

Dear Foster Child

Hi. My name is Suzanne. I was once a foster child, like you. I've also talked to many foster children in the past years. I know what it's like to live in a foster home. For a lot of you, being in a foster home is a lot worse than being in your own home, isn't it? Don't you wish someone would listen to you when you try to tell them important things?

I'll listen to you. You can write to me by clicking [here](#). Be sure to tell me your name and where you live. Tell me your parent's names, address and phone number. Also tell me the names of the other people you are talking about in your letter.

I'm older now. I'm a mom and a grandmother. I know many of your real moms and dads because they contact me every day. They are worried about you. They love you very much. They want you to know that the people that stole you from them have been telling lies to you. The case workers and others tell lies to the judge, too. They even tell lies to your parents.

They tell the judge and your parents that you are doing fine. They say you are very happy in your foster home. They tell the judge that your mom and dad shouldn't get you back home. That's probably why you haven't been able to go home yet. They tell the judge that it is bad for you if your parents visit you. Your parents probably really do want to see you, but the caseworker doesn't want you to see your parents.

Your mom and dad don't believe that you are doing fine. When they see you, they can tell you aren't doing fine. They want to bring you home and make it better for you. They really want to protect you, but the caseworkers and the judge won't let them. That's because the judge believes the caseworker's lies.

Did you know that you have a person who is supposed to tell the judge what you want him or her to say? This person is called a Guardian ad litem. You can refer to him or her as a G-A-L. It looks like this: GAL.

Your GAL is supposed to be trying to help you get back home and make sure your home is safe. He is supposed to meet with you to make sure you are safe in your foster home. This meeting should happen at least once a month. Your GAL should talk to you when nobody else is around, so that if you need to say something about what is going on in the foster home, nobody else can hear it and you can be safe.

You should tell your GAL if you are being abused in the foster home. Your GAL should not let you go back to that foster home if you are being hurt or abused there. If your GAL doesn't meet with you, or doesn't protect you, or tells lies, you can ask the judge to fire him or her. You can do this by sending a letter to the judge. You can ask to appear at the next court hearing and tell the judge you want your GAL fired. **YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO FIRE YOUR GAL!** Tell everybody when you decide you want your GAL fired. Tell your teacher and your counselor. Even tell your foster parents. They have to help you tell the judge.

You also have the right to hire your own attorney and make the court pay for it. You do this by asking an attorney to represent you and he will take care of the rest for you. This is different than the GAL. . .this attorney will represent YOUR WISHES.

Maybe you are being abused in your foster home. If you are abused, you should tell everyone about it. Tell it as many times as needed until you are safe. Tell your teacher at school. Tell your counselor. Tell your GAL. Tell your caseworker. Tell the police. Most important, TELL YOUR PARENTS. You can even tell me.

What is not allowed in foster homes?

- Your foster parents or other kids are never allowed to hit you. Sometimes foster parents allow the other kids to hit you because they can't hit you themselves. They must NEVER allow the other children to hit you or hurt you.
- They are NOT allowed make you eat at different times or different places or eat different food or smaller amounts than the rest of the family. They are not allowed to withhold food from you at all. You cannot be punished by not being allowed to eat a meal.
- They are not allowed to make you sleep in a place that has not been approved by the agency. Sometimes caseworkers or GALs are really dumb - like when foster parents will show the caseworker or GAL the pretty bedroom but they really make you sleep on the basement floor.
- They are NOT allowed to talk bad about your parents or anybody in your family.
- They are NOT allowed to say things to you or about you that make you feel bad about yourself. They are not allowed to call you names or say bad things to you. This is called emotional abuse.
- They are not allowed to try to make you lie about anything that went on in your family home or about anything that goes on in the foster home.
- They are NOT allowed to let other foster kids baby sit for you.
- They are NOT allowed to take your things away from you or give them to the other kids. You get to keep your toys and clothes and nobody should ever steal them from you. This includes your pictures of your mom and dad and letters from them.
- They are NOT allowed to lock you up in a room or a closet.
- They are NOT allowed to tie you up with anything. Not rope, or tape or anything.
- They are NOT allowed to chain you or put you in a cage.
- They are NOT allowed to gag you in any way. They cannot tape or tie your mouth shut.
- They are NOT allowed to make you spend all your time in a room or on a chair. They cannot isolate you in any way.
- They are not allowed to torture you by doing things that scare you, or making you do things that scare you.
- They are not allowed to take your money. Not even to pay for damage you cause. They have insurance to cover that.
- They are not allowed to snoop in your mail.
- They are not allowed to touch you in the wrong way. Maybe one of the adults or children touches you in the wrong places, or makes you touch them in the wrong places. If that happens, you should call 911 and tell the police. They will take you away from that foster home. If anyone touches you in the wrong places or makes you touch them in the wrong

places, never keep it a secret. You can call 911 from any pay phone without needing money.

I'm sure your parents are trying very hard to bring you back home. Don't forget how much they love you. You know in your heart whether or not the stuff the foster parents and others are telling you is true or not. Trust your heart. The others might be lying to you just to make it easier to keep you from ever going home.

If you do want to go home, be sure to tell everyone all the time. If you don't, they'll tell the judge you don't want to go home. Tell them you were safe at home over and over again and demand to go home. Demand more visits with your parents. Demand your GAL to tell the judge what you want. You DO have rights, it's just that nobody wants you to know that.

Your mom and dad are probably fighting real hard for their rights to bring you home. You have to help them by fighting for your rights, too.