

Supporting Teens Leaving Care: Resources & Guidance for Foster Parents

Take a moment and reflect on when you were a young adult thinking about leaping from living at home to moving out on your own. Were you excited? Were you scared? Were your feelings a complex combination of both exhilaration and fear? Did you have a reliable support network that was available for you in case you needed to move back home because living on your own was much more expensive than you had anticipated, or college was more difficult than you had expected?

Several challenges can present themselves for young people in foster care who are approaching this milestone achievement of living independently. You can help the tweens and teens in your care prepare for this transition by starting as early as possible—especially if the identified goal in the permanency plan is for the youth to transition from foster care to living on their own or living with others.

As a helpful reminder, teens who have an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) are eligible to continue living in their foster homes after they graduate from high school and until age 21.

The Wisconsin Department of Children and Families has a comprehensive list of resources that may help you and the youth in your care: [Teen and Young Adult Portal](#).



The Critical & Ongoing Roles of Foster Parents

The transition to adulthood and self-sufficiency can be an incredibly challenging journey for any young person. For teenagers who have been in foster care, the upcoming transition to adulthood is often an intimidating and, at times, overwhelming experience.

There are a multitude of responsibilities that these young adults will need to familiarize themselves with, manage, and navigate:

Housing

- Locating safe and affordable housing options
- Understanding what a rental agreement or lease is and the consequences that will occur if they do not fulfill these contracts
 - Investing enough money for a security deposit and first month's rent

Financial

- Earning enough money to cover daily living expenses
- Learning how to manage and maintain a budget
- Setting up a checking and savings account
- Understanding repayment of loans and how credit works
- Applying for postsecondary financial aid options

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- Obtaining health, auto, and rental insurance coverage
- Establishing a savings plan for planned and unexpected expenses

Employment

- Knowing where to seek out job opportunities
- Developing resume skills
- Establishing interviewing skills
- Being responsible at work (being on time, respecting authority, etc.)

Transportation

- Developing a transportation plan (public transportation vs. owning a car; walking vs. riding a bike)
- Insurance needs and bank loans if choosing a car for transportation to work and/or school

Education

- Applying to and visiting post-secondary education technical colleges and colleges
- Navigating the financial aid process
- Learning to balance work, school, and personal life
- Accessing educational and other support services at their school of choice if they have an IEP or a 504 Plan
- Connecting with campus contacts who help youth formerly in foster care navigate admission, financial aid, and student and academic services before and once on campus. Campus contacts are listed below for each of the technical colleges, University of Wisconsin System schools, and private colleges and universities (Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities).
 - [Wisconsin Technical College](#) campus contacts
 - [UW System](#) campus contacts
 - [Wisconsin Association of Independent Colleges and Universities](#) campus contacts

Wellness

- Maintaining a healthy and balanced diet
- Focusing on physical fitness and wellness
- Focusing on mental health and mindfulness
- Locating and accessing community resources and support services

These are just a few examples of the responsibilities, challenges, and opportunities young people look forward to. The good news is that there are support systems and resources available to help them succeed. As one young person formerly in foster care shared, “When you are a young adult leaving care, you find you are often ill-prepared for adult life and do not have the networks to support you if an emergency occurs. For most young people, 18-24 are years when they take risks and figure out what career path they want to follow. Being a support for youth can allow them to transition into adulthood and give them a chance to explore opportunities, develop financial independence, and create healthy, lifelong relationships.”

This is where you have an opportunity to prepare and support the youth in your care. Talk with them about their thoughts, plans, and hopes for their future. Provide them with opportunities to learn and practice new skills. Empower youth to build positive connections with others and cultivate new connections and community support networks.

All of us rely on the guidance and advice from our circles of support. We look to those people to lift us up when we are feeling down and to offer suggestions when we are unsure of what to do. At a time when most young adults are still relying on family for financial and emotional support, youth who are transitioning from care are often fully on their own.

But they do not have to be. You can provide integral support and ongoing connections for

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these young adults as they take their next steps in life. You might:

- Continue to be a mentor
- Offer guidance, support, and advice
- Be an advocate
- Provide compassionate and empathetic listening
- Be a scout for local, state, and online resources
- Celebrate successful choices and use the not-so-successful outcomes as learning and growth experiences.

Following are some further ideas for supporting the youth in your care:

Daily living & life skills. Young people often learn best through first-hand experiences. Incorporating everyday “teachable moments”

provides valuable lessons. For example, sharing how you manage paying bills, investing money for needs that will arise in the future, thoroughly and accurately completing a job application, knowing how to properly load the washer, and teaching cooking skills, are a few examples of life skills that you can teach the youth in your care.

A personalized transition plan. The sooner the discussion about the topic of transition planning is initiated, the more opportunities will become available for you and the youth in your care to explore some interactive experiences. Asking open-ended questions about their goals and dreams will provide wonderful insights and encourage open dialogues with one another.

The same holds true for the more practical goals. For example, going to a bank or credit

union and opening a checking and/or savings account is a life skill they will need to learn. Searching together for housing options, such as apartments, might be enlightening for the young person in your care, and provide an opening for conversations about where the youth would like to live, the practicalities of rent, and the rules and realities that come with renting or leasing a place of their own.

Building positive community connections.

One of the most important building blocks of resilience for a young person is a connection to a supportive, caring adult. Connectedness and a sense of belonging is one of the important gifts we can give young people and this is one of the gifts that keeps on giving.



As young adults move forward, it becomes essential for them to develop and maintain

supportive relationships that will empower them to reach and achieve their goals. Having open and honest discussions about their goals, hopes, and dreams can provide you with insightful information that you can use to help guide the youth in your care toward other supportive people. Perhaps that means a connection you have with someone in your faith-based community, school, work, or service club. Facilitating those connections for the youth in your care can help create a safe and supportive network of people.

A permanency pact. A permanency pact is a pledge from a supportive adult to provide specific support to a young person in foster care to establish a lifelong, kin-like relationship. [This example](#) was created by FosterClub, a national network for young people in foster care. You might use something similar with the youth in your care,

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as well as encourage them to create similar agreements with other caring adults in their lives.

Post-secondary educational options & resources. There is a wide range of postsecondary options that are available for young people from types of schools (public, private, non-profit, and for-profit) to types of programs (targeted certificate programs, apprenticeships, two-year Associate degree programs, four-year plus programs, and a variety of others).

[The Foster Care Transition Toolkit](#), created by the United States of America Department of Education, has a wealth of information from how to apply to a school or program, information about standardized testing, and financial aid options, all the way to suggestions on how young people can prepare themselves for the rigors associated with ongoing education. This toolkit is also intended as a resource for caring and supportive adults.

There is no doubt that transitioning to adulthood can be a challenging experience for any young person to undertake. All you do to help educate, support, and empower the youth in your care makes an incredible difference. If you need further information, resources, or support, please contact our team of Resource Specialists.



Resources

From the [Resource Library](#)

- *Transition Health Care Checklist: Preparing for Life as an Adult*, by the Wisconsin Community of Practice on Transition Practice Group on Health
- *The Black Foster Youth Handbook: 50+ Lessons I learned to successfully Age-Out of foster care & Holistically Heal*, by Angela Quijada-Banks
- *Life After Foster Care - 100 Things I've Learned*, by Georgette Todd

Tip Sheet

- [Helping Teens in Care Transition to Adulthood](#)

Training From [Champion Classrooms](#)

- [Strategies for Building Stronger Relationships With Teens](#)

Additional WiFCC Resource

- [Scholarship Information](#)

Additional Resources

- [Wisconsin Department of Children and Families \(DCF\) Scholarship Points of Contact](#)
- [Youth Services Paying for College](#)
- [Wisconsin Independent Living](#)
- [Handbook for Youth in Foster Care](#)
- [Opening the Doors to College](#)
- [About Financial Aid—UW Help](#)
- [Helping Youth Transition to Adulthood: Guidance for Foster Parents](#)
- [Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative](#)
- [Youth Communication](#)