

# The Nebraska Strengthening Families Act

Nebraska has a new law for youth in foster care, the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act (or NSFA), and it's all about "normalcy," youth empowerment and permanency. Normalcy is the idea that young people



in foster care should be able to do the same things and have the same opportunities as other youth. This includes things like getting a driver's license, sleeping over at a friend's house, having a part-time job, and much more!

## What is the NSFA all about?

### The Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard

**(RPPS)** – The RPPS allows your foster parents or a point person if you are in a group home to use their best judgment in making day-to-day decisions about what activities you can participate in. They must consider your input and other factors, like your age and safety, but the idea is to have fewer barriers keeping you from just being a kid. You have the **right** to participate in normalcy activities!

**Knowing your rights** – At age 14 you must start receiving a document that describes your rights including things like the right to:

- Education
- Health care
- Visitation
- Court participation and to understand the system
- Have your voice heard in your case
- Have lifelong family connections
- Live in the most family-like setting
- Receive skills and resources you need to make a successful transition to adulthood
- and more!

Your caseworker must show and explain this list of rights to you. If you are in a group home, the group home has to post the document in a place that young people can see it clearly.

- If you feel that your rights are not being respected, you should speak up! You shouldn't get in trouble for speaking up if your case isn't going the way it should.
- **What can you do if you have concerns?**
  - Mention your concerns to your caseworker and guardian ad litem
  - Contact the Office of the Inspector General of Nebraska Child Welfare (855-460-6784)
  - Contact the Ombudsman's Office (1-800-742-7690)

### Empowering you to have a say in your case plan–

Your caseworker must give all youth the opportunity to be a part of making their case plan. Transition planning for "aging out" of foster care starts at age 14. You can choose two people close to you to be your advocates in making your transition plan.

### Making sure you have copies of your documents–

Before you "age out" or exit foster care (at age 18, 19 or 21), your caseworker must give you important documents that you will need to do things like find housing and apply for school and get a job.

You should receive the following documents (if they apply to you):

- Birth certificate, social security card, and driver's license
- Health insurance information and medical records
- Educational/school records
- Credit report check
- Contact information for family members
- List of local community resources and information and application for public assistance (for example, food stamps, housing programs and child care assistance, etc.)
- A letter from DHHS that states that you were in foster care (this is helpful for things like getting Medicaid, college loans, and scholarships)
- Written information about your Indian heritage
- Written information on how to get these documents in the future if you need them again

### Making sure you have permanency and supportive adults in your life –

The law gets rid of "independent living" as a permanency plan for youth *under age 16* because the goal is for you to have a family or supportive adult to live with if possible. But, if you are 16 or older, your permanency plan can be independent living. However your plan must then name supportive adults willing to be involved in your life as you transition to adulthood. The idea is that naming these people will help you know who can turn to when you need a helping hand.

**The Nebraska Strengthening Families Act is meant to empower you, let you have a say in your case and know your rights, make sure you have the support and information you need, and allow you to participate in activities that are important to you.**



If you have any questions or concerns about the NSFA, you can contact Nebraska Appleseed at 1-800-845-3746.