

STUDENT GUIDE TO LEGAL RIGHTS

Turning 18 means making new decisions about your future. This Guide will point you toward people and resources you need to plan your future.



Florida
Developmental
Disabilities
Council, Inc.



Turning 18 means making new decisions about your future. You will make decisions about working and managing your money and where to live. You may want to continue your education to learn new skills or get a degree. You may want to find a new doctor or a new apartment. Or, you may want to leave everything in place the way it is right now. It's good to have help making these decisions, and there are many people ready to support you. This Guide will point you toward those people and the resources you need to plan your future. Here are some of the rights you have as an adult, and some supports you can get.

Here is a list of **your legal rights** when you turn 18.

LEGAL RIGHTS	SUPPORTS TO TALK ABOUT WITH YOUR PARENTS
The right to make educational decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You choose someone to make your education decisions.
The right to get a bank account or debit card	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider a joint bank account with your parent: then either of you can sign the checks. Direct deposit and online banking save time and trouble. You will make fewer trips to the bank. A Special Needs Trust can be set up –to invest certain kinds of money safely, and still receive federal assistance.
The right to work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talk with job coaches or transition specialists. Visit different workplaces to see what they are like.
The right to choose a place to live	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There are many things to think about when choosing a place to live: budget, safety, access to public transportation, special accommodations, etc. Check online at the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council www.fddc.org for resources like A Place Where I Belong, Housing in Florida, and A Personal Assessment Guide.
The right to sign contracts and leases (for cell phones, cable TV, apartments, etc.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Signing a contract or lease comes with responsibilities: to pay a monthly bill for example. You must pay your bills on time. If you don't, you might lose your cellphone service, utilities – even your apartment! Talk to your parents about giving them power of attorney. Then, they can sign leases and contracts if you are unable to do so. Paying bills on time gives you a good credit rating. That's important if you want to get a loan to buy a car, a big TV, or a home.
The right to sue and be sued	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Always try to hire a lawyer if you are involved in a lawsuit. Not paying monthly bills can also end up in a lawsuit. A judge can take money from your paycheck or even make you sell your car to pay your bills. But if a landlord is not keeping your apartment clean or safe, you have the right to sue the landlord.

MAKING DECISIONS ABOUT WORK AND SOCIAL LIFE

It is important to set goals that you can reach. Here are some questions you can ask when you are making decisions about work:

- What things do you like to do? Work with people? Work in an office?
- What things are you good at? Cooking? Working with computers?
- Do you have to go to school for certain jobs?
- Do you need to pass a test for certain jobs?
- Do you need to live near your work and support people?
- Do you want to get more education? There are many new programs available, including some that help you take college courses.

LEGAL RIGHTS	SUPPORTS TO TALK ABOUT WITH YOUR PARENTS
The right to choose one's own doctor or dentist , and the medicines to take	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can choose your own doctor or dentist if you wish. It is a good idea to ask parents, friends, teachers, or others for information and advice about new doctors before you choose. A parent or trusted friend can become a "medical proxy" if you don't fully understand your medical choices. You can ask your parent or trusted friend to become a "health care surrogate" to give you advice on medical decisions Both a medical proxy and health care surrogate can access medical information and apply for public benefits. You can grant your parent or trusted friend durable power of attorney (DPOA). Then they can make medical decisions if you are unable to communicate.
The right to apply for governmental benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You must keep up with paperwork to get governmental benefits. If needed, you can ask a parent or other trusted person to become a representative payee to manage the cash benefits to take care of paperwork and bank accounts for you.
The right to vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You need to have a Florida ID or birth certificate to register to vote.
The right to travel	<p>Here are some websites with information helpful when traveling with a disability.</p> <p>www.travelguides.org</p> <p>www.disabled-world.com/travel</p> <p>www.independenttraveler.com/travel-tips/senior-travel/disabled-travel</p>
The right to drive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Persons with disabilities have the same rules for getting a driver's license as all adults. The steps are: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Apply for a learner's permit. Pass a written test. Pass a road test (someone with a valid license must drive you to the road test). If you needs a car with special modifications, you must bring that car to the road test. If you want to buy a car, you also have to buy insurance. If you are financing the car (borrowing money to pay for it), you will need to sign a contract.
The right to choose your social life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> You are free to choose your friends, lifestyle, religion, entertainment, food to eat, exercise, etc. Remember that freedom comes with responsibility: stay healthy and safe, and enjoy your new freedom!
The right to marry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The laws about getting married are the same for persons with disabilities.

CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

Most young people ask for advice and guidance from their parents when making important decisions. But you can also benefit from advice and assistance from many others people. These people are your **circle of support**.

People in your circle of support should: know you well; understand your likes and interests; know your strengths and capabilities; and support you to become more independent. Circles of support often include family members, trusted friends, someone from a place of worship, a teacher, a caregiver or service provider, a mentor or life coach, and others.

KEEPING SAFE

With your new independence, you need to be safe from harm from people who don't care about you.

- **Abuse** is when someone bullies you, threatens you, or hurts you.
- **Neglect** is when someone is not taking good care of you, like not feeding you well, or not keeping the house clean.
- **Exploitation** is when someone is trying to get you to do something for them that isn't good for you, like taking your money and not returning it, or trying to make you do something sexual that makes you uncomfortable.
- **Internet Exploitation** is a danger for everyone. Don't give out addresses, phone numbers, social security numbers, debit card numbers, or any other personal information unless you know it is safe:
 - These are some **safe sites**: job applications, government benefits, online stores like Amazon and Ebay.

WARNING SIGNS OF ABUSE, NEGLECT AND EXPLOITATION

Someone calls you names, makes fun of you, or threatens to hurt you.	Your caregiver does not cook food as required.	Someone wants to borrow your money or things, but doesn't say when they'll give them back.	A person gets upset when you don't do what they want you to do.
Someone hits you, pushes you, kicks you, or bites you.	Your caregiver does not keep your living space clean as required.	Someone calls you on the phone or emails you to ask for money	A person tells you scary stories to get you to do things.
Someone makes sexual gestures or comments that make you feel uncomfortable.	Your caregiver does not assist with medications as required.	Someone asks for your confidential information: social security number, bank account, Medicaid	Someone encourages you to do sexual acts that you don't want to do.
Someone touches you sexually against your will.	Your caregiver does not provide for your physical safety.	Someone wants you to sign a document, but you don't know what it is.	A person tells you to keep secrets about any behavior that you think is bad.

IF YOU THINK SOMEONE IS HARMING YOU, TELL SOMEONE YOU TRUST OR CALL THE POLICE (9-1-1) / OR THE FLORIDA ABUSE HOTLINE 1-800-96-ABUSE

SOME THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT LEGAL GUARDIANSHIP

- When a court assigns a person a legal guardian, all or some of their rights are taken away by a judge and given to the guardian.
- There are other ways and supports to keep you more independent.
- To get your rights back, you have to go back to court and show you are able to take care of these things yourself.
- Guardianship is an expensive process.
- If someone in your circle of support suggests guardianship, ask if there are better choices.



*Turning 18 is a big deal!
Know your legal rights*



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WWW.SUPPORTINGCHOICES.ORG

WWW.FDDC.ORG

WWW.GUARDIANTRUSTS.ORG