



## **BEYOND THE FOOD PANTRY: COVID-19 Response for Students Who are Homeless or With Experience in Foster Care**

**Barbara Duffield, Marissa Meyers, Jennifer Pokempner, Jillian Sitjar  
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The current health crisis is scary for everyone. It can be much scarier for young people who are on their own. The risk that this crisis will cause increased instability for students is great, given a lack of existing support systems.

Many students who have experienced homelessness or foster care do not have a strong support system to which they can turn to in times of crisis. They may not have a caring adult to call for advice or information on how to keep safe and healthy. This lack of familial support can mean they do not have help to prepare in times of a public health crisis, nor manage the additional life stressors the crisis brings. COVID-19 is affecting many people of all ages, but students are especially vulnerable and cannot be overlooked.

This guide aims to provide concrete tips and resources in order to support students who are homeless or with experience in foster care during the COVID-19 crisis in order to promote health and educational success.

**Check in with students frequently during this period to provide emotional support and reliable information.**

Homeless liaisons and foster care points of contact on college campuses, case workers, Independent Living Workers, CASAs, and lawyers should check in with young people frequently to provide emotional support, information, and resources. A health scare and resultant instability may be traumatizing, cause anxiety, or recall previous trauma for many students. Let students know you are there as a support so that they do not feel alone. Allow students to talk things through, provide timely and accurate information, and be prepared to help connect them to services and additional supports. Here are [some tips](#) about helping students manage their anxiety around COVID-19.

**Pro-active and regular check-ins from multiple people are highly recommended!**

## Help students find a place to live and access services if they must leave the residence halls.

Students who have experience in foster care or are homeless may not have a home to go to if they need to leave their residence hall. Some institutions are providing options for students to remain on campus, while others are asking students to leave immediately. It is imperative to provide supports in order to prevent these students from experiencing homelessness.

Students who are in foster care or on a foster care board extension should be provided assistance by their child welfare agency to find a place to live. Almost all states have extended foster care (board extensions) in some form. Child welfare agencies should be contacting all students on a foster care board extension to help them arrange for alternative housing and address any other needs like access to food, health care, and emotional support. Advocates may need to assist to ensure this process occurs. Help students reach out to their foster care case worker to ask for help.

For students experiencing homelessness, consider the housing options listed on [this SHC tip sheet](#). One choice may be to partner with a local hotel/motel for temporary housing, or petition to remain on campus such as the option provided by many colleges.

## Help youth access programs and funds that could assist in meeting emergency needs, including housing.

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood is a federal law that provides funds to all states to support youth who have aged out of foster care as they transition to adulthood. These funds can provide assistance with room and board, which can also include help finding temporary housing, and help paying for rent and food. All states are required to provide these services to eligible youth and all states have Chafee coordinators (sometimes referred to as Independent Living or IL coordinators). Child welfare agencies should proactively reach out to Chafee-eligible youth and let them know of the availability of Chafee room and board funds and Chafee aftercare services.

Help students request these services and funds by contacting the Independent Living Coordinator from the county and state in which the student is now living. [Child welfare agencies are obligated](#) to provide these services to young people who are Chafee-eligible and living in their state or county. Chafee/IL coordinators for all states can be found [here](#).

Students experiencing homelessness (with or without a foster care history) can utilize [emergency aid](#), if available, to help with unexpected expenses. Together We Rise is providing emergency financial assistance to as many college students who have been displaced. Help students complete [this form](#) to seek help from Together We Rise.

**If you are a school or agency that has the capacity to develop an emergency fund, we encourage you to do so!**

## Create student-friendly materials to explain what is happening and what to do.

This is likely the first time students have experienced a public health crisis of this magnitude. It can be scary and confusing. Students need information that is clear, sound and delivered appropriately. For example, terms like “social distancing” should be explained in a way that is clear but does not produce additional anxiety. Consider tips from the Hope Center about [Supporting #RealCollege Students During COVID-19](#).

## Create opportunities for students to connect with each other that are virtual and/or safely accessible.

Help students take advantage of opportunities that will enable them to continue their studies. Many colleges are conducting classes online; however, not all students have access to the internet, a laptop, or a safe and stable place to study. Students with experience in foster care or who are experiencing homelessness often rely on public spaces for internet access, to meet with friends, and to find safety. If students must now stay away from public spaces, they will need supplemental resources to continue their education such as laptops, wi-fi hotspots, and a place to attend online classes and study. [Comcast Internet Essentials](#) and [Spectrum Internet Assist](#) offer free broadband internet to low-income households. To qualify, students must be eligible for public assistance programs such as the National School Lunch Program, Medicaid, or SNAP.

It is also important to provide students with opportunities for social connection that will support them during this challenging time. Create opportunities for togetherness and community that are alternatives to congregating in groups and public spaces, so they do not feel alone. Hosting “watch parties” on the internet and scheduling online or web-based activities should be considered. You can also help students stay connected by setting up a private Facebook page for groups to safely talk and support one another.

## Create opportunities for students to connect with each other that are virtual and/or safely accessible.

A student’s work hours may be cut or suspended due to COVID-19 precautionary measures. This, in turn, may impact their receipt of crucial public benefits like SNAP, TANF, or CCIS (childcare). Work with students to connect with their County Assistance Office caseworker to create a contingency plan and maintain compliance.