

Success In School For Children and Youth In Care

Tips For Caseworkers

Caseworkers are members of the core team, which includes caregivers, a school point person, the classroom teacher, the student and any other guardian of the student. Together with these members of the core team, the caseworker can help promote success in school by reinforcing the importance of an education, positive peer groups, and connection to supportive adults in the lives of young people in care.

Compared to the general student population, children and youth in care do poorly on Provincial Achievement Tests, fall farther behind in school or drop out as they get older, and are less likely to graduate from high school. The caseworker can have a major influence on a child or youth in care's success in life by including their educational needs as a key consideration when making case decisions.



Youth in Care Say...

■ *"I've already lost my family. Friends are everything to me right now. School is the only place I feel normal."*

■ *"Please talk to my teachers before planning for me to change schools. Maybe if I just stayed another few weeks, my credits would transfer properly and I wouldn't have to re-take a class."*

■ *"Starting another new school and meeting another new foster family can be exhausting. Can we do one thing at a time? It's hard to start fresh every time. Sometimes, it becomes easier to just stop caring."*

■ *"Please remember to pay my school field trip fees. When I call you, please call me back, otherwise I'm not sure I'll get to go or not. When my friends and teachers ask me about it I don't know what to say."*



How Can I Support Educational Success for Young People in Care?

DEVELOP A STRONG, POSITIVE AND SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP :

- Talk to the young person about his or her school experience. Ask about his studies and his favourite or most challenging subjects. Ask about relationships with teachers and school staff. Who are his friends? What do they talk about and what do they like to do?
- Talk to the young person about what she does during recess, lunch time, breaks, gym and before or after school. If needed, talk to the school about increasing positive connections for the young person during unstructured time.
- Share your expectation that he will graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education or work training.
- Share information about the Advancing Futures Bursary Program throughout junior and senior high. Ask the school about other bursary or scholarship opportunities.

- Encourage the young person to let you know when she experiences a success, such as doing well on a test, completing a special assignment, making a new friend at school or joining an extra-curricular activity. Celebrate her accomplishments with her. Celebrations may include sending a note, taking her out for a treat, or simply with words of sincere praise or admiration for their accomplishment. etc.)
- Use funding and resources supportively. Provide access to privileges that young people commonly have. Proactively providing resources helps the young person to build relationships and useful skills.

ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF THE YOUNG PERSON AT SCHOOL :

- Assist educators to understand the effects of grief and loss on a young person in care. This will promote the view that behavioural and academic difficulties are expected or predictable outcomes of the young person's past experiences. Caregivers and teachers who recognize the signs of grief and loss will respond to the young person with greater empathy and realistic expectations.
- If academic assessments are suggested for a new school placement, or are required when the young person comes into care, work with school staff to explore the option of deferring testing or assessment requirements to a time when the young person is more stable.
- Share enough information with the educators about the student to allow them to effectively support, supervise and program for the young person. Use your discretion about the level and detail of information that needs to be disclosed to the school. The collaborative core team process allows for increased communication with the school system, but caseworkers need to work directly with school staff so they understand what can or cannot be shared about the student and family's past and current situation.

MINIMIZE THE NUMBER OF PLACEMENT CHANGES AND SCHOOL MOVES :

■ Placement changes usually lead to school moves and sometimes to caseworker changes. Such changes sever relationships, and can create additional feelings of grief and loss. These changes may have a negative impact on a young person's emotional well-being and ability to learn and succeed.

■ When transitions are inevitable, consider the timing of school moves. Semester breaks and other natural breaks in the school year may make transition easier, and allow the young person to complete courses or earn credits. Provide transportation where required to enable a young person to attend his current school until a natural school break occurs.

■ Whenever possible, discuss school transitions and allow time for adequate planning prior to the move. If a transition to another school must be made due to an emergency, try to arrange an opportunity for the young person to return to her old school to collect phone numbers or email addresses, and say good-bye to her friends and teachers. Phone calls to former classmates or teachers may help to address the need for closure for the young person, and also for her former classmates and teachers. Alternatively, the teacher may want to have the class create farewell pictures or write notes to the young person in care.

OTHER SUPPORTS AND CONSIDERATIONS TO AID SUCCESS IN SCHOOL :

■ Because research indicates that children and youth in care are often behind in school and may benefit from additional support, it is important to consider arranging and paying for tutors if students are experiencing difficulty. This also helps alleviate struggles in the home related to school work.

■ Minimize the amount of time the student is pulled out of class for appointments.

■ Pay school and extra-curricular fees, or reimburse the caregiver as soon as possible. The young person will feel more confident that he will be included in school activities and that he will not miss out on learning opportunities.

■ Develop a recreation plan and fund extra-curricular activities, such as hockey or music lessons. These positive activities can be an incentive to stay in school, while also promoting positive relationships, personal growth and development. Such activity can help lead to success in other aspects of life, including academic.

■ For young children in care who require extra stimulation, utilize early childhood education opportunities such as preschool. Research indicates that early success in school contributes to future positive school experiences and reduces the likelihood of academic, social and emotional/behavioural difficulties.

■ Communicate that completing high school is a priority, and provide supports to help young people in Supported Independent Living (SIL) successfully achieve this goal. While there are advantages to SIL, many young people drop out of school due to the responsibilities of living on their own.

■ Ensure young people in care know about the Advancing Futures Bursary Program, and other scholarships and bursaries if they qualify.

■ Help young people in care access Youth Connections through Employment and Immigration for help with transitioning to the workforce.

A Message from Caregivers to Caseworkers

I am an important part of the team because I spend my days with this young person. I know about her wishes and aspirations. I wake up and comfort her when she is distraught in the middle of the night. I supervise her phone calls with her parents and her day-to-day activities. I support her as she comes to grips with any issues she faces, and I celebrate with her when things go well.

When working with me, please understand that I am an important resource for you. I am a part of the team. And, at the end of the day, when all is said and done, we all need to work together to overcome challenges and address the young person's needs. I am willing to help you to understand the young person's needs from my perspective as we work together.

A Message from Educators to Caseworkers

You are an important part of the team because you see the young person in a variety of settings, and know a great deal about his life history. When working with me, please understand that the more information you provide, particularly about prior assessments or diagnoses, the more likely I can place him in the right setting and provide the most appropriate support.

Please emphasize the importance of school to your young person in care and stay involved to demonstrate your commitment to his schooling. By letting the young person in care know how important his attendance, behaviour and achievements are, you are helping me to help him. Please attend school functions, participate in parent meetings and encourage and support other school activities as much as you can.

Together, I know we can make a difference for your young person in care and my student.