

# Teen Fathers Tip Sheet for Youth in Washington State Foster Care

## Will becoming a father change my placement in foster care?

The Washington State Department of Children, Youth & Families (DCYF) has a responsibility to continue your placement. Your caseworker will discuss your options with you in the event a change in placement is required.

## How can I plan to be in my child's life?

Every child needs a father in his or her life. Talk with your caseworker, independent living provider and others to develop a plan that allows you to be a present and involved father.

## What are my rights as a father?

- You have a right to know if you are the father. This can be determined through testing.
- If you are the father, you have a right to have your name on the birth certificate.
- You have the same rights as the mother, including visitation and decision-making on who will raise your child.

## What are my responsibilities as a father?

- Fathers play a significant role in fostering social-emotional, cognitive, language and motor development in the lives of their child. Fathers strengthen development when they take an active role early and often in the lives of their child. Rather than having one single "right" way, fathers have many ways to be involved in all aspects of raising their child including:
  - Playing together.
  - Reading to your child.
  - Being nearby while a child explores.
  - Taking a child to medical checkups.
- The value of a father's involvement is determined by the quality of the interaction with the child, rather than the amount of time spent.
- Use a folder or notebook to help you keep things organized and make it easier to find important documents.



## Take care of your stress.

- Know when to request a time out from difficult conversation topics (parenting styles, custody or visitation disagreements, etc.). This shows respect for yourself and the other person.
- Do what you can to avoid drugs and alcohol. You may be tempted to use when you are stressed but it makes stress worse in the long-term. Use of drugs and alcohol will have consequences, such as limitations on what you can and can't do with your baby/child.
- Don't try to do everything at once. Figure out what is the most important (or easiest) thing to do and focus on that first.
- Try to walk or work out every day, even for just 10 minutes. You will have more energy and think more clearly.
- Stay healthy. Eat well and regularly. Get a balanced diet.
- Get six to eight hours of sleep if you can. Too little sleep can increase your stress level and reduce your energy. So can too much sleep.
- Don't smoke or let anyone else smoke around your baby.
- Recognize you are doing all you can do and give yourself a break.
- When stressed, use your support network including friends, family members, church members, school staff, caseworker or other professionals.



## **How do I support the mother of my child?**

Parenting is a partnership, whether you and the mother of your child are together or not. You can support her in the following ways:

- Actively participate in appointments for your child.
- Share the responsibility for day-to-day care of your child.
- Participate in the decision-making for your child.
- Provide financial support through child support.

## **I am a father in foster care without custody of my child. I want to visit my child as often as I can. What are my options?**

You should explore with your caregiver the willingness to help support you as a new father. Things you can discuss include:

- Visitation with your child, either in the home you are placed in or transportation so you can see your child.
- Helping you participate in your child's doctor (and other) appointments.

## **I am a father in foster care and my child has also been placed in foster care. What information should I know?**

Our Fathers Matter project offers tools for legal fathers with children in the child welfare system. Visit

**[www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/child-welfare-system/  
fathers-matter](http://www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/child-welfare-system/fathers-matter)** for detailed information on:

- Your rights and responsibilities.
- Working with the caseworker.
- A father's role in court.
- Working with your lawyer.
- Who will be in court.
- Your role outside of court.