


GUIDELINES
TO

GRADUATION

*A Self-Instructional Workbook
for
Foster Parents and Relatives
of
High School-Age Youth*

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Acknowledgements

This workbook is dedicated to all foster and kinship families devoted to caring for young people who have experienced loss and trauma. This is a challenge you are addressing. Your affection and support allows these youth to successfully flourish into productive members of our communities. Heartfelt thanks for your caring and commitment to the protection, wellbeing, and educational support of the youth in your care.

Welcome to Guidelines to Graduation!

The title of this workbook is *Guidelines to Graduation*. It focuses on understanding the effects of foster care, and learning how to effectively advocate for, support, and help the teenagers in your care graduate from high school. Many foster and kinship caregivers may not be fully prepared to care for youth who are in high school. They may not know where to go for services and resources or how to obtain them. This curriculum is meant to help foster and kinship caregivers, as well as service providers to gain an understanding of how to assist youth to graduate high school.

First, because this workbook is self-instructional, you're the one in charge of deciding when to start, skipping to sections that are most relevant to you, and ending when you want. As a foster caregiver, kinship caregiver, child welfare worker, or service provider, you can focus on what is most pertinent for you and the young person in your care.

Second, this workbook is aimed to reduce stress. This workbook was developed to act as a resource guide and empower you as you undertake the significant role of caring for the adolescent in your care.

Third, this workbook will provide information about risk factors, strategies for getting youth to school, increasing youth's motivation, and working with teachers and agency staff.

Finally, this workbook is an educational, not therapeutic intervention. It cannot be substituted for help from service providers such as therapists, child welfare workers, teachers, or legal aides.

Introduction to the Workbook

Target Population

The target population for this self-instructional workbook, *Guidelines to Graduation*, is kinship caregivers and foster parents caring for young people who are in high school. Another target group would be child welfare workers who work with these families. The workbook can also be beneficial for foster parents or kinship care giving associations who would like to provide workshops on this topic and could use the content as part of their training program.

Goals and Objectives

The goal is to provide kinship caregivers and foster parents with (1) assistance in navigating the crucial last 2- years of high school in which students are preparing to transition into the workforce and/or a post-secondary education; and (2) skills and knowledge needed to assist the youth in their care graduate high school. Specific objectives are to provide foster parents and kinship caregivers with the ability, resources, and willingness to:

- Understand how academic achievement can be impacted by the circumstances that created the need for separation from parents such as abuse or neglect;
- Understand how being a part of the child welfare system can be both protective and risk factors;
- Identify the academic struggles unique to youth who have experienced loss and trauma;
- Make a commitment to helping youth in their care graduate from high school;
- Know high school graduation requirements;
- Know how to advocate for educational supports and resources;
- Work collaboratively with public and private child welfare agency staff and school personnel.

Overview of Resources

This self-instructional workbook consists of:

- A title page with the name of the workbook and author
- A table of contents that lists the workbook activities
- An introduction section that welcomes users to the workbook
- An explanation of the basis for having a self-instructional resource
- An assortment of activities including, for example, critical thinking sections, fact sheets and quick references.
- Additional resources, references, and contacts.

Using the Workbook

This workbook is self-instructional so that foster parents and kinship caregivers can be in charge of your own learning. Remember the many times that you have had to teach yourself something such as cooking, swimming and using a computer. When we need a little extra help with doing something many of us will use books or even ask for family or friends advice. This workbook is meant to be used to get that little extra assistance with helping the youth in your care graduate high school.

As a self-instructional workbook, foster and kinship caregivers are expected to be in control of their own learning and work at their own pace. If possible, foster and kinship caregivers would be able to work with other family members or service providers to complete the workbook. By banding together this will provide further support and guarantee teamwork.

To start, take a look at the Table of Contents. It illustrates that this workbook will cover a wide range of topics related to helping the youth in your care graduate high school.

Materials Needed

This workbook will be offered as an easy to follow self-instructional text that will only require a pen or pencil for participants to write answers or make notes. The workbook could be organized into a three-ring binder which would allow you to easily add other resources for your convenience. Additional materials, such as a computer, will only be necessary in order to access supplemental resources.



Activity: True or False

Read the questions below and circle true or false.

1. High school graduates tend to earn more money than non-graduates. True/ False
2. High school graduates are more likely to be boys than girls. True/ False
3. High school graduates are less likely to engage in criminal behavior. True/ False
4. Minorities are more likely to not graduate high school. True/ False
5. High school dropouts are more than twice as likely to live in poverty. True/ False
6. Foster youth have a higher rate of substance use. True/ False
7. Children in foster care test lower than that of peers. True/ False
8. Youth that experience foster care are more likely to drop out, repeat grades and get suspended or expelled. True/ False
9. Moving during childhood does not cause risks of failing a grade in school. True/ False
10. Youth living with relatives do not have more school behavior problems than their peers. True/ False

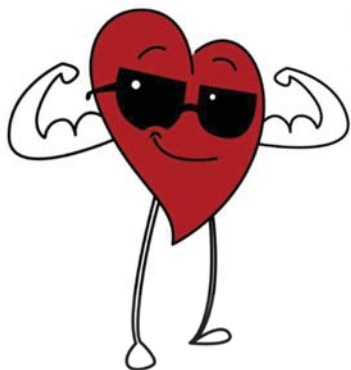
True or False Answers

1. True: According to Day and Newburger (n.d.) the average dropout can expect to earn an annual income of \$20,241 compared to \$30,627 that a high school graduate typically makes.
2. False: National research shows that female students have a higher graduation rate vs. boys. Nationally, in 2011-2012 graduates were 84% females and 77% males (Mellville, 2006).
3. True: High school graduates are less likely to be involved in criminal behavior. Dropouts are more likely than graduates to report having been arrested (Sum et al, 2009). Also 40% of all incarcerated 16- to 24-year olds in the United States are high school dropouts (Aud, 2011)
4. True: Nationally, 69% of Black students graduated high school, 73% Hispanics students graduated high school, and 86% Whites students graduated high school (Aud, 2011).
5. True: According to Rumberger (2012) a high school graduate makes at least half a million dollars more in income than a dropout and is three times less likely to live in poverty (Mellville, 2006).
6. True: Foster youth demonstrate higher rates of illegal drug use, at 34%, than youth who have never been in foster care at 22% (Basca & North, 2009).
7. True: It has been found that children in foster care test far below their peers (Paulson, 2005).
8. True: Foster youth are more likely to drop out, repeat grades, and get suspended or expelled (Paulson, 2005).
9. False: Moving during childhood amplifies the risks of failing a grade in school (Wood, Halfon, Newacheck, & Scarlata, 1993).
10. False: Youth in kinship care have more school behavior problems than their peers and are more likely to be suspended or expelled from school (Nelson, Gibson, & Bauer, 2010).

Instructions for Activity:

Strengths

This activity focuses your strengths and the strengths of the youth in your care. Sometimes it is difficult to think about the strengths we as individuals have and writing them down may help with embracing these strengths. This activity may also be helpful in finding out what areas you may need more assistance in. It is also important to see the strengths others have. It may also be beneficial to discuss the strengths you see in the youth in your care with the adolescent so that they too embrace their strengths. The following page has a section where you are to write the strengths you see in the adolescent in your care and the other section for your own strengths.



Strengths

Child's Strengths	Your Strengths

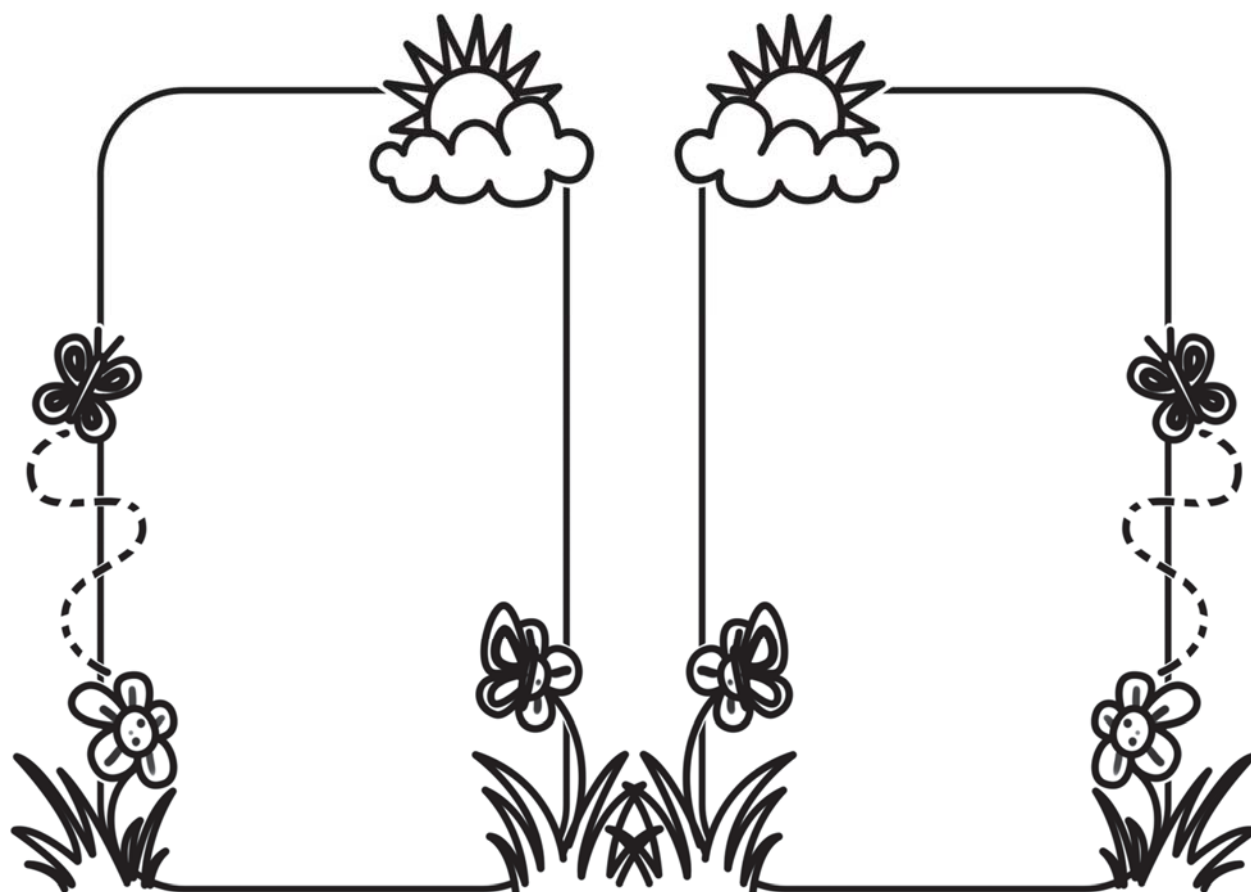
(Copyright Rachel Snyder, 2017)

Instructions for activity:

Positive Traits

This activity focuses on thinking about all the positive traits that the youth in your care has. In one of the empty boxes provided below write the youth's name and for each letter in their name write a positive trait. Adolescents (even adults at times) have difficulty when trying to recognize the good in themselves and by expressing what traits you appreciate about the adolescent in your care it may help with their self-esteem and motivation. Two empty boxes are provided where you can fill out one box and have the youth in your care fill the other one out. You could also write your own name and write your own positive traits. An example box for the name "Rachel" is provided.

Positive Traits



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Who can you ask for help?

Asking for help can be a tough thing to do. But at some point we all need help with something. Asking for help should not be seen as a weakness but instead as a strength because it does take a great amount of strength to ask for help. It is much easier to not ask for help than to actually ask for the assistance. Remember the times when someone has asked you for help; no doubt you felt good that they had trusted you enough to ask for support. You should not only try to feel more comfortable with asking for help but you should also encourage the youth in your care to ask for assistance when needed. Advocating for yourself and the teenager in your care is a great skill to have.

This workbook is designed specifically for helping the youth in your care with graduating high school; we will be discussing who you can ask for help with this topic. To begin with communicating with the school the young person is in is imperative. By communicating with the school you will be able to find out if they have tutoring services or other programs that the adolescent in your care can benefit from. According to Vacca (2004), educational achievement is a major problem for youth that experience foster. Kinship youth aging 6 to 17 years old have a greater possibility for low school engagement than youth raised by their parents. It has been statically proven that youth that have experienced foster care struggle academically more than that of their peers. It is highly possible that if the youth in your care receives extra help with school work they will not struggle as much academically.

Young people who experience foster care are at times at a disadvantage for graduating high school. Chambers and Palmer (2011) stated that there is a connection between kinship youth being held back multiple times and dropout rates. According to Yu (2003), research shows 26% to 40% of youth in foster care repeat one or more grades. Chambers and Palmer (2011) found that many kinship 15-year-olds were placed in eighth grade and many kinship 18-year-olds were placed in ninth grade. It is my hope that this workbook will help with lowering the dropout rate for young people that experience foster care. In addition to asking for the youth's school for help you can also benefit from asking for assistance from agencies, organizations and health care providers.

Your Own Personal Resources

In the section provided below write down the support people that you trust you can seek help from. These individuals should be the ones who can help you with finding resources about helping the teenager in your care graduate high school. For example, you could list members of the school the youth in your care attends: agency worker, counselors, teachers, principals, support groups.

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Graduation Requirements

One of the most essential aspects about graduating high school is being informed about what the specific graduation requirements the school the youth in your care attends. Each school has their own requirements on how many classes, credits, grades, and exams each graduate has to complete. It is also necessary to look at the transcripts to make sure you know what classes they have already taken. An estimated 22% to 70% of young people in foster care experience moves in one year (Chamberlain, 2006). There is also the possibility that school records can get lost so ensuring that you have access to the youth's records is important.

Graduation Requirements for the Young Person in Your Care

The section below is meant for you to write the specific requirements of the school the teenager in your care attends. It is essential that you and the adolescent in your care be aware of what the graduation requirements are.

What classes must be taken at the school?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

What grades are considered passing?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How many units are needed?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Do they need to pass an exit exam?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Negatives of Absences

Young people that experience foster care have most likely missed some school due to having to move from their pervious home. According to Malcom (2003), there are six possible effects of teenagers missing school.

- Academic underachievement
- Difficulty making friends
- Loss of confidence and self esteem
- Engagement in premature sexual activity
- Stress amongst young careers
- Impaired socialization for work

The related effects to this workbook are academic underachievement, difficulty making friends and loss of confidence and self-esteem. It is noted that absences can break the stability of learning, and the school's curriculums are tightly structured and absences can cause a youth to miss something essential (Malcom, Wilson, Davidson & Kirk, 2003). Malcom (2003) continues by stating that teachers believed that students who were often absent had difficulty making and keeping friends and peers appeared to show them less respect. School staff also shared that the students that had reduced attendance often became, insecure, bad tempered, undisciplined and frustrated. Students with poor attendance began to dislike school more, and wanted to be at school less (Malcom, 2003).



Motivating the Teenager in Your Care

We have discussed some of the aspects that you as a caregiver can do to assist the young person in your care to graduate high school. But what do you do now if the youth in your care does not want to continue going to school? We will be discussing methods of increasing teenager's motivation in order for them to achieve a high school diploma.

According to Bumgarner (n.d.), empathy is a step you can take in order to motivate the teenager in your care. Cognitively empathy is all about the facts. For example, the message is "So this is the way it is for you, this is your current experience, this is how you see it (Bumgarner, n.d. pp. 31)". It is necessary in cognitive empathy that you use your listening skills. You should also listen without comments, judgment, and without advice. Purely by listening to what the youth in your care has to say and summarizing what you heard at the end you are showing cognitive empathy (Bumgarner, n.d.). Bumgarner (n.d.) states that this can change the dynamic between you and the adolescent in your care in a positive matter.

Bumgarner (n.d.) shares that goal setting is an essential step towards motivation. Bumgarner (n.d.) continues that a question that everyone can ask themselves is "What do I want?" By asking this question one will think about one's goals, beliefs, preferences, and values. It also helps the youth in your care reflect upon whether their behavior is supportive of or conflicting with their goals (Bumgarner, n.d.). Some critical questions you can ask the teenager in your care regarding school and having them think about what they want for themselves are:

"Do you want to be the kind of student who completes homework?"

"Do you want to be on the Honor Roll?"

"Do you want passing grades?"

"Do you want to graduate?"

"Do you want to go to college?"

The purpose is for the youth in your care to state their own goals rather than having adults say what their goals should be (Bumgarner, n.d.).

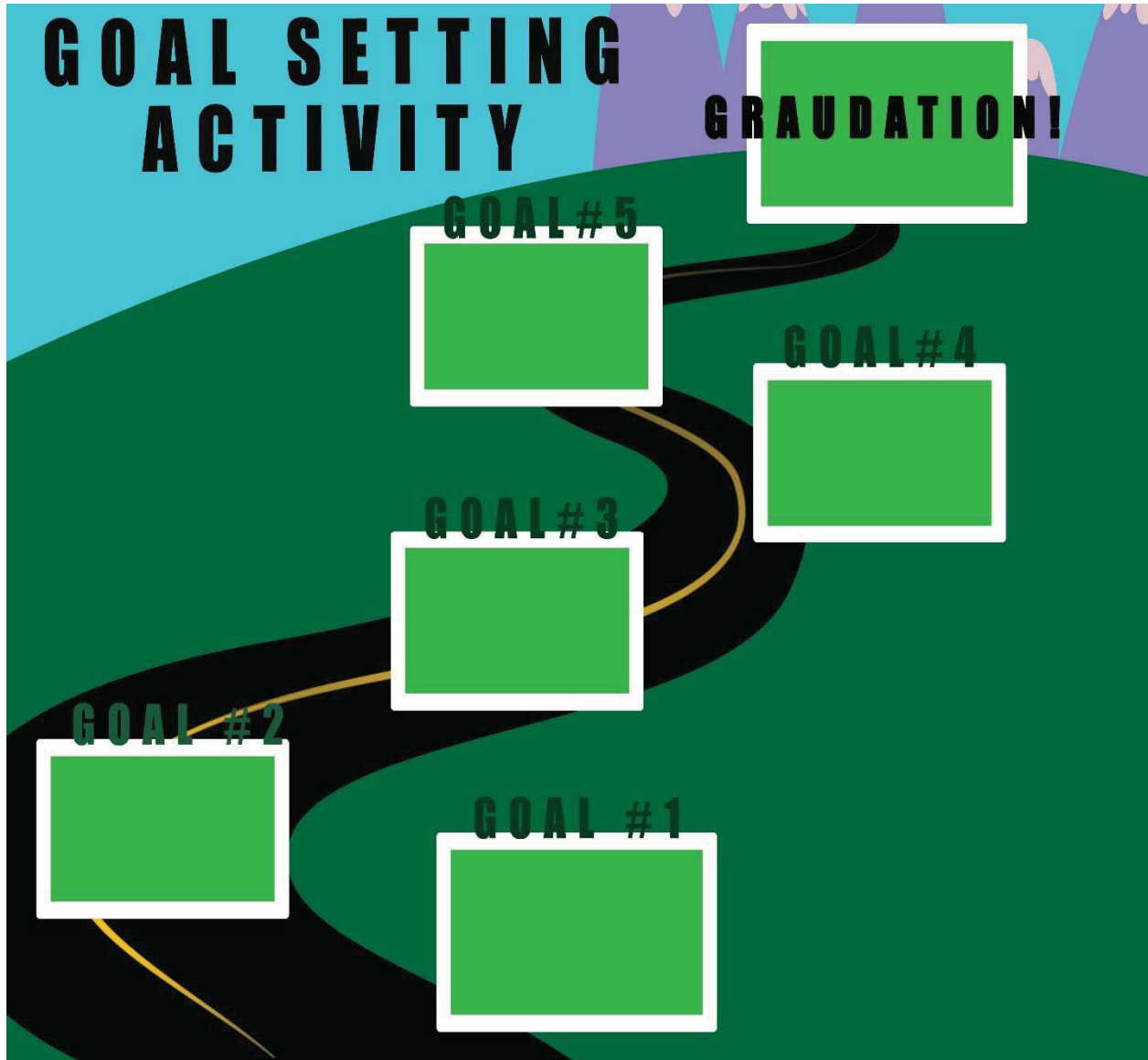
Instructions for activity:

Goal Setting Activity

The final activity of *Guidelines to Graduation* is to be worked on by yourself and the young person in your care. It is important to discuss goals with the youth in your care. This will help them visualize their goals as well as become more motivated to complete their goals. In the boxes provided below have the youth in your care fill out what steps they must complete in order to graduate high school. Keep in mind that every individual will have different steps in order to accomplish their goal. It is not necessary to fill out every box, they are just there in case you need them all.



Goal Setting Activity



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Additional Resources:

As adults we do all we can to assist the ones we care for but sometimes we need additional help. It is important to look into the community you live and find out whether there are resources that you can use: this could be tutoring services, mentoring or even online classes for the youth in your care.

A few websites/ agencies that have extra help with topics covered in school are:

- CK12.org
- Khan Academy
- *Graduation Success* program provided by Treehouse
- *The Foster and Kinship Care Education Program*

It is essential that you discuss and understand where the youth in your care is struggling so that you can advocate for them.

Feedback

The developer of this Workbook would like some feedback on whether you found this resource to be helpful. All completed surveys will remain confidential and will only be used to determine the efficacy of the workbook and provide helpful feedback for improvements. Please circle the “grade” you believe fits best for the questions provided.

Questions about the information shared:

1. Was the workbook helpful? A B C D or F

If you did not give a grade of “A” please say what would have to be done to obtain an “A” grade for information shared.

2. Was the workbook easy to follow? A B C D or F

If you did not give a grade of “A” please say what would have to be done to obtain an “A” grade for information shared.

3. Would you recommend this workbook to other families? A B C D or F

If you did not give a grade of “A” please say what would have to be done to obtain an “A” grade for information shared.

About the Workbook Developer

Gloria Consuelo Villagomez, MSW (May 2017), developed this workbook project as a graduate student at California State University, Long Beach, School of Social Work.

Ms. Villagomez has a passion for advocating for children and families, supporting them, and ensuring their development and wellbeing. Ms. Villagomez hopes to have the honor of working with foster youth, foster and kinship families.

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