

TEENS IN FOSTER CARE AND THEIR BABIES



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PREGNANT OR PARENTING TEEN IN FOSTER CARE

Are you a pregnant or parenting teen in foster care?

If you are a pregnant or parenting teenager in foster care, you may have some questions or concerns. Being a teen parent can be stressful, and the added demands of being in the foster care system might leave you feeling confused or concerned for your baby's future. This brochure answers some common questions and explains what your rights are as a pregnant or parenting teen in foster care.

Family planning

Teens in foster care have the same right as other teens to obtain advice on birth control, family planning, and pregnancy tests without the consent of anyone else, including their social worker. To get these services, contact Family Planning at (800) 942-1054 or Planned Parenthood at (800) 576-5544.

HIV testing

If you are 12 or older, you can get tested for HIV/AIDS without anyone else's permission and without giving permission for others to be told. However, if you tell a DCFS social worker that you are HIV+ or have AIDS, the social worker must tell others.

What if I become pregnant while I'm a court dependent?

The decision regarding how to handle your pregnancy is yours. You may choose to keep the baby, put the baby up for adoption, or have an abortion. Nobody can take this choice away from you – not your parents, relatives, foster parents, your boyfriend and his family, the judge, or your social worker.

Who can I talk to if I need help making a decision about my pregnancy?

If you need information on your choices, your DCFS social worker must give you referrals for family planning counseling. If you are under 18 and your partner is older, you may have concerns about statutory rape. For more information, see the Public Counsel brochure about statutory rape.

Do I have to tell anyone if I decide to have an abortion?

NO, you do not have to tell anyone. If you ask for help getting services, your social worker must provide you with information and if necessary, help you make arrangements and get to appointments. Your social worker must keep this a secret if you ask her to. You do not have to pay for an abortion yourself. The “Medi-Cal Minor Consent Service Program” will cover it. You can apply for this program at many health clinics.

Will DCFS help me during my pregnancy?

Yes. You should get prenatal care, infant care classes, birthing classes, and a safe place to live during your pregnancy.

Can the social worker or the court take my baby away?

Your baby does NOT automatically become a foster child just because you are in foster care. Whether your baby becomes a foster child depends on your ability to take care of your baby and keep your baby safe. If you abuse or neglect your baby, or fail to take care of your baby (this could include running away or leaving your baby with someone who does not take good care of your baby), DCFS may take your baby out of your care. If DCFS has concerns about your ability to care for your baby, the social worker might ask you to sign a voluntary family reunification contract (which means you are volunteering to place your baby in foster care while you work on the concerns that DCFS has about your ability to parent your child). Before you sign any papers or agree to any voluntary services, you have a right to speak with your lawyer.

Does DCFS provide special services for teen parents?

Yes. A pregnant and parenting teen (PPT) conference is a voluntary meeting that you can ask for to help you connect to available resources, like child care, WIC and MediCal, and organizations that provide cribs, strollers, and more. You can invite people who are important to you and meet with a teen parent specialist who can help you learn about all the resources that are out there for teen parents. Ask your social worker to schedule a PPT conference for you.

Does DCFS provide special placements for teen parents?

Yes. DCFS must try to find placements where teen parents and their babies can live together and get the support they need. Foster youth who are teen parents may be placed with relatives, with foster parents, or in specialized group homes for pregnant and parenting teens.

A Whole Family Foster Home (WFFH) is a special kind of foster home for teen parents and their non-detained children with a foster parent or relative caregiver who has been trained to provide supportive family focused care and help teen parents develop parenting skills.

Additional placements for pregnant and parenting AB12 youth in Extended Foster Care

Parenting foster youth who are in extended foster care (between 18-21 years old and have volunteered to keep your case open) can also live in transitional housing programs or independently in a Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP).

Parenting foster youth who live in a SILP with their children may receive the Infant Supplement, an extra monthly cash aid payment, in addition to their monthly SILP benefits. In addition, another extra payment is available if Shared Responsibility Plan (SRP) or a Parenting Support Plan (PSP) is created.

A Shared Responsibility Plan (SRP) is an agreement between the teen parent and the WFFH foster parents about how they will share the rights and responsibilities of parenting the teen parent's child. For example, an SRP creates a schedule for who will care for the baby at what times and days of the week; states who is responsible for feeding, changing, bathing, buying items for the baby, etc.; states how the teen parent and the caregiver will resolve any disagreements about the baby's care, etc. The plan can be changed as the baby's and the teen parent's needs change.

A Parenting Support Plan (PSP) is an agreement between a teen parent living in a SILP and a supportive adult who agrees to help the teen as they take on the added responsibility of being a new parent. For example, an PSP will identify areas in which the teen thinks they may need extra help, like with transportation or child care, and create a plan for ensuring the teen gets this help.

If my baby becomes a foster child, what services do we get?

If the court decides you DID abuse or neglect your baby, the court will decide whether the baby will stay with you under DCF supervision or be placed in a separate foster home or relative's home. Either way, you will receive services to help resolve the problems that led to the abuse and neglect and you will have to follow a case plan. It is very important that you keep in touch with your attorney and attend all of your court hearings. The case plan may include counseling, parenting classes, help with drug and alcohol problems, and planning for your future after you leave foster care. You must prove to the court that you are able to take care of your child and provide a safe home. In most cases, you will only have six months to complete the case plan so it is important to make sure you understand what you need to do and attend all classes and appointments. Once your child is returned to your care, your baby's case will still remain open for 6 months or more to make sure you are able to safely care for your baby.

What happens to my baby if I do not complete the case plan?

If you do not complete your case plan, or you decide you are not ready to be a parent, your baby may be adopted by a relative or foster parent, or placed in a legal guardianship. You should talk to your attorney about these options.

What if I want to become emancipated?

All teens, including teens in foster care, automatically become emancipated at age 18. There is a legal process for emancipation before age 18, but only teens who are truly able to live on their own and support themselves qualify. See Public Counsel's Emancipation brochure for more detailed information.

For most teens – especially teen parents – it is better to stay in the foster care system and get help with housing, child care, completing high school, etc. Between age 16 and 21, you are eligible for the Independent Living Program (ILP), which should help you learn skills for adult living and provides funds for graduation expenses and other benefits.

DCFS has transitional housing programs for teens who are ready to live on their own, but need some support. Most of these programs are for 18-21 year olds, but there are some for 16-18 year olds. Ask your social worker for more information.

When you turn 18, you are legally an adult and can decide where to live. You can also decide whether you want to stay in the foster care system past age 18 under a program called "Extended Foster Care" or "AB 12."

Marriage

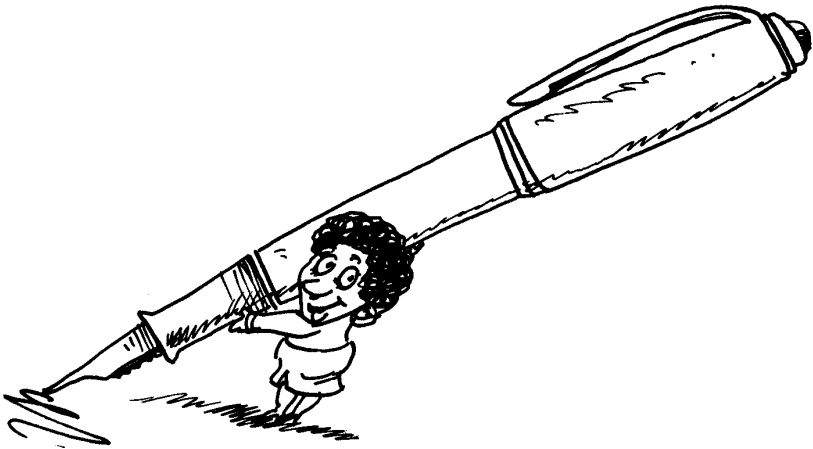
Teens in foster care have the same right to marry as other teens. If you are under 18, you will need the consent of your Dependency Court judge to marry. For more information, read Public Counsel's brochure, *Legal Issues for Teen Families*.



WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

Questions	If your baby is not in foster care	If your baby is in foster care
Can my baby live with me?	If your baby is not a foster child, DCFS must allow you and your baby to live together. If this does not happen, call your lawyer right away.	If your baby becomes a foster child, DCFS will still try to keep you and your baby together, unless you are a danger to the baby.
Who makes decisions about my child's care?	<p>If your baby is not a foster child, you decide how to care for your baby—even if you are still under 18. But all new parents need help and support, especially during the first few months, so talk with your foster parents to help them understand and support your decisions.</p> <p>Note: If your foster home is a “Whole Family Foster Home,” your “Shared Responsibility Plan” (SRP) (see page 6) allows you to think through how you want to parent your child and helps to avoid misunderstandings with your foster parent regarding the care of your baby.</p>	If your baby becomes a foster child, the foster parent makes decisions about the baby's care. Even if your child is in foster care you still have the right to make medical, educational, and developmental decisions about your child unless a judge limits these rights. You should be given the option to attend medical and other appointments for your child.
What about my baby's other parent?	If your baby is not a foster child, DCFS may suggest that you and the baby's other parent agree on a plan for custody and visits. Before you do this, you may want to speak with a family law lawyer. For more information, read Public Counsel's brochure, <i>Legal Issues for Teen Families</i> .	If your baby becomes a foster child, DCFS will notify the baby's other parent, his/her family, and your family to see if they can take care of the baby. DCFS must try to place the baby with relatives if it is safe to do so. If there is no relative who can care for the baby, DCFS will place the baby in a foster home.

Notes:



MORE INFORMATION

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Are you a pregnant or parenting teen in foster care and have questions about:

- Who to talk to about being pregnant?
- What services are there for teen parents?
- Will your baby become a foster child?
- What services will you and your baby receive?
- Can your baby live with you?
- What about your baby's other parent?

This booklet will answer questions you might have about being a pregnant or parenting teen in foster care and your baby.

We are here to help.

**HAVE QUESTIONS FOR
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