

**National
Child Welfare
Resource
Center for Youth
Development**

A service of DHHS Children's Bureau

The Four Core Principles for Adolescent Transitional Living Programs

Youth Development: There is a range of life skills youth need to learn in order to function independently, especially in the areas of education, employment, housing, relationship formation, and service acquisition. They must also be trained to recognize and respond to crises that place them at risk after emancipation. Another key component of youth development is the involvement of youth in the decision-making for their case. Youth need to be empowered to make these types of decisions so that they feel equipped to do so after emancipation.

Collaboration: Collaboration refers to the need for child welfare teams to seek community involvement in the life of the youth. This community involvement creates linkages that can assist youth after their emancipation and may provide them with job and mentoring opportunities. Child welfare supervisors and their teams need training in techniques such as family team meetings, which bring together multiple family members, friends/acquaintances, and professional helpers, both intra- and inter-agency partners.

Cultural Competence: our understanding of cultural competence is constantly evolving as cultures change. Given the overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system, supervisors and workers must have an adequate understanding of youth strengths and needs related to culture. Since the youth who are transitioning out of foster care are not a homogenous group, there is a need for culturally sensitive and individualized interventions. One strategy to encourage ethnic identity in the emancipation process is the use of "rites of passage" that are common to many ethnic groups.

Permanent Connections: This final core principle relates to the need for youth transitioning to independence to learn skills and have the opportunity to form healthy family, social, and professional relationships. It underscores the importance of involving as many family and friends as possible in the casework process and transition to independence. Youth must be given the opportunity to explore their feelings about past family relationships and consider relationships they want to form in the future. Transitioning youth have been exposed to poor role models of relationship initiation, maintenance, and dissolution through their families of origin and often in their foster homes. They need additional training and modeling of how to identify appropriate romantic and friendship partners, how to initiate romantic relationships and friendships, how to discern compatibility with others, how to maintain close relationships and how to

dissolve close relationships properly and safely when necessary. They also need the assistance of their child welfare worker to establish any necessary helping relationships to support them following emancipation.