

# The Guardian

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## YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

### Temporary COVID-19 Life Changes are Our Everyday Life in Foster Care

by Jessica Overstreet

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The current crisis that you are facing and the emotions you are experiencing during this pandemic are like what foster youth experience every day. People are now walking in our shoes as they experience fear, uncertainty, and constant changes to daily life. You can't see your friends or family due to circumstances beyond your control. You can't pursue hobbies, entertainment, or social clubs.

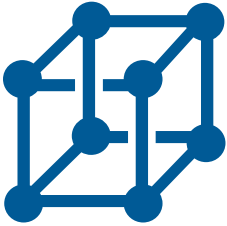
You do not know if you will be able to stay in your home if another family member gets sick. You may not have access to needed resources. You're given conflicting information that you don't understand and don't know who to ask for answers. You have crazy rules and restrictions in place for what you can and can't do. Today can be very different than tomorrow — just like it is for youth in foster care when we are forced to abruptly move placements. For us, everything is always changing.

As we all deal with the effects of COVID-19, we feel as though we don't have a voice or a say in our own lives — which feels exactly like what children experience in foster care.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



**Jessica Overstreet** is an advocate of Florida Youth SHINE, a statewide youth-driven, peer-led organization under Florida's Children First that empowers current and former youth from foster care to become advocates for all youth in care. A native of Hillsborough County, she came into foster care at age 14, and was adopted at 17. While dedicating her time to be a strong voice for youth in foster care, Jessica is studying Hospitality Management at the University of Central Florida and is working in the hospitality industry.



Some of you are navigating working in a new place and using new technology platforms, like the youth who navigated an unknown system when we were abruptly thrown into foster care. You are experiencing what it's like to try to maintain connections via phone but long for actual contact with loved ones. Plans that you had are cancelled or postponed, like our plans when we had to miss special events, sleepovers, or prom. You couldn't celebrate your birthday — many of us didn't celebrate in foster care either.

You will not be able to get all the items on your grocery list, and you learn to ration food and supplies. The same is true for children in foster care — when homes would lock the fridge or when our families couldn't put food on the table. Your resources are low, and you start improvising, just like we do when we become adults without parental support.

You feel excluded in making decisions and plans for your life. You are nervous you or your loved ones may not have the medical care and support they may need. We experienced this, too, through uncertain access to doctors and medications. You may have to navigate a complex process of advocating for your own health and well-being. Many of us needed to learn to be self-advocates because our lives depended on it. Social distancing is taking a toll on you and your emotions. Youth in foster care know all about social distancing and the emotional impact it had on us. You don't feel safe around certain individuals, or at all.

However, many of you are fortunate that you can safely “stay at home,” because some of us never found a safe place to call home.

Although this is a very stressful and scary time, you can be resilient and get through this. I know this because this is my and my peers' lives. Many of us got through this with the help of supportive individuals.

Through this crisis we can learn from our struggles and successes and support one another to thrive and become resilient. You can view this experience as part of your past that will make you a stronger person in your future. ■