

Leaving residential child care and independent living

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First published: 18 March 2019

Last updated: 6 February 2025

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Find out more about how you can support the young people you care for to leave residential child care and move on to independent living

An introduction to leaving residential child care

Many young people report that their experience of being in care has made life better for them and care experienced young people have been at the forefront of challenging the stigma associated with being 'in care' and promoting a more balanced picture.

You have a vital role to play in helping prepare young people with the life skills and mental resilience to leave residential care and move to independent living. This will be a big step for many children and the better you can prepare them for this journey, the greater their chances of living a stable, safe and independent life.

Some of the disabled children you support may not leave care for independent living but transition from residential child care to residential care for disabled adults.

Pathway plans

When a young person is about to turn 16, their local authority will prepare a pathway plan to support their transition to leaving care. The pathway plan will set out what needs to be done by:

- the local authority

- the young person's carer
- the young person
- the parent(s)
- any significant others.

The pathway plan will continue once the young person turns 18. You can find out more information about pathway planning included in Chapter 5 of the Part 6 Code of Practice.

[Code of Professional Practice for Social Care Workers](#)

PDF 73KB

The experience of leaving care for young people

For young people, the experience of leaving care can be scary and can feel like they're falling off a cliff in terms of the support they're used to coming to an end. This is shown in comments from care leavers gathered by Voices from Care:

- "It was lonely, going from a busy residential home to being by myself"
- "It's too quiet"
- "I've gone from having carers around all the time to only seeing someone every now and then"
- "I needed more support. My mental health suffered and I ended up in hospital before anyone helped".

[Voices from Care, Young People's Views on Leaving Residential Care](#)

This is where your good planning, preparation and support are crucial in the transition process.

Preparing young people with life skills

You have a crucial role in preparing young people who are leaving care to develop the skills they need to be able to live alone when they leave care. Some of these skills will be practical, for instance, making sure they're aware of local bus timetables and can manage money. Other skills will be mental, like good decision making and managing their time. The young person's pathway plan might include an independent living programme to build up their life skills.

The following is a chronology of life skills you would expect a child to have by a certain age. Bear in mind that [some children may not develop as quickly or as fully as other children](#).

Ages 4 and 5: important names and numbers

This is the age to teach safety skills. A child should know:

- Their full name, address and a phone number to reach you
- How to make an emergency call.

You should also teach them how to:

- Perform simple cleaning tasks like dusting and clearing the table
- Sort and put their clothes away and put dirty clothes in the basket
- Choose their own clothes and get dressed
- Feed pets
- Identify money and understand the process of paying for things
- Brush their teeth, comb their hair and wash their face without help

- Perform basic swimming.

Ages 6 and 7: basic cooking

Children at this age can start to help cook meals, and learn to:

- Mix, stir and cut with a dull knife
- Make a simple meal, like a sandwich
- Help put the food shopping away
- Wash the dishes.

You should also teach them how to:

- Use basic household cleaners safely
- Tidy the bathroom after using it
- Make their bed without help.

Ages 8 and 9: pride in personal belongings

By this time, children are ready to learn about taking care of their personal belongings, including:

- Folding clothes
- Caring for outdoor toys such as bikes.

You should also teach them how to:

- Take care of personal hygiene without being told
- Use a brush, mop and vacuum cleaner
- Follow a recipe and prepare a simple meal
- Set an alarm clock and get out of bed
- Help make a shopping list
- Give change in money

- Take out the rubbish
- Decide whether to give, save or spend money.

Ages 10 to 13: gaining independence

Ten is about the age when a child can start to perform many skills independently. They should know how to:

- Go to a local shop and buy things by themselves
- Change their own bed clothes
- Use the washing machine
- Plan and prepare a meal with a few ingredients
- Use the oven
- Understand time management in relation to homework, chores and leisure.

You should also teach them how to:

- Read labels
- Iron clothes
- Use basic hand tools.

Ages 13 to 15: advanced skills

By 14, children should have mastered the skills above. Building on these, they should be able to:

- Perform more involved chores, such as cleaning the oven
- Create and maintain a calendar
- Compare prices in shops
- Understanding local bus and train timetables
- Have a basic understanding of finances, for example a savings account

- How to memorise passwords, for example email and social media accounts. This skill will become important for banking and paying bills.

Ages 15 to 18: preparing for independent living

- Understand how to manage a bank account, pay a bill and how credit works. Young people in post-16 education will need a bank account to receive any available funding
- Understand basic contracts, like mobile phones and accommodation rent
- Budgeting
- Apply for a National Insurance Number (NI) as close as possible to their 16th birthday. They must have a NI number to access post-16 training
- Read and understand medicine labels and dosages
- Prepare a variety of meals
- Fill out a job application and write a CV
- Apply for their own passport. This is important: if the young person needs to apply for Universal Credit, the Department of Work and Pensions cross reference against a passport and without it payments can be delayed for six to eight weeks.

[View transcript](#)

00:00

my name is Peter Hornik my job role is a

00:03

residential childcare worker

00:05

hello passion is possibly the most

00:11

important thing when you work in this

00:14

sector because this is what what takes

00:16

you forward because I want to make an

00:18

impact I want to make a change I want to

00:20

help I got this desire burning in me

00:23

in this setting we support younger

00:26

children these children have to be

00:28

removed from families unfortunately to

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give them safety and stability you have

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to build relationship with the young

00:36

person on a daily basis it's really

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depending on the children what they like

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sometimes we do a bit of massive cocaine

00:46

pancakes have some fun in the kitchen

00:49

and I try to let him do as much as he

00:53

can to pass skills and physical

00:57

activities really importantly quite

00:59

often just grab the helmet go out for a

01:01

bike ride if the weather is nice

01:05

is how to communicate how to channel all

01:07

the energy to make a change in the young

01:10

people's life and this is what motivates

01:13

me when I see the achievement that the

01:16

young people do it really makes my heart.

Supporting young people in further and higher education

You should be aware of the options available to young people to continue their education, including financial support.

Many care leavers don't achieve the levels of educational or training they need to have stability, safety, and independence. You can play an essential role in directing them to information and resources.

A useful [Care Leavers Toolkit](#) is available that gives young people and care leavers step-by-step advice and guidance about post-16 learning and training courses.

Cardiff University run a [Confident Futures Project](#) aimed at care experienced young people and care leavers aged 14 and over. The project pairs young people with mentors who are current university students and offers:

- taster days at the university
- workshops to support studies and applications for college, university or jobs
- revision workshops

- advice sessions to support Personal Education Plans
- social events.

Many universities run similar schemes and these can be useful for introducing young people to the opportunities and support available to help them with their learning, development and planning for the future.

Most universities also now have a key contact for care leavers who can help with:

- applying for student funding and additional resources
- managing money while at university
- support with academic issues
- finding accommodation and problems with landlords.

Financial support to continue learning

Care leavers aged 18-21 can claim Income Support and Housing Benefit if studying below degree level, as long as they enrol before their 19th birthday.

Young people aged 19 or over can also apply for the Welsh Government Learning Grant Further Education. This is up to £1,500 for full time studies but depends on applicants' overall income level.

[Welsh Government Learning Grant Further Education](#)

Many universities offer a Care Leaver Bursary Scheme, which is open to care leavers and students who are estranged from their parents, and offers additional financial support up to £3,000. Local authorities also provide money through grants or bursaries.

The Higher Education Bursary is £2,000 but there are usually other discretionary amounts available, including support for accommodation outside term times. There is more information about funding and support in higher education on the dedicated website for care leavers Propel.

[Propel](#)

Welsh care experienced young people are also exempt from paying council tax until their 25th birthday.

Young people between 21 and 25 who have left education but then decide to go to college are entitled to extra support to do so, but they will need to apply to their local authority. There's no automatic arrangement to make this support available and no ongoing duty on the local authority to maintain contact with them.

Keeping in touch once children leave the home

As we discussed in the page about [Professional boundaries](#), you must not make private contact with the young people you're looking after. This also applies once they've left the home.

Your home may have a Facebook page or contact hub for care leavers to stay in touch with staff and other children from the home. All contact should be through this work-based channel and you must follow your organisation's policies at all times.

Transitions can be hard for workers too

You might find transitions are difficult for you as a worker, as well as for the young person. You may feel a sense of loss when the young person leaves, as well as other emotions such as worry about whether they'll be able to cope living away from the home. You can find links to help your mental well-being in the [Understanding challenging behaviour in children](#) page.

Useful resources

[Our work to support children who are looked after](#)

[Our chosen or 'curated' research about the number who are looked after](#)

[Children in Wales has downloadable guides for young people who are looked after, including money and budgeting, and rights](#)

[Voices from Care Cymru and Children in Wales: Young People's Views on Leaving Residential Care](#)

We want your feedback

Help us to improve the Residential child care worker resource by telling us what you think about it in our short [four question survey](#).