youth achieve their adulthood case plan goals. OYS primarily focuses on helping Youth who are expected to turn 18 in foster care; however, OYS can be implemented concurrently with other goals like reunification and adoption.

Collaborative Care: Indiana's extended foster care program, is a continuation of OYS for Youth (from age 18 until they turn 21) who voluntarily agree to remain in foster care. Collaborative care helps Older Youth reach their case plan goals and successfully transition into adulthood.

Voluntary Older Youth Services: Services for Older Youth who have "aged out" of the foster care system at 18 or whose Collaborative Care case closed at age 21. These services assist former foster youth in the areas of housing, employment, and education.

Special thanks to Indiana Youth Advisory Board (IYAB) for their collaboration in the creation of this guide. IYAB is great resource for older foster youth. More information about IYAB is available at <https://fostersuccess.org/youth-engagement/iyab/>