



Making an Emergency Plan with Transition Age Youth in Foster Care in Philadelphia

A Checklist for Dependency Attorneys, Caseworkers, and Advocates

The COVID-19 pandemic has unexpectedly altered our lives and especially the lives of youth in foster care who need support and advocacy now more than ever. Caseworkers 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 and are not rendered more vulnerable as a result of the pandemic.

This guide details how to create an emergency plan for young adults in foster care and provides 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 and provide supports. **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 in the upcoming weeks.** 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.

CURRENT HEALTH

- **Is the youth aware of and 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.
 - Share the recommendations and information from the City of Philadelphia, which are available and being updated here: <https://www.phila.gov/programs/coronavirus-disease-2019-covid-19/>. **Youth can also get updates by text by texting COVIDPHL to 888-777 to receive updates.** Make sure that the youth is aware of the specific precautions and orders in place including the requirement to stay at home and not gather in groups.
 - Ensure that youth understand which health conditions place them at higher risk for severe illness and that they have a plan to stay healthy and seek medical assistance if necessary. For example, youth with asthma, compromised immune systems, or other medical conditions are at higher risk. Guidance is available here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/specific-groups/high-riskcomplications.html> .
 - Make sure the youth has access to a smart phone or computer/laptop and internet service so that they can get information and reach out for help if needed.
- **How is the young person feeling physically?**
 - Review the COVID-19 symptoms (cough, fever, respiratory distress) that youth need to be aware of for self-assessment.
 - Make sure they have a current number for their healthcare provider.
 - **Give them the number for the Greater Philadelphia Coronavirus Helpline: 1-800-722-7112.** This Helpline is open 24/7 and is staffed by healthcare professionals.
 - Help them develop a plan of action if they become ill or a member of their family becomes ill. Advise youth to call their healthcare provider before going to the emergency room and help them locate the best number to call.
- **How is the youth feeling emotionally? Are they feeling isolated, depressed, and/or anxious, and expressing or demonstrating a need for behavioral health services?**
 - Reassure the youth that increased anxiety and feeling isolated during this crisis is normal and can be triggering for youth. Brainstorm ideas for social contacts, coping mechanisms, and develop a stress management plan with clear actions and important contacts for every youth. Example here: <https://parentandteen.com/teen-stress-management-plan/> .

- If the youth is experiencing a mental health crisis, **Community Behavioral Health has a 24-hour crisis line that can be reached at 215-686-4420. You can also call the 24-Hour Mental Health Delegate Line at 215-685-6440. If you have questions about accessing services, including crisis services or CBH Member Services at 866-545-2600.**
- **The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) also operates a mental health hotline at (800) 950-6264 (or text 741741).** NAMI has a resource guide related to COVID-19 issues: <https://www.nami.org/getattachment/Press-Media/PressReleases/2020/COVID-19-and-Mental-Illness-NAMI-Releases-Important/COVID19-Updated-Guide-1.pdf?lang=en-US>.
- Discuss with the youth any concerns or worries they may have about being at home or spending time with partners or loved-ones that makes them feel unsafe. Let them know that you can help them find resources if they are experiencing any domestic or partner violence or abuse. **Share with them the number of the 24/7 hotline run by Women Against Abuse: 1-866-723-3014.**

MEETING ONGOING HEALTH NEEDS

- **Does the youth have active health insurance and know how to use it?**
 - Remind youth that the COVID-19 test is free regardless of type of (or lack of) insurance.
 - Make sure the youth has a copy of their health insurance card?
 - Youth can check the status of their health insurance by calling their caseworker, CUA worker, or the Health Management Unit at DHS. Youth can also call the **Pennsylvania Health Access Network helpline at 877-570-3642** if they have questions about their insurance.
 - Youth may have health insurance through their college and should check how benefits work if a youth is off-campus. It may make more sense for the youth to leave the college's health insurance plan and enroll in Medicaid (Medical Assistance) depending on where they are residing and what coverage their university health insurance offers for off campus providers.
- **What is the youth's plan to maintain their ongoing health and behavioral health needs?**
 - **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 caseworker and obtaining court orders as needed.
 - **Are there mental health treatment needs?**

- Work with youth to develop a plan for continued access - see below tips to make sure youth have the technology available to set this up.
 - If the youth already had services in place before the crisis, ask if they have the number for their therapist or counselor to see if remote sessions are available. The youth may need to check with their counselor to determine whether remote sessions would be covered by their insurance. Work with them to reach out to identify if remote access is available or to set it up.
- **Does the youth have any current or ongoing medical issues that will require attention during the crisis?**
 - Make sure the youth knows where to go for treatment during the next month and where to go if there is a crisis.
 - 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 whenever possible.

HOUSING/PLACEMENT

- **Is the youth in a stable and secure placement where his or her needs can be met?**
 - Are they in a placement that they can remain in during the crisis? This means that they need to be able to stay there for at least the next two months.
 - Is this a placement where their health needs can be met, including those related to reducing chances of contracting the virus?
 - Is there any risk that the youth will need to leave their placement during the crisis?
 - If the youth expresses that they may have to leave their placement for any reason, including that they are turning 21, immediately contact the program and the youth's caseworker and DHS to advocate for the youth to stay in the program for the duration of the crisis.
 - Share DHS's policy that no youth will be discharged from their placement because they are no longer compliant with their board extension.
 - If the youth expresses that they want to leave care or their placement please advise them of the serious health risks of leaving a stable placement at this time. Contact DHS, the youth's child advocate attorney, and AIC coach and YVlifaset coach if applicable and seek their assistance in counseling the youth.
 - If the youth currently rents an apartment and cannot pay rent for the month due to effects from the crisis, seek assistance from the provider agency or DHS to prevent homelessness.

- You can help the youth reach out to Community Legal Services to determine whether there are any moratoriums on eviction and to refer the youth to a housing attorney. **Community Legal Services Housing helpline is in operation at this time and can be reached at 267-443-2500.**
- **Is the youth concerned about payment of utilities?**
 - Advise the youth that There will be NO electric, gas, water, or landline home phone shut-offs in Philadelphia at least through May 1. These utilities will remain ON. In addition, PECO and PGW are waiving new late payment charges through at least May 1, 2020.
 - If the youth does not have working electricity, gas or water, they should reach out immediately to the utility company.
- **Is the youth a college student who has been advised to move out of their dormitory?**
 - Contact youth in college immediately to assist them in making arrangements for housing if they are no longer permitted to remain on campus.
 - Determine whether they can make requests to stay on campus if they would like to do so and help them create an argument for why it is in their best interests to remain in on campus housing.
 - Notify DHS immediately of a need for placement if they cannot or do not want to remain on campus and are in extended foster care.
 - If the youth is not in extended foster care and is not able to remain in the dorms, help them call AIC and ask about the availability of room and board assistance and help them contact Together We Rise at info@togetherwerise.org to see if they can provide any assistance.
 - 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: <https://www.uhaul.com/Articles/About/20625/College-Students-U-Haul-Offers-30Days-Free-Self-Storage-amid-Coronavirus-Outbreak/>.
- **Does the youth have a backup housing plan in case of an emergency?**
 - Help youth come up with a backup housing plan by speaking with them about other resources and supports that they may be able to access. Are there other relatives, family friends or supports that they can use?
 - Work with youth to identify family members or other important, safe adults who could be housing options in case of an emergency. Offer to help youth find and make contact with those adults if they are concerned or hesitant about reaching out.

TECHNOLOGY, DEVICES, AND INTERNET ACCESS

- **Does the youth have sufficient access to phone and internet to meet their needs for the next several weeks?**
- **Does the youth have a working cell phone and sufficient minutes that can be used throughout the crisis?**
 - Ensure that the youth has a working cell phone that can be used throughout the crisis. Advocate for emergency funds from the provider or DHS if this is not the case.
- **Does the youth have internet service?**
 - Comcast is offering free broadband internet to low-income households. Youth apply for this free service by using this link: <https://variety.com/2020/digital/news/comcast-free-broadband-low-income-households-coronavirus-1203532765/> To prove that they are low income they can tell Comcast that they receive Medicaid.
 - Spectrum is also offering free internet for students in K-12. Contact them at: <https://www.wect.com/2020/03/15/spectrum-offer-free-internet-students-during-coronavirus-outbreak/>
- **Make sure that you have a backup number for the youth in case they lose service.**
- **Make sure that the youth has the numbers for all of their important contacts including your phone and email, the caseworker and their supervisor. (Use the form below.)**

FOOD AND BASIC NEEDS

- **Does the youth have enough food (or money for food) to get through the next few weeks?**
 - If they are in a SIL program ensure that they have access to their stipend funds and request additional funds if the youth used wages from work to purchase food and other daily living needs and that income is not available. If they were normally picking up their stipend at the agency, determine with the youth how they will get the funds if the agency is closed.
 - Help youth apply for Foodstamps (SNAP) if they are eligible, but know that that will not meet immediate needs. If the youth's food stamps were turned off, inform the agency caseworker that there will be additional needs for food and essentials.

- Share information with the youth 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. Here is a list of locations: <https://www.phila.gov/2020-03-14-find-free-meals-and-safe-spaces-for-students-while-schools-are-closed/>
 - You can search for foodbanks in Philadelphia here: <https://www.philabundance.org/find-food/food-map/>
- **Does the youth have enough money to meet his or her basic and daily needs related to clothing, hygiene items, and incidentals?**
 - Help the youth access emergency assistance from the provider agency or DHS.
 - Get a list of the essential items that the youth will need in the interim and a proposed budget for those items and expenses.

TRANSPORTATION

- Talk with the youth about any transportation needs.
- Talk with youth about plans for transportation in case of shelter in place orders and/or reductions in public transportation options.
- Make sure the youth understands what precautions to take if using public transportation to protect his or her health.
- Make sure the youth has sufficient money to pay for transportation if they need to use transportation to get around.

PARENTING

- **Is the youth parenting and in need of immediate funds to meet basic needs?**
 - Help the youth identify the unmet needs and make requests for emergency funds from the provider agency and DHS.
 - County Assistance Offices are currently closed, so all actions related to benefits like TANF can only be conducted online at <https://www.compass.state.pa.us/compass.web/Public/CMPHome>. If you have questions about eligibility for benefits you can also contact Benephilly at 844-848-4376.
- **Is the youth parenting and in immediate need of food or formula?**
 - Help youth apply for WIC if they are not already receiving WIC. You can start the application here: <https://www.pawic.com/OnlineApplication.aspx> The youth may

still have to come into the WIC office to complete the application but it is critical to start the application as soon as possible.

- Advise youth that the federal government has given states flexibility in their WIC eligibility determinations, such as certifying eligibility remotely and issuing benefits up to three months in advance.
- **Does the youth have other immediate needs for themselves and their children?**
 - Ensure that youth are 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 funds to purchase these items are an issue, assist youth in identifying a local charitable group who can provide basic supplies or request emergency funds from the provider or DHS.
 - Ensure that the youth has the resources they need to provide activities and care for the child if the child's daycare and other activities are now canceled.
 - Ensure that the youth has a plan for meeting any health and other needs of the child, including that they have reached out to the child's pediatrician if there are upcoming visits or if they have ongoing medical concerns.
- **Does the youth have a child in foster care?**
 - Help the youth ensure continue contact and visitation.
 - 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.
 - If they are supervised visits, 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, 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.
 - The youth should call their attorney if they have questions about their rights as a parent. **They can also call Community Legal Services Family Advocacy Hotline at 215-981-3765.**

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- **Has the youth's coursework moved to a remote setting?**
 - Confirm that the youth is receiving the information needed for the school, college or vocational training program.
 - Ensure that they have the equipment and internet access they need to succeed in a remote setting.
- **Resources for laptops if the youth is in college: email One Simple Wish at info@onesimplewish.org**
- **See below for information about free internet access from Comcast and Spectrum.**
 - 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 some youth in foster care. If a professor is unwilling to be flexible, contact the Dean of Academic Affairs and/or the campus foster youth program.
 - If 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 one on one tutoring sessions.
- **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.
 - 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. 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 video calling or other digital resources.

EMPLOYMENT

- **Is the youth's work being affected during the crisis?**
 - Advise youth that they may be eligible for unemployment benefits if they meet certain criteria. See this [information](#) provided by Philadelphia Legal Assistance that explains the application process and who may be eligible.
 - For college students who had work-study jobs, help them check with their schools to see if they can continue to receive work-study payments and/or do work-study jobs remotely. [Federal guidance](#) has authorized schools to pay students who are losing work hours due to the COVID-19 crisis.
 - If the youth was working and is now not permitted to come to work, check whether they are entitled to any paid time off or sick leave through their employer. If they think that they were denied in violation of Philadelphia's emergency paid sick leave.

STAYING CONNECTED TO ACTIVITIES AND PEOPLE

- **Is the young person staying in contact with important people?**
 - Assist youth in compiling a list of important contacts to keep with them during the crisis (see template emergency contact list below). You can even fill out the form with them and then email it to them so that they have the list on their phones.
 - Make sure that they know how to reach you specifically (i.e., is your office open? Are you checking voicemails? Email?).
- **Do they have the ability and/or a plan for staying 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 joining 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.
- **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, work or hobbies to fill the day.

CONTACT LIST

Important Contact	Phone and Email	Notes
Family members		
Other supportive adults		
Case worker		
Case worker's supervisor		
AIC Coach		
YVLifeset Coach		
Child Advocate Attorney		
Child Advocate Social Worker		
CASA		
Doctor's office for youth		
Pediatrician for the child if the youth has a child		

Therapist/clinician		
School contacts		
Childcare provider (if applicable)		
Local food bank		
Local pharmacy		
Emergency contact numbers		

Special thanks to the Youth Law Center for developing the original tool Juvenile Law Center adapted to provide information to young people in Philadelphia.