

In early December 2022, the OHIO YAB asked:

- In what ways did you and did you not experience “Normalcy” during foster care?

Below is the first installment of responses, organized by category:

Category of Youth Experience	Positive Examples	Negative Examples	Desired Outcomes
Communication	-I was allowed to have a cell phone	-Was not allowed to have social media or a phone, per the county policy.	-Cell phones are vital assets when preparing for college entrance.
Driving	-My foster parents taught me to drive once I was no longer in foster care.	-I didn't learn how to drive until I was 22. -I didn't learn how to drive until I was 24. -I still don't know how to drive.	In 2022, the OHIO YAB will be looking into possibilities to emulate Florida's Keys to Independence initiative.
Educational	-I had a voice in IEP meetings and whether I was pulled from class or not. - Nothing about foster care felt particularly normal. School structure helped.	-Lack of school clothes and school supplies (especially for youth in kinship care). -No one checked my grades or went to a parent teacher conference. -Not allowed to participate in Science Fair because the foster family did not believe in Science as part of their religion. -Constantly being taken from class for IEP meetings and therapy (this came up multiple times). -A group of adults wearing agency badges meeting with youth at school.	-Focus on the "I" (for Individual) in IEP. Individual: What works for this student, at this point in time? Quote: "I was embarrassed by being pulled out of class by my CASA worker while in high school, and I was at lunch. She was very loud about things I wanted to remain private. I didn't like people knowing I was in foster care at school."

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Peers wondering why there was a different staff person picking me up from school every day. - I didn't get to walk the stage when I graduated. 	
<p>Extra-curricular</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I was allowed to participate in extra-curricular activities. -I was allowed to participate in sports. - I was encouraged to participate in activities and sports by two of my six foster families. I personally grew the most in their care for that year and a half and am still proud of the many achievements I accomplished during that short period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Missed out on opportunities because by the time the permission slips were signed, the event was over. -Not allowed to participate in extra-curricular activities unless on a certain level. -Only able to participate if the foster or kinship placement was able to provide transportation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Extra-curricular activities help youth recognize their talents and can help with college applications. -Wishing that permission slips didn't have to go through such an extensive checks and balances process Quote: "School clubs built my responsibility and leadership skills."
<p>Emotional</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -My foster parents treated me as their own and never referred to me as a "foster." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -I had to tell the people I was living when if and when it was my birthday. -Grown adults asking "why you got taken away" or "why your parents didn't want you" as if a young child had the answers to those questions. - The awkward moment the grocery store clerk calls your foster mom your "mom" and she said "oh she's just my foster." - I wasn't allowed to make a mistake, be angry, voice my feelings, be upset about 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Quote: "I feel like I wasn't prioritized as a child but more so as a case or bill and I still have a hard time feeling human to this day."

		not being home with my mom, or really say anything to defend myself if someone wanted to talk badly towards me.	
Employment	-I was allowed to get a part time job	-Not allowed to work or have a savings account.	Quote: <i>"It would have prepared me for adulthood more. We weren't allowed to learn to be independent while in care, and let's be real the sporadic IL classes that we got to attend didn't actually prepare us"</i>
Everyday	-My foster parents allowed me to do everyday things.	-Not allowed to operate a lawn mower. -Not allowed to jump on a trampoline. -Not allowed to sit in the front seat of a car. -Not allowed to use the microwave. -Not allowed to go to the mall. - Van label identified me as a foster child.	Quote: <i>"The normalcy that I experienced in my foster home was a main contributor to how well adjusted and prepared I was for adulthood."</i>
Feeling Powerless		-Didn't know what was coming next. I was kept in the dark a lot until things would take place. -Example, I would come home from school and find out a case worker was on their way to pick me up for a visit with my biological parents. No communication.	

<p>Food</p>	<p>-My last foster family taught me how to cook.</p>	<p>- Cupboards and refrigerator were padlocked.</p> <p>- I wasn't allowed to get into the refrigerator and just get something to eat.</p> <p>- Any food I was allowed to eat would be set on table.</p>	<p>-Food restriction during childhood and teenage years can have lifelong physical and emotional health consequences.</p>
<p>Holidays</p>	<p>-We celebrated holidays as a family unit.</p>	<p>-My Christmas gifts said "8-year-old girl" and not my name.</p> <p>-Christmas "family ornament;" the picture didn't include the foster youth.</p> <p>-Less gifts than the foster family's "real" children.</p> <p>-I never knew who to give the "Mother's Day" or "Father's Day" cards we made at school.</p>	<p>-Desire for youth in out-of home care to have positive memories and experiences.</p>
<p>Siblings</p>		<p>-Not allowed communication with siblings who were also underage but not in foster care.</p>	
<p>Social</p>	<p>-I was allowed to go to Prom.</p> <p>- Time with my peers helped my social and emotional skills greatly. I learned self-confidence and the ability to say no to peer pressure.</p>	<p>-Never allowed to see friends outside of school.</p> <p>-Background checks of a friend's parents required before allowing sleepovers.</p> <p>-Not allowed to go to birthday parties.</p>	<p>-Quote: "I would have gained the skills to be able to interact with others in social situations."</p> <p>-Quote: "It feels very alienating when you aren't allowed to do what "normal" kids get to do. Hearing classmates talk about</p>

	<p>- While spending the night at friends, going to the movies, dances etc. may seem like small things, not being told “no because you are a foster kid” helped me feel normal. The simple fact that I felt as similar to my peers as one in care could made a world of a difference.</p>	<p>-I’ve never been to a school dance.</p>	<p><i>how much fun they had at dances, or experiencing things that we weren't allowed to participate in reinforces the belief that we are less than. I would have felt equal to my peers if I were able to participate in these events.”</i></p>
<p>Vacation</p>	<p>-Being able to go on vacation with the foster family</p>	<p>-Having to go to respite when the foster family takes a vacation (<i>this came up multiple times</i>)</p>	<p>-Quote: <i>“I’ve heard arguments from foster parents that the problem is sometimes they don’t have permission to take the foster child out of state but I feel like that’s a cop-out so they don’t have to interrupt their “normal” lives because of the foster kid.</i></p> <p><i>“When you dedicate to be a foster parent, that should be with your whole heart. You should adjust your vacations accordingly.”</i></p>