**Preparation for Independence Strategy**

**What children and young people have told us**

*Taken from the Bright Spots Your Life in Care and Your Life Beyond Care surveys, undertaken in 2021:*





**Introduction and context**

Why is preparing young people for independence important?

The transition to adulthood or towards greater independence is one of the most significant, and potentially daunting, experiences of a young person, and their families or carers’, lives. This is particularly the case for cared for children, or children with disabilities, who have become used to networks of professionals involved in their care planning and decision-making. There can sometimes be a lot of uncertainty about what this transition may look like, and what support a young person or parent/carer can access when they legally become an adult, and some young people may have gaps in terms of their skills for independence, which may be ongoing for some time after they turn eighteen.

In order to ensure that this transition into independence is as positive an experience as possible, and to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people as they take this big step into their adult lives, it is imperative that planning and preparation begins as soon as possible, and is considered at every step of their childhood journey. Consideration of a child’s ability to become more independent forms a central part of the assessment process, when considering for example a child’s self-care skills and their ability to increasingly meet their own needs, however there is a statutory obligation for Children’s Services to formally consider transition and planning for change from the age of fourteen and above. Preparation for independence work does not and should not cease at the age of eighteen, and often this will work will continue to form an integral part of pathway planning for care experienced young people.

Every child and young person, regardless of their legal or placement status, will develop their skills for independence at a different pace, and in a different way, and it is a principle of this Strategy that assessment and planning is bespoke and personalised and in line with the assessed needs of the child and young person.

The benefits of early, consistent and planned preparation for independence intervention are:

\*Increased confidence in their own ability, linking to their sense of identity and self-esteem.

\*An enhanced sense of personal development, and an increased ability to goal set and plan for the future.

\*Early identification of gaps in terms of a child or young person’s capacity to develop their independence skills without additional support.

\*A reduction in the anxiety and subsequent feelings of fear and trepidation about the transition into independence.

Preparing for Adulthood (Independence) Outcomes:

In line with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance, the intended outcomes for all work related to preparation for adulthood and independence should be based on:

* Education and employment
* Being part of the community and having friends and relationships
* Health and wellbeing
* Independent living and housing options

**How else do Torbay intend to improve their Preparation for Independence Offer for children, young people, their parents, carers and families?**

* Task and Finish Group in relation to Preparation for Independence established and ongoing (held by Service Manager, Regulated Services).
* Linking in with South Devon College in respect of bespoke educational or training opportunities which link to skills for independence.
* Creation of a Tracker relating to all cared for children which maps their access to therapeutic support and life story work.
* Transitions Panel being established, which will review all children with disabilities and cared for children from the age of fourteen and above, with preparation for independence as a rolling agenda item.
* As part of the Corporate Parenting Offer, working with HR to create schedules of employment preparation opportunities, such as CV writing workshops and interview preparation.

**Assessment, planning and practice considerations**

Towards Independence Packs

Torbay has access to three different Towards Independence Packs. These provide a helpful guide and prompt, for children and young people to begin self-assessing their readiness for independence and to provide the foundation for direct work relating to preparation for independence. They should not, however, be used as a plan of independence in and of themselves or as a way of ‘checking’ off skills which the young person has achieved.

Access to these packs can be found here:

[towards-independence-pack-phase-1.pdf (torbay.gov.uk)](https://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/7494/towards-independence-pack-phase-1.pdf)

[towards-independence-pack-phase-3.pdf (torbay.gov.uk)](https://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/7496/towards-independence-pack-phase-3.pdf)

[towards-independence-pack-phase-4.pdf (torbay.gov.uk)](https://www.torbay.gov.uk/media/7497/towards-independence-pack-phase-4.pdf)

Moments of increasing independence

When supporting a child or young person in terms of their preparation for independence, social workers should particularly consider both significant transition points in their lives, for example:

* Changes of placement or care arrangements, in particular any moves to semi-independent or independent accommodation, especially the first move.
* Changes of educational provider (starting primary, starting secondary, going to College or University for the first time).
* Changes of social worker or other professional involved in their planning.
* Introduction of new professionals, such as the Personal Advisor or an adult social worker.

Indicators of resistance to independence

Children and young people, and indeed their parents or carers, may have very valid conscious or unconscious fear of the transition to independence.

Social workers should be alert to behaviours which may indicate this such as:

\*The child or young person disengages when facing a task related to independence.

\*The child or young person evidences a pattern of avoidance or disengagement when discussing their preparation for independence or about specific transitions or changes.

\*The child of young person becomes upset or withdrawn or distressed regarding change.

\*You notice changes in terms of their behaviour pattern and their ability to engage in independence related tasks such as: their patterns of eating or drinking; the presentation of their home environment; their self-care capacity; their budgeting or financial management; their connections and relationships and engagement in opportunities for social interaction.

These behaviours may suggest that the child or young person requires more enhanced, additional support related to independence and exploration should take place as to what support, intervention or strategy can be implemented for them at this point.

Creating a bespoke assessment and plan of independence

A child’s plan, whether this is a Cared For, Child in Need, Child Protection, Pathway Plan or Targeted Help plan, needs to support the child, their parent or carer and the wider professional group in understanding how ready for independence that child is, what support the child and/or their parent/carer might need in creating the capacity for more independence and how these increasing moments of independence can be safely practiced and tested and reassessed.

Parents, foster carers and other caregivers will often struggle with the concept of increasing independence, especially when the very act of doing this may increase risk or undermine a child’s safety. This is particularly the case for cared for children, whereby their foster carers are exercising Parental Responsibility through Delegated Authority and may be fearful of testing out scenarios which increase a child’s capacity for independence in the event that there are negative outcomes for which they will be judged.

However, children and young people have a right to develop these skills, and we have a duty to assess and plan how we can promote this safely.

It may be useful to think of situations like this in terms of questions, for example, “Is it safe for Child X to go out with friends for a period of time after school alone?” or “How would Child Y cope with being left alone in placement for a few hours at a time?” This ensures that assessments and plans are based on the specific task and context as well as linking this in a personalised way to the specific child and their specific capacity.

For example:

“Is it safe to allow Child A (thirteen years old) to walk ten minutes to and from placement to school every day?”

1. ASSESSMENT: What is the *current* assessment of the child’s capacity to manage *this particular task* safely? What are the strengths evidence in the child’s capacity and what concerns might the team around the child have about this? Agree a set of specific assessment questions which will help to establish a clear understanding of the strengths and risks. In this case, these may include: how traffic conscious is Child A? Does the route include any specific risks? Does Child A already adhere to certain safety rules both in and outside of placement? How aware is Child A of their surroundings? How responsive is Child A to boundaries? How confident would Child A be in seeking help from appropriate people if they needed to? This allows us to form a view on whether the young person is ready to manage this situation and, if not, what supervision or support may be required.
2. PRACTICE: following this assessment, it may be that a pause is required to assist the child or young people in developing skills that are required in order for them to independently complete this task. These may include: demonstrating road awareness whilst supervised by a trusted adult; demonstrating their ability to adhere to safety plans (such as check-ins with specific adults); demonstrating an awareness off who would be appropriate to seek help from in certain hypothetical situations; how able they are to identify risk in physical environments; how able they are to manage how they are feeling and protection themselves from emotional risk; demonstrating what they would do if they felt unsafe in hypothetical situations. These skills can then be rehearsed and practiced in situations which do not pose a high level of risk, for example going to a school event with trusted adults, in order to prepare the child or young person for tasks which may carry higher levels of risk; or, similarly, trial runs of the task identified can be undertaken with supervision, and then with a trusted adult close by, slowly increasing the independence given to the child.
3. REVIEW: it will always be important to then review and celebrate the achievement of the young person in working their way towards this goal. Never assume that a child’s capacity to continue to undertake this skill for independence will remain static, as often situations or levels of risk can change and it will be important for parents and carers and professionals to ensure that there are safety and contingency plans in place, should children feel concerned about tasks they complete independently. It will also at this point be important to set new goals and begin this three step process again.