

Campus Support Programs: Tips for Students Who Have Been in Foster Care

Making a successful transition to college¹ can be difficult for all young people. If you've experienced foster care, you may face additional challenges and need extra support. You may be wondering how you'll pay for college or how to afford all your expenses while in school. You may not feel academically prepared for college-level work, or you may question whether you'll have a support network and someone to mentor you during this life change. To address some of these concerns, colleges and universities across the country have developed campus support programs for young adults who have experienced foster care.

¹ The term "college" is used throughout this publication to refer to any type of postsecondary institution, including colleges, universities, trade schools, and other programs.

WHAT'S INSIDE

How campus support programs can help

How to find the right campus support program

Other resources for students with foster care experience

Conclusion

This factsheet will help you learn why campus support programs are important, the types of supports they offer, and how to find them. It was developed in partnership with young people with lived experience in foster care who have used college support programs. Their experiences, insights, and advice shaped the content of this publication. The information in this factsheet is for all students with backgrounds in foster care who are interested in attending college and want to learn more about the types of supports available.

HOW CAMPUS SUPPORT PROGRAMS CAN HELP

Campus support programs offer services on college campuses to students who have experienced foster care. Although each program is unique, the overall goal of these programs is to help young people have positive experiences in college and equip them to graduate and succeed afterward. The supports offered may include mental health services, financial assistance, tutoring, academic advising, peer support networks, mentoring, coaching, financial planning, and more. Students in these programs gain knowledge and develop critical life skills for self-sufficiency, such as problem-solving and goal setting. The programs also allow young people to be part of a community with peers who share similar life experiences. By creating a welcoming environment, offering academic and emotional support, and addressing financial needs, campus support programs can help you achieve your educational aspirations.

Here are some important supports offered by many campus support programs.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

Your mental health matters. Counseling and other [mental health services](#) can help you address trauma, improving your overall well-being and equipping you to better handle stressors or challenges you may experience on campus.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

[Tuition assistance](#) and other financial aid can help you afford college and additional expenses, such as meal plans and school supplies. You may also want to investigate housing assistance and consider whether college housing will be available over holidays and school breaks.

ACADEMIC ADVISING, TUTORING, AND CAREER PLANNING

An academic advisor can help you sign up for the right courses for your major and keep your grades on track. College classes may be more rigorous and require more studying than high school courses, so tutoring can also help you manage your workload and maintain good grades. It may also be beneficial to get help with [career planning](#).

MENTORING AND COACHING

You're more likely to succeed in college if you feel supported and have a mentor, peer mentor, or coach you can talk to, get advice from, and check in with when you need to. This may help you feel more comfortable and can provide a sense of belonging on campus.

LIFE SKILLS AND FINANCIAL PLANNING

Learning life skills and financial literacy is critical for students who have experienced foster care. Some things you'll need to learn may include time management, communication and social skills, self-care, how to create and live on a budget, the importance of building good credit and paying bills on time, and how to avoid debt.

Consider a Precollege Summer Program

Precollege programs at colleges across the country give high school students in foster care real-life exposure to life on campus through a summer college experience. Precollege programs are often offered to high school juniors, seniors, or recent graduates as they prepare for what comes next. Participants can live on campus in residence halls, attend classes, receive services such as academic tutoring and counseling, and become more comfortable and familiar with college life. You can participate in social and academic activities and learn skills to help you become more self-sufficient and prepared for postsecondary education. This exposure can help you realize that attaining a college degree is a realistic possibility, and it can make the transition to college easier. Look for a precollege program in your area.

HOW TO FIND THE RIGHT CAMPUS SUPPORT PROGRAM

There are many campus support programs for youth who've experienced foster care at colleges and universities across the country. The availability and quality of a support program is something you should consider (among other factors) when applying to and selecting schools. To find the right program for you, think about your specific needs, your plans for the future, and the types of support that will be most helpful to you.

CONSIDER YOUR GOALS

What are your academic and career interests? As you approach the college admissions process, it's important to research majors to determine what type of path may be right for you and set some career-related goals. What type of academic supports will help you reach your goals? What type of environment will help you thrive? Evaluate college support programs and the services they provide based on your needs.

Find Programs in Your State and Beyond

This [National Postsecondary Support Map](#) provides information on State tuition waivers, statewide education support programs, and 4-year campus-based support programs for students who have experienced foster care. The website includes a listing of campus support programs across the country.



GET HELP FROM OTHERS

The college admissions process can be intimidating for anyone, so it's important to get help from people you can trust. Ask your relatives and kin, foster parents, caseworkers, guidance counselors, or other caring adults for help with locating programs, applying for college and scholarships, navigating the transition, and succeeding in college.

How to Check Out a Campus Program

When researching campus support programs, start by searching online for programs in your State, nearby, or in your desired region. Identify schools that offer supports for students with foster care experience and the ones that seem like a good academic and social fit for you. Look at the types of supports offered to students with backgrounds in foster care and determine whether they will meet your needs. Does the program seem like it has elements that will help you succeed in college? Are there supports you used in high school that you'll need in college? Find contact information for the campus support program and consider reaching out for more information or with any additional questions. You can also talk to family, friends, or other supportive adults to get their help and advice. The more you research, the better prepared you'll be to make an informed choice!

OTHER RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS WITH FOSTER CARE EXPERIENCE

There are several other resources available to youth with foster care experience that can help make your time in college easier and more affordable.

TUITION AND FEE WAIVERS

Many States offer [tuition and fee waivers](#) for students who have experienced foster care. Research what types of tuition assistance programs are available in your State.

INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAMS

Independent living programs are in every State and provide services and resources to help you more effectively and smoothly transition into adulthood with a sense of [normalcy](#) and permanent, stable connections. The [John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood](#) provides funding for services and supports to youth and young adults transitioning out of foster care. Child welfare agencies can use these funds to help youth pursue postsecondary education or vocational training.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHERS (ETVS)

The ETV program provides financial resources to students who have aged out of foster care or who left foster care after age 16. Eligible students may receive grants of up to \$5,000 per year for up to 5 years or until their 26th birthday. To learn more, contact your State's [Independent Living and ETV coordinator](#) or view [your State's ETV website](#).

FREE APPLICATION FOR FEDERAL STUDENT AID (FAFSA)

The [FAFSA](#) form is the main way to apply for student aid. If you were in foster care after your 13th birthday and can provide documentation of your foster care status, you could be eligible to receive thousands of dollars in aid. By indicating your foster care status, you may qualify for grants, scholarships, and stipends that you do not have to pay back, which will help pay for tuition and additional living expenses while you're in school.

SCHOLARSHIPS

There are many scholarships for students who have been in foster care. Colleges and universities often offer their own scholarships, and you also can connect with local organizations for young people who have been in foster care to learn more about scholarships in your city or State. There are also websites that have listings of potential opportunities, including [Scholarships.com](#) and [BestColleges.com](#).

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

SNAP is a Federal program that provides food assistance to college students who meet [eligibility requirements](#). Through the program, you can receive an Electronic Benefits Transfer card, which is used like a debit card at the grocery store. The money comes from your federally funded SNAP account.

TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)

[TANF](#) provides aid for some low-income families with children. Eligible recipients receive monthly cash payments and other services designed to promote self-sufficiency, such as help with child care. Attending college can count toward TANF work requirements.

OTHER SUPPORT

The [Foster Care to Success](#) website can help you navigate the college process, determine career goals, and create networks of support. [FosterClub](#) also supports young people who have experienced foster care and offers a free [transition toolkit](#) that can help you plan and prepare for your future. The [Foster Care Transition Toolkit](#) from the U.S. Department of Education is a helpful resource to learn about college and other opportunities. [College Navigator](#) can help you build a list of schools that may be right for you.

CONCLUSION

College may seem intimidating at first, but campus support programs can help. There are many programs at colleges and universities across the country supporting young people like you. Take some time to research available programs and talk to your guidance counselor, caseworker, or other trusted adults. Identify the types of supports you need most and find a college or institution that offers the best program to help you succeed.

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2024).
*Campus support programs: Tips for students
who have been in foster care*. U.S. Department
of Health and Human Services, Administration
for Children and Families, Children's Bureau.
[https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/
campus-support-programs-tips-students-
who-have-been-foster-care](https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/campus-support-programs-tips-students-who-have-been-foster-care)



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Administration for Children and Families
Administration on Children, Youth and Families
Children's Bureau



This material may be freely reproduced and distributed. However, when doing so, please credit Child Welfare Information Gateway. This publication is available online at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/resources/campus-support-programs-tips-students-who-have-been-foster-care>.