

Leaving Care Plans

The process of preparing a young person to leave care is called leaving care planning. It involves working with a young person, and the important adults in their lives, to identify and support their transition to adulthood and plan the support they will need beyond 18.

The document used to detail the goals, tasks, and actions is called the leaving care plan. A leaving care plan provides a road map for a young person's transition to adulthood. An effective leaving care plan must help the young person feel empowered about making decisions about their future. Permanency Support Program Service Providers (PSP) should have a template for you to use when creating leaving care plans.

Leaving care plans are governed by several policies and legislation. It is important that you have a sound understanding about the purpose and expectations of a leaving care plan by reviewing these documents.

See [Legislative and Policy Framework Leaving Care and After Care](#) for a summary of all key legislation and policies.

Leaving care plans should be hopeful and realistic and tailored to the strengths, capacity and needs of a young person.

When does Leaving Care Planning Start and Stop

Leaving care planning starts “formally” when a young person is 15 years old. This is the time where you should start meaningful and ongoing conversations with a young person, and the adults in their life. These conversations are about what the young person needs now and into the future, to support their goals, their health and wellbeing and other life domains.

Explain that the plan is a way of documenting this support and everyone has a role to play in making the plan ‘happen’. While building skills for life should have started much earlier, now is also the time to identify any gaps i.e., such as developing cooking skills.

You will need to prepare and submit the final leaving care plan to your local [Child and Family District Unit \(CFDU\)](#) in time for approval. At least six months before the young person's 18th birthday. Do not leave this until the last minute, approval may take time.

Remember the plan should be updated as a young person's circumstances change, up to the age of 25.

For more information see: [Roles and Responsibilities in Leaving Care and After Care.](#)

After Care Support

In the plan, detail the post care support and actions to help them achieve their goals and address their identified needs. Tell the young person that they can request their ‘final’ plan to be amended at any time until they turn 25, if their support needs change. Give them information about how they can request a change and who they need to contact. In exceptional circumstances, after care can be provided post 25.

For more information see: [Foundations of After Care](#).

Getting Ready

The first step in meaningful planning is to engage with the young person. Hopefully, you have had the opportunity to get to know the young person before you begin making a leaving care plan together.

If this is not the case, take the time to build a relationship with the young person and explore their strengths and interests, as well as their dreams and hopes for the future. It is critical you approach the young person with compassion and empathy.

For more information see: [Taking to Young People About Leaving Care](#), [Relationship Based Practice](#) and [Working with Young People](#).

Role of Carers and Others

Carers have an important role in preparing the young person in their care to transition into adulthood. Include the carer in discussions about the leaving care plan as well as any other significant people in the young person’s life, as much as the young person is comfortable.

This will help identify what the young person’s strengths are and what they need as they approach adulthood and any goals or barriers i.e., building social skills or learning to drive.

[Leading the Way](#) and [Raising Them Strong](#) act as guides for carers to talk to the young people in their care about a wide range of living skills and transitioning out of Out-of-Home Care (OOHC).

For more information see: [Practice Tools to Engage with Young People and Carers](#).

Case-Planning Meeting

A case-planning meeting is held to inform or review the plan. The following people should be considered in participation planning:

- the child or young person
- their parents, significant others, including extended family, and carers
- any support person nominated by the child, carer, or parent
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander caseworker or community member for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child
- community member for a child from a migrant or refugee background
- services working with the child, carer, or parents
- anyone who may have responsibility for carrying out tasks in the case plan.

Leaving Care Plan Domains

The leaving care plan is a modification of the young person's care plan. It focuses on a young person's needs from age 15 and their support needs after they have left statutory care, although they may not be leaving the carer's home. Leaving care plans must consider all the life domains (areas). These are:



Adapted from Department of Communities and Justice

Check out the [key elements of a leaving care plan](#) on the DCJ website for detailed information on the above diagram to help you develop the leaving care plan.

For more information see: [Casework Practitioners Guide to Leaving and After Care.](#)

1. Culture and Connection

As part of case planning, develop strategies to support the young person to strengthen relationships with family, friends and other support people who can maintain a relationship with them after they leave care. Young people need to know they have people to turn to for support and advice after they have left care.

Some young people without family will need support to establish and build connections with other significant people and their community. Help them invest into growing safe networks of friendship and support in their local community. This may include youth, hobby, community or sporting groups, or reconnection with a teacher or former carer or neighbour.

Searching for Family

Discussions about family and connection may lead to the young person wanting to reconnect with, or find, their family. You may need to gather information about the young person's family members through discussions with other organisations.

[Find and connect](#), [Link-Up](#), and [Care Leavers Australasia Network](#) can assist you and a young person with finding family. You may also use Family Group Conferencing in some case to engage with family members and to help assess supportive connections for young people beyond 18.

Make sure that the young person engages in Life Story work and has an accurate and clear understanding about how and why they came into care. It is also important you ensure the young person has all their Life story work and has a plan for how it will be kept safe in the future.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Multicultural Backgrounds

Cultural support planning is mandatory for children and young people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural backgrounds. This extends to leaving care plans. Cultural planning must:

- identify the cultural needs of the young person
- outline how the young person will be immersed in their culture to maintain their cultural identity, language, spirituality, and religion, connection, and sense of belonging to family, community, country, and culture
- ensure important cultural and family information is maintained if the child does not want to identify with their culture or community
- include information about ongoing practices and processes related to cultural support planning and life story work.

“Being Aboriginal isn’t just about culture. It’s deeper than that, it’s about community kinship, and returning to country” – Care Leaver

Proof of Aboriginality

If the young person is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage, discuss with them the process of obtaining [Proof of Aboriginality](#) and see if that is something they would like support with. If it is not something they are interested in pursuing, let them know who they can contact in the future if they change their mind.

2. Health and Wellbeing

Young people face a broad range of issues as they move to adulthood. It is important to identify and address health and wellbeing issues during the teenage years and into young adulthood. You will need to have a plan that supports their health and ensure they are clear about who can assist them.

Remember, even with good parenting and role modelling, adolescence is generally a time for trying risky behaviours. It is very normal for them to:

- want more independence
- experience changes to their bodies and feelings
- have relationships and think about and/or have sexual intercourse
- explore their sexuality or gender identity
- experiment with alcohol and other drugs
- consider higher education and find a job.

Young people may need your help with referrals and connections to a good community GP, Family Planning NSW, Headspace, or other mental health services.

OOHC Health Pathway Program

The [OOHC Health Pathway Program](#) specifically targets 15–17-year-olds who are expected to leave care within the next year. The program aims to build connections between health professionals and young people to improve the health outcomes of young people in OOHC.

The young person should have the details of their GP, [Medicare Card](#), [Health Care Card](#), [Low Income Health Care Card](#), and have nominated an emergency contact.

You will need to support the young person to obtain these cards before they leave care to ensure they can access medical care. You will also need make sure the young person has all their medical records, particularly if they have a disability.

Young People with Disability

If you are creating a leaving care plan for a young person with a disability, the Permanency Case Management Policy (PCMP) has a set of minimum inclusions for their leaving care plan. These are:

- Identifying and documenting the disability needs of the young person, including any unmet or future needs to support them in preparation for independence.
- Working with their disability support coordinator or National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) planner, to develop the young person's NDIS plan and identify future options for independent living, and vocational care or shared accommodation options as part of the leaving care planning.
- Liaising with the nominated unit if the child needs the Public Guardian to be appointed for them or advocacy to assist in their preparation for leaving care.
- Ensuring the young person's NDIS plan and leaving care plan work together to provide them with tailored support as they transition to adulthood.

For more information see: [Leaving Care Planning and the NDIS.](#)

Living a Healthy Lifestyle

Talking about health gives you a good opportunity to talk about living a healthy lifestyle. Not all young people leaving care have had good and continuous role models throughout their life. Talk to the young person about good daily habits, like bathing and brushing their teeth and dietary guidelines. You may want to check in with carers about these kinds of conversations, so there is a team approach to promoting good eating, exercise and wellbeing.

For more information see: [Teens Health and Wellbeing](#)

Experimenting with Alcohol and Other Drugs

Experimenting with alcohol and other drugs is common for young people. However, it is still important to discuss the effects and dangers of alcohol and drug use. Help the young person develop a plan about how they will stay safe when using alcohol and other drugs.

Remember drugs and alcohol misuse can be a way for young people to cope with trauma. Talk to young people about why they may misuse drugs or alcohol and refer them to services that can assist as early as possible. Alcohol and drug use, such as binge-drinking, can also be a form of self-harm.

Some good alcohol and other drug resources include:

- [Binge-drinking: teenagers](#)
- [Your Room](#) – a place to get facts about alcohol and other drugs
- [How to Quit Smoking](#)
- [Risky behaviour in teenagers: how to handle it.](#)

Sexual Health

Sexual health is a broad topic that covers areas such as sexually transmitted infections (STI), contraception, sexual identity, and healthy relationships. Even if a young person does not feel comfortable discussing all aspects of their sexual health with you, make sure you let them know you are available to hear their worries and will listen without judgement. You could also connect them with a good GP or to Family Planning if they prefer.

It is your job to support the young person to feel empowered to make their own decisions about their sexual health and identity and connect them with relevant services. Some useful resources include:

- [Sexual Health Info Link](#) - answers to questions about sexual health including HIV and sexually transmitted infections.
- [Family Planning](#) - leading provider of reproductive and sexual health services.
- [LGBTQI Community Services and Organisations](#) - a comprehensive, state-by-state list of community services and organisations available.
- [Teenage relationships: romance and intimacy](#) – an overview of how to support teenagers.

Check in with the Young Person Regularly

Adolescence is an emotional time for most young people. For young people transitioning to adulthood from out of home care, it can be even more difficult. Check in with the young person regularly to see how they are feeling and if they have any questions or concerns about the process of legally leaving care.

Remember, not all young people will be leaving the carer's home. Tell them it is okay not to have all the answers about the future just yet, and that whatever happens they can still get help and support.

Don't forget to tell them about the DCJ Care Leavers Line and let them know about good mental health services such as [Headspace](#), [Kids Helpline](#) and [Youth Beyond Blue](#), that provide support specifically to young people.

3. Education

You play an essential role in improving the educational outcomes for young people in care. This means ensuring the plan has meaningful education goals and supports outlined.

Think about how you can help the young person engage with and complete their schooling years and what will help the young person achieve this e.g., identifying the use of tutors, homework centres or purchase of a laptop. The plan should also include future goals for study, training and employment.

Remind the young person that there are lots of pathways and supports available to them and they do not need to limit themselves when they think of their future.

Some supports available include:

- [Western Sydney University – DCJ OOHC Pathways Scholarship](#)
- [Smart and Skilled Fee Free Scholarships](#)
- [DCJ Scholarships](#)
- [Education Access Scheme \(EAC\)](#)

For more information see: [Education planning for children and young people in OOHC: caseworker guide about education planning.](#)

4. Training and Employment

As young people reach their teen years, they may be interested in earning their own money. Encourage young people to take up small part time work such as walking dogs or babysitting or working in retail. Casual and part time work can help build confidence and is a great entry point to the workforce.

Talk to the young person about what kind of job they might like to have in the future and how to develop important skills such as money management, working with others, and responsibility.

If the young person has not had a job before, you may need to talk to them about: [preparing a resume](#), [interview skills](#), and their rights and responsibilities as a worker, such as letting their boss know if they're sick.

Ensure they are aware of training and apprenticeship opportunities and the value of work experience. You and their carer may need to assist them with applications or to gain a work experience role to support their next steps after school. Don't forget to tap into the following resources:

- [Centrelink – JobSeekers](#)
- [Job Jumpstart](#)
- [Job Access](#)
- [Ladder Step Up](#)
- [RISE UP \(NSW Police\)](#)
- [TAFE](#)

5. Living Skills

It is important that when a young person leaves care that they know how to take care of themselves and can solve small problems.

The [Independent Living Skills Checklist](#) offers a comprehensive list of skills a young person should have to be independent. The list is a good opportunity to work out what areas a young person needs support in before transitioning out OOHC. It could be as simple as asking the carer to involve the young person in preparing meals or making the household budget. Some resources to support young people develop these skills include:

- [How to do a budget](#)
- [Grocery shopping](#)
- [General housekeeping and cleaning skills](#)
- [Basic vehicle maintenance](#)
- [Interpersonal skills](#)
- [Concession travel cards and TAFE Student Cards.](#)

Learning to Drive

Learning to drive is a valuable life skill. The [PCMP](#) outlines what is expected of PSP service providers regarding supporting a young person to develop their living skills:

- Supporting the young person to obtain their provisional driver licence.
- Providing professional driving lessons of sufficient quantity to enable the young person to obtain their provisional driver licence.
- Providing opportunities for the young person to access a car (and a person to accompany them) to practice driving and completing the logbook hours required to obtain their licence.
- Informing the young person that help to obtain a driver licence is available when they are ready to learn (up to 25 years).

Some additional supports for young person to get their provisional driver's licence:

- [Green Light Movement](#)
- [Drivers Licensing Access Program \(DLAP\)](#)

The [Safer Drivers Course](#) run by the Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) is free for eligible young people in care, and helps them learn about road safety. This includes how to reduce road risks by developing safe driving behaviour and understanding speed management, gap selection, hazard awareness and safe following distances.

6. Legal Matters

In the leaving care plan, the legal matters domain covers areas such as identification, Victims of Crime support and interactions with justice departments.

Interactions with Youth Justice

A young person you are working with may already have had interactions with Youth Justice. If this is the case, it is important you are familiar with the [Memorandum of Understanding between DCJ and Youth Justice](#). In the event you are working with a young person who is in custody, you should continue to support them in transitioning to leave care.

Supporting the young person's goals, strengthening their connections to their support system, and listening to them with compassion will show the young persons they have other options than returning to the justice system.

Victims of Crime

You will need to make an NGO referral for a Victims of Crime application to DCJ if you think the child or young person is eligible and may benefit from Victims Support Services. Children and young people in care have often been the victims of violent and traumatic crimes and can access this support to help with recovery, healing and sometimes recognition payments.

For more information see: [Supporting Victims of Crime](#).

Unpaid Fines

Don't forget to ask young people if they have any fines. If the young person you are working with has unpaid fine debt, they may be able to pay them off using a [Work Development Order \(WDO\)](#). The WDO scheme lets eligible people "pay off" their fine debt by participating in certain activities and programs such as:

- case management (\$50 per hour)
- educational/vocational/life skills course (\$50 per hour)
- volunteering (\$30 per hour)
- medical or mental health treatment/drug or alcohol treatment/participation in mentoring program (full compliance with treatment plan - \$1,000 per month).

Young Person's Rights and Responsibilities

Discussions about legal matters should cover topics such as the young person's rights and responsibilities as an adult. [Youth Law Australia](#) is a valuable resource for a range of law related topics such as online scams, dealing with debt, and discrimination. You can support the young person to have the best start to adulthood by helping them understand and obtain a few key items such as:

- [tax file number](#)
- [passport](#)
- [opening a bank account](#)
- [registering to vote](#)
- [how tax works](#)
- [Legal Aid NSW](#)
- [access to their care records](#).

7. Finance Support and Entitlements

Young people leaving care may be entitled to additional financial supports such as the Transition to Independent Living Allowance (TILA). Their carers can also receive the Teenage Education Payment (TEP) or Post Care Education Financial Support (PCEFS) to support them to finish their studies.

Keep in mind that if the leaving care plan includes expenses you are asking DCJ to cover, you will need to provide a solid explanation for why the young person needs the item. You should provide evidence for the need and include a quote for the item if possible. Assistance can include the After Care Allowance and one-off Contingencies Payments to help with things like securing accommodation, education and training, legal advice, finding employment, accessing health services, and for counselling and other support.

For more information of these entitlements see: [Foundations of Leaving Care](#) and [Foundations of After Care](#).

There are other support payments available to all young people, depending on the criteria they meet, such as:

- [Youth Allowance](#)
- [Austudy](#)
- [ABSTUDY](#)
- [Assistance for Isolated Children](#)
- [Vocational Education and Training \(VET\) student loans](#) and [Higher Education Contribution Scheme \(HECS\)](#)
- [The National Debt Helpline](#)
- [Salvos](#) and [Vinnies](#)

8. Accommodation

Continuing to Live With a Carer

Planning to leave care does not always mean a young person has to leave their current home. A young person can continue to live with their carer for as long as they both are happy with this arrangement.

There may be some barriers or worries about a young person staying at home after the age of 18 years old. If you get a sense of this you may want to use The [Living Arrangement Agreement Template](#) and the [Discussion Guide of Living Arrangement Agreement](#) to help resolve these issues.

Supporting a young person to live with their carer or another significant person in their life is highly encouraged. Young people in OOHC deserve the same the opportunity as other young people to transition to independence in their own time.

Other Accommodation Options

There are other options if a young person is unable to live with their carer or family. The [Support for Young People Leaving Care to Obtain Private Rental Accommodation factsheet](#) lists support available for care leavers to obtain private rentals. Young people leaving care can also access universal services such as: [NSW Housing](#), [Aboriginal Housing](#), and [homelessness services](#).

PCMP Guidelines

The PCMP has guidelines that state that leaving care planning for a young person, must include:

- facilitating options for a young person to remain with their carers or live with siblings or family/kin when this is a positive option for them
- providing assistance to find and secure safe, stable, affordable, and appropriate accommodation before their care order ends
- ensuring their plan includes provision for establishment costs to set up a new home.

Other Resources

The [Create](#) website, the [Go Your Own Way](#) booklet, and DCJ [leaving care and aftercare resources for caseworkers](#) are valuable resources when developing a leaving care plan.

For more information see: [Casework Practitioners Guide to Leaving and After Care and Leaving care planning – referrals, collaboration and connections](#).