



On Their Way

PREPARING YOUTHS FOR THE FUTURE

guidebook

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Introduction

The ON THEIR WAY Curriculum was created to assist caregivers as they prepare youths for future goals. Throughout this curriculum, caregivers are defined as adults caring for young people who live with them. This can include many people such as:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Foster Parents | Biological Parents |
| Adoptive Parents | Respite Parents |
| Residential Counselors | Mentors |
| Kinship Parents | Transitional Parents |



Oftentimes, caregivers underestimate their influence on young people. Caregivers get busy meeting day-to-day demands and overlook the importance their positions have in changing the outcomes for foster youths as they transition to adulthood. Recognizing this powerful role can help caregivers realize they **can** make a difference with a young person that *does* last a lifetime.

Research indicates that caregivers are critical in promoting increased educational opportunities for young people. More than ever, education beyond high school, even just completing a one-year training program; will increase a young person's ability to sustain themselves once they leave foster care. Caregiver influence is often correlated to a youth's interest in exploring post-secondary opportunities.

ON THEIR WAY hopes to increase caregivers' ability to understand the range of options available to young people today and how to help them navigate the sometimes unknown process of obtaining education beyond high school. If caregivers can encourage youths to embrace education as a *lifetime of learning*, and not just as getting through high school, then young people could well be on their way towards more successful futures.

ON THEIR WAY includes both a DVD and guidebook to assist caregivers to learn ways to promote educational and life skill goals while working on day-to-day demands.

ON THEIR WAY will suggest ideas for daily activities and conversations with youth on critical areas such as jobs, budgeting, housing, and health.



ON THEIR WAY will also help caregivers understand a youth based website, www.OnYourWay.org (fully described on page 4). Both this program and the website work in tandem, but they also can be used effectively as separate tools.

Special Features

The *ON THEIR WAY Guidebook* is divided into sections corresponding to the eight sections of www.OnYourWay.org.

1. Planning My Education
2. What I Like to Do!
3. What Are My Choices?
4. How Do I Pay for It?
5. Who Can Help Me?
6. Staying Healthy to Succeed
7. Where Will I Live?
8. Getting Connected

Five special features (described below) are consistent for each section. The information and features provided are useful for involving young people in the home regardless of whether or not www.OnYourWay.org is used.



Understanding Adolescents

- A commonly used adult saying about adolescents is discussed.



Message

- Main points are listed at the beginning of each section.
- These are valuable messages that are worth repeating and to be used as frequent reminders.



Things You Can Do

- Simple activities that can be incorporated into your everyday schedule are listed in each section.
- These activities are meant to strengthen the connection between a suggested topic and youths' future successes, and to increase caregivers' knowledge of the topic.



On Your Way Website Features

- Each section will contain a list of some special aspects of www.OnYourWay.org that relate to the above mentioned topics.
- Special aspects are activities that go beyond the basics of the website, such as completing profile fields, viewing videos, and listening to the animated antics of Jamal.



Dinner Discussions

- Discussion questions/statements are suggested that relate to a corresponding topic to try to bring lively discussions to the family dinner table.
- Discussion ideas are suitable for adults, adolescents, and even younger children to learn and enjoy during dinner discussions.

ONLYOURWAY.ORG

www.OnYourWay.org is a **FREE**, secure website created for young people ages thirteen and older. Some aspects will also be helpful to younger youths with adult guidance.

Benefits

- A young person can begin a secure on-line profile, inserting information about family history, health, education, goals, and so forth.
- As young people move through the foster care system, information will never get lost. It will always be stored in one place, www.OnYourWay.org.
- Young people will build their skills for things that are required for a successful future, such as budgeting.
- Young people will explore the range of educational options available and save favorites in their profiles.
- When youths “age out” and realize they need information about their past, they can access the information via the Internet, without having to visit the social service agency.

Caregiver Role

- Caregivers need to assist youths in understanding why information is important in the adult world, something young people rarely grasp.
- Caregivers are needed to initiate, support, and motivate a young person to “work” the www.OnYourWay.org site and complete a profile.
- Incorporating suggestions from the **ON THEIR WAY** Curriculum will help motivate and support youths’ efforts.
- Caregivers can help to reinforce the idea that the site is intended to be completed over time – albeit a little at a time - but the goal for a youth is to complete the profile prior to leaving foster care.
- Resources are listed on all pages of the website that can help youths learn more about the topic being presented. Those resources are connected to a shopping cart for on-line purchase.

Using www.OnYourWay.org

- Youth must create a user name and password to begin using the site.
- Each section has a short video introducing the topic and why it is important.
- An animated character, Jamal, is always located in the top right hand corner. His job is to tell the user new information or reinforce important messages.
- Each section has fields to insert information. As the user inserts information, he or she can proceed through the section.
- Some sections are less involved and easier to complete than others.
- Users can always save the information and go back another time to complete the section.
- Users can always go back to the section and change any information; goals, favorite schools, addresses, references, etc.
- Some sections have a special activity such as an interest assessment, creating a resume, making a budget, using website connections, and many other cool aspects for learning.



Planning My Education

Understanding Young People ~ “They have no common sense.”



“Common Sense” can actually be developed through experience. Adolescents are very concrete in their reasoning and as a result; do not understand ideas the same way as adults. Adults should not assume young people understand instructions given in what might be considered abstract terms or complicated sequencing ($A+B=C$). The developing mind of an early adolescent is much more concrete ($A+A=A$) and the traumatic effects of movement in foster care can also delay the development of a young person’s ability to understand abstract instructions and discussions.

Be patient. Take the time to “connect the dots” for young people. Help them understand how concepts come together. (“It will take an hour to wash and dry clothes. What time should you get started to be done before dinner?”) As adolescents have more life experiences, their ability to connect consequences to actions will increase. What adults and caregivers often interpret as a “lack of common sense” is actually a concrete thinker who needs more life experiences to develop the ability to “connect the dots.”

In this section of www.OnYourWay.org, young people will begin personal profiles that incorporate their past and present personal information. At this point they probably will not understand the importance of having a profile. Adults however, understand because they have had life experiences that required having this information available. Please support your young people in completing this information gathering experience. It may not be very much fun at first, but this “seemingly unimportant” information will become more valuable as youths grow up and move out of foster care. Imagine a 27 year-old foster care alumnus who desires to return to school to increase his education and earnings. Without a personal profile to turn to, limited knowledge of his past and information about his connections to others could impede his ability to apply to school or for a job. For many young people, not just foster youths, this hurdle can be enough to discourage their pursuit of both education and job opportunities.

Messages



1. As caregiver, help young people in your home create an **On Your Way** profile before they leave your care. Even if they just start the profile with you, they can finish it anywhere they go after leaving your home.
2. A plan is needed to succeed: “If I fail to plan, I plan to fail.”
3. A plan to succeed can be started now – there is no time to waste.
4. Learning is for a lifetime.
5. Caregivers and other important adults need to “raise the bar” and expect youths to finish high school and continue forward – even if it is just one more year of education or training, this can increase their *earning* potential and chances of success.

Things You Can Do



1. Understand that the education you received to be successful in the adult world may not be the same level young people need today to be successful.

2. Help youths connect classes in school to possible work options: English to journalism or reading plans, Math to carpentry or medical training, Psychology to work with either or both people and animals, PE to Physical Therapy or labor, Art to advertising or professional painter, designer, and website design, and Science to work in all kinds of jobs, including cooking.
3. Encourage youth to enroll in concrete skill building classes – computer, cooking, carpentry, auto, first aid, babysitting, lifesaving, etc. (Studies have shown such classes help maintain a youth’s motivation to stay in school.)
4. During school breaks (summers, holidays, and teacher-work days) suggest that youths sign up to attend skill building camps or experiences (such as preparing food at a soup kitchen). These opportunities build character and survival skills.
5. Ask youths about specific skills they use in each class – such as time management, organization, listening, advocacy, speaking, communication, etc.
6. Start discussions of how those same skills can be used in the real world.
7. Begin to identify teachers or mentors who see youths’ strengths. Which of those adults would write a nice reference letter?
8. “Raise the bar” by encouraging youth to enroll in more challenging classes and taking more classes than the minimum required to graduate.
9. Review transcripts of high school students. Make sure sophomores and juniors schedule time to meet with their guidance counselors to evaluate gaps in their classes. Seniors may not have time to fill those gaps and therefore should be involved in discussing options on how to “catch up” or “get ahead.”
10. Encourage youths to do extra work on tough subjects (i.e., instead of the required homework problems in math... do additional problems). Be sure to positively reinforce their commitment to learn.
11. Expose youths to as many post-secondary educational options as possible as part of a vacation (visit trade schools, community colleges, universities, etc), or during a drive home from an errand, or by going on the Internet (as an alternative to on-site visits).

On Your Way Website Features



- The development of a profile begins with this section and continues throughout the site.
- Youths will have the opportunity to insert many aspects of their education (testing, general school information; such as areas of study and extra skills classes) in their profiles.
- As information changes (such as grades, SAT scores, number of classes, references), youths can go back and adjust their profiles accordingly.
- Youths will answer some questions related to their preferences for education after high school (post-secondary) and what types of jobs they would like (careers). This information will be used to sort through their options and start a search for appropriate matches.

Dinner Discussions



- Have everyone including adults, express a “dream” of what they would want to learn after high school (or if they went back to school) and what they would hope to do with that learning experience.
“If I could learn anything in the world... I would learn _____ and then hope to _____.”
- Use meal time to plan a family day trip to look at a school or business (job) in the area. Have every family member (regardless of age) express:
 - Where would they go?
 - What would they want to see?
 - What may be an area of interest at the school or business they could pursue?

What I Like to Do!

Understanding Young People ~ “They don’t do anything.”



It may seem hard to believe, but adolescent bodies and minds are always doing something. However, it may not be what you want them to be doing at that moment. Adolescence is a time of growth in all ways: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. In fact, adolescents’ brains enter a rapid growth spurt in adolescence lasting well into their twenties, particularly in the areas of executive matters: decision making, logic, and understanding risks and consequences. One way to get adolescents to “do something,” is to give them options regarding work experiences and extra-curricula activities. Experts have repeatedly stated that youths participating in extra-curricular activities and work experiences (no more than twenty hours per week) have more advantages than their peers in areas of communication skills, stress management, increased academic performance, decreased use of drugs, and violent behavior. A great way for adults to help is to assist youths in finding extra-curricula options in areas they express interest!

Messages



1. This section helps make a connection between what youths like to do and careers that match their interests.
2. If a young person likes a chosen career, they will stay motivated and want to go to work, increasing their knowledge and productivity.
3. Assist youths to get work experiences now (it can be volunteer or paid) to allow them to check out areas of personal interest. This can help increase their earnings (both now and later) and assist them in learning about what they might or might not enjoy doing as a job or career.

Things You Can Do



1. Explore a range of activities such as sports, music, theater, volunteering, opera, etc., in your community. Exposure to more options will allow youths to make better decisions.
2. Connect youths to those activities they are good at or seem to enjoy – even if they are not very good at them now.
3. Help youths use those activities to see the range of work experiences (how many jobs do you notice at a veterinarian’s office – it’s not just the doctor).
4. Ask if they have ever thought they could earn money doing something they like to do.
5. Encourage work experiences – list the potential options for both paid and volunteer experiences in your community during school holidays and vacations.
6. Provide incentives for youths to explore volunteer work experiences (even if only for a day) during school holidays and vacations. Non-monetary incentives, such as a special dinner in their honor, their choice of movie rental, permission to attend a function or get a job, have a friend over, or some trinkets provided by a local business, church or school are good alternatives to money. Use your creativity and youths’ interests to think of other incentives.

7. Visit different places in your community to find out what interests them.
8. Work together to find local educational information related to your young person's area of interest.

On Your Way Website Features



- Youths will have an opportunity to start listing favorite activities and things about themselves for their profiles.
- Youths can do something called an interest inventory that is based on a process that uses the Holland Codes (explained on the website).

Dinner Discussions



- The family can discuss dream jobs and what makes those dream jobs.
- The family can discuss things they are doing now that they never thought they would like.
- The family can identify things they would like to do in the future. Can they also identify jobs or careers connected to those activities?
- Try to name as many jobs or careers as possible that are associated with activities the family has identified as what they like to do.
- An employed family member can give detailed descriptions of activities during a typical day at work. Other family members can identify activities that they find interesting or would seem to enjoy.

What Are My Choices?

Understanding Young People ~ “They make bad decisions.”



So... are you really worried about the *BAD* decisions young people make – or are you worried about allowing young people to make any decisions for fear that these will have unfortunate outcomes? You are not alone. This is an area where nearly all adults struggle. Adults will often make many decisions concerning youths because they fear the outcome of “youthful decisions.” Learning to make decisions comes from experience. Youths must make decisions to be able to learn the decision-making process. Adults may need to consider whether allowing the natural consequences of some decisions could assist youth learning. Regardless, adults can help youths learn a more thoughtful decision-making process.

PACE is a quick and easy method to teach youths how to consider their options.

P – Ask youths: What is the **PROBLEM**? Realize youths and adults will not always see the same problem. Some situations have multiple problems. Deal with one problem at a time.

A – Ask youths to identify five **ALTERNATIVES** to solving the problem. If they can only think of two, help them identify three more. Try to always come up with five options. All options are viable. Do not evaluate the options yet.

C – Ask youths to **CHOOSE** one of the five (or more) options.

E – Ask youths to **EVALUATE** whether it seems the choice could solve the problem.

Sometimes the choice can create a new problem. If the problem is not solved, ask youth to select another option until he or she is satisfied with the results. This method can be used at the family table using an everyday low-conflict problem. Example: There is not enough milk for breakfast tomorrow and no time to go to the store tonight. Now **PACE** yourself... and teach the whole family how to identify and evaluate options.

Messages



1. Help youths realize they can increase their earnings by increasing their level of education.
2. Education can be pursued later so the information gathered now has future use.
3. Returning to school is possible even if youths' have dropped out.
4. Youths with a GED need to continue their education to increase earning potential.
5. Many people work and go to school at the same time. The challenge is to create a balance so students do not have to quit school.

Things You Can Do



1. Promote job shadowing activities as a means to help youths explore what type of education is needed for a specific career. Job shadowing opportunities can last an hour to a full day depending on the youth and employee who will be shadowed.
2. Contact people you know in the community to see if a young person could “shadow” at their workplace. It is extremely helpful to match youths' interests with a compatible workplace.

3. Teach the decision-making process (**PACE**) and practice it often. Ask youths, “How do you plan to do to solve your problem?” (Let them own the problem.)
4. Allow youths to practice decision-making in the home.
5. Practice time-management. Help youths make a schedule of activities (don’t do it for them) and estimate the time needed for each activity.
6. Help youths learn to prioritize their **Needs and Wants** (not your priorities). Have them make a list of 10 things they love. After that – they need to rank them in order (#1 being the thing they love most; #10 being the least). After that – tell them (pretend) they can only pick five of the ten things. Now tell them and they have to provide the money to do each. Would they still take the top five? Which five would they pick now knowing they have to pay for it?
7. Allow youths to make mistakes – in fact you want them to make mistakes now while you are still around to help them.
8. Permit natural consequences to occur whenever possible. For instance, if youth breaks something at a store, he or she is responsible to pay for it. **PACE** the situation and let youths decide how to solve their problem.

On Your Way Website Features



- Youths can learn more about job shadowing and how to participate in those experiences.
- Youths can create resumes based on information already entered into their profiles. The resume is preformatted but can be adjusted as needed by cutting and pasting into a word processing document such as Microsoft Word™.

Dinner Discussions



- Discuss the salary differences between someone with a high school diploma, GED, college degree, or trade certificate. How are these different in your community? (Note: Communities can have different salary grades for their workforce. This usually corresponds to community needs for specific jobs.)
- Discuss the difference between **Needs and Wants** especially when financing each. Are there needs that cost nothing? What are those? What are the most expensive needs? Wants?
- Pose the question: If you were living on limited funds which would you give up – cable TV, a car, video games, or all take out food (Taco Bell, Hardee’s, Pizza, KFC, etc.)?

How Do I Pay for It?

Understanding Young People ~ “They spend money like it grows on trees.”



Remember the first lesson presented - young people are often very concrete. This is most true in money matters. Unless they are holding it, earning it, spending it, trying to find more of it...youths will not learn effective ways to manage money.

Bottom Line: Young people need money to practice managing it before they are on their own. As concerned adults, one of your goals is to help get money into

youths hands as early as possible: allowance, extra chores, neighborhood jobs, etc., are opportunities to teach budgeting skills. Once youths are old enough to have a part-time job (no more than twenty hours per week) they will benefit from valuable lessons about money and life that non-working peers will miss. So, what if they decide to spend their first paycheck on a gift for their girlfriend (and they break up two days later). It is their money and a valuable lesson will be learned that they would have otherwise missed. Make a deal with them that they need to save half of everything they earn. Celebrate saving milestones such as opening a bank account and meeting goals. The more practice youths can have with money management, the better prepared they will be as young adults living on their own.

Messages



1. Money is available to attend school, even trade schools, with additional assistance available for foster youths.
2. It's never too early to learn budgeting skills.
3. Youths need to have money to learn and practice budgeting.
4. Help young people begin to earn and save money at a young age.

Things You Can Do



1. Practice budgeting – use examples from your family budget.
2. List items that need budgeting now as a teen and later as an adult, such a rent, clothes, car payments, insurance, etc.
3. Allow youths to write out checks to pay bills (you sign the check). This can teach appropriate check writing skills.
4. Look for financial literacy classes at banks and consumer credit agencies for youths to attend.
5. Encourage money making opportunities. As a general practice, suggest youths place at least one-half of their earnings in savings accounts (not to be touched).
6. Have everyone in the household participate in making a list of all the supplies, furniture, appliances in one or more rooms in the house – go through each list and as a group, place an estimated price on each item. For any items youths have already collected and could use when living on their own, estimate the cost and add these up to show the amount they have already saved for the future.
7. If your youth is interested in a trade such as cosmetology, trucking, electronics, computers, etc., consider exploring the community college system as a possible less expensive way to receive training. If more training is desired after completing

that type of program, then point out that youths could transfer to another school that has a more extensive curriculum in that career field.

8. Find other youths who pursued continuing education (foster care alumni if possible), to speak with your young person about their experiences and who could offer advice on what to do now and in the future.
9. Use play money to allow youths to practice “purchasing” items from around the house for a week. Some things might be a weekly rent, meals, clothes, laundry, transportation, electricity, cable, etc. Consider expanding this practice to a month after one week has been practiced a few times.
10. Help youths open a savings or checking account (many banks have programs specifically set up for young people) and help them to begin accounting for their income and expenses.
11. Create a list of budget categories. Play a game of determining which expenses belong to certain categories (such as food, recreation, utilities, transportation, housing, personal care, health, etc.).
12. Begin a “change” jar for collecting extra change. After several months, have youths count the money and help them decide how to spend half of it (save the other half).

On Your Way Website Features



- Foster youths will learn tips for completing the FASFA (Federal Application for Student Financial Aid).
- Youth will learn how to anticipate expenses and they will begin to create a budget based on those needs. The online budget is interactive and self-tabulating.
- Youths’ expense budgets are compared to their anticipated incomes and the differences are projected. The budget information will stay in youths’ profiles and can be updated as new information becomes available.

Dinner Discussions:



- Start a discussion about the pros and cons of having a credit card. Mention stories associated with both sides of the discussion.
- Have a discussion about ways to legally increase a person’s income while maintaining a fulltime job. Suggestions could be short-term, temporary, or permanent solutions.
- Have the family talk about their short and long-term financial goals. Short-term means a goal to complete in two months or less. Long-term are those that will take several months or years to complete.
- Ask family members to suggest food items that correspond with various levels of income, suggesting that the more money a person earns impacts the food they can afford. For instance, a student may eat noodles or soup for dinner but after graduating with a trade or degree, that same student could afford a fully balanced dinner.

Who Can Help Me?

Understanding Young People ~ “They think they can do and know everything.”



Young people do see themselves as all powerful and much smarter than adults. Fortunately, most adults have the ability to remember when they felt the same way – although they may not have broadcast those feelings throughout the house. Role-playing or modeling by verbally expressing how helpful it is to ask and receive help from someone, is a great way to send the message that no one can do it alone.

Avoid lecturing; otherwise adolescents will quickly “tune you out.” Try using moments during car rides, meals, and similar opportunities to casually mention when someone did something helpful.

People are meant to live in a community interdependently, not in isolation. Foster youths already see themselves as isolated and that “no one knows how it feels to be me.” That is true. Everyone walks a different path. As an influential adult in their lives, you can help youths find their path and learn how and when it is appropriate to ask for assistance and support. This lesson can make the difference in helping youths achieve their goals.

Messages



1. This section addresses academic and personal support (not mental health).
2. Everyone needs help – it takes strength in character to seek help.
3. Don't be afraid to ask for and accept help.

Things You Can Do



1. Readily enlist the help of tutors (volunteer or paid), to help youths minimize the negative feelings or stigma that is associated with asking for help.
2. Encourage youths to become a tutor at school in a favorite subject.
3. If youths lack classes needed to attend college, discuss attending a community college to “catch up” and transfer when appropriate.
4. Attend school meetings to learn about resources available to students – many schools offer free tutoring by teachers, upper classmen, or volunteers. Other schools have partnered with local higher education programs to help students earn credits for both high school and college simultaneously.
5. Discern the type of learners you have in your home (visual-seeing, auditory-hearing, or kinesthetic-touching) and help them understand how this may impact how they choose to study.
6. Promote and encourage student study groups in your home and with church groups.
7. Role-model getting help for yourself and others in the family.
8. Concretely identify those around you and others in the household who are available to help and the kind of assistance each can offer (different people for different needs).

9. List groups that are available for help or support in schools, the community, or churches.
10. Encourage your young person to plan and coordinate dinner for the family, using family members to assist with different tasks. Discuss how working together as a team makes a difference in process and meal.

On Your Way Website Features



- Youths will begin to explore the range of educational services and departments available to help students succeed.
- Youths can take a learning style quiz and discover ways that can help them study more effectively.

Dinner Discussions:



- Adults can tell a story of how they have sought and received help for a particular need. Encourage the family to individually and collectively tell their own story.
- Have each family member identify one area/skill/subject/sport they may want to receive help to improve. It should be an area they are currently not receiving assistance.
- If the meal was produced by several family members, discuss how helpful it was to have a team approach to making the meal. Was it more fun? Did family members complain less about “when dinner would be ready?” Was dinner more enjoyable to eat? Why? How does the coordinator of the meal feel about the help they received?

Staying Healthy to Succeed

Understanding Young People ~ “They think they are immortal.”



For reasons previously stated, adolescents do not always consider their health when involved in risky activities. Abstract reasoning, typical of adult thinking, brings connections between eating fast food and obesity; driving fast and injury; having sex and diseases; smoking and illness; and so forth. Despite attempts by health professionals, educators, and community leaders, youths continue to take health risks. It is still important for parents, caregivers, and other influential adults to send messages that “connect the dots” for adolescents. Experts on adolescent development continue to support parenting messages, indicating that although adults do not think young people hear them, they indeed do listen. It is more important however, to role model responsible health behaviors.

As with other issues, allow youths to practice monitoring their own health, charting exercise or weight charts, making doctor appointments, taking their own temperature, understanding when emergency care is required, and learning CPR and first aid. These skills will guide them to making more healthful decisions.

Messages



1. Get help for both physical and mental health needs and concerns.
2. Be aware of potential health concerns and learn about them. Awareness can help a person stay healthy.
3. Maintaining good health is essential to happiness and success.

Things You Can Do



1. Help youths understand the difference between health emergencies and non-emergencies. In general, foster youths across the country have not shown competency in responding to their health needs. Data indicates that foster youths use emergency rooms for even simple medical concerns.
2. Role model good practices to managing your own health issues, such as regular doctor visits, exercise, stress relief, etc.
3. Plan healthy meals and making family decisions around healthy activities.
4. Involve youth in planning at least one healthy, low-fat meal per week. Ask youth and other family members to suggest healthy items such as baked potatoes instead of fried potatoes.
5. Help youths learn to make and prepare healthy food choices.
6. Help youths identify risk issues (predisposed and other concerns) specific to them and assist in their gathering information and learning more about those issues.
7. Teach youths to make and schedule their health appointments.
8. Attend appointments with youths. Help them create a list of questions to ask their provider and then allow them to ask the provider the questions.
9. Allow youths to monitor whatever vitamins and/or medications they take (as appropriate and approved by the responsible authority).
10. Teach youths (or have someone else teach them) about personal safety.

11. Encourage youths to get involved in their school SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) program.
12. Take CPR and first aid classes with your young person or as a family.

On Your Way Website Features



- Youths will have a place to insert all their medical information (self and biological family). This information is securely stored and will always be available to them.
- www.OnYourWay.org includes a list of common teen health concerns with corresponding websites so youths can learn more about each health issue.

Dinner Discussions



- Ask everyone in the family if they have a health issue that they know very little about and would like to have more information. The family can discuss what they know about the issues including ways to learn more and how to get help in the community.
- Have each person in the family discuss one thing they can do to maintain good health. Nothing can be repeated.
- Have family members discuss the health benefits of the meal they are eating as well as consequences of eating too much or too little of various food items. Ask family members to suggest healthy food items to prepare for other meals.
- Identify reasons for going to the emergency room, what can be treated over the drugstore counter, and reasons for scheduling a doctor's appointment.

Where Will I Live?

Understanding Young People ~ “They are clueless about how much it costs to live.”



Housing issues are extremely important to foster youths. As they age out of care, many have never experienced how to secure a stable home. As a result, they often resort to “couch-surfing” – the process of staying for short periods of time at the homes of a variety of different people. Couch-surfers do not consider themselves homeless. Their situation, however, is at the whim of their host, making themselves vulnerable to “true-on-the-street” homelessness. Their lack of experience with housing issues and knowledge about what to do is a critical deficiency. Many adults move out on their own for positive reasons and with support (marriage, jobs, school, and military) whereas foster youths often move out for reasons frequently associated with abandonment and lack of support.

Yes, youths are clueless, but you can help to give them a clue. Make regular connections between daily activities and household expenses. Let youths see your utility bills. Help them understand the language on those bills, and if available, rental agreements. Explore the costs of apartment or house rentals and compare these to youth’s actual and projected incomes. When a youth is working, begin a savings program where youths save 50% of their earnings but designate 30-40% to “rent” as preparation for security deposits and other startup housing costs. Savings and “rent” should be placed in *their* savings account to use when they move out on their own. There is so much that can be done in advance to prepare youths. Make the time to give them a clue!

Messages



1. Housing is a very foreign concept to young people – up to this point they have pretty much been told where to live with little involvement by them in the planning.
2. Understanding housing language is essential.
3. PLAN. Youths must leave care with some information about how to plan for housing. *“If I fail to plan, I plan to fail.”*
4. Homelessness: In general, studies have shown that between 40% and 50% of all foster youths experience some homelessness after leaving foster care.

Things You Can Do



1. Practice a range of housing issues with the youths: cleaning, budgeting items, creating lists of items for the home, bargain shopping, etc. Make a connection with how these issues are part of planning for housing. (For instance, what would you do without a toilet brush?)
2. Have youths practice completing a housing rental application and reviewing a lease. Explain the differences and what they mean.
3. Explore different housing options in your community and get youths involved in the visits. Hands-on exposure is the best teaching method.

4. If college bound, discuss college vacations and dorm closings – where will youths go during those times?
5. Start looking at local costs for housing rentals, electricity, water, cable TV, etc., and work on a budget using those costs.
6. Compare the housing costs and determine whether the least expensive rentals are the best options.
7. Help youths create a list of all the things they need (and want) in a home or apartment.
8. Get youths involved in collecting things they will need to live on their own (this will help save money later on). Try garage sales, donations from friends or family, thrift shops, etc.
9. Help youths start a budget (using their current incomes) and map out apartment costs as if they were on their own.

On Your Way Website Features



- The video in this section provides a look at housing options on a college campus and in the community (if attending a community college or trade school).
- Youths are provided downloadable housing documents to explore rental terms, applications, and a sample rental lease.

Dinner Discussions



- Begin a conversation listing the pros and cons of having a roommate.
- Brainstorm potential roommate conflict situations and problem-solve those with youths.
- As a family discuss what each person would want in a first apartment. Adults can discuss their experience in their first place away from home. What did you have or want? What did you need? How are things different now for young people?
- Discuss the range of housing options that exist in your community. Look at everything from the room over Grandma's garage, to homeless shelters, hotels, boarding houses, etc., and under what circumstances might you live in each option.

Getting Connected

Understanding Young People ~ “They think they don’t need anyone.”



Most young people, regardless of foster care, are around people all the time: school, home, work, sports, church, etc. Developmentally they are often in conflict with these people. This conflict is normal and natural – so a reasonable youth response would be “I don’t need anyone.” It is not until young people move out of foster care or their permanent homes, that they experience being physically alone.

Before that moment, it is difficult to imagine why being connected to others really mattered. Current studies of foster alumni indicate that the strength of a young person’s support network is the single most influential indicator for a successful transition to adulthood.

Adults can teach youths how to initiate a connection such as joining a group, introducing themselves to a group of strangers, helping them identify community issues that interest them, and generally getting along with others. Youths still may not appreciate the value of being connected until much later, but at least you will have taught skills they can use in getting connected.

Messages



1. Youths who are connected to people in the community where they live have a greater likelihood of being safe and successful.
2. Even one connection to a caring adult (outside the system) can make the difference in the life of a young person transitioning from foster care.
3. Staying connected to others is a lifelong goal: friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc.

Things You Can Do



1. Help youths practice social skills - role play using telephone skills, introducing self, interviewing others, etc.
2. Help youths practice meeting new people - role play situations and then practice these skills in stores, at churches, meetings, and other settings before allowing youths go it alone.
3. Play a game of “Commonalities.” Each person should find something in common with another person. The commonality could be a sport, interest, goal, favorite item, etc. Persons should try to find a different commonality with each person. This can be played by adults and young people of any age in any setting: party, meeting, event, family reunion, etc. The goal is that people of all ages and situations should be able to find something in common.
4. Help youths identify and reconnect with someone from their past and miss.
5. Help youths create a list of people they can turn to if needed. Ask: Under what circumstances would you turn to one person instead of another?
6. Explore and encourage family and or youth to attend school functions.
7. Explore youth group options at your local church, YMCA, recreation center, etc.

8. Take an interest in youths' friends, address them with respect, and allow them to meet *your* friends.
9. Facilitate connections with birth families as appropriate or permitted.

On Your Way Website Features



- Youths will begin to insert information about groups and organizations they belong to or may join.
- Youths will be prompted to include information about their biological family and either their adopted or family of choice. Existing associations that are concerned with foster youth's interests will be displayed.
- The video in this section will pull together stories of the young people previously profiled throughout the website.

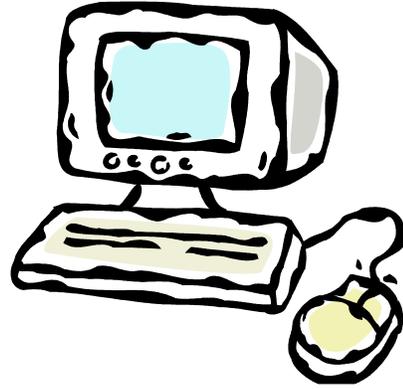
Dinner Discussions:



- Have everyone in the family suggest ways and places to make connections at school or after school, in the community, and at church (things that are connected to their interests).
- Have everyone speak about someone new they met that day or week and with whom they had something in common (even a store clerk could work).
- Have a discussion about character traits that make good friends and trustworthy people.

Your IT Connection

Useful Technology Information for
www.OnYourWay.org



General Information

1. Dialup and broadband internet users will be able to view videos without a problem.
2. Because this is a secure website, the young person **MUST** remember the **USER NAME** provided during “*sign up*.” If the **USER NAME** is lost or forgotten, a new account must be established and profile information will be lost.
3. Suggest the young person select a **USER NAME** they will not easily forget.
4. **PASSWORDS** can be changed or reset if forgotten or lost.
5. To change a **PASSWORD**, users may enter their current **USER NAME** and **PASSWORD** and click **PROFILE**. Instructions are provided at the top of the screen.
6. User may also change their email address on the **PROFILE** page.
7. If a youth loses a password, the “*forgot password*” feature on the home page will automatically reset the user password. A message with the new password will be sent to the email address provided during “*sign up*” (or later changed in the **PROFILE**).
8. The Jamal character (animated feature in the upper right hand corner of the screen) can be utilized in a variety of ways:
 - Click “*Yes*” to listen to Jamal with your speakers turned on,
 - Click “*Shhhh*” button (this will stop Jamal but you are still able to use the rest of the section), or
 - Click “*No*” to read Jamal’s comments in callout boxes across the screen. If your speakers are turned on, you will be able to hear Jamal as well as read his comments.
9. If a youth does not complete a page and wants to return later, click the **SAVE** button located at the bottom of the page. This will save the information that has been already inserted and return the user to the top of the page.
10. The **CONTINUE** button on each page will save the information and advance to the next page. It is **NOT** necessary to press both **SAVE** and **CONTINUE**.
11. A youth’s information cannot be accessed by anyone but the **USER** with a password.
12. Some pages offer direct links to other resources. By “clicking” the link, users will be able to view the link without leaving www.OnYourWay.org

PROFILE Information

1. All pieces of information inserted by users in fields throughout the site are included in their profiles. It is saved and can be retrieved with the appropriate user name and password.
2. The Profile button at the top of the website only sorts through educational and employment information and is helpful for quick access.
3. Information can be changed by simply going to the corresponding section of the website and changing it at that point. Be sure to click **SAVE** at the bottom of the page.

4. To print profile information from the website (immunization record for instance) the user must go to the related section and page with that information.
5. All text, including questions asked, that the user wishes to print from the website page must be hi-lighted by using the cursor (mouse).
6. Users can then click “*print*” and “*selection*” (from their mouse – right click for most users) to have the areas hi-lighted printed. **NOTE:** Clicking the print icon provided by your Internet server may not print the desired text.

MY SCHOOLS Information

1. The MY SCHOOLS connection at the top of the website helps users sort through thousands of schools to find the ones best suited for their needs and interests.
2. Profile information concerning school needs is easily accessible at the top of the MY SCHOOLS section to assist with using the sorting engine at the identified website.
3. Users may insert the website and contact information of their favorite schools and save in the MY SCHOOLS location for future use.

RESUME Information

Creating a resume (is a feature in “*What Are My Choices?*” section).

1. The resume is created by responses youths’ provided in their website profiles.
2. The “*See Your Resume*” button will format the information into a resume structure.
3. To print and use the resume, be sure to follow the directions listed on that page.
4. As information is changed in the profile, the resume will be updated.
5. Be sure youths save the resume on the hard drive of the computer or mobile disk drive. The user will then be able to access it at anytime without having to go to the OYW website.

If you have questions about other aspects of the website, the DVD, or this guidebook, please call Independent Living Resources, Inc., 800-820-0001.

References

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Mahoney, Sarah, “Why Teenagers Act Weird,” (June 2005), *Prevention Magazine*, Rodale Press.

“Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own,” (May 2007), Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative.

Independent Living Resources, Inc. Publications:

- Build Your Own Roots and Records Book
- Foster Parent Training Collection
- Independent Living Program Strategies.
- Putting It Together