

Success In School For Children and Youth In Care

Tips For Educators

Educators can have a significant impact on improving results for young people in provincial government care by working with caseworkers, caregivers and the students themselves, to plan and implement strategies for success. With the adults in their lives demonstrating understanding, realistic expectations and compassion for them, students in care can experience increased success in school and life.

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. When children and youth in care speak about their school experience, many share that they feel stigmatized, labelled and disconnected. As with other students, they also say they want to succeed in school and have adults in their lives who care, support, mentor and advocate for them.



Youth in Care Say...

■ *“Just knowing that someone at school cares about me makes all the difference.”*

■ *“Please try to find out what is ‘right’ with me. Sometimes, when you are in care, people are trying to figure out what’s ‘wrong’ with you, and I would like them to find out what’s ‘right.’”*

■ *“I often feel like teachers don’t expect me to succeed. Please set the bar high, and support me in reaching it.”*

■ *“Switching schools is never easy. Please allow me time to adjust and wait until we get to know each other before doing an assessment to see where I am at.”*



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

LISTEN, SUPPORT AND CARE:

- School staff who make an extra effort to build a relationship with young people in care can have a tremendous positive impact on their success in school. Young people in care want and need to have supportive adults in their lives who they can count on to provide stability. Young people in care want to be shown love, dignity, and respect, and to have a voice in decisions affecting them.
- Identify one or more caring adults in the school who can commit to touching base regularly with the young person, and who will help him focus on his strengths and abilities.
- Involve the student in her educational plan, envisioning short and long term goals and identifying her strengths and needs.
- Students in care say that when they want help, they would like the adults to pull them aside and speak privately with them about what they might need, rather than being offered the help in front of their peers.
- Make positive phone calls, celebrate successes, and set up positive contracts for school success in areas such as attendance, behaviour or achievement.
- Talk with the student and help him connect to activities that interest him.
- Encourage and support positive relationships with peers in and out school.

PROVIDE A POSITIVE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT:

- Plan ahead for transition times and offer additional support if needed. Consider having a “buddy” for a new student, who will show her around the school and share time with her at recess, lunch and other times.

- Young people in care, of all ages, have emphasized they just want to be “normal” and treated like everyone else. They do not want to be labelled, judged or singled out as being a young person in care.

- If a new student in care is registered, gather as much information as possible about past academic achievement, enrolled courses, assessments and any special programming needs to help with planning and academic continuity.

- Encourage and support the young person in care to become involved in extra-curricular activities. If there are problems with costs or transportation, work with the core team to help resolve those problems.

- Offer cultural alternatives for students in care, if appropriate. For example, some students may benefit from having a community elder provide guidance and support.

- If a student in care is suddenly moved to a new school, try to arrange an opportunity for them to return to their old school to collect phone numbers or email addresses, and say good-bye to their friends and teachers. Alternatively, have the class create farewell pictures or write notes to the student.

BE FLEXIBLE:

- Allow for as much continuity as possible from one school to another in terms of coursework so they do not lose high school credits due to mid-year school changes.

- Help the young people in care set realistic, achievable goals, without underestimating their abilities.

- Help young people in care participate in school field trips and extra-curricular activities by contacting the caseworker or caregiver if there is a question about obtaining required fees or consents.

- Help to maintain young people in care in their home school whenever possible. If a foster home placement changes, assist the caseworker to do whatever is possible to ensure the young person can remain at the school until a natural break.



A Message from Caseworkers to Educators

You are an important part of the team because you can best address the young person's learning strengths and needs, observe and influence their social interactions and influence the way that a young person views lifelong learning. You spend a large part of every day with the child or youth.

As the caseworker, I play a pivotal role in supporting a young person in care with school success and in working with the core team. I have general information about the needs of children and youth in care, and specific information about individual young people in care. I have legal authority to make important decisions on behalf of the child or youth in care.

When working with me, please understand that at times, I have to make difficult decisions based on the safety of the young person, while considering policy, the legal requirements, and resources available. While I try to find the least disruptive option, sometimes I am required to move young people to new placements, a new school or return them to their biological home.

Please remember that I am often out of the office responding to emergent situations or meeting with children, youth and families. It is helpful when you leave messages or email me. Please give me as much notice and information as possible about what you and the young person need, so that I can respond within the time required. If I cannot be reached and there is an emergent need, please press zero and ask for a backup worker or supervisor. In an after-hours emergency you may need to call the **Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-5437**.

I understand that educators and caregivers play a critical role in helping to keep young people in care safe and supported for success. Thanks for all you do.

A Message from Caregivers to Educators

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