

TRANSITIONS: PREPARING YOUR CHILD FOR INDEPENDENCE

Non-parental role models play an important role in supporting your young person's journey to adulthood. As the young person you care for grows they will face challenges as they search for affordable housing, practice money management, take care of their own health, and possibly pursue further training or study.

These kinds of things are major life events for any person. Some young people will receive continuous support and guidance and will pursue their future goals knowing they have a safety net to return to if needed. Their transition pathway will look something like:

Dependence → Interdependence → Independence

Adolescents from complex homes and/or who are under Guardianship of the Minister have to cope with additional challenges as they often do not have the skills, guidance or safety net needed to move towards independence.

For these young people the transition may look like:

Dependence → Independence

While transitioning to independence can generally be conceptualised as the range from 15 to 25 years (*Transitioning from OOH to Independence, 2010*), preparation for independence can begin as early as possible.

For effective transition to independence to take place, the two main kinds of support your young person needs are:

- **Social support:** This includes relationship building, community participation, housing, health and wellbeing (promoting positive self esteem and identity), and development of practical skills required for independent living.
- **Economic and financial support:** This refers to supporting your young person's progression into education, further training and/or employment, rather than the provision of financial support.

We know that your young person's pathways to independence will be much smoother if they develop skills to build and maintain connections.

Building A Foundation For A Successful Adult Life

As a significant adult in an adolescent's life, you are in a unique position to help your Time for Kids young person prepare for a successful future.

You can:

- Empower your young person to take charge of his or her own future by showing an interest in their goals, listening and guiding.
- Support skill development and activities that assist your young person to carry out their plan.

- Encourage independence and safe exploration of new experiences.
- Coach your young person by listening, advising and supporting opportunities to learn.
- Communicate high, but realistic, expectations. Many young people are used to hearing about their limitations. Make sure you send a positive message about their ability to achieve great things.
- Start as early as possible.

Supporting Relationships

You can support your young person's relationship and social skills by:

- Encouraging your young person to maintain relationships with appropriate family members.
- Talking about group activities and other opportunities for developing peer support networks, such as social or sporting clubs.
- **Talking about what your long-term relationship with your young person will look like. It will be comforting for them to hear if you will maintain regular contact, what your contact will look like, and if you will be available for them to reach out to for support.**

Managing Money

Many young people will need to learn practical skills to assist with maintaining a budget, paying taxes and bills, and saving money.

- Try to use everyday moments to teach your young person lessons about paying bills, shopping smart, and saving for long-term goals.

For more suggestions around teaching money management in daily life, visit:

http://raisingchildren.net.au/articles/money_management_teenagers.html

Education And Training

Education and training are critical to helping your young person achieve success later in life. It can open the door to new opportunities, support the development of new skills and positive self-esteem, and increase your young person's earning potential. Many young people are not prepared for further training or study as frequent school changes or behavioural challenges can affect their confidence, motivation and educational achievement.

Some tips for talking about your young person's future include:

- Talk about educational goals and how these goals can link in with their strengths and passions. It can also be useful to discuss possible barriers and ways to overcome these.
- Encourage your young person to talk to school counsellors or teachers, search on the internet, and contact study or training sites.
- Speak with Time for Kids for other ways to support your young person's direction.

Keep in mind: your young person's goals should always be central to the discussion. Although their goals for themselves might look quite different from where you'd like to see them, they are just as important!

Employment

Economic security is dependent on a young person's ability to find and maintain a job. Equally as important is the greater life satisfaction that can come from a job that fits with personal interests and talents.

You can:

- Help your young person identify where their strengths and interests lie, then have conversations about possible job choices.
- Explore various career paths. This could include research online, visiting career fairs or open days, or encouraging your young person to speak with a school counsellor or somebody who works in that profession.
- Encourage skill development and firsthand experience through volunteer work, classes, Internships, apprenticeships, or entry-level jobs.
- Talk about workplace expectations, such as appropriate dress, positive workplace attitudes, and arriving on time.

Health And Wellbeing

Young people entering independence need guidance to develop and maintain healthy habits. They will learn from the significant adults and role models in their life about manners, and positive communication.

Other ways you can support your young person's healthy development include:

- Being a positive food role model – provide a healthy diet and involve your young person in meal preparation as well as physical activity.
- Talking about physical health and mental health issues including ways for managing stress and expressing emotions.
- Discussing when it is appropriate to seek medical attention and provide your young person with information about how to find inexpensive health and mental health services, such as student centres and community health centres. Time for Kids can suggest some relevant services if needed.
- Including your young person in everyday activities at home, such as meal preparation, laundry, house cleaning, grocery shopping, making repairs etc.
- Discussing behavioural expectations, and remember to model that behaviour yourself.
- Talking with your young person about transportation. Lack of transportation can be a significant barrier to community participation, study and employment. Discuss the costs and benefits of public transportation and owning a car.
- Identifying safe, healthy and accessible recreational activities.
- Speaking to Time for Kids about referrals to appropriate services.

Fact: "Youth who have experienced abuse, neglect, and out-of-home care are at increased risk for health problems, chronic illnesses, and emotional/mental health issues."

For more information about encouraging a healthy lifestyle, see the Time for Kids induction pack or contact your Time for Kids support person.

Children Transitioning Out Of Care (Unique Challenges For Children Under Guardianship)

If you care for a child who is no longer with their birth parents you may find there are additional challenges as your young person transitions out of care.

Although it is likely that they are still living with a loving family member, some of the challenges include:

- Abrupt exits from the child protection system without appropriate post care support;
- Insufficient support for kinship carers to adequately prepare the child for a smooth transition to independence;
- Inadequate assessment of the child's needs and support planning for your young person's future; and
- Young people choosing to disengage from the system.

Generally young people who have lived in out of home care have fewer safety nets and support networks than many other children their age. Although they may continue living with their kinship carers after the age of 18 (and older), all support from the State including financial, emotional, and case worker support will end when a young person turns 18.

In addition to living skills, young people transitioning out of care will need support to develop a positive sense of self. Some way you can support are:

- Talking to your young person you care for about their identity: this might include spirituality, values, sexual orientation and racial or ethnic background.
- Creating a memory book (or box) together of your time together including key events and photos.
- Exposing your young person to experiences that will increase self-confidence.

There are several unique services in South Australia available to young people transitioning out of care into independence. If you think the young person you care for may benefit from additional support, please contact Time for Kids.

Some young people may have a formal 'leaving out of home care' plan developed along with their social worker and family which outlines their goals, actions and the support needed. If you would like to find out if the young person you care for has a 'leaving care' plan, you can speak with their kinship carer or Time for Kids.



Children are better equipped to grow into independent and responsible adults when they have warm, stable and trusting relationships with positive adults in their life.

Working together with your young person, their parent or guardian and Time for Kids can help build a strong foundation for a thriving future.



Time for Kids' carer resources are available to download from www.timeforkids.com.au.

To discuss any issues raised in this resource, please call us on 8245 8100.

The Department for Communities and Social Inclusion has contributed funds towards this project.

