

Emergency Planning with Transition-Age Youth in California's Foster Care System: A Checklist for Dependency Attorneys, Youth Providers, and Advocates

The COVID-19 pandemic has unexpectedly altered our lives and the lives of youth in foster care who need support and advocacy. The pandemic has been ongoing for over 18 months, and many young people are experiencing pandemic-related fatigue and continued disruption to normal life. County workers are working to meet their supervision and case planning duties, including in-person visits and video calls as appropriate, while also continuing to exercise appropriate public health precautions. Collaboration with young people and their full network of support remains critical to ensure that youth feel safe, stable, and cared-for.

This updated guide details some of the components of an emergency plan for young adults in foster care and suggests 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 public health crisis continues. 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. 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.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to the forefront of our minds the need to be prepared for ongoing emergencies as it relates to vulnerable youth, unfortunately other crises have arisen (such as the 2021 wildfires) or are likely in the coming years. Much of the content of this toolkit will be useful in a variety of contexts to support youth in foster care in their times of greatest need.

Contents

This document is divided into a series of nine topical checklists, each related to the potential material, physical, and/or emotional needs of young adults in foster care, which may need to be addressed in the context of an emergency situation such as COVID-19. The topics included below are (click a section heading below to jump directly to that checklist):

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This guide concludes with [an emergency contact list template](#) (Page 17) that can be completed with youth to help ensure their awareness of and access to vital support resources during a crisis.

Note on Hyperlinks

This toolkit contains hyperlinks to numerous online resources. Hyperlinks are indicated by underlined text which appears in blue if you are viewing this document in color. (Email addresses and internal document links to jump to a referenced section of the toolkit also appear in underlined blue text.)

If you are using this toolkit in a printed or scanned version, to access hyperlinked resources please see the original electronic version of the document at <https://ylc.org/resource/emergency-plan-with-tay-in-foster-care>. Additionally, we recommend that you access the electronic version of this toolkit as it and any linked resources may be periodically updated as circumstances change.

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If you wish to adapt this toolkit in whole or in part for use in your jurisdiction or for any other purpose, please credit this toolkit as the source document as “Emergency Plan for TAY in CA Foster Care, YLC 2021.”

Checklists

Food Security

1. *Does the youth have enough food (or money for food) to get through the next few weeks?*

- With the youth on the phone with you, submit [a CalFresh application online](#).
 - Be sure to correctly answer the questions that trigger, specifically, emergency CalFresh—i.e., that the youth's household makes less than \$150 monthly and has less than \$100 on hand right now, and/or their household's combined monthly income and money on hand are less than their combined monthly rent and utilities. Follow up with the county CalFresh office [by phone](#) to ensure receipt and processing of the application within three days and to verify any information that may pose a barrier to eligibility.
 - As of August 2021, all CalFresh households are now eligible to receive an emergency allotment that will raise each household's monthly CalFresh allotment to the maximum allowable allotment based on household size. The household may also be eligible for an additional emergency allotment as well. The California Department of Social Services has been issuing monthly All-County Welfare Directors Letters regarding CalFresh emergency allotments and additional benefit allocations. The most recent letter dated August 11, 2021 can be found [here](#) and future letters regarding any changes to the emergency allotments can be found [here](#).
- If the youth receives CalFresh, help the youth find grocery stores, including Wal-Mart, Safeway, and Amazon, that will accept their EBT card [online](#).
- Send the youth information 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. Help the young person call the food bank, Google search for local school lunch resources, or call 211 if it isn't clear whether their local food bank is open or if their hours are limited.
 - [California Food Banks](#)
 - [Feeding America](#)
 - [211](#)

Foster Care

1. *Is the youth about to turn 21 years old?*

- Advise the youth that due to the impacts of COVID-19, all young adults who turned 21 while in Extended Foster Care on or after January 27, 2020 are authorized to continue receiving support through December 31, 2021, pursuant to the voluntary reentry requirements described in [All-County Letter \(ACL\) 21-51](#). Coordinate with the youth's social worker or probation officer to confirm that the youth will continue to receive case management and funding support until December 31, 2021. See [ACL 21-96](#) for details.

- Note: Juvenile court jurisdiction terminates as a matter of law when the youth turns 21 years of age; however, youth may continue to receive support from either child welfare or juvenile probation without court-oversight upon signing a voluntary reentry agreement and agreeing to reside in an approved setting. The youth's social worker or probation officer must work with the young adult to help them develop a transition plan, which should include identifying natural supports along with community-based systems that the young adult may access once there is no further support available from either child welfare or juvenile probation. See [ACL 21-96](#) for further details.
 - If the youth decides against continued extended foster care support after 21, the youth can "opt in" again until December 31, 2021 by signing a voluntary reentry agreement and agreeing to reside in an approved setting.
2. *Is the youth worried about meeting the extended foster care (EFC) participation requirements due to gaps in work or school?*
- Advise the youth and their social worker or probation officer that the education and employment conditions of EFC are waived through September 30, 2021. From October 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021, the waiver of the participation conditions continues *if the reason the youth cannot meet a participation condition is due to the impact of COVID-19*. Even if none of the participation requirements are met, funding should still continue. See [ACL 21-96](#) for further details.
3. *Is the youth eligible for, but not currently participating in, extended foster care?*
- Eligible youth ages 18 to 21 can still petition the court to re-enter extended foster care. Social workers and probation officers can conduct reentry assessments by phone or video, and they can work with the youth to sign the [Mutual Agreement for Extended Foster Care \(SOC 162\)](#) and [Voluntary Reentry Agreement for Extended Foster Care \(SOC 163\)](#) digitally or via email or text.
 - Social workers and probation officers should immediately assist the youth in finding a placement. They cannot postpone housing and services in order to file or hear a reentry petition in juvenile court. See [ACL 21-96](#) and [ACL 19-105](#) for further details.

Healthcare & Mental Health

1. *Is the youth aware of and do they have an adequate understanding of the current health crisis?*
- Review the main points of the current public health emergency and basic guidance on protecting oneself and preventing the spread of the virus, including wearing masks, receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, and maintaining social distance. Recommendations from the California Department of Public Health are available and being updated [here](#).
 - Make sure that the youth is aware of the specific precautions and orders in place in their county.
 - Ensure that the youth understands which health conditions place them at higher risk for severe illness and have a plan to stay healthy. CDC guidance is available [here](#).

2. *Has the youth (age 12 and older as of August 2021) been informed about their eligibility for the COVID-19 vaccine?*

- Vaccinations, including vaccinations against COVID-19, are considered “ordinary treatment” pursuant to California Health and Safety Code (HSC) section 1530.6 and California Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) section 16519.57, and therefore, a licensed or approved foster caregiver or residential care provider (facility administrator or their designee) may consent to vaccinations for a foster youth without a need for a court order. For more information, see [All County Information Notice \(ACIN\) I-42-21](#).
- If the foster youth is still a minor, the decision to get vaccinated is not solely up to the youth. If a minor foster youth would like to be vaccinated, but their parent or foster parent doesn’t consent to the youth getting vaccinated, the minor foster youth should consult with their legal counsel to pursue the matter further.
- Nonminor dependents age 18 and older are legal adults who are able to consent to vaccination without receiving any additional permissions.
- Remind the youth that the COVID-19 vaccine is free regardless of their type of insurance or lack of insurance. Information about health insurance is discussed in question number 5 of this section.
- For additional information and guidance on the safety and effectiveness of the COVID-19 vaccine, see The American Academy of Pediatrics Policy Statement, available [here](#) and the Center for Disease Control’s (CDC’s) Vaccine Guidance, available [here](#).

3. *How is the young person feeling physically?*

- Review [the COVID-19 symptoms](#) (particularly cough, fever, and respiratory distress) that youth need to be aware of for self-assessment.
- Make sure the youth has a current number for their health provider and/or the county health line in case they develop symptoms or have health-related questions.

4. *What is the youth’s plan if they or a loved one get sick?*

- Advise the youth to call their healthcare provider before going to the emergency room and help them locate the best number to call.
- The youth may need to receive testing for COVID-19 and/or quarantine if they have had close contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19.

5. *Does the youth have active health insurance?*

- Remind them that the COVID-19 test is free regardless of their type of insurance or lack of insurance.
- Youth can check the status of their Medi-Cal by calling the hotline at 800-541-5555. They will need their birth date and Social Security Number or Medi-Cal ID. The youth’s social worker or probation officer should also be able to help the youth confirm their Medi-Cal ID number and status.
- Youth in college may have health insurance through their school and should check how benefits work if they are accessing services off-campus. It may make more sense for the youth to leave the college’s health insurance plan and enroll in Medi-Cal depending

on where they are residing and what coverage their university health insurance offers for off-campus providers. Students should communicate with their colleges about waiving the student health fee if they decide to switch to Medi-Cal.

6. *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 social worker and obtaining court orders as needed.

7. *Does the youth have any current or ongoing medical issues (including mental health concerns) that require attention?*

- Make sure the youth knows where to go for treatment. Depending upon the youth's physical location and the impact of the pandemic in that particular area, regular medical services may be handled differently, and youth will need information and 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. Additionally, advise the youth about the importance of attending telephone or virtual medical and mental health appointments in a private location where they cannot be overheard so that their privacy rights are respected.
- Talk with caregivers, youth, and the youth's social worker or probation officer about plans for transportation for in-person appointments while public transportation options may be running on a reduced schedule or may not feel safe for the youth or family.

8. *Is the youth feeling isolated, depressed, and/or anxious, and expressing or demonstrating a need for mental health services?*

- The COVID-19 pandemic has had a strong impact on mental health and well-being for youth in foster care. If the youth is experiencing a mental health crisis, every county operates a 24/7 crisis intervention number. A list of these numbers is available [here](#).
- The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) also operates a mental health hotline at 800-950-6264 (or text 741741). NAMI also has a [resource guide](#) related to COVID-19 issues.
- Brainstorm ideas for social contacts, coping mechanisms, and develop a stress management plan with clear actions and important contacts for every youth. The Center for Parent & Teen Communication offers [an example stress management plan](#), and the CDC has provided [a guide for talking about COVID-19 with young people](#).

9. *Is the youth struggling to manage interpersonal relationships?*

- Share with the youth some evidence-based strategies, such as DBT skills, for [communicating their needs](#) and [managing interpersonal stress](#).

10. *Does the youth feel unsafe at home due to domestic abuse?*

- Discuss with the youth any concerns or worries they may have about being at home or spending time with partners or loved ones that make them feel unsafe. Let them know that you can help them find resources if they are experiencing any domestic or partner

violence or abuse. The National Domestic Violence Hotline is available 24/7 at 800-799-7233.

Housing

1. *Does the youth have access to stable and secure housing where their needs can be met?*

- Counties have an obligation to offer safe and appropriate available housing to youth in care, including non-minor dependents. See the [Foster Care](#) section above.
- If the youth thinks that they may have to leave their transitional housing program for any reason, including that they have reached the maximum age of participation, immediately contact the program and the youth's social worker or probation officer to advocate for the youth to stay in the program for the duration of the crisis, and contact the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office at 877-846-1602 or fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov. The following is a short list of reasons that a youth should remain in their program:
 - Youth who turn 21 in extended foster care after January 27, 2020 can remain in extended foster care without court supervision until December 31, 2021. Foster care payments for those youth will continue until December 31, 2021. Transitional housing programs therefore should keep youth in the program until at least December 31. See [ACL 21-96](#) for details.
 - Youth in a transitional housing program have a right to receive written notice of termination and a right to appeal the loss of housing. In most cases, youth should be advised that they do not have to leave their housing program if they have not received written notice. Advocates can also help youth pursue a grievance or appeals process once they receive such a notice.
 - The youth may be protected from program discharge if their city or county has suspended evictions due to the COVID-19 crisis. This most clearly applies to youth in THP-Plus programs, as those programs are required to follow landlord-tenant law. See [MPP 30-920.1\(p\)](#) for details. For more information regarding youths' rights in THP-Plus (transitional housing for former foster youth ages 18 to 24 (or 25 in certain counties)), see Youth Law Center's Advocacy Guide: [Preventing Involuntary Exits from THP-Plus](#).
- If the youth can no longer live in their supervised independent living placement (SILP), their social worker or probation officer has a duty to help them find another SILP. They can approve the new SILP without an in-person inspection. The inspection can be done remotely through December 31, 2021, and the social worker can collect signatures by email or text. See [ACL 21-96](#).
- If the youth expresses that they may have to leave their resource family home or short-term residential therapeutic program for any reason, advise the youth that [the laws to prevent abrupt placement changes](#) still apply. Contact the social worker or probation officer immediately to begin implementing a placement preservation strategy.
- If the youth currently rents an apartment and cannot pay rent for this month or has past-due rent due to the pandemic, research and counsel the youth on [AB 832](#), the state

wide eviction moratorium currently in place (until September 30, 2021) to halt evictions in most cases. In addition, some local jurisdictions, such as Los Angeles, offer additional protections for tenants. The Law Foundation of Silicon Valley has created a [FAQ about the current eviction moratorium](#).

- If the youth is a college student and experiencing housing access issues at UC, CSU, or California community college, they should first contact the campus foster youth liaison (likely Guardian Scholars, or NextUp). If they are unable to assist, elevate the concern to the campus's Provost's office and the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office (877-846-1602; fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov). If a youth is at a private college, call the college's director of residential life (or equivalent). Explain that the youth is in foster care and cannot readily secure alternate housing. Follow up with an email to the residential life contact, attaching proof that the young person is in foster care and copying the Dean of Students and the director of the college's foster youth or low-income student support program.
- Ensure that the youth is aware of local civil legal aid resources that may be able to help with housing resources, guidance on housing law, and other benefits. Search for legal assistance in your county at <https://www.lawhelpca.org/>.

2. *Does the youth have a backup housing plan in case of an emergency?*

- Come up with a backup housing plan. Call transitional housing programs on behalf of the youth or offer to stay on the phone with them as they call. See the following provider lists for contact information:
 - [THP-NMD Provider Roster](#)
 - [THP-Plus Provider Roster](#)
- Work with the youth to identify family members or other important, safe adults who could be housing options in case of an emergency. Offer to help them find and make contact with those adults.
- For any current or former foster youth who lacks stable housing, advise them to contact Together We Rise at info@togetherwerise.org.

3. *Is the youth in need of emergency housing?*

- Contact the youth's social worker or probation officer to request emergency placement. Counties have an obligation to offer a "safe and suitable placement that is immediately available to the NMD" ([ACL 19-105](#)).
- If the county is not able to immediately provide emergency housing options for the youth, contact the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office (877-846-1602; fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov).
 - If the youth does not have a place to stay tonight, contact [Covenant House](#) or consult the [California Foster Youth Handbook](#) for other options.

Income & Employment

1. *Is the youth in need of income to cover unexpected expenses?*

- Run through the income support programs that are available to transition-age youth. A comprehensive summary is available [here](#).
- For questions related to federal Economic Impact Payments (aka stimulus checks), Child Tax Credits, the Earned Income Tax Credit, and other sources of funding available to youth, see the Youth Law Center TAY Pandemic Funding Maximization Matrix available [here](#). You can also find information about the Child Tax Credits [here](#).

2. *Is the youth's work being affected during the crisis?*

- Advise the youth that they may be eligible for unemployment or disability benefits if they meet certain criteria. California made changes to unemployment and disability benefits to assist people whose work was negatively impacted at the outset of the pandemic. Some of those changes are ending and others are in flux. Youth should consult the [State's Employment Development Department \(EDD\) resource page](#) for updated information, but may need the assistance of an advocate to navigate any EDD processes, which have proven exceedingly difficult during this time.
 - The [One Fair Wage Campaign](#) has also started a relief fund for restaurant and gig workers affected by the crisis. Youth can apply to receive assistance as it becomes available.

3. *Is the youth a college student who was receiving work study income or some other form of financial aid?*

- Many campuses are resuming in-person instruction and services, meaning that on-campus work study jobs may be available, although this may change as the semester progresses. If the youth is a student with a work-study job, help them check with their school about their policies for compensating student employees if work moves remote again, or if students or the workplace they are in are required to quarantine.
- Note that colleges received money through the Higher Education Emergency Relief Funds III (HEERF III) in order to provide direct emergency assistance to students. Undocumented students are eligible to receive these funds, and this emergency assistance is not considered taxable income. Colleges are supposed to prioritize "students with exceptional need, such as students who receive Pell Grants or are undergraduates with extraordinary financial circumstances in awarding emergency financial aid grants to students. Beyond Pell eligibility, other types of exceptional need could include students who may be eligible for other federal or state need-based aid or have faced significant unexpected expenses, such as the loss of employment (either for themselves or their families), reduced income, or food or housing insecurity." The Department of Education FAQ on HEERF III is available [here](#). Students facing unexpected loss of income, increased childcare costs, or other COVID-related burdens should contact their campus foster youth liaisons and/or financial aid office about whether they are eligible for an emergency grant.

Parenting

1. *Is the youth parenting and in need of immediate cash aid?*
 - Advise the youth that CalWORKs applicants can request an Immediate Need (IN) payment due to lack of housing, food, and other basic essentials. Help them complete [the Immediate Need request form](#), and submit the form to the local CalWORKs office. The office must determine eligibility within one day. The youth can also request that the CalWORKs office expedite its processing of the CalWORKs grant, which takes three days but may result in a larger payment.
 - Advise the youth that the CalWORKs office should have suspended some of its usual eligibility requirements, such as any in-person interviews or medical verification of pregnancy, and that CalWORKs recipients are exempted from the usual work requirements during the Governor's Declared State of Emergency. See the [All-County Welfare Directors Letter \(July 29, 2021\)](#) for details.
 - Advise the youth that if they are receiving an infant supplement with their monthly foster care benefit, that amount may be offset by the amount of CalWORKs paid at the beginning of the month.
2. *Is the youth parenting and in immediate need of food or formula?*
 - Help the youth locate a WIC office or grocer. California's WIC program has [a mobile-friendly platform](#) for this purpose.
 - Advise the youth that the federal government has given states flexibility in their WIC eligibility determinations during the nationally-declared public health emergency, such that they may certify eligibility remotely, as well as other exceptions to usual eligibility requirements.
3. *Does the youth have other immediate needs for themselves and their children?*
 - Ensure that the youth is able to access critical resources 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 resources are an issue, assist the youth in identifying a local charitable group that can provide basic supplies, such as a [local diaper bank](#) or calling [211](#).
4. *Does the youth have a child in foster care who they are having difficulty getting information about or visiting?*
 - 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 in a manner that is consistent with public health guidance. If visits are supervised, 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, then this should be something that the agency is able to determine quickly to resume or continue regular visitation.
 - In-person visitation is preferred when visits can be conducted safely for involved parties and when otherwise appropriate for the child's case plan. Even if in-person visitation is

not an option during this time, ensure that a plan is in place for virtual visitation and ongoing contact. See [ACL 21-18](#) for more information.

- Note: Each county may have a different juvenile court standing order and local court forms regarding visitation based on county-specific COVID-19 concerns, so youth should consult with their dependency attorney regarding the current visitation guidance within their county.
- If the youth has difficulty getting an answer from the social worker or county, elevate any ongoing issue with the juvenile court and/or the Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office at 877-846-1602 or fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov.

School

1. *For students in high school, has the student been informed of distance learning options through independent study and how to access them if they choose to do so?*

- This school year (2021-2022), as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, students and families can choose between in-person school options, or distance learning through independent study. Independent study is different from last year's distance learning options. It is also different from programs that may have been offered in prior years in the student's school district under the name "independent study." [This guide](#) from the ACLU and the National Center for Youth Law explains how the new independent study option is supposed to work. Students can switch between independent study and in-person learning during the school year.
- Advocates should assist students in obtaining information about educational options in their district by convening a meeting with the student, education rights holder (if the student is not their own education rights holder), district or County Office of Education foster youth liaison, and relevant school staff to discuss all programmatic options available this school year. This planning is particularly important for students with special education needs (IEPs, 504 Plans, or pending evaluation). Make sure to ask about what the district's policies and plans are for short-term instruction in case of an emergency.
- The [ACLU and NCYL guide](#) includes 10 Key Questions that should be addressed in these discussions (available on page 2 of the guide in [English](#) and [Spanish](#)). The recommended questions in [Appendix A of ACIN I-37-21](#) may also be helpful in thinking through the pros and cons of independent study, how best to structure an independent study program for a child or youth, and how best to facilitate a transition between in-person and virtual learning if that becomes necessary during the course of the school year. All team members should leave the meeting with an understanding of:
 - What independent study options are available in the district now, how are they different from or similar to last year's distance learning options, and how might they be structured in a way that best fits the needs of the student?
 - For students starting in-person learning, what considerations might prompt the student to discuss switching to independent study? For students starting in

independent study, what considerations might prompt the student to discuss switching to in-person learning?

- What is the process for enrolling in in-person school vs independent study, and who is the point person that the student should contact for this process?
- In the case of school closure due to quarantine or other emergencies, who is the point person that the student should contact to ensure that educational needs continue to be met?
- Who is in charge of contacting the student in case of changes to the educational options in the district? Who can the student contact with questions?

2. *Do college students know how to access accurate and updated information about campus-specific COVID-19 policies?*

- Colleges should be posting updates about their COVID-19 policies to their websites; assist students in navigating to the correct page and bookmarking or downloading any relevant pages or apps. Some colleges have COVID-19 helplines, some have text alert systems, and others are using contact-tracing apps.
- Adults supporting youth should keep tabs on how college policies are changing and/or may impact students' needs. For instance, if on-campus dining options are limited, students may need more support with obtaining and storing healthy food; nonperishable and microwavable items may be enough for late-night snacks but not an adequate primary source of nutrition.

3. *For college students, has the student been connected to the resources and support services available to them for both in-person and online learning?*

- As of the end of August 2021, some college campuses have opted to continue distance learning for all or the majority of their classes, while others have opted for hybrid models or are hoping to keep the majority of classes in-person. However, policies may change very quickly in response to public health circumstances. Students may find that courses that were initially planned to take place face-to-face are moved remote either short-term or for the duration of the semester.
- Functionally, this means that most students should be prepared both for in-person and for online learning, understand that their needs may change quickly from week to week, and supportive adults should be prepared to be flexible. For example, a student may need increased flexibility in their transportation or utilities budget, as they may have initially expected to travel to campus daily, but later find that they will actually be taking all of their classes remotely. Or they may need to devote funds to increased investment in an at-home workstation with better lighting and comfortable seating to support student attendance and engagement if students become unable to work on campus.
- Students may find it harder to connect with campus support services and communities like NextUp/CAYFES, Guardian Scholars, Rising Scholars, Disability Resource Centers, Umoja and Puente, LGBTQIA+ resources, or on-campus clubs and extracurricular activities. These support services and peer groups can be helpful in providing academic support, or opportunities for social connection. Information about these programs and

how to access them may be found on the college's website, although in some cases students may need to call an office to ask what the current offerings are (and may need some encouragement to do so). Colleges and their various offices and clubs may also have official Instagram or TikTok accounts, or student-run [Discord](#) servers where students can find more information about what is going on and/or meet other students. Campus newspapers, if the college has one, may also be a helpful resource to students.

- Because circumstances may change very quickly, frequent and regular outreach by case managers and advocates may be helpful in ensuring that students' needs are quickly identified and met.
4. *Does the student have the equipment and supplies they need if their school or college unexpectedly moves remote due to COVID-19 or natural disaster, or if they need to quarantine due to exposure at school?*
- As mentioned above, there is a possibility that students may unexpectedly need to quarantine or move to remote learning. Make sure that students have a plan for how they will access necessities, like food and medicine, and be willing to work with them on procuring supplies (like headphones or an external keyboard) on short notice.
 - Providers should consider having commonly needed supplies on hand so that they can be quickly delivered to students who are unable to leave their dwellings.
 - Support students in communicating with professors and instructors about circumstances that may impact their ability to complete coursework, such as disruptions to housing or childcare plans, illness, or lack of technology access. If professors and instructors are unwilling to adjust deadlines or expectations, contact the campus foster youth contact or the Extended Opportunity Programs & Services (EOPS) office for guidance on how to proceed. Private colleges do not have EOPS offices, so if a student is enrolled at a private college, instead reach out to any office focused on diversity and inclusion and/or first-generation college students.
5. *If the youth has not yet been vaccinated, do they have a plan for how they will get vaccinated if their campus enacts a vaccine mandate?*
- Some colleges and a few school districts have already enacted vaccine mandates for students and staff returning to in-person instruction. It is likely that more colleges will consider a vaccine mandate as vaccines are formally approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA). If a student is not yet vaccinated, connect them to the appropriate resources to get more information about where the vaccine is available in their area (many colleges will have on-campus vaccination sites), and to have any questions about vaccine safety and efficacy answered. Each college and school district should post information about their vaccine policies and grounds for exemptions on their website.

Staying Connected

1. *Is the young person staying in contact with important people?*

- Assist the youth in compiling a list of important contacts to keep with them during any emergencies (see [the template emergency contact list](#) below). You can fill out the form with them and then email it to them so that they have the list accessible on their phone.
- Make sure that the youth knows how to reach you specifically. Make sure to communicate with them about whether your office building is open, whether you are checking voicemails, and whether you can be reached by text message or email. Be clear with youth about your work hours so that youth know when to expect a response.

2. *Do they have the ability and/or a plan to stay in touch with friends, family, and social supports during any isolation period? Do they have someone to talk with regularly?*

- Have youth consider how to visit with friends by video or group chats to catch up or by visiting outside and maintaining social distance. Social isolation and loneliness are not trivial. Youth should make concerted efforts to stay in touch with their social networks. Video chats, phone calls, and in-person outdoor visits can help fill some of the gap, and they are better at providing interactive opportunities than email or text.
- Many therapeutic providers are providing therapeutic sessions virtually and/or in-person. Talk with the youth about their wishes to see whether virtual or in-person sessions can be accommodated.

3. *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 and spending time outdoors, and work or hobbies to fill the day.

Technology, Devices, and Utilities

1. *Does the youth have sufficient access to a phone and the internet to meet their needs?*

- Advise the youth that current and former foster youth ages 13 to 26 are eligible for smart phones (with hotspot capability) through [iFoster's](#) joint pilot program with the Public Utilities Commission. The Foster Care Ombudsperson's Office can help with phone distribution at 877-846-1602 or fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov. The iFoster program will become [permanent in February 2023](#).
- Adequate access to high-speed internet has been a challenge for low-income students and families since the beginning of the pandemic. Advocates should be aware that, depending on a youth's residence, [the low-income plans offered by providers may be insufficient to meet their needs, and may actually be more expensive per bit of data than more expensive plans](#).

- Youth may qualify for the [FCC's emergency broadband benefit](#), which provides a discount of up to \$50 per month towards broadband service for eligible households and up to \$75 per month for households on qualifying Tribal lands. Eligible households can also receive a one-time discount of up to \$100 to purchase a laptop, desktop computer, or tablet from participating providers if they contribute more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase price. More information is available [here](#).
 - [EveryoneOn](#) partners with the FCC to provide information about low-cost internet options available to students and families. Students can enter their zip code and answer a few questions to see what programs are available in their area.
 - Students enrolled in California colleges and schools may consider purchasing discounted equipment and wireless hotspots through [CollegeBuys](#), a nonprofit tech store operated by the Foundation for California Community Colleges.
2. *Does the youth have access to the technological devices they need to meet their educational needs?*
- For K-12 students, under the new distance learning through independent study rules, the school must provide, free of charge, any laptops, tablets, software, books, stationery, internet access, or anything else that is needed to participate in instruction. If a student is planning to participate in distance learning through independent study, this should be covered in the independent study written agreement. See: the [ACLU's and NCYL's Resource on Independent Study](#).
 - Note that when distance learning is enacted due to an emergency, districts are required to comply with all of the distance learning requirements within a “reasonable amount of time,” meaning that they are not immediately required to sign written independent study agreements or immediately implement synchronous instruction (where teachers and students are online at the same time). Districts are required to have an emergency plan for providing distance learning, and students should ask what that plan is in order to be prepared.
 - For college students, check with the campus Guardian Scholars, NextUp, or EOPS program for information about college resources. For youth at a private college, talk to their financial aid officer or to any office focused on diversity and inclusion or first-generation college students.
 - Be sure to clarify whether the youth needs a computer with certain specifications or software to complete coursework (such as coding, or graphic design). Colleges may offer Chromebooks as a default, which are appropriate for some students but not for all.
 - College students with disabilities who need assistive devices or help with things like notetaking or extra time on tests should contact their college disability services office. Note that students may need some assistance providing the necessary paperwork in order to qualify for disability services at the college level. Colleges have a responsibility to serve students with disabilities, but their rights and responsibilities are a little different than they are at the K-12 level, and having an IEP in high school does not automatically guarantee that a student will qualify for accommodations in college.

- General information about college disability services is available [here](#).
- Disability Rights California has information about disability discrimination at colleges and universities [here](#).

3. *Is the youth concerned about loss of their utilities (e.g., gas, water, electric)?*

- Advise the youth that the [California Public Utilities Commission](#) determined that communications companies must halt service disconnection for non-payment and for late payment. This directive was extended again on July 14, 2021 until September 30, 2021.

Emergency Contact List

Important Contact	Phone and Email	Notes
Office of the Foster Youth Ombudsperson	(877) 846-1602 fosteryouthhelp@dss.ca.gov	Statewide resource and support center for California's foster youth
Social worker/probation officer		
Social worker's/probation officer's supervisor		
Juvenile court attorney		
CASA		
Other advocates (legal aid, education attorney, etc.)		
Doctor's office		
Therapist/clinician		
School contacts (Guardian Scholars, financial aid, counselor, etc.)		
Placement program (THP, STRTP, etc.) case manager		
Local food bank		
Local pharmacy		