

6J: Tips for Child Welfare Workers

Children and Youth In Care



TIPS *for* Child Welfare Workers

Child Welfare Workers have an important role in ensuring positive educational outcomes for children/youth in care. This role can include advocate and champion with respect to ensuring the unique learning needs of children and youth under their care are considered throughout their education.

Many children/youth in care require additional assistance and support if they are to be successful in school. Supporting

educational success, including meeting with school personnel, requires active involvement from the worker, the caregiver and others who are significant in the child/youth's life. Research indicates that high expectations and support are linked to higher student achievement.

Ensure you understand the child/youth's unique educational needs:

- Within 30 days of the child/youth coming into care, meet with their school and include the child/youth and their caregiver, and parent(s)/guardian(s) if appropriate.
- Develop an initial plan, which may include but is not limited to:
 - Assessments;
 - Educational supports or other activities to support the child/youth through their transition to care;
 - How contact and communication will be facilitated.
- Assess the child/youth's learning needs by:
 - Gathering information from relevant sources, including the child/youth, their family, school, day care, pre-school, family physician and/or pediatrician, caregiver, Indigenous community and any others with direct knowledge of the child/youth's abilities and needs; and
 - Arranging for the child/youth to be evaluated by a qualified professional if there are any concerns or indications that they may have learning support needs for which they will need additional supports or services.
- Consult with school staff to determine whether the child/youth requires an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP).
- If necessary services are not available within the school system, consult with a supervisor to determine whether obtaining services outside of the school system would be the best plan for the child/youth.
- Where a child/youth in care is having difficulty within the regular school system, due to the impact of trauma and/or specific behavioural or medical needs, consult with a Child and Youth Mental Health Clinician or other behavioural specialist to determine the best supports and services for the child/youth.
- If necessary, in extreme circumstances, consider alternatives to in-school education programs in order to accommodate the child/youth's behavioural, medical or trauma related needs and to ensure the safety of others.

Be an Active Participant in the Child/Youth's Education:

- Have regular contact with the school and participate in school meetings;
- Encourage and provide opportunities for the child/youth to participate in school activities, outings and extracurricular programs that will enhance learning and promote acquisition of academic and social skills.
- Address specific issues as they arise, such as prolonged absence or lack of achievement, in collaboration with school staff and the child/youth's caregiver as part of the child/youth's Care Team or Circle.
- Review the education program for the child/youth at least twice annually and document in the Care Plan.

Minimize Disruptions:

- Whenever possible, support children/youth to remain in the same school they attended before the current placement, in order to ensure continuity, minimize disruption in their education and promote relational and physical permanency.
- A change in school is only considered when there is no other reasonable option or when the Care Team or Circle determines that the child/youth will benefit from a change in school environment.
- When a change of schools is necessary, contact the current and new schools to help facilitate a smooth transition for the child/youth, and to ensure that school records and other important information is transferred to the new school.

Consider the Needs of Youth Transitioning to Adulthood:

- Determine with the youth their education and vocational goals, as well as the services and supports that can be provided to assist with their education or vocational development.
- Determine with the youth whether a specialized education program or service is required to best meet their potential and goals.
- For youth who plan to complete high school, plan with them to participate in graduation activities with their classmates. During the youth's Grade 11 year, begin to make a plan about how graduation expenses will be covered.
- For youth in care under the age of 19 years who are planning to attend post-secondary education or training, inform them about post-secondary financial supports that they are eligible to receive as former youth in care: <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/youth-and-family-services/teens-in-foster-care/aging-out-of-care>
- For youth with support needs who are or may be eligible for adult services from Community Living BC, follow the Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Special Needs and begin the process when the youth is at least 14 years of age. Information about the Protocol can be found at: http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/children-teens-with-special-needs/2012_ytpp_protocol.pdf

Other Considerations to Support Success:

- Participation in social and recreational activities gives children/youth the opportunity to play and have fun, develop talents, expand and explore interests and interact with other children/youth and adults.
- Before a child/youth can participate in certain activities, sponsoring organizations may require a parent/guardian to sign the organization's form. Such forms might be entitled, for example "Parental/Guardian Consent," "Consent and Release of Liability," or "Waiver, Release and Indemnity" or some combination of similar wording.
- When a decision is made for the child/youth to participate in a particular activity and signing a form is required, determine the child/youth's legal status to decide who needs to sign:
 - If the child/youth is in care under a Voluntary Care Agreement or a Special Agreement, the parent(s)/guardian(s) should sign.
 - If the child/youth is in care under an interim, temporary or continuing custody order, the worker should sign or the caregiver may sign if a routine matter such as field trip.

