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## Introduction

The Department for Child Protection (the Department) is committed to supporting young people who leave the care of the CEO to make a successful transition from care to independence. The Department is guided by the Children and Community Services Act 2004 and aims to ensure adequate preparation and planning for leaving care is undertaken incrementally throughout the leaving care process. It is also committed to providing support and assistance for young people after leaving care up to the age of 25 years.

The Department recognises the important and valuable role of foster carers caring for children and young people in the care of the CEO. The formation of sound, quality relationships is essential to helping these children and young people move from isolation to connection. Foster carers have a pronounced impact on a young person's well-being because they are the people immediately responsible for their day to day safety, nurturing and support. The Department is also committed to supporting foster carers caring for these children and young people.

Supporting a young person preparing to leave care is a very important role. Teaching young people the skills, knowledge and common sense to survive and thrive on their own once they leave home is a big responsibility. The transition to adulthood is often not achieved simply because the young person reaches 18 years of age. It can often take many years to reach full independence.

A key part of the transition to adulthood is the development of life skills. These may involve simple and ordinary tasks such as learning to cook, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, or managing money and working. However, these are skills that need to be learned as they are vitally important to becoming independent.

Carers are often the most influential people in the lives of young people and are therefore well placed to teach these skills. Teaching practical life skills and values are important parts of developing young people into well rounded and happy adults.

Opportunities to teach young people in the course of everyday life are everywhere. The key is to be

aware that you have the capacity to teach young people in everything you do. 'Teachable moments' occur in everyday activities, in and around the home. Managing time, doing the shopping, cleaning the house, managing and maintaining relationships are

## What is leaving care?

For the purposes of this guide, the term leaving care refers to young people aged between 15 and 25 years who are leaving, or have left, the Department's care<sup>1</sup> and are moving to independent living.

Generally young people remain reliant on their family for support as they make the transition to independent adulthood. Many young people leaving care do not have these supports in their transition to independent living.

Evidence worldwide shows that children who have been in care face increased difficulties when they make the transition towards independent living and adulthood.

Young people who leave care are often at greater risk, particularly in areas of:

- homelessness,
- poor attachments with birth family and/or carer family,
- low educational attainment,
- unemployment,
- dependency on social welfare,
- imprisonment,
- young parenthood, and
- incidence of self-harm.

Often these young people, who are most vulnerable, move to independence with less supports than those who have not experienced out of home care.

### The three phases of leaving care:

#### Preparation (phase one)

The preparation stage focuses on ensuring that young people in care aged 15 years and over receive appropriate education and life skills development to enable a successful transition to independent living in the future. It is important this stage include discussions with the young person about the leaving care process and what it means for them. Case workers will support the young person to engage with life and independent living skills programs as part of the preparation stage.

#### Transition to independence (phase two)

Depending on the age at which a young person enters care, the transition to independence phase may occur at the same time as phase one. Planning for independence assists young people to access and maintain suitable accommodation and entry into education, training or employment. During this stage it is important to consolidate the development of life and independent living skills and build on the work undertaken as part of the preparation phase.

Case workers will also refer young people to a Leaving Care Service, where they are available, during this stage (see page 6). These services are funded by the Department and designed to support the move to independent living. They can also assist in developing linkages with other relevant agencies. Young people may be referred by youth agencies as well as by the Department and may enter, re-enter or leave the service at any stage.

Planning the young person's future and ongoing accommodation arrangements is a key task for those supporting young people transitioning from care.

#### After care (phase three)

Once the young person has left the CEO's care and is living independently, Leaving Care Services provide aftercare assistance including advice, referral and support in areas of employment, housing, health and other matters. These services also provide a point of contact so that ongoing supports continue, if necessary, until the young person is 25 years of age.

As part of the young person's plan for leaving care, after care goals will be clearly defined and planned.

The case worker will also explain to the young person what aftercare supports are available and the process for seeking future support from the Department (see page 7).

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<sup>1</sup> A child or young person is no longer in the care of the CEO if the child or young person:

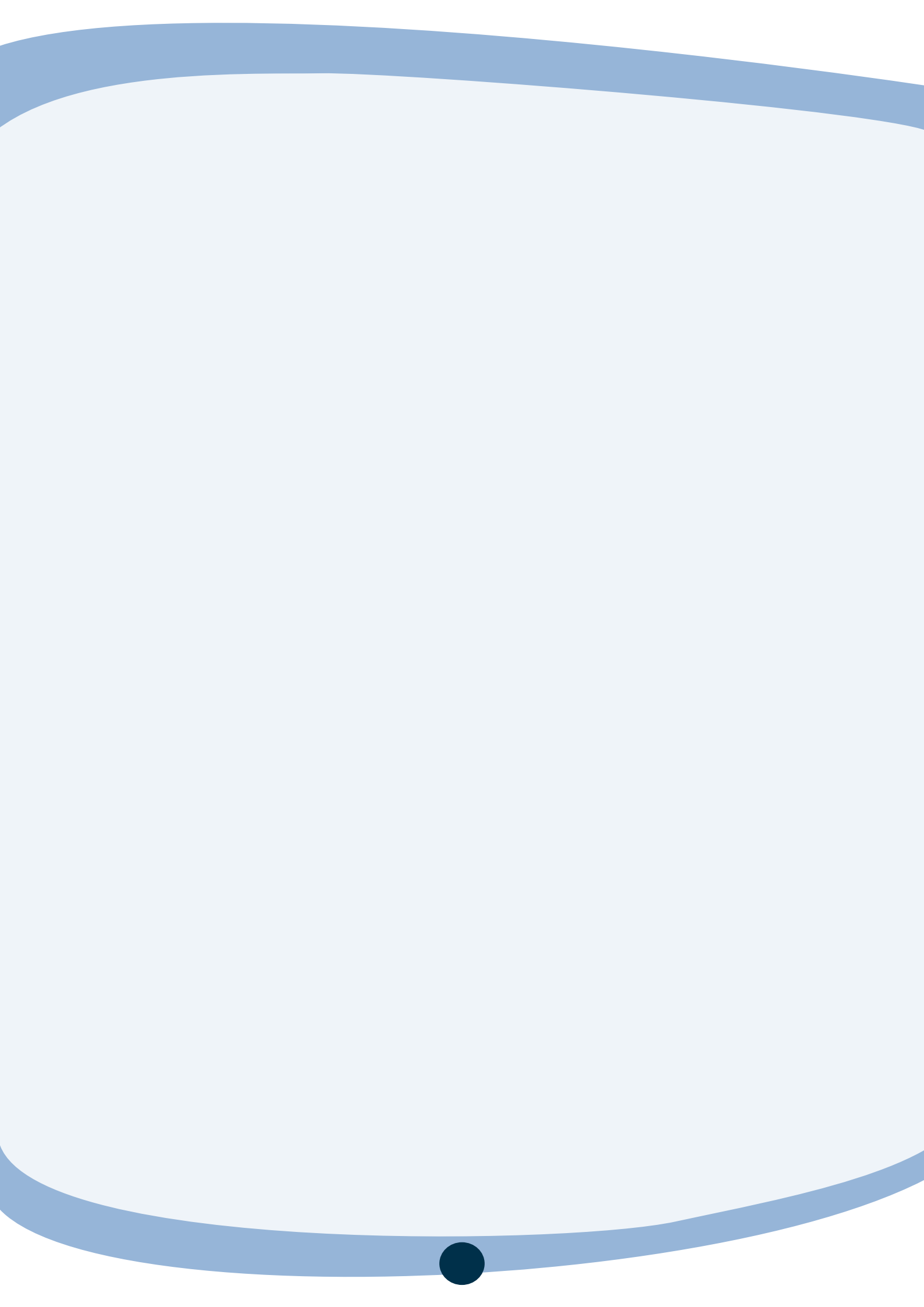
- is made the subject of a Protection order (supervision) or Protection order (enduring parental responsibility) or Protection order (Special Guardianship); or
- is no longer in provisional protection and care, or the subject of a Protection Order (time limited), or Protection Order (until 18); and/or
- no longer lives in placement services as provided by the CEO under section 32(1)(a)
- is made the subject of an Adoption Order.

Young people leaving the Department's care are entitled to assistance through a number of avenues<sup>2</sup>.

### Leaving care services

The Department funds three community sector organisations to provide four leaving care services across the state. These services take referrals of young people aged between 14 and 25 years who are in, or have left, the care of the CEO, with priority given to those most at risk and who have experienced multiple placements. More information on these services can be found under the leaving care services section of this guide.

### Transition to Independent Living





## Skill development for young people

This section of the guide is designed to offer points for discussion, as well as opportunities for skill development for young people. Much of it is part of everyday life, and many carers will already be focusing on helping prepare young people for adult life. Therefore, you are probably doing, or have done, most of the things outlined in this section.

The suggestions below are intended to supplement the things you are already doing. They may help fill in the gaps and assist in identifying and discussing some of the areas that need to be considered by young people as they prepare for leaving care and become adults.

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Home management, maintenance and house cleaning
- Security and safety
- Food, nutrition, cooking and recipes
- Shopping
- Food storage
- Hygiene.

### Getting started...

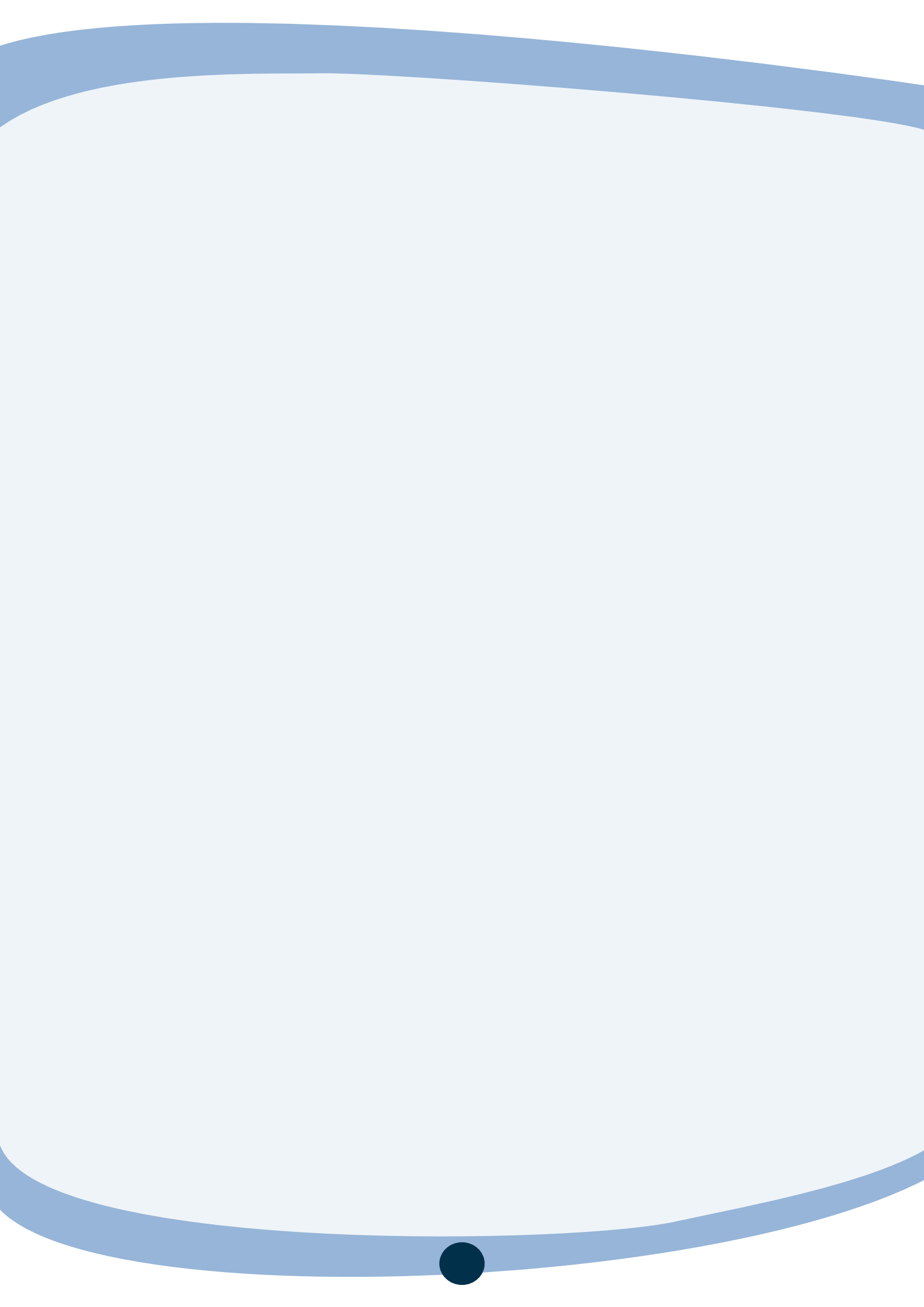
Part of preparing a young person for living independently is teaching those seemingly ordinary everyday things. It's often simple things that make the biggest difference, things like doing a proper grocery shop, meal planning, shopping with a list and comparing prices. Learning this stuff can save time and money.

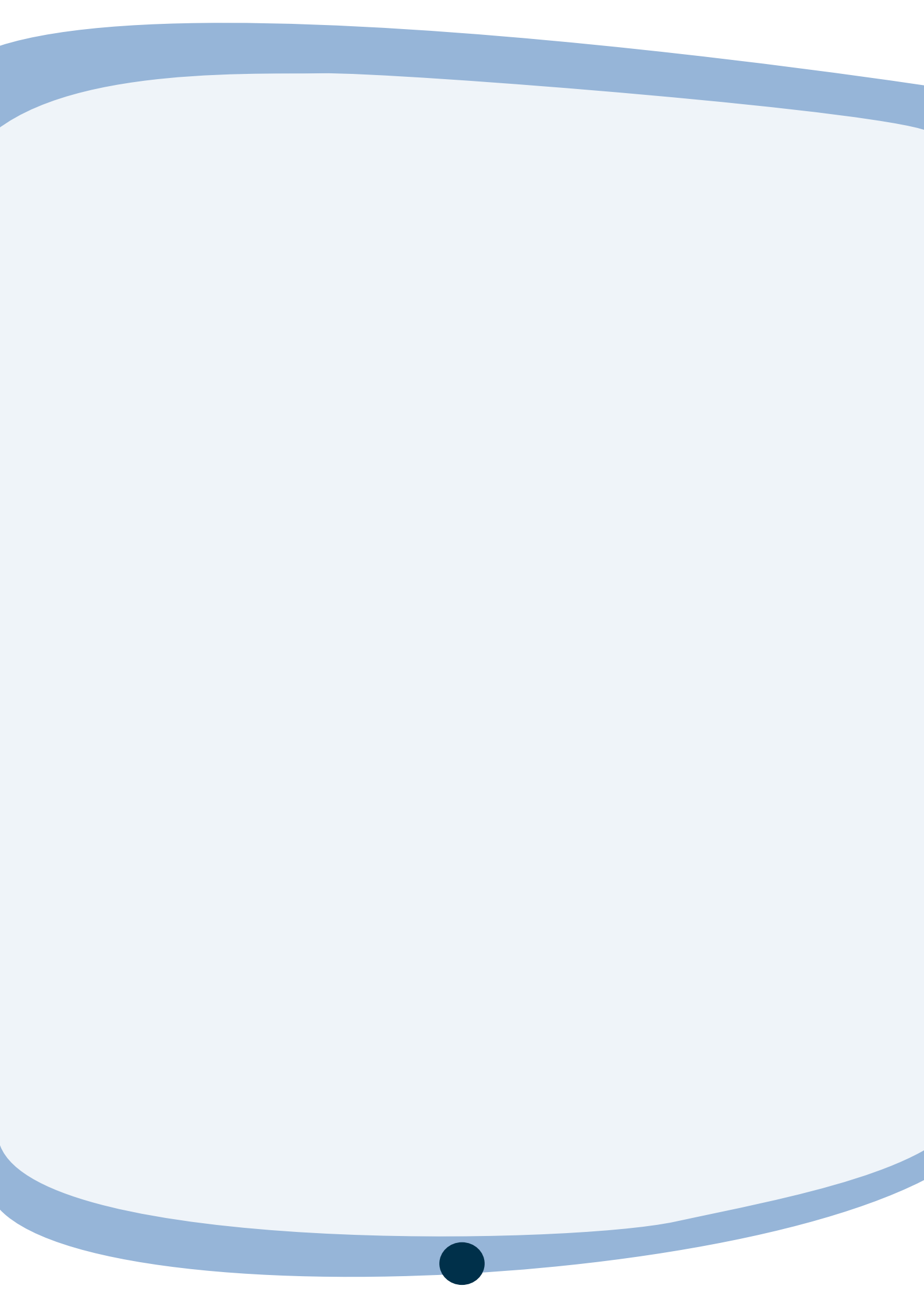
Below are some suggestions on how you can help young people develop skills they will need to use every day once they are living independently.

### Healthy food and nutrition

- Talk to the young person about food and nutrition during your meal times, discuss what you've made for dinner or lunch and what the nutritional benefits of each food is. Talk about high fat and high sugar foods and why we need to eat a balanced diet.
- Try to include young people in meal preparation.
- Help them develop a recipe book of their favourite meals and over time help them learn how to prepare and cook them.







## Identity and self-care

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Identification
- Keeping records
- Confidentiality and disclosure
- Emotional wellbeing and self-esteem
- Hygiene and personal appearance
- Emergencies
- Personal safety
- Culture and identity
- Religion
- Political interests

### Getting started...

Understanding who we are and being able to look after ourselves is another skill we need to continue to learn and develop as we become adults. Some young people find it hard to develop a healthy identity and self-care skills, particularly young people who are recovering from traumatic experiences in their past.

Given the right information and opportunity to do so, young people are usually capable of making good self-care decisions. By involving young people as full participants in their self-care, they're more likely to choose healthy behaviours throughout their lives.

Smoking, abusing alcohol, or taking illegal drugs can have a significant impact on young people who may have had negative experiences with these things in the past. With effective role modelling young people will learn that these activities jeopardize health and well-being.

Encourage the young person to think independently and express their own thoughts. This will help build a healthy sense of self and greater resilience.

## Personal Documents

When a young person leaves care they will receive their Child History Folder containing all relevant original documentation. The young person will be advised by their case worker that they will receive this information as part of the process of developing their Care Plan modified for leaving care.

Talk to the young person about why it's important to keep track of important documents and suggest some good places to store these types of things.

For details on personal information held by the Department, and how and when the young person will receive these, speak with the case worker.

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Family history
- Foster family
- Establishing and maintaining contact
- Reunification
- Family obligations and expectations
- Positive relationships and friendships
- Extended family
- Support networks and services.

### Getting started...

Relationships are important to all of us, and positive relationships are one of the most rewarding things in life. It's important that young people develop strong and positive connections.

Successful relationships take time to build and maintain and are based on trust, respect, care, support and friendship.

### Communication

One of the most important life skills is communication, and one of the most important parts of good communication is listening. If a young person feels properly listened to, they feel understood and validated.

### Conflict

Often the teenage years can be a time of increased conflict between adults and young people. Conflict is a normal part of relationships, and the teenage years can often be more intense because of many changes occurring for young people.

During adolescence these changes can happen

## Education and training

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Career options and linking training
- Traineeships and apprenticeships
- University
- Secondary School
- TAFE
- Government financial assistance.

### Getting started...

A good education is a key factor in overcoming disadvantage. Young people leaving care generally experience poorer outcomes in terms of education than their peers. It's important to set young people on the right path to a positive future and a good education can provide the right stepping stones.

All young people, in Western Australia must participate in some form of education, training or employment until they're 17 years old. Young people who decide not to continue with normal full-time schooling have other options they can choose. If young people decide not to stay in full time school for year 12 they have three options:

- Option 1) Participate in a full-time training program, apprenticeship or traineeship. This must be at a registered training organisation such as a State Training Provider (TAFE).
- Option 2) Participate in a combination of school, training and/or employment (e.g. part-time schooling and part-time training).
- Option 3) Participate in full-time employment rather than full-time schooling.

### TAFE – State Training Providers

Under a new agreement between the Department for Child Protection and State Training Providers all young people leaving care and those up to the age of 25 who have already left care, can have the associated fees waived for most of the courses offered through TAFE.

Instruction on how to get a TAFE fee waiver for a young person can be obtained from the case worker or through the Department's *Child Protection 10.17 Learning and Employment* available via the Department for Child Protection website ([www.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au)).

## Employment

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Career options
- Traineeships
- Apprenticeships
- Government financial assistance
- Job searching
- Centrelink obligations
- Work experience and volunteer work
- Superannuation
- Job Network Providers
- Maintaining a job.

### Getting started...

Finding a job can be challenging at the best of times. However, once young people know how to look for them they'll be easier to find. The suggestions below may help:

- Use word-of-mouth, family and friends particularly, talk to people about the young person looking for a job.
- Help the young person call up, or visit, organisations that they may like to work for and see if they have any positions currently available. Consider leaving some details or a resume there in case something comes up later.
- Look in the community newspaper and or the West Australian Newspaper, particularly on Wednesdays and Saturdays which have large employment sections.
- Get the young person to go on to job search websites such as [SEEK](#) and [Career One](#).
- Check out the government jobs board at the Western Australia government jobs [website](http://www.jobs.wa.gov.au/), [www.jobs.wa.gov.au/](http://www.jobs.wa.gov.au/).
- Centrelink's [Looking for work](#) webpage provides links to jobseeker services and other resources, [www.centrelink.gov.au/](http://www.centrelink.gov.au/).

- Information can also be found on the Job Services Australia [website](#) to help find the right service.
- Centrelink also provides access to phones, photocopiers, fax, job guides, pamphlets, a noticeboard and computers for typing up resumes and letters.

Once young people have a job, in the eyes of employers, they are often much more employable from that point on.

It's also important for young people to understand workplace expectations and norms, and participation and collaboration in the workplace. Young people need to be aware of how to operate in functional work environments and to know what they can do to assist resolving workplace grievances.

## Money and finances

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Budgeting
- Banking
- Income
- Paying bills
- Consumer protection
- Credit
- Grants
- Tax File Number and tax returns
- Gambling
- Compensation
- Emergency financial assistance.

### Getting started...

Financial stability is one of the most important elements of achieving stability in other areas of life. Learning money management skills like saving, credit cards and loans, and budgeting and spending can help young people learn important lessons before they become independent.

Many young people learn what's important about money from the adults around them. This helps develop an understanding of what's important and what's a priority in terms of what they spend their money on.

Young people might be eligible for allowances or other help with money either before or after they leave care. The young person can talk with their case worker about the services and supports available and how to apply for them.

### Budgeting

Teaching young people about budgets and more importantly how to stick to them can be difficult. Young people need to learn about competing priorities when it comes to money. If they have an income, talk to them about what they want to spend their money on, how long the money needs to last, what they actually spend it on, and how they might handle their money better in the future.

### Credit

One of the toughest lessons many young people face is learning the hard way about credit and its pitfalls. Talk to them about how credit works and consider mapping out a 'dummy' credit repayment system and show them how much the original item cost and how much it will cost by paying it back with interest.

## Drugs and alcohol

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Effects of alcohol
- Types of drugs and their effects
- The law
- Personal safety
- Smoking
- Drugs, alcohol and medications.

### Getting started...

It's important young people understand the dangers involved with drug and alcohol use so that they can make informed decisions which can help keep them and others safe.

As they get older young people will make their own decisions about whether or not they will drink alcohol. It is important that we teach them how to stay safe, and minimise the effects, if they do end up drinking.

Carers can help make the situation easier by encouraging open discussion about alcohol and drug use.

While most young people won't have a problem with alcohol or drugs, a supportive environment, where they can openly discuss difficult issues, reduces the risk of problems arising.

The facts are that alcohol use is very risky for young people and evidence suggests the longer they delay alcohol use, the less likely they are to develop problems associated with it. That is why it is so important to help young people avoid or limit any alcohol use.

It's important to remember that many young people in care may have been significantly affected by negative experiences around alcohol and drugs in the past.



## Personal and social development

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Hobbies and interests
- Social contact
- Sports
- Volunteering
- Presentation
- Personal development
- Social behaviour
- Social media and cyber safety
- Limits and boundaries
- Public transport
- Taxis
- Bicycles
- Walking
- Cars and motorcycles
- Learning to drive and licences.

### Getting started...

One of the most important things for young people is strong social inclusion. Encouraging young people to be involved in activities that include other people and particularly other young people will help.

Spending too much time alone can be counterproductive for some young people.

Many young people now use online social networking for much of their communication with friends. It's a great way to stay connected with your friends, provided it's done safely.

Cyber safety and social networking may not be part of your everyday life, but it will be part of the young person's. Understanding how to be safe and avoid pitfalls is important.

Information on cyber bullying and cyber safety can be found at [://www.cybersmart.gov.au/](http://www.cybersmart.gov.au/).

### Learning to drive

Learning to drive is also a great skill to have. The Department can help young people learn to drive and get a licence. Just ask the case worker for more information on how.

## Legal rights and responsibilities

### Some things young people need to know about...

- Legal Aid
- Legal rights
- Court systems
- Prosecutions
- Lawyers, solicitors and barristers
- Police
- Voting

### Getting started...

Rights and responsibilities change when we become adults so it's important to know what we can and can't do legally.

While young people will be able to do many things for the first time, such as vote, the penalties will also be much harsher if they break the law.

Young people's rights include the right to know about their time in care, to have a leaving care plan and to know who is responsible for providing them with aftercare support.

The young person's case worker can tell them how to see records about their time in care. Not everyone wants to do this and it can be upsetting, but they can be provided with a support person who can help if they wish.

The leaving care plan should include the young person's goals and record who is doing what to help achieve them. This might include agreements to help buy furniture, pay for textbooks or see a counsellor.

Ask the case worker what the young person might be entitled to and to explain who can help if things don't go according to the plan.

### Voting

By law, all Australian residents over the age of 18 must vote. It's an important right for all Australians, getting to have a say in who runs their country. Failing to vote may result in a fine. Before being able to vote you need to register with the Electoral Commission and this can be done by getting forms from the post office. Some schools will do this for young people in year 12 so ask a teacher about it. For further information on voting, check out the Electoral Commission's website.

The Department for Child Protection would like to thank all foster carers for their continued commitment to supporting young people undertaking the transition from care. The vast majority of carers will already be doing most of the things that are outlined in this guide and it is hoped that with a renewed focus on leaving care, these young people will develop into strong, resilient adults who contribute positively to their community.