

Independent Living: Tips for Foster Parents @TN_DCS

As a foster parent, you are in a unique position to help the youth in your care prepare for a successful future. You can support development of the youth's transition plan, and you can aid in important skill-building activities that will improve the youth's ability to carry out his or her plan. In addition, you can encourage a young adult's growing independence and guide safe exploration of new experiences, while providing a cushion of support.

As the foster parent of a youth preparing to transition, you have several vital roles:

Coach—listening, advising and providing youth with opportunities to learn and practice new skills

Advocate—learning about and fighting for the youth's rights as they relate to education, health and mental health care, court proceedings, and case practices

Networker—helping to cultivate connections and supports for the youth

As a Foster Parent you CAN!

What can I advocate, coach and network about?

- Empower youth to make decisions
- Communicate high expectations
- Start early. Preparing for adulthood does not occur overnight
- Decrease control and increase youth responsibilities gradually
- Understand that youth will learn from mistakes

At age 14- Preparation for Adulthood

Independent Living Plans are developed by the FSW, with all custodial youth ages 14-16. The purpose of the Independent Living Plan is to help youth learn skills they will need to be successful as adults. The planning process should be increasingly directed by the youth as they get older; consider the following:

- The plan must be personal to the youth and detailed, with specific actions that will be taken to help a youth learn independent living skills and social skills.
- Examples of life and social skills include shopping, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, organization, managing money, developing resumes, job interview skills, understanding transportation, decision-making, communication, and relationship building. (make it fun!)

- The plan should include specific resources, steps, and deadlines needed to help youth gain IL skills and achieve success.
- Request Independent Living wrap around funding like good grade incentives, funding for extracurricular activities, leadership and life skills stipends through FSW's. (See IL wrap list for more categories)
- Make sure they get a life skills assessment annually through FSW or provider.
- Connect them to a social enrichment, vocational or extracurricular activity.
- Ask about the availability of youth boards, opportunity passport, or pregnancy prevention services through FSW or Independent Living Specialist.
- Help teach the tangible and intangible life skills needed. The first part involves imparting knowledge so the youth has an understanding of the skill; the second part involves practice, practice, and more practice.

At age 17- Success beyond 18

It is required that a Transition Plan be developed by the FSW, with youth who will likely exit state custody at or after 17 years of age to help them have a successful transition to adulthood; consider the following:

- The plan must be personal to the youth and detailed, with specific actions that will be taken to help a youth prepare for leaving care and for the transition to adulthood. The indicators are social skills (connections to supportive/caring adults), housing, health, mental health, employment, education, finances, life skills, communication and transportation.
- The plan will include specific steps, deadlines, needed documents, and identified resources for each section. (Do they know this and can do this after they are 18?)
- Request Independent Living wrap around funding like good grade incentives, funding for extracurricular activities, leadership and life skills stipends, graduation packages through FSW. (See IL wrap list for more categories)
- Make sure they get a life skills assessment annually through FSW or provider case manager
- Ask about the availability of youth boards, opportunity passport, or pregnancy prevention services through FSW or Independent Living (IL) Specialist.
- Learn and educate youth about post-secondary scholarships available or contact IL Specialist
- Connect them to a vocational or employment opportunity

What do youth 14 and older need to learn?

Find something that the youth you are working with is interested in learning about. Or, select a goal that the youth would like to pursue. Through conversation or observation, assess how much the youth already knows about the skills involved. Ask the FSW to see the life skills assessment to better understand strengths and weaknesses, and what you can help with.

Why is it important to involve youth in planning?

Because youth have their own ideas about permanency, they need to be part of the permanency planning discussion. When planning for permanency with adolescents, think about using different approaches than might be used with younger children. Many times the youth, themselves, are the best at identifying permanent connections that may lead to legal permanency and/or lifelong relationships.

When to consult your regional IL Specialist:

- Anytime a youth 14 and older is not getting a service, you believe they should be getting
- A special needs youth (Adult Mental Health/DIDD) that is 17-years-old or older
- A youth is 16-years-old or older & in need of a state photo ID
- You have questions about IL Wrap Funding
- If you, a youth or his/her team has questions regarding Independent Living Services, LifeSet Services, IL Policies or Extension of Foster Care Services(EFCS)

What do youth in TN want?

1. Help us feel safe.
2. Help us settle into our new life.
3. Speak to us and listen to us.
4. Make us part of your family.
5. Help us be independent.

Research and practice show that having ongoing support from at least one permanent, caring adult can make an enormous difference in the life of a vulnerable youth

Credit: [Child Welfare Information Gateway](#). TN Youth Engagement work available through IL.