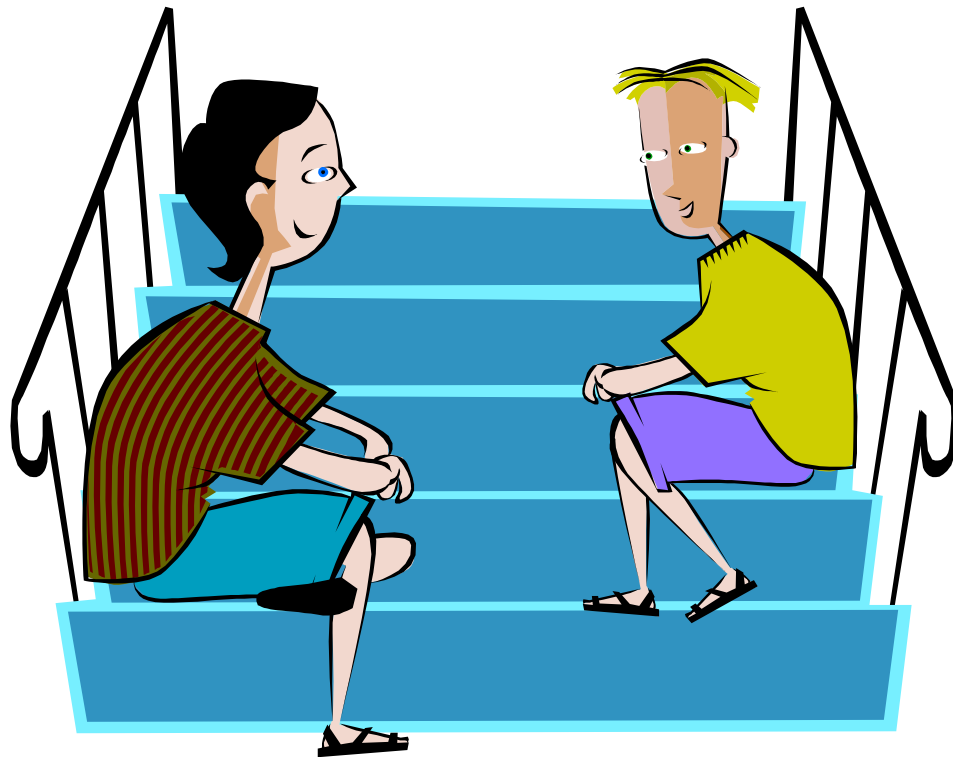




JFS Adoption & Foster Care program

**The Official Children's Resource Family
Program Manual**



Resource Family Program

Mission Statement

Jewish Family Service of Greater Harrisburg, Inc. is a not-for-profit human service agency that promotes and strengthens healthy family life for the Greater Harrisburg Community. Jewish Family Service provides professional counseling, social work and educational services to individuals, families, and groups.

Our Mission:

JFS helps individuals and families meet life's challenges; we are a forward-thinking mental health and social service agency dedicated to helping people achieve their full potential while honoring choice, diversity, and both Jewish and Social Work values through every stage of life.

Our Key Beliefs relate to:

- Making a difference in people's lives through service, for Jews and non-Jews alike
- The physical, spiritual, and psychological well-being of our entire community
- Helping families, in whatever form, through periods of challenge and difficulty
- Bringing parents and children of all ages together
- Supporting people with special physical, emotional or psychological needs to cope effectively
- Respecting the dignity and value of all our clients, staff and volunteers

Introduction

The Foster Care program of Jewish Family Service (JFS) works to achieve permanent homes for children who are placed in resource or foster care by the county under concurrent planning -i.e., dual placement goal of birth family reunification and termination of parental rights/adoption. Each Resource Family is committed to creating a permanent home for the children and adolescents in their care until that child or teen reunifies with a birth parent or relative, decides to be adopted, has a legal guardian appointed, or that teen is truly ready to live on their own as an adult.

The Adoption & Foster Care program of JFS carefully recruits and trains Resource Families and considers them to be an integral part of the service team. Each family is then carefully matched with children in the resource care system so that the child's needs and the Resource Family's strengths match, and areas for additional support and training

are identified early on. The Adoption & Foster Care program promotes a child or youth's growth and development by providing the physical care, nurturance, and opportunities for individual, social, emotional, and intellectual development that enhances the child or youth's potential in these areas. Resource Families are expected to provide room/board, basic physical care, health care, supervision, monitoring of normal developmental needs and educational progress, and supportive services such as assisting with visitation and communication with the family of origin. For teens, Resource Parents take the lead in teaching skills you will need to be successful as an independent adult. They will also help you connect with resources for post-high school plans, such as college, work, or a training program. The care of the Resource Family should be provided in a way that recognizes and values the child or youth's own immediate and extended family as well as his or her ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious background.

JFS Resource Families and children participate in the development of the Individual Foster Care Service Plan (IFCSP) and cooperate with the plan that is finalized. IFCSPs are created at the time of placement and then monitored to ensure that every child placed into resource care is receiving the best possible service. The care and planning for resource children may require collaboration with agency staff around mental health and educational services, monitoring child's behavior and communicating observations to agency, client specific advocacy, and routine contact and informal interaction with family of origin and providing role modeling.

The child and resource family will be assigned a JFS caseworker who will visit you in the resource home weekly, biweekly, or monthly, depending on your needs. Children requiring intensive services are monitored with a minimum of weekly contact and in-person contact on at least a bi-weekly basis. In addition, each child and family participates in twice-yearly reviews and case planning for that child. County caseworkers and birth families are also included in this planning during the period of court ordered reunification.

Resource Parents Rights and Responsibilities

Even though you have rights as a child or teen in resource care, your resource parents have certain rights and responsibilities, too. Sometimes these two sets of right don't work well together, but we can try.

- Resource parents have the right to make rules in their home as long as those rules do not break state or federal law.
- Resource parents have the right to discipline the children in their care. They are not allowed to use physical discipline, or withhold food, clothing, bedding or visitation with your birth family as punishment for bad behavior of any resource child. But they can restrict your activities or take away your electronic devices.
- Resource parents have the right to decide who you can spend your free time with, and to make sure you are safe there. The state now says they can decide who you stay with overnight, and what activities you get involved with, and even if you have a part time job. They are allowed to decide for you what a "**reasonable and prudent parent**" would decide for any child in their home. This means they can treat you like any other child in their home. SO... if their birth child can't do it, don't ask.
- Resource parents have the right to decide if your clothing is appropriate for a person of your age. They can say if you may wear makeup or not. They also have the right to tell you to put a coat on in the winter, it's cold out.
- Resource parents have the right to give or not give you an allowance to spend as you wish, as long as they meet your daily needs. If you get an allowance and you spend it, the resource parents don't have to give you more money that day or that week. If you spend it on dangerous, banned, or illegal things, you probably won't get any more money for a while. Be responsible.
- Resource parents have the right to say no. They can say no if they think you are too young, not responsible enough, or this is a bad time for what you are asking for, or because you haven't finished your homework yet, or because you just went to that person's house, or for whatever reason. You do have the right to know why, even if it is "because I said so." They are your parents for now, sorry.
- Resource parents have the right to ask for you to be moved from their house. They also have the right to ask for you to stay with them and for them to be your forever family. They are the first ones asked if you need a permanent home. Let them know how you feel about that. Tell your Resource Family caseworker, too.
- Resource parents are responsible for your safety, health, and well-being. They are also responsible to help you grow up to be mature, responsible, polite, well behaved, and with some self-control. Work with them on this, they only want what is best for you. Really.

Discipline

You have the right to live in a healthy and structured environment that is free from abusive discipline and provides you with support, praise, encouragement, and a chance to grow up strong. You have the right to a home free of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse.

Prior to being approved, your resource parents must go through training to learn how to keep you safe and parent you without abuse. They are offered information about the best way to help you learn to make good choices and have self-control. They are also taught lots of different ideas about how to discipline you without hurting you emotionally or physically.

The following are not permitted as discipline for resource children:

- Verbal abuse
- Derogatory remarks (put downs)
- Threats of removal from the resource home.
- Withholding of visitation with birth family
- Withholding of food, clothing, or shelter
- Punishment for bedwetting.
- Delegation of your punishment to another child.
- Denial of anything in the Family Service Plan or your Individual Service Plan
- Assignment of physically strenuous exercise or work solely as punishment.
- Restraint by any method other than passive physical control techniques.

The following are permitted as discipline techniques for resource children:

- Restriction of privileges, such as free time in the community, talking to or seeing friends, watching television, playing video games, and use of the computer
- Loss of special activity, such as going to a dance or club activity
- Time out, which includes a set time in your bedroom or another place in the house to calm yourself down and/or to think over the problems.
- Time in, which means being with one of the adults in your home at all times
- Writing an essay, letter of apology, or other educational assignment
- Extra chores
- Loss of allowance or repayment from your money for something you broke, or payment for a repair

Rights of Child/Youth in Resource Care

By law (Children in Resource Care Act of 2010):

- You have the right to be treated with fairness, dignity, and respect.
- You have the right to be treated without discrimination based on race, color, religion, disability, national origin, age, and gender.
- You have the right to be treated without harassment, corporal punishment, unreasonable restraint, or physical, sexual, emotional, and other abuse.
- You have the right to live in the most family-like setting that meets your needs.
- You have the right to be given enough food and food of good quality.
- You have the right to clothing that is clean, seasonal, and age and gender appropriate.
- You have the right to get all of the medical and mental health services that you need.
- You have the right to take part in developing your medical or mental health treatment plan.
- You have the right to agree to medical and mental health treatment, including medication.
- You have the right to visit your parents at least every other week.
- You have the right to have contact with your family.
- You have the right to be placed with your siblings, or visit with them at least every other week.
- You have the right to be placed with your kin and relatives if possible.
- You have the right to be placed with families that have supported you before if possible.
- You have the right to have all the contact information for your guardian ad litem, attorney, court-appointed special advocate, and members of your planning team.
- You have the right to be in a place that maintains your culture.
- You have the right to be able to stay in the same school when you change placements.
- You have the right to be able to take part in extracurricular, cultural, and personal enrichment activities.
- You have the right to have the opportunity to work and develop job skills.
- You have the right to get life skills training and independent living services.
- You have the right to have your case and personal information kept confidential.
- You have the right to get notices of court hearings for your case, and have the ability to attend the hearings.
- You have the right to a permanency plan that you helped create and that you can review.
- You have the right to get notice that you can ask to stay in care after you turn 18.
- You have the right to get notice of the grievance policy from the county or private provider agency.
- You have the right to be able to file a grievance, to receive the agency's grievance policy, and to have your rights and the grievance policy explained to you in way that you understand.
- You have the right to exercise parental and decision-making authority for your child (if you are a parent).
- You have the right to take part in religious services and observances.

Children's Grievance Procedure

Your rights should be explained to you by the Resource Family caseworker as soon as you enter placement and you will need to sign a paper saying you know about this and understand. You will also be provided with information about how to file a formal grievance if you cannot work things out with your resource parents or during the service plan meeting.

If you have a problem or complaint about your placement, you should always try to work it out with your resource parents first. If you can, talk to your resource parents about the problem and see if you can work it out on your own. Find a good time to talk to them when you are calm and your parents are not busy. You may even want to "make an appointment" for a time that is good for all of you. Try to use "I" messages. This means you say how you feel about the situation and what brings up that feeling, and then ask for what you want to change. For example, you could say, "I feel unwanted when you send me to respite every time Tommy has a soccer tournament because I feel like you don't want me to be part of this family. I would like to go along and cheer for Tommy, because I want to be in this family, and I think of Tommy as my brother." See if you can work out the problem with the resource parents on your own.

If this doesn't work or the issue is with the resource family and you don't feel safe talking to them about it, you have the right to speak with your Resource Family Coordinator and/or county caseworker about your concerns, as well as have the placement teamwork with you to solve any problems. This may mean bringing it up, with help, during the service plan meeting.

If this doesn't solve things or you don't think you can do this on your own, your Resource Family Coordinator will help you to talk about the problem with your resource parents. Your caseworker can help you figure out what to say and can practice with you. Your caseworker can also help you put into writing what you think the problem is and how to you would like to solve it before you talk to your resource parents face to face.

If you believe that your resource parents can't or won't resolve the problem with you, or they agree to work on it and then don't follow through, let your Resource Family Coordinator know as soon as possible. Then the caseworker will work with the resource parents and see what can be done. This may include bringing in your county caseworker, your therapist, and any other people who might help solve the problem, to work together to find a solution. This should be done as soon as possible after talking to your Resource Family Coordinator about the problem.

Remember that not all problems have easy solutions, and some problems may require both sides to do things to solve them. You will need to know what you want to change and what you are willing to do for your resource parents to make the change happen. Also remember that sometimes the adults around you have to make a decision for your safety and well-being, and that decision may not be what you want. You are entitled to know why a decision is made in a way you can understand.

If talking to the resource parents, bringing it up at a service plan meeting, talking to your Resource Family caseworker, and/or talking to your county caseworker does not resolve the issue, you have the right to file a formal grievance.

What is a grievance?

A grievance is like a complaint. You can fill out a grievance form if you think your rights have been violated, or you are being treated unfairly, or you have a complaint that cannot be resolved and needs more attention. Anyone who you trust or feel comfortable with can help you fill out this form, such as: a parent, guardian, caregiver or supervisor; a caseworker; your therapist; a teacher or other school staff; your Guardian ad Litem a Court Appointed Special Advocate if you have one, or any other adult who helps you

If you use the attached form to file a formal grievance, the Director of the Adoption & Foster Care program of JFS will send you a letter within Seven (7) days of getting your form. The letter will tell you that we have received your grievance form and the actions we will take to resolve the situation.

After we read your form, the Program Director of the Adoption & Foster Care program will decide if we agree with you. We will send you a letter within seven (7) days to tell you our decision. Our decision is called a "resolution."

If you don't agree with our resolution, you can file an appeal. The letter you get telling you our resolution will also tell you how to file an appeal.

You will be given a form to sign that tells us that you have received this information and understand your rights and how to file a grievance.



Children's Grievance Policy

When you are placed with a resource family through JFS, and you have a problem or concern about your placement, you have a right to speak with your caseworker and/or your county caseworker about your concern, as well as have the team work with you to resolve the problems. These concerns might include feeling that your rights have been violated, feeling you are being treated unfairly, feeling you are being treated differently than other children in the home, etc.

The steps to filing a grievance are:

1. Discuss the problem with _____(Resource Parents) and _____ (Resource Family coordinator). Try to be specific about the problem, how it makes you feel, and how you would like to see the problem resolved. You are welcome to make a statement in writing about your concerns.
2. If this doesn't resolve the problem, you have a right to speak to the program director (Rachel Kuhr at 717-233-1681). You have the right to speak with the program director privately, without the resources parent being present in the meeting, about your concerns. You also have the right to speak to _____(county caseworker) about this situation. The coordinator and county caseworker will try to involve the entire team in planning a way to resolve the problem
3. If you are still unhappy about the resolution of the problem, you may appeal to the agency director. A meeting with you, the team, and the director of Jewish Family Service will be held. Together we will try to create a plan to resolve the problem as soon as possible after the concern is raised.
4. If you are still unhappy about the final decision of the agency director, you have the right to ask for the funding agency to review the situation. A form will be provided to you for this purpose.
5. You have the right to make a written statement about the grievance to be placed into your record, and you have the right to review any responses written by the resource parents, agency caseworker, program director, or agency director.

Signature of child

Date

Signature of witness

Date

Resource Child Visitation

You have the right to visit with your birth family if this has been approved by your county caseworker and if visits can happen in a safe way. The visitation plan should be written into the Family Service Plan (FSP) that was created with your birth parents and county caseworker when you first came into foster care. All information about who you may visit with must come from the county caseworker. The caseworker also decides when, where, and for how long, the visits will last, and if the visits are supervised, and if so, by whom.

Unless the court has said you are not allowed to see your birth parents for safety reasons, or their parental rights have been terminated, you should be able to see your birth family for at least one hour every two weeks. This might change depending on where you live and where your birth parents live, and if you are going home to live with them, or if you are going to be adopted. Sometimes visits stop after the court at certain points in the legal process, but you can tell your lawyer that you want to keep visiting with your birth family. You can only have permission to stay overnight if your birth family has done certain things first, and these things should be in the Family Service Plan. You are also allowed to refuse to visit a birth parent if you feel unsafe during visitation.

Your resource parents are there to help you get ready for the visit and to talk about it before and after, including fears, sadness, and anger that the visit might bring up. The resource parents are not allowed to cancel a visit with your birth family as punishment for your behavior, although the place and length of the visit may be changed with county caseworker permission. So, if the visit is supposed to be all day Saturday at Hershey Park, and you have been struggling to manage your anger at school, and have been suspended, the visit cannot be cancelled but it may be changed to a two hour visit at McDonalds instead.

You also have the right to regular visits with your siblings, whether they are also in foster care, at home with birth parents, or adults and on their own. The law says you get to see them at least twice a month, unless there is a good reason not to. Sometimes the county caseworker sets visitation up and names the time and place, and sometimes they will give permission to the resource family to set up visits. You also have a say in who you want to visit, and for how long, so make sure to bring up other important people in your life you want to stay in touch with. For instance, if your brother lives far away but he is important to you, you should ask your resource parents if he can come when you are in the school play or for your birthday or during school vacations, so they can set up these visits with the county caseworkers.

The same rules apply to phone, Facebook, or email contact with your birth family. It must be okayed by the county caseworker, and how long and when you get to talk may be decided by the resource parents, based on how you are following the rules and how you are managing your feelings before and after family contact.

Religion

You have the right to participate in religious services or activities, such as Sunday school or youth group programs, that you have picked. If you feel most comfortable in a particular "organized religion," meaning a certain church, synagogue or mosque, please let your Resource Family Coordinator and resource parents know this as soon as possible after your placement. The resource parents are supposed to do what is reasonable to allow you to participate in activities within the faith or denomination of your choosing.

If you do not have any preference, but would like to attend some religious services, you are welcome to participate with your resource parents or to ask for help to find a denomination you feel comfortable in. You also have the right to say you don't want to participate, even if your resource parents do, as long as you can agree on what you will do while the parents are attending religious services.

Finally, you have the right to practice the traditions of your birth family, culture, community, and personal identity. If your practices, like how you celebrate a holiday, are different from those of your resource family, ask the resource parents to include your ideas about family's traditions. For example, if in your birth family, you get to pick dinner on your birthday, open one present on the eve of a holiday, or give away food baskets to the needy for Thanksgiving, the resource family should try to include these in their family traditions. If the family will not do this, talk to your Resource Family caseworker.

Clothing money

When you enter your new foster home, you and the resource parent need to take an inventory of all your belonging. There are two reasons for this. One is to have a list of what you brought to the home so that if you leave, the resource family can make sure they get all your things together. But the second is to make sure you have what you need for school and winter and summer activities. If, after you make the list, it is found that you don't have enough pants or socks to attend school daily in clean clothes, or if you have grown and things are too small, or if you lack something important like sports shoes, we can request an initial clothing allowance form the county to get more clothing for you right away.

Also, the resource parents receive money each month for your care, including for food, clothing, recreational activities, school supplies, and your daily needs. When you first move in with a family, you and one of the parents need to do a "clothing inventory," so everyone knows what clothing you have and what you might need. If you need anything, you have to ask the resource parents, and they will purchase the item for you. The law says, "Youth in care are entitled to seasonal clothing that is age and gender appropriate."

The resource parents have the right to deny you some item due to the cost of the item, the amount spent on clothing for you in the past month, the inappropriateness of the request based on your age, or for disciplinary reasons, as long as they do not deny you appropriate clothing. You are entitled to participate in choosing your clothing, but the resource parents have the final say about any specific item of clothing.

For example, the resource parents may find your choice is not okay for your age, such as high heels dress shoes or adult language on a t-shirt. They do not have to buy you expensive jeans if money is not available, as long as they make other jeans available to you. Girls in some families may not be permitted to own bikini bathing suits. If you have lost three jackets this winter, you are entitled to a jacket, but it may not be as expensive and fancy as the one you want. Also, any clothing required for your participation in an extracurricular activity will be purchased for you with program funds. Talk to the resource parents or the Resource Family Coordinator.

Clothing funds may not be used to get jewelry, haircuts, make-up, or to get your nails done. These are up to the resource parents or can be paid for with your allowance or earnings from a job. You may not get a tattoo until you are eighteen or if you are adopted and your adoptive parents sign the consent. Same for piercings. Sorry.

If you feel that your clothing needs are not being met, you should talk to your Resource Family Coordinator or your lawyer about this situation.

Allowance and earnings

The resource parents are given funds to meet your needs. This includes fees for extracurricular activities, participation in recreational activities, and school activities. This is the Resource Parents' money, not your own. It is to meet your daily needs.

Resource families are encouraged to give children who are school aged and older a weekly allowance for the child to use to buy themselves what they choose, as long as it is legal, or unless this causes disruptions in the child's placement. If you receive a weekly allowance this does not mean you will necessarily have the money in their possession, but you have the right to spend it according to your family's rules. Some families ask for the child or youth to do certain things prior to receiving this allowance, such as complete chores or clean your room. Other families give money to each child for their own use regardless of other situations. Each family makes their own decisions about allowances.

You need to ask your resource parents whether you will get an allowance, how much, when, and how. If the resource parents are unwilling to give you one, and you feel you should have one and are responsible enough to manage money, speak to your AdoptionLinks caseworker, so that this issue can be discussed during regular family meetings.

If you are over 14, and want to work, your resource parents should help you to obtain your working papers from your school district and locate a job. They should also help you complete the application, attend the interview, and get to work, unless you both agree on other arrangements. The resource parents can also deny you the ability to work if they believe it will interfere with your other commitments, starting with school, and including family visitation and reunification efforts. This decision should also be made with the AdoptionLinks caseworker.

If you do get a job, you and your resource parents will make an agreement about your earnings before you get paid for the first time. Some families ask that a part of each paycheck go into a savings account for big purchases or so you will learn how to save. If this happens in your family, you and the resource parents will decide how much to save and how much you can keep each week. You will also need to decide what you may spend your money on.

Cars and driving

You may have the right to learn to drive. This is a decision between you and your resource parents. If there is a disagreement about this, bring it up at a home visit with the Resource Family Coordinator or when the Individual Foster Care Service Plan (IFCSP). In order to learn to drive, you will need to be sixteen, pass a physical exam and vision screening, and then pass a written skills test to get a Learner's Permit. You may be required to first complete a classroom course on driver's education. You will also need your birth certificate, proof of identify, and social security card (or proof of the number—ask your caseworker). You must then have this permit for at least six-month before you can take your driver's test. The test must be taken in a registered, insured car.

If you pass the driver's test, you will get a license to drive except between 11 p.m. and 5 a.m., unless it is for work or a school activity. You will have this license until you are 18.

You have the right to own a car when you are in resource care. However, there are barriers to overcome. First, you will need to earn the money for a car, and cars can be expensive. Second, when you buy the car, you will need to insure it to be able to drive it. It is illegal to drive in Pennsylvania without insurance. Your resource parents may not be willing to accept the liability (they would have the responsibility to pay if you hit someone with your car), so you may have to wait to get insurance until the resource parents are willing to help you insure it or you turn eighteen and can get insurance on your own. Third, insurance is expensive for young drivers. Make sure before you buy a car you know who will insure it and how much that will cost, and how often that amount will need to be paid, so you can save up.

Permissions

Your resource parents can decide about overnight visits with friends and families. They can determine that the family you are staying with is appropriate, based on their own information as a "reasonable and prudent parent." They are permitted to make their own requirements for this, such as knowing where you are, who the responsible adult is, and how to reach them. You will have to work this out with the resource parents.

If you want to sleep over with any member of your birth family, you will need to get permission from the county caseworker, unless they have already determined that the resource parents can make these arrangements. This includes overnight visits with birth parent, grandparents, siblings in resource care or with their birth parents, and visits with kin, like your Godparents or best friends.

Your resource parents may sign permission slips for school trips, and it is their responsibility to inform your resource family coordinator where you are, for how long, and who you are with. This is true both if you stay in Pennsylvania and if you go out of state.

You may date but the resource parents are responsible for deciding at what age, and under what rules. They may ask that they meet the person you date, meet this person's parents or the people they live with, and set up the times and places for your "dates." They may also say if and when you are allowed to ride in cars with drivers who are under age eighteen (18). If you feel that your resource parents' rules are too strict, or unfair, tell you Resource Family Coordinator and/or your county caseworker, and a meeting will be held to try to resolve the differences.

You are NOT guaranteed the right to a cell phone, a computer in your room, or unlimited internet activity. You are not guaranteed access to instant messaging or all internet sites. The resource parents decide this. Any permission may be taken away based on how well you follow the rules for computer or cell phone use, or you might lose this privilege for breaking other rules in the home.

Playing sports and other activities

All children and teens placed with JFS resource families are encouraged to find some kind of physical activity they like and that they want to be part of on a regular basis.

If you are interested in playing a sport, either on a school team, in the community, or taking lessons, you should tell your resource parent so that arrangements can be made for you. Your resource parents have the ability to decide if this activity is appropriate for you, and they may say yes or no based on safety, health, financial, or other reasons.

It will be the resource parents' responsibility to make sure you get to practices, meetings, or classes, and to make sure you have the equipment you need to participate. If you choose an activity that has very expensive equipment, you may not be able to participate unless you work and pay some of the cost. An example would be if you want to learn to ride a horse, you might need to volunteer at the stable in exchange for lessons, which can be expensive. If you join the Boy Scouts, you may not get brand new backpacking equipment, which is also expensive.

JFS feels that both day camp and overnight camp stays, along with mission and school trips, are valuable experiences for all children and youth. We try our best to find funding for all activities. Please bring this up with your resource parents and Resource Family Caseworker sooner rather than later.

If something is important to you, PLEASE bring it up in your service plan meeting, since that is where issues can be worked out, like how to get the money for the tuba, or transportation back and forth to arts camp or how to rearrange visitation so you don't miss the soccer practice, stuff like that. If we don't know it is important, we can't work it out.

Independent Living

If you are in foster care when you turn fourteen (14) years old, you are eligible for services and funding to prepare you to live independently, whenever that happens. There is no rush, as you may stay in foster care until you are 21-years old, even if you are in college.

Independent living is a program of services for children who are or have been in foster care into their teen years. You can start the program as young as fourteen (14) but most teens participate at latest when they are sixteen (16). The program will teach you budgeting, household management and maintenance, job readiness, job search skills, how to finish high school and get into college or advanced training, how to find housing, how to find community resources, and how to get your health care needs met. Many programs put aside money for each person who participates that you will receive when you complete the program.

If you are going to be adopted after age sixteen (16) but are in foster care at that age, you will be assessed for the Independent Living Skills program before finalization of the adoption. Then you can be part of the program in the county in which you live.

The Independent Living Skills program can also help you find funding for college or advanced training. If you are in the program, you can apply for Education and Training Grants (ETG) as long as you under 21 when you apply. This grant is in addition to any grants, loans, or scholarships you receive from other sources. Also, in Pennsylvania, if you are older when you are adopted or remain in foster care after high school graduation, you may be able to attend a Pennsylvania State College or University FREE OF CHARGE.

If you are not adopted or have not had a legal custodian appointed during your stay in resource care, you have the right to stay in resource care until you are 21 years old. This is true as long as you in a "program of treatment or instruction." This includes high school, college, community college, training or vocational programs, a GED preparation program, or any other educational program, as well as mental health treatment centers. If you stay in care, you will have stability, a place to live, free health care, support, food and clothing, and can finish your education before you have to support yourself. This will be a big help once you leave resource care.

Pennsylvania law also says if you choose to leave foster care after age 18, then want to return, you have that right up until you turn 21, nalthough you must decide within six (6) months of leaving care (signing yourself out). However, you will need to be enrolled in a "program of treatment or instruction," or work 80-hours per month to qualify for this service. In addition, aftercare services may be available to you if you complete your county's Independent Living program and later leave resource care.

Permanency

You will hear the term "Permanency" thrown around a lot in court (Permanency review hearings), in services (Child Preparation for Permanency) and in our program (Permanency Coordinator). Here are some facts:

When you entered foster care, the court told your parents and/or guardians that if they had to do certain things for you to return home, and they were given a list of things they had to do, including visitation, along with a timeline. The timeline is set by both federal and state law. They have twelve months from the time you entered foster care to show the court you can come home or "15 of 22 months"-meaning if you go home and then come back into foster care, the clock does not start at the beginning but keeps going. If neither of your parents makes substantial progress on their goals, then the court cannot order reunification. They can give more time, but if not, they must make a permanency plan for you.

The law says the following are all the permanency goals, in this order of priority-which one the court favors:

1. Reunification with a birth parent or prior guardian
2. Adoption
3. Guardianship
4. Kinship foster care placement until you turn 21, also known as "Another Planned Permanency Plan."

If you cannot go home to a birth parent or stay with a relative, the court will ask you if you want to be adopted and speak to your Resource Family about being your adoptive family. If you are older than twelve, you have to agree to be adopted, but if not, you have to be clear why you do not want to be adopted. There are lots of good reasons, but you need one.

If this is not the right family for you to be adopted, you will be referred to services to help identify a better match, and this is called "Child Specific Recruitment" and The Older Children Matching Initiative." You will be part of that process and decision making about what type of family is right for you and where you would like to live. You will also get to meet the family before you ever agree to move in with them. If that works, you have to live there for at least six months before the court can "order permanency" for you.

You have the ability to stay in foster care until you are 21-years old, even if you attend college and live on campus, or enter Job Corp or another training program. You are also legally entitled to continue to receive Medical Assistance until you are 26-years old, just like birth and adopted children stay on their parent's insurance until that age.

Finally, you have the right to request a formal or informal Post Adoption Contact Agreement to ensure on-going contact with relatives who are important to you that you may not be able to live with.

Post Adoption Contact Agreement

You are entitled to ask to have contact with birth relatives after you are adopted. However, it is also your job to tell your Resource Family Coordinator that this is important to you, and ask to work on creating an agreement for this contact.

There are **MANY** types of contact. This means you could get a letter once a year from a birth relative, have permission to friend them on Facebook, be able to call monthly to speak to someone or have the ability to visit face to face. Sometimes the type of contact is determined by what type of contact you have before the adoption. It can also be determined by what is needed to keep you safe. You have to talk about what will work best for you and what you want with your Resource Family Coordinator. You can also talk to a Child Preparation worker if you have one.

There are two types of agreements: **Informal and Formal**

In an **informal agreement**, you talk to your adoptive parents and express your desire to stay in touch with people from your life before you came to live with them. It will be important to let them know who you want to be in contact with, and what type of contact you want. The contact needs to make sense as part of your entire life. So if you want to go every weekend to be with your older sibling in his foster home, which might mean too little time with your new family. It also keeps your new family from getting to know your brother. So you will need to be able to work with your family to decide what makes sense.

In a **formal agreement**, the steps are the same as with an informal agreement, but the courts look at the plan and orders it to happen after the adoption is finalized.

The good thing about this is that if someone doesn't do their part to follow the agreement, you can ask for it to go back to court to be enforced. This is true even if it is your adoptive parents who don't follow through. It also means that if you want to change or end the agreement, because it no longer makes sense for you and your family, you have the right to ask the court to do this too.

Remember that the court will need to understand why this contact is important to you. You will need to talk to the adult who is helping to create the agreement so they also understand how it is good for you to have contact with someone from your birth family. That part is up to you.

Learning to Hunt and Shoot

If you want to learn to hunt or shoot a rifle or pistol, you should first speak to your Resource Parent. If they agree, they must notify the county caseworker and JFS Resource Family Coordinator and share the training plan. They must also arrange for you to participate in a Pennsylvania Game Commission certified hunter safety course. If you are going to learn target or skeet shooting, then training with a teacher at a range would also be acceptable. Where and when possible, training by a certified firearms instructor in gun safety and handling is preferred.

You are not permitted access to the guns that belong to the Resource parents, as state law requires that they be locked up when not in use, unless they are on the Resource Parent for work or protection, or if they have a permit to carry a concealed weapon. They are also required to keep all firearms and ammunition secured from you unless you are hunting or practicing together.

You **may not** keep a firearm with you, in your bedroom, or otherwise in your possession when not under the direct guidance and control of the Resource Parent or certified instructor. This would put your family's foster care license at risk. More importantly, it could pose a danger to you, to your family, to other children in the home, or to the community, even if you know how to be safe with a firearm.

Required Contact Information:

The Children in Resource Care Act of 2010 requires that you receive the contact information for the people listed here. These people may be part of your "team," and will be involved in service planning for you. You are also entitled to invite up to two additional people to be part of planning for you, and to be invited to the service plan meetings.

In addition, if you need to file a grievance while in resource care, you may contact these people about your grievance or submit the grievance form to them directly. You may request a copy of your grievance and any notices go to these people. You will be notified when contact information for any of these people changes.

Resource Care Agency Caseworker:

Name:

Address:

City:

Phone:

Email:

MH/ID Case manager

Name:

Address:

City:

Phone:

Email:

Children and Youth Caseworker

Name:

Address:

City:

Phone:

Email:

Guardian ad Litem

Name:

Address:

City:

Phone:

Email:

Juvenile Probation Officer

Name:

Address:

City:

Phone:

Email:

Other important adult

Name:

Address:

City:

Phone:

Email:

Court Appointed Special Advocate
(CASA)

Name:

Address:

City:

Phone:

Email:

Other important adult

Name:

Address:

City:

Phone:

Email