



National Resource Center for
Permanency and Family
Connections



VIRGINIA DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

Ten Things that Youth Want Child Welfare Professionals to Know: Engaging Youth in Foster Care

Project LIFE, a partnership of United Methodist Family Services with and funded by Virginia Department of Social Services, held a state-wide conference on permanency in October 2013. During the conference, adopted youth and youth in foster care shared their experiences and developed their ideas into tips for child welfare workers. This NRCPPFC resource highlights their recommendations for workers when engaging youth in foster care.

1. It is important to me that I take ownership of my future by helping to create my case plan.

Ask if my plan works for me before changing to it. Allow me to be proactive and involved, using my expertise and knowledge about my own life and relationships.

As we work together in pursuing my goals and aspirations and make important decisions about my life together, I will learn invaluable skills that will help to ensure my success once I leave care.

2. Remember that frequent, consistent, and comfortable communication is paramount to the success of healthy relationship building.

If possible, plan our meetings outside of the child welfare agency office or school setting, which will allow me to feel more at ease. When you meet with me at my foster home, make time to talk to me privately and ask me about how things are going at home.

3. Please stay open minded and actively listen to my opinions.

Do your best to understand where I am coming from – don't just tell me that you can't help. Try to incorporate my ideas and opinions into our work together.

4. Show me that I can trust you.

Maintain confidentiality to the greatest extent possible. When you have to share information about me, talk to me about it beforehand. Keep me updated about information that affects me.

5. Understand that I make mistakes just like everyone else.

Remember that my mistakes don't define me – they are a part of my learning and development process.

6. Communicate with me as early as possible about changes that will impact me (such as a stipend ending, etc.).

Help me to plan for how to manage those changes.

7. Talk to me and act in a way that shows me that you respect me.

Get to know me. Keep in mind that sometimes I feel like I am dismissed, treated like a "piece of paper", or judged unfairly because I am in foster care.

8. Engage me in solving problems.

Talk about my problems with me and in front of me. Include me in the conversation. Be aware of power dynamics – avoid bribing me or overpowering me.

9. Remain genuine with me.

The more open, honest, and relatable you are to me, the more comfortable and engaged I will be in our work together.

10. You are not only my social worker but an adult that I consider a role model.

I want to learn from you and your experiences. Your advice, guidance, and feedback will help me make my own positive decisions and plans.