

# For Staff: Group Activities for Youth

## Solve the Problem With a Policy

### Read the Story: 10 minutes

As a group, read aloud “Five Things Foster Parents Should Do,” by Sedrick Sanchez (p. 16), taking turns. Let teens pass if they don’t want to read.

### Discussion: 20 minutes

Ask the group if any of Sedrick’s tales of foster care and tips for foster parents resonate with them. They will probably start telling stories of bad treatment in care. At that point, start writing on the board or easel paper, identifying specific problems, like “Foster parent didn’t explain the house rules clearly,” or, “Caseworker didn’t tell me I was supposed to be getting an allowance.”

Allow teens time to vent and share their negative experiences. **But then turn the conversation to brainstorming some solutions.** What kinds of policies for foster parents, agencies, or caseworkers could have addressed these problems? Write down the ideas they come up with.

At the end of the session, ask for a volunteer to type up the notes, or do it yourself, then copy them. Share the suggestions with your own foster care agency, if you work for one. Pass them out to teens and encourage them to share with their caseworkers, law guardians, or other adults in the system. If you meet regularly, ask teens to share whatever responses they receive.

Share these resources with teens who want to get more involved in making change:

**Foster Youth in Action:** [fosteryouthaction.org](http://fosteryouthaction.org)

**FosterClub:** [fosterclub.com](http://fosterclub.com)

**Foster Care Alumni of America:** [fostercarealumni.org](http://fostercarealumni.org)

**North American Council on Adoptable Children:** [nacac.org/help/be-a-youth-advocate/nacacs-youth-advisory-team](http://nacac.org/help/be-a-youth-advocate/nacacs-youth-advisory-team)

## Ask For What You Want

### Freewrite and Discussion: 15 minutes

Write the following prompt on the board or chart paper:

“Write about a time when an adult in the system—case-worker, therapist, lawyer, etc.—surprised you by doing something unexpected that helped you. Describe what the person did for you in a paragraph or two and why it was so meaningful.”

Remind teens that they don’t need to worry about spelling or grammar. After people finish writing, invite them to share if they’d like. Summarize the main points from the teens’ stories (e.g., “He stayed after his workday ended to play basketball with me,” or, “She signed me up for a dance class when I told her I liked to dance,”) and write those points on the board or chart paper.

### Read the Story: 10 minutes

As a group, read aloud “When a Staff You Love Leaves,” by Zariah Oliveras (p. 23), taking turns. Let teens pass if they don’t want to read.

### Discussion: 15 minutes

Ask the group to identify things that Awilda, Zariah’s worker, did that helped Zariah. [Awilda arranged activities for the girls and offered to take them; she warned Zariah about talking too much in front of other staff; she shared her own experience and related advice; she tried to get Zariah into her own old foster home; she kept in touch after she quit the job at the group home.] Add their responses to the list you’ve started on the board or easel paper.

As a group, make the list into general guidelines for foster care staff, for example, “Listen nonjudgmentally” or “Share your own teenage experience if it’s relatable” or “Look out for programs that fit with our interests.”

Finally, invite them to share if they had Zariah’s experience of a beloved staff leaving abruptly. How would they have liked their staff to break the news of their leaving to them? Add any concrete suggestions for how staff should handle telling youth that they’re quitting to the list.

Tell the group that you are going to type up the list and make copies to distribute next time they’re back. Encourage them to share it with someone at their agencies and to report back how it was received. Remind them that they are experts in foster care and that adults can learn from them. ■

## Looking for More Stories & Lessons?

Youth Communication offers five programs to help educators and youth workers use teen-written stories to build their students’ social and emotional learning (SEL) skills.

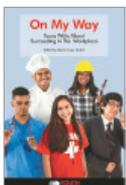
Each program includes interactive professional development, curricula, and coaching. Contact Betsy Cohen at [bcohen@youthcomm.org](mailto:bcohen@youthcomm.org) for more information.



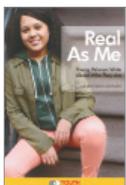
SEL for Middle School



SEL for High School



Career Readiness



Girls' Empowerment



Positive Masculinity