



Dear Cedar

A First Nations youth toolkit
for understanding Ontario's
child welfare system



FEATHERS OF HOPE

*“The ancestors are in the wind
that blows, the water that flows,
the trees that dance.”*

FEATHERS OF HOPE
CHILD WELFARE FORUM PARTICIPANT

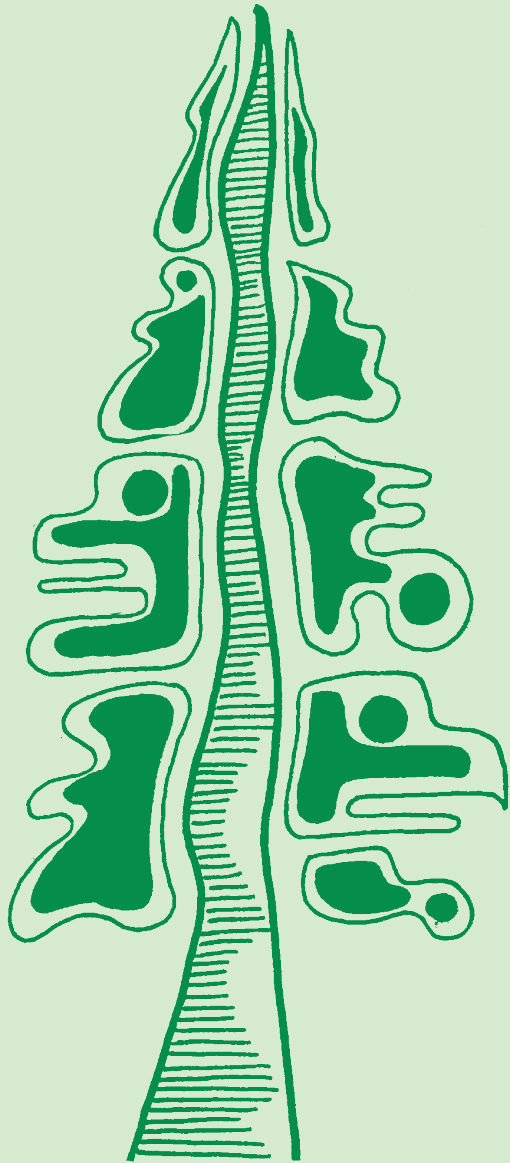


Dear Cedar

A First Nations youth toolkit
for understanding Ontario's
child welfare system

Are you a young person who is
involved with the child welfare system
or a children's aid society (CAS)?

Then this toolkit is for you.



Hello, I'm Cedar.

Just like you, I need the right conditions to grow healthy and happy. That's why good homes are so important.

You probably have questions about why you've been taken away from your family, what your rights are, and what happens next.

In the pages of this toolkit, I will do my best to help you find your way.



Find a question

Look through the questions at the beginning of each section to find the specific ones you would like to learn more about



How you can use this toolkit



Jump to a section

Use the Contents on page 8 to help you identify an area you are interested in learning more about



Print a copy

Print a copy of the toolkit to keep as a resource that you can carry with you in case you have more questions or need the contact information. You can download this toolkit as a PDF at www.feathersofhope.ca



Look it up

Look up new words, or words that you are uncertain of, in the Definitions on page 106



Find resources

Explore the Resources on page 102 to learn more about your rights and to better understand what you can do if you need support

This toolkit is a resource for young people who are or have been involved with a child welfare agency. It may also be helpful for young people who might have questions about the child welfare system.

This toolkit can be read from front to back or can be used to answer questions one at a time. The table

of contents at the beginning will help you find the section you are interested in. Each section has its own table of contents at the beginning that can guide you to specific questions.

At the end of the toolkit, there is contact information about organizations that can help young people learn about and assert

their rights in the child welfare system.

If you are an adult ally, this toolkit can support (and help you support) the young person you know. You can give it to them as a resource or read through it with them so they will have a better understanding of their journey with the child welfare system.

If you are using a digital copy of the guide, important words or terms are underlined and linked to the Definitions on page 106. There you will find more details about these underlined words or terms.

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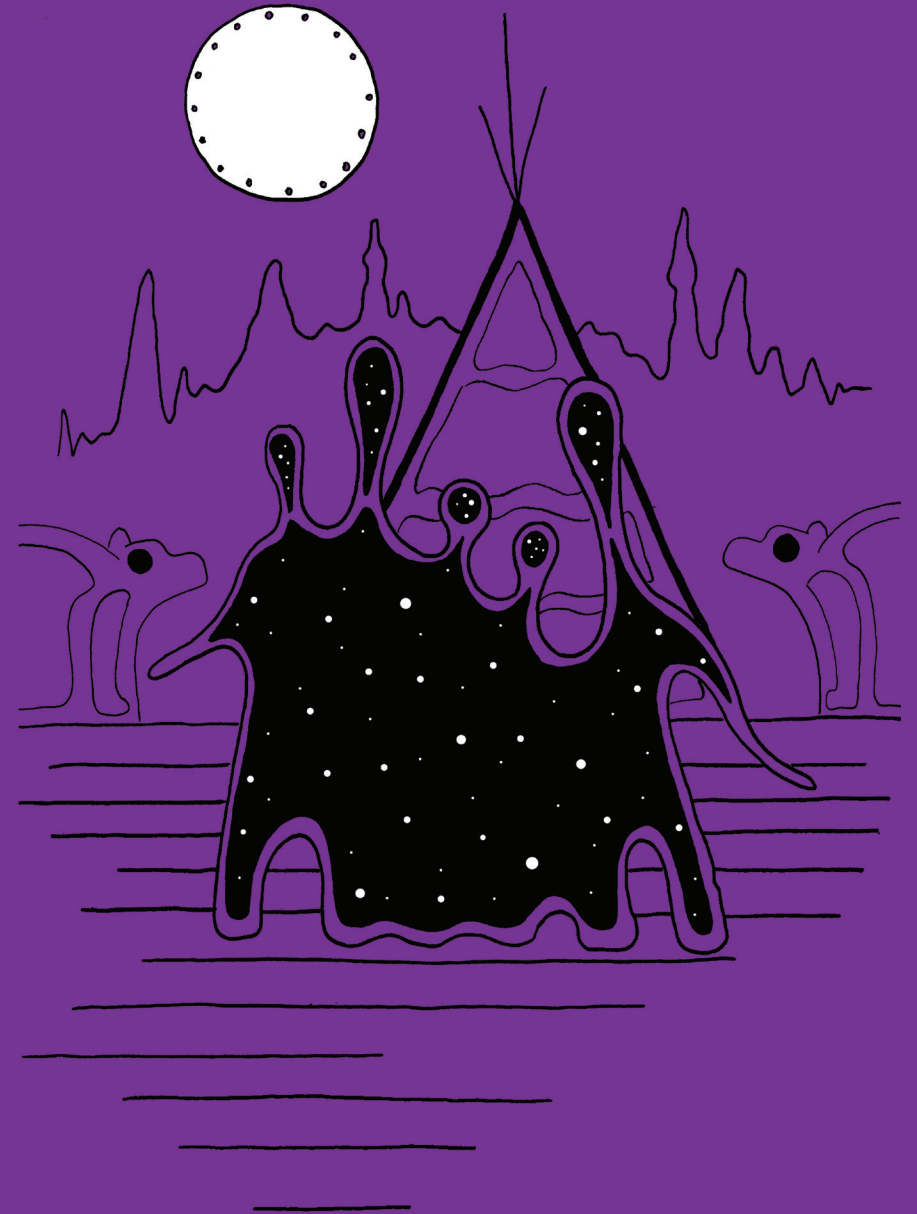


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Grandmother Moon is so bright in the night sky. She watches over our communities with such love and care.

Makwa, the bear, stands on either side of all families, protecting and watching over us. We have so many animals, so many spirits and so many ancestors looking out for us all of the time.

Together, all of these beings make up our webs of creation that support us throughout our lives. Our parents, aunties, uncles, siblings, grandparents, animal helpers, trees, earth, water, ancestors and spirit helpers all make up our webs of creation. All of these beings make up our families.





SECTION 1

About this toolkit

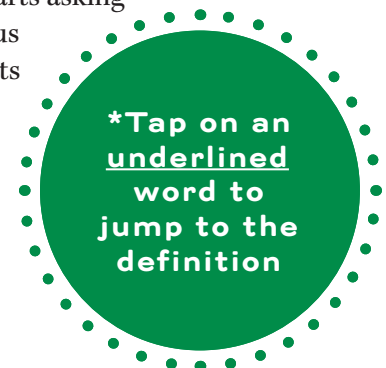
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Introduction

The relationship between Indigenous peoples and the child welfare system has a long and troubled history. This history is rooted in colonization.^{*} In the past, there were government policies that were meant to “kill the Indian in the child.” In other words, the policies tried to separate Indigenous children from their cultures. Changing Ontario’s child welfare system to make it better for Indigenous children requires commitment to making sure that past harms are not repeated.

Imagine if Indigenous children had the support of every Ontarian—if everyone said, “Enough! No more trauma, no more legacies tied to pain, no more poverty or racism.” Imagine if Ontarians took every action possible to offer hope, healing and reconciliation to Indigenous young people. It can happen if everyone starts asking questions about the wellbeing of Indigenous young people. It can happen if everyone gets involved and adds their voices to those of young people calling for a transformation of Ontario’s child welfare system.



The idea for this toolkit came from an advisory group of Indigenous young people with lived experience in the child welfare system



Creation of the toolkit

The idea to create this toolkit came from a voluntary advisory group of Indigenous young people with lived experience in the child welfare system. All attended the Feathers of Hope Youth Forum on Child Welfare in Thunder Bay hosted by the Ontario Child Advocate in 2015. Close to 100 Indigenous young people attended the forum. At the forum many young people shared that during their time in care they often felt lonely and lost. They had many questions about what was happening to them and their families when they were placed in care, but were unsure of where to go to find answers. The advisors wanted to create a toolkit to answer questions raised at the forum in hopes of helping children now and in the future.

Youth at the forum shared that they often lacked consistent, caring and supportive people in their lives. Frequent changes between homes and workers have left them unsure of who to trust. As a result, the youth

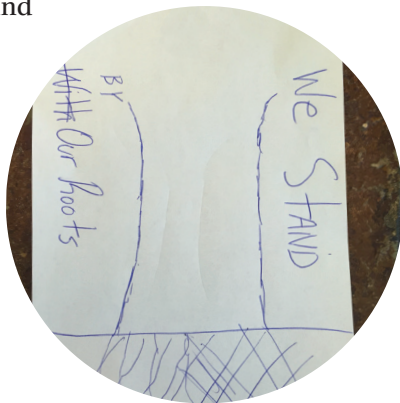
advisors from Feathers of Hope wanted this toolkit to be written as a conversation between a young person in or entering the child welfare system and a knowledgeable comforting spirit.

The young people who worked on the development of this toolkit choose the name “Cedar” to represent the guiding spirit. The cedar tree has its own life and spirit, and is a powerful symbol of strength and revitalization. It has medicinal powers and is used in sweat lodges and in ceremonies to protect people.

The tree imagery was chosen because it represents the journey a child takes while navigating new changes or when they are experiencing a separation from their family. Just like the tree, the young person represents strength and a resilient spirit that can withstand the harsh winds and thunderstorms that life sometimes brings because, like the trunks of trees, they are able to remain strong with their roots, forever connected to the land and culture they come from.

The artwork that is included throughout this toolkit tells the story of a young person’s journey through the child welfare system. The story guides a young person through their struggles with the system. It supports them to find strength within themselves and look to Mother Earth, their ancestors and culture for guidance. This is why the Amplifiers chose to name the young person in the story Giizhikens, meaning “little cedar.”

This sketch of a tree, made by one of the youth advisors at their first meeting, was the inspiration for Cedar.



What is the Ontario Child Advocate?

The Ontario Child Advocate (OCA) became an independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario in 2007. The mandate of the Child Advocate is to help elevate the voices of young people. The OCA does not speak *for* children and youth; the OCA works *with* them to create the change they wish to see. The OCA create safe spaces where young people can gather to discuss issues of concern. The Ontario Child Advocate works with young people to make recommendations to service providers, decision-makers and government.

The Ontario Child Advocate is scheduled for closure in the spring of 2019. After this time, all calls or complaints about the Child Welfare System will be handled by the Ontario Ombudsman’s Office.

“What if they give us a handbook made by kids who used to be in care...not just about rights... [but about] being in the [child welfare] system.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT



Feathers of Hope is an Indigenous youth-led movement

What is Feathers of Hope?

Feathers of Hope is an Indigenous youth-led movement. Young people involved in Feathers of Hope want to create communities for young people that are healthier and safer. With the support of the Ontario Child Advocate, these young people are changing the systems and services that support them. Feathers of Hope youth are a source of hope and inspiration to other young people in their communities.

The roots of Feathers of Hope reach back to January 2012, when the Ontario Child Advocate— with the support of First Nations leadership and federal and provincial members of the [Intergovernmental Network \(IGN\)](#)—began planning to bring together young people from 92 remote and fly-in First Nations communities in northern Ontario. The goal was to give young people an opportunity to discuss their concerns and present them to IGN members. Soon after, the Ontario Child Advocate hired five northern youth Amplifiers to create forums to raise the voices of Indigenous young people.

In March 2013, 150 youth from 62 northern communities met in Thunder Bay to talk about their experiences and share their hopes. A mini-forum in Kashechewan four months later added the voices of 37 more young people. The stories and recommendations of these 185 youth formed an action plan to address issues like identity and culture, child welfare, sports and recreation, and physical and mental health. Based on the responses of young people at the gatherings, the Ontario Child Advocate committed to working with Indigenous youth to hold annual forums. The goal was to address two key priority issues at each forum over a period of five years.

Why are Indigenous children over-represented in child welfare?

“We have this circle from generations and years of trauma that happened in [the] 60’s Scoop and Residential Schools...we’re here to stop the intergenerational trauma.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

1828–1998

The Indian Residential School System

1853–Today

The Child Welfare System



The roots of the problems faced by Indigenous children and youth in Ontario’s child welfare system go back hundreds of years. Long before there was a formal child welfare system, there was the [Indian Residential School System](#). The residential schools, created by the [British Crown](#), began operating in 1828. Even before that, as early as the 1620s, there were “boarding schools” for Indigenous children run by different religious groups. These schools existed at different points in history, but the overall goal was always the same: to “civilize” Indigenous children and teach them the religion, customs, language and ways of the European settlers. By the 1930s, there were more than

80 residential schools across Canada. The last residential school closed as recently as 1998.

Children torn from their families and forced to live at residential schools far from their homes suffered greatly. So did their parents, families and communities. Stories that former students shared with the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada](#) revealed that large numbers of children were abused, beaten or starved. They were taught to think their cultures were “bad” and their traditions evil or wrong. Eventually, many lost a sense of the meaning of family and community.

Survivors of the residential schools have been said to share a “collective soul wound” that is the result of being disconnected from their cultural and spiritual traditions.

Because of their negative experiences in the residential schools, many people experienced trauma as children. Symptoms of trauma can include feeling “blue” or down all the time, being jumpy or nervous, and not being able to sleep. Other symptoms can include feeling lost and confused, worrying too much, lashing out at others, deliberately hurting themselves, or getting stuck in negative thoughts and feelings. As they become adults, children who have suffered trauma sometimes struggle with alcoholism, drug abuse, addiction, physical and mental illness, suicide and violence. Some abuse their own children. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission referred to these challenges as the legacy of the residential school system. It means the long-term impact of the treatment that young people received at the residential schools.

Struggling to cope with these challenges is a part of everyday life for many Indigenous people. The emotional pain and suffering experienced by parents or Elders who attended the residential schools is often passed from one generation to the next. This is often called intergenerational trauma. People struggling with trauma need support,

“The past is the past and we are trying to make it better for other youth. They shouldn’t have to go through what we did.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

More than half of children under the age of 15 in foster care in Canada **are Indigenous, even though they only account for 7.7 per cent of the child population.** In Ontario, they account for **30%** of foster kids **but only 4.1 per cent of the population.***

treatment and counselling, but often cannot receive it because the services they need are not available on reserve. People struggling with trauma are often unable to work. This leaves them with little money to buy food or clothing for their children. They may also have no choice but to live in poor quality and over-crowded housing.

Many young people do not understand the impact of the residential schools on older generations. They may find it hard to understand why adults in the community, including their parents and grandparents, behave the way they do. But many adults simply never learned how to parent. When provincial child welfare agencies visited communities and heard concerns about or saw how children were being cared for, they often apprehended the children instead of giving parents and families the support they needed to overcome their trauma.

In the 1960s, a large number of Indigenous children were taken from families in what is called the Sixties Scoop. Again, rather than provide supports and resources, child welfare agencies removed thousands of young people from their homes. Many of these children were adopted by non-Indigenous families across Canada, the United States and other countries. Children who were removed from their families and communities in the 1960s are now adults. Many are disconnected from the language, traditions and ceremonies of their communities.

**Interrupted Childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black Children in Ontario Child Welfare*, <http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/interrupted-childhoods#4.1.Indigenous%20children>

Sometimes, our families can be disrupted.

As Indigenous peoples, we experience many disruptions in our lives because of colonization. Many of us find ourselves far away from the places we come from or far away from the people we love.

Sometimes, we may feel like a lone wolf that is separated from its pack. We must always remember our webs of creation that we come from.

We must always remember that we are never alone.



SECTION 2

What is happening to me?

SECTION 2

What is happening to me?

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Why would a child protection worker come to my house?

Dear Cedar,

A stranger is at my house. They said they are a child protection worker from a child welfare agency. Why would they come to my house? Is it because of something I did or said?

CEDAR:

First, I want you to know that you didn't do anything wrong—so no, chances are the reason for their visit has nothing to do with anything you said or did. I can tell you that child protection workers visit kids' homes any time they get a call from someone who thinks the young person might not be safe or properly cared for there. These visits feel scary and upsetting, but the worker is not there to punish you or your parents. They are checking to make sure you are safe.



You
didn't do
anything
wrong

Who called and why?

Dear Cedar,

Who called the child welfare agency?
Why did they call?

CEDAR:

Someone calling about how things are in your home can feel like a real invasion of privacy. But the law says that if an adult thinks you might not be safe at home, they have to call a child welfare agency, and the agency has to look into it. This adult who called could be a family member, neighbour, teacher, coach, counsellor or other concerned adult. Young people sometimes call an agency themselves because they do not feel safe at home and need help.

There are various things that could make an adult worry about your safety at home. For example, they might have noticed you're always hungry. They may have seen or heard screaming, yelling, crying or someone being hit. They may have seen bruises or marks on your body. They might be worried that a person in your home is hurting you physically or emotionally. They might be wrong, but someone still has to check.

Sometimes your parent or guardian may call because they need extra support to take care of you.

Why does the CAS take children away from their families?

Dear Cedar,

Why does a child welfare agency sometimes take children away from their families?

CEDAR:

I know that it is scary to think about having to live somewhere that is not your home. If a child protection worker finds out that you've been hurt, or that you're at risk of harm, they have to come up with a plan to make sure you are safe. Sometimes everyone involved can agree on the best plan, and it might involve living at home with support or living with relatives for a while. Other times it means you have to live in a foster home or group home instead. This can be a tough transition, but your safety matters.



What if I can't go home?

Dear Cedar,

I have been told I may not be able to return home. Who gets to make this decision? How is it going to turn out?

CEDAR:

Being removed from your home can be very confusing and upsetting. It's also hard to understand. I want you to know that right now, keeping you safe is the most important thing.

Sometimes your parent/guardian may realize that they are struggling to take care of you on their own. In that case, they might ask a child welfare agency for help. If this happens, your parent/guardian might sign a Voluntary Service Agreement (VSA). A VSA lets you stay in your home while your parent or guardian gets help. It describes the things the child welfare agency and your parent/guardian have to do to make sure you are safe. These things could be receiving help for an addiction, going to counselling, or making sure you are fed, attending school and getting medical care. If your parent/guardian does not follow all the conditions or rules of the agreement, you could be taken into care.

If everyone can't easily agree on what is best, the child welfare agency may agree to use mediation (where someone neutral helps both sides to create a solution) or Indigenous traditional methods, including family


group conferencing to try to come to an agreement.

In other situations, the child welfare agency may ask your parents/guardian to sign a Temporary Care Agreement.

This means they think you are not safe at home. It also means you will be taken into care while things get sorted out. The agency may place you with another family member or someone in your community. If that's not possible, you may be placed in a foster home or group home.

If the child welfare agency find that it is unsafe for you to be at home, and your family has not made any attempts to receive help, the agency may seek an order from the family court to place you in either interim society care, formerly known as a Society ward, or in extended society care, formerly known as a Crown ward. If you are placed in interim society care, the child welfare agency may continue the order for up to one year. However, you may be able to return home at any point during the year under a supervision order.

At a child protection hearing or any other hearings or discussions about your care, you have the right to make everyone aware of what you want, either directly or through a lawyer or advocate. A court can order that



You have the right to make everyone aware of what you want

What if I can't go home? (Continued)

a lawyer be made available to you through the Office of the Children's Lawyer.

If you are placed in extended society care without access, your parents/guardian no longer have any legal rights over you. The Crown (government of Ontario) becomes your parent until you reach the age of 18. You also become available for adoption. If you are placed in extended society care with access, you may be able to have visits with your parents while in care.

No matter what happens, I want you to know that it's not your fault if you cannot live with your family. Sometimes parents or caregivers have been hurt themselves. This can make it hard for them to care for you and keep you safe.

If you are having problems at home, you may also decide for yourself that you want to enter into the

“My parents actually do love me, but they have their own issues... It's not just black and white.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

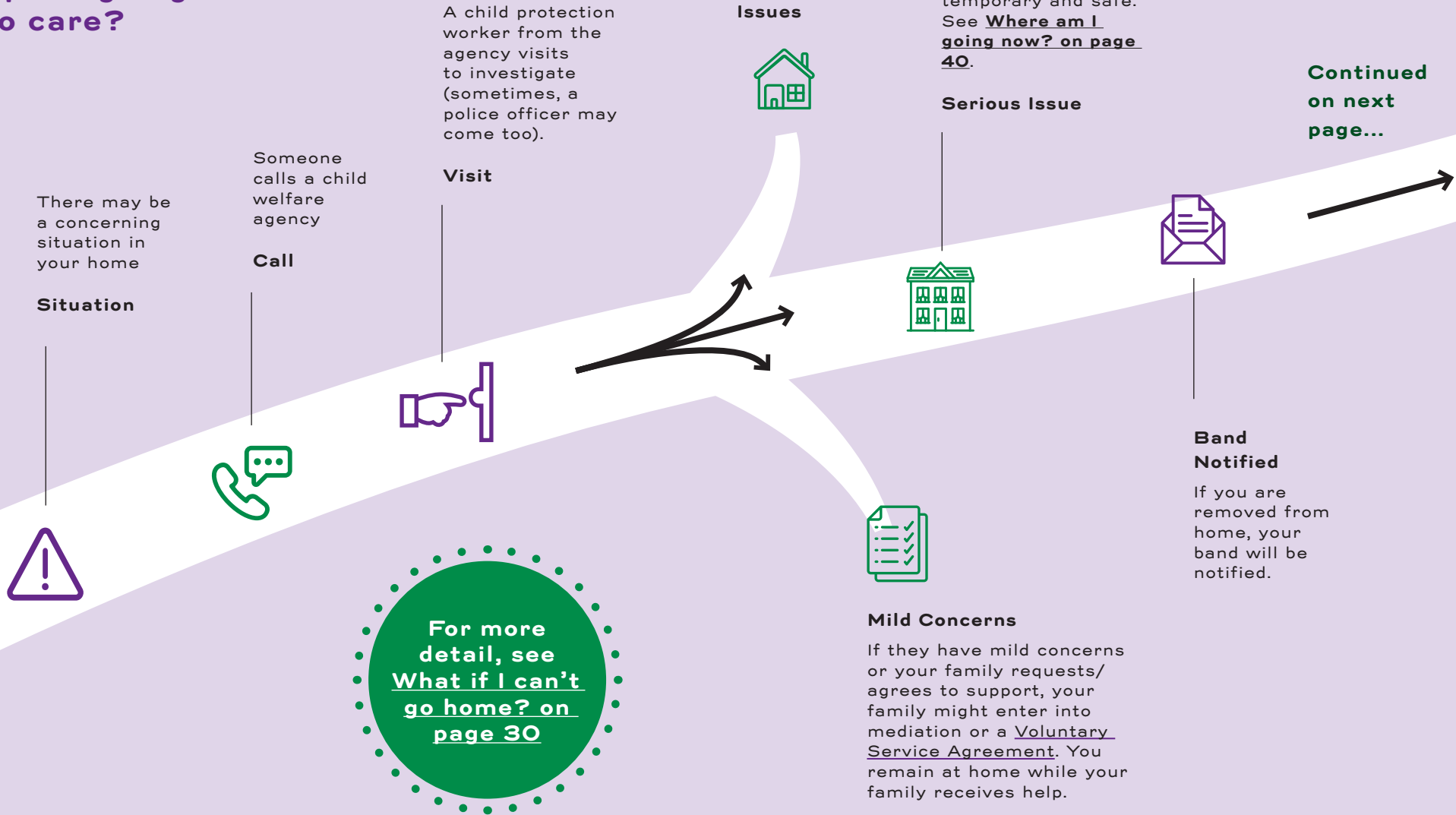
care of child welfare agency. If you are 16 or 17 years old and the child welfare agency finds that you need protection, you can choose to enter into a Voluntary Youth Service Agreement (VYSA). Before signing a VYSA, you have the right to get legal advice. The Office of the Children's Lawyer may be able to help you with this. If you choose to enter into a VYSA, the child welfare agency will work with you to develop a Voluntary Youth Service Plan within 30 days. This plan must include a safe place for you to live, financial and social supports, medical care, and ways for you to maintain or develop cultural connections. It will also identify your goals and ways to work toward them, including goals for school and work.

I understand this is a lot of information! On the next page there is an picture that may help you understand the process better.



The process of going into care

What are the steps of going into care?



The process of going into care (continued)

Continued from previous page



Attempt at Resolution

CAS will attempt a resolution without going to court. They may use a mediator.



If an alternative arrangement is found your parents might enter into a Temporary Care Agreement.

Temporary Care Agreement



Child Protection Hearing

If no one can agree on what should happen, a child protection hearing will be scheduled in front of a family court judge. The judge will decide whether you will be in care on a temporary or permanent basis (Supervision Order, interim society care).



Situation Improves

If the situation at home improves at any time on a Supervision Order or with interim society care, you could return home.



Situation does not Improve

If the situation at home does not improve, you will return to court and a judge could decide to place you in extended society care.



In extended society care, CAS becomes your permanent caregiver.
Extended society care



Transition out of care

At the age of 18, you can transition out of care. See Section 6, **What happens when I transition out of care? on page 87**



Will I see my family again?

Dear Cedar,

Will I see my siblings and parents again? What about my extended family?

CEDAR:

If a judge thinks your parent or caregiver won't be able to keep you safe from harm, they can decide you should be removed from your family and not go back. You may feel devastated about this. Even if things weren't perfect at home, thinking about a long separation may make you feel lonely and worried.

So please know that while you are in care, you may be able to stay in touch with your family. It depends on what you want, but also how serious the situation was at home. When the judge makes this decision, your safety always comes first. One way you can have contact with your family is by having your case worker or other person appointed by the court be present at a supervised visit. This allows you to go home for a day visit. If everything keeps improving, you could begin to visit without a case worker and sometimes have an overnight stay.

Even if the judge determines that it isn't safe for you to visit your parents/guardians, you have a right to stay in contact with your siblings. You can ask your case worker to help make this happen.

What did my family do wrong?

Dear Cedar,

What did my parents or caregivers do wrong?

CEDAR:

It can be hard to realize that how you've grown up is different from other children. You may not have understood this until now, and it can be really upsetting to consider. I understand you love your family, but please believe me: you have the right to be cared for without being harmed. You have a right to the things you need to be safe and healthy while you grow up.

It could be that your parent or guardian was hurting you or neglecting you. Harm can be physical (when your body is hurt) or emotional (when your feelings are hurt). Neglect can be things like not providing enough food, or leaving you alone when you are too young.

There could be many reasons why your parent or caregiver is struggling to care for you. Sometimes it's because parents themselves have emotional pain. This can be because they experienced violence, abuse or neglect themselves. In some Indigenous families and communities, intergenerational trauma or legacy issues continue to impact daily life. Even so, it is never okay for a parent to hurt you or neglect you.

To learn more about intergenerational trauma and legacy issues, refer to the question **Why are Indigenous children over-represented in child welfare? on page 20.**

Where am I going now?

There are several places you might go **temporarily**, until things get sorted out.



Group Home

A home where a small number of unrelated youth live supervised by trained staff



Other Community Member

Also called customary care, a safe and approved living arrangement with someone in your home community.



Extended Family

Also called kinship care, this could be an approved living arrangement with an aunt/uncle, grandparent, older siblings or other family member.



Foster Home

A family who cares for a young person for a period of time while the young person is in care



Receiving Home

A temporary, short term placement



What will it be like where I'm going?

Dear Cedar,

You seem to know what you're talking about. Can you tell me who else will be where I am going? Will it be nice? Will it be safe?

CEDAR:

These are important questions. You're facing a lot of unknowns without some of the familiar people in your life. So remember, you have rights, and the people who are getting involved in your life now have certain rules they're supposed to follow.

Where you're going to live depends on who can look after you. It will be someone who can give you the things you need to be healthy, supported and safe. You have the right to be involved in conversations with your case worker about where you will live. Wherever possible, the child welfare agency will try to find a family or community member who can care for you. Placement with a family member is called kinship care. Placement in the community is called customary care.

If the child welfare agency can't find a family or community member to take care of you, then they must try as hard as possible to find a foster home that is in or near your community. Sometimes you may be the only child in the foster home. In other cases, the foster family may have their own children or other foster children living there as well.

You might also be placed in a group home. Usually there will be several other children there, plus staff to look after you.

Either way, it will be different from what you are used to. You might find it scary at first.

It's also worth knowing that the adults caring for you in a foster or group home should be trained. They should have a criminal record check or vulnerable sector check. That means the police have checked whether they have committed any crimes or harmed a child before in any way. These checks help make sure that the new adults looking after you will keep you safe.

Any home you live in should be clean and safe. You should have enough food and clothing, and a place to sleep. Any time you have concerns about your living arrangements, you should let your case worker know right away. If you feel like no one is listening to you, you can call the Office of the Children's Lawyer. If you're older than 12, you can apply to the Residential Placement Advisory Committee (RPAC) and the Child and Family Services Review Board (CFSRB) and ask them to review your living situation.

If all the above options have failed, you can contact the Ombudsman's Office to make a complaint.



Any home you live in should be clean and safe. You should have food and clothing, and a place to sleep

Will I live with an Indigenous family?

Dear Cedar,

Will I live with an Indigenous family?

CEDAR:

The goal of the child welfare agency will be to keep you in your community so that you can stay connected to your culture and the people and places that are important to you. If this is not possible then they have a responsibility to try and place you with an Indigenous family. Sometimes the child welfare agency will not be able to find an Indigenous home for you to live in. Whatever family you do live with must still support your culture and traditions. This might mean being able to smudge, go to pow-wows, spend time with an Elder, or do other activities that are important to you and your culture.

“You need four things to grow up as a person and that’s love, food, shelter and safety. And when you have those four things you can grow.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

Will I be able to visit my community?

Dear Cedar,

Will I be able to visit my community?

CEDAR:

It may seem unfair, but a judge will decide whether or not you can visit your community while you're in care. If it's important to you, make sure you let your case worker, your family and your lawyer know when you're at family court. They should consider your wishes, but your safety will be their main concern.

“The way you grow up on reserve, your cousins are down the road and you have siblings all over the house. Grandma’s house is down the road....Then to be apprehended you don’t have those things anymore.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

What about my school and friends?

Dear Cedar,

Can I keep going to my usual school?

CEDAR:

It can be tough to start at a new school and make friends all over again. The hard truth is that whether or not you can stay at the same school depends on where you are placed. If your foster family or the relative taking care of you lives close enough, you may be able to keep going to the same school. If not, it's possible that you will have to go to a new school.

Will I still see my old friends?

CEDAR:

I know friends are a big part of your life, and it's really hard to think about not seeing them. Whether or not you can still see them depends on a few things. First, if you have to move to a new community, it might be hard to get together with them. If you are old enough to take the bus or a taxi, or to drive, you may still be able to visit. Seeing your friends might also be part of visiting your family.

It also depends on why you ended up in care. For example, if your friends were part of the reason you were taken into care, staying away from them might be part of your plan of care to keep you safe.

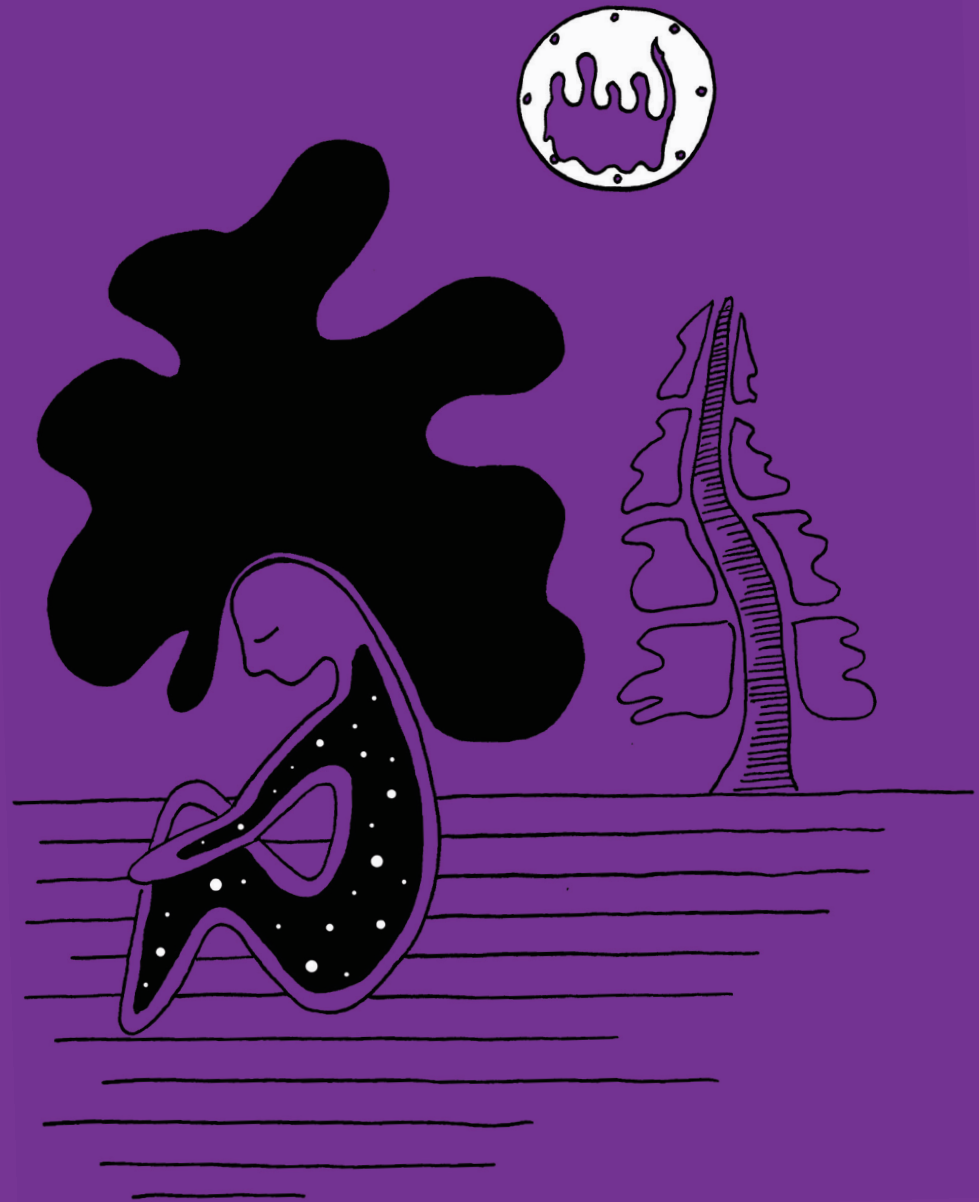
Giizhikens* has recently been placed in care. They have been taken away from their parents and siblings and they are feeling alone.

They feel so alone that it feels like a great black cloud of darkness is surrounding them, consuming their thoughts. The cloud of darkness feels so heavy that the child has to sit down on the earth and cry.

Far above, in the still night sky, Grandmother Moon is watching and she sees the child crying. She can always see us. She is always caring for us.

She shines her light down on Giizhikens and whispers into the wind, "I love you, I see you."

**The young person in this story is named Giizhikens, which means "little cedar" in Anishinaabemowin*



SECTION 3

**Who is my caseworker and
how can they help me?**



SECTION 3

Who is my case worker and how can they help me?

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Who is my case worker and how can they help me?

Dear Cedar,

I am in the care of a child welfare agency, and a stranger has shown up and said they are my case worker. Who is this person? What does a “case worker” do?

CEDAR:

It’s normal to be feeling many different emotions right now. You may be feeling worried, unsure, angry or overwhelmed. I can tell you that this person is typically a social worker or a child and youth worker. Your case worker works for the child welfare agency that got involved with you.

Many young people feel overwhelmed and unsure when they first meet their case worker. I can tell you that your case worker’s job is to make sure that you are safe, your needs are being met, and your rights are being respected. Your case worker should visit you regularly. In reality, that doesn’t always happen, and that is not okay. In many ways, this person works for you. If you are returning to your family, they must check that resources are in place to support you and your family. If you can’t go home, your case worker should meet with you regularly to make sure you are safe. They may also help you or your parent or caregiver get connected to counselling or other services.

What does my case worker know about me?

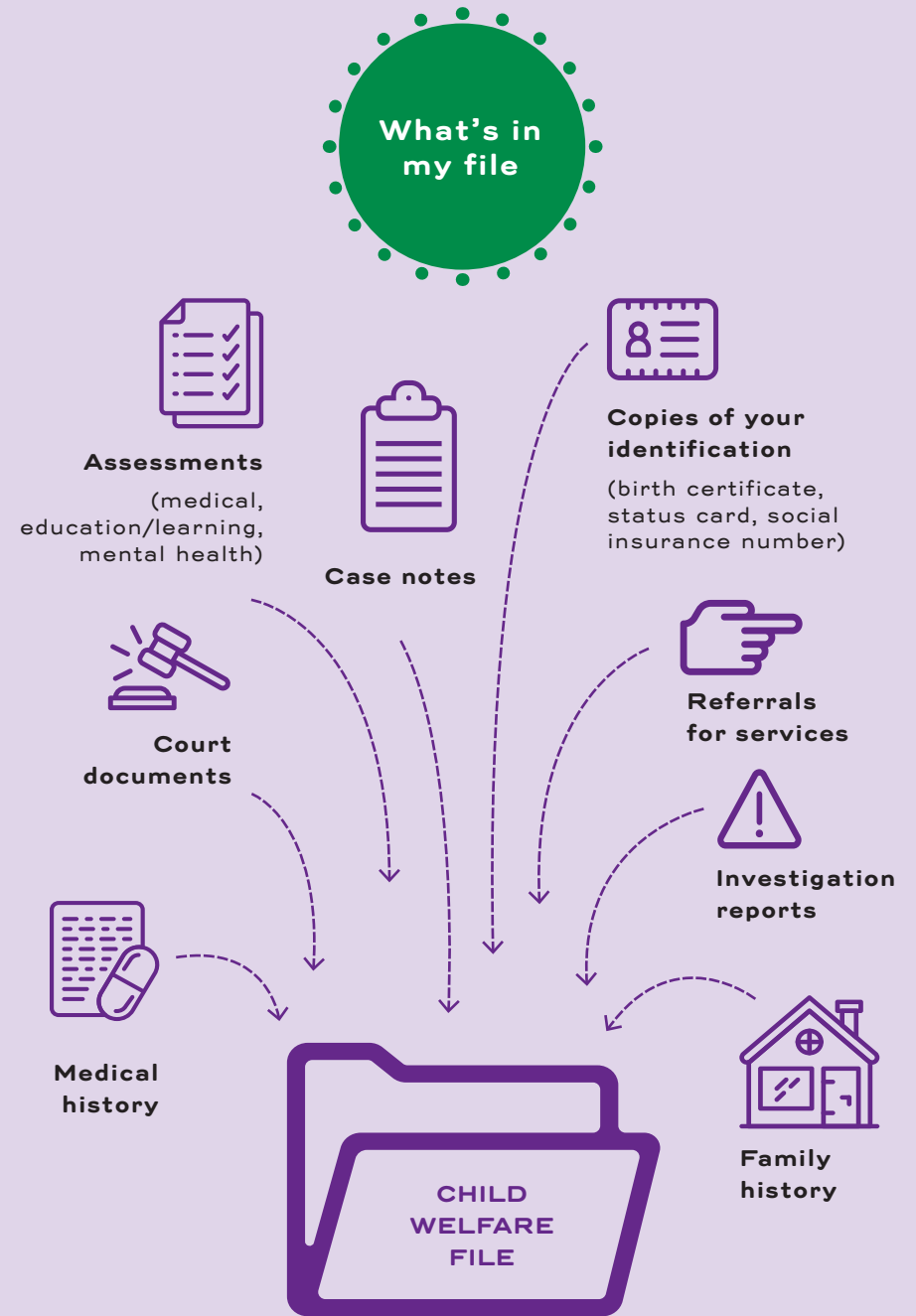
Dear Cedar,

What does my case worker know about me?

CEDAR:

The main thing your worker will know about you is why you are in care. They may also know about any tests you've had. For example, you might have had a medical check-up or had your learning needs or emotional health assessed. They have this information so they can create the best possible plan of care for you.

They likely found this information in your child welfare agency file. It has important facts about you that your worker needs to know to make sure you are well cared for.



Who else will know my story?

Dear Cedar,

Who else will know my story?

CEDAR:

You should know that anything you tell your case worker can be recorded in your file. Case workers will try to respect your privacy, but sometimes, they may have to share the things you discuss with others who can help. If your case is in court, anyone who participates in the court proceedings may be able to read, and have copies of, the documents from your file.

For example, if you tell someone that you want to harm yourself or another person, or if you have hurt a child under 16, your worker will have to report this to keep you and others from harm. This is called a duty to report. All professionals have a duty to report. Your case worker might also share your private information with someone who is part of your plan of care. Examples are doctors or nurses, a parent, a foster parent, your band or another caregiver.

Will my case worker care?

Dear Cedar,

Will my case worker really care about me? Can I trust them?

CEDAR:

Your case worker *should* always have your best interests in mind. They should also treat you with respect, even before they get to know you better. If your case worker is not Indigenous but you are, they should be curious about your specific needs and culture.

I know that sometimes it can be hard to trust a case worker, especially if the adults you trusted have let you down in the past. It is important to remember that case workers may make mistakes and see issues differently from you. Some are more genuinely concerned about the children and youth that they work with than others.

So it's good to know what you should expect from them. It is a case worker's job to be honest with you and include you in decisions about your care.

“They need to listen and relate to you, they need to know how to be your friend, they need to develop trust.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT



Remember, trust takes time to build. It may seem hard to confront your case worker, but don't be afraid to ask them, "Why should I trust you?" or to question them if it feels like decisions about you are getting made without your input.

If you have serious concerns about your case worker, you can use your child welfare agency's formal complaint system to report your concerns. If you keep feeling like you are not being listened to, you have the right to contact the [Child and Family Services Review Board](#) and the [Office of the Children's Lawyer](#). If all these options have failed, you can contact the [Ombudsman's Office](#) to make a complaint.

Will I always have the same worker?

Dear Cedar,

Will I always have the same worker?

CEDAR:

Maybe—but probably not. Unfortunately, case workers change all the time. There are various reasons for this, and usually it has nothing to do with you. Even so, it's never easy. You may feel sad, worried or abandoned. There should be a plan in place to make the change more comfortable for you. You will also have a chance to talk about your needs and feelings during the transition.

"If you're willing to talk about things, things get better. I can't stress that enough."

FORUM PARTICIPANT

Who else can I talk to?

Dear Cedar,

Is my case worker the only person I can talk to about myself or my concerns?

CEDAR:

Definitely not, but your worker is often the one best equipped to actually do something about your concerns and if you want something to change, you should certainly talk to your case worker.

Sometimes all you need is someone to listen. In that case, it can be difficult to know who to reach out to. At times, you may not feel like you have anyone. Think about some of the people in your family or social circle that you may feel comfortable talking with. Is there an aunt, uncle, cousin, teacher or coach that you trust and can confide in? There are also services like Kids Help Phone that let you talk or text with someone. There are times when it can feel safer to speak to someone anonymously like that.

If you have specific questions that your case worker can't answer, you can contact the Ontario Ombudsman. They can help you understand the rights that you have while you are involved with a child welfare agency.

Remember, there are also other services that can support you during difficult times.



Family member



Elder



Coach



Friend



Children's Lawyer



Teacher



Kids Help Phone





Will my worker understand my culture?

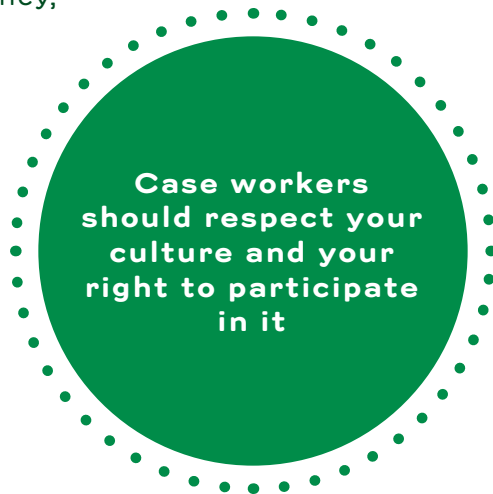
Dear Cedar,

Will my case worker understand my culture?

CEDAR:

Case workers come from many different backgrounds and experiences. Yours may or may not have any understanding of your culture. Even if they don't, they should show an interest, and they must still respect your culture and your right to participate in it. You can also ask them to give you cultural support and resources.

If you want to learn more about cultural resources and your right to access your culture while you're involved with a child welfare agency, you can go to Section 4 of this toolkit for more information.



“Culture is who we are. Whether we practice it, or whether we know about it or not, it’s still who we are. It is a part of us.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

Giizhikens feels the wind on their face and feels a little bit better.

They stand up and hear their name in the distance. They can't be sure, but it sounded like their name was being called from the tree.

This tree is a cedar tree, tall and sturdy and when the child looks real close, they can see the faces of many animals and spirits within it. Giizhikens also feels the strength and power of this tree, it reminds them of one of their relatives, an auntie who used to help Giizhikens when they had a problem or were feeling sad.

“Cedar, please help me. I am feeling alone, I am feeling lost. Please help me to feel better.”





SECTION 4

What are my rights?

- 63 What are rights?
- 64 Who will explain my rights to me?
- 65 What are my rights?
- 68 Do people know I have rights?
- 69 Do I have the right to make decisions about my care?
- 70 What can I do if my rights are ignored?
- 71 Do I have rights to access medical professionals?
- 72 Do I have a right to know about my birth family?



What are rights?

Dear Cedar,

I've heard that I have "rights." What are rights?

CEDAR:

Rights are the things that all people need to be free, live, grow, feel safe and lead happy lives. Everyone is entitled to basic human rights, no matter how old they are, where they live, what language they speak or their gender, culture, colour or religion.

You should know that governments do not have the power to decide what rights you can have. You have a right to all of them. Rights cannot be taken away because of your behaviour or as a punishment.

“Young people in the child welfare system should know their rights within that system.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

Who will explain my rights to me?

Dear Cedar,

How can I learn about my rights?

CEDAR:

The law says that when you come into care, someone must tell you what your rights are. You should expect your case worker to explain them in a way you understand, not just give you a pamphlet to read. Ask them to help you understand your rights.

If you have a lawyer from the Office of the Children’s Lawyer, you can also ask them to explain your rights and their role in protecting them. If you feel you are not receiving the information you want from your caseworker or caregiver, you can contact the Office of the Children’s Lawyer or the Ontario Ombudsman.

If you are interested in learning more about rights, there is a list of resources at the end of this tool kit that can provide you with more information.

What are my rights?

Dear Cedar,

What are my rights?

CEDAR:

You have many rights by law. Under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017 you have the right to:

 Enough food	 Proper clothing	 Medical and dental care	 Your personal belongings
 An education	 Reasonable privacy	 Receive mail	 Be heard and share your views
 Be told how to make a complaint to your child welfare agency or service provider	 Be told how to apply to the <u>Child and Family Services Review Board (CFSRB)</u>	 Have your band notified of your situation (if you are First Nations, Métis or Inuit), even if you live off-reserve	 Speak in private with and receive visits from your lawyer, if you have one



All children around the world have certain rights. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) protects all children’s rights to:



Be safe



Be heard



Non-discrimination



Enough food



Clean water



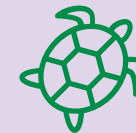
Decisions made are in child’s best interests



The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is another document that countries around the world have signed as a promise to respect the rights of all Indigenous peoples. Canada signed it in August 2016. Among other things, it protects an Indigenous child’s right to:



Learn about and practice their cultural traditions, ceremonies and customs



Live their lives as both an Indigenous person and a citizen of Canada



Have access to resources that will ensure their physical and mental health



Support for disabilities



Protection from all forms of discrimination



Access to all levels of education, including university and college



Be educated in their own language and in their own culture



Not be subjected to forced assimilation, removal from land, or destruction of culture

Do people know I have rights?

Dear Cedar,

Do people in the child welfare system know I have rights?

CEDAR:

Your case worker, foster parents, group home staff, and other people who work in the child welfare system should know what your rights are. If you think they don't, you have the right to speak up.

Speaking up can mean different things, such as talking to your case worker, talking to their supervisor, making a complaint through your child welfare agency, or letting another supportive adults know. These are only some examples of ways to speak up. There are also more formal ways to make a complaint. You can contact the [Office of the Children's Lawyer](#), the [Child and Family Services Review Board](#), or the [Ontario Ombudsman](#) if you feel you are being denied your rights.

Do I have the right to make decisions about my care?

Dear Cedar,

Does having rights mean I can make my own decisions about my care? What decisions can I make?

CEDAR:

If you are unhappy with your care, or feel your worker isn't listening to you or respecting your rights, you can ask for changes. You can make a complaint to your child welfare agency or to the Child and Family Services Review Board You can also apply (by filling out a form) to the Child and Family Services Review Board to move.

Some of your rights depend on your age. If you are 12 or older, you can attend meetings, including court dates, and have a say in any decisions about your care. If you've taken any medical tests or done any educational or psychological assessments, you can ask what has been said about you. If there are errors in the documentation, you can complain to your child welfare agency, or apply to the Child and Family Services Review Board to have the record corrected.

If you are younger than 12, you may not be able to attend court dates, but you can still have a say in the decisions about your life by speaking with your case worker or lawyer. You also have the right to know what will happen in court, and to be part of all plan of care meetings.



What can I do if my rights are ignored?

Dear Cedar,

What can I do if my rights are ignored?

CEDAR:

You should know that if you feel your rights are being ignored, you can talk to your case worker about it. Tell them what the problem is and how it is affecting you. Ask what can be done to ensure your rights are protected. If you are not satisfied with the answer, you can file a complaint with your child welfare agency.

If you aren't happy with your placement, or any other decision about your care, you can ask the Child and Family Services Review Board to review your case. You can also call the Office of the Children's Lawyer or the Ontario Ombudsman and ask what steps you can take to address the situation.



Do I have rights to access medical professionals?

Dear Cedar,

What are my rights when it comes to getting services from a dentist, doctor, mental health counsellor or other professional?

CEDAR:

You should know that when you are in care, you have the right to any services you need to be healthy. This means you can see a dentist, doctor, mental health counsellor or any other health professional. You also can find out about any decisions that have been made about your care, including any drugs a doctor prescribes you.

If you are younger than 12, you have the right to have someone explain any decisions concerning your health care. And if you're over 12, you have a right to attend meetings where your health history and care are discussed.

Under the Health Care Consent Act, 1996, anyone living in Ontario has the right to make decisions about their physical or mental health care. This includes children. You have to be "capable" of making these decisions. This means you have to be able to understand the information given by the health care professional and the risks or consequences of any decision you make.

A foster parent or other caregiver can't assume you are incapable of making decisions just because they think you're too young.

Do I have a right to know about my birth family?

Dear Cedar,

If I am adopted, do I have a right to know about my birth parents, family and history?

CEDAR:

Yes, you have a right to know about your birth parents and your background—and there are ways to find out where you came from if you want to. Your child welfare agency or adoptive family may be able to help you get that information if you ask. And once you are 18, you can ask the Ontario government for the information.

The first thing you need to do is fill out a post-adoption birth information package and send it to the Registrar General of Ontario. If you were adopted outside of

You turn 18 years old

18



Request info by filling out a post-adoption birth information package

Send the package to the Registrar General of Ontario



Birth parents agreed to provide information

Open Adoption



Information provided
Medical history and other information that might affect you



Severe Medical Search

Doctor or other health professional may be able to help you find your birth parents' medical history



Closed Adoption

No identifying information can be given without birth parents' permission

Ontario, you will need to contact the province where the adoption took place.

Whether or not you can get information about your birth parents will depend on whether your adoption was open or closed. A closed adoption means your birth parents asked that no identifying information about them be given out without their permission. But with an open adoption, your birth parents agreed to give your adoptive parents any information that might affect you, like their medical history. A doctor or other health professional may also be able to help you find out your birth parents' medical history through a severe medical search which can be requested with the help of a medical professional.

If you do decide to look for your birth parents, make sure you have the support of someone who understands how the process works. Having help might make the search easier.

“Sit down with me,” Cedar says. Giizhikens places their back along the curve of Cedar’s trunk and begins to relax.

“Cedar, what am I supposed to do now that I am away from my family?”

Giizhikens feels a great rumbling underneath them as Cedar extends its roots further into the earth. This reminds the child that they also have roots that go deep into the earth and in fact, that the child is the earth itself.

As they look up at the sky, an ancestor descends from the stars. This ancestor has come to visit Giizhikens to remind them that they are never alone, and to remind them that they are made of stars and love.

The child is feeling so much better and so much stronger.



SECTION 5

Why is learning about my Indigenous culture important?



SECTION 5

Why is learning about my Indigenous culture important?

- 77 **Why is learning about my Indigenous culture important?**
- 78 **Can you tell me more about Indigenous culture?**
- 79 **Why don't I know more about my culture?**
- 81 **Do I have to accept my foster parents' culture or religion?**
- 82 **Can I learn about and have access to my culture while I am in care?**
- 84 **How can I participate in cultural activities?**



Why is learning about my Indigenous culture important?

Dear Cedar,

People keep talking about the importance of my culture. What is culture? I don't know where to begin or who to ask. Do you have any ideas?

CEDAR:

Over time, I've learned that culture is an important part of who you are and how you see yourself. You should understand that Indigenous peoples and communities pass their cultural traditions down from generation to generation. These include language, ceremonies, teachings, beliefs, songs, ways of living, practices and values about how to treat others and live your life. All of these things are part of Indigenous culture.

Although you are Indigenous, it doesn't mean you must do all these things. Many Indigenous people don't speak their traditional language or do all the things that are part of their culture. You are not any less Cree, Ojibway, Oji-Cree or Métis if you only have limited (or a little bit of) cultural knowledge. But you do have the right to learn about and practice your culture and traditions. If you want to learn more about your culture, ask a family member or Elder, or go to an Indigenous Friendship Centre near you that offers cultural programs.



Can you tell me more about Indigenous culture?

Dear Cedar,

Can you tell me more about Indigenous peoples and language?

CEDAR:

It is difficult to explain Indigenous culture in a few words. One of the reasons for this is there is not just one Indigenous culture in Canada. There are actually 11 families, or “nations,” of Indigenous peoples across the country. These families speak more than 53 different languages and have more than 200 dialects. (A dialect is the form of a language that’s spoken in a particular area.)



Why don't I know more about my culture?

Dear Cedar,

Why don't I know more about my culture?

CEDAR:

There are many possible reasons why you don't know more about your culture. The roots of the problem may lie in how Indigenous children and communities were treated in Canada in the past.

Long before there was a child welfare system, there was the Indian Residential School System. Indigenous children were torn from their families and forced to live at schools far from their homes. The goal of these schools was to teach Indigenous children the religion, customs, languages and ways of the European settlers.

The residential school system had a devastating and lasting impact on these children and their parents, families and communities. Eventually, many lost a sense of their family and community, as well as knowledge of and connections to their Indigenous culture. This lasting effect is what is referred to as legacy issues.



“I feel like we should all be proud as Aboriginal people.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

In the 1960s, child welfare agencies removed thousands of Indigenous children from their homes in what is now known as the Sixties Scoop. Many of these children were adopted by non-Indigenous families in Canada, the United States and other countries. Today, those children are adults who often don't know about the language, traditions and ceremonies of their original communities. Many survivors of the Residential School System and the Sixties Scoop have had their own children taken away by child welfare agencies. These children have then grown up without learning about their culture or their traditions too.



Do I have to accept my foster parents' culture or religion?

Dear Cedar,

Do I have to accept my foster parents' culture or religion?

CEDAR:

It can be lonely when you “join” a family that has their own traditions and doesn't share yours. You might feel like you owe it to them to give their culture or religion a try. The answer is: No, you do not have to do this. If you're Indigenous, you have the right to know about and practice your own traditions, culture and ceremonies. You don't have to accept your foster parents' culture or religion. Your caregiver can't force their culture or religion on you. In fact, you have the right to expect them to understand that you already have your own culture. Ideally, they should respect it and perhaps even show some interest in it.

In fact, under the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, you have the legal right to be involved in decisions about your cultural identity. You can ask your child welfare agency or caregiver to help you participate in your community's cultural activities or ceremonies. They can consult your band, community or birth parent to get the information you need.



Can I learn about and have access to my culture while I am in care?

Dear Cedar,

Can I learn about and have access to my culture while I am in care?

CEDAR:

Yes. You should know that any First Nations, Métis or Inuit child in care has the right to learn and participate in their cultural practices and ceremonies. Your cultural needs and wants should also be discussed regularly during your plan of care meetings with your case worker.



You have the right to practice and embrace your culture anywhere you live. If someone tries to stop you from doing so, you can contact your case worker or



lawyer, file a complaint with the child welfare agency, or contact the [Ontario Ombudsman](#).

You may be able to find some resources near you that will help you learn about or participate in your culture. If there is nothing where you live, you may be able to find some information online. Your foster family or workers at your group home should also be encouraged to learn more about your culture so they can understand why it's important to you and find ways to help you practice your traditions.

“The culture and the faith, traditions and everything is a really big support. It’s a really big confidence booster.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

How can I participate in cultural activities?

Dear Cedar,

How can I participate in cultural activities? Who can teach me?

CEDAR:

I think the best way to learn about your culture and traditions is from Elders or other Knowledge Keepers in your community. Elders are people who have a very strong understanding of First Nation, Métis, or Inuit history, traditional teachings, ceremonies and healing practices. They carry the stories and the histories of the community and its ancestors. Many also speak your community's language and are often healers.

You also have the right to ask your case worker to help you access cultural programs and services, either locally or online, while in care. You can also learn more about your culture at an Indigenous Friendship Centre, if there is one where you live. Friendship centres can provide you with a lot of information. They also offer cultural activities, like drum nights, language programs, medicine teachings and gatherings, and access to Elders. They can help you find programs, Elders and Knowledge Keepers from your community. These activities can give you a sense of belonging and connection when you are not home or when you are living outside your community.



Ask an Elder

about your culture and traditions



Ask your case worker

to help you access cultural programs and services



Visit a Friendship Centre

to learn more about your culture



Go to a drum night



Attend a medicine teaching or gathering



Download a language app



Learn about ceremonies

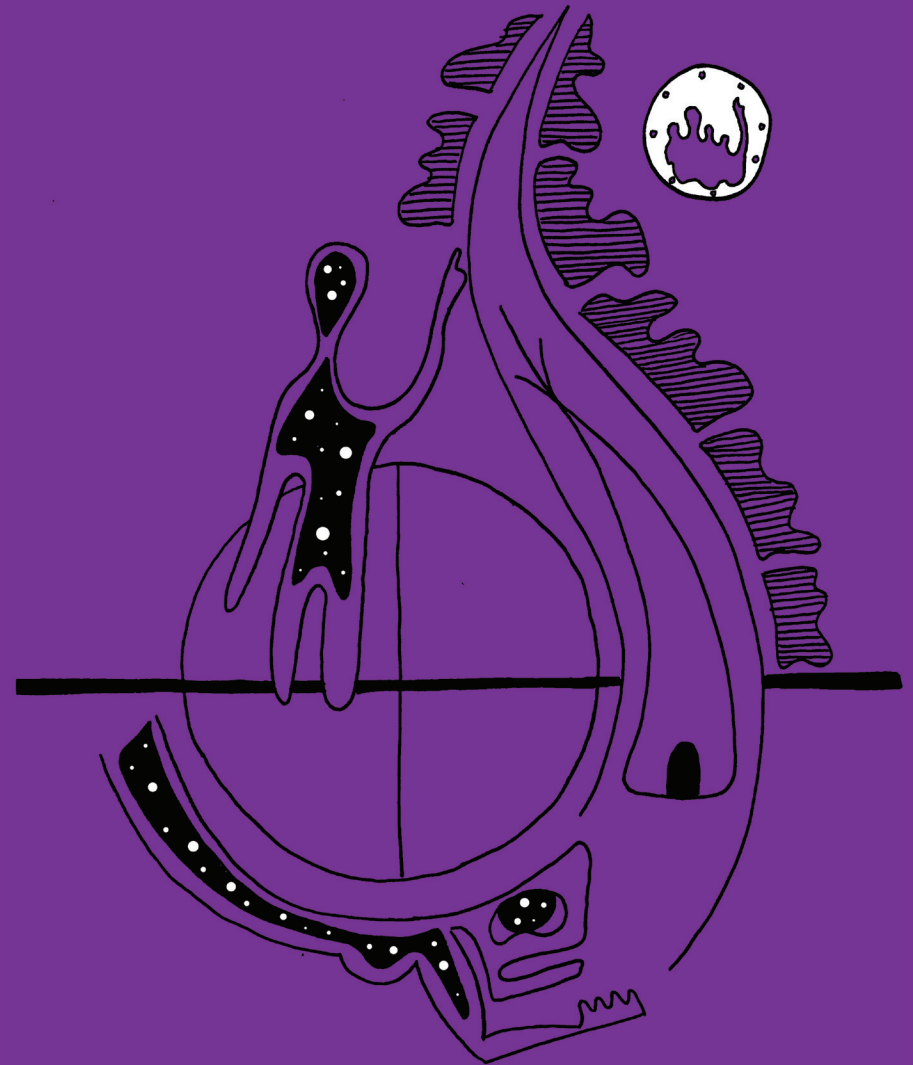
You can also find Indigenous language apps that will help you learn to speak Cree, Ojibway and Mohawk languages. There are also many online games and activities you can play to learn your community's language.

Giizhikens does not feel alone anymore.

“Cedar, what are some other ways I can feel strong?” Cedar’s trunk begins to move under the still night sky and the child can see the outlines of a teepee begin to form within the trunk.

Giizhikens begins to remember all of the ways that our communities come together to practice our culture. Within Cedar’s trunk, the child begins to see the medicine wheel and the colours make the child feel at home.

“You see, the culture lives within all of these different elements. The culture lives within you, the culture lives within me, the culture lives within our ancestors whom are all around us wherever we go. No matter how far we feel from our culture, we can always participate in this dance, we can always participate because the culture is always living within us. It can never be taken from us.”





SECTION 6

What happens when I transition out of care?

- 89 How can I plan for transitioning out of care?
- 90 Can I sign myself out of care?
- 92 What will happen to me when I am too old to be in the system anymore?
- 94 Who will help me plan for my education?



How can I plan for transitioning out of care?

Dear Cedar,

How can I be a part of planning for my transition out of care?

CEDAR:

Transitioning into adulthood is difficult for everyone, even kids who have never been in care. If you're in care, it's definitely more challenging, so you may need a lot of support. Don't hesitate to ask for it.

Your child welfare agency is responsible for helping you plan for this transition well in advance. Your case worker should talk with you about your goals and connect you with programs and resources that can help you work toward them.

Once you turn 16, you should be connected with a youth-in-transition worker. This person can work with you until you are 24, and should help you explore your options and develop a plan for your future. This plan should link you to community services and include steps for finding housing, looking into educational resources and funding, using employment services and getting access to training in life skills, like budgeting and cooking.

Can I sign myself out of care?

Dear Cedar,

Can I sign myself out of care?

CEDAR:

If you are 16 years or older and don't want to live in care anymore, you have a few options. If you still want to receive supports from a child welfare agency, you can speak to your case worker and request an independent living allowance. This allowance can help with things like rent, health and dental care, transportation and clothing. Entering into independence does not mean leaving care completely. You are still eligible for aftercare, even once you are 18.

If you do not want to have any further connection with a child welfare agency at all, you can choose to leave care completely. You have to be 16 years of age or older to do so. Choosing to leave care looks different depending on your situation.

If you have a Voluntary Youth Service Agreement (VYSA), it's usually a straightforward process. A VYSA is a voluntary agreement, so you can end it any time. You can also choose to create another VYSA later, if you're still eligible. Before deciding to end your VYSA,

you may want to explore your child welfare agency's complaints processes or talk with the Office of the Children's Lawyer to see if your concerns can be addressed without leaving care.

If you are not under a VYSA, and you are under 18, the only way to leave care is by a court order. To get one, you will need to ask the court for a status review. This means they will consider whether you need to be in care. You can request a status review if you are 16 or 17. A status review can also be requested by your parents, the person who has custody of you, or the child welfare agency.

If you request a status review, you may be assigned a lawyer from the Office of the Children's Lawyer. The lawyer will meet with you to understand what you want and why you want to leave care. They will represent you in court. A judge will decide if it is in your best interests to leave care. Leaving may mean going back home, or it may mean living on your own.

“One thing they should teach you is how to self-sustain... When other people were validating me it was kind of like throwing a pebble in a lake; it was nothing. When I learned to love myself, be happy with myself, then I didn't need other people.”

FORUM PARTICIPANT

What will happen to me when I am too old to be in the system anymore?

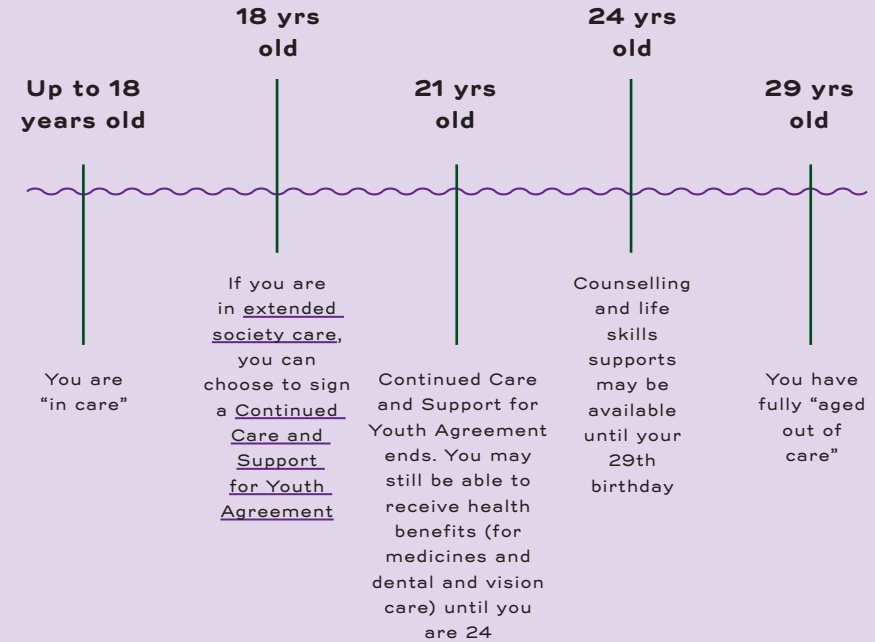
Dear Cedar,

What will happen to me when I am too old to be in the system anymore?

CEDAR:

Thinking about what happens when you're old enough to transition out of care (sometimes known as "aging out") is scary. You may be wondering who will support you? It's worth knowing that your child welfare agency is required to continue supporting you past your 18th birthday if you want the help. There are actually many types of supports and services available to you as you transition into adulthood.

If you are in extended society care, when you turn 18 you can choose to sign a Continued Care and Support for Youth Agreement with your child welfare agency. This agreement outlines the ways in which your child welfare agency will support you until you turn 21. This includes financial support (such as an \$850 per month living allowance), medical and dental care, and an assigned case worker to help you to plan for school and work and connect you to service providers. Your agreement will also outline some expectations for you to follow. This may involve being in school or working, and staying in touch with your case worker. A



Continued Care and Support for Youth Agreement is voluntary, and must be renewed every year. You have the right to end this agreement before you turn 21 if you wish. Your child welfare agency also has the right to end the agreement, but they have to give you three months' notice.

Once you turn 21, you may still be able to receive health benefits (for medicines and dental and vision care) until you are 24. As well, counselling and life skills supports may be available until your 29th birthday. This is referred to as the Aftercare Benefits Initiative.

Who will help me plan for my education?

Dear Cedar,

Who will help me plan for my education?

CEDAR:

If you are completing your high school education, or if you want to attend post-secondary school (or if you are already attending post-secondary school), there are supports available for you after you turn 18. If you are working on finishing your grade 12 diploma, you can get extended funding through the Stay Home for School Program. This will allow you to keep living with your caregivers. You will have access to this funding until you turn 21.

If you register for an eligible post-secondary education or vocational training program, you will be able to access funding to support your education through your child welfare agency. All child welfare agencies are required to establish Registered Education Savings Plans for eligible children and youth. There are also many other programs that you may be eligible for, such as:

- Continued Care and Support for Youth: This program provides full tuition coverage for youth leaving care.
- The Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP): Former youth in care are eligible for a few different financial assistance programs.
- Living and Learning Grant: If you are attending a full-time education program and are between the ages of 21 and 24, you can receive up to \$2,000 per semester to help with living costs.
- Education Championship Team Mentoring and Orientation Programs: These programs offer mentorship, peer support and guidance.

Giizhikens feels so strong now.

They stand up and feel their feet so firm on the earth, their legs rooted in the ground just like Cedar's roots connect the tree to the land. Giizhikens sighs, they are the land, the land is them.

The child decides to build their own teepee, to build their own community of people they love and care for and trust.

Chi miigwech for all of your teachings Cedar. Above, grandmother moon lets out a loud howl of laughter, she is happy, she is whole.

And the child is happy and the child is whole.





SECTION 7

Words of support & resources

- 99 **Letter from the Amplifiers**
- 102 **Resources**
- 106 **Definitions**



Letter from the Amplifiers

Between May 19-23, 2015, 89 young people from First Nations communities across northern Ontario gathered at the Feathers of Hope Child Welfare Forum in Thunder Bay, Ontario to share their stories and lived experiences. On the final day of the forum, the youth presented in small groups to a listening table of dignitaries representing provincial and federal governments, First Nations leadership and child welfare agencies. This was an important step forward by First Nations youth to help address the failings of a system that continues the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools, the 60's scoop, and colonization in general. These young people shared with emotion and wisdom their recommendations for change. This toolkit is a way to share the voices of these young people and reach out beyond a forum to support other youth who are in, entering or leaving the child welfare system.

Throughout the development of this toolkit, a youth advisory committee offered their personal understanding of the system. They also carried the voices of the youth from the Child Welfare Forum with them in the process of completing this work. For over two years, the youth advisors worked together to share their insights, personal stories and guide the development of the toolkit that is now in your hands.

Letter from the Amplifiers



SAMANTHA CROWE



KARLA KAKEGAMIC



RYAN HUNTER



TALON BIRD



SAVANNA BOUCHER



TRIVENA ANDY



DESIREE TOWEDO



ELTON BEARDY

The youth advisors gave up numerous weekends and traveled many kilometres to attend meetings. They never faltered in their commitment and dedication despite changes in office support staff. This commitment speaks to the depth of their passion and their eagerness to create change and be a part of a better future. We cannot thank them enough for all that they have done and continue to do.

As Amplifiers, we know all children and youth carry a fire within themselves. Through our own experiences, and from listening to the stories of other young people, we know that challenges and trauma in their lives can dampen that flame. We hope that this project can help strengthen and feed the fire within young people. We want to support them in finding their voices to speak up when things aren't right. We also hope that adults working within the child welfare system who read

Letter from the Amplifiers



EDWARD NARCISSE



MELINDA HENDERSON

this document will listen with an open heart to what young people have shared and let their words impact the way they do their work. With the closing of the Ontario Child Advocate, it is more important than ever for adult allies to take on the challenge of continually advocating for and with all of Ontario's Indigenous young people.

Signed,

Past and present Amplifiers

SAMANTHA CROWE

KARLA KAKEGAMIC

RYAN HUNTER

TALON BIRD

SAVANNA BOUCHER

TRIVENA ANDY

DESIREE TOWEDO

ELTON BEARDY

EDWARD NARCISSE

MELINDA HENDERSON

Resources

For Complaints or Concerns about a Child Welfare Agency

Ontario Ombudsman www.ombudsman.on.ca/home
1-800-263-1830

Residential Placement Advisory Committee *To obtain information on the organization in your region who is responsible for RPAC applications contact your child welfare caseworker.*

Office of the Children’s Lawyer www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/family/ocl/
(416) 314-8000

Child and Family Services Review Board www.sjto.gov.on.ca/cfsrb/
416-327-0111 or 1-888-777-3616

Crisis Support/Mental Health Services

Kids Help Phone www.kidshelpphone.ca
1-800-668-6868

First Nations and Inuit Hope for Wellness Help Line www.hopeforwellness.ca
1-855-242-3310
Both phone and online options open 24 hours a day

ConnexOntario: Addiction, Mental Health, and Problem Gambling Treatment Services www.connexontario.ca
1-800-531-2600

Telehealth Ontario 1-866-797-0000

TeenLine www.teenlineonline.org
1-800 852-8336

Resources

Organizations

Feathers of Hope www.feathersofhope.ca

Right to Play www.righttoplay.ca

Youth-in-Transition and Housing Support Worker Programs *If you are or have been involved with Family and Children Services and are between the ages of 16 and 24, the Youth In Transition Worker (YITW) program is available to help you transition to a more independent lifestyle.*

Contact your child welfare caseworker or a quick internet search will provide you with the agency in your area who provides this service.

Rights Information

Ontario Justice Education Network, OJEN www.ojen.ca



United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child www.unicef.org/crc/

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples files.unicef.org/policyanalysis/rights/files/HRBAP_UN_Rights_Indig_Peoples.pdf

Office of the Children’s Lawyer www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/family/ocl/
(416) 314-8000


Resources

Rights Information (continued)

Justice for Children and Youth  [Leaving Home jfcy.org/en/rights/leaving-home](http://jfcy.org/en/rights/leaving-home)
 [Child Discipline, Child Protection and Child Custody jfcy.org/en/rights/child-discipline-and-child-protection](http://jfcy.org/en/rights/child-discipline-and-child-protection)

Child, Youth and Family Services Act  www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/17c14#BK5

Child Welfare Organizations

First Nations Child and Family Caring Society  fncaringsociety.com

YouthCAN  ontarioyouthcan.org
 Communication, Advocacy and Networking

Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies  www.oacas.org

Language Applications and Websites

Anishinaabemowin  bit.ly/anishinaabemowin (iTunes Store)

Cree Dictionary  bit.ly/creedictionary (iTunes Store)

Ojibway  bit.ly/ojibway (iTunes Store)

Michif to Go  bit.ly/michiftogo (Google Play)

Speak Oneida  bit.ly/speakoneida (Google Play)


Speak Mohawk  bit.ly/speakmohawkapp (Google Play)

Resources

First Voices from First Peoples Heritage Language and Cultural Council  www.firstvoices.com

Indigenous Culture and Knowledge

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres  www.ofifc.org

Ontario Native Women's Association  www.onwa.ca

Four Directions Teachings  www.fourdirectionsteachings.com

Source to explore culture and Pow Wow Information  www.powwows.com

Indigenous Cinema  www.nfb.ca/indigenous-cinema

A Circle of Caring  www.copahabitat.ca

Indian Residential School and 60's Scoop

Where Are the Children  wherearethechildren.ca

Truth and Reconciliation Commission  www.trc.ca

100 Years of Loss  legacyofhope.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/100-years-print_web.pdf

Forgotten Métis  forgottenmetis.ca

Recovering Canada's Lost Histories  missinghistory.ca

Definitions

A

ACCESS TO ADOPTION RECORDS ACT Adopted adults and birth parents can apply for information from birth and adoption records, if the adoption was registered in Ontario.

ADOPTION is the legal process that allows an individual or family to permanently take over the responsibility of caring for and raising a child from his or her natural parents.

ADOPTION AGREEMENT
A detailed guide stating if, how, and how much the birth parents, adoptive parents, and adopted child will stay in touch after the adoption takes place. This agreement is typically developed by the birth parents and adoptive parents together, but written by a licensed adoption agency.

AFTERCARE BENEFITS INITIATIVE Young adults aged 21 to 24 who have left care, and their dependents, may be eligible to receive prescription drug, dental, vision and extended

health benefits. In addition, they may also be eligible to receive counselling and life skills supports up to the age of 29.

APPREHEND Take a child from their home and into the care of the Province of Ontario if there are reasonable and probable grounds to believe the child is at risk of harm.

B

BEST INTEREST Under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*, the best interests of a child includes consideration of a number of different factors, such as the young person's views and wishes; their culture, community, and identity; physical, mental, emotional needs and development; the importance of family relationships and continuity of care; the risk of harm to a child; and the effect of any delay in making decisions about the child.

BRITISH CROWN The symbol of power of the British monarchy;

Definitions

“members of the British Commonwealth owe allegiance to the British Crown.”

C

CASE WORKER Within the context of this toolkit, this refers to a social worker and/or child and youth worker who is assigned to a young person or family involved with a child welfare agency.

CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW BOARD (CFSRB) Conducts reviews and hears applications about certain matters that affect children, youth and families under the *Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017*. See **CFSRB on page 102** for contact information.

CHILD AND YOUTH CARE WORKERS often work with young people confronting mental health challenges, addictions, trauma, family problems, identity crises and/or abuse, neglect or abandonment.

CHILD PROTECTION HEARING A civil court hearing before a judge that determines if a child is in need of protection and what protection order should be made.

CHILD PROTECTION WORKER A person who is responsible for investigating cases where a child may be at risk of harm and, if appropriate, finding appropriate child welfare services for children and families.

CHILD WELFARE AGENCY children's aid society (CAS) or a First Nations child and family service agencies are responsible for investigating concerns that a child under the age of 18 may be at risk of harm and, when necessary, taking steps to protect children.

CHILD, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES ACT, 2017 The CYFSA is the legislation that governs all child welfare services in the Province of Ontario. The paramount purpose of this Act is to promote the best interests, protection and well-being of children. The Act aims to

Definitions

improve the oversight of service providers, including children’s aid societies, so that children and youth receive consistent, high-quality services across Ontario.

CLOSED ADOPTION A form of adoption in which the biological parents no access to their biological child, no direct contact with the adoptive family, and there is little to no information shared between the adoptive family and the biological family of a child.

COLONIZATION The process by which a central system of power dominates the surrounding land and its components, including the Indigenous people of the area.

CONTINUED CARE AND SUPPORT FOR YOUTH AGREEMENT An agreement between a youth who is 18, 19 or 20 years old who is transitioning from care and a child welfare agency. This agreement outlines the supports that the agency will provide the youth with.

CRIMINAL RECORDS CHECK The *most basic records*

check available. It includes any criminal convictions from the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) and/or local databases.

CROWN WARD See [Extended Society Care](#)

CUSTOMARY CARE Placement in the community with a community member or extended family member. This is a form of care that has been practised historically and continues to be practised in First Nations communities.

D
DUTY TO REPORT Under section 125 of the Child, Youth and Family Services Act, every person who has reasonable grounds to suspect that a child is or may be in need of protection must promptly report the suspicion and the information upon which it is based to a child welfare agency. This includes people who perform professional or official duties with respect to children, such as health care workers, teachers, operators or

Definitions

employees of child care programs or centres, police and lawyers.

E
ELDERS Are very important community members who have attained a high degree of understanding of First Nation, Métis, or Inuit history, traditional teachings, ceremonies, and healing practices.

EXTENDED SOCIETY CARE (Formerly “Crown Ward”) When a child is placed in the long-term care of a children’s aid society and the society assumes the legal responsibilities of a parent.

F
FAMILY COURT A court of law that handles cases involving domestic issues such as divorce, child custody, etc.

FAMILY GROUP CONFERENCING A culturally sensitive, alternative approach to child protection that empowers

marginalized families. It brings together family group members to craft a plan of care for their children that addresses concerns identified by child welfare/children’s mental health professionals.

FEATHERS OF HOPE A youth-led initiative to facilitate a dialogue between youth, First Nations leadership and government. Feathers of Hope has grown into a powerful youth movement drawing thousands of First Nations young people from across Ontario and Canada together.

FOSTER FAMILY A family with whom a child is placed by a children’s aid society under the [Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017](#).

G
GROUP HOME A home where a small number of unrelated young people in need of care, support or supervision are placed under the [Child, Youth and Family Services Act, 2017](#).

Definitions

H

HEALTH CARE CONSENT ACT, 1996

An Ontario law that outlines a person’s right to accept or refuse treatment. It stipulates that any person has this ability as long as they are capable of making the decision. Being capable means that the person understands the information that is relevant to making a decision about the treatment, and able to appreciate the reasonably foreseeable consequences of a decision or lack of decision with respect to that treatment. There is no minimum age of consent. That is, capacity is not determined by age. This Act outlines how someone can be deemed incapable and who can make decisions about their health care if that happens.

I

INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL SYSTEM

A network of government-funded and church-run boarding schools for Indigenous peoples. The Indian Residential School System was

created to remove children from the influence of their own culture and assimilate them into the dominant Canadian culture.

INDIGENOUS FRIENDSHIP CENTRES

Friendship Centres are non-profit community organizations that provide services to urban Inuit, Métis and First Nations people. They typically provide a variety of programs and services to members that can include youth programs, health services, housing, employment, cultural programs and more.

INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA

Trauma, including historical oppression and abuse, that has an impact across more than one generation. This impact includes shared collective memories that affect the health and well-being of individuals and communities and that may be passed on from parent to child.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL NETWORK

A working group made up of First Nations leadership, federal and provincial government, indigenous young

Definitions

people and the Ontario Child Advocate.

INTERIM SOCIETY CARE

(Formerly “Society Ward”) The temporary placement of a child in the care of a children’s aid society for a period up to 12 months for a child under the age of 6, and 24 months for a child over the age of 6.

J

JUDGE A public officer authorized to hear and decide cases in a court of law.

K

KINSHIP CARE Kinship care refers to the day-to-day care and nurturing of children by relatives or others described as family by a child’s immediate family members for children who are in need of protection. It can include an approved family member, godparent, step-parent, familiar friend, or community member who has a blood or existing relationship with a child or youth in care.

KNOWLEDGE KEEPERS

Foster awareness, understanding and respect for traditional perspectives, worldview, language, culture and traditions. There are many different types of knowledge keepers, such as fire keepers, shkaabes and healers.

L

LEGACY Anything handed down from the past, such as from an ancestor or predecessor.

M

MEDIATION A voluntary process through which groups or individuals can be assisted by a mediator in reaching mutual agreement during a conflict.

MEDIATOR A person who attempts to help people involved in a conflict come to an agreement.

MEDICAL HISTORY A record of a past medical problems and treatments that a person has had.

Definitions



OFFICE OF THE CHILDREN’S LAWYER

When asked by the court, can represent children under the age of 18 in court cases involving custody and access and child protection, as well as in civil and estates and trusts cases. See [Office of the Children’s Lawyer on page 103](#) for contact information.

OMBUDSMAN is an independent officer of the Legislature who investigates complaints from the public about Ontario public sector bodies within his jurisdiction, recommending improvements for governance and resolving individual issues. See [Ontario Ombudsman on page 102](#) for contact information.

ONTARIO CHILD

ADVOCATE An independent office of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, which had a mandate between 2007 and 2019 to provide an independent voice for children and youth, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis children and

youth and children with special needs, by partnering with them to bring issues forward.

OPEN ADOPTION An adoption that involves contact between the biological and adoptive parents and sometimes between biological parents and the adopted child.



POST-ADOPTION BIRTH INFORMATION PACKAGE

This package may include the original statement of live birth (showing the name of the birth mother) and additional information from the adoption professional or children’s aid society that facilitated the adoption.



RECONCILIATION The re-establishing of a positive relationship. In Canada, this often refers to healing the legacies of colonization, including the Indian Residential School System.

Definitions

RECEIVING HOME A temporary home for children in care who are in transition from an emergency placement

RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (RPAC) This committee receives complaints and reviews the residential placement and plans of care of children to ensure they are best suited to the unique needs of that child.

RIGHT/HUMAN RIGHTS A legal, social or ethical principle of freedom or entitlement. Rights are the fundamental normative rules that protect an individual’s autonomy and personal legal rights from actions of the government.

RISK OF HARM Likelihood that a young person could be hurt physically, emotionally or because of neglect or abuse.



SEVERE MEDICAL SEARCH A search that helps you locate and contact a birth

family member to share medical information that can help diagnose or treat a severe mental or physical illness.

You will need a doctor or other regulated health professional to verify that getting this information would significantly boost the likelihood that the condition could be diagnosed and/or treated.

SIXTIES SCOOP Refers to a practice that occurred in Canada of “scooping up” Indigenous children: taking them from their families and communities and placing them in foster homes or putting them up for adoption.

SOCIAL WORKER/ “WORKER” Within the context of this document, a social worker and/or Child & Youth Worker is assigned to each child and youth or family involved in children’s aid.

SOCIETY WARD See [Interim Society Care](#)

SUPERVISED VISIT A visit that is monitored by a child protection worker.

Definitions

SUPERVISION ORDER

A court order that permits a children's aid society to monitor a child's well-being within their family home. This means that a worker will be assigned to the child. There may be conditions attached to the order. For example, the family may have to inform the child welfare agency if they move to a new home.

T

TEMPORARY CARE

AGREEMENT An arrangement made by a child welfare agency that provides a place for a child or young person to live other than with their parents. This arrangement might be with another family member, in foster care, or in another type of accommodation. This agreement gives the child welfare agency the right to decide where the child should live and to make decisions about the day-to-day care of the child.

TRADITIONS/ TRADITIONAL METHODS

A belief or behaviour passed down from generation to generation

within a group or society that has symbolic meaning or special significance.

TRAUMA results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being.

TREATMENT A plan to care for a person's medical, emotional or psychological needs.

TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION OF CANADA (TRC)

Established in 2009 to examine the impact of Canada's Indian Residential School System and to bear witness to the stories of survivors and those affected by these schools. The Commission released its final report in December 2015.

U

UNITED NATIONS CONVENTION ON THE

Definitions

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD A human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. See **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child on page 103.**

**UNITED NATIONS
DECLARATION ON THE
RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS
PEOPLES** An international instrument that enshrines the rights that constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world. See **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples on page 103.**

V

**VOLUNTARY SERVICE
AGREEMENT (VSA)** A contract between a parent or guardian and a child welfare agency. This agreement sets out the expectations that a parent or guardian must follow to keep a child safe at home, such as counselling, providing for basic needs, medical care, etc. The

child welfare agency will keep the child's file open and can take other steps if the family does not follow the agreement, or if they have any new concerns about whether the family can care for the child.

**VOLUNTARY YOUTH
SERVICE AGREEMENT
(VYSA)** Where a 16- or 17-year-old is found to be in need of protection, the young person can enter into a VYSA with a child welfare agency. This agreement is between the young person and agency. This plan will include finding a place to live and will set out how other supports will be provided, such as financial and social supports, planning for transitioning into adulthood, and help with developing and/or maintaining cultural connections.

**VULNERABLE SECTOR
CHECK** This criminal records check screens applicants seeking employment and/or volunteering in a position of authority or trust relative to vulnerable persons in Canada.



TOGETHER WE ARE

FEATHERS OF HOPE





PROTECT. EDUCATE. EMPOWER.

Feathers of Hope and the Ontario Child Advocate would like to acknowledge Right To Play for making play an essential part of the Feathers of Hope Forum



FEATHERS OF HOPE

www.feathersofhope.ca

@fohtbay #togetherweare #feathersofhope

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