

Talking to Young People about Leaving Care

Turning 18 years old is an exciting time for most young people. It is a time to think about the future and enjoy new rights as an adult. For a young person in out-of-home care (OOHC), it also marks a time of uncertainty. This factsheet is aimed to help you have meaningful conversations with young people to help them prepare for leaving care for their future and to understand and access the supports available to them. Conversations about leaving care or planning for adulthood need to start from when a young person is 15 years old, although general conversations about future plans will take place throughout your casework. Planning for adulthood is not something that happens at one or two meetings but is an ongoing process over a few years.

Tips to Talk to Young People

Hopefully, you have already had the opportunity to build rapport with the young person you're working with, and they feel comfortable talking to you. Remember when you support a young person to prepare to leave care, you are part of an important and vulnerable time in their lives. It is critical you approach the young person with compassion and empathy. These are two of the most valuable skills you have when building a relationship with a young person. A positive relationship between you and the young person will lead to a comprehensive and in-depth leaving care plan, to support the young person as they transition into adulthood. For more information, see: [Relationship Based Practice](#).

When talking to young people about their future after OOHC, it is important to keep in mind that they are the leaders in their own lives. It is your role to support and guide decisions, not to dictate to them. When having conversations about their future, always keep the [Care Leavers' Charter of Rights](#) in mind. Start the conversation about transitioning to adulthood by talking to the young person about their hopes and dreams for the future. Take the time to explore the young person's interests and strengths. Talk to them about what they see themselves doing as an adult, where they would like to live, and who they would like to establish and maintain a relationship with.

Having at least one secure and enduring relationship with a committed adult is a critical factor for the successful transition to independence for a young person. Identifying who that person is and working with them should be a key focus during this process. You must also help the young person to access the [Your Next Step](#) booklet and [Create Your Future](#) websites.

Explaining the Leaving Care Plan

You will need to talk with a young person about all the areas covered in their leaving care plan which include:

- [culture and connections](#) (including life story work)
- [health and wellbeing](#)
- [education](#)
- [training and employment](#)
- [living skills](#)
- [legal advice](#)
- [financial support and entitlements](#)
- [accommodation](#).

When talking to the young person about living skills, you should use the [independent living skills checklist](#). For more information on independent living skills see the [Transitioning to Independence](#) (Life Skills) factsheet. For more information, see: [Leaving Care Plans](#).

Sensitive Topics

You will also need to speak to the young person about topics that are more sensitive such as: sexual health and identity, personal safety, healthy relationships, contraception, and consent. Be prepared for these conversations by familiarising yourself with local organisations who can provide more information and support for the young person in the future (for example, [MSI Australia](#) and [Family Planning NSW](#)). Help the young person identify who the right people are to talk to about these topics is i.e. their carer, family planning services or a youth support organisation. If the young person is already a parent or an expectant parent, you must continue to help them build a leaving care plan. Talk to the young person about early intervention parenting services and support them to engage if they agree to a referral. For more information, see: [Working with Young People](#).

Anxiety about Leaving Care

Leaving care can be an emotional and worrying time for a young person. Check in regularly with the young person as they approach their 18th birthday. Encourage the young person to lean on their support networks, which may include friends, relatives, or carers for emotional support during this time. In some cases, young people may need more help than can be provided by their support network. This may be the case if the young person is self-harming or self-medicating with alcohol and other drugs. You may need to support the young person to access mental health support through their GP, an organisation such as [Headspace](#), or through the young person's [Health Pathway Program](#) network. For more information about talking to young people, see: [Difficult Conversations with Children, Families and Carers – Tips and Guidance](#).

Talking with Carers

Share the [Leading the Way](#) guide with carers. It will help carers to have conversations with young people about their future and offers valuable information about support available after care. Carers are a significant person in a young person's life and play an important role in transitioning young people into adulthood. It's important you include them as much as possible in the leaving care planning process, as much as the young person is comfortable with.

A strong relationship between you, the young person, and the carer will help the young person to feel safe and connected as they prepare to leave OOHC. You may need to support carers and young people when the time comes to decide what items belong to the young person. The general rule of the thumb is if it was bought specifically for the young person, then they can take it with them when they leave. There may also be changes in the relationship between a young person and their birth family as they prepare for adulthood. Some young people may want to live with their birth family after they turn 18 years old. This is the decision of the young person and their family. Even if you or the carer do not agree with this decision, it is important that your support is not withdrawn and that everyone continues to help the young person plan to reach their goals. For more information, see: [Practice Tools to Engage with Young People and Carers](#).