

Supporting Transition Age Youth in Arizona



Objectives

- How to support youth who are experiencing foster care:
 - Discuss Normalcy and Transition Planning
 - Social Connections
 - Supportive living arrangements
 - Meaningful service delivery
 - Advocacy



Normalcy



- Public Law 113-183, the Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, was passed in 2014. This law requires states to implement a Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard to support normalcy for children in care.
- DCS Policy: Chapter 4 Section 15

Normalcy Continued

- Normalcy is an integral part of a young person's successful transition to adulthood.
 - Youth in foster care have the right to experience “normal” activities just like their peers who are not in foster care.
- Professionals can support youth by asking what types of activities youth are interested in, and then connecting them with opportunities to get involved:
 - School sports, clubs, extracurricular activities, school events, spending time with peers outside of school, etc.
- If youth are experiencing barriers to participating in these activities, encourage them to speak with their DCS Specialist, or the professional can support them in reaching out to the DCS Permanency and Youth Services Unit at:
 - PermanencyYouthServicesUnit@AZDCS.GOV



Transition Planning

- Ideally, transition planning begins the moment a young person enters foster care.
- Most systems require transition plans, it's imperative that all systems supporting a young person are discussing transitions. (foster care, behavioral health, school, etc.)
- It is important that young people involved with multiple systems have transition plans which are congruent.
- Often times, youth experiencing foster care, can feel that their supports and services are happening “to” them. Help assist youth in taking the lead in their transition planning process by talking to them about their short term and long term goals.
- Helpful tool for transition planning:
 - Foster Club-Transition Toolkit:
<https://store.fosterclub.com/transition-toolkit-download/>



Social Connections

- Social connections are important to all youth as they transition to adulthood, and youth experiencing foster care are no exception!
- Youth experiencing foster care often feel disconnected from the support systems they knew prior to entering foster care.
- Ways you can help:
 - Ask them about what relationships they have in their life and how the relationships support them.
 - **It's key to make sure they have relationships outside of paid professionals on their team.
 - If the youth indicates they have connections they would like to re-connect with, assist them in talking to their DCS Specialist about how to engage these people as part of their support team.
 - Talk with youth about their experiences with peers and help them navigate peer relationships.
 - If youth reports they don't have connections, normalcy opportunities are imperative, as those are the natural places that youth can make new lifelong connections.



Supportive Living Arrangements

- The home environment can be one of the biggest contributors to well-being and success for youth.
- Youth experiencing foster care, should feel supported and cared for in their living arrangements.
- Caregivers can ensure normalcy, social connections, and support youth in their transition plans.
- If a young person has concerns about their living arrangement, please help them speak to their DCS Specialist about how to improve the situation.



Meaningful Service Delivery

**When you plant lettuce, if it
does not grow well, you don't
blame the lettuce.**

Thich Nhat Hanh



靈氣 ENERGY THERAPY



Advocacy

- Professionals can support young people in their advocacy journey.
 - Remember: “Do for, do with, CHEER on!”
 - As you work to support youth who are new to advocacy, you model the behavior for them, then advocate with them, and finally cheer them on as they advocate for themselves.
- Youth experiencing foster care often don’t understand their rights to advocate for their services across systems. Ways to support youth in having their voices be heard:
 - School: Is their school experience meeting their needs? If not, assist them in organizing a meeting with their school supports to share their needs.
 - Behavioral Health: Is their behavioral health treatment plan meeting their needs? If not, assist them in leading their Child and Family Team meeting and sharing their experience with services.
 - Foster Care: Is their foster care experience meeting their needs? If not, assist a youth in organizing a staffing or Team Decision Making Meeting to discuss areas for improvement.
- If youth feel that their needs are still not being met, encourage them to contact the DCS Office of the Ombudsman:
 - Email: ombudsman@azdcs.gov
 - Call: 602-364-0777 or 1-877-527-0765



Arizona DCS Youth Empowerment Council (YEC)

- The Department and youth leaders have partnered to develop a Youth Empowerment Council.
- The Youth Empowerment Council developed the following criteria for the Council:
 - Mission: Improve the Experience of Foster Care for Youth
 - All youth must be at least age 14 but not older than 23 residing in the State of Arizona.
 - If you know of any interested youth, please have them contact: *YouthAdvisoryBoard@AZDCS.gov*.



Thank You!

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