

Emergency Planning 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.

Contents

This document is divided into a series of nine topical checklists, each related to the potential material, physical, and/or emotional needs of young adults in foster care, which may need to be addressed in the context of an emergency situation such as COVID-19. The topics included below are (click a section heading below to jump directly to that checklist):

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This guide concludes with [an emergency contact list template](#) (Page 13) that can be completed with youth to help ensure their awareness of and access to vital support resources during a crisis.

Note on Hyperlinks

This toolkit contains hyperlinks to numerous online resources. Hyperlinks are indicated by underlined text, in blue if you are viewing this document in color. (Email addresses and internal links to jump to a referenced section of the toolkit also appear in underlined blue text.)

If you are using this toolkit in a printed or scanned version, to access hyperlinked resources please see the original electronic version of the document at <https://ylc.org/resource/emergency-plan-with-tay-in-foster-care>. Additionally, we recommend that you access the electronic version of this toolkit as it and any linked resources may be periodically updated as circumstances change.

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If you wish to adapt this toolkit in whole or in part for use in your jurisdiction or for any other purpose, please credit this toolkit as the source document as “Emergency Plan for TAY in CA Foster Care, YLC 2020.”

Checklists

Food Security

1. *Does the youth have enough food (or money for food) to get through the next few weeks?*
 - With the youth on the phone with you, submit [a CalFresh application online](#).
 - Be sure to correctly answer the questions that trigger, specifically, emergency CalFresh—i.e., that the youth’s household makes less than \$150 monthly and has less than \$100 on hand right now, and/or their 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 three days and to verify any information that may pose a barrier to eligibility.
 - For the months of March, April, and May, CalFresh recipients should receive the [maximum benefit](#), regardless of other income.
 - If the youth receives CalFresh, help the youth find grocery stores, including Wal-Mart and Amazon, that will accept their EBT card [online](#).
 - Send the youth information about food delivery and food banks, 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, Google local school lunch resources, or call 211 if it isn’t clear whether their local food bank is open or if their hours are limited.
 - [California Food Banks](#)
 - [Feeding America](#)
 - [211](#)

Foster Care

1. *Is the youth about to turn 21 years old?*
 - Advise the youth that, as of April 18, 2020, youth who turn 21 in extended foster care can remain in care until June 30, 2020. In some counties, agencies may provide extended foster care services beyond June 30. Coordinate with the youth’s social worker or probation officer to confirm that the youth’s case will remain open and funding will continue until June 30 or later. See [All-County Letter \(ACL\) 20-45](#) for details.
2. *Is the youth worried about meeting the extended foster care participation requirements due to gaps in work or school?*
 - Advise the youth and their social worker or probation officer that the state has instructed counties to “demonstrate flexibility” for any non-minor dependent who can no longer meet the work and school requirements under current circumstances. Social workers and probation officers can use category 3 (participating in activities that reduce barriers to employment) or category 5 (short- or long-term medical condition) instead. Even if

none of the participation requirements are met, funding should still continue. See [ACL 20-45](#).

3. *Is the youth eligible for, but not currently participating in, extended foster care?*

- Eligible youth can still petition to re-enter foster care. They need not be currently participating in any of the five participation requirements as long as they are willing to satisfy the participation requirements.
- Social workers and probation officers can conduct reentry assessments by phone or video, and they can work with the youth to sign the [Mutual Agreement for Extended Foster Care \(SOC 162\)](#) and [Voluntary Reentry Agreement for Extended Foster Care \(SOC 163\)](#) digitally or via email or text.
- Social workers and probation officers should immediately assist the youth in finding a placement. They cannot postpone housing and services in order to file or hear a reentry petition in juvenile court. See [ACL 20-45](#) and [ACL 19-105](#) for further details.

Healthcare & Mental Health

1. *Is the youth aware of and do they 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](#).
- Make sure that the youth is aware of the specific precautions and orders in place in their county.
- Ensure that the youth understands which health conditions place them at higher risk for severe illness and have a plan to stay healthy. CDC guidance is available [here](#).

2. *How is the young person feeling physically?*

- Review [the COVID-19 symptoms](#) (particularly cough, fever, and respiratory distress) that youth need to be aware of for self-assessment.
- Make sure the youth has a current number for their health provider and/or the county health line in case they develop symptoms or have health-related questions.

3. *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.

4. *Does the youth have active health insurance?*

- Remind them that the COVID-19 test is free regardless of their type of insurance 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 in college may have health insurance through their school and should check how benefits work if they are accessing services 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. Students should communicate with their colleges about waiving the student health fee if they decide to switch to Medi-Cal.

5. *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.
6. *Does the youth have any current or ongoing medical issues (including mental health concerns) 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 while public transportation options are running on a reduced schedule.
7. *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 [here](#).
 - The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) also operates a mental health hotline at 800-950-6264 (or text 741741). NAMI also has a [resource guide](#) related to COVID-19 issues.
 - Brainstorm ideas for social contacts, coping mechanisms, and develop a stress management plan with clear actions and important contacts for every youth. The Center for Parent & Teen Communication offers [an example stress management plan](#), and the CDC has provided [a guide for talking about COVID-19 with young people](#).
8. *Is the youth struggling to manage interpersonal relationships?*
 - Share with the youth some evidence-based strategies, such as DBT skills, for [communicating their needs](#) and [managing interpersonal stress](#).
9. *Does the youth feel unsafe at home due to domestic abuse?*
 - Discuss with the youth any concerns or worries they may have about being at home or spending time with partners or loved ones that make them feel unsafe. Let them know that you can help them find resources if they are experiencing any domestic or partner violence or abuse. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is available 24/7 at 800-799-7233.

Housing

1. Does the youth have access to stable and secure housing where their needs can be met?

- Counties have an obligation to offer safe and appropriate available housing to youth in care, including non-minor dependents. See the [Foster Care](#) section above.
- If the youth thinks that they may have to leave their transitional housing program for any reason, including that they have reached the maximum age of participation, immediately contact the program and the youth's social worker or 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. The following is a short list of reasons that a youth should remain in their program:
 - As of April 18, 2020, youth who turn 21 in extended foster care can remain in care until June 30, 2020. Foster care payments for those youth will continue until June 30. Transitional housing programs therefore should keep youth in program until at least June 30. See [ACL 20-45](#) for details.
 - Youth in a transitional housing program have a right to receive written notice of termination and a right to appeal the loss of housing. In most cases, youth should be advised that they do not have to leave their housing program if they have not received written notice. Advocates can also help youth pursue a grievance or appeals process once they receive such a notice.
 - The youth may be protected from program discharge if their city or county has suspended evictions due to the COVID-19 crisis. This most clearly applies to youth in THP-Plus programs, as those programs are required to follow landlord-tenant law. See [MPP 30-920.1\(p\)](#) for details.
- If the youth can no longer live in their supervised independent living placement (SILP), their social worker or probation officer has a duty to help them find another SILP. They can approve the new SILP without an in-person inspection. The inspection should be done remotely, and the social worker can collect signatures by email or text. See [ACL 20-45](#).
- 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 or 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 the pandemic, research and counsel the youth on the [statewide orders](#) currently in place to halt evictions in most cases. In addition, some local jurisdictions, such as Los Angeles, offer additional protections for tenants.
- Ensure that the youth is aware of local civil legal aid resources that may be able to help with housing resources, guidance on housing law, and other benefits. Search for legal assistance in your county at <https://www.lawhelpca.org/>.

2. *Does the youth have a backup housing plan in case of an emergency?*

- Come up with a backup housing plan. Call transitional housing programs on behalf of the youth or offer to stay on the phone with them as they call. See the following provider lists for contact information:
 - [THP-NMD Provider Roster](#)
 - [THP-Plus Provider Roster](#)
- Work with the youth to identify family members or other important, safe adults who could be housing options in case of an emergency. Offer to help them find and make contact with those adults.
- For any current or former foster youth who lacks stable housing, advise them to contact Together We Rise at info@togetherwerise.org.

3. *Is the youth in need of emergency housing?*

- Contact the youth's social worker or probation officer to request emergency placement. Counties have an obligation to offer a "safe and suitable placement that is immediately available to the NMD" ([ACL 19-105](#)).
- If the county is not able to immediately provide emergency housing options for the youth, contact the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office (877-846-1602; fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov).
 - If the youth does not have a place to stay tonight, contact [Covenant House](#) or consult the [California Foster Youth Handbook](#) for other options.

4. *Is the youth a college student who has been advised to move out of their dormitory?*

- Public colleges in California have agreed that non-minor dependents 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).
- 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 a non-minor dependent and cannot stay in the dorms, their county should continue their SILP payment until they can find another residence. Their social worker/probation officer must assist them in finding a new residence. See [ACL 20-45](#) for details.
- If the youth is not able to remain in the dorms, advise them to contact Together We Rise at 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.

- 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.

Income & Employment

1. *Is the youth in need of income to cover unexpected expenses?*

- Run through the income support programs that are available to transition age youth. A comprehensive summary is available [here](#).
- For questions related to economic impact payments (aka stimulus checks), note that the timing and amount of the youth's payment will depend on whether they have previously paid taxes, receive SSI or SSDI, or have dependent children. More information is available [here](#) and [here](#).

2. *Is the youth's work being affected during the crisis?*

- Advise the youth that they may be eligible for unemployment or disability benefits 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. 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
- If the youth is self-employed or classified as an independent contractor:
 - During the crisis unemployment and disability insurance are extended to cover some classes of workers not previously covered. This includes some individuals who are self-employed or classified as independent contractors. Youth should not assume they are ineligible for unemployment or disability benefits. They should consult the [State's EDD page](#) to determine if they currently qualify.
 - The [One Fair Wage Campaign](#) has also started a relief fund for restaurant and gig workers affected by the crisis. Youth can apply to receive assistance as it becomes available.
- If the youth is a student, help them check with their school to see if they can continue to receive work-study payments and/or continue their 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). [Federal guidance](#) allows institutions to be flexible with work-study under certain circumstances.

Parenting

1. *Is the youth parenting and in need of immediate cash aid?*
 - Advise the youth that CalWORKs applicants can request an Immediate Need (IN) payment due to lack of housing, food, and other basic essentials. Help them complete [the Immediate Need request form](#), and submit the form to the local CalWORKs office. The office must determine eligibility within one day. The youth can also request that the CalWORKs office expedite its processing of the CalWORKs grant, which takes three days but may result in a larger payment.
 - Advise the youth that the CalWORKs office should have suspended some of its usual eligibility requirements, such as any in-person interviews or medical verification of pregnancy, and that CalWORKs recipients are exempted from the usual work requirements during the months of March, April, and May. See the [All-County Welfare Directors Letter \(May 4, 2020\)](#) for details.
 - 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.
2. *Is the youth parenting and in immediate need of food or formula?*
 - Help the youth locate a WIC office or grocer. California's WIC program has [a mobile-friendly platform](#) for this purpose.
 - Advise the youth that the federal government has given states flexibility in their WIC eligibility determinations, such that they may certify eligibility remotely and issue benefits up to three months in advance, as well as other exceptions to usual eligibility requirements.
3. *Does the youth have other immediate needs for themselves and their children?*
 - Ensure that the youth is 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 the youth in identifying a local charitable group that can provide basic supplies.
4. *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 in a manner that is consistent with public health guidance. If visits are supervised, 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, then 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 the youth has 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.

School

1. *Has the youth's coursework shifted to a remote format? Are they receiving the information needed from the school, and is it in the correct language? Do they have the equipment they need to succeed in a remote setting?*
 - Support the youth in connecting with the Community College Chancellor's Office in order to sign up for a free iFoster cell phone. The phones can be used as wireless hotspots and have unlimited data. Students can sign up for these phones [here](#).
 - 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.
 - If the 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 individual tutoring sessions.
2. *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 office's records or assessment of attendance costs or aid eligibility are not accurate, 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 (e.g., 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 videoconferencing or other digital resources.

- As mentioned in the [Health](#) section above, if the youth has health coverage through their college health insurance plan, they should check if those benefits are still useful or economical if they are living off-campus. The youth should communicate with the financial aid office and their campus health insurance program about waiving the student health fee if they need to switch to Medi-Cal.

Staying Connected

1. *Is the young person staying in contact with important people?*

- Assist the youth in compiling a list of important contacts to keep with them during the crisis (see [the template emergency contact list](#) below). You can fill out the form with them and then email it to them so that they have the list accessible on their phone.
- Make sure that the youth knows how to reach you specifically. Make sure to communicate with them about whether your office is open, whether you are checking voicemails, and whether you can be reached via email.

2. *Do they have the ability and/or a plan to stay 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 join 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 could transition to a virtual medium?

3. *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, and work or hobbies to fill the day.

Technology, Devices, and Utilities

1. *Does the youth have sufficient access to a phone and the internet to meet their needs for the next several weeks?*

- Advise the youth that NMDs are eligible for smart phones (with hotspot capability) through [iFoster's](#) joint pilot program with the Public Utilities Commission. The Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office can help with phone distribution at 877-846-1602 or fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov.

- 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. Make sure they receive the terms and conditions in writing so that they know when the free term ends.
 - For students who do not have a computer and are trying to stay enrolled in school:
 - 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 call their school and ask if one can be provided. If the school does not provide a computer, the youth (or their 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 their internet to be installed. Help call or write to the appropriate contact at their school. If at a public institution, check with their campus Guardian Scholars or EOPS program.
 - If the youth is attending a private college, talk to their financial aid officer or to any office focused on diversity and inclusion or first-generation college students. Students with disabilities who need assistive devices should contact their college disability services office.
 - Be sure to clarify whether the youth needs a computer with certain specifications or software to complete coursework (such as coding, or graphic design). Colleges may offer Chromebooks, which are appropriate for some students but not all.
2. *Is the youth concerned about loss of their utilities (e.g., 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.

Emergency Contact List

Important Contact	Phone and Email	Notes
Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson	(877) 846-1602 fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov	Statewide 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		