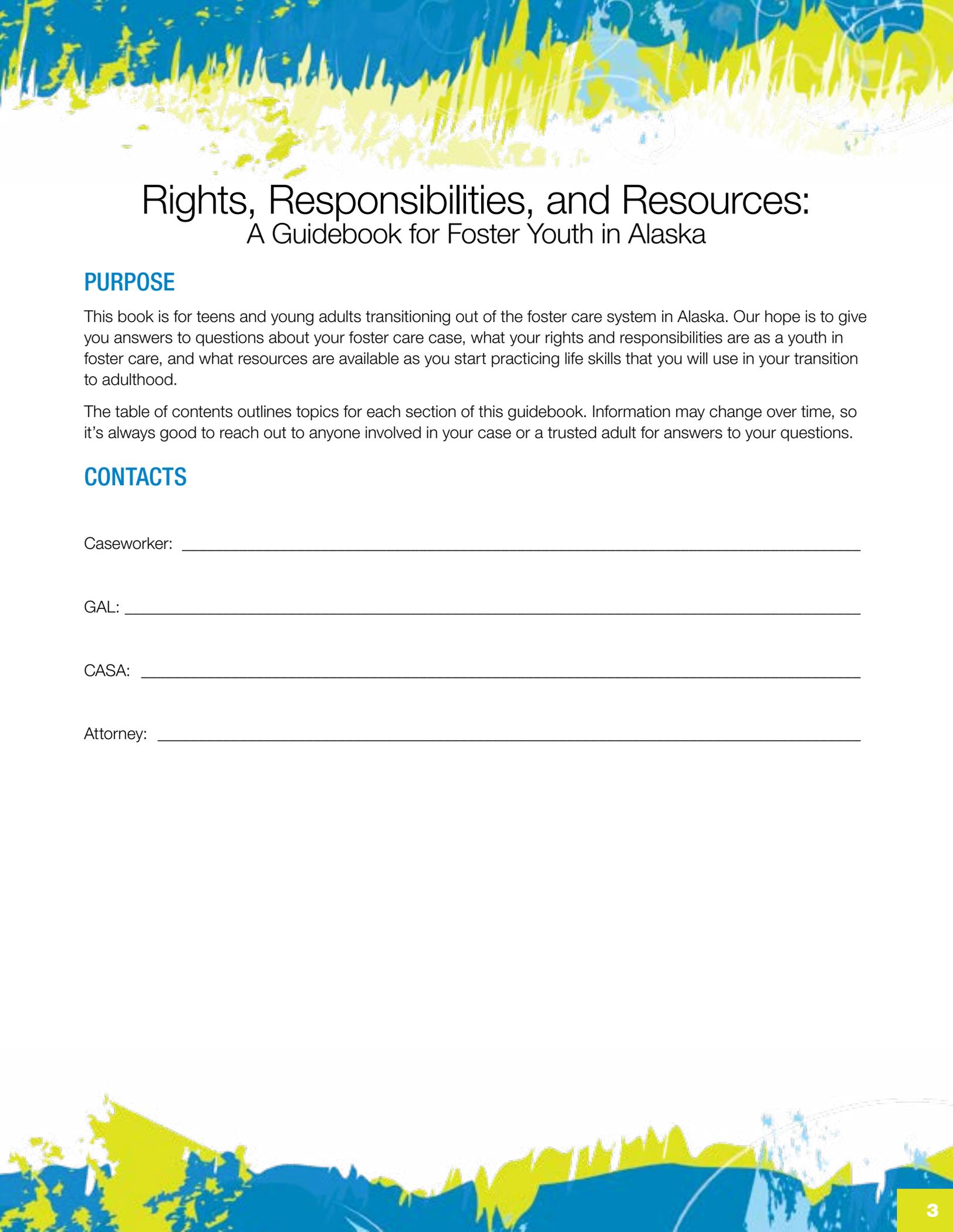




Rights, Responsibilities, and Resources:

A Guidebook for Foster Youth in Alaska





Rights, Responsibilities, and Resources: A Guidebook for Foster Youth in Alaska

PURPOSE

This book is for teens and young adults transitioning out of the foster care system in Alaska. Our hope is to give you answers to questions about your foster care case, what your rights and responsibilities are as a youth in foster care, and what resources are available as you start practicing life skills that you will use in your transition to adulthood.

The table of contents outlines topics for each section of this guidebook. Information may change over time, so it's always good to reach out to anyone involved in your case or a trusted adult for answers to your questions.

CONTACTS

Caseworker: _____

GAL: _____

CASA: _____

Attorney: _____



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INTRODUCTION

Growing up in Foster Care I never knew how to advocate for myself. This was because I never knew my rights, what I could and couldn't ask for and how things worked.

My hope is that you feel empowered to stand up for yourself and advocate for what you want, need and deserve out of life.



Slade Martin
Former Foster Youth



ACRONYMS

Acronym	What it stands for	What it is
AAG or AG	Assistant Attorney General	Lawyer for the Office of Children's Services (OCS)
AHFC	Alaska Housing and Finance Corporation	State agency that helps low income Alaskans get housing
APPLA	Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement	Long term foster care or a fancy name for "aging out"
BIA	Bureau of Indian Affairs	Federal agency that deals with matters related to Alaska Native and American Indian people, including issuing CIB cards
CASA	Court Appointed Special Advocate	Person who works with your GAL to advocate for your best interests
CIB/CDIB	Certificate of Indian Blood or Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood	Card issued by BIA that helps you get some medical and financial help.
CINA	Child in Need of Aid (pronounced "China")	Child or youth in OCS custody due to abuse or neglect
DOB	Date of Birth	The day you were born
DMV	Department of Motor Vehicles	Where you go to get your driver's permit or driver's license
DPA	Division of Public Assistance	State agency that provides Medicaid, food stamps and assistance to low-income families and individuals
ETV	Education Training Voucher	College funding for current and former foster youth ages 16 to 23
FAFSA	Free Application for Federal Student Aid	Online application to receive financial aid for college or vocational training
FFCA	Facing Foster Care in Alaska	Non-Profit led by current and former foster youth ages 15 and older
GAL	Guardian Ad Litem	Person who advocates for your best interests
GED	General Education Development	Like a high school diploma
ICC	Interim Case Conference	Meeting with all the people involved in your case
ICWA	Indian Child Welfare Act	Federal law that applies to Alaska Native and American Indian families
ILS	Independent Living Specialist	Person at OCS who works with older youth
IRS	Internal Revenue Service	Federal agency where you file your tax return
MOP	Meeting of the Parties	Another name for ICC
OCS	Office of Children's Services	State agency where your caseworker and ILS work
PFD	Permanent Fund Dividend	Money received every year from the state
SW	CW — Caseworker	Person at OCS who works with you and your family
TBRA	Tenant-Based Rental Assistance	Housing coupons that can help to cover a portion of your rent for up to 3 years.
TDM	Team Decision Making Meeting	Meeting at OCS to decide if you should move



YOUR LEGAL CASE

PARTICIPATING IN YOUR OCS CASE

It's your right to participate in court hearings and meetings in your case. Remember that your voice is important. The people involved in your case want to hear from you and need to have your input to make the best decisions. If you are uncomfortable being there in person, you can be on the phone or have an attorney or GAL speak for you.

MEETINGS

What are they?

There are lots of meetings that happen during the life of your OCS case. Some will happen at the OCS office or other places. In general, the legal parties to the case (caseworker, Attorney General, GAL, parents and their attorneys, tribal workers, etc.) are invited to the meetings. Some of the common meetings are:

- **Team Decision Meetings (TDMs).** This meeting is scheduled when there is a change or potential change in where you are going to live. Family members, family friends, teachers, foster parents, therapists, and others can also be invited to this meeting as support.
- **Case Planning Meetings.** OCS is supposed to meet with you throughout your OCS case to develop and revise a case plan for you. The GAL should be invited to this meeting. The case plan sets out goals for you while you're in custody and identifies services to help you meet those goals. You can bring up to two adults (friends, family, etc.) to support you and advocate for you.
- **Transition Planning Meetings.** This meeting is for you to meet with your regional Independent Living (IL) specialist and caseworker to identify goals, programs, services, knowledge, skills, and support to help you prepare for your transition from custody. This should happen at least once a year. You can bring up to two adults (friends, family, etc.) to support you and advocate for you.
- **APPLA Team Meeting.** This meeting will be held if you have requested to age-out of custody or to be emancipated. APPLA (Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement) is another way of saying long-term foster care. At the meeting, your caseworker will talk to you about all possible options (such as adoption, guardianship, fit and willing relative, etc.) before you decide on APPLA as your goal. You can bring up to two adults (friends, family, etc.) to support you and advocate for you.
- **Administrative Reviews.** These meetings are required every 6 months for OCS

to track the progress of your case. These meetings are only by phone. You should get a letter in the mail from OCS with the date, time, and access code.

- **Initial Case Conferences (ICC)/Meeting of the Parties (MOP).** The ICC meeting is required by the court and is usually held within a few months of you coming into custody. The purpose is to discuss what is happening with your family and what needs to happen. Additional MOPs can be held to discuss things that may be needed to support you, your parents, or to discuss any issues.
- **Mediation.** If there is a disagreement about something in your case, you might have a mediation to talk about it with a neutral person to see if everyone can agree to a solution.
- **Treatment Team Meetings.** If you are in therapy or in residential treatment, these meetings will be held to talk about your treatment goals and your progress.
- **Best Interest Meeting.** In some communities, if you have moved to an area outside of your school zone, this meeting will determine if you remain in the same school.

COURT HEARINGS

What are they?

Court hearings are an opportunity for you to be heard. You and the people involved in your case update the judge about what is happening in your case. This is an opportunity for you to express what you want or need to the judge. There are a lot of different types of hearings and the judge will need to make decisions at each one.

Why should I go?

Important decisions are being made about your life. This case is about you. Your voice and opinions matter.

For additional information download: *What am I doing here?* ffcalaska.org/uploads/4/4/8/2/44826273/courtbook.pdf. You can also talk to your attorney or GAL. A description of each hearing is included in the “*What am I doing Here?*” handbook and you can get a copy from your attorney, GAL or send a request via email to info@ffcalaska.org.





ROLES AND DEFINITIONS

Who are the people involved with my case?

Caseworker A caseworker, sometimes called a Social Worker or Protective Service Specialist is responsible for determining whether you can safely remain in your home or be returned to your home; finding an appropriate place for you to live if you can't be at home; arranging visitation between you and your family; working with your parents to address the problems in their home; making sure you are receiving an education.

Your caseworker should give you their work phone number and their email address for you to use if you have a question or if you need something. If you need this information, you can get contact information for your local OCS office dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs or call 907-269-4000 and they can help connect you to your worker. Your caseworker should be visiting you at least once a month to make sure you are doing ok and if you need anything or have concerns.

Assistant Attorney General (AAG) The Assistant Attorney General is OCS' attorney. They advise the caseworker about the law. They are also in charge of presenting and proving OCS' case in court. They may also attend important meetings about you with the caseworker.

Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) A Guardian Ad Litem (GAL) is assigned to represent and advocate for your best interests, both in and outside of court. Every youth in OCS custody has a GAL. The GAL's job includes explaining the court proceedings and your rights to you and encouraging you to participate in your court case; gathering information and reading important records about you; making sure that OCS is providing appropriate services to you and your family; and making sure the judge knows what you want, in addition to what they think is best for you. Your GAL should have regular contact with you particularly before court to make sure you understand what is happening in court and to understand if you have any concerns that the judge should be aware of.

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA or CASA Volunteer) The CASA's job description is the same as a GAL's. If assigned to your case, they will be able to spend lots of time with you because you and your siblings are the only youth on their caseload. Your GAL is their supervisor.

Child/Youth Attorney There are several reasons a youth might have an attorney. For example if what you want is different from what the GAL believes is best for you, the guardian ad litem or any other person involved in your case may ask the court to appoint an attorney who will advocate for what YOU want. You can request an attorney for yourself or the judge can appoint one if they think you need one. There are some circumstances where the court has to get you an attorney. You will get an attorney if any of the following circumstances apply to you.

- You do not consent to going to a residential facility.
- You refuse psychotropic medications.
- You don't want your therapy records shared.
- You are pregnant or parenting while in foster care.
- You disagree with adults on your case.

If you have an attorney, their job is to advocate for what YOU WANT. They will advise you about the law and your options. They will keep everything you say confidential, unless you give them permission for the information to be released. They will present your case in court for you. Your attorney should have regular contact with you particularly before court to make sure you understand what is happening in court and to understand if you have any concerns that the judge should be aware of.

Indian Child Welfare Act Worker (ICWA Worker) If you are Alaska Native or American Indian, your Tribe has a right to participate in your court case. The ICWA worker is a representative of the Tribe. Their job is to let the people in your case know what your Tribe would like to see happen for you and your family. They will help make sure that you are connected to your tribal family and culture.

If you want to know if there is an ICWA worker on your case, you can ask your caseworker or your attorney for their name and contact information. You can also call your Tribe and ask to talk to their ICWA worker. Find your Tribe and ICWA workers contact information: govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-04-30/pdf/2020-09155.pdf.

Parent Attorney Your parents have the right to an attorney. Each parent or guardian will usually have a separate attorney. Their attorney will provide them with advice about their legal rights and options. They advocate for parents and act as their spokesperson in meetings and in court.

Judge The judge's job is to make decisions about you and your family, including deciding whether you are a Child in Need of Aid; deciding whether you can be safely reunified with your parents; settling disagreements about where you live if you're not living with a parent; deciding whether appropriate services are being offered to you and your family; and deciding when you should no longer be in state custody.

NOTE: If your attorney, GAL, or caseworker are a state employee you can find their contact information here: alaska.gov/whitepages.

COMPLAINT/GRIEVANCE PROCESS

What is it?

If you're having an issue with someone related to your case (caseworker, GAL, attorney, CASA, etc.), there is a complaint process. Before you start the process, try to resolve it by reaching out to the person directly. Here are a few steps you can take:

- write a text, email, or letter
- leave a detailed voicemail messages to include your name and contact





information (if you leave several messages and don't hear back, follow up with a text or email.)

- explain to the person exactly what the issue is
- If the issue is you feel unsafe, skip the steps above and go to a trusted adult to report the issue.

What if I have an issue with my caseworker?

If you can't resolve it with the caseworker directly, talk to your attorney if you have one. If you do not, you can talk to your GAL your CASA, or your ICWA worker if you have one. You can also contact your caseworker's supervisor to try to come to a resolution.

What if I have an issue with my GAL or CASA?

If you can't resolve it with the GAL or CASA directly, talk to your attorney if you have one. If you do not have an attorney, call 907-334-2678 Anchorage, 907-451-5933 Northern, 907-465-4173 Southeast, 907-707-1740 Matsu-Valley, 907-269-3500 for all other areas; ask to speak to the GAL supervisor. You can also talk to your caseworker to see if they can help resolve the issue.

What if I have an issue with my attorney?

If you can't resolve it with your attorney directly, talk to your GAL or caseworker. If they cannot help you resolve the issue, they can give you possible next steps.

What if I have an issue with someone else involved with my case (such as caregiver, therapist, etc.)?

If you can't resolve it with the person directly, talk to your attorney, ICWA Worker, GAL, CASA or caseworker.

What if none of those steps work?

You can contact the Ombudsman's Office and make a complaint. It is their job to investigate complaints against state agencies. Their contact information is below.

Office of the Ombudsman

Email: ombudsman@akleg.gov (be sure to include your name & phone number)
Address: 333 W. Fourth Ave., Ste. 305, Anchorage, AK 99501
Phone: 269-5290 (Anchorage); 800-478-2624 (outside of Anchorage)
There is also an office in Juneau at the Court Plaza Building (Spam Can), 240 Main St., Suite 202.

If the person you are complaining about is an attorney, you can contact the Alaska Bar Association and file a "bar" complaint. Their contact information is below:

Alaska Bar Association
Phone: 907-272-7469
Email: info@alaskabar.org

Info on filing a bar complaint can be found here: alaskabar.org/wp-content/uploads/UPDATEDGrievance-2.pdf



IT'S MY LIFE (RELIGION, SIBLINGS, ACTIVITIES/TRAVEL, AND STAY IN PLACEMENT/RUNAWAY STATUS)

RELIGIOUS PREFERENCES

What is it?

You, your parents, foster parents, and caregiver each have the right to your own religious beliefs.

How do I do it?

If you are not allowed to participate in your own religious activities or you are being told you have to participate in someone else's religious activities you can contact your OCS caseworker, GAL, CASA, ICWA Worker, or attorney to try to resolve the situation. You can also tell the judge about it during a hearing.

SIBLING CONTACT

What is it?

Federal law says if you are not placed with your siblings, OCS has to provide "frequent" contact so that you can see each other as long as it is not harmful to any of you. Alaska state law says that OCS should allow frequent, regular, and reasonable contact between the child, the parent or guardian, and family members (such as siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.). OCS policy says you also have the right to not see your siblings or family members if that's what you want.

How do I get it?

You can talk to your foster parents, caregiver, OCS caseworker, Independent Living Specialist, GAL, CASA, ICWA Worker, attorney, or trusted adult. Again, you can also tell the judge if you have concerns about sibling contact.

PERMISSION FOR ACTIVITIES, MEDICAL/DENTAL, AND TRAVEL

What is it?

You may need permission for extracurricular activities medical care and travel.

How do I get it?

Your foster parent can, without permission from your caseworker, make a decision to allow you to do extracurricular activities such as playing sports, clubs, field trips, dances, and sleepovers. They can sign permission slips for any of those things if a permission slip is needed. They can also take you to a dentist, eye doctor, and medical doctor. If you already have a dentist, eye doctor, or medical doctor that you like going to see, let your foster parent know and they will try to keep you with the





same provider. Your foster parent can agree to any in-state trips that are less than 3 days. OCS must give permission for any out-of-state/country trips or for any in-state trips that are more than 3 days.

STAY IN PLACEMENT ORDER/RUNAWAY STATUS

What is it?

You will be considered on “runaway status” if you do not return to your foster home when you are expected to. Your foster parent has to notify your caseworker if you do not return to the home. Your caseworker will try to find you to figure out what is going on and to return you to your foster home or another identified safe place. If you are picked up by a police officer, you will be taken to the OCS office or to another safe place (the caseworker decides what is considered safe).

If you keep running away, your caseworker, GAL, or CASA may ask the judge in your case to issue a “Stay in Placement Order.” If the judge signs it, it says that you will stay in your foster home and that if you don’t, you will be picked up by the police and can be taken to “juvie” for up to 24-hours then released.

LEAVING FOSTER CARE

There are several ways that your OCS case could be dismissed. You could be reunified with your parents. You could be adopted or enter into a guardianship. You could be released on your own after you turn 18 and have a plan for how you will take care of yourself. No matter how you exit custody, the judge in your case has to sign an order releasing you from custody before your case can be closed.

There are a few things you need to know.

- OCS should not release you from custody without telling you ahead of time.
- You have the right to receive notice 30 days prior to leaving care.

REUNIFICATION

Reunification is when you are returned to your family and your OCS case is dismissed. You may be with your family for some time before the case is dismissed to make sure things are going okay.

ADOPTION

Someone other than your birth parents becoming your legal parents. Your OCS case is closed when the adoption is final.

Adult Adoption

It is possible in the State of Alaska to be adopted at any age, even after you're out of state custody. Your parents do not have to agree to it once you turn 18. You can ask your caseworker, IL specialist, or GAL/CASA if you would like more information.

GUARDIANSHIP

Someone other than your birth parents who are given most of the rights and responsibilities that a parent would have. Your OCS case is closed when the guardianship is final. A guardianship ends at age 18.

What's the difference between guardianship and adoption? There are many important differences and you should talk to your attorney and/or GAL or CASA before you decide which one is best for you.

PERMANENT PLACEMENT WITH A FIT AND WILLING RELATIVE

You can also be placed permanently with a relative and your OCS case may or may not be closed until you reach adulthood.

ANOTHER PLANNED PERMANENT LIVING ARRANGEMENT (APPLA)

This is sometimes referred to as aging out, although it is also called another planned





permanent living arrangement. APPLA is only available to youth ages 16 and older, who agree, and have worked with OCS to determine if another option for leaving care is a better fit. If your plan is APPLA, other goals may be explored during your time in care. You are eligible to remain in care until 21, not to be confused with emancipation.

ADULT GUARDIANSHIP/CONSERVATORSHIP

If you will need help making life decisions or managing your money, a guardian or conservator may be appointed by the court. It is a separate court case and an attorney will be appointed to represent you. Your GAL, CASA, attorney, or ICWA Worker could explain these to you more completely and the differences between guardianships and conservatorships.

EMANCIPATION

Emancipation is a legal process where you take on all the responsibilities and freedoms of being an adult after you turn 18. In Alaska, to become emancipated you have to:

- Be a resident of Alaska.
- Be 16 or older.
- Be living apart from your parent or guardian.
- Prove you are able to take care of and provide for yourself.
- Give your consent to emancipation.
- Have consent from your parent or guardian (consent can be waived by the court under certain circumstances)

You will have to file a petition with the court to become emancipated. More information is available on the Alaska Court System's website: courts.alaska.gov.



EXTENDING OR RE-ENTERING FOSTER CARE

STAYING IN CARE UNTIL 21

What is it?

The judge can, without your permission, keep you in custody past the age of 18 up to your 19th birthday. You decide whether you want to stay in custody past that. You can exit custody at any time past your 19th birthday until you turn 21. There are several perks to staying in custody longer:

- You can stay in a foster home and not have to pay for your own housing, food, utilities, etc.
- Your team (caseworker, GAL, CASA, attorney) will still be there for you until you decide you're ready to exit care.
- You can live in college housing and still be in state custody.

How do I do it?

Be sure to talk to your caseworker, GAL, CASA, ICWA Worker, or your attorney (if you have one) to discuss your thoughts and questions about staying in custody past your 19th birthday.

RE-ENTERING FOSTER CARE

What is it?

Sometimes, life doesn't work out quite the way you planned. And that's okay. If you have been released from OCS custody and things aren't going like you planned, you can ask to go back into foster care. It's called a "resumption of custody" and is allowed under state law if:

- You agree to it.
- You were in foster care when you were released to your own custody;
 - You were 18 and released to your own custody; or
 - If you were at least 16 and emancipated or if you were released to the custody of a parent because you were refusing anything else.
- You are in need of foster care to avoid personal harm, because of a disability or homelessness, or you are completing an educational program (GED, college, job training program, etc.).
- Often re-entry means entering into an agreement with OCS regarding placement and/or school/job training.





How do I do it?

Contact your Regional Independent Living Specialist or anyone who was formerly involved with your case. They will help you determine if you are eligible to re-enter and assist you in completing the paperwork. You can also call your GAL, CASA, attorney, or ICWA Worker to explain the problem if you struggle to re-enter custody after talking to OCS.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR 18-21 YEAR OLD YOUTH IN CARE

Once you turn 18, you are legally an adult. This chart will tell you the rights you have and what, if any, limits are placed on those while you're in care. Even if you have a right, you should talk to a trusted adult about some of these big life decisions.

Rights	Notes/Considerations
Voting	No limitations if you're in OCS care. Register to vote when you're 18. Information can be found here: elections.alaska.gov
Driver's License/Permits	No limitations if you're in OCS care. Information can be found here: doa.alaska.gov/dmv/akol
Piercings/Tattoos	No limitations if you're in OCS care. Use your best judgment and a licensed professional.
Loans/Credit Cards	No limitations if you're in OCS care. Please review Let's Talk About Money section.
Tobacco	Cannot purchase until age 21. It is your responsibility to abide by any rules in the home.
Marijuana/Alcohol	Cannot purchase until age 21. It is your responsibility to abide by any rules in the home.
Jury Duty	No limitations if you are in OCS care. It is your responsibility to follow any instructions if you receive a jury summons.
Joining Military	No limitations if you're in OCS care. Cannot remain in OCS care upon enlistment.
Firearms	You can purchase a rifle or shotgun at 18. You must be 21 to purchase a handgun. It is your responsibility to abide by any rules in the home. Foster homes are required to lock any firearms in the home.
Marriage	No limitations if you're in OCS care. You cannot remain in OCS care once you are married.
Filing Taxes	No limitations if you're in OCS care. You must file if you worked, received PFD funds or Native corporation dividends, or other sources of income. Please review Let's Talk About Money section.
Entering into a Contract	No limitations if you're in OCS care. A contract is any document you sign that requires you to do something.
Rental/Lease Agreements	No limitations if you're in OCS care. Discuss this with your OCS caseworker because resources may be available. You may not be able to remain in OCS care if you are in your own housing.
Medical Decisions Including Psychotropic Medication (mental health - aka "meds")	No limitations if you're in OCS care. You can consent to your own medical care including meds when you turn 18.



Rights	Notes/Considerations
Designating Medical Decision Maker	No limitations if you're in OCS care. You can designate someone to make medical decisions for you in the event you are unable to make them for yourself.
Medical and Mental Health Records	No limitations if you're in OCS care. You have the right to access and get copies of your medical and mental health records.
Staying in OCS Custody	OCS can keep you in custody until 19 without your permission. You can choose to remain in custody until 21. Please see Extending or Re-Entering Foster Care section.
Re-entering OCS Custody	You may be eligible to re-enter foster care after 18. Please see Extending or Re-Entering Foster Care section.
Placement Decisions	OCS has the right/responsibility to make this decision for youth in custody. Your input and preference will be considered. If you do not agree with the placement, talk to your attorney, GAL/CASA, or ICWA worker.
Education Decisions	No limitations if you're in OCS care. You have the right to consent (or not) for special education services outlined in your IEP if you have one.
Education Records	No limitations if you're in OCS care. You have the right to request a copy of your education records.
Passport	No limitations if you're in OCS care. travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/passports/how-apply/forms.html
Out of State Travel	With OCS approval in advance.
Study Abroad	With OCS approval in advance, a passport, and a plan for housing and living expenses.
Suing or Being Sued (lawsuit)	No limitations if you're in OCS care. Once you are 18, you can sue or be sued.

Rights	Notes/Considerations
Criminal Issues	Once you turn 18, if you are charged with a crime you get charged as an adult regardless of OCS custody?
Medicaid Eligibility	OCS policy says that OCS will file for youth over 18 and eligibility is based on income. See section on Medicaid.
Applying for Permanent Fund Dividend	If you are in OCS custody, OCS will apply for your PFD regardless of age. If you are out of custody and 18 years or older, you must file for your own PFD
Receiving PFD	Your PFD is held in trust until you are no longer in custody. A court order can release some of the funds to you earlier than that, if you want to do that speak to your GAL or your attorney. In some situations a conservator may be set up to manage your money after you are released from custody.
Receiving Native Corporation Dividends	At age 18, the Native Corporation releases funds held in trust to you whether or not you are in state custody. In some situations, a conservator may be set up to manage your money after you turn 18.



GETTING YOUR IMPORTANT DOCUMENTS

What is it?

When you exit foster care, you get to take your important documents with you. OCS is required to provide the following important documents:

- Birth Certificate
- Social Security Card
- Driver's License/Identification card
- Health Insurance Information
- Medical Record
- Passport
- Certificate of Degree of Indian or Alaska Native Blood (if applicable)
- Legal and Placement History (only if you're 18+)

The documents below may also be available. Ask your caseworker if you would like a copy.

- Tribal Enrollment Documentation
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Card
- Shareholder Documentation
- If a parent is deceased, their Death Certificate
- High School Diploma or GED
- Medicaid or other health insurance eligibility documentation
- Automobile Insurance
- List of known relatives including their addresses and telephone numbers
- Release of Custody Order
- Resume
- Letters of Recommendation

How do I get it?

Most of these documents cost money to get and can be difficult to get on your own. You will want to make sure you talk to your caseworker or your IL specialist about gathering these documents for when you leave care. Think about buying for yourself or asking IL to purchase you a small, fireproof safe to store these crucial documents.

You should never carry your birth certificate or social security card around with you in your wallet or purse. They need to be stored someplace safe to protect your identity.

HOW TO GET A COPY OF YOUR OCS FILE

What is it?

OCS keeps ongoing records throughout your case. Depending on how long you were in custody, your file could be very large. Some of the documents in the file are notes from the assigned caseworker, records from other agencies, letters, case plans and related documents, financial information, legal documents, and case history information.

Why would I want it?

- Learn your life story
- Reconnect with foster parents, relatives, teachers, etc.
- Understand your parents' issues
- To help work through past traumas

Why wouldn't I want it?

- It could be triggering
- Disappointing - it may not reflect what you remember or tell your full story
- Hard to understand and not organized
- It's a lot of paper
- Keeping information confidential can be difficult

How do I get it?

You have a legal right to access your OCS case file (or part of it - some information has to be withheld for legal reasons). How to get it will depend on whether you're in custody or out of custody.

- If you're in custody and if you have an attorney, your attorney periodically receives copies of the OCS file and can provide you with a copy. If you do not have an attorney, your GAL may be able to give you a copy of your file. If they are unable to give you a copy, you may want to ask for an attorney.
- State law says if you're out of custody, you will need to file a motion with the court to order OCS to give you a copy. You can find a blank motion form here: public.courts.alaska.gov/web/forms/docs/civ-805.pdf to file with the court where you were in custody. You may only get copies of the documents that are about you. Anything about your parents and siblings may not be given to you without their consent.
- If you want to get your file, get it before you get out of custody.





What do I do when I get the file?

Going through all of this information may be difficult. It may be helpful to go through the case file with your attorney, GAL, CASA, ICWA Worker, therapist, or another trusted adult. They may be able to answer questions and help you process what you're reading. Be sure to not leave papers or disks around as someone else may look at them. Protect this information. It is best not to leave it in your car. Think carefully about who you share this personal information with.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

Becoming an adult is hard and making sure you have what you need to be successful as you get closer to being an adult takes some work. However, there is someone to help you. All foster youth who are 16-21 years old, or former foster youth who were in care on or after their 16th birthday, are eligible to receive Independent Living (IL) services including life skills training. An IL specialist in your area will meet with you after you turn 16 to find out where you're excelling and where you may need a little help. The IL program has free classes to make sure you know how to do things like setting a budget, how to open a checking and/or saving account, planning meals, filling out a job application, writing a resume, and other things that you may need to know. Talk to your IL specialist to see if you may be eligible to get a check or gift card for engaging in IL services.

The Office of Children's Services (OCS) is required by Federal law, specifically the Foster Care Independence Act, to provide you these services. All youth 16 and older transitioning out of foster care, no matter where they live, should get a little help with things like education, getting a job, managing your money, housing, social support, and a connection to at least one caring adult. If you do not know who your IL specialist is, ask your caseworker, GAL, CASA, attorney or call the main number for OCS in your area.

MENTORING PROGRAMS

SYNC PROGRAM

What is it?

The Sync program is sponsored by Big Brothers Big Sisters of Alaska and helps foster youth make the transition to independence through a mentor program. The program matches youth with an adult role model in the community who helps you develop your independence through opportunities to learn career-building skills, try new things, and have a friend that can provide advice and guidance.

How do I get involved?

If you are interested, talk to your caseworker, your IL specialist, your GAL, CASA, or attorney.

YOUNG LIVES/YOUNG LIFE

YoungLife is a mentoring program for youth in middle through high school or college. YoungLives is a support for Pregnant and Parenting Teens.





How do I get involved?

If you are interested, talk to your caseworker, your IL specialist, your GAL, CASA, or attorney.

Visit younglife.org to learn about opportunities in your community.

CHOSEN

What is it?

Chosen is an initiative designed to pair at-risk youth in Alaska with trained mentors. Mentors connect with their mentees on a regular basis, and are an ongoing and consistent force for good in their life.

If you are interested, talk to your caseworker, your IL specialist, your GAL, CASA, or attorney. You can also check them out online at chosenalaska.org

CHOOSING OUR ROOTS

What is it?

Choosing Our Roots (COR) is a non profit dedicated to addressing homelessness among LGBTQ+ Youth.

Choosing Our Roots provides participants with more than just shelter: COR assists queer youth and young adults, ages 13 to 24, by building supportive, long-term relationships with volunteer Host Home families and community members.

In addition to providing safe homes and bringing together new families, COR coordinates with community partners to provide wrap-around services and build a network of support for its participants. You can check them out online at choosingourroots.org/#about.

HOUSING ASSISTANCE, VOUCHERS, LEASES, AND RESOURCES

HOUSING ASSISTANCE (INDEPENDENT LIVING FUNDS)

What is it?

As you prepare for adulthood, you may start thinking about living on your own. This could be in your own apartment, with roommates, or in a transitional living program.

How do I get it?

If you were in foster care at 16 years old or later, you may be eligible for limited assistance to help with a security deposit and first month's rent. You should contact your Regional Independent Living Specialist to determine if you qualify for this funding.

HOUSING VOUCHERS

What is it?

If you were in foster care at age 16 years old or later, you may be eligible for one of two different types of housing vouchers depending on availability and the community where you live. You should contact your regional Independent Living Specialist to determine if you qualify and if there are vouchers available in your community. You have to leave OCS custody to access a housing voucher and live in your own apartment.

Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) are housing coupons that can help to cover a portion of your rent for up to 3 years. You can have to access TBRA before age 21 if you have a source of income as you will be expected to pay 30% of your overall income. Your portion of the rent may be adjusted if the amount of your overall income changes. Income can include money from a job, financial aid, social security, dividends, and any source of funding you may be receiving. Any criminal issues can disqualify you from the program.

Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) are housing coupons that can help to cover a portion of your rent for up to 3 years. You have to access FYI before age 23, and meet income requirements. You will be expected to pay 30% of your overall income. Your portion of the rent may be adjusted if the amount of your overall income changes. Income can include money from a job, financial aid, social security, dividends, and any source of funding you may be receiving.





How do I get it?

Contact your Regional Independent Living Specialist to determine if you qualify, complete an application and submit it to the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation, attend an orientation, and follow all the guidelines outlined by the voucher.

LEASES

What is it?

A lease is an agreement you sign when planning to rent an apartment or home. It outlines how much you will pay for rent, utilities, security deposit, and any rules required to live on the property. A lease is a legal document. Once you sign you are responsible for anything described in the document both financially and caring for the property where you live. You must be 18 years old or older to sign a lease. A lease can have varying time frames from 6 months, 1 year, or month to month. If you break the terms of the lease, or damage the property you may be responsible for the cost of rent or damage.

Landlords have responsibilities too and it's important to communicate with your landlord or property manager if any problems arise.

There's a book available to learn more about the responsibilities of you and your landlord: law.alaska.gov/pdf/consumer/LandlordTenant_web.pdf

How do I get it?

Before you sign a lease talk to your regional Independent Living Specialist or someone who is knowledgeable about lease agreements.

ADDITIONAL HOUSING OPTIONS AND RESOURCES

What is it?

Housing options and resources may vary depending on the community where you live.

Below are some examples of what may be available.

- **Host Homes:** Less formal than traditional foster homes, in the Host Home Project you actively participate in the decision process for which host family is best for you. Allowing you more choice in your living situation means a great deal. You may be eligible for a host home whether you are in or out of OCS custody. Host Homes are limited to the number of available homes.
- **Permanent Supportive Housing:** This program is for youth who have experienced homelessness and are struggling with severe mental health and substance abuse issues. On-site case management support is provided.

- **Rapid Re-Housing for Young Adults:** You must be ages 18-24 to access the Rapid Re-Housing program. This approach quickly houses you in actual home settings instead of in shelters. It helps you build support networks and resiliency and includes temporary rental assistance as needed. Rental assistance and other supportive services may be offered over a limited period of time as you gain stability.
- **Permanency Navigator Team:** A Permanency Navigator may assist you as you move through housing programs and systems with the consistency you need from a supportive adult. The assistance the Permanency Navigator provides depends on your needs. They can help you access behavioral health, substance abuse or disability services, find the right place to live, participate in meetings with OCS, develop a permanency plan, or provide aftercare to encourage success.

How do I get it?

Contact your Regional Independent Living Specialist.





DRIVER'S LICENSE, PERMITS, AND INSURANCE

What is it?

An instructional permit (also known as learner's permit) allows you to drive with another licensed driver over the age of 21 in the car with you. The permit will allow you to practice driving so that you can pass your driver's road test for your driver's license.

A provisional driver's license lets you drive on your own but with some rules attached: You cannot have passengers under the age of 21 in your car unless they are your biological siblings. You also cannot drive between the hours of 1:00 a.m. and 5:00 a.m. You can get your minor's driver's license after you've had the provisional license for 6 months without any tickets. If you apply for your driver's license after you turn 18, you will be given a license without any provisions.

How do I get it?

If you're 18-21 and still in care, please see the section on Rights and Responsibilities of 18-21 Year Olds as the process will be different.

If you're under 18, with the approval of OCS and your parents (unless your parents' rights have been terminated), you can get your permit when you turn 14 and your driver's license when you turn 16. Your foster parent cannot sign your application for either your permit or your driver's license.

To get either your permit or license, you (or your parent or OCS caseworker) will need to bring the following to the Division of Motor Vehicles (DMV):

- a court order (if you are under 18, and your parent's rights are terminated)
- social security number
- proof of your residence address (any mail received at your current address)
- proof of your date of birth (such as birth certificate, court order that has your full name, DOB, and court seal, military ID, passport)
- money to pay for the license or permit (prices can be found on the DMV website at doa.alaska.gov/dmv).

You will need to pass a written test at the DMV in order to get your permit. The driver's manual is found online at doa.alaska.gov/dmv/dlmanual/dlman.pdf. It is strongly recommended that you study the manual before you take the test. You can take sample tests online at online.dmv.alaska.gov/knowledgegetest.



Once you have your permit for at least 6 months, are 16 years old, and have had at least 40 hours of practice driving, you can apply for and obtain a provisional driver's license. To get it, you need to:

- pass an alcohol and drug awareness knowledge test at the DMV.
- take a road skills test. You will be driving with a DMV employee who will be grading you as you drive.
- schedule the road test online at online.dmv.alaska.gov/starii/index.aspx.

To drive with your license, you must buy car insurance. Car insurance is a contract between you and the insurance company that helps cover costs if you are in an accident your car is stolen, broken into, or damaged. You can get an insurance policy in your name or in the name of an adult who is willing to take financial and legal responsibility.





SOCIAL MEDIA AND TEXTING (SEXTING, ETC.) LAW, SAFETY ISSUES, PRIVACY

SOCIAL MEDIA

What is it?

Social Media are interactive websites and apps that allow you to connect to people and share information through texting, pictures, videos, and other graphics, and live chatting. You have a reasonable expectation of privacy. Be aware that you may be expected to follow rules of the home when it comes to social media activities.

How Do I Stay Safe on Social Media?

- **Privacy and security settings:** Use them to control who sees what you post and manage your online experience in a positive way.
- **Protect your reputation:** What you post online stays online forever. Remember just because you deleted something does not mean someone else hasn't taken a screenshot and reposted your post. Think twice before posting pictures you wouldn't want your parents or future employers to see.
- **Be cautious:** The more information you post, the easier it may be for a hacker or someone else to use that information to steal your identity, access your data, or commit other crimes such as stalking.
- **Photo/video sharing:** The pictures you post online can remain in cyberspace forever, even if you post on an app that causes a picture to disappear later as a friend may screenshot it and repost it. If you are a minor, and post or receive inappropriate photos, you can get in trouble for child pornography.
- **Know and manage your friends:** Social networks can be used for a variety of purposes. Some of the fun is creating a large pool of friends from many aspects of your life. That doesn't mean all friends are created equal.
- **Meeting People In Real Life:** Be extremely cautious meeting with people in real life that you have met online.

TEXTING

What is it?

Text messaging or "texting" is a way to send messages through a cell phone or apps.



How do I Stay Safe while Texting?

- Sexting: Never send nude photos or videos, even if you trust someone. They can be shared with others, and if you are under the age of 18, this could mean criminal troubles for you.
- Limit personal information online (name, age, birth date, address, telephone number, or school name).
- Be cautious when you post your plans and activities as this can be used to find your location.
- Be very cautious about meeting someone you met online in person, without first telling a trusted adult or friend.
- Treat others how you want to be treated.

SEXTING

What is it?

Sexting means sharing sexy images or messages. Naked photos can easily be copied and shared on the internet. Once a picture or text is on the internet, it is impossible to erase. Currently, Alaskan law does not protect you if your naked picture ends up on the internet. Be careful what you share and with whom you share it.

What are the consequences of Sexting?

Sexting can also have serious legal consequences. The taking and sharing of sexual photos or videos of a person under age 18 is called child pornography. Having these photos or videos on your laptop, tablet, cell phone, iPod, or any other device can result in very serious charges and time in jail. You could also end up listed on a sex offender registry. Even if you are under 18, if you take or pass along a photo of another teen, you can still be charged with a crime.





DATING AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

DATING

What is it?

You have the right to be who you are and date who you want. A healthy relationship is one where you are valued, safe, and respected. To some extent, dating is a skill that's learned over time. It requires you to have a well-rounded understanding of who you are and what you're looking for in another person. It's important for you to be able to practice these skills to create and know the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships.

Things to consider

- Know the expectations of your caregiver or guardian.
- Be honest about who you are dating.
- Be safe by telling a trusted adult or friend where you are going, who you are going with, and when you plan to be back.
- There are resources available for information about your rights in a relationship and where to turn when there's a problem. See alaskabar.org/youth/sex-drugs-and-rock-n-roll/sex/sexual-relationships/same-sex-relationships.

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

What is it?

Reproductive health refers to your physical health as it relates to sex, birth control, pregnancy, abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases.

How do I access it?

You don't need permission from any adult to see a medical provider to talk about your reproductive health, get testing for sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy tests or options, get birth control, or get an abortion.

If you are comfortable, you can talk to your parents, foster parents, caregiver, Regional Independent Living Specialist, caseworker, GAL, CASA, attorney or trusted adult about your reproductive health needs.

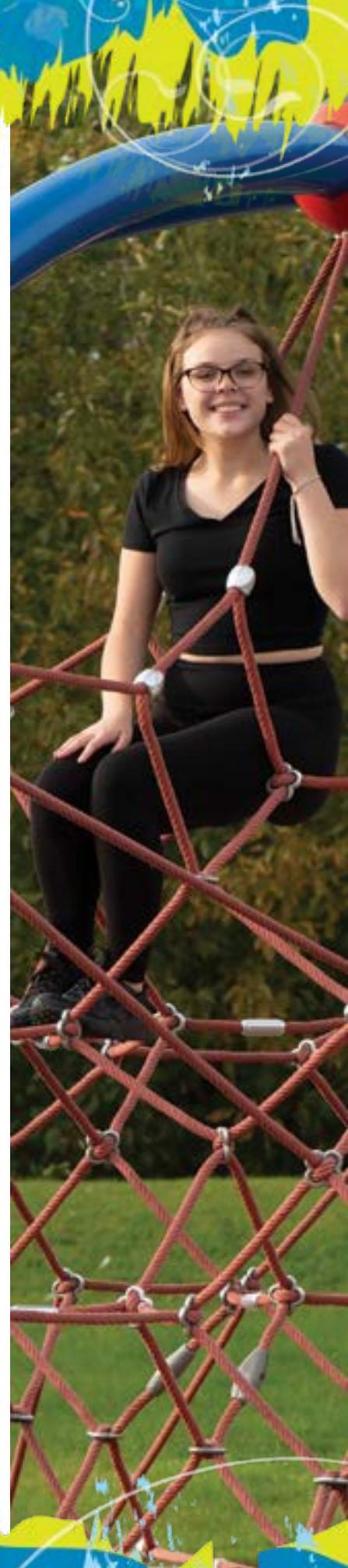
AGE OF CONSENT

What is it?

In the State of Alaska, you must be 16 years old before you can give your consent/ approval to have sex. “Age of consent” means the minimum age a person must be before the law considers that person old enough to agree to have sex. In part, this depends on the age of the other person. Having sex with someone under the age of consent is a very serious crime. If you are sexually active, be very sure about the age of the other person before having sex.

Two people who are both 16 or older can agree to have sex with each other. When a person involved in sex is under the age of 16, Alaska law looks at the difference in ages to decide whether that person is legally able to agree to sex.

- No one over 16 can have sex with someone who is 13 or younger.
- No minor can have sex with someone who is 4 or more years older than they are.
- The law also makes it a crime for a person in a position of authority over a younger person (such as a teacher, minister, employer, caseworker, etc.) to have sex with the younger person.





PREGNANT AND/OR PARENTING WHILE IN FOSTER CARE (MOMS AND DADS)

WHAT DO I DO IF I'M PREGNANT AND IN FOSTER CARE?

Talk to a trusted adult about your options, which include keeping your baby, placing your baby for adoption or guardianship, or seeking an abortion. Do not wait to see a doctor - some of your health care options are time limited.

IF YOU DECIDE TO KEEP YOUR CHILD

Even if you are in foster care, you will be your baby's legal guardian. OCS will find a placement where you can live with your baby. There are also programs for pregnant or parenting teens.

ADOPTION OR GUARDIANSHIP

You may decide for someone else to raise your baby. You can plan for your child to be adopted or for someone else to be their legal guardian. This is a legal process and you can go through an adoption agency or talk to an attorney. If you don't know where to start, talk to a trusted adult. You and the baby's father will be involved in this process. Your Tribe may also be involved in an adoption or guardianship.

SAFE SURRENDER

Alaska has a law that says you can leave your baby, up to 21 days old, with a staff member at any hospital, fire station, or any emergency medical service provider in Alaska. You do not have to identify yourself but you may be asked for your name, the child's name, and medical history. You will not be criminally prosecuted for doing a safe surrender.

ABORTION

If you decide you want to have an abortion, you'll need to locate a place to have one. You do not need to tell your parents or anyone involved in your OCS case, unless you want to. You do not need the permission of your parents or anyone involved in your OCS case to get an abortion. If you want more information, see health.alaska.gov/dph/wcfh/Pages/informedconsent/abortion.



WHAT IF I GET SOMEONE PREGNANT WHILE I'M STILL IN FOSTER CARE?

Even if you are in foster care, you are your baby's legal guardian. You have all the legal rights and responsibilities of being a father. You are responsible for supporting your child. Being a new parent is a big life change. You can always talk to your caseworker, GAL, and/or attorney, or another trusted adult for help or resources.

You'll need to talk with the baby's mom about where and with whom your baby will live. If your baby is living with you, OCS will find a foster home that can take you and the baby.





FINANCES AND HEALTH

FINANCIAL HELP WITH COLLEGE OR VOCATIONAL SCHOOL

Once you have your high school diploma or GED, you may decide to go to college or to a vocational training program. There is Financial Aid to help with that. Financial Aid is any form of grant, loan, or scholarship that can be applied toward school or other school related costs. To receive financial aid, you must first complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)

What is it?

FAFSA is an online application you must complete to receive financial aid for any of the programs described below as well as other possible grants and/or scholarships.

How do I do it?

1. Go to fafsa.gov.
2. Follow the online instructions.
3. For help, contact your IL specialist or another trusted adult.

Because you have been in foster care, you are eligible for various forms of financial aid described below.

EDUCATION TRAINING VOUCHER (ETV) PROGRAM

What is it?

ETV is financial assistance for current and former foster youth to attend an accredited college, university, vocational or technical college. You can utilize up to \$5,000 per academic year, as long as you are enrolled at least half time. This can cover the following school related expenses:

- Tuition
- Student Fees
- Books & Supplies
- Room (On-campus & off-campus housing)
- Board (Food)
- Transportation
- Personal/Miscellaneous
- Child care

Once awarded, you must maintain good academic standing and meet the school's Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy. **You should not expect ETV to cover your**

entire cost of attendance. ETV funds can be combined with other grants and scholarships to minimize or eliminate the need for student loans.

Who is eligible?

- Youth who are or were in foster care with a state or Tribe (out-of-home care) on or after their 16th birthday and have not yet reached age 21.
- Youth must have completed a high school diploma or GED.
- Youth must be accepted into a qualifying institution of higher education.
- Youth must be enrolled in a program prior to their 21st birthday to receive funds until they reach age 23.
- Youth must be attending at least half-time to an accredited school.

Where can I go?

An accredited school is one that:

- Awards a Bachelor's degree or not less than a 2-year program that provides credit toward a degree, or
- Provides not less than 1-year of training towards gainful employment, or
- Vocational program that provides training for gainful employment and has been in existence for at least two years.

How do I get it?

You have to apply. To apply, please talk to your Independent Living (IL) specialist or go to dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/independentliving/etv.aspx. You can also talk to your GAL, CASA, or attorney.





UNIVERSITY OF ALASKA PRESIDENTIAL FOSTER YOUTH TUITION WAIVER

What is it?

The University of Alaska offers a limited number of tuition waivers every year to current or former foster youth. If you would like to attend classes at any University of Alaska campus, the cost of your tuition can be waived up to 144 credits.

Who is eligible?

- OCS youth who are or were in custody and in foster care (out-of-home care) on or after their 16th birthday and have not yet reached age 21.
- Youth must have completed a high school diploma or GED.
- Youth must be accepted to a University of Alaska campus.
- Must be an Alaska resident.

How do I get it?

You have to apply by June 1st and there are no extensions granted on that deadline. To apply, please talk to your Independent Living (IL) specialist or go to dfcs.alaska.gov/ocs/Pages/independentliving/etv.aspx. You can also talk to your GAL/CASA or attorney.

PELL GRANT

What is it?

Pell is a grant based on financial need you can get by completing the FAFSA.

Who is eligible?

If you were in foster care on or after your 13th birthday, you qualify as an “Independent Student” and are not required to claim a parent’s income when you apply for student aid (FAFSA). What this means is that you will automatically qualify for the Pell Grant which is federal money for education.

How do I get it?

To receive a Pell Grant, you must complete the FAFSA.

FOSTER CARE TO SUCCESS SCHOLARSHIP

What is it?

Foster Care to Success offers scholarships for current or former foster youth. The amount is based on demonstrated need. The scholarship is renewable for up to five years if you maintain eligibility requirements.

How do I get it?

Visit fc2success.org for eligibility requirements and to apply online. Apply between January 1 – March 31st.



TRIBAL/NATIVE CORPORATION FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

What is it?

If you are Alaska Native or American Indian, you may be eligible for financial assistance through your Tribe or Alaska Native Corporation.

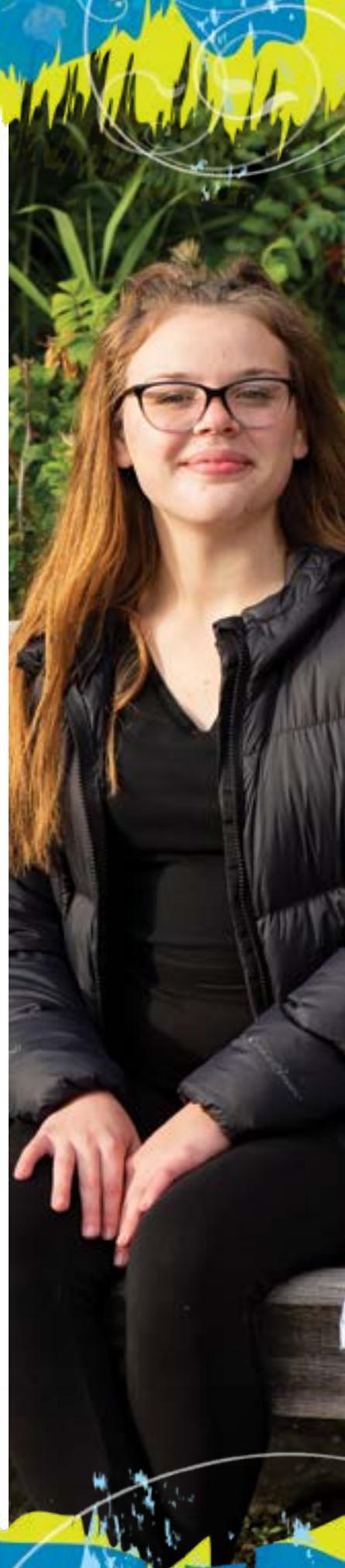
How do I get it?

Each Tribe and Alaska Native Corporation has their own rules and deadlines for their financial assistance programs. For more information, contact your IL specialist or go to your Tribe or ANCs website. This is a good resource: thecirifoundation.org/education-funding-overview.

OTHER FINANCIAL AID

There's lots of free money out there. You can apply for other grants and/or scholarships that are not described above. Check your school's website as most will have a link for scholarships available. Be creative — Google is your friend.

Student Loans: If you do not locate enough money to pay for school outright, you may look into taking student loans out to help cover tuition or the cost of living while in school. These loans are often offered at low interest rates but will have to be paid back after you are out of school. When borrowing money, you may want to speak to a trusted adult on these important decisions.





LET'S TALK ABOUT MONEY (PFD, IL FUNDS, ALLOWANCE, VOUCHERS)

PERMANENT FUND DIVIDEND (PFD)

What is it?

Every person who is a resident of the State of Alaska (was born here or has lived here more than a year) gets a Permanent Fund Dividend (PFD) every year in October. The PFD is money that Alaskans get just for living in Alaska. While you are in OCS custody, OCS will apply for your PFD and it will be held in an interest-bearing trust fund by OCS. Once you are out of custody and over 18, you will need to apply for yourself. The deadline for applying is March 31st.

How do I get it?

In custody: With good reason and the judge's approval, it is possible for you to get some of this money released for things that you may need or want. The judge will want to know what it is you want, how much it costs, and why you want it. Talk to your GAL, CASA, attorney, ICWA Worker, or caseworker if you want to request some of your PFD money. Think ahead and be patient – it can take months to have this money released. **You will need to pay taxes on any money released from your PFD (see section on taxes in this guide).**

Out of custody: If you enter into a guardianship or adoption before you turn 18, the funds will either be kept in trust by OCS or, with a court order, they will be released to your adoptive parent/guardian. If you exit care after your 18th birthday, the remainder of the funds will be released to you. **You will need to pay taxes on any money released from your PFD (see section on taxes in this guide).**

INDEPENDENT LIVING FUNDS

What is it?

If you were in care on or after your 16th birthday, you may be eligible for independent living funds until your 21st birthday. This is money for you to buy goods and services you may need to transition from foster care to living independently.

How do I get it?

Before the money is released, you must complete the Casey Life Skills Assessment within the past year and have a current transition plan before the money will be released. You can make a request up to your 21st birthday. Talk to your regional Independent Living specialist to see if you're eligible and how to access the funds. Funding for this program is limited. The funds may need to be paid directly to the vendor rather than to you.

Who is eligible?

Youth who are or were in foster care with a state or Tribe (out-of-home care) on or after their 16th birthday and have not yet reached age 21.

What can the funds be used for?

Independent Living funds may be offered in the form of a voucher paid directly to a store, landlord, or agency. You may also receive some Independent Living funds in the form of a check or gift card for participating in life skills activities or to be used for the purchase of qualified goods and services. These funds are limited to \$1000 per year for youth currently in foster care and \$3000 for youth who are no longer in foster care and have not yet turned 21.

- Life skills education
- Transportation-driver's education, driver's license, car insurance, snow tires, bus pass, bike, air travel
- State ID, birth certificate, social security card
- Rental assistance
- Furniture and supplies for an apartment or home on your own
- Emergency food assistance
- Professional clothing
- Items/needs for an infant or child of an eligible youth
- Internship
- Mentoring
- Career preparation
- Post-secondary education — See section on education and training voucher and foster youth tuition waiver
- Goal setting and development of plans to achieve them

ALLOWANCE

If you are living in a licensed foster home, OCS policy says that approximately 2% of the money your foster parents receive for taking care of you is to be used to give you an allowance. That's not a lot of money and it is often less than \$20 per month. The exact amount of the allowance will be determined by your foster parents.





ALASKA NATIVE CORPORATION DIVIDENDS

What is it?

If you are Alaska Native you may be able to get dividends (money) from owning shares in an Alaska Native Regional Corporation and/or Village Corporation. While you are in OCS custody, those dividends will be held for you by the Native corporation until you are 18 years old or out of custody. Your caseworker is supposed to figure out if you are a shareholder in a Native corporation and let the Native corporation know that you are in custody. If you happen to know that you are part of a specific Native corporation, please help out your caseworker and let them know.

Many Alaska Native Corporations also provide some benefits to descendants of shareholders, such as: funding for educational programs (besides college); scholarships to attend culture camps etc.

How do I get it?

Dividends held by the corporation will be released to you when you reach 18 or to your legal guardian if you are released from custody before you reach 18. **You may need to pay taxes on any dividends paid to you (see section on taxes).**

SOCIAL SECURITY FUNDS

What is it?

Social Security funds are funds you may be eligible for based on a diagnosed disability or death of a parent. Not all youth are eligible for these funds.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Social Security administers this program. They pay monthly payments to people with limited income and resources who are disabled, blind, or age 65 or older. Blind or disabled children may also get SSI.

Social Security Survivor Benefits Social Security Survivor Benefits are paid to an unmarried child of someone who has passed away and is one of the following:

- Younger than age 18 (or up to age 19 if he or she is a full-time student in an elementary or secondary school).
- Age 18 or older with a disability that began before age 22.

How do I get it?

SSI: The Office of Children's Services or another adult in your life may apply for SSI funds on your behalf. If OCS applies for these funds, they should let you know. You have the option to ask that someone else receive these funds on your behalf, or that you receive them yourself. The person who receives this funding is called a representative payee.

Social Security Survivor Benefits: OCS may collect your survivor benefits on your behalf. You may also identify an adult or request to become your own Representative Payee to collect these funds.

VOUCHERS

Vouchers are a piece of paper that businesses accept in place of money. There are different kinds of vouchers, but two we will discuss here are for clothing and housing.

Clothing Voucher

What is it?

OCS is responsible for making sure you have adequate clothing when you are first placed in foster care and then, on a case-by-case basis, allow for any extraordinary clothing needs after that.

How do I get it?

You or your caseworker will make a clothing inventory (a list of all the clothes you have) and decide if you need more. If so, they can approve clothing vouchers – the amounts may vary. The vouchers can only be used at a limited number of stores and depends on where you live. Foster parents are supposed to use part of the money they get to take care of you to buy clothes. OCS policy says it should be approximately 10% of the money they get every month. All clothing purchased for you belongs to you and you get to keep it when you leave a placement. If you don't have adequate clothing, please talk to your caseworker, Independent Living Specialist, attorney, GAL, ICWA Worker, or CASA.

Housing Voucher

See Housing Voucher section under Independent Living.

TAXES

What are they?

Taxes are special kinds of fees or charges that the government requires people to pay in order to live and work in their state or country. If you worked or received any money (PFD, Native corporation dividends, IL funds, etc.) from January-December, this is considered income and you must file a tax return. A tax return is an Internal Revenue Services (IRS) form. They're available online at [irs.gov](https://www.irs.gov) or at the post office. Tax returns are to be filed by April 15th every year for the previous year.





What to look for?

If you receive mail where the envelope says “This is important tax information,” you will need that to do your taxes and you should not throw that away. From your job, you will receive a form called a W-2. You may receive a 1099 or 1098 form for other sources of income.

How do I do them?

You are responsible for filing your own tax return. This is not the responsibility of your caseworker, GAL, attorney, etc. You can talk to your IL specialist about resources that may be able to help you file your tax return. Please have that conversation early so that you are more likely to get help.

Will I have to pay?

You might get money back from the federal government or you might have to pay – either way you need to file a tax return. If you’re working, most often money is already taken out of your pay for taxes, so you may not owe.

CREDIT REPORT AND IDENTITY PROTECTION

What is it?

A credit report is like a report card on how you manage your finances. It may include things like loan payments and status of any credit card accounts. It may also show if someone has stolen your identity. This is important because you need good credit for things like renting an apartment, credit cards, car loans, and jobs (some employers run a credit check).

How do I get it?

If you’re between the ages of 14-18, OCS must give you a copy of your credit report each year and explain how to read it. If you are over the age of 18 and still in custody, you get to decide whether or not you want OCS to pull your credit report. Your IL specialist will make sure that you know how to get your own credit report and how to fix it if there is something on it that shouldn’t be.

What is identity theft?

Someone uses your personal information (such as your bank account number, social security number, credit card number, etc.) to make a purchase, open an account, or borrow money without your permission.

How do I protect my identity?

- Do not carry important documents with you such as birth certificate and social security card.
- Be wary of fraud and scams (see more information below).
- Be careful about sharing personal information with others (including family and friends) and think about who you can trust.

FRAUD/SCAMS

What is it?

A scam is when someone tries to get a hold of your money either through your banking information or your credit cards. Anyone can be the target of a scam; it can cost you a lot of money and potentially ruin your credit. Scams are always evolving.

How do I protect myself?

Below are some ideas, however if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is. If you're unsure, run it past a trusted friend or adult before you give out any personal or financial information.

- **Know that scams exist and can sometimes look like it is coming from someone you know.** If someone contacts you on the phone, by mail, or in an email that you do not know, even if they claim to be from a business, think to yourself that it might be a scam and do not give out ANY personal or financial information such as account numbers, passwords, date of birth, social security number, address, etc. If it is your bank or credit card company calling, they already have this information.
- **Do not open suspicious texts, pop-up windows or email – delete them.** Any links, attachments, or phone numbers that you click on may contain a virus that can harm your computer. Even if links in the email say the name of the company, don't trust them. They may redirect you to a fake website.
- **Keep your personal details secure.** Keep passwords and pins in a safe place and change them every so often. Shred your bills and other important documents before you throw them away.
- **Be wary of any requests for your details or money.** Never send money, credit card details, online account details, or copies of personal documents to anyone you don't know or trust. Don't agree to transfer money or goods for someone else – money laundering is a crime.
- **Be careful when shopping or selling things online.** Beware of offers that seem too good to be true and always use an online shopping service that you know and trust.
- **Install virus-detection software on your computer.**
- **Do not access banking or credit card websites/applications while on a shared Wi-Fi.** Make sure you are using cellular data to access those sites or a home, password protected Wi-Fi.





DEBT

What is it?

A debt is a promise you make to pay back money you have borrowed or services given to you. When you apply for a credit card or a loan, and sign the application, that is your promise to pay the money back. There are various forms of debt: debt from a loan (like student loans or car loans), credit cards, utility bills, and cell phone bills.

Credit cards: Borrowing money using a card from a bank or a store. Whatever I spend, I have to pay back either all at once or in smaller payments. Payments are due roughly every month. If you do not pay it back all at once, you will owe interest. Interest is what the bank or store will charge you on top of what you spent. If you miss a payment or make a late payment, you will be charged a late fee. You can also damage your credit by missing payments or making late payments.

Before you get a credit card, you should think carefully about how you plan to use it. If you pay the full balance of each monthly bill before the due date, a credit card can be a very convenient substitute for cash or checks, and can help you establish good credit. But if you use a credit card to pay for things you cannot afford, you can get deeply in debt and will end up paying far more for your purchases in the long run because of interest.

Personal loans and credit cards are both types of loans - you borrow money that you have to pay back. However, there are some differences between the two.

- Personal loans come in a lump sum. You have a specific amount of time to pay them off. On top of interest, you might also have to pay application, origination, monthly or prepayment fees.
- Credit cards are a revolving form of borrowing, so they can theoretically last a lifetime. There's a cap on how much you can borrow each month and you have to make at least a minimum monthly payment on your balance. Many credit cards charge annual fees but also come with interest-free grace periods, balance transfers and rewards.

Utilities, Medical Bills, Cell Phone Bills are other possible forms of debt. Utilities include electricity, gas, water, garbage removal, cable/internet, etc. When you sign a contract for any of these services, you are taking those on as a debt. You will get a bill for what you owe each month. You will need to pay it on time or risk getting charged a late fee or possibly having utilities turned off until you can pay.

How do I get a credit card or loan?

You have to be 18 or older to apply for a credit card or loan. Do your research carefully and take time to compare the interest rates, fees and terms offered by different banks and credit card issuers. They will make you an offer based on

your credit worthiness as determined by your credit score. A **credit score** is basically your grade at how well you manage your money: how much debt you have compared to how much money you make as well as how well you've repaid previous debts/loans. Credit scores are extremely important because they affect your ability to borrow money, get a certain job, or even get a place to live.

One way to build your credit score is to ask someone to co-sign for your loan or get a secured credit card. For a secured credit card, you need to first deposit money into the bank to "secure" your credit card. For more information, go talk to a banker at the bank or credit union of your choice.

How can I build good credit? It is important that you make wise financial decisions because your credit history will stay with you for many years. Here are some suggestions for maintaining a good credit score:

1. Pay bills on time.
2. Only apply for the credit that you need.
3. Don't spend up to your credit limit.
4. Review your credit report every year. OCS will run a credit report for you every year starting when you turn 14. They will mail you a copy.

What do I do if I can't pay?

If you can't pay your loan payment, credit card bill, doctor bills, or utility bill, call your bank, credit card company, doctor, or utility company and talk to them about it. Let them know what is going on and see if you can work something out. Maybe you can make a partial payment or skip a month. **Do not ignore it.** If you ignore it, a debt collection company may come after you for the amount you owe or you might be sued. They can garnish your Permanent Fund Dividend.





MEDICAID (MEDICALCARE/HEALTH INSURANCE)

What is it?

Medicaid is a type of government provided insurance that does not cost you any monthly premiums so that you can go to the doctor, the pharmacist, the eye doctor, or the dentist for free – or very close to free. There are many different types of Medicaid coverage, but young adults who are transitioning into life on their own are usually eligible for some type of Medicaid coverage.

Who is Eligible?

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS IN CUSTODY:

Any youth or young adult who is in the Office of Children's Services foster care program is eligible for Medicaid benefits while they're in the custody of the State.

YOUTH AND YOUNG ADULTS RELEASED FROM CUSTODY:

Youth and young adults who have been released from OCS custody are normally eligible for some type of Medicaid coverage. Here are the most common types of Medicaid coverage you may be eligible for when you are no longer in foster care:

- **Former Foster Care Medicaid Coverage:** To be eligible you must have been in OCS custody at age 18 and received Medicaid while you were in foster care. It does not matter how much money you make or have for this coverage, so you can have a full-time job and save money in the bank too. This Medicaid coverage is for young adults between the ages of 18 and 26.
- **Under the Age of 21 Medicaid Coverage:** To be eligible you must be between the ages of 19 and 21 and have very little income. Youth and young adults who are in school, or looking for a job are often eligible for this Medicaid coverage, but when you get a full-time job – you can still be eligible for the Former Foster Care Medicaid Coverage described above, and you may have insurance from your employer too.
- **Pregnant Woman Medicaid Coverage:** If you're currently pregnant, you may be eligible for this Medicaid coverage even if you're working and have income (there are income limits, but they're a bit higher). This Medicaid coverage is good for up to two months (60-days) after you have your child, or the end of your pregnancy.
- **Parent and Caretaker Medicaid Coverage:** If you're a young parent you may be eligible for this Medicaid coverage for yourself, and your child(ren) will be eligible for Medicaid under Denali KidCare too. There are income limits for

this Medicaid coverage and you can receive Transitional Medicaid benefits, or Former Foster Care Medicaid benefits after you get a job and go over those income limits.

- **Disability Related Medicaid Coverage:** You may be eligible for this Medicaid coverage, depending on how much money you're receiving in disability benefits from Social Security.

How do I get it?

The Division of Public Assistance (DPA) provides Medicaid coverage and you can apply in person, or online at my.alaska.gov. You have to register for a myAlaska account before you can login to apply for Medicaid coverage.





ALASKA NATIVE/AMERICAN INDIAN RESOURCES

If you are Alaska Native or American Indian, you may be eligible for benefits, supports, or resources described below.

ICWA WORKERS

Who are they?

If you or one or both of your parents are Alaska Native and a member of a Tribe, there may be an Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) worker assigned to your case. ICWA workers work for the Tribe and are trained to work with children and families. Tribal child welfare programs provide a wide variety of services. ICWA workers attend court hearings in both tribal court and state court. They also attend meetings about your family's case and make recommendations on behalf of the Tribe.

How do I get in touch with them?

If you want to know if there is an ICWA worker on your case, you can ask your caseworker, guardian ad litem (GAL) or CASA, or your attorney for their name and contact information. You can also call your Tribe and ask to talk to their ICWA worker. Every year the federal government publishes a list of ICWA contacts for each Tribe. The most recent list can be found here: [govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-04-30/pdf/2020-09155.pdf](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2020-04-30/pdf/2020-09155.pdf). Alternatively, you can find the contact information for your Tribe using the BIA's Tribal Leaders Directory: [bia.gov/bia/ois/tribal-leaders-directory](https://www.bia.gov/bia/ois/tribal-leaders-directory). This directory is regularly updated.

TRIBAL MEMBERSHIP AND ENROLLMENT

What is It?

Tribes are governments and as such make their own laws about who is a citizen of the Tribe. The authority to determine tribal membership is among the most fundamental and hallowed powers of a tribal government. Tribal citizenship requirements may be lineal, based upon your family and ancestors. Some Tribes may have a 'blood quantum' requirement based upon the amount of Native or Indian blood you have. Some Tribes may have a residency requirement to become a citizen. There are over 570 Tribes nationwide, 229 of which are in Alaska. If you are from Alaska, usually the name of your Tribe will be the same as or similar to the name of the village you or your relatives were raised in. Being a member of a Tribe is not necessarily the same thing as being enrolled in the Tribe. Even if you are considered a member of a Tribe, you may still need to go through the process of officially enrolling in the Tribe to be eligible for some resources or to be able to vote in the Tribe's elections.

How do I find out if I'm a member of a Tribe?





If you do not know the name of your Tribe, ask your caseworker, ICWA worker, your parents, or someone else involved in your case to find out for you. You may be able to help identify your Tribe by telling your caseworker who your relatives are and where they live. OCS has employees called ICWA Specialists who may also be able to help identify your Tribe. A list of all federally recognized Tribes is published every year by the federal government. The most updated list can be found here: [govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-01-29/pdf/2021-01606.pdf](https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2021-01-29/pdf/2021-01606.pdf).

How do I enroll in my Tribe?

Your caseworker and/or ICWA worker should also be able to find out if you're enrolled in your Tribe. The ICWA Specialists may also be able to help you get enrolled.

How do I find out about the programs that my Tribe may offer?

Tribes often have scholarship programs, mentorship programs, or culture camps available for students. Tribes are governments and may offer a variety of other benefits to their citizens. Ask your Tribe if there are any scholarships or other opportunities for Tribal citizens. If your Tribe has open employment positions, Tribes have Native hiring preferences. While they are not required to hire you because you are Alaska Native, they are allowed to give Alaska Natives and American Indians priority when it comes to hiring decisions.

CERTIFICATE OF DEGREE OF INDIAN OR ALASKA NATIVE BLOOD (CDIB, AKA CIB)

What is it?

A CDIB card, also known as CIB card, is an official U.S. document issued by the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) that certifies your degree (percentage) of Indian or Alaska Native blood.

Why do I need it?

You may need to have a CDIB to receive some educational scholarships and to receive medical and mental health care services through Indian Health Services.

How do I get it?

Ask your caseworker whether you have a CDIB card in your OCS file. If there is no card in your file, ask your caseworker to help you apply for a card for you. If there is a card in the file, make sure it is given to you when you exit state custody.



NATIVE CORPORATION DIVIDENDS AND OTHER BENEFITS

What are Alaska Native Corporations?

In 1971, a federal law was passed that created Regional and Village Corporations (ANC) and Alaska Native people became shareholders of the corporations. Alaska Native Corporations are businesses and are different from Tribes. There are two types of Alaska Native Corporations: Regional Corporations that have shareholders from an entire region; and Village Corporations that have shareholders descended from a single village. You may be a shareholder in one or both types of Alaska Native Corporations.

You may be a shareholder if: your parents or other relatives gave their shares to you as a gift; you inherited shares from someone who passed away; or if your Native Corporation issued new shares directly to you. If your corporation makes money, then dividends are given to shareholders. While you are in state custody, your corporation is required to hold the dividends in a trust account for you.

How do I find out if I am a shareholder and if I have dividends being held?

Your caseworker, your ICWA worker, or the ICWA specialist should be able to help you identify your regional corporation and village corporation. You can contact the corporations to find out if you are a shareholder and whether there are dividends being held in trust for you.

How do I get any dividends being held?

If you are released from state custody before you are 18, your dividends will be released to the person who has custody of you (your parents, adoptive parents, or legal guardians). If you are still in state custody when you turn 18, the dividends will be released directly to you.

How do I find out about internships/jobs?

Many Native corporations have internship programs available for students. Many Native corporations have jobs available. Native corporations have shareholder hiring preferences. While they are not required to hire you because you are a shareholder, they are allowed to give shareholders priority when it comes to hiring decisions.

SCHOLARSHIPS

How do I find out about scholarships?

Some Native corporations support non-profit educational foundations that provide scholarships and other benefits for college/secondary education/trade school/certificate programs/other educational programs. Ask the representative from your Native corporation if there are any scholarships or other opportunities for shareholders or descendants of shareholders.

CIRI Foundation has list on their website thecirifoundation.org/scholarships.

HEALTH CARE

What is it?

As an Alaska Native or American Indian youth, you may be eligible for medical, dental, vision and mental health services at no cost to you.

For additional information, go to ihs.gov/forpatients/faq.

Where do I go?

The Alaska Tribal Health System manages hospitals, health centers, and village clinics throughout the State of Alaska. To find health care near you, go to: ihs.gov/findhealthcare or talk to a trusted adult.

How do I get it?

Talk to your OCS caseworker, Independent Living Specialist, foster parent, or trusted adult. You may already be registered with Indian Health Services.

If not already registered, you may need to get a CDIB card to receive medical, dental, vision, and mental health care services through Indian Health Services.

INDIAN EDUCATION PROGRAMS

What is it?

School districts in Alaska receive grants from the federal government to provide opportunities for Alaska Native students to meet and exceed state academic and cultural standards. Each school district develops its own programs and services, which can include such things as academic support, tutoring, cultural enrichment activities, higher education support, and leadership skill development.

How do I get it?

You or your OCS caseworker can contact your school or your school district directly to find out what services are available and how to apply for them.





CULTURAL CONNECTIONS

What is it?

Culture is a defining feature of who we are. Culture may be broadly defined as the ways of living embraced by groups of people, often defined by:

- race
- ethnicity
- language
- gender (identity)
- sexual orientation
- geography

Every cultural group has its own values, beliefs, and ways of living, such as food, clothing, celebrations, communication, religion, and language. Preserving cultural connections is about identifying aspects of culture important to you and working to keep connections that will maintain a sense of identity and belonging.

How do I do it?

Let your caseworker, GAL, CASA, ICWA worker and/or attorney know what cultural factors are important to you and your family, including:

- values
- beliefs
- cultural traditions and activities
 - food
 - subsistence activities
 - celebrations or gatherings
 - clothing
 - religion
 - language
 - cultural arts (such as dance, beading, drumming, etc.)

Let your caseworker, GAL, CASA, ICWA worker or attorney know if you feel you are being denied access to any of those cultural connections.

What can I expect?

To help keep you connected to your culture OCS will, if possible,

- place you with relatives, family friends, or a member of your Tribe if you are Alaska Native or American Indian.
- place you with your siblings.



- maintain connections with siblings if not together.
- keep you informed of what is going on with your siblings.
- provide visitation and communication with your parents.
- maintain connections and provide visitation with grandparents, aunts and uncles, and other extended family.
- arrange for you to practice the religion of your choice.
- provide opportunity to learn more about your culture.
- provide opportunity to participate in cultural activities and gatherings.





RESOURCES

FACING FOSTER CARE IN ALASKA (FFCA)

What is it?

Facing Foster Care in Alaska (FFCA) is a nonprofit dedicated to improving the foster care system, developing leadership skills among current and former foster youth, and creating a network of peer support that is a lifeline for many foster youth and alumni.

FFCA provides foster youth and alumni opportunities to share lived-expertise about life in foster care to raise community awareness, educate child welfare staff, and government officials, and educate foster youth throughout Alaska about their rights, resources, and opportunities to share their voice to promote change.

How do I get involved?

Connect with Facing Foster Care in Alaska:

Facebook: facebook.com/FacingFosterCareinAK

Instagram: instagram.com/facingfostercareak

Twitter: twitter.com/FFCAAlaska

YouTube: youtube.com/channel/UCidK9WmfgE8qY0ZqZDcc2zg

Website: ffcalaska.org

Email: info@ffcalaska.org

FosterClub

fosterclub.com

National Foster Youth Institute

nfyi.org

Foster Care Transition Toolkit, US Department of Education

www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/foster-care/youth-transition-toolkit.pdf

Alaska Youth Law Guide

alaskabar.org/youth/entering-the-real-world/housing/renting-an-apartment

Learn about your OCS Case in Court: What am I doing Here? A Roadmap for Youth in the Alaska Child in Need of Aid System

ffcalaska.org/uploads/4/4/8/2/44826273/courtbook.pdf





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