

it's T time

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Transition Time

Don't leave foster care without these 21 things

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- 1** **Test your life skills, take the ACLSA.** Visit www.caseylife.org and take an online test that will help you see where your strengths (and needs) are when it comes to skills for living on your own.
 - 2** **Join the Independent Living Program.** Want FREE help applying for college, finding financial aid, getting scholarships, landing a job, and learning skills for life after foster care? How about some MONEY for renting your first apartment? Then the Independent Living Program (ILP) is for you! It's designed to help youth prepare for life on their own after foster care. To find an ILP near you, check out www.fosterclub.com and search for your state listings.
 - 3** **Build a Transition Plan.** It's T time! Put together a team of supportive adults in your life and build a transition plan. Check out www.fosterclub.com for more info.
 - 4** **Get solid: understand what permanence is all about... and get it if you can.** You may have heard the word "permanence," but do you know what it is? Can you list the five types of permanency? Talk to your caseworker and find out what your permanency plan is (every youth should have one), or visit www.fosterclub.com.
 - 5** **Surround yourself with a safety net. Make a PACT with supportive adults.** Youth that are successful when they transition out of foster care have one thing in common: they have supportive adults in their lives that they can count on. Talk to a supportive adult in your life about a PACT. Learn more at www.fosterclub.com.
 - 6** **Find out about Chafee.** You may be eligible for assistance for paying for rent or other costs associated with living on your own. Talk to your caseworker, Independent Living Program or Chafee worker to find out how to apply.
 - 7** **Get a rental reference from your foster home.** Consider creating a rental agreement with your foster home or group home for the last few months you're in foster care. If you are a good tenant, they could provide a reference for your first apartment. A reference can provide information about on-time rent payments, cleanliness and respect for the property and other tenants.
 - 8** **Secure a place to live, have a backup plan.** Transitioning out of foster care to homelessness is never a good idea. Homelessness includes living in your car, camping, and even sacking out on a couch at a friend's house. There's plenty of help in locating housing, but you have to do some of the legwork. Talk to your caseworker, Independent Living Program or Chafee worker.
 - 9** **Get your social security card and birth certificate.** These personal documents can be particularly hard to get if you wait... have your caseworker get you your own copies of these items before you leave care.
 - 10** **Get state-issued photo ID.** You'll need photo ID for lots of things when you are living on your own: to rent an apartment, get a job, travel on an airplane, and much more. Even if you don't have a driver's license, make sure you get DMV or state-issued identification.

11 **Get a copy of court docs that prove you were in care.** You may need this proof to qualify for special benefits, such as scholarships and financial aid for higher education.

13 **Save money.** Most young adults are taken by surprise by the cost of living on their own. Have an adult help you work out a monthly budget for life after foster care. Try to save enough money to cover three months of the budget, plus the move-in costs for your first apartment.

16 **Get a job.** This one's a no-brainer: of course you need a job before you set out on your own! And getting a job can be tougher than you think. Even if you are receiving funds from other government sources, no one is really self-sufficient until they earn their own living. It's best if you can gain work experience while you are still in care.

17 **Get medical coverage. See a doctor.** In some states, youth transitioning from foster care may be eligible for health coverage. Be sure to ask about this BEFORE you leave foster care — it may be too late if you wait! If you will be losing your health coverage, make sure you see the doctor for a check-up before you leave care. Make sure all your shots are up to date and that you are in the best health you can be in.

19 **Take daily living skills classes.** Get set for adulthood by learning skills for life after foster care! Ask your Independent Living Program (ILP) or caseworker about classes offered. Check out classes at your local Community College. Or ask your foster parent to work with you on life skills (they can download an entire book of ideas called Ready, Set Fly at www.caseylifeskills.org)

12 **Open a bank account (and savings, too!)** If possible, open a bank account EARLY (at least a year before you leave foster care) so that you have time to practice money management (it can be surprisingly tough). Learn to balance your checkbook.

14 **Get a High School diploma or GED.**

Once you're on your own, it can become very difficult to concentrate on school because you'll be busy making money to pay your way. Try to finish getting your GED or high school diploma while you're still in foster care — before you pile on all the extra worries of supporting yourself.

15 **Find out about money for higher education.** The Federal Government has handed down millions of dollars for Scholarships and Educational Training Vouchers for foster youth! Best of all, in most cases this money can help pay for a Trade or Vocational school, housing, transportation, books, fees and other costs related to education. Find out how to access this money in your state at www.fosterclub.com.

How many things can you check off the list?

18 **Get mental health coverage. See a therapist before you leave care.** Youth transitioning from foster care may be eligible for mental health coverage. If you will be losing your mental health coverage, you may want to see a counselor before you leave care and get help coping with the stress and anxiety most youth have when transitioning out of foster care. And hey, if therapy is good enough for all those stars in Hollywood, then there's got to be something to it, right?

20 **Build an Independent Living Portfolio.** Keep a professional portfolio containing the following: completed sample job application and apartment rental application, resume, education records, awards and achievements, and copies of personal documents. For ideas, check out the FYI Binder at www.fosterclub.com.

21 **Find out if you can stay in care until you're 21.** You may have a lot to gain. What have you really got to lose? You may want to make a list of the pros and cons of staying in care or leaving. If you take a close look, you may just find out that there are many advantages to staying in care. If you prove your maturity and readiness, you may even be able to live on your own while you are in foster care — talk to your caseworker or judge.