

A GUIDE FOR FOSTER, RELATIVE AND KINSHIP CARERS

leading the way

PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR LEAVING CARE



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1
leading
the way

Leading the way

From the first day you met the young person in your care, you have been helping them grow into a capable and confident young adult. You have supported their education, encouraged respectful relationships, connected them with people who care about them and nurtured their sense of identity and belonging.

But as they approach 18 years of age, that young person will be facing a whole new set of responsibilities. Over the next few years, they'll be enrolling in further studies, going to job interviews and learning to manage their money. And they'll be enjoying a whole new set of freedoms like planning for holidays and owning a car.

It's a whole new world, for you and your teen. But don't worry - you're not alone!

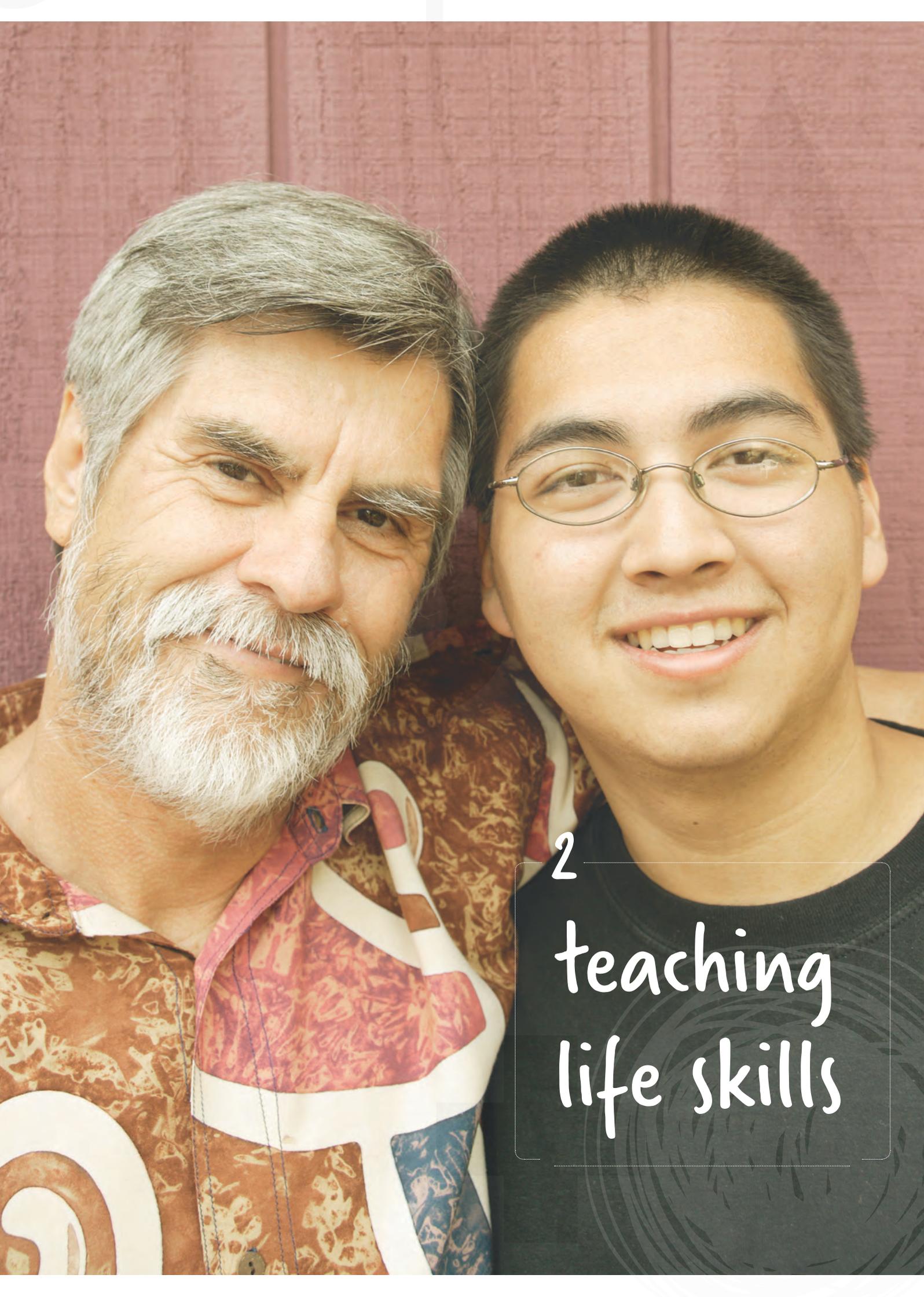
Produced by Family and Community Services, *Leading the Way* is all about helping you support the young person in your life develop the skills and confidence they need to move into adulthood. It is organised into three sections:

- **Teaching life skills** offers loads of ideas on how to help the teen in your care learn and practice the everyday skills they will need in adulthood, with questions you can use as a checklist.
- **Making plans** is a handy reference to some of the official processes that go on while a young person is preparing to leave care, as well as places you and your teen can go to access financial and other sorts of support.
- **Dealing with change** looks at what goes on for young people emotionally and psychologically as they get ready to leave care, and how you can help make the experience a positive and reassuring one.

In short, *Leading the Way* is full of tips and ideas that you can use to identify your teen's needs, answer their questions and help them make plans for the future.

Leaving care doesn't mean the end of your relationship. Knowing that you'll always be there with love, insight and support will be a source of great comfort to the young person throughout their adult lives.





2

teaching
life skills

teaching life skills

All young people need to learn how to cook, clean, look after their own mental and physical health and manage their money before they can make it on their own as adults.

What are 'independent living skills'?

It's part of your role as a carer to teach the teen in your care the skills they need for independent living – but don't be overwhelmed by the responsibility. You are already teaching your teen valuable skills, just by going about your day and getting them involved. You are a role model! Even if you don't realise it, your teen is watching you and learning how to do things like cook and shop for bargains.

On the following pages are some practical ideas for helping young people develop the skills they need. Feel free to use them, or to find your own way of teaching life skills to the teen in your care.



Family and Community Services (FACS) have put together a useful checklist of independent living skills; to find it, go to facs.nsw.gov.au and search for 'Independent Living Skills Checklist'.



Identity

Carers play a crucial role in supporting a young person's understanding of where they come from, who they are and who they want to be. Here are some questions you can use to kick-start some conversations about identity with the young person in your care.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

1 Have you ever thought about all the things you're good at?

Help your teen list all the things they do well. When they're finished, add a few they've forgotten. For example, you might suggest they have an amazing memory for sporting statistics, or that they're very good at comforting their friends. Have them write it all down on a piece of paper and keep it some place handy. When they are feeling down, they can pull it out and be reminded of all their good points.

2 Are you taking your My Life Story Book with you?

Working on the *My Life Story Book* will have helped the young person better understand their birth family, their community and their own personal history. Remind your teen about their *My Life Story Book* and the conversations you've shared along the way. Talk about how valuable it is to see not just who they are and where they have come from, but how they've grown as a person. If they are leaving your home, suggest they take it with them, or help them to decide on a safe place to keep it (they may want to leave it with you!).

3 How are you going to handle setbacks?

Sometimes young people with poor self-esteem take mistakes and failures very hard. Sometimes they are even too scared to look for a solution in case they fail. Help the young person understand that making mistakes is one of the best ways to learn. Tell them about the times you made mistakes or failed, and talk positively about what you learned and how you feel about it now.

CONNECTIONS TO FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

4 Are you feeling good about your family relationships?

Over the years, you will have been helping the young person in your care stay connected with their family and develop safe, stable, loving and respectful relationships with family members. Your support and positive attitude is just as valuable now. Check in with the young person to see how they're feeling and if they have any concerns about family relationships. Remind them that you will be there for them if things ever get tough.

5 Who do you think of as your support network?

Help the young person to identify the people they can rely on for love and support in the years ahead. They could be family members, people in the wider community like teachers, neighbours or friends, or people who have been involved in their care (this is a good opportunity for you and the young person to talk about how you would like to stay involved in each other's lives in the future). If certain relationships aren't as strong as they could be, help the young person deepen their connections with those people.

6 How are you going to stay in touch with your culture and community?

Young people who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or from other culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, will have a Cultural Plan. Cultural Plans are developed by caseworkers and members of a young person's family and community to ensure they remain connected to culture during their time in care. Talk to the young person about how they can stay connected after they leave care, including accessing Aboriginal Medical Services, engaging in local cultural and sporting activities, and having regular contact with Elders and other senior members of the community. These connections demonstrate how the local Aboriginal community can play a critical role in building identity, self-esteem, confidence and a sense of belonging.

IDENTITY AND DOCUMENTATION

7 Do you know where your birth certificate is?

Birth certificates are needed for all sorts of transactions including getting a passport or a driver licence. Speak to your caseworker for help locating the birth certificate of the young person in your care. Family and Community Services (FACS) should have a birth certificate on file. If they don't, they will apply to Births, Deaths and Marriages to have one released, and pay the necessary costs. A birth certificate can take two or three weeks to be processed, so make sure you take action on this early.

8 Do you have a Confirmation of Aboriginality certificate?

A young person with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island background does not need certification to identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. However, formal confirmation of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island family is usually required if a young person over the age of 16 wants to apply for certain scholarships or work opportunities, or access certain payments or other benefits. In NSW, Aboriginal identity can be formally established with a Confirmation of Aboriginality from a nationally incorporated Aboriginal organisation. The process for confirmation can be long. Providing as much information as possible about a young person's heritage can quicken the process. It's important that the young person is given plenty of time and support to make the application. It should be noted that some Aboriginal young people do not want to formally identify as Aboriginal, even though many do. It is essential to respect a young person's wishes about whether or not they want to secure official recognition. However, it's also important to make sure the young person understands what the certificate may entitle them to and that you will support them through the process of applying for it.

9 Have you got your Medicare card?

Young people should have a Medicare card in their own name when they leave care. Typically, Family and Community Services (FACS) organise for children and young people to get a Medicare card when they first enter care. If for some reason the young person in your care does not currently have a Medicare card, and they are over the age of 15, they can apply for one online: go to the Department of Human Services website (humanservices.gov.au) and search for 'How to enrol or re-enrol in Medicare'.

10 Have you got your Health Care Card?

Children and young people in out-of-home care receive a Health Care Card, giving them access to prescription medicines and other health services at reduced rates. After their care order legally ends they may still be eligible for a Health Care Card but only if they

are receiving a government payment such as Youth Allowance. Check in with the caseworker and the Department of Human Services (humanservices.gov.au) to find out whether the teen in your care is still eligible for a Health Care Card, and if any paperwork is required.

11 Can you pass the '100-point identity check'?

Certain transactions, like opening a bank account, signing a lease or applying for a driver licence, require you to prove your identity through something called a '100-point identity check'. Different identity documents such as birth certificates, Medicare cards, student ID cards and lease agreements can contribute to the 100-point tally. It's a good idea for you and the caseworker to check the teen has enough identity documents to pass an identity check.

12 Do you need a passport?

The young person may not have an immediate need for a passport, but it could be a good idea to at least get them thinking about what's involved in getting one. For example, they will have to present a combination of identity documents which may include a driver licence, a birth certificate and a Medicare card. Passports for people aged 16 and over are valid for ten years, so if you help them apply one for now, they will be equipped to travel overseas at some point in the future.

13 Are you enrolled to vote?

Young people aged 16 and over can get their names on the electoral register so that when they turn 18 and are eligible to vote in federal, state and local elections, they are ready to do so. As soon as they're old enough, encourage your teen to enrol with the Australian Electoral Commission (aec.gov.au). Remind them that their experience and views are important, and that they deserve to have their opinions heard at a political level.

Health and wellbeing

Wellbeing is built on physical, mental and emotional health. It's about healthy eating, being active, having good social relationships and feeling that you're going well in ways that matter to you. Check in with your teen to make sure they have a good idea of what it takes to maintain a happy and healthy lifestyle.

PHYSICAL HEALTH

1 Are you eating well?

It's valuable for young people to have a basic understanding of nutrition and know how to prepare meals that are good fuel for their mind and body. You might feel you have plenty of healthy eating knowledge to share, but there are also some excellent, credible sources of information online. These include:

- **Make Healthy Normal** This is a great guide to everyday eating and how to make the small choices that put you on track for good physical health. Take a look at makehealthynormal.nsw.gov.au.
- **Heart Foundation** This site has great information on healthy eating choices as well as a guide to reading nutrition labels. Go to heartfoundation.org.au/healthy-eating.

Encourage teens to make their own school lunches or have them regularly cook an easy family meal like pasta or a stir fry. And make an effort to keep less sugary, salty and fatty foods in your pantry.

2 Are you staying active?

Regular exercise not only keeps you fit, it also helps you deal better with stress, anxiety and depression. Talk to the young person in your care about making physical activity a regular part of their week. Some will enjoy action-packed activities like rock climbing or surfing. Others will respond better to less competitive, more meditative activities like yoga, bushwalking, swimming and martial arts. There are plenty of low-cost options, from hitting the beach or the local public pool to hopping on a bike.

3 How good are you at looking after yourself?

Young people should know the basics of grooming, like showering, brushing teeth and washing hair on a regular basis. They should also know how to look after simple injuries. If the young person in your care relies on you for these things, try getting them more involved by encouraging them to decide which products they need and prefer. Then go shopping with them to put together their own kit of shampoos, toothpaste, band aids, antiseptic creams and so on. It could be a way of kick-starting some self-care.

4 Can you recognise the symptoms when you're sick?

Help young people recognise the connections between certain symptoms and common illnesses like colds, flus or stomach bugs. Before they take any over-the-counter or prescription medication, have them read the label to see how it relates to their symptoms, how to take the drug, and what side effects to look out for.

5 Do you know who to go to if you're sick or injured?

If you already have a network of healthcare professionals that you see regularly, make sure the young person has those contact details and understands how to make an appointment. If you don't, then encourage your teen to find a doctor and dentist of their own. Also talk to the young person about times when they should go to a hospital instead of a local doctor – for example, if they have a serious wound, burn or break, or they are having trouble breathing.

EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH

6 How do you feel about leaving care?

It is normal for young people to feel a range of emotions about growing up and leaving care. They could be scared, apprehensive or sad about how relationships might change and worried about who will be in their lives in the future. Or they may be excited and hopeful about what lies ahead. Regularly check in with the young person about how they are feeling. Talk to them about their hopes and dreams. Reassure them that you will be there for them in the years ahead. And stay involved with them as they make plans for the future. All of these will help balance out those feelings of uncertainty.

7 Do you know what you want to say to new people about being in care?

As they start new jobs or move on to further study, young people are likely to come into contact with lots of new people. As they get to know each other, those people may start sharing stories about their family, their home and their childhood. Sometimes, young

people who have been in care find it hard to join in those conversations. Have a talk to the teen in your care and remind them that they can decide how much of their personal story they share with others. Offer to do some role playing with them so they can get a feel for what they could say and how certain people might react.

8 Do you feel like you're coping OK?

Help the young person in your care to be aware of their emotions and their behaviour. Encourage them to think about what triggers big emotions like fear, sadness or rage. Is it certain places? Situations? Words? It can help to keep a diary and look back over it after a month or two to see if a pattern emerges. If you can, discuss those triggers with your teen and try to come up with some solutions together. It could be about thinking ahead to avoid those moments, or finding different ways to deal with them (like going for a run if you hit a wall of frustration, rather than yelling at someone). If the young person has ongoing difficulties dealing with their emotions, encourage them to speak to a counsellor or a psychologist. Your caseworker can help put you in touch with someone who can help.

Some young people who identify as LGBTQI or who are questioning their sexuality or gender identity may need some extra support over the next few years. Check in with them to see how they're feeling. Make sure they know about the resources available to them, including support for their own mental health and wellbeing, and for making positive connections with LGBTQI communities. Check out the Resources section on page 48.



9 Are you getting enough sleep?

When you're not getting enough sleep, it's hard to concentrate and easy to get irritated and frustrated. Teach the young person in your care about good sleep habits, including having a regular bedtime and turning off screens at least an hour before heading to bed. If you think emotional or psychological issues are causing sleep loss, get professional support.

10 Do you think about your mental health?

Encourage the young person in your care to think about their mental health in the same way as their physical health. Remind them that talking to trusted friends and family members can be a big help, but also talk about the kind of support they can get from experienced mental health workers such as counsellors and psychologists. Make sure they know about some of the organisations that advocate for mental health and provide free counselling services. These include:

- **Reach Out** Practical online tools and support for young people. Go to reachout.com.
- **Headspace** Young people and their families can get help online, over the phone or at a local Headspace centre. Find out more through headspace.org.au or call 1800 650 890.
- **Youth Beyond Blue** Offering online chat and a 24-hour help line for teens. Go to youthbeyondblue.com or call 1300 22 4636.



11 Do you know what to do if you feel like you're really struggling?

Help the young person in your care understand the difference between having bad feelings that come and go, and having darker feelings that last longer and make it hard for them to do the things they would normally do. Make sure they know it's important to get help when they feel like that. Encourage them to come to you to talk about how they feel, but also let them know about services they can call in an emergency or if they want some privacy. These include:

- **Lifeline** This organisation provides crisis support and suicide prevention services through online chat and a 24-hour phone service. Find out more at [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au) or call 13 11 14.
- **Suicide Call Back Service** This service provides free phone, video and online counselling for anyone affected by suicide, including people who need immediate help. Connect with them through [suicidecallbackservice.org.au](https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au) or call 1300 65 94 67.

12 Have you thought about how to respond to racial discrimination?

Let the young person know that it is not okay for anyone to be treated with disrespect on the basis of race or culture. Make it clear that discrimination is a crime and if they encounter it they have a right to report it to someone who can take action, such as the Australian Human Rights Commission ([humanrights.gov.au](https://www.humanrights.gov.au)). If you are not from a diverse background yourself, look for support from leaders in the young person's cultural community. Help the young person connect with those leaders and find out how they have responded to discrimination and bullying in the past.

RELATIONSHIPS

13 What does a good friendship look like?

Have a conversation with the young person about their friends and get them to identify what makes someone 'a good friend'. Talk about how good friends are people who respect and trust each other, care for each other's wellbeing and help each other out. Remind them that someone who doesn't listen to them, puts them down, encourages or forces them to do things they don't want to do or talks about them to other people without their permission is not being a good friend.

14 Who would make a good mentor for you?

Introduce the young person to the idea of mentors. Mentors are people who can share what they have learned through their own experiences and help guide the young person through challenges and opportunities as they arise. The young person may already think of you as a mentor, or they might look to a teacher, a sports coach, an employer or an Elder. It may be very valuable for the young person in your care to connect with a mentor from within their cultural community.

15 What kind of behaviour do you think is okay in a relationship?

It's valuable for young people to understand that romantic relationships should be based on mutual respect, trust, love and commitment. Make sure the teen in your care understands they don't have to put up with being disrespected, lied to, verbally abused, emotionally abused or physically hurt by anyone. Have a talk about the good relationships you've both seen, and what makes them work. Also talk about what a person might do if they are in an unhealthy relationship, including connecting with one of the following services:

- **The Line** Ideas on keeping relationships healthy and respectful, and avoiding behaviour that makes someone feel frightened, intimidated or humiliated. Visit the website at theline.org.au.
- **1800 Respect** Online and telephone counselling for people experiencing sexual assault or domestic violence. Look up 1800respect.org.au or call 1800 737 732.

INTIMACY AND SEX

16 Do you feel like you know what you need to know about safe sex?

As the young person in your care grows up, they will start developing a sense of their own sexuality and will likely get involved in intimate relationships. Make sure your teen knows how to stay safe, including using contraception to protect against pregnancy and avoiding sexually transmitted infections. If you find it hard to discuss these things with the teen in your care, ask a mentor or caseworker to have a talk to them. You can also suggest they do their own research at websites including:

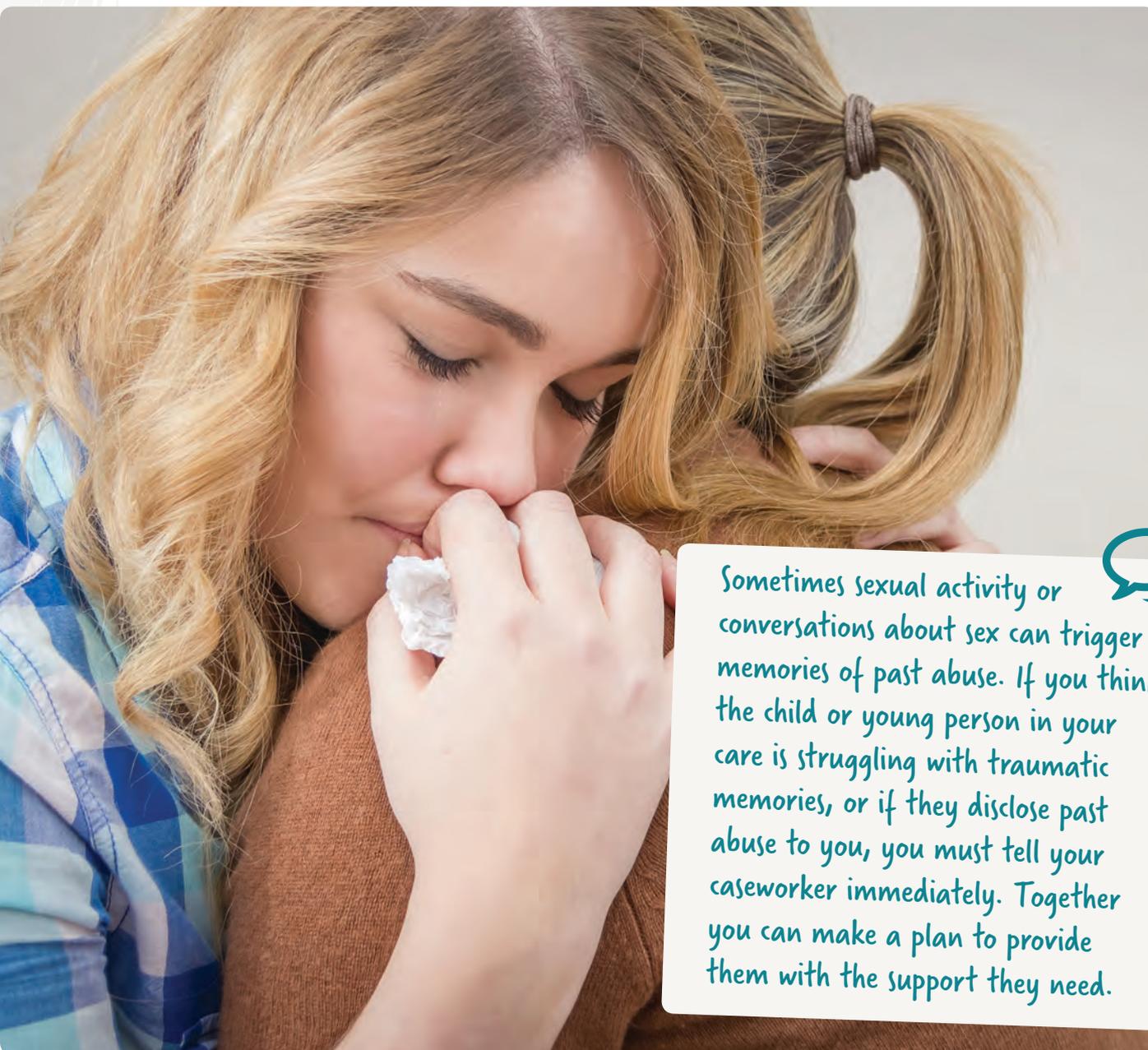
- **Family Planning NSW** Providing lots of online information about contraception and sexual health. Young people can also make appointments at clinics across Sydney and in Dubbo and Newcastle. Go to fpnsw.org.au or call 1300 658 886.
- **Play Safe** A source of online information about safe sex, contraceptives and sexually transmitted infections. Visit playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au.

17 Have you ever felt pressured by friends about sexual relationships?

Peer pressure can affect a young person's decisions about sexual behaviour. Ask the teen you care for if they think people sometimes make up stories about their sexual activities to impress their friends - or if they have sex with someone, just so they can 'fit in'. Talk to them about the idea of 'mutual consent' and make sure they understand that consent can be withdrawn at any time if a person changes their mind about what's going on. Together, develop a plan around how the young person could respond if they felt like they were being pressured to have sex.

18 Have you thought about what you would do if you or your partner were pregnant?

Talk to the young person about what it means to be a parent and explore the impact they think being a teenage mother or father would have on their life. Make sure they know how to use contraception to protect against pregnancy. Also let them know that if they or their partner do become pregnant, there are people around to support them and help them make decisions about their future. Those people include you and organisations like NSW Family Planning (fpnsw.org.au).



Sometimes sexual activity or conversations about sex can trigger memories of past abuse. If you think the child or young person in your care is struggling with traumatic memories, or if they disclose past abuse to you, you must tell your caseworker immediately. Together you can make a plan to provide them with the support they need.

ALCOHOL, DRUGS, AND TOBACCO

19 Do you understand the impacts of smoking, drinking and using drugs?

Using alcohol, drugs and tobacco can affect your judgement, be bad for your health and even have criminal consequences. Start a conversation with the young person about their attitudes to smoking, drinking and using drugs. Tell them about your own experiences and the boundaries you have set for yourself.

Some teens will respond very emotionally to a conversation about drugs and alcohol. It could be because it stirs up difficult memories, or because they are using drugs and alcohol to help manage the pain of past trauma. If you're worried about the young person's response, talk to the caseworker. Together you can work out the best way to support the young person.



20 What are your limits around drinking or using drugs?

It is important for teens to know how alcohol and drugs can affect their health and wellbeing. It's also important for them to understand what it means to use alcohol and drugs safely. They should only ever take something if they know what's in it: accepting drinks or drugs from strangers or from an unknown source is very risky. If they're using drugs, they should let a trusted friend know what they've taken so they can get the right help if something goes wrong. They should know that even moderate drinking or drug use will affect their decision-making ability so they need to think ahead about things like contraception and travel plans. And they should have in mind some people they can contact – people like you – if they get into a situation that worries them or where they feel unsafe.

Finance

Financial problems can be avoided with good habits such as keeping to a budget, having a regular savings plan and shopping for value rather than buying on impulse. Here are some ideas on how you can help young people develop good money habits and start thinking about how they can make their money last.

BUDGETS AND SPENDING

1 Do you know how to put together a budget?

Help the young person develop a budget to make sure they're not spending more than they're earning. Find one online or draw up your own basic version, including income, fixed expenses such as board or pre-paid mobile phone fees, and variable expenses such as clothing and outings.

2 Do you want to have a go at living on a budget?

The best time to experiment with living on a budget is before leaving home. Together with your teen, work out how much gets spent each month on things like mobile phone bills, lunches, toiletries, snacks, outings, clothes and haircuts. Then ask them to put

together a budget. At the start of the month, hand over the budget in cash and let the young person manage the spending. At the end of the month talk about what went well and what didn't. If they have money left over, think about letting them spend it or save it.

The government's MoneySmart website has an online budget tool (go to moneysmart.gov.au and search for 'budget planner') and an app (search for 'Track My Spend' or download from the App Store or Google Play).

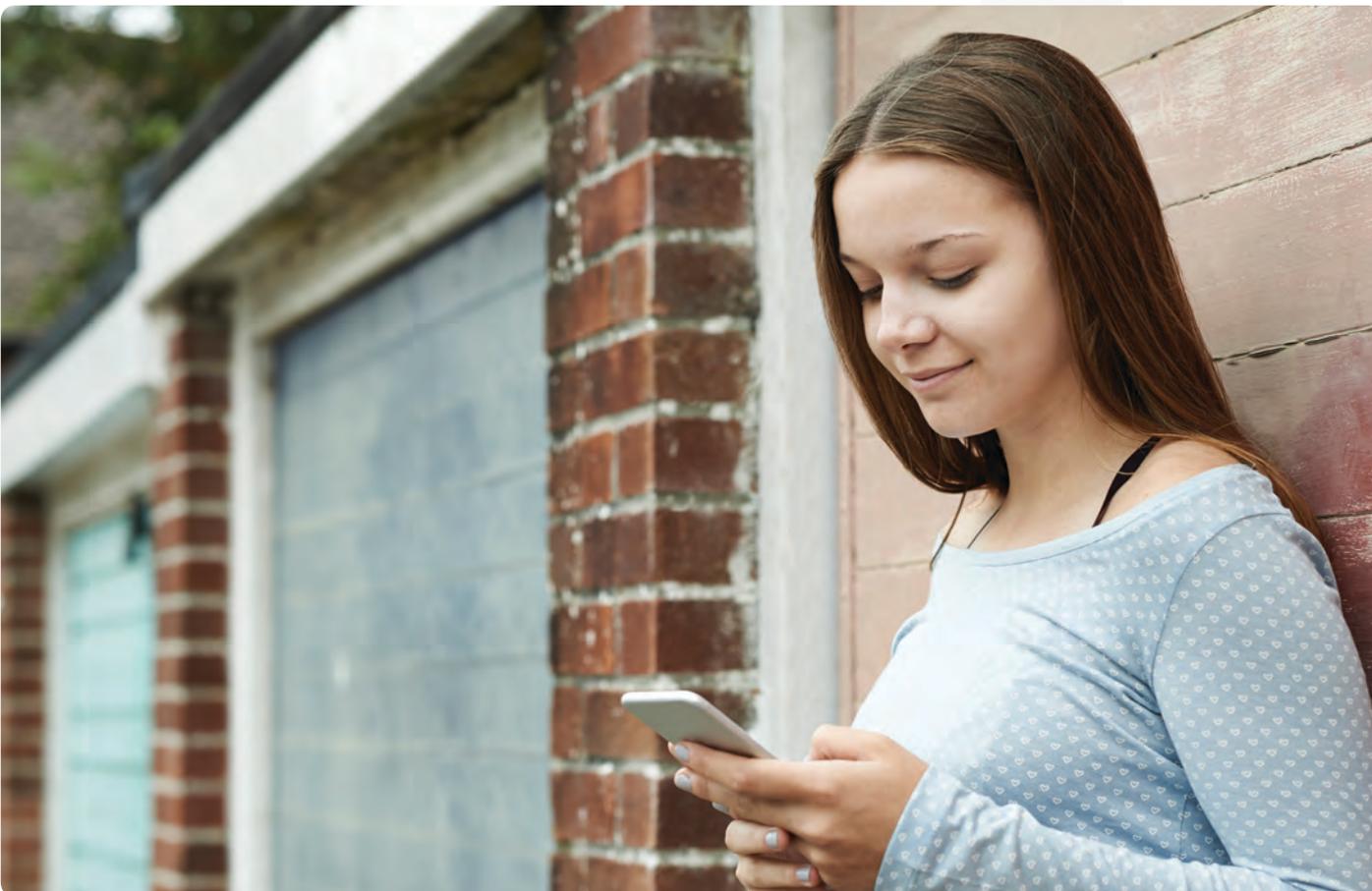


3 Can you find the best deals?

Show teens how to make their money go further by shopping around. Pick an item like a pair of shoes or a portable speaker and make a note of what it costs in different stores and online; sometimes the difference can be as much as double. Also see how the price of a generic brand compares to the name brands. If the young person insists on buying name brands, give them a generic brand-budget for an item and tell them they have to use their own money to make up the difference.

4 Have you thought about spending money on a car?

Buying a car is a priority for many young people. Have a conversation and explore the options: buying a cheaper car with the money you have now, or borrowing money to buy a more expensive car. What are the positives and negatives? Will the cheaper car cost more in the long run because it's older and takes more work to maintain? If you buy an expensive car with a bank loan, how much will the interest add up to over the life of the loan? Which car will cost more to insure?



SAVINGS

5 Are you putting aside some savings every week?

Help the teen work out a savings plan and encourage them to stick to it. For example, you could suggest they divide their weekly earnings into three, with one third going to long-term savings (not to be used until they leave home), one third to short-term savings (for things they want but don't have enough to pay for yet) and one third they can spend straight away.

6 Is there something special you want to save up for?

A young person might want to save up for something in particular like a trip with friends or a car of their own. Help them work out how much it will cost and how much they need to save each week to reach the target in time.

BANKING AND CREDIT

7 Do you understand that banks charge you for some services?

Talk about the savings institution you bank with and the services you use including ATMs, phone and online banking, credit cards and loans. Using bank statements if you can, show the teen how these different services have different fees.

8 Did you know some bank accounts are for savings and some are for transactions?

Explain the difference between an everyday transaction account and a savings account. A transaction account is good for day-to-day banking because it has low fees, but it won't pay much interest. A savings account pays higher interest, but will charge high fees if you want to access your money. For a young person who finds it difficult to save, a savings account with limited access may be the best way to achieve saving goals.

9 Do you understand how easy it is to get into debt?

Retailers selling expensive items like phones, TVs or cars may offer packages that lock young people into long-term payment contracts, often with an enticing 'interest-free' or 'no repayments' period at the beginning. What looks like a great deal at the start can easily lead to debt and bad credit ratings. Encourage your teen to think carefully before committing to any sort of payment contract. Let teens know there are services that offer good advice for people struggling with debt, including the National Debt Helpline (ndh.org.au or 1800 007 007).

TAX

10 Do you understand how tax works?

Explain to the teen that basically everyone who works gives some money to the government in the form of tax. The government uses that money to pay for big public works and services, like hospitals, schools and roads. Make sure the teen understands they are responsible for paying tax. Explain that their tax might be deducted from their pay by their employer, but if they work for themselves, or work for cash, they will have to put the money aside themselves.

11 Do you know what GST is?

The Goods and Services Tax, called the 'GST', is a broad-based tax of 10% added to the cost of most goods and services. Take a look together at a receipt from a supermarket or chemist and show your teen where the GST appears. It's also a good idea to point out advertisements that aim to mislead by showing a price and then including the words 'plus GST' in the small print. Make it clear that teens should double-check that GST is included in the price before agreeing to any big purchases, like a computer or a second-hand car.

12 Do you have a tax file number?

The reference number used to identify a person in the tax system is called a tax file number. You don't have to have a tax file number, but if you don't have one you will be charged a higher rate of tax. Help your teen to apply for a tax file number online with the Australian Tax Office at ato.gov.au/Individuals/Tax-file-number.

FINANCIAL AID

13 Have you thought about what to do if you get into trouble with money?

Emergency relief organisations can provide immediate financial and material support to young people in financial crisis. They offer things like clothing, food and transport vouchers and part-payment of utility bills, as well as referrals to other services that help address the underlying issues. If you and your teen have a good relationship, remind them they can always come to you in an emergency. It's also a good idea to make sure they know about options including:

- **Salvos** Also known as The Salvation Army, the Salvos provide help with housing, job seeking, financial support, problem gambling, addiction and domestic violence. Contact them through salvos.org.au or call 13 SALVOS (13 72 58).
- **Vinnies** St Vincent de Paul or 'Vinnies' can help young people get around roadblocks to do with housing, finances, health support, food support and domestic violence. Reach them through vinnies.org.au or call (02) 9568 0262.
- **Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA)** This is a financial aid scheme for people who are having trouble paying their electricity or gas bills because of a crisis or emergency. The scheme is managed by a number of welfare organisations including St Vincent de Paul and the Salvation Army. For details of the nearest EAPA provider go to resourcesandenergy.nsw.gov.au and search for 'EAPA provider contact' or call 13 77 88.

Housing

The teen in your care might want to move out when they turn 18 - or they might be keen to stay on with you. Either way, they will one day need to know how to find somewhere to live, and how to pay for it. Help them understand their options and try to make sure they have somewhere safe and sensible to live when they eventually do leave your home. Talk to the caseworker if you need extra information or support.

HOUSING OPTIONS

1 What are your options for housing?

Look at places for rent and compare the prices for different sizes and locations. Discuss what the young person might be able to afford either by themselves or sharing with others. Help them explore a range of options to work out what is possible within their budget. These include:

- **Renting or sharing privately** If they can afford to cover rent and bills, young people can take a room in a share house or take out a lease on a house or apartment; visit real estate agents or take a look at what's available online.
- **Independent Living Programs** Some non-government organisations run programs that help teens make the transition to independent living with low-cost accommodation and structured support for things like paying bills and looking for work; the caseworker can put you in touch with a suitable program.
- **Social Housing and Affordable Housing Programs** Affordable rental options for people on low incomes are available through a number of different government and non-government agencies; find out more at the NSW Federation of Housing Associations (communityhousing.org.au).
- **Rent Choice Youth** This program is available to young people aged 16 to 24 who live in regions including the Hunter, Tamworth, Orange, Bathurst, Penrith and Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Wagga Wagga, South Western Sydney, Western Sydney, South East Sydney or Southern NSW. It offers support to help young people find a place to live, get approved for a lease and pay their rent for up to three years. For more information go to housingpathways.nsw.gov.au and search for 'Rent Choice Youth'.

2 What sort of place do you want to live in?

Ask the young person what they would look for in a place to live: big rooms, a good view, easy access to trains or buses? Take a look at the list and point out any gaps. For example, have they thought about whether pets are allowed, whether the room comes furnished or unfurnished, or whether they have any close friends nearby? Also have a talk about the difference between needs and wants, then suggest they try prioritising their list.

3 How will you know which place is the one for you?

Inspect a couple of apartments or houses even if the young person in your care is not intending to move yet. Ask what they think about things like the condition of the property, the size of the rooms, and the level of noise from nearby shops or roads. Have them work out what their rent would be if they shared the property, with one flatmate in each bedroom. After you've seen a few properties, ask the teen to make up an 'inspection checklist' they can take with them when they start looking for places to live.

4 Have you thought about having a flatmate?

Sharing rental accommodation with another person can help keep costs down, but it comes with its own challenges, especially if all the flatmates are young people with little or no experience of independent living. Talk to your teen about the responsibilities that flatmates share, including paying bills on time and co-operating with cooking and cleaning.

5 What will you do if you need somewhere to stay in an emergency?

The best time to talk about emergency accommodation is before it is needed. If you and your teen have a good relationship, remind them they can always come to you if they need a place to sleep. Also let them know there are places they can go if they ever need emergency or crisis accommodation. Tell them about Link2home, the 24-hour referral service that helps find accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless. Call them on 1800 152 152 or go to housing.nsw.gov.au and search for 'Link2home'. The YOU booklet and website (you.childstory.nsw.gov.au) is another good source of information.

HOUSING COSTS

6 Do you have the money you need to live independently?

Ask the young person in your care to write down everything they would have to pay for if they were to move into their own place next week. Go through the list with them and help them see what they've missed or where they have underestimated or overestimated a cost. You might find some basic concepts need explaining such as rental bonds, advance rent and connection fees for utilities. You might also need to remind them about one-off costs, like a television of their own or a set of saucepans. Help them identify where they can get assistance with these costs. 'Where to go for financial support' on page 41 is a good overview of the help available.

Let young people know they can make small payments towards their utilities bills at any time; this will reduce the amount owing by the time the bill arrives. Young people who collect Centrelink payments can make use of Centrepay: a free and voluntary service that lets them pay bills and expenses as regular deductions from their payments. To find out more go to humanservices.gov.au and search for 'Centrepay'.



7 Do you have money put aside for emergencies?

What happens if the young person is sharing a place and one of their flatmates moves out? Will they be able to cover the rent until they find a new flatmate? What if they lose their job or their hours of work are reduced? Talk to the young person in your care about the importance of having a cash reserve so they don't end up with a broken lease or no place to live.

8 Do you know where to get housing assistance?

Talk to your teen about government services that offer support to people in need of affordable housing. These include:

- **Housing Pathways** The young person in your care can use Housing Pathways to access public housing, Aboriginal housing or community housing, or to apply for private rental assistance. Get in touch with Housing Pathways at housingpathways.nsw.gov.au or 1800 422 322.
- **Centrelink** In some circumstances, people under 25 who claim a Centrelink benefit such as the Youth Allowance, can also claim rent assistance through Centrelink. Call Centrelink on 132 468.

MAINTAINING STABLE ACCOMMODATION

9 Have you thought about what it means to sign a tenancy agreement?

A tenancy agreement may be the first contract a young person signs as an adult. Talk to them about the consequences of breaking the lease including losing their bond or being charged rent until new tenants move in or the lease expires. Explain how breaking a lease can make it hard to rent somewhere else. If you have a copy of a tenancy agreement, show it to the teen in your care.

10 Do you know what you can and can't do as a tenant?

Talk with the young person about what it means to be a good tenant including paying the rent on time, keeping the home clean and well maintained, and being respectful of neighbours. Explain that if they don't meet those responsibilities, they could end up losing their lease – and that could mean losing their bond as well as losing their home.

Make sure the young person understands that, as a tenant, they are responsible for their visitors' behaviour, too.



11 What sort of boundaries will you set for friends?

Young people who live independently sometimes find that peers take advantage of their situation. Share stories you've heard about times when friends or acquaintances caused problems by being selfish, rowdy or irresponsible. Talk about the house rules the teen may want to put in place. For example: friends who stay for meals have to contribute to the cost of groceries and help clean up; friends who crash on the lounge have a two-night maximum; and anyone who is violent or steals property while visiting is not welcome back.

12 What will you do if you have problems with the landlord?

Sometimes, tenants have problems with their landlords. For example, they might have trouble getting a landlord to fix a broken oven, or they might have a landlord who uses their own key to enter the property when the tenants aren't home. Organisations like

Tenants NSW provide tenants with information, advice and advocacy; find out more on their website at tenants.org.au.

Daily living skills

GROCERY SHOPPING, COOKING AND STAYING SAFE IN THE KITCHEN

1 Do you know how to cook your favourite meals?

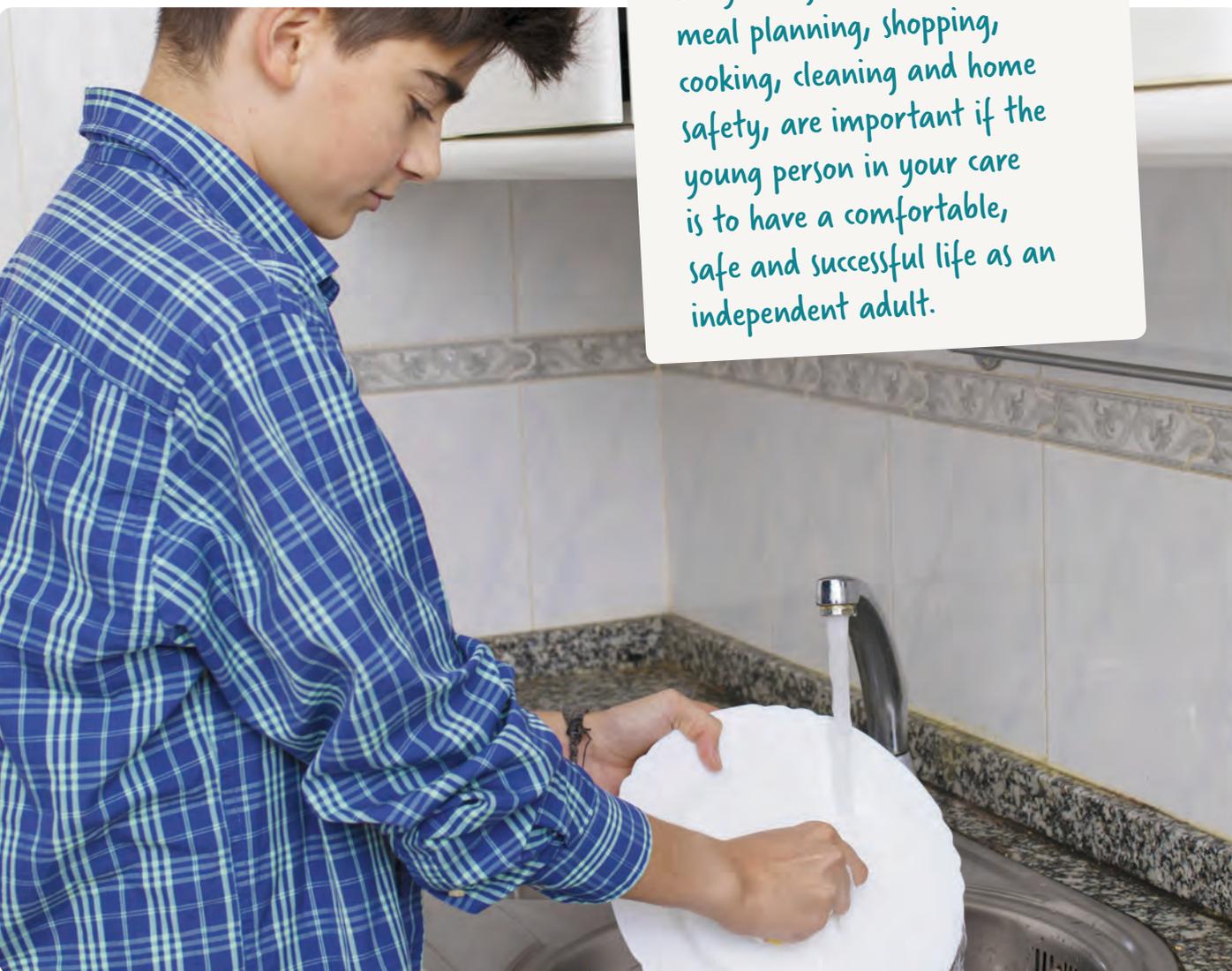
Get the teen involved in cooking at home, especially the meals they like the best. You could also share with them some of your favourite sources for recipes and cooking tips, including TV shows, cook books or magazines, or websites.

2 Do you know your way around a supermarket?

Start asking the young person to write up the family shopping list. Be sure they include the ingredients for any meals they want to make, and remind them to include things like cleaning products and toiletries. When you're shopping, encourage them to choose the healthiest products at the best prices. Talk about quality versus cost and why the least expensive item is not always the best one to buy.



Daily living skills, including meal planning, shopping, cooking, cleaning and home safety, are important if the young person in your care is to have a comfortable, safe and successful life as an independent adult.



3 Do you know how to handle food safely?

It's easy to be excited by the fun stuff like shopping and cooking, but young people should also understand what it takes to prepare and store food safely. Make sure they know the basics, including:

- always wash your hands before and after handling food
- make sure that chopping boards, bowls, knives and other utensils used to handle raw food are kept well away from any ready-to-eat food; wash them with soap and dry them before you use them again
- store leftovers and other perishable foods in the fridge in closed containers; put cooked foods on high shelves and raw foods on low shelves to ensure there is no cross-contamination.

Put it to the test! Suggest that your teen prepare a feast for the family or even for a few friends. Give them a budget and then have them plan the meal, do the shopping and cook up the meal.



HOUSEHOLD CHORES AND SAFETY

4 Do you know how to keep a house safe and clean?

Establish a weekly chore roster. If possible, rotate the tasks so that everyone gets a chance to see how what they do, or don't do, affects others. For example, if the young person's job is to clean the bathroom they quickly learn not to leave toothpaste all over the basin.

5 Do you know how to look after your clothes?

Show teens how to use the washing machine and dryer, then have them wash a load of their own clothes. Teach them about sorting clothes into whites, light colours and dark colours, and about reading clothing labels, especially items that need handwashing or can't be put in the clothes dryer.

TRANSPORT

6 Do you know how to get around to the places you want to go?

Teach teens how to use bus and train timetables so they arrive at their destination on time. Also check to see they have a good understanding of some of the trips you regularly take by car or on foot. Next time you drive to school, work or a friend's place, ask the young person in your care to notice landmarks such as street signs and buildings. On the next trip, ask them to give you directions.

7 Have you got an Opal card?

Opal cards are smartcard tickets used for train, bus, ferry and light rail services across Sydney, the Blue Mountains, Central Coast, Hunter, Illawarra and Southern Highlands. Users load value onto their cards at top-up machines, online or through selected retailers, then 'tap on' and 'tap off' at either end of their journey to pay their fare.

The type of Opal card your teen needs will depend on their age and whether they are still a student. Make sure they know that if they lose their Opal card, they should cancel it. To find out more, go to opal.com.au.

8 Have you got your driver licence?

Your teen can apply for a licence from the age of 16. They will need to learn the road rules and do at least 120 hours of supervised driving. Lessons with a professional driving instructor are a great idea. Every hour with a driving instructor counts as three hours of driving experience in the learner driver's log book (capped at 10 hours of lessons for a total of 30 hours in the log book.) Speak to your caseworker about including a driver licence as one of the goals in your teen's Leaving Care Plan. These services and programs also offer support:

- **'Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers' workshop** Provided by Roads and Maritime Services (RMS), these free workshops provide parents and carers with information about licence conditions for learner and P-plate drivers, tips for using the learner driver log book, how to plan driving sessions and how to provide constructive feedback. For information about workshops in your area call 13 22 13.
- **Safer Drivers Course** Young people who have a learner permit and have completed at least 50 hours of log-book driving may also be eligible to attend an RMS 'Safer Drivers Course' free of charge. For information, go to facs.nsw.gov.au and search for 'Free Safer Drivers Course'.
- **Driver Licensing Access Programs** Roads and Maritime Services work with service providers across NSW to support young people from indigenous communities to obtain and retain their licences as safe and legal drivers. Services include literacy skills, driver mentoring and access to roadworthy vehicles. For information about programs in your area call 13 22 13.



12 Do you know what to do if you get a fine for a driving or parking offence?

Make sure the young person understands that unpaid fines can result in additional financial penalties or other consequences such as losing your licence or having your car registration cancelled. If the young person can't pay a fine, they can ask for a Work and Development Order (WDO). Under a WDO, they can reduce their fine by doing unpaid work, or by attending certain courses or programs. Read more about WDOs in 'Do you know what to do if you can't pay a fine' on page 34.

Education and training

Let the teen in your care know that finishing school and going on to further study will improve their employment prospects. And make sure they understand there are plenty of supports in place to help them make it through to the next level of education.

STUDY HABITS

1 Have you got a good study environment?

Ask the young person to do some reading or maths problems for about 10 minutes at a time in different settings. For example, they could work in front of the television, at the kitchen table, on their bed or at a desk. Ask them to think about how productive they were in each setting and what that means for how they set up their study environment.

2 Are you keeping yourself motivated?

Some kids need help to stay motivated, day by day and week by week. Encourage the young person in your care to build some incentives into their study time. For example, they might reward themselves after each hour of study with a 15-minute break, or give themselves a weekend off when they finish a major assignment.

STAYING ON AT SCHOOL

3 Do you need any help with your schoolwork?

Keep talking to the young person in your care about how they're going at school so you can pick up on any learning gaps. If you need to, ask about learning support and other resources that could help your teen. You can also look into tutoring. Your caseworker can help you track down a homework club at a local library or community centre.

4 Are money worries stopping you from finishing school?

Sometimes carers find it hard to support teens through the final years of high school. Sometimes the teens themselves assume there are issues with money, and drop out of school without explaining why. Talk to your caseworker if money is an issue in your household. Some of the supports available include:

- **The Teenage Education Payment (TEP)** This is a payment made to carers to help them support 16 and 17-year-olds in care to remain in education or training. Eligible carers receive payments of up to \$6,000 a year.
- **Post Care Education Financial Support** This payment supports the education of young people aged over 18. It provides carers with the financial support they need for the young person to continue living in their home while they finish school.

5 Is there anything else stopping you from finishing high school?

Sometimes teens disengage from school because they feel depressed or socially isolated, or because they get caught up with alcohol, drugs or other risk-taking behaviour. If your teen is losing interest in school or not giving any attention to further education options, have a talk to them about how they're feeling. Call on people like the school counsellor and the young person's caseworker if you need some help identifying the problem and coming up with solutions.

6 Have you thought about what you want to do?

Spend some time with your teen reflecting on their strengths and interests. What do they love doing? What comes naturally to them? What sort of lifestyle do they enjoy? Help your teenager find out more about the sort of jobs that match their interests, and what sort of education, training or experience they will need. Some useful resources include:

- **Career Bullseyes** These charts show the connections between interest areas and career choices, and provide some insights around the levels of education required to achieve certain goals. Go to myfuture.edu.au/bullseyes.
- **My Future** This website helps young people identify their interests and strengths, and gives them insights into suitable careers. Take a look at myfuture.edu.au.



7 Have you heard about Vocational Education and Training?

Your teen may think there is no point staying on for Years 11 and 12 if they don't plan to go on to further education. These days, high schools offer Vocational Education and Training (VET) for students interested in trades or vocational areas such as music or sport. These traineeships and apprenticeships involve school-based training and some paid work as well as ordinary school studies. If you or your teen think a VET course is a good option, talk to your school and your caseworker.

FURTHER EDUCATION AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

8 Are you thinking about university?

While they are still at school, talk to your teen about the idea of going to university. Offer to take them to Open Days being held at universities near you so they can get a feel for the experience. Some universities have specialised programs that give teens in care an introduction to university life through camps and “taster” programs. These include Newcastle University which holds on-campus residential experiences to help high school students get a feel for university. Talk to your caseworker for more information, or contact the university through newcastle.edu.au or (02) 4985 4200.



9 Do you know about all the support you can get at university?

Young people who have been in care and who make a start at university may have certain challenges around things like study skills, career aspirations, access to housing and general financial support. Most universities have programs in place to help young people make the transition to university successfully. Get in touch with Student Services to find out about relevant programs at the universities your teen is likely to attend. Or target a university with a well-established program such as:

- **Live, Learn, Grow** This program at Newcastle University offers support including subsidised on-campus accommodation and guaranteed on-campus employment. Talk to your caseworker for more information, or contact the university through newcastle.edu.au or (02) 4985 4200.
- **U1st** Western Sydney University also runs a program that supports young people with an out-of-home care experience. Talk to your caseworker or go direct to the uni through westernsydney.edu.au or (02) 9678 7603.

10 Did you know you could get financial support to go to uni?

Most colleges and universities have fee-free and part-scholarships to assist with the cost of studying and accommodation. These include Institution Equity Scholarships and Commonwealth Scholarships such as the Indigenous Commonwealth Scholarship. Your caseworker can help you identify any financial support that might be available.

11 Are you thinking about TAFE?

Technical and Further Education institutes, known as 'TAFEs', offer skills-based courses in fields such as hospitality, tourism, construction, office work and community work. In the past, TAFEs were seen as providing training for work in low-paying jobs. These days, TAFE graduates have employment rates and salary levels similar to those of university graduates. Encourage the teen in your care to explore TAFE courses online at tafensw.edu.au and to attend local Open Days.

12 Did you know you could get a fee-free scholarship for your vocational training?

Under the Smart and Skilled initiative, the NSW government subsidises the cost of training for certain in-demand skills. The course list changes every year but can include courses such as Conservation and Land Management, Floristry, Retail Banking and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care. Fee-free scholarships are available to all young people in care or about to leave care who choose to enrol in a Smart and Skilled course. To find out more about the courses on offer and how to access the scholarship, go to smartandskilled.nsw.gov.au. The program will be reviewed in 2020.

13 Have you thought about how you can support yourself while you study?

Aside from the upfront costs associated with a traineeship, an apprenticeship or a university degree, young people will also have to cover everyday costs like transport to and from their place of study. Have a talk with your teenager about how these costs will be covered. Will you be able to help with an allowance? Should the young person be thinking about getting some part-time work throughout the year, or during holidays?

Employment

The time between finishing school and getting your first stable job takes much longer now than it did a generation ago. The ideas here will help prepare a young person to approach the workforce with focus, patience and confidence.

CAREER CHOICE

1 Have you had a look at what sort of careers are out there?

Some young people have a clear idea of what they want to do while others are looking for some guidance. Career information days held by schools, TAFEs, universities and other organisations are a great opportunity to explore possibilities and find out what it takes to pursue a particular job. Ask the school career advisor if they know of any events coming up, or go online and search for 'career information days' or 'career expos'.

2 What's going to help you get where you want to go?

Have the young person write their career goal at the top of a page. Starting at the bottom, ask them to write everything they are doing to help reach the goal. For example, if their goal is to be a vet they might be volunteering at an animal shelter or working at a pet store. Above this, they can write other things they can do to help reach their goal, and the names of any people who can help them.

3 Have you thought about getting some work experience?

Industry experience counts for a lot when you're trying to get a job. Talk to the young person about doing some volunteer work or an unpaid internship in their chosen field.

APPLYING FOR JOBS

4 Have you written a resume?

Help the young person prepare a resume. It should include information about the education and training they have had so far, plus details of their work history including who they were employed by, how long they worked there and what their responsibilities were. Encourage your teen to collect letters of recommendation from people like teachers or past employers. You can find lots of resume-writing advice on the internet; the government website jobjumpstart.gov.au is a good place to start.

5 Where are you thinking of looking for work?

There are a number of services and information sources around for young people entering the job market. These include:

- **Job Jumpstart** A government-run source of online information on how to find a job, build a career and get ahead at work. Take a look at jobjumpstart.gov.au.
- **Job Active** This is a service provided by the government for young people receiving the Youth Allowance. Find out more at jobactive.gov.au or call 13 62 68.
- **Centrelink** This agency delivers a range of payments and services for Australians, including young job seekers. Go to humanservices.gov.au.
- **JobAccess** This service provides information and advice for job seekers with disability. Get in touch through jobaccess.gov.au or 1800 464 800.

6 Are you ready for a job interview?

If the young person is offered a job interview, sit down and go through a mock interview with them. Afterwards, talk to the young person about what they answered well and what they could do a little better. Let them interview you so they can hear what the answers sound like to the interviewer. Get them to write down any questions they might want to ask their prospective employer, such as hours or rates of pay.

Talk to your teen about actively going out to find a job rather than waiting for something to turn up. For example, if there is a business they would like to work with, encourage them to go in with their resume and ask to speak with the person in charge of hiring.



7 Have you thought about following up a job application or interview?

Suggest that the young person in your care follows up after an interview with a thank you note, e-mail or phone call. If the young person was unsuccessful, encourage them to ask why. The feedback they get can be used to improve their performance in the next job interview. Following up and showing an interest also lets employers know how keen you are – they might just keep you in mind the next time there is a vacancy.

8 Are you worried about a juvenile justice record?

Some teens think they will never be able to get a job because they have a juvenile justice record. That's not true. But a juvenile justice record may have some impacts that need to be considered when looking for work. For example, some jobs require workers to have a Working With Children Check (WWCC), and in some circumstances it may be hard for someone with a record to attain a WWCC. If the young person in your care has a record, then you should go together to a free legal service to get advice.



SETTLING INTO A JOB

9 Have you thought about how you want to present yourself at work?

Help the young person understand the difference between how they behave with friends and how they should behave with employers, colleagues or customers. Make sure they know what it means to be well groomed and appropriately dressed. And encourage them to take an interest in what they're doing at work. Reassure them that no-one knows everything they need to know on their first day, and that their employer will expect them to ask questions.

10 Have you thought about how to behave and relate to people at work?

Talk with the teen in your care about what is and isn't okay in the workplace. Explain that when someone gives them instructions or corrects what they're doing, it doesn't mean they're being criticised or controlled. Let them know they're allowed to stick up for themselves or disagree if they need to, but they should do it calmly and constructively. Make it clear that if they argue loudly or get physically violent, it will probably impact on their employment and could mean they risk losing their job.

11 Do you understand that you have rights in the workplace?

Young people have a right to feel safe, comfortable and respected in their workplace. There are a range of services available to inform young people about their rights at work, and to protect them if things start going wrong. These include:

- **Young People at Work** This government website explains the rights and responsibilities of young job seekers and employees. Have a look at youngpeopleatwork.nsw.gov.au.
- **Fair Work Ombudsman** The purpose of this government body is to ensure that both employers and workers comply with workplace laws. They have lots of information for young people at fairwork.gov.au/find-help-for/young-workers-and-students.
- **Lawstuff** This website is dedicated to providing legal information to children and young people. They have a section devoted to employment issues, discrimination at work and sexual harassment at work. Find out more at lawstuff.org.au/nsw_law/topics.



Legal rights and responsibilities

Teaching a young person about their legal rights and responsibilities is an important part of preparing them for life as independent adults. The information here is not meant to provide legal advice, but it does introduce some concepts about rights and responsibilities. More information about this can be found by contacting your local community legal centre.

RIGHTS

1 Do you know your rights?

Ask the young person in your care to list as many personal and legal rights as they can. You could make this competitive with some of their friends or siblings to see who can come up with the biggest list. Use the internet or other resources to check their list and identify anything that's missing. Lawstuff (lawstuff.org.au), run by the National Children's and Youth Law Centre, is a reputable source of information about young people's rights. They have loads of information online; you can also email your questions and expect to have them answered within 10 days.

2 Do you know your responsibilities?

After the young person has come up with a list of rights, see if they can match each one with a responsibility. For example, a right could be "free speech" while the responsibility might be "respect for others".

3 Do you know what to do if you have to deal with the police?

Even law-abiding citizens can come into contact with the police. For example, they might come to the attention of the police if their dog has escaped from their backyard, or because they were in an area when a crime was committed by someone else. The teen in your care should always be prepared to co-operate with police, but they should also be aware of their rights. The following sources can provide expert guidance:

- **Legal Aid Youth Hotline** The Hotline provides legal advice and information to young people under 18. Call 1800 10 18 10.
- **Lawstuff** Run by the National Children's and Youth Law Centre, this site has lots of information about young people's rights; you can also email your questions and expect to have them answered within 10 days. For information specifically about contact with the police, go to lawstuff.org.au/nsw_law/topics/police.
- **Community Legal Centres NSW (CLCN)** CLCN is the peak body for community legal centres across the state. Visit clcnsw.org.au/looking_legal_advice to find a centre near you.
- **Shopfront** Youth Legal Centre The inner-Sydney centre is a free legal service for homeless and disadvantaged young people aged 25 and under, run jointly by Mission Australia, the Salvation Army and the law firm Herbert Smith Freehills. Find out more at theshopfront.org or call (02) 9322 4808.

4 Do you know what to do if you can't pay a fine?

If a young person doesn't have the money to pay a fine, they can ask to be issued with a Work and Development Order (WDO). Under a WDO, they can reduce their fine by doing unpaid work or attending certain courses or programs such as a financial counselling program, a vocational skills course or treatment for drug and alcohol issues. The amount by which their fine is reduced will depend on the activity they complete. The young person's WDO application must be supported by an approved sponsor organisation. For more information on how to apply for a WDO, go to revenue.nsw.gov.au and search for 'What is a Work and Development Order', or call the WDO Hotline on 1300 478 879.

5 Do you want access to government records about your time in care?

Young people are entitled to access agency records for information about their time in care. The records may include the caseworker's notes, reports from doctors and counsellors and reports on contact visits as well as documents including the young person's birth certificate and school reports. For legal reasons, some types of information may be removed from the records before they are released. This can include:

- personal information about other people unless they have given their consent to release the information
- information that could lead to the identification of a person who reported that a child was at risk of harm
- privileged communications between a lawyer and their client where that communication was created for the main purpose of providing legal advice or assistance, or preparing for court proceedings.

It is recommended that young people have someone to support them as they look through the information about their time in out-of-home care. In NSW, a senior FACS caseworker or experienced intake officer will be available to answer questions and provide support. For young people outside NSW, staff at the Care Leaver Records Access Unit will be available to answer questions by phone.

Access to agency records is free of charge. For advice on how to request access speak to your caseworker or call the FACS Care Leavers Records Access Unit on 1300 137 160 or (02) 9716 2500.

Young people are entitled to access their agency records when they leave care, or at any time in the future. Make sure your teen understands how to go about accessing their records later if they don't want to do it now.

6 Did you know you could claim support as a victim of crime?

Some young people who have been in care are eligible for counselling and financial assistance from Victims Services and Support. Your caseworker will be able to check the young person's eligibility, and submit the necessary paper work. Find out more at victimsservices.justice.nsw.gov.au or call 1800 633 063. The Aboriginal Contact Line is 1800 019 123.



3

making
plans

making plans

From the day they enter care, young people are involved in conversations, experiences and decisions that help get them ready for life as adults. The official part of that process is the development of the 'Leaving Care Plan'.

What is a Leaving Care Plan and how does it work?

When a young person turns 18 the court order that placed them in care (known as a 'care order') legally comes to an end. This means they are no longer under the parental responsibility of the Minister. The official term for this is 'leaving care'. As their carer, you are part of a network of people and resources supporting the young person in your care to make the most of this important life stage. With the right sort of support, young people can use this time to make their plans for a bright future.



Leaving Care Plans (sometimes called 'Future Plans') are an opportunity for caseworkers, carers and teens to think about what a young person needs to have in place as they move towards adulthood, and what it will take to make those things happen. That can include making sure the young person has a strong support network, that they know how to connect with information and services, and that identified costs are covered as agreed. It's about building a future!

Some young people will continue to live at home with their carer after their care order legally comes to an end. Others will choose to move out, either to live independently or with their birth family.



The caseworker will start working on the Leaving Care Plan as soon as the young person turns 15. It's a time for the young person and their support network (including you) to explore ideas about the future and to think about whether the teen is feeling ready – emotionally, psychologically and on a practical level – for life as an adult.

Between the ages of 15 and 17 the Leaving Care Plan focuses on developing social and emotional strengths. It's about building a young person's confidence, connecting them with people who will provide guidance and support in the years ahead, and helping them pick up lots of useful life skills.

Beyond the age of 17 the emphasis shifts to making sure the young person is working towards future life goals like education and employment.

A Leaving Care Plan can include:

- social support networks including connection or reconnection with family and community
- new and ongoing cultural connections
- school and future study through TAFE, university or apprenticeships
- career goals and job-readiness, including resumes and job interview skills
- setting up bank accounts and a tax file number
- organising driving lessons and getting a driver licence
- enrolling to vote
- living arrangements
- collecting identification documents including birth certificate and certificate of Aboriginality
- the need for ongoing counselling or other mental health services
- the need for ongoing healthcare support
- financial support from sources including the Transition to Independent Living Allowance, (TILA) Youth Allowance or financial assistance from Victim Services and Support.

After the young person has turned 18 and their care order has ended, FACS or the non-government agency involved in their care will provide 'After Care' support. This involves reviewing the Leaving Care Plan and providing assistance, advice and referrals to mainstream and specialist services until the young person turns 25. After-care assistance can include:

- referral and financial assistance for accommodation, further studies, counselling, job-seeking support, legal advice, health services or professional services
- help for young people to access personal documentation such as birth certificates and paperwork relating to their time in care.

It's valuable for young people to stay in touch with their agency and their carer in the years after the care order ends. These people have the knowledge, experience and insight to help the young person make the most of their opportunities and overcome whatever challenges they might meet.

If the young person in your care is not able to get aftercare support from their out-of-home care agency, a specialist aftercare service may be able to provide assistance. To find out more go to the Family and Community Services website (facs.nsw.gov.au) and search for 'Specialist After Care Services'.

How carers can contribute

As the carer of a teenager, you are in an incredible position to influence that young person's future. Your involvement in the Leaving Care Plan shows the young person in your care that you believe in them and their potential to live a rewarding adult life. It also gives you an opportunity to make sure the young person's needs and goals for the future are genuinely reflected in the Leaving Care Plan.

When the development of the Leaving Care Plan begins, the caseworker will probably ask you for your ideas about how to help the young person prepare for life as an adult. They may also ask how much you can help with things like applying for a driver licence or enrolling at university. And they will talk to you about whether you are able to have the teen stay on at your home, or to be part of their support network into the future.

Young people sometimes start to worry about who will be around for them in the future. Make sure the teen in your care feels connected with people who will love and support them in adulthood. Help them understand they have a network of people they can always rely on.



How young people can contribute

It's incredibly important for the young person to be involved in the development of their Leaving Care Plan, but it can be hard for them to imagine what they want their future to look like. Talk to the young person in your care about their hopes and dreams and encourage them to think about the steps they will need to take along the way.

Make sure they know about YOU: a booklet and website produced by Family and Community Services (FACS). YOU inspires young people to take control of their future plans and stand up for their rights. It also explains how they can get the support they need to make informed choices about things like money, education and housing. Take a look at you.childstory.nsw.gov.au.

All young people in care and their carers should be aware of The Charter of Rights for Children and Young People in out-of-Home Care in NSW. To read it go to facs.nsw.gov.au and search for 'Charter of Rights'. It's also on the YOU website at you.childstory.nsw.gov.au.



Leaving Care Plans for young people with disability

A National Disability Insurance Scheme Plan (NDIS Plan) sets out the supports, assistance and funding approved to help a young person with disability meet their needs and achieve the goals in their NDIS Plan. Specifically, the NDIS can provide:

- access to community programs, services and activities
- support for participation in further education
- job-seeking assistance
- provision of aids such as wheelchairs and communication devices
- support for travelling to appointments or activities in the local community
- support for staying connected with culture.

During the leaving care planning process, it's useful to also review the NDIS Plan.

The intention is for the NDIS Plan and the Leaving Care Plan to work together to achieve positive outcomes for the young person. For example, the Leaving Care Plan may identify a goal for further education at TAFE or a university, while the NDIS Plan sets out the funding required to support access to those educational opportunities which links to a goal in the NDIS Plan.

It is worth noting that NDIS Plans tend to have a 12-month focus, while Leaving Care Plans address both longer-term and shorter-term goals. Planning and consistency between the two are important to prevent the risk of the young person missing out on a good opportunity or encountering a sudden crisis point.

It is the caseworker's role to request the NDIS Plan review, but it is vital that both you and the young person provide input. Encourage the young person to participate to the best of their ability so the caseworker can provide all relevant information to the NDIS representative as part of the request.

It's important to think about their decision-making ability, particularly during the leaving care planning process. When the young person turns 18 they will be an adult and will have the same rights as any other adult, including making decisions for themselves.

Consider whether the young person has the capacity to make decisions in their own best interest in the years ahead. If they don't, they may need help with decision-making support from a trusted and caring person such as yourself. Alternatively the caseworker may consider advocacy or other services offered by the Public Guardian (publicguardian.justice.nsw.gov.au) and the Public Trustee (tag.nsw.gov.au) to assist the young person past 18 years of age.

For more on NDIS access, planning and review processes for young people in care and care leavers, go to facs.nsw.gov.au and search for 'NDIS Carer Guideline'. For more on the NDIS go to ndis.gov.au.



How young people feel about leaving care

The process of leaving care can affect young people in different ways. Some will be excited and energised. Others will be hesitant, uncertain or anxious.

If you think there's some kind of disconnect between you and the teen, check in with them. Maybe they feel like they're not being listened to, or that the support you're organising doesn't line up with their own ideas about the future.

Explain that you want to help them get the best possible start to their adult life and that you really need to be honest and open with each other so that, together, you can put the right plans in place.

Also remind them that you, and the agency, will be around to help keep things on track into the future. Let them know there are people that care about them, and that they have a strong support network to tap into when things don't go as planned.

For support, inspiration and up-to-date information about being a carer, go to caring.childstory.nsw.gov.au. Or go to facs.gov.au and search for 'Fostering our Future' to subscribe to the Fostering our Future carer newsletter.



Where to go for financial support

The young person in your care may be eligible for financial support to help them set up a home or settle in to further study or a new job. Caseworkers are responsible for making sure young people have information about the support available to them.

Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA) Most young people leaving care are eligible for this one-off payment. It is intended to cover costs including:

- moving expenses
- appliances, whitegoods and other furnishings
- utilities connection (such as gas and electricity)
- food bills
- education
- transport to get to studies or work
- bus tickets, phone cards, and similar.

The young person cannot apply directly for TILA. The caseworker will assess their eligibility and make the application on their behalf. To find out more speak to the caseworker or visit facs.nsw.gov.au and search for 'TILA'.

Youth Allowance The Youth Allowance is a Commonwealth benefit that provides financial support for young people aged 16 to 24 years who are studying full-time, undertaking a full-time apprenticeship, training or looking for work. Young people under the age of 22 who are studying part-time may be eligible for Youth Allowance as a job seeker, but they will need to have a Job Plan and be participating in activities such as part-time work, volunteer work or youth programs.

After Care Payment This short-term payment is provided to eligible young people to help them establish safe, stable accommodation. It is paid fortnightly and reviewed every three months. To be eligible, young people must:

- be undertaking full time training or education, and
- be at risk of homelessness if financial assistance is not provided.

Contingency Payments Whether or not they receive the After Care Payment, care leavers may be eligible for one-off contingency payments as part of their approved Leaving Care Plan. These payments are provided to help cover the cost of things such as:

- driving lessons
- buying books, materials or tools for work or study
- getting accommodation or establishing tenancy (for example, to cover the cost of a rental bond)
- dental treatment not covered by public dental hospitals
- counselling
- independent living or social skills training
- fees for accessing identity documents
- securing a childcare placement (for example, paying a deposit)
- getting legal advice if this can't be provided by Legal Aid or LawAccess services.

Family and Community Services (FACS) is responsible for supporting young people as they transition to independence. Young people who have left care or are about to leave care are encouraged to get in touch if they have questions or need support. Call the FACS Care Leaver's Line on 1800 994 686 or email careleaversline@facs.nsw.gov.au.



A photograph of a woman with curly brown hair, wearing a white off-the-shoulder top, smiling warmly as she hugs a young girl with long brown hair. The girl is wearing a light blue patterned shirt and has her eyes closed in a peaceful expression. They are outdoors with a blurred green background. A large, faint white cross is visible in the upper right corner of the image. The text '4 managing change' is overlaid in the bottom left corner.

4

managing
change

managing change

You and the young person in your care need to think about what life will be like after they turn 18, and what it will mean for your relationship.



What will change – and what will stay the same?

Preparing the Leaving Care Plan helps the young person think and plan ahead for their future (with you and their caseworkers). It involves discussions about study, work and where their money will come from, and about staying on with you or other living options. You have some important things to talk about together. What will things be like in the future? Will you see each other regularly? Will you have an open-door approach? Will they be able to pick up the phone for advice? Have open and honest conversations about how things might change, or not change. Ask them how they are feeling. Keep in mind these conversations can be tough. Be mindful that the young person may be feeling worried even if they sound confident. Support can make a big difference to how a young person settles into life as an independent adult.

Talk to the young person about how some of the practicalities will change: things like how you will stay in contact in the future, who will look after the pets, and whether they will have to take on certain payments like gym memberships or phone bills.

But while you're talking, remember to reassure the young person with clear messages about what they mean to you. Tell them how important they are to you, and how you love them and care about them. And talk to them about all the different people they know now that will stay connected with them in the years ahead.

Below is a guide to some of the issues that can come up after a young person's Care Order has finished, regardless of whether the young person stays on with you or chooses to move out.



Your teen is likely to have mixed feelings about this milestone. Respond to their worries and sadness by talking with them about what they'll miss and what they're nervous about. But encourage them to feel good about this change, too, by discussing their hopes and dreams and asking them to think about what is going to make them feel proud of themselves in the future.

DISCUSSING THE FUTURE - STAYING ON OR MOVING OUT

Most young people benefit from ongoing stable family support even after they turn 18, but you will need to have discussions about what the living arrangements will be. The caseworker, you as the carer, and the young person need to discuss what will happen and the options. This may be staying with you or moving out to live with friends, to study, or to reconnect with family or kin.

It's important there are no misunderstandings about why this is happening, especially if one of you wants the placement to continue while the other doesn't. You might have expected that the young person would stay on with you. You might have been surprised and a bit hurt by their decision to leave. You might even have concerns for their safety when they leave you. For their part, the young person may have assumed they would be staying on in your home. They may not understand what you mean when you say it's time for them to experience independence. They may feel hurt and rejected.

The more you talk, the clearer things will be for the young person and you.

STAYING ON - GETTING USED TO AN INDEPENDENT ADULT IN THE HOUSE

If the young person continues to live with you after they turn 18 (as most teens do these days!) you will both need to adapt to having another adult in the house. Like any young adult, they will want to have some independence but they will also need to respect the rules of the house.

You might want to renegotiate those rules to make sure everyone is clear about the privileges, freedoms and responsibilities that come with being an adult. Will they be expected to pay board or contribute to bills? Will it be alright for them to bring someone home for the night or to stay out without letting you know beforehand? What will and won't change?

ESTABLISHING A NEW KIND OF RELATIONSHIP

If the young person in your care is leaving your home, you will both need to think about what your relationship will be like after the move. Often there isn't enough discussion about how that relationship might change. As a result, carers and young people make assumptions - and if those assumptions are very different, things can get painful. Below are just a few questions to help kick-start a discussion with the young person in your care.

- How will the two of you stay in touch in the future?
- Will they be able to come to you to talk about what's going on in their lives, the good and the bad?
- Will they have to take all their belongings with them or can they leave some with you?
- Will they have a key to your house?
- Are they welcome to drop in any time for a meal or to do their washing?
- Are there any bills that you pay now that you expect them to take over?
- Will they still take part in everyday family gatherings like Sunday dinner, and big occasions like birthdays and Christmas?

DECIDING WHAT STAYS AND WHAT GOES

It can be upsetting when you and the young person have different ideas about what they should be taking with them when they leave.

If the Care Allowance has been used to pay for essentials such as a bed, wardrobe or desk, then these items belong to the young person. But what if you bought a television for their bedroom: was it for them personally or was it intended for any children that stay with you? Are there any gifts that belong jointly to the young person and others in the family (maybe a video game console or some fishing gear)? Are there items around the house the young person considers theirs because they use them more than others (perhaps something as simple as a hair dryer or an old surfboard)?

Consider these questions carefully. Think about what it means for the young person to be able to take these items with them. What seems like a simple and practical decision to you may be seen by them as a message about their worth and role in your family.

THINKING ABOUT PETS

Young people often have special bonds with pets. If there is a pet in your home, think about whether it will go with the young person or be left behind with you.

If you're happy for it to go, will the young person's new living arrangements be suitable for a pet? Would you be prepared to look after the pet in the short-term, until the young person moves into more suitable accommodation? If the pet stays with you, are you happy for the young person to visit and care for the pet in the future?

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS AROUND BIRTH FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the time that the young person has been living with you, the caseworker will have been working with their birth family to address the issues that resulted in them being placed in care. Both you and the caseworker will have been supporting the young person to stay connected with their family and develop family relationships that are safe, stable, loving and respectful.

By the time their Care Order comes to an end, the connection between the young person and their birth family may be healthy and strong – or there could be some challenges remaining. Maintain your positive and supportive attitude towards family connections, but also encourage the teen in your care to think about how things might develop in the years to come. Let them know who they can talk to if they have concerns or questions, or if things aren't going the way they'd hoped. Both you and the caseworker will be an ongoing source of support, but they might also want to connect with organisations such as the CREATE Foundation (create.org.au) or Relationships Australia (relationshipsaustralia.org.au).

Dealing with a young person's expectations around birth family relationships can be particularly hard for relative and kinship carers. Ask your caseworker for support if you find these conversations difficult.



DEALING WITH CHANGE, GRIEF AND LOSS

You, your family and the young person mean a lot to each other and may experience strong feelings in response to change, such as feelings of grief or loss. This happens in most families when young people grow up and prepare to leave home.

Make time to talk about the changes and how you will stay connected in the future. And don't forget to get help if you are feeling sad about any changes.

Sometimes, either the carer or the young person takes the view that an ongoing relationship is not appropriate. If that happens, it's important that the decision is not seen as a message of rejection, shame or blame. It might be necessary for the caseworker to provide some extra support.



5

resources

SUPPORT FOR CARERS

Caring for Kids

caring.childstory.nsw.gov.au

Information and insights for foster, relative and kinship carers from Family and Community Services (FACS),

Raising Teens and Tweens

Ideas and tips for carers of kids aged 8 to 18. Go to facs.nsw.gov.au and search for 'Raising Teens and Tweens'.

National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

ndis.gov.au

1800 800 110

Providing support for Australians with disability, their families and carers.

Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat (AbSec)

absec.org.au

1800 888 698

A free telephone advice and advocacy service for carers of Aboriginal children.

Child Protection Helpline

132 111

Call the 24-hour Child Protection Helpline if are concerned about a missing child.

SUPPORT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

YOU

you.childstory.nsw.gov.au

Information for young people about their rights, particularly what sort of things they can make happen before and after they transition from out-of-home care.

CREATE Foundation

create.org.au

1800 655 105

Programs, workshops and events for young people in care and care leavers.

FACS Care Leaver's Line

1800 994 686 or

careleaversline@facs.nsw.gov.au

Information and support for young people who have left care or about to leave care.

FACS Care Leavers Records Access Unit

Locked Bag 4028, Ashfield NSW 2131

(02) 9716 2500 or 1300 137 160

Providing care leavers with access to records about their time in care.

SUPPORT FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Relationships Australia

relationships.org.au

1300 364 277

Providing relationship support services for individuals, families and communities.

Reach Out

reachout.com

Support for the wellbeing of young people, including lots of practical tools.

Kids Helpline

kidshelpline.com.au

1800 55 1800

Free confidential counselling for young people up to 25 years.

Lifeline Australia

lifeline.org.au

13 11 14

Providing crisis support and suicide prevention phone and online counselling.

Family Planning NSW

fpnsw.org.au

1300 658 886

Reproductive and sexual health advice at clinics in Ashfield, Newcastle, Penrith, Dubbo, Fairfield and Blacktown, or by personal email.

Play Safe

playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au

Information on sexual health and safe sex.

Sexual Health InfoLink

shil.nsw.gov.au

Information about sexual health including HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Minus 18

minus18.org.au

Youth-led organisation for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth offering online resources and support services, social events for under-18s, and mentoring.

Twenty 10

Twenty10.org.au

(02) 8594 9555 (metropolitan areas)

Community-based support for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex young people.

ACON

acon.org.au

1800 063 060

(02) 9206 2000 (Sydney)

(02) 6622 1555 (Northern Rivers)

(02) 4962 7700 (Hunter)

Supporting the mental and sexual health of the LGBTQI community with online information, support workshops and counselling services.

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au

(02) 9361 8000 and 1800 422 599

Get facts about alcohol and other drugs.

SUPPORT FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

Centrelink

(including information for young people as they become independent)

humanservices.gov.au

This government agency delivers a range of payments and services including the Youth Allowance. The website also has specific information about financial support and other services for young people. Go to the site and search for 'Young people becoming independent'.

Money Smart

moneysmart.gov.au

Ideas and tips for managing money, plus online tools like budget planners and savings calculators.

TAFE NSW

tafensw.edu.au

131 601

Offering short courses, diplomas and degrees in TAFEs across the state.

Study Assist

studyassist.gov.au

131 601

Information for students about government support for access to tertiary study. Go to the website and search for 'Pathways to university study'.

Job Active

jobactive.gov.au

13 62 68

A job-seeking support service provided by the government to young people receiving the Youth Allowance.

JobAccess

jobaccess.gov.au

1800 464 800

Information and advice for job seekers with disabilities.

Young People at Work

youngpeopleatwork.nsw.gov.au

Explaining the rights and responsibilities of young job seekers and employees.

Housing Pathways

housingpathways.nsw.gov.au

1800 422 322

A service to help young people access public housing, Aboriginal housing or community housing, or to apply for private rental assistance.

Link2home

1800 152 152

This 24-hour referral service helps find accommodation for people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless.

Energy Accounts Payment Assistance (EAPA)

13 77 88

A financial aid scheme for people having trouble paying electricity or gas bills.

Vinnies

vinnies.org.au

(02) 9568 0262

Vinnies can help young people get around roadblocks to do with housing, finances, health support, food support and domestic violence.

Salvos

salvos.org.au

13 SALVOS (13 72 58)

The Salvos provide help with housing, job seeking, financial support, problem gambling, addiction and domestic violence.

SUPPORT FOR LEGAL MATTERS

Legal Aid Youth Hotline

1800 10 18 10

The Hotline provides legal advice and information to young people under 18.

Community Legal Centres NSW (CLCN)

clcnsw.org.au/looking_legal_advice

CLCN is the peak body for community legal centres across the state. Visit the website to find a centre near you.

Shopfront Youth Legal Centre

theshopfront.org

(02) 9322 4808

A free legal service for homeless and disadvantaged young people aged 25 and under, run jointly by Mission Australia, the Salvation Army and the law firm Herbert Smith Freehills.

Work and Development Order (WDO)

revenue.nsw.gov.au/fines/eo/factsheet/wdo

1300 478 879

If a young person doesn't have the money to pay a fine, they can ask to be issued with a WDO. Under a WDO, they can reduce their fine by doing unpaid work, or attending certain approved courses or programs.

