



Pregnant and Parenting Youth in the Independent Living Program

Q. Can I participate in the Independent Living Program if I am pregnant or I have a child?

A. Yes. The Independent Living Program provides services to youth in foster care and young adults who were formerly in foster care. The goal of the program is to assist you in getting the life skills and education necessary to become self-sufficient, live independently and maintain employment. The services include life skills training and financial, educational and social support. As a young person with a child, you are eligible for all of the same services as someone without a child. Examples of services include parenting classes, child care, tutoring, career counseling and therapy and psychological counseling.

Q. I sometimes get overwhelmed by being a parent and am not sure if I am doing what is best for my child. How can I get help?

A. All parents get overwhelmed sometimes. You can turn to the caring older adults in your life for guidance and support. Your old foster mother, a coach or teacher at school, your aunt or anyone else that you trust might be willing to share advice and even watch your child occasionally when you need a break. Your IL caseworker may also be able to refer you to Parenting Classes. Taking parenting classes does not mean you are a bad parent; it just means that you want to be the best parent you can be. If you need someone to talk to one-on-one, your caseworker can also refer you to someone for counseling.

Q. I am worried that I will not be able to finish school or get a good job because of the responsibilities of caring for my child. What can I do to be able to support myself and my child in the future?

A. Being a parent is a big responsibility. And studies show that teenage parents are more likely to drop out of school and as a result earn less in their lifetime. The more children you have, the harder it is to stay in school. Studies also show that the further you go in school, the more money you are likely to make. So the best thing you can do for yourself and your child is to stay in school. You should also set goals for yourself and come up with a plan to meet those goals. The Independent Living Program can help by giving you services and financial assistance while you work on your goals. If you go to school full-time, you may be eligible for the maximum Road-to-Independence stipend depending on your needs. Your caseworker can also give you information about food stamps and other resources.

If you are still in high school, your school should help ensure that you can finish high school. School districts must provide parenting classes and the option of participating in regular classroom activities or enrolling in a special program designed to meet your particular needs as a teen parent. Students participating in your school district's teenage parent programs are exempt from minimum attendance requirements for absences related to pregnancy or parenting, but must make up work missed due to absence.

Q. I cannot attend school or work because I have no one to watch my child. Can I get assistance with child care?

A. Yes. Your caseworker can refer you to free or low cost child care in your area. Simply ask your caseworker for a referral form. Once you get the form, it is up to you to keep your appointment with the child care agency. If your agency, does not refer you for free daycare in your area, you can submit a request for Transitional funds or Aftercare funds to cover the cost of daycare.

Q. I am not ready to become a parent (again). Where can I get help with reproductive health and will the information I share with my doctor be confidential?

A. Your caseworker can refer you to a doctor or you can call Planned Parenthood at 1-800-230-PLAN (7526). If you are over 18 or you are pregnant or already have a child, you do not need anyone's permission to get birth control. Everything that you share with your doctor will be confidential. If you are under 18 and are not already pregnant or a parent, you need a guardian's permission to get birth control. You should talk to your caseworker or foster parent about getting permission.

Q. Can I get the Road-to-Independence (RTI) stipend if I am pregnant or I have a child?

A. Maybe. If you remain enrolled in school full-time during your pregnancy and after you have a child, you will be eligible for an RTI stipend and may receive the maximum RTI award depending on your needs.

Q. Will I lose my RTI stipend if I need to miss a few days of school when I have my baby?

A. It depends. As soon as you know you are pregnant, you should talk to your teachers or counselors to decide how much time you will be allowed to take off and how you will be able to make up for any days you miss because of illness or when you have the baby. You should let your IL case manager know what is happening. If you remain enrolled in school, take only a short time off, make arrangements with your school to deal with your absences and make up for missed work, you should continue to receive RTI. On the other hand, if you simply stop going to school without speaking to your teachers, you are in danger of losing your RTI stipend.

Q. What if my teachers do not want to give me time off when I have my baby?

A. By law, your school is supposed to give you a reasonable maternity leave and allow you to make up for missed work. If your teachers refuse to do that, ask your IL case manager for help discussing the issue with your teachers. If that still does not work, contact the University of Miami Children and Youth Law Clinic or another legal advocate for assistance. Some ways to make up work include taking summer classes or completing additional hours during regularly scheduled school sessions.

Q. I am having a difficult pregnancy and it is hard for me to physically attend school. Can I still participate in the RTI program?

A. Maybe. Again, the key to staying in the RTI program is to remain in a school program during the difficult period. You have several options. You may be able to enroll full-time in an online educational program. Be careful to choose a program that will give you a skill or certificate that will help you get a job or transfer to another school afterwards. Your IL case manager can help you in selecting a program that is right for you, and you may apply to either purchase or borrow a computer.

If you are having medical complications and you are in public school, you may be eligible for the hospital homeward bound program, which provides educational services to you at home. You should speak to your counselor at school about the program.

If you are having serious medical complications and your doctor says you cannot carry on your normal activities, this may be considered a temporary disability and you may be able to attend school part-time and still receive RTI until you give birth and/or recover. You should speak to your doctor and your IL case manager to see if this is an appropriate option to meet your needs.

Q. It is just unrealistic for me to attend school full-time right now. Can I receive other Independent Living services after I turn 18?

A. Yes. You may be eligible for the other two categories of post-18 Independent Living services – Aftercare Services and Transitional Support services. The Transitional Support program does not require you to be in school, but does require a transitional plan that outlines specific steps you must take to become independent. For example, your plan may say that you are going to work while you attend school part-time. You can work with your IL caseworker to develop a realistic and appropriate plan to meet your needs. Aftercare Services are available to help you deal with emergencies.

Q. Who can I call if I want help obtaining Independent Living benefits?

You should talk to your case manager or the Independent Living Coordinator for your agency. If you would like to talk to a lawyer about your independent living services, you can call the University of Miami School of Law Children & Youth Law Clinic at (305) 284-3123.