

Transition to Adulthood and Leaving Care Policy

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1. Introduction

Leaving care can be both an exciting and stressful time for young people who have been living in foster care, as it is a time of change and transition in several ways:

- From a family environment to their own home
- From school to university or work
- From one town or city to another
- Changing support networks and friendships

Experiencing a number of major life events within a short space of time is always stressful, and the impact of these transitions can be improved by aiming for a series of gradual changes over time, with careful planning and a support system in place.

ISP is committed to improving our young people's life chances by supporting young people to 'Stay Put' wherever possible, and by encouraging the development of life skills throughout their time in placement.

See our *Staying Put* policy.

2. Care Leaver Entitlements

Care leavers are entitled to a package of support from their local authority and other statutory services as they enter adulthood. These include:

- An assessment of their needs and a Pathway Plan to support their transition from foster care to independence.
- Education bursaries as they continue their studies after GCSEs, take on an apprenticeship, or go to university.
- Priority status for council housing, with exemption from the shared housing rate up to the age of 25.
- A 'setting up home allowance' to help them purchase furniture and household appliances when they move into their new home.

The young person's local authority must proactively keep in touch with them up to the age of 21, and the young person can request continued support up to 25.

As well as statutory duties, local authorities have the power to provide additional support to care leavers at their discretion, and these can be viewed by accessing the local authority's 'Local Offer' for care leavers.

Support during the transition from care to full independence at 25 is important as care experience has been associated with a number of social problems including unemployment, crime, substance misuse, young parenthood, domestic abuse, mental health problems, debt and homelessness. By supporting young adults, and ensuring that they are aware of their entitlements and know how to access support services, we aim to help our young people transition to successful adult lives.

Care leavers' legal rights can be viewed at the Children's Commissioner's website:
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand/leaving-care-your-rights/>

3. Life Skills

Regardless of age, children and young people should be actively and naturally developing life skills so that they can become increasingly capable and responsible over time. Life skills can be considered within 6 broad categories:

- 1) Health and hygiene
- 2) Social skills
- 3) Time management
- 4) Money and shopping
- 5) Around the house (housekeeping and cooking)
- 6) Decision making

Life skills develop in the first instance through the observation of caregivers, and by receiving their care and attention. In time, children are encouraged to join in and help their caregiver, learning through imitation and trial-and-error. Children who are encouraged in this way learn about capability and experience achievements and enhanced self-esteem. Over the years, the skills and knowledge that they have observed and practised will become internalised and they will be able to transfer this learning to new situations and ultimately become effective parents themselves.

For this reason, it is important that the development of life skills is viewed as life-long learning, taking place throughout childhood and adolescence rather than as part of the 'leaving care' process at 16+. Our Life Skills Development Programme provides a framework for this task in foster care.

4. ISP Life Skills Development Programme

The Life Skills Development Programme comprises 4 levels, each roughly-equated to a stage of childhood or adolescence:

1) Primary years (up to 10/11)

Learning through experiences of being cared for, and having things explained to them. Joining in with family activities and decision-making.

2) Transition between primary and secondary years (10-13)

Becoming more able to do things for themselves and spending some time with friends, away from home. Learning about their own needs, being responsible and about consequences of actions.

3) Teenage years (13-18)

Becoming more independent in thought and action, developing new social networks, making decisions, taking responsibility.

4) Preparing to live independently (17+)

Learning about how to manage your own home and about community services and the workplace.

i. The young person's starting point

Young children will start at level 1 and progress through the levels accordingly. Older children who come into placement will start at the level most representative of their current ability. Not all young people will progress as far as level 4; this level is aimed at those who will be moving into their own independent accommodation upon leaving care. Level 4 is a useful tool for young people in Staying Put placements.

The booklet can be issued to foster parents as an editable PDF copy, which they can save on their computer at home and complete electronically. Alternatively, a paper copy can be provided.

ii. Who completes the booklet?

The foster parent should take ownership of the booklet, and responsibility for recording the young person's development and achievements over time. The young person should be aware of the booklet, and the skills that they are going to be working on. Skills development is not intended to be a short-term piece of work, but an ongoing part of the foster placement, with young people developing new skills naturally as they get older.

The Supervising Social Worker should discuss the young person's progress with the foster parent, and record this in their supervision notes. The young person's progress will form part of ISP's Outcomes Tracker.

iii. Supportive information and resources

Our I-SPACE website (www.i-space.org.uk) will host information and challenge tasks to support young people and their foster parents to develop life skills and associated knowledge at each level.

Each booklet can also be viewed and/or downloaded at I-SPACE.

iv. Sharing and storing progress

Progress should be shared on a regular basis with the young person's local authority, in the following ways:

- Progress will feed into the ISP Outcomes Tracker, which should be provided to the local authority to inform the Care Plan review.
- The booklet can be emailed to the Local Authority Social Worker when complete (or on request). This will be easiest if the PDF version is used – paper booklets will need to be scanned.
- The Local Authority Social Worker can view the booklet when they visit the young person in placement.

Each completed booklet can be uploaded to CHARMS under the progress item called "Independence Skills Assessment".

v. Acknowledging young people's progress

Regional ISP centres may choose to reward young people with a certificate of achievement when they complete a level, and/or a small gift.

5. Support for Young People and Foster Parents

- i. During the placement, support will primarily be provided by the Supervising Social Worker, and wider team at the young person's local ISP Centre. The Policy & Practice Advisor can also be contacted for advice and assistance with specific issues or concerns.
- ii. Young people can access a wide range of information about becoming independent from the agency's I-SPACE website, including skills development challenges, fact sheets and links to external websites. On occasions, ISP will organise opportunities for young people to come to their local Centre to discuss independence issues with other young people, Foster parents are asked to encourage young people to attend and assist them in making the journey to the event as necessary.
- iii. Foster parents are encouraged to attend training opportunities to raise their awareness of the leaving care process and ways of developing young people's independence skills. Foster parents can also access a wide range of information about the leaving care process from our I-SPACE website.
- iv. The Local Authority will provide the young person with a Personal Advisor (PA) as per the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. The PA is responsible for ensuring that the actions set out in the Pathway Plan are being addressed and should advise and guide the young person through the process of becoming an independent adult. The PA will keep in touch with the young person post-18, when they transition from being a child in care to a care leaver, with associated legal rights. Care leavers' legal rights can be viewed at the Children's Commissioner's website:
<https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/help-at-hand/leaving-care-your-rights/>
- v. Accessing an Independent Visitor or an advocate can be of particular importance to young people in the transition stage from a foster placement to moving into independence and it is vital that young people are given details about how to access these services and of their entitlement to independent advocate support. The agency's Children's Guide provides this information to young people.