

(INSERT CHILD’S PHOTO HERE)

Who Are Foster Youth?

Foster youth are children removed from the care of their parents. This may be due to abuse or neglect by the parent as a result of complex family, social, and environmental conditions. Children may also be removed as a result of their own out-of-control behavior. It is estimated that 80% of these cases involve alcohol or other drug abuse in the family. More than 90,000 children live in foster care in California. Some children in foster care experience frequent changes in their living arrangements—usually through no fault of their own. With multiple homes come multiple school placements. Changing schools frequently leads to gaps in education. Keeping foster youth in the same school is a high priority. In some cases, a child may be transported from another district to keep the child in the same school. The odds are that during the school year you will meet several foster children wishing to attend your school. They may be placed in one of many different types of placements and some children have lived in several of these:

- Guardian’s home
- Kinship home (home of a relative)
- Foster Home (non-relative private home)
- Group Home
- Emergency Shelter

Who Are the Adults Involved in a Foster Child's Life?

Foster children have many adults managing different aspects of their lives. Caregivers and social workers may change several times during a child's time in foster care. Some of the adults involved in the life of a foster child may include one or more of the following:

- Social Worker
- Foster Parent
- Probation Officer
- Court Appointed Lawyer
- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)
- Educational Surrogate
- Biological Parent
- Family Advocate
- Representatives from other SLO County Agencies

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What Should I Do When the Social Worker Calls?

Once every six months the social worker is required to file a report with the court regarding each of the children on his or her caseload. This report should include information about the child's school attendance and performance. The social worker is legally entitled to access all information about the child.

- Confirm that the person who has identified him/herself as the social worker is in fact the student's social worker. All social workers have county identification badges. You may also confirm the identity with the foster parent.
- Answer any questions the social worker may pose about the student.
- Relate positive experiences you have had with the child.
- Tell the social worker about concerns you may have about the child.
- Ask to be notified of court dates and medical appointments that may take the child out of school or cause emotional upheaval.
- Invite the social worker to attend upcoming school events.

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Suggestions for School Staff

- Ask the foster parent to include the social worker's name and phone number on the student's emergency card and inform the school office if the social worker changes.
- The student's biological parent may retain educational rights; ask social workers to supply notification if specific rights have been limited by the court.
- Create an environment that makes the student feel included and safe. Be sensitive to the needs of homeless youth.
- Don't make assumptions about a child's status or living situation. Ask questions in a respectful way to learn the necessary information.
- The living status of a foster or homeless youth is a confidential matter only to be shared with appropriate site staff. These children tend to hide the facts of their living situation from peers. Even though adults may understand that the child is not responsible for the circumstances, your student may not want anyone to know.

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Who Are Homeless Youth?

The term "homeless" covers a range of living situations for children. Because of this, many parents or their children do not identify themselves as homeless or understand that their situation qualifies them for services. Staff often use the term "families in transitional housing" to avoid the stigma attached to being homeless. Youth that are protected under federal guidelines as homeless are those living:

- In a motel, hotel or weekly-rate housing
- In a house or apartment with more than one family because of economic hardship or loss
- In a shelter (family, domestic violence, youth shelter, or transitional living program)
- In an abandoned building, a car, at a campground, or on the street

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- In temporary foster care or with an adult who is not the parent or guardian
- In substandard housing (without electricity, water, or heat)
- With friends or family because the youth is a runaway.

Indicators That a Child May Be Homeless

Does the child...

- have a backpack containing important possessions, hygiene items or other things that would indicate they have no place to store things?
- wear the same outfit for more than two days or the same pair of shoes with all outfits?
- hesitate to give an address or tell where he/she lives?
- refrain from making reference to his/her bedroom or home?
- seem excessively tired as if from lack of sleep or fall asleep at school?
- seem inappropriately afraid of police officers?
- ever talk about domestic violence?
- have a history of irregular school attendance due to something other than illness?
- express concern about or refer to age-inappropriate responsibilities?
- talk excessively about food?
- save food to take to family members?
- eat little and ask to save rest for later?
- move frequently or change schools often?
- remain behind academically, despite regular attendance?
- consistently fail to do homework?
- have age-inappropriate sexual knowledge?
- ever mention having lived in a motel or shelter?
- excessively fantasize about growing up, becoming rich, and/or helping others?

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