CT CASA Recommended Films for Advocate Training

Updated September 2026

Training note: Up to 8 hours of the 12 required training hours may come from fictional movies. This revision prioritizes child welfare, foster care, youth voice, trauma, family systems, disability, racial equity, poverty, substance use, sexual abuse, juvenile justice, and transition to adulthood.

Viewing availability: Streaming services change frequently. PBS titles listed below were verified as available through PBS/PBS apps during this review; for other titles, advocates should check current availability before viewing.

Core Child Welfare, Foster Care & Youth Voice

Foster

Documentary | about 2 hours

An intimate look at the Los Angeles County child welfare system through children, parents, foster parents, social workers, attorneys and judges.

Training focus: child welfare decision-making; reunification; placement; courts; youth and family voice

Removed NEW

Short film | runtime varies by source

A child-centered look at removal, foster care, loss and the emotional meaning of placement changes.

Training focus: removal; placement changes; family separation; child perspective; trauma

Content note: Trauma and family separation.

Possible Selves: Overcoming the Odds in Foster Care NEW

Documentary | 56 min 49 sec

Follows two teenagers in foster care during high school as they work toward education and adulthood. Filmmakers were granted access by the Los Angeles County Children's Court.

Training focus: adolescent development; education; permanency; transition planning; resilience

Absence/Presence NEW

Documentary short | 27 min 46 sec

Centers the lived experience and perseverance of youth in the child welfare system and shows how school, extended family and supportive adults can affect a young person's path.

Training focus: youth voice; natural supports; education; resilience; avoiding stereotypes

Rebecoming Me NEW

Documentary short | 29 min 51 sec

Five people who experienced foster care in Colorado describe systemic challenges, successes and ways communities can better support young people in care.

Training focus: lived experience; system improvement; youth voice; community support

Congratulations, You're On Your Own: Life After Foster Care NEW

Documentary | 56 min 46 sec

Young adults describe life after foster care, including how children enter care, what happens while they are in care and the challenges of transitioning out.

Training focus: aging out; housing; education; relationships; transition planning

Understanding Transition Age Youth NEW

Documentary film series | multiple short modules

System-involved young adults discuss trauma, strengths, coping and the transition from child welfare and juvenile justice settings into adulthood.

Training focus: transition-age youth; trauma; juvenile justice; resilience; supportive relationships

Aging Out NEW

Documentary | about 1.5 hours

Follows young people transitioning from foster care and highlights the consequences of leaving care without durable adult support.

Training focus: aging out; housing; relationships; independent living; durable adult support

Content note: May include difficult experiences involving homelessness, violence or loss.

Finding Home: A Foster Youth Story

Documentary | about 1 hour

Follows four teens in foster care as they prepare for life outside the foster care system.

Training focus: aging out; independent living; permanency; youth voice

Unadopted

Documentary | 35 minutes

A former foster youth examines his own case file while the film follows teens deciding among emancipation, extended care and permanent family connections.

Training focus: permanency; records and identity; aging out; extended care

They Have Names

Documentary | 30 minutes

Follows children, young adults and families navigating Arizona's child welfare system and asks what happens before, during and after foster care.

Training focus: case management; family experience; aging out; system accountability

The Day I Picked My Parents

Documentary series | about 45 minutes per episode

Follows foster youth participating in a program that gives them an active role in identifying prospective adoptive families.

Training focus: youth voice; adoption; permanency; shared decision-making

Trauma, Abuse, Mental Health & Substance Use

Resilience: The Biology of Stress & the Science of Hope

Documentary | about 1 hour

Explores adverse childhood experiences, toxic stress and efforts to build protective relationships and resilience.

Training focus: ACEs; toxic stress; trauma-informed practice; protective factors

Broken Places

Documentary | about 1 hour

Revisits people first filmed as children facing serious adversity and examines how early experiences shaped their adult lives.

Training focus: childhood adversity; resilience; long-term outcomes

Paper Tigers

Documentary | about 1.75 hours

Explores trauma-informed approaches in a school setting and the relationship between adversity, behavior, connection and resilience.

Training focus: trauma-informed schools; ACEs; behavior; relationships; resilience

Hiding in Plain Sight: Youth Mental Illness

Documentary series | 2-part film / about 4 hours total

Young people from varied backgrounds describe mental health challenges, barriers to care and paths toward support and recovery.

Training focus: youth mental health; stigma; access to care; listening to youth

Content note: Includes discussion of severe mental health symptoms and suicidal thoughts.

Healing Neen

Documentary | about 1 hour

A mother's journey through childhood trauma, addiction, incarceration and homelessness highlights the importance of trauma-informed services.

Training focus: intergenerational trauma; addiction; incarceration; trauma-informed care

Content note: Substance use, abuse and incarceration.

6 Balloons

Fictional film | *75 minutes*

A sister tries to help her brother obtain detox treatment while caring for his young daughter.

Training focus: substance use disorder; family roles; child safety; boundaries

Content note: Drug use and overdose risk.

Athlete A

Documentary | *about 1.5 hours*

Examines the USA Gymnastics sexual abuse scandal and the institutional dynamics that allowed abuse to continue.

Training focus: sexual abuse disclosure; institutional accountability; believing children; mandated systems

Content note: Detailed discussion of sexual abuse.

Unbelievable

Dramatized limited series based on real events | *about 6.5 hours total*

Examines a teenager's report of sexual assault, the response to her disclosure and the later investigation.

Training focus: trauma-informed interviewing; credibility; systems response; sexual assault

Content note: Sexual assault and distressing investigative material.

The Trials of Gabriel Fernandez

Documentary series | *about 6 hours total*

Examines the abuse and death of an eight-year-old child and failures across child-serving systems.

Training focus: fatal child abuse; system accountability; cross-system communication

Content note: Extremely disturbing child-abuse content and graphic material. Best used selectively, not as an introductory training film.

Identity, Disability, Race, Poverty & Family Context

Crip Camp

Documentary | *about 1.75 hours*

Connects the experiences of disabled young people at a summer camp with the disability-rights movement.

Training focus: disability rights; self-advocacy; inclusion; dignity

CODA

Fictional film | *about 2 hours*

A hearing teenager in a Deaf family balances family responsibilities with her own emerging goals.

Training focus: family roles; disability culture; adolescent identity; self-determination

Deej

Documentary | *about 1.25 hours*

A nonspeaking autistic young man adopted from foster care tells his story through documentary and poetry while pursuing education.

Training focus: autism; communication; presuming competence; adoption; education

The Big Picture: Rethinking Dyslexia

Documentary | *about 1.75 hours*

Explores dyslexia through students, families and researchers, with attention to strengths and educational barriers.

Training focus: learning disabilities; educational advocacy; strengths-based practice

13th

Documentary | *about 1.75 hours*

Examines race, criminalization and mass incarceration in the United States.

Training focus: racial equity; incarceration; structural systems; family impact

Content note: Violence and disturbing historical material.

The Hate U Give

Fictional film | *about 2.25 hours*

A teenager navigates two communities after witnessing the fatal police shooting of a childhood friend.

Training focus: adolescent voice; racial identity; grief; policing; advocacy

Content note: Police violence and grief.

Just Mercy

Fictional film based on real events | about 2.25 hours

Follows attorney Bryan Stevenson as he represents people facing wrongful conviction and unequal treatment in the justice system.

Training focus: racial inequity; legal advocacy; due process; incarceration

Content note: Racism, execution and violence.

The Florida Project

Fictional film | about 2 hours

A young child and her mother live in a low-cost motel near Orlando, revealing housing instability and poverty largely through a child's perspective.

Training focus: housing instability; poverty; child perspective; family stress

Content note: Adult language, neglect and child-welfare involvement.

A House Made of Splinters NEW

Documentary | 90 minutes

Follows children temporarily separated from parents in a shelter in eastern Ukraine and the social workers supporting them while family futures are decided.

Training focus: separation; uncertainty; social work; child voice; attachment

Content note: War context, parental substance use and family separation.

Adoption, Permanency & Family Relationships

Instant Family

Fictional film | about 2 hours

A couple becomes foster parents to a sibling group and encounters the emotional and practical complexity of foster care and adoption.

Training focus: sibling placement; foster parenting; reunification; adoption; trauma

Content note: Some experiences are simplified for comedy; useful when paired with discussion.

Lion

Feature film based on a true story | about 2 hours

A young man separated from his family as a child searches for his origins, raising questions about adoption, identity, grief and family connection.

Training focus: separation; adoption; identity; grief; birth-family connection; belonging

Content note: Separation and loss.

Closure

Documentary | 75 minutes

A transracial adoptee searches for her birth family and explores identity, belonging and family connections.

Training focus: transracial adoption; identity; birth family; search and reunion

Found

Documentary | about 1.5 hours

Three adopted cousins born in China explore family, culture and identity and seek information about their origins.

Training focus: international adoption; identity; culture; belonging

Like Dandelion Dust

Fictional film | about 1.75 hours

Two families' lives intersect around a young child, raising difficult questions about parenthood, attachment and permanency.

Training focus: birth parents; adoptive parents; attachment; permanency

Content note: Domestic violence and family conflict.

Sound of Hope: The Story of Possum Trot NEW

Fictional film based on real events | about 2 hours

Depicts a faith community in East Texas mobilizing to foster and adopt children, including sibling groups and children with significant trauma histories.

Training focus: foster/adoptive parenting; community support; sibling groups; caregiver capacity

Content note: Faith-centered perspective; should be paired with discussion about reunification, youth voice and realistic caregiver supports.

Human Trafficking & Exploitation

Trafficked in America

PBS FRONTLINE documentary | about 1 hour

Examines labor trafficking of immigrant teenagers in the United States and systems that failed to protect them.

Training focus: labor trafficking; immigrant youth; exploitation; system response; youth safety

Content note: Exploitation and trafficking.

Very Young Girls

Documentary | about 1.5 hours

Examines commercial sexual exploitation of adolescent girls and the ways exploited youth can be treated as offenders rather than victims.

Training focus: commercial sexual exploitation; victim identification; trauma; system response

Content note: Sexual exploitation, abuse and adult language; use thoughtfully.

Playground

Documentary | about 1.5 hours

Explores child sexual exploitation and trafficking in the United States. Best used as specialized rather than general training.

Training focus: child sexual exploitation; trafficking; prevention; system response

Content note: Disturbing sexual-exploitation themes.

Additional Strong Selections

Short Term 12

Fictional film | about 1.5 hours

A young staff member at a residential program supports adolescents while confronting her own trauma.

Training focus: residential care; trauma; relationships; secondary trauma; boundaries

Content note: Self-harm, sexual abuse and intense emotional material.

Jacinta

Documentary | about 2 hours

A mother and daughter affected by incarceration and substance use confront intergenerational trauma and recovery.

Training focus: intergenerational trauma; addiction; incarceration; parenting

Content note: Drug use and incarceration.

Precious

Fictional film | about 1.75 hours

An abused pregnant teenager finds support through an alternative school and begins building a different future.

Training focus: abuse; education; resilience; supportive adults

Content note: Severe physical and sexual abuse.

Gimme Shelter

Fictional film based on a true story | about 2 hours

A pregnant teenager leaves an abusive home and experiences homelessness before finding support.

Training focus: homelessness; pregnancy; abuse; supportive adults; service access

Content note: Abuse, homelessness and family rejection.

Gracie's Choice

Fictional film based on real events | *about 1.5 hours*

A teenager tries to create stability for younger siblings while their mother struggles with addiction and incarceration.

Training focus: kinship/sibling caregiving; addiction; parentification; family courts

Content note: Substance use and abuse.

Hunt for the Wilderpeople

Fictional film | *about 1.75 hours*

A foster child and caregiver become unlikely partners during a crisis, offering a less clinical entry point into belonging and attachment.

Training focus: belonging; foster care; grief; attachment; caregiver relationships

Content note: Comedic and unrealistic system elements; use for reflection rather than system accuracy.