



# Advocating for Children and Youth in Care: Your Role as a Caregiver

» *Advocacy is part of what you do every day — in matters related to family relationships, recreational activities, school, and healthcare. Advocacy may also be required for situations that involve collaborative planning during which the child or youth’s views must be heard and considered to inform important decisions. Examples include: the amount of visitation with family, involvement with cultural and community activities and changes in living arrangements.*

**A**dvocating for children and youth in care means helping them to use their own voice or speaking out on their behalf to make sure that their rights, interests and views are respected and protected.

*As a caregiver, it is part of your role to advocate for the children and youth in your care, and to work collaboratively with other members of the team to make good decisions that are in the best interests of the child or youth.*

The following must be considered when making a “best interests” decision:

- » safety;
- » physical/emotional needs and level of development;
- » continuity of care;
- » maintaining relationships with parents and others;
- » cultural, racial, linguistic and religious heritage;
- » for an aboriginal child, preserving cultural identity must be considered;
- » the child’s views; and
- » the effect on the child if there is a delay in making a decision.

Advocating on behalf of a child or youth is not always easy or straightforward. Every situation is different and the circumstances surrounding the issue or concern may be very complex.

## **TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY**

### **1/ Understand your role as an advocate**

An effective child and youth advocate:

- promotes a child-centred approach;
- promotes a collaborative problem-solving approach;
- is knowledgeable about the rights of children and youth (eg. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Child, Family and Community Service Act);
- sets aside personal views and focuses on the child or youth’s views and best interests; and
- upholds the child or youth’s right to participate by ensuring their views are heard and considered.

### **2/ Be prepared**

It’s always good to be prepared in your advocacy role, by:

- gathering all the information needed to fully understand the situation;
- having a conversation with other members of the team about how you see your role as an advocate;
- supporting and encouraging the relationship between the child or youth and their worker;
- recognizing the child or youth’s level of development and how they can best participate in meetings;
- encouraging the child or youth to use their own voice;
- managing the child or youth’s expectations about situations; and
- knowing your limits. If you feel your role as a caregiver is impacted, get support for yourself and seek out another advocate for the child or youth.



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### 3/ Support self-advocacy

Support children and youth to advocate on their own behalf by helping them to:

- use their voices to express concerns, needs and desires;
- learn how to keep records of events and meetings and obtain information;
- learn to negotiate and brainstorm ideas with others;
- listen to and consider others views; and
- identify advocates who can help them.

### 4/ Build positive relationships

Developing and modeling good working relationships can be accomplished through a “team approach” which puts top priority on the best interests, needs and rights of the child or youth in care through:

- mutual goals and understanding;
- creative problem-solving that leads to better decisions and outcomes;
- a focus on the child or youth’s strengths and abilities; and
- an environment where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

### 5/ Model good communication

Effective advocacy requires good communication skills. Here are three principles for success:

- communicate clearly;
- listen to and understand the perspective of everyone involved; and
- be aware of your feelings and be objective. Emotions can run high when advocating and it is important to know if they are getting in the way.

### 6/ Get support if you need it

Help can come from a number of sources such as another caregiver, your resource worker or one of the organizations listed in the “For More Information” section.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

### **MCFD Complaints Resolution Process**

Contact your local MCFD office first to address your concerns. You can also contact the Dispute Resolution Consultant in your area. The phone number can be found by calling MCFD Client Relations. Toll-Free: 1 (877) 387-7027  
[www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/complaints/index.htm](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/complaints/index.htm)

### **Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks**

The FBCYICN provides advocacy and support for young people in and from care. Toll-Free: 1 (800) 565-8055  
[www.fbcyicn.ca](http://www.fbcyicn.ca)

### **Representative for Children and Youth**

The RCY team of advocates provide information, advice and support to callers, and can advocate directly for children and youth needing or receiving services. In Victoria: (250) 356-6710  
 Toll-Free: 1 (800) 476-3933  
[www.rcybc.ca](http://www.rcybc.ca) or [www.talktotherep.ca](http://www.talktotherep.ca)

### **Public Guardian and Trustee**

As guardian of the estate, the PGT protects the legal and financial rights of children and youth in the continuing care of MCFD or a Delegated Aboriginal Agency. Phone: (604) 775-3480  
[www.trustee.bc.ca](http://www.trustee.bc.ca)

### **Office of the BC Ombudsperson**

If you think a public agency has treated you unfairly, the Ombudsperson may be able to help. In Victoria (250) 387-5855  
 Toll-Free: 1 (800) 567-3247  
[www.bcombudsperson.ca](http://www.bcombudsperson.ca)

### **B.C. Federation of Foster Parent Associations**

Toll-Free: 1 (800) 663-9999  
[www.bcfosterparents.ca](http://www.bcfosterparents.ca)

### **Federation of Aboriginal Foster Parents**

Phone: (604) 291-7091  
 Toll-Free: 1 (866) 291-7091  
[www.fafp.ca](http://www.fafp.ca)

### **Delegated Aboriginal Child and Family Services Agency**

Contact your local agency first to address your concerns. Each agency has a complaints process. The number for your local agency can be found by calling MCFD Client Relations. Toll-Free: 1 (877) 387-7027

### **Foster Parent Support Line**

Call the support line, Monday to Friday from 4:00 pm – 12:45 am, weekends and statutory holidays from 8:00 am – 12:45 am. Toll-Free: 1 (888) 495-4440

### **Foster BC**

Lists foster parent support organizations in B.C.  
[www.fosterbc.ca](http://www.fosterbc.ca)

## CHILD RIGHTS RESOURCES

### **Use Your Voice**

[www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/complaints/pdf/youth\\_complaints\\_brochure.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/complaints/pdf/youth_complaints_brochure.pdf)

### **Your Life, Your Rights**

<http://fbcyicn.ca/ylyr>

### **Know Your Rights**

[www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/know\\_your\\_rights.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/know_your_rights.pdf)

### **This is me and I have rights**

[www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/this\\_is\\_me.pdf](http://www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/foster/pdf/this_is_me.pdf)