**An Interactive Journal**
**for Foster Youth**

This journal helps you understand your rights and how to stand up for yourself. It gives you steps and actions to take. It was made by people who were once in foster care and by lawyers who help those with lived experience in foster care.

#### **What's Inside the Journal:**

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	* Find Safe People and Places
2. **Discovering and Knowing Your Rights**
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	* Know Who to Tell
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### **Step 1: Believing in Your Rights**

### **Say Good Things to Yourself**

Sometimes, people in foster care don't feel they can stand up for themselves. You are important and deserve respect.

Write down some good things you want to tell yourself. Tell yourself things like, "I am special" or "I deserve to be treated well."

**Find Safe People and Places**

Next, think about the places that make you feel strong and confident. These could be youth advocacy groups, youth advisory boards, or support organizations at school or in your community. The "[Your Case, Your Rights: Your Guide to Exercising Self-Advocacy](https://naccchildlaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/NACC-Companion-Guide.pdf)" document lists specific organizations you can join. Staying up-to-date with these services or talking to people who know about them can help you feel part of a caring and knowledgeable community. This can also help you practice speaking up for yourself.

Write down the names of these places and their contact information.

**Step 2: Discovering and Knowing Your Rights**

#### **Learn About Your Rights**

Here’s how you can learn about your rights:

1. Look at the [National Map for Foster Care Rights](https://naccchildlaw.org/your-case-your-rights/) (a tool that shows the rules for foster care in different places).
2. Ask your lawyer or caseworker.
3. Search online.

Write down where you can find your rights and what they are.

#### **Write Down Hard Words**

Some words might be hard to understand.

Examples:

* Attorney: Another word for lawyer, someone who helps you with legal issues.
* Ombudsman: A person who helps solve problems and complaints in foster care.
* Self-Advocacy: Speaking up for yourself and your rights.
* Documentation: Important papers or proof that show something happened.

Write them down and ask your lawyer or look them up online.

**Step 3: Self-Advocacy Planning**

**Advocacy** means speaking up for yourself or others to make sure your needs and rights are respected and met. It involves supporting a cause, often by communicating with people who have the power to make decisions.

#### **Collect Proof**

Sometimes, you need to show proof when your rights are not respected. Save texts, pictures, emails, or notes.

Write down what proof you have.

**Plan What to Say**

What happened?

Think about what you need to say and write it down.

#### **Practice Speaking Up**

Practice talking about your rights with someone you trust.

Write down who you will practice with and what you will say.

**Step 4: Ensuring Accountability and Exercising Your Rights (Making Sure Your Rights Are Protected)**

**Identify Your Pathway for Reporting**

You have different options for reporting problems. You can talk to your caregiver, social worker, or their supervisor. You can also report to your attorney, during a court proceeding, or through a state ombuds office. Deciding who to talk to can be tricky.Our examples are one of many answers that may work best for you. Add your answers below.

Who might you first go to with your concern?

Example: My attorney.

What are the benefits of working with this person?

Example: They know the laws, they see me in person every month, and they are supposed to represent me.

What are the drawbacks of working with this person?

Example: They are very busy and don’t always answer my texts.

How do I contact this person?

Example: Next time they visit me, I can review this guide with them. I can also ask them the best way to reach them and who I should contact if they don’t respond.

**Go “Up the Chain” to Ensure Accountability**

If one person says “no,” it doesn’t mean you have to stop. Sometimes, you need to ask other people who have more authority to help you. For example, if you can’t reach your caseworker or attorney, call their office or look up their supervisor.

Who else might you go to if your first try doesn’t work? How would you find their information?

Example: My caseworker’s email signature says when they are out of the office and gives their supervisor’s name and number. I could call the supervisor or email them using the address I found on the Child Protective Services website.

**Putting This Guide to Use**

Any plan you make only works if you use it. Now that you’ve made your plan, think about the following to make sure you’re ready to take action.

When will I contact the support people I’ve listed?

Example: Tuesday when I see them for our monthly check-in.

What information do I still need? And how do I get it?

Example: I need to list the legal terms I didn’t understand from the court report. I can talk with my attorney next week.

What barriers might I face? How can I prevent or address them?

Example: I’ve tried speaking up before and no one listened, so I ran away. I could try writing a letter for the judge to read instead of speaking in court because it made me nervous.

When did this happen?

Example: In March when I skipped gym.

Where did the problem happen? Was it at home or somewhere else?

Example: In the resource parent home only.

What have you done to speak up for yourself? Have people ignored, punished, or resisted your needs?

Example: I’ve told the resource family I’m hungry after school and they say I won’t starve till breakfast. If I yell, they take away my phone.