

## ***Making an Emergency Plan with Transition Age Youth in California's Foster Care System A Checklist for Dependency Attorneys, Youth Providers, and Advocates***

The COVID-19 pandemic has unexpectedly altered our lives and the lives of youth in foster care who need support and advocacy. County workers are working to meet their supervision and case planning duties, including in-person visits and video calls as appropriate, while also complying with the local and state restrictions on movement and contact. The coming months will present a critical opportunity to collaborate with young people and their full network of supports to ensure that they feel safe, stable, and cared for.

This guide details some of the components of an emergency plan for young adults in foster care and suggests resources for meeting emergent needs. It aims to provide a starting point for dependency attorneys and other advocates working to assess client needs as this crisis unfolds. Transition age youth--young people who may be in college, living on their own for the first time, starting new jobs, and developing and testing their independent living skills--may be particularly vulnerable and require specific attention. There are a number of emergency services and resources available for this population, but they are not always easy to access. Advocates can help bridge the gap by reaching out to each of the young people they work with and asking targeted questions to assess their current situation. Once advocates have an understanding of a young person's current situation as well as their needs over the next few weeks or months, they can assist by offering to connect youth to emergency resources and advocacy support.

### **Health**

- **Is the youth aware of and have an adequate understanding of the current health crisis?**
  - Review the main points of the current emergency and basic guidance on protecting oneself and preventing the spread of the virus.
  - Recommendations from the California Department of Public Health are available and being updated here:  
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DCDC/Pages/Immunization/ncov2019.aspx>
  - Make sure that the youth is aware of the specific precautions and orders in place in their county.
  - Ensure that youth understand which health conditions place them at higher risk for severe illness and have a plan to stay healthy. Guidance available here:  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-risk-complications.html>
- **How is the young person feeling physically?**
  - Review the COVID-19 symptoms (cough, fever, respiratory distress) that youth need to be aware of for self-assessment.
  - Make sure they have a current number for their health provider and/ or the county health line in case they develop symptoms or have health-related questions.
- **Does the youth have active health insurance?**
  - Remind them that the COVID-19 test is free regardless of type of (or lack of) insurance.
  - Youth can check the status of their Medi-Cal by calling the hotline at (800) 541-5555. They will need their birth date and social security number or Medi-Cal ID.

- Youth may have health insurance through their college and should check how benefits work if youth is off-campus. It may make more sense for the youth to leave the college's health insurance plan and enroll in Medi-Cal depending on where they are residing and what coverage their university health insurance offers for off-campus providers. Student should communicate with college about waiving student health fee if student is switching to Medi-Cal.
- **What is the youth's plan if they or a loved one gets sick?**
  - Advise youth to call their healthcare provider before going to the emergency room and help them locate the best number to call.
- **Is the youth currently taking any prescription medication?**
  - Make sure the youth has enough prescription medication and refills to last at least the next month, coordinating with the youth's medical provider and social worker and obtaining court orders as needed.
- **Does the youth have any current or ongoing medical issues (including mental health) that will require attention during the crisis?**
  - Make sure the youth knows where to go for treatment during the next month. Many regular medical services are being postponed or handled differently, and youth will need a plan to access necessary treatment.
  - Make sure the youth has access to a smart phone or computer/laptop that will allow telemedicine health access.
  - Talk with caregivers about plans for transportation in case of shelter in place orders and/or reductions in public transportation options
- **Is the youth feeling isolated, depressed, and/or anxious, and expressing or demonstrating a need for mental health services?**
  - If the youth is experiencing a mental health crisis, every county operates a 24/7 crisis intervention number. A list of these numbers is available at <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/individuals/Pages/MHPContactList.aspx>.
  - The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) also operates a mental health hotline at (800) 950-6264 (or text 741741). NAMI has a resource guide related to COVID-19 issues: <https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Press-Media/Press-Releases/2020/COVID-19-and-Mental-Illness-NAMI-Releases-Important/COVID-19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf?lang=en-US>.
  - Brainstorm ideas for social contacts, coping mechanisms, and develop a stress management plan with clear actions and important contacts for every youth. Example here: <https://parentandteen.com/teen-stress-management-plan/>.

## **Housing**

- **Does the youth have access to stable housing?**
  - If the youth lacks stable housing, advise them to contact Together We Rise at [info@togetherwerise.org](mailto:info@togetherwerise.org).
  - If the youth expresses that they may have to leave their transitional housing program for any reason, including that they are turning 21, immediately contact the program and the youth's social worker/probation officer to advocate for the youth to stay in the program for the duration of the crisis, and contact the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office at (877) 846-1602 or [fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov](mailto:fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov).
  - If the youth expresses that they may have to leave their resource family home or short-term residential therapeutic program for any reason, advise the youth that the laws to prevent abrupt placement changes still apply. Contact the social

- worker/probation officer immediately to begin implementing a placement preservation strategy.
- If the youth currently rents an apartment and cannot pay rent for the month due to effects from the crisis, research and counsel the youth on any local orders barring evictions. For instance, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Alameda County have all suspended evictions.
  - Ensure youth are aware of local civil legal aid resources that may be able to help with housing resources, housing law, and other benefits. Search for legal assistance in your county at <https://www.lawhelpca.org/>.
- **Is the youth a college student who has been advised to move out of their dormitory?**
    - Public colleges in California have agreed that NMDs and former foster youth may continue to stay in dorms, though they may be asked to move to a different room to comply with state and local protocols for social isolation. Any barriers to staying in a UC, CSU, or community college dorm should be elevated to the Provost's office and the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office (877-846-1602; [fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov](mailto:fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov)).
    - If the student attends a private college, call the college's director of residential life (or equivalent). Explain that the youth is in foster care and cannot readily secure alternate housing. Follow up with an email to the residential life contact, attaching proof that the young person is in foster care and copying the Dean of Students and the director of the college's foster youth or low-income student support program.
    - If the youth is not able to remain in the dorms, advise them to contact Together We Rise at [info@togetherwerise.org](mailto:info@togetherwerise.org). Elevate any ongoing threat of displacement and lack of housing to the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office at (877) 846-1602 or [fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov](mailto:fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov).
    - For students who find alternate housing but need temporary storage, U-Haul is offering 30 days of free self-storage for college students moving out of dorms: <https://www.uhaul.com/Articles/About/20625/College-Students-U-Haul-Offers-30-Days-Free-Self-Storage-amid-Coronavirus-Outbreak/>.
  - **Does the youth have a backup housing plan in case of an emergency?**
    - Come up with a backup housing plan. Call for youth or offer to stay on the phone with the youth as they call transitional housing programs.
      - THP-NMD Provider Roster: <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/THP-NMD-Roster-1.2.2020.pdf>
      - THP-Plus Provider Roster: <https://www.jbaforyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/THP-Plus-Roster-12.17.19.pdf>
    - Work with youth to identify family members or other important, safe adults who could be housing options in case of an emergency. Offer to help youth find and make contact with those adults.

### **Food Security**

- **Does the youth have enough food (or money for food) to get through the next few weeks?**
  - Submit a CalFresh application online, with the youth on the phone with you: <https://www.getcalfresh.org/>. Be sure to answer correctly the questions that trigger emergency CalFresh (your household makes less than \$150 monthly and has less than \$100 on hand right now, and/or your household's combined monthly income and money on hand are less than your combined monthly rent and utilities). Follow

up with the county CalFresh office by phone to ensure receipt and processing of the application within 3 days and to verify any information that may pose a barrier to eligibility.

- Send the youth information about food delivery and food bank, and brainstorm strategies for the youth to get to their nearest food bank or food distribution site. Many school districts are providing free breakfasts and lunches to youth under the age of 18. Help the young person call the pantry or google local school lunch resources or call 211 if it's not clear whether their local food bank is open (or if their hours are limited).
  - California Food Banks: <http://www.cafoodbanks.org/find-food-assistance>
  - Feeding America: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank>
  - 211: <http://www.211.org/services/covid19>

## Parenting

- **Is the youth parenting and in need of immediate cash aid?**
  - Advise youth that CalWORKs applicants can request an Immediate Need (IN) payment due to lack of housing, food, etc. Help them complete the Immediate Need request form here: <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/cdssweb/entres/forms/English/CW4.PDF>, and submit the form to the local CalWORKs office. The office must determine eligibility within 1 day. The youth can also request the CalWORKs office to expedite its processing of the CalWORKs grant, which takes 3 days but may result in a larger payment.
  - Advise the youth that CalWORKs office require face-to-face visits before final approval of a CalWORKs grant. Support the youth in thinking through ways to get to the local CalWORKs grant and any precautions to take while around other people in the office.
  - Advise the youth that if they are receiving an infant supplement with their monthly foster care benefit, that amount may be offset by the amount of CalWORKs paid at the beginning of the month.
- **Is the youth parenting and in immediate need of food or formula?**
  - Help youth locate a WIC office or grocer. California's WIC program has a mobile-friendly platform for this purpose: <https://m.wic.ca.gov/>.
  - Advise youth that the federal government has given states flexibility in their WIC eligibility determinations, such as certifying eligibility remotely and issuing benefits up to three months in advance.
- **Does the youth have other immediate needs for themselves and their children?**
  - Ensure that youth are able to access resources that are difficult to find, such as diapers, wipes, or formula. Assist youth with locating a nearby store with the necessary supplies and make a plan for the youth to get to a store. If resources are an issue, assist youth in identifying a local charitable group who can provide basic supplies.
- **Does the youth have a child in foster care who they are having difficulty getting information about or visiting?**
  - Determine whether the visits are supervised or unsupervised. If they are unsupervised help the youth figure out a safe location for visiting or whether it is possible to visit with the child at the foster home. If they are supervised visits help the young person figure out whether the foster parent or a family member can supervise the visits in a safe location or in the foster home. If they have a child in care with a relative this should be something that the agency is able to determine

quickly to resume or continue regular visitation. Even if in person visitation is not an option during this time, ensure a plan is in place for virtual visitation and ongoing contact. If you have difficulty getting an answer from the social worker or county, elevate any ongoing issue to the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office at (877) 846-1602 or [fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov](mailto:fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov).

### **School**

- **Has the youth's coursework moved to a remote setting? Are they receiving the information for the school, and is it in the correct language? Do they have the equipment they need to succeed in a remote setting?**
  - Support youth in connecting to the Community College Chancellor's Office to sign up for an iFoster free cell phone. The phones can be used as hotspots and have unlimited data. Students can sign up for the phones here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3GZTLX7>.
  - Certain internet providers (Comcast, Spectrum, etc.) are offering free internet for a limited time to K-12 or college students. If any of these providers are in the youth's service area, advise the youth to call, identify as a student, and request any free service the internet provider is offering (getting the terms and conditions in writing so that they know when the free term ends).
  - Youth should proactively reach out to professors teaching their classes to communicate that they may have issues completing coursework on time or attending class via video due to disruption in living arrangements- professors may assume that students moving off campus are returning to a fully-stocked home with computer and internet, which is not the case for all NMDs. If a professor is unwilling to be flexible, contact the Dean of Academic Affairs and/or the campus foster youth program.
  - Does the youth have a computer? Many school districts that have moved to distance learning are offering Chromebooks to youth so that they can continue learning. If a student does not have a computer, advise them to first to call their school and ask if one can be provided. If the school is not helpful, youth (or case worker) can call the district and/or the county office of education's Foster Youth Liaison. Also ask about a wireless hotspot if the student is still waiting for internet to be installed.
  - If youth's coursework has moved to a remote setting, ask if they know how to access their school email address. Students (especially high school students) may never have logged in to it before, or may not know their password. Many school districts operating remotely are only communicating via email.
  - If the youth was receiving supplemental tutoring or support, assist the youth in contacting the tutor or service to arrange for online/virtual one on one tutoring sessions.
- **Have college students received an update on any changes to their financial aid?**
  - Sometimes colleges will reduce a student's financial aid if the youth unexpectedly leaves campus, on the assumption that the youth has returned home to a parent's care. Advise any youth for whom this is not the case to reach out to their financial aid office to confirm that they are listed as an "independent student" and that their cost of attendance has not changed. If the financial aid's offices are not accurate, then follow up the call with an email to the financial aid office with proof of foster youth status, copying the Dean of Students and any applicable foster youth support program (i.e. Guardian Scholars). Additionally, provide advocacy support if the

youth wants to ask for additional disbursements or travel assistance to reflect the costs related to moving off campus.

- Students who are independent and living off campus may be eligible for *more* aid, depending on how the college calculates off-campus cost of attendance. Colleges are often able to adjust cost of attendance to take into account students' specific circumstances, so if there are particular costs that NMDs have that other students do not, youth should communicate those. Youth should communicate with financial aid about, for instance, increased textbook, internet, and computer costs if they are unable to access campus libraries. Youth should also communicate with financial aid about money for internet access if they find that the free internet speeds offered by providers are insufficient to allow them to use videocalling or other digital resources.
- As mentioned in the health section above, if youth have health coverage through their college health insurance plan, they should check if those benefits are still useful/economical if they are living off-campus/far from the college. Youth should communicate with Financial Aid and the Campus Health Insurance about waiving student health fee if the student needs to switch to Medi-Cal.

### **Employment**

- **Is the youth's work being affected during the crisis?**
  - Advise youth that they may be eligible for unemployment or disability insurance if they meet certain criteria. California waived the one-week waiting period for accessing these benefits. Review the youth's basic situation and consult the State's EDD resource page related to the Covid-19 with all youth facing a change in their work circumstances. [https://www.edd.ca.gov/about\\_edd/coronavirus-2019.htm](https://www.edd.ca.gov/about_edd/coronavirus-2019.htm). Pay particularly close attention to youth in any of the following situations:
    - Laid off
    - Hours reduced
    - Sick or quarantined
    - Unable to work because they are caring for someone who is sick or quarantined
    - Unable to work due to school closures requiring them to care for a child
  - Self-employed or classified as Independent Contractor: The One Fair Wage Campaign has also started a relief fund for restaurant and gig workers affected by the crisis. Youth can apply here to receive assistance as it becomes available: <https://ofwemergencyfund.org/help>.
  - For Students: Help students check with their schools to see if they can continue to receive work-study payments and/or do work-study jobs remotely. Information about this is likely to be available through a college's COVID-19 response page (although not all colleges, at this time, include such information on their webpages), and federal guidance allows institutions to be flexible with work-study under certain circumstances: <https://ifap.ed.gov/electronic-announcements/030520Guidance4interruptionsrelated2CoronavirusCOVID19>.

### **Technology & Utilities**

- **Does the youth have sufficient access to phone and internet to meet their needs for the next several weeks?**
  - Advise youth that NMDs are eligible for smart phones (with hot spot capability) through iFoster's joint pilot program with the Public Utilities Commission. The Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office can help with phone distribution: (877) 846-1602 or [fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov](mailto:fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov).
- **Is the youth concerned about loss of their utilities (gas, water, electric)?**
  - Advise the youth that the California Public Utilities Commission determined that water, sewer, energy, and communications companies must halt service interruption for non-payment. This directive was issued retroactive to March 4th. See <https://www.cpuc.ca.gov/covid/>.

### **Staying connected**

- **Is the young person staying in contact with important people?**
  - Assist youth in compiling a list of important contacts to keep with them during the crisis (see template emergency contact list below). You can even fill out the form with them and then email it to them so that they have the list on their phones.
  - Make sure that they know how to reach you specifically (i.e., is your office open? Are you checking voicemails? Email?).
- **Do they have the ability and/or a plan for staying in touch with friends, family and social supports during the isolation period? Do they have someone to talk with regularly?**
  - Have they considered how to visit with friends by video or joining group chats or video calls to catch up? Social isolation and loneliness are not trivial. Youth should make concerted efforts to stay in touch with their social networks. Video chats and phone calls can help fill some of the gap, and they are better at providing interactive opportunities than email or text.
  - Are they missing therapy appointments that can transition to virtual?
- **What are they planning to do to stay busy?**
  - Discuss the importance of maintaining a good routine to combat the negative effects of social isolation. Consider topics such as waking up at the same time as usual, an exercise routine, light exposure, work or hobbies to fill the day.

***For questions and technical support related to this guide, please contact:***

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*If you adapt this checklist for your jurisdiction or another purpose, please credit this document as "Emergency Plan for TAY in CA Foster Care, YLC 2020"*



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### ***Emergency Contact List***

<b>Important Contact</b>	<b>Phone and Email</b>	<b>Notes</b>
Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson	(877) 846-1602 fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov	State-wide resource and support center for California's foster youth
Social worker/probation officer		
Social worker's/probation officer's supervisor		
Juvenile court attorney		
CASA		
Other advocates (legal aid, education attorney, etc.)		
Doctor's office		
Therapist/clinician		
School contacts (Guardian Scholars, financial aid, counselor, etc.)		
Placement program (THP, STRTP, etc.) case manager		
Local food bank		
Local pharmacy		