

Expecting and Parenting in Care: Tips for Youth

Pregnancies and parenting come with a lot of unknowns, even for the most prepared adults. When you are expecting or parenting a child during your time in foster care, it can be challenging to balance school, work, permanency goals, and more. You deserve support as you navigate this chapter of your life, and many tools and resources are available to help.

This factsheet was developed in close partnership with lived experience leaders from FosterClub who have expertise as expectant or parenting youth in care. Their experiences, insights, and advice shaped the content in this publication. When quoted, they are identified according to their preference—by name, by State, or fully anonymous.

This factsheet has information about government assistance, parenting supports, medical services, and other resources that

may be available to you and your family. It also has information about your options and rights when it comes to pregnancy and parenting. The information in this factsheet is for all expecting and parenting youth in care, including those who are pregnant, their

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partners, mothers, fathers, nonbinary parents, and other members of the LGBTQIA2S+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, intersex, asexual, Two-Spirit, or other gender or sexual identity) community.¹

PREGNANCY IN CARE

Pregnancies can be difficult to navigate, especially for first-time parents. In this section, find information about your options, health care, childbirth, and more.

UNDERSTANDING YOUR OPTIONS

When you or your partner becomes pregnant, you face a very important decision. Usually, you will have three options to consider (not necessarily in this order of preference):

1. **Parenting:** Proceeding with the pregnancy and raising the child
2. **Abortion:** Terminating the pregnancy
3. **Adoption:** Proceeding with the pregnancy and arranging for the child to be adopted

If you are pregnant, deciding whether to raise a child is a very personal decision. It can be helpful to talk through your decision with your partner and others, but at the end of the day, only you can decide what is best for you. Do not let the beliefs and opinions of relatives, caseworkers, foster caregivers, attorneys, and others pressure you into making a decision that does not feel right. If you need an unbiased person to talk to about your options, you can contact your local [Planned Parenthood](#) or [All-Options](#), a free hotline that offers peer-based counseling and support in pregnancy decision-making.

"When I first became pregnant, I was very adamant to go to college and keep my baby. . .I had a plan. Unfortunately, my case manager and the other professionals on my team didn't agree with my plan. They didn't think it was possible, and they thought adoption was better. They were pushing me towards that direction, and that's what I ended up doing with my first child. And it's something that I still regret to this day." —Young person from Virginia who experienced pregnancy and parenting while in foster care

If you are the partner of someone who is pregnant, it is important that you provide support during the decision-making process (and seek supports for yourself). This means being there for your partner, listening, and providing emotional and physical support. Support can also include doing research, developing plans, and doing other thought work throughout the pregnancy. You should express your feelings and discuss your options as a team, but deciding whether to proceed with or terminate a pregnancy is ultimately up to the pregnant individual. It is important to respect and support their decision.

Since *Roe v. Wade*—the 1973 Supreme Court case that legalized abortion nationwide—was overturned in June 2022, laws about reproductive rights have become especially

¹ This publication aims to use inclusive language when possible, and most information is applicable to all expectant and parenting youth. The term "expectant" applies to youth in a partnership in which one individual is pregnant. Certain sections of this publication provide information that applies to specific subsets of expectant and parenting youth, namely (1) pregnant individuals, mothers, and others who can become pregnant or give birth and (2) fathers and partners of pregnant or birthing individuals.

complicated. [Many of these laws vary by State](#), including some requiring [parental consent](#) for abortion, which can be complicated if you are in out-of-home care. Regardless, you deserve access to safe, affordable health care, including abortion. More information about reproductive rights, including abortion resources for those living in States where it is illegal, is available on the [Planned Parenthood](#) and [National Network of Abortion Funds](#) websites. When seeking pregnancy support, be cautious of [crisis pregnancy centers](#), which are clinics run by antiabortion activists who spread misinformation.

Paternity Testing

Paternity testing may be something either partner seeks to explore to identify or acquire an official record of paternity. Noninvasive prenatal paternity tests can take place as early as 8 weeks after conception and involve collecting DNA samples from both people involved. These tests are usually safe and accurate. Testing can also occur after the child is born using DNA samples from the child and the alleged father.

You do not have to be the pregnant partner to request paternity testing. If you have been told you are the father of a child, but you are not sure if that's true or would like further confirmation, you can request paternity testing.

For more information, see [chapter 3](#) of the Office of Child Support Enforcement's *Child Support Handbook*.

PRENATAL CARE AND HEALTH CARE

If you choose to proceed with the pregnancy, it is vital that you get prenatal care. Prenatal care ensures you and the baby stay healthy by reducing complications during pregnancy and preventing problems that can occur during delivery. It also provides opportunities to ask questions and learn about labor and delivery, breastfeeding, newborn care, and more. Prenatal appointments [typically begin](#) between week 6 and week 8 of pregnancy, start occurring monthly, and then increase in frequency as the pregnancy progresses.

When [choosing an obstetrician-gynecologist](#) (ob-gyn), some logistics to consider are the location of the practice, whether they are covered by your insurance, and the hospital where they deliver. You may also want to consider compatibility with your doctor (such as factors important to you, which could be gender, race, etc.) and your health history. (Certain conditions, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, or diabetes, may require a doctor who specializes in high-risk pregnancy.) You can find an ob-gyn near you using the [search tool](#) on the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists website. You can also ask friends, family, and others you trust for recommendations. Most people chose an ob-gyn to monitor their pregnancy and deliver their baby; however, you may also choose to look for a [midwife or doula](#). A [midwife](#) is typically an alternative to an ob-gyn and provides support during low-risk pregnancy, labor, and delivery. They may offer a more holistic and natural approach. A doula, on the other hand, is usually used *in addition* to an ob-gyn or midwife and provides physical and emotional support. When looking

for a midwife, doula, or ob-gyn, asking about their training, experience, and approach to pregnancy and birth may help you make a decision.

Prenatal care is typically covered by insurance, so if you don't have health-care coverage already, signing up is a good idea. Your agency and caseworker should be a source of support in ensuring you have health insurance and making sure your coverage will continue after you exit care. In addition to prenatal care, qualified health insurance plans also cover childbirth and newborn care services, which can be expensive without insurance. Most youth in foster care are eligible for [Medicaid](#) (the joint Federal and State health-care program that provides coverage to low-income Americans) and can begin coverage at any time. If you are already enrolled in Medicaid by the time you give birth, your newborn is automatically enrolled and remains eligible for at least a year. More information about health care is available in Information Gateway's [Health-Care Coverage for Children and Youth in Foster Care—and After](#) and HealthCare.gov's [Health Coverage If You're Pregnant, Plan to Get Pregnant, or Recently Gave Birth webpage](#). If you are not sure about whether you have health-care coverage, use the following prompts to start the discussion with your caseworker:

- Do I have health-care coverage? If not, can you help me enroll?
- How does health insurance work?
- Will my health insurance cover prenatal care, childbirth, and/or newborn care? Will I be responsible for any portion of those costs?
- What financial support is available outside of insurance?

"I would suffer without Medicaid. . . With those benefits, it really helps. It would be a hard thing right now to pay any medical bills because that's a lot of money."—Young person from Indiana who was expecting and parenting in care

If you are the partner to someone who is pregnant, it is important to stay involved during the pregnancy and maintain communication with your partner about their needs. Just because you are not carrying the baby doesn't mean you don't have a role to fill. You, too, can benefit from attending doctor appointments, understanding health insurance, learning about the pregnancy and birthing processes, and preparing for the baby's arrival. It's important that you are present and supportive for your partner. Fatherhood.gov has a [list of 17 things](#) you can do to support your partner during their pregnancy.

LABOR, CHILDBIRTH, AND HOSPITALS

Having a baby is a very personal experience, and you likely won't know exactly how labor and childbirth will unfold until it happens. Pregnancies are unique, and different hospitals and birthing centers have varying procedures, so there is no one-size-fits-all approach to childbirth. However, you and your partner can prepare for the experience by learning about labor and delivery and talking to your doctor or midwife about options ahead of time.

During pregnancy, it's a good idea to become familiar with the [types of delivery](#) (e.g., vaginal birth, c-section) and terms associated with childbirth. Prenatal appointments can be a

good time to learn about the birthing process and make a plan with your pregnancy care provider for a safe delivery method. Your ob-gyn or midwife will be able to answer questions about timing, pain management, who can be in the room during the birth, special circumstances (e.g., twins), and more. Birthing classes can also help you create a birth plan, learn about common things that may happen, and practice strategies for managing pain. Insurance may fully or partially cover the cost of these classes; you can call the customer service number on the back of your insurance card to ask what your plan covers. You may also want to ask your insurance provider about coverage related to hospital stays and bills. If paid birthing classes are not an option, there are several free childbirth videos and courses online (such as Tucson Medical Center's [YouTube series](#), Lamaze's [labor confidence course](#), and Pampers' [nine-part childbirth series](#)). When seeking out childbirth information online, stick to reputable sources and websites, such as hospitals and medical centers, in order to avoid misleading information.


No matter how prepared you are for childbirth, things do not always go according to plan; babies may come early or late, your ob-gyn may be on vacation, or the delivery method may need to change unexpectedly. Births can be unpredictable, but medical professionals are trained to handle these surprises and last-minute changes.

Some youth in care may face challenges related to custody and consent during or after childbirth. For example, one youth in care reported needing the consent of her foster caregiver before she could undergo an unplanned c-section, and another was told

she would not be allowed to take her child home from the hospital since, as a youth in foster care, she "didn't have custody of herself." State laws related to expectant and parenting youth in care vary, and hospital staff may not be familiar with them. However, there are two important facts to remember throughout the process:

- 1. You have the legal right to care for your child like any other parent unless otherwise specified by a court of law.**
- 2. Just because you are in foster care does not mean that your baby is automatically in State custody.**

For more information about your rights as a parent in care, talk to your caseworker or attorney. You can also find information in the Juvenile Law Center's [resource guide](#) on the topic. It is a good idea to talk to your caseworker or attorney about these potential custody and consent challenges as early as possible during your or your partner's pregnancy so you can be proactive and avoid potential issues.



"The hospital got a CPS worker in my case even though there was nothing wrong. I was able to go home with my kid; they just brought me through the ringer."—Young person who experienced pregnancy and parenting in care

ADDITIONAL PREGNANCY RESOURCES

- [Planned Parenthood](#)
- [What to Expect](#)

PARENTING IN CARE

Parenting while living in out-of-home care can be a balancing act. This section contains information about government assistance, housing, education, work, parenting supports, and more.



"Take your time. You will [mess] up and make mistakes, but you will always have tomorrow to do better. Do not allow others to dictate how you parent or love your child. You are not your parents. You got this."
—Makaelah, experienced pregnancy and parenting in foster care

GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

There are several programs that may be available to you to help with finances and other basic needs. Your caseworker should be knowledgeable about what is available to you and help with the various application and enrollment processes. Talk to your caseworker about these and additional resources that may be available in your State and community.

- **Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC):** WIC is a nutrition program for infants and children up to 5 years old, as well as those who are pregnant, postpartum, and breastfeeding. To qualify, individuals must meet certain income guidelines and be determined at "nutritional risk" by a health

professional. The program supplies checks, vouchers, or benefits cards to purchase specific, nutritious foods. WIC recipients can also receive nutrition education and referrals to other health services. Use this [prescreening tool](#) to see if you are eligible.

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF):** TANF is a program designed to help low-income families with children achieve economic self-sufficiency. Eligible recipients receive monthly cash assistance payments and other services designed to promote self-sufficiency, such as child care assistance and job preparation. Contact your [State TANF program](#) for eligibility and application information.
- **Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP):** Formerly known as food stamps, SNAP is the Federal nutrition assistance program that provides benefits to low-income families to purchase food. Contact your [local SNAP office](#) to apply.
- **John H. Chafee Foster Care for Successful Transition to Adulthood (the Chafee program):** The Chafee program provides youth in foster care and young adults formerly in care with services and financial assistance to help with the transition to adulthood. For more information, contact your [State's independent living and education and training voucher coordinator](#).
- **Child Care Financial Assistance:** States and Territories receive Federal funding to provide child care financial assistance for low-income families. Use the Federal Office of Child Care's [locator tool](#) to get contact information for your State's child care subsidy agency.

- **Head Start and Early Head Start:** These programs help prepare children from birth to age 5 for school and provide services to help with learning, development, mental well-being, and physical health. The services are free for eligible low-income families. To find a Head Start or Early Head Start program near you, visit the [Head Start program locator](#).

Child Support

In situations where children are living with only one parent (the custodial parent), that person can apply to receive [child support payments](#) from the child's other parent (the noncustodial parent). All States have official child support guidelines that are used to calculate how much a parent should contribute to financially support their children. To collect child support, custodial parents will need to establish a child support order. You can contact your [local child support office](#) for more information and to apply.

HOUSING

Some youth may be able to remain in the same out-of-home placement after their baby is born. Others may need to transfer to a kinship home, foster home, or residential care facility that is better equipped to meet the needs of a parent-baby duo. Early in your or your partner's pregnancy, talk about who the baby will live with and how it will impact your

placement in care. If one of the parents does not live with the baby, they have the right to request visitation.

Your child welfare agency has an obligation to find safe and comfortable housing for you, and you deserve a say in where you and your child will live. Independent living options may be available for youth in extended foster care (youth older than 18), and some States may offer specific programs for young parents with children. Talk to your caseworker about housing during the pregnancy so you have a plan in place for when the baby comes. Your permanency goals (e.g., reunification, adoption, guardianship, transitioning to independent living) may play a role in determining the right placement for you.

If you feel as though your agency is not providing adequate support regarding housing and placement, there are steps you can take to voice your concern:

- Talk to your foster caregiver, residential home staff, or a supportive adult.
- Talk to your caseworker, their supervisor, or another member of the child welfare agency.
- Talk to your court appointed special advocate (CASA), guardian ad litem (GAL), or your State's [child welfare complaint office](#). (More information about the complaint process is available in the Dealing With Stigma and Oversurveillance section of this publication.)
- In case of emergency, contact 911 or the [Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline](#) at 1-800-4-A-CHILD.


NAVIGATING EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE

Both pursuing education and entering the workforce are important steps young parents can take to set themselves and their families up for success. As a parent, it's important to set education and career goals that will help you financially support your family. There are different ways to provide for and support a family, and everyone has a different path. It's okay if yours does not look the same as your peers, friends, or others.

Education: Education is an investment in your future. It creates opportunities for you since many career paths require certain degrees. (It's easier to become a businessperson with a business degree or a hair stylist with a cosmetology degree.) In addition to acquiring specific career skills, education helps you develop life skills like problem solving, critical thinking, communication, and confidence. Going to school can also help you find direction in life and decide what you want to do. You can take various educational pathways, including graduating from high school, getting your GED (an alternative to the traditional high school diploma that is earned by passing an exam), going to college, or attending vocational school to learn skills in a specific trade. The Federal title IX law grants you rights and protects you from discrimination due to pregnancy or parental status in educational programs and activities. This means schools must allow you to continue participating in classes and extracurricular activities, grant excused absences and medical leave, and allow you to make up work. More information is available on the [U.S. Department of Education website](https://www.ed.gov/).

Getting a job: Entering the workforce is another path you may choose as a young parent. You may have access to workforce development programs or career counseling through your child welfare agency or community organizations and programs. Some programs offer support with finding, applying to, and interviewing for jobs. Talk to your caseworker about your options and include "getting a job" in your case plan goals. For more information, see Information Gateway's [Employment and Training Services for Youth webpage](https://www.dhs.gov/employment-training-services-youth).

For young parents, balancing school or work with raising a child can be tricky. Securing reliable and affordable child care can be crucial in achieving your education and career goals. You can also tap into your support system of relatives, friends, foster caregivers, and others who may be willing to babysit and help as needed.



"My son, he was born my finals week of senior year, and if it wasn't for how amazing my professors were and how understanding they were, it would have been really, really stressful. . . I was just thankful my professors gave us as much of an extension as a university can, that way I could graduate on time. So thankfully I did that, and what I learned from that experience is that as long as you talk and you get one person on your side, then you can get more. Don't give up, because there are a lot of people who will help you with your educational goals."

—Young person from Indiana who was expecting and parenting in care

Even talking to your teachers or boss about your situation can be helpful. If they know you are a parent, they may be more understanding when emergencies come up. They also may be more willing to accommodate your needs, for example, by giving you an extension on an assignment because your child is sick or scheduling your work shifts around your child's daycare pick-up and drop-off times.

Young parents who need to pursue education and employment simultaneously in order to support their families may face additional challenges. These youth should also use the resources mentioned above. However, if you feel overwhelmed or struggle to juggle multiple responsibilities, talk to your caseworker about additional supports and services that may be available.


Ask your caseworker about what education and career resources may be available, such as scholarships, training programs, career counseling, and more. Some programs are specifically designed for young parents, like the [New Heights Program for Expectant and Parenting Students](#) in Washington, DC, which provides both educational support and child care services in the same location. More information about education and employment for expectant and parenting young families is available on [Youth.gov](#).

As you think about potential careers, advocacy work may be one path you choose to pursue. As someone who experienced the child welfare system, you have valuable insights that can help the system improve. Talk to your caseworker about how you can get involved, or check out [FosterClub](#) or the [National](#)

[Foster Youth Institute](#), two organizations that help young people get involved in child welfare reform through various programs and internships.

BEING THE BEST PARENT YOU CAN BE

Raising children is hard, but it can be very fulfilling. It is also something that no parent can be fully prepared for. Parenting is a skill, and it takes time to find your rhythm, especially since there are multiple [parenting styles](#) and various cultures parent differently. Fortunately, there are many programs, organizations, and online resources designed to help.



"Allowing people the tools to be self-sufficient and giving them the space to reach permanency and stability on their terms is important. On their own terms, meaning everybody's viewpoint of permanence looks different. My permanency values could be me going to college and finishing the business degree just like someone else's could be going to New York and going to Julliard. As long as you have an understanding and you're stable and doing what you want, and you have the ability to do so, then you have reached permanency." —Lanitta, experienced pregnancy and parenting in foster care

All new parents need help learning how to successfully care for and raise a child. Taking parenting classes can help you develop these skills. Courses usually cover things like learning about child development, communicating with your child, creating structure and rules, developing positive discipline techniques, and accessing community services. You can enroll in parenting classes through a variety of sources, including your child welfare agency, schools, hospitals, and other government and community organizations. Classes come in different formats and may be in a group setting, one-on-one, or offered via virtual learning. Home-visiting programs where nurses or other professionals help you in your home environment may also be available. For more information and examples of parent education programs, see Information Gateway's [Parent Education Programs webpage](#). The following are some online resources that may help:

- [Young United Parents](#) is an online resource with videos and articles on a range of parenting topics, from bathing, diapering, health, milestones, money management, self-care, and more. The website is designed to help young parents connect to and learn from a community of peers without stigma or judgement.
- [National Parent Helpline](#) is a free service that provides trained advocates to listen to you, provide emotional support, help problem solve, help connect you to services and resources, and more. The website also provides a variety of resources for parenting, basic needs, emergencies, and more.

- [National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse](#) is a resource for fathers and nonbirthing parents. It provides information about strong families, healthy relationships, child support, custody, visitation, personal resilience, supporting your child in school, and more.

Another important part of being the best parent you can be is taking care of your own mental and physical health. It can be difficult taking care of another human if you are not feeling at your best physically or mentally. Taking care of your physical health includes eating healthy, staying active, avoiding drugs and alcohol, and going to the doctor when you are sick. Taking care of your mental health and seeking out help when you need it is equally important. It's not uncommon for parents to experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. Seeking supports and services for your mental health can help improve the situation before it escalates and becomes more challenging. Talk to your caseworker about therapy and mental health services that may be available to you. Mental health services are often covered by health insurance, and many practices offer tele-therapy and virtual options, so you don't need to worry about child care or a babysitter.

"I never wanted to be a single mom. I never wanted that for myself, and then I became a single mom out of nowhere and I couldn't navigate. I was going through a lot of depression and anxiety. . .I know a lot of people, especially women who try to be strong, will be like, 'Oh, we got this. We can do this,' and I couldn't. I had to surrender and ask for help and reach out to friends and mentors just to say, 'I can't do this. I thought I could, but I can't.' So I got a lot of support and help."—Makaelah, experienced pregnancy and parenting in foster care

The following are some mental health resources:

- [National Maternal Mental Health Hotline](#) is a free, confidential hotline for expecting and new parents that offers access to professional counselors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- [FindTreatment.gov](#) is a service locator that can help you find mental health and substance use treatment providers by zip code.
- The National Alliance on Mental Health has a [Youth and Young Adult Resources page](#) with guides, factsheets, videos, and more.


DEALING WITH STIGMA AND OVERSURVEILLANCE

Unfortunately, expectant and parenting youth are often subjected to bias and stigma from adults, peers, service providers, and others. In addition to implicit bias based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, geographic location, and class, you may experience negative stereotypes associated with being in foster care or being a teen or young adult parent. One negative consequence of these unfair stereotypes is oversurveillance. You may feel as though your ability to parent is being questioned or that others are "waiting for you to mess up." Some States and agencies may even have policies and practices in place that directly subject expectant and parenting youth to increased scrutiny and supervision compared to peers who are not in the child welfare system.

One way to deal with oversurveillance is by knowing your rights. Knowledge is power, and when you are well equipped with your rights as a parent and as a youth in foster care, you can push back against unfair treatment. Two important things to know are **(1) you have the right to the legal and physical custody of your children** and **(2) your child is not automatically a dependent of the State just because you are**. Specific laws about your rights may vary by State, so your best bet is to talk to your caseworker or attorney about what those rights are. [Some States](#) have a foster children's bill of rights.

Another way to be proactive about oversurveillance is by keeping a detailed record of things you've done to ensure your child's safety and well-being, including a history of prenatal appointments, parenting classes, your child's doctor appointments, and more. These things can help ensure your child stays in your legal and physical custody if the State or agency petitions for removal.

If you feel as though your rights are being violated, there are steps you can take. First, talk to your caseworker, attorney, or foster caregiver. Express what feels wrong and see if you can work together to resolve the issue. If the problem is with your caseworker, contact their supervisor or someone else at the child welfare agency. Some caseworkers include their supervisor's contact information in their recorded voicemail greeting. If you have tried vocalizing your concerns and still feel unheard, contacting an ombudsman may be an option in your State. Children's ombudsman offices, sometimes known as offices of the child advocate, are offices that handle issues and complaints related to child welfare services. These offices are often separate from the child welfare agency, so you have another place to go if you feel your agency is not listening. Child Welfare Information Gateway has a [list of complaint offices by State](#) where you can see what is available where you live. For more information about resolving complaints, see Information Gateway's [From Complaint to Resolution: Understanding the Child Welfare Grievance Process](#).



"I would say that there are people in the system who care to help but you need to be very vocal to your workers, and if they aren't listening, ask to speak to their supervisors."
—Young person from Indiana who was expecting and parenting in care

PLANNING FOR A BRIGHT FUTURE

Planning for the future may look a little different with a family since you are responsible for someone other than yourself. It's important that you are well prepared for life after the foster care system so that you have what you need to keep your family safe, happy, and healthy. If you take steps to ensure you have stable, affordable housing and continued access to resources and support, you can also help prevent your own children from entering the foster care system.

TRANSITION PLANNING FOR YOUR FAMILY

Transition planning is a process that occurs as you plan to exit out-of-home care and begin living on your own. For some youth, the transition out of foster care occurs on their 18th birthday. For others in States with extended foster care, it may occur later. Transition planning helps you establish things like where you will live when you exit care, what education or work goals you will pursue, how you will continue accessing resources and support, and more.

Considering Extended Foster Care

In most States, you can extend your placement and continue receiving services from your social services agency after your 18th birthday. Choosing to remain in extended out-of-home care can give you more time to receive support as you prepare for the transition to self-sufficiency. Different from traditional foster care, extended care allows young people to have independence while still being able to access support. Services and resources you can receive in extended care may include academic support, career preparation, housing (traditional placements or subsidized independent living), financial assistance, mentoring, counseling, help enrolling in health care, and more. More information about extended out-of-home care is available on Information Gateway's [Extending Out-of-Home Care for Youth Past Age 18 webpage](#).

Legally, transition planning with your caseworker must occur at least 90 days prior to your exit from care, but realistically, it should occur much sooner. As a parent, you will have a lot of decisions and logistics to navigate. The sooner you begin having these discussions about your future, the better prepared you will be, so talk to your caseworker about beginning transition planning early, even if it will be a few years

before you transition out of the foster care system. When speaking with your caseworker, there are a few important topics to discuss:

- **Ask about your housing options.** Can you stay in your current placement? Will you need different accommodations? If you are seeking independent living, how can your caseworker help you ensure it is affordable and safe? Getting clarity on this early on will help set you up for the rest of the journey.
- **Ask about resources and services available to you.** Your caseworker should have some already in mind, and you can also use this factsheet as a guide to developing your own priorities. For example, what supports might you need to continue with your school and/or work plans—child care, financial aid, transportation, etc.? If you are currently receiving services through the child welfare agency, talk about how you can apply for those services or similar ones on your own once you leave care.

Other things to consider during transition planning are independent living programs, which can help you learn about things like managing your finances, finding stable and affordable housing, developing support networks, and more. You should also make sure you leave time to collect your legal documents, such as your birth certificate, social security card, and court orders. These may be difficult to acquire once you exit State custody. For more information about the transition from care, see Information Gateway's [Resources for Youth Transitioning to Adulthood webpage](#).

"I personally feel like it would be helpful if before a youth ages out, the social worker or the independent living worker can have a conversation with them or show them how to utilize and obtain those resources so when they get to be 18, they're not looking like, 'Oh my god, I don't know what to do, I feel so overwhelmed.' So it really starts before they age out."

—Lanitta, experienced pregnancy and parenting in foster care

ESTABLISHING A SUPPORT SYSTEM

A significant part of preparing for the future is establishing a network of friends, relatives, and other supportive people in your life. People need connections with other people to live happy, fulfilling lives, and we all need someone to turn to when we need help, advice, or a shoulder to cry on.

Think about the people in your life whom you trust. This may include relatives, friends, partners, neighbors, foster caregivers, teachers, coworkers, health-care providers, child welfare staff, a GAL, a CASA, and others. Make it a priority to keep in touch with these people during and after your time in care. During your time in care, talk to your caseworker about inviting these supportive people to be part of case planning and other decision-making meetings. Having someone outside the child welfare agency with your best interests in mind can help ensure your and your family's needs are met.

Support networks don't just have to be people you already know. New connections with other parents and peers can help you find camaraderie, acceptance, and understanding from people in similar situations. These connections may be especially helpful in increasing your knowledge of how to navigate the child welfare system and better access services and supports. You may be able to make these connections through [support groups](#) and mentorships. Talk to your caseworker about what is available in your community. You can also seek out groups online or through social media.

"Reach out for help. It doesn't make you weak; it makes you smart and stronger than those who struggle silently." —Makaelah, experienced pregnancy and parenting in foster care

CONCLUSION

Expecting and parenting in foster care can be difficult and isolating, but you don't have to do it alone. Use the resources in this factsheet to apply for benefits, learn about pregnancy and parenting, and set a foundation for a successful future after care. There are many programs and organizations that offer support for expectant and parenting youth, so talk to your caseworker or other adults you trust about what is available in your community.

"I learned to not be so quick to burn bridges and build relationships with people. Learn to make mistakes while you are in care so it can be like a safety net. Explore yourself and learn how to be healed. Utilize and find all resources that are given to help you as much as you can. Encourage yourself to create family, friends, life goals, career paths, and overall life as you see fit."
—Lanitta, experienced pregnancy and parenting in foster care

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Resources for Expectant, Pregnant, and Parenting Youth in Foster Care](#) (Information Gateway)
- [FosterClub](#)
- [Expectant and Parenting Young Families](#) (Youth.gov)

SUGGESTED CITATION

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2023). *Expecting and parenting in care: Tips for youth*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau. <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/expecting-parenting-youth>



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau



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