

Working with Adolescents

Young people are empowered when they have a voice in planning for their future. There are many opportunities to involve adolescents in planning, but in order to do so, you must build a trusting relationship with them. You must get to know the young people for whom you advocate well enough to understand their needs and their wishes for the future.

In your role as a CASA volunteer, you will communicate the youth's wishes to the judge. You will also communicate your recommendations, which may or may not be the same as the youth's wishes. The important thing is to ensure that the youth's voice is present in the court system.

If you are working with an older youth who is getting ready to age out of foster care, there is a very helpful guide created by the Juvenile Rights Project entitled *A Survival Guide for Teens Aging Out Foster Care*. It can be downloaded at the following link: http://www.jrplaw.org/Documents/Teen_Survival_Guide_for_Teens_07.pdf

Please also see Tips for Assisting Youth in Transition to Adulthood and local resources for adolescents at the end of this article.

To help adolescents become healthy, self-sufficient adults, their permanent plan should enhance their opportunities to participate in meaningful planning for their future. This planning may be about educational goals, occupational goals, or transitional-living programs that meet their unique needs.

Most importantly, all adolescents need a meaningful connection with at least one healthy adult. In your role you can assist the youth in staying connected to the adult(s) who will be there for them in the long run.

Tips for Assisting Youth in Transition to Adulthood

- Help them develop support systems and lifelong connections to family and other significant adults.
- Help them form a positive and realistic picture of the future.
- Respect the grief that comes from loss of their family.
- Tailor services to their needs.
- Advocate for resources—don't leave them hanging.
- Help them understand their rights and responsibilities.
- Explain what you see as best for them and why.

- Involve them in decisions.
- Make sure someone is talking with them about puberty and relationships.
- Know what permanence means to them. According to Casey Family Programs, one element of permanence is “a permanent connection with at least one adult who provides love; unconditional commitment; lifelong support; a safe, stable and secure parenting relationship; and a legal relationship if possible.”

Materials for this section were adapted from “Litigating the Independent Living Case,” Kathi Grasso, ABA Child Law Practice, July 1999.

Volunteer Training Curriculum, National CASA Association

Local Resources

Integral Youth Services Independent Living Program 882-7675

For youth age 14 through age 21. IYS equips youth for their transition into Independent Living. Employment, Housing, Education, Health, Community Connections and Support

Foster Club FYI3.com <http://www.fosterclub.com/fyi3/>

Be more involved. Be more informed. Be more independent.

The Issue Project 883-3471

Substance abuse prevention services, intervention services and treatment services for 7th through 12th grade students. The Issue Project provides evidence- and research-based “best practice” programs. Youth who are taught to be successful in adolescents will continue to seek out a success-based orientation to life as an adult.

Kids in the Middle Mentoring Program 882-3198

“Kids in the Middle” is all about "providing youth, 4th through 8th grades, with opportunities to build resiliency and character by connecting them to caring adult mentors who model and encourage relationships built on trustworthiness, personal responsibility and positive communication." Research is overwhelming clear: when youth have at least one responsible adult in their lives, they are significantly less likely to drop out of school, become bullies, or abuse drugs.

A Teen’s Legal Guide to Foster Care in Oregon Juvenile Rights Project

http://www.irplaw.org/Documents/Teen_Legal_Guide_to_Foster_Care.pdf