

Furnishing Your First Place

You may be leaving a foster home, group home or other living situation. You have enough money to rent an apartment. It's a great place, but comes unfurnished. How do you get enough furnishings to make it comfortable, and maybe a little cool? Here are some ideas to help you do that.

Some facts of life that you will have to make decisions about include:

Money

Don't rent an unfurnished place if you can't furnish it. Wait until you do. If you know you don't have good money management skills, you will have to learn quickly or wait to get your first place on your own. Stay where you are— group home, foster home, friend's, or family's place— if you can while you learn to manage your money and save some bucks. Unless you have lots of money, you will have to start out with just the basics. Then you can fix it up as you go along.

How Unfurnished Is It?

Some places are *partially furnished*. They will have the basics like a couch, table and chairs, a bed, dresser, lamps, and end tables. What do you need to purchase to live there? *Make a list* of what is there and what you will need. We will talk about how to make that list later.

Roommates

If you move into an unfurnished apartment with friends, one of the first things you will have to decide together is who owns what. If you buy TVs, couches, or microwaves together, for example, who will get those things when one of you moves out? You may want to avoid discussing this, but it will be a lot easier now than when one of you moves on and nothing has been decided.

You will also need to learn to share your space and belongings with your roommates. You can be the best of friends, but living together as roommates often creates a lot of conflict. Communication, flexibility, and trust are all keys to getting along with your roommate.

How Are You Going to Move the Stuff You Bought?

If you own a truck, and you are strong, and have strong buddies to help on the day you need them, you are all set. But that isn't the case for most people. What are your options? Do you know someone who owns a truck? What is the charge to deliver items from Goodwill, Salvation Army, or the store where you purchase them? Can you get off work to meet the truck or do you have someone trustworthy who can be there when the truck comes? Do you want to clean the place before you move your new stuff in?



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Start With a Check List

Write it down. Make three columns for: What I Have, What I Need, and What I Would Like. A plasma T.V. goes in the last column. A good place to sleep comes at the top of the first column. See the checklists on page four to get you started.

Other Things to Remember

A sense of humor. It will help when you feel alone or you are trying to put and keep it all together. Learn from your kitchen disasters and other mistakes. Mistakes aren't failures, but if you don't learn from them, then they might be.

A sense of responsibility. You will need to care for yourself, your property and apartment. Set boundaries about unwanted guests, visitors who want to move in, people borrowing and lending your things and throwing parties.

Big parties can make you popular for a night but also might cause you to lose your place and leave you with your stuff destroyed.

Beat the statistics. Statistics show that a lot of kids find it overwhelming when they go on their own. Many don't know how to keep a place and end up losing their apartment and even their stuff in it. Some lose their place because of job loss, lack of support from others or health issues. Beat the statistics.

But remember: **those furnishings are yours. It might not be that leather couch you dream about or a 42" television, but you have possessions that belong to you.** Most people who have been in care *do* have places of their own someday, and if you want it badly enough, you will learn the skills it takes to keep and furnish a place.

Ask for help. Last, but one of the most important things to remember, is to get

Ways Some Communities Support Their Teens With Furnishings

Fond du Lac County: Give teens a laundry basket filled with things they need. They also have mattresses that were donated to them by the Ramada Inn.

Shawano County: Vouchers are given to teens for a hope chest when they take independent living classes.

Brown County: Vouchers for donations center that the county collects and stores at the Ruth Meier Center.

Menominee County: Casino donates used hotel furniture for teens and foster families.

Outagamie County: An organization of local churches has a furnishing shower and party for the teens moving to their own place.

Sheboygan County: An organization of churches has *Laundry Love Day* each month where they supply tokens at Laundromats for those in need.

Winnebago County: Teens can volunteer at St. Vincent de Paul and trade their work for merchandise.

Dane County: Provides housing vouchers when available. Teens often receive a hand made quilt and other gifts after completing a 6-week independent living class.

advice and support from anyone you can, including from social

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workers, an independent living coordinator, birth, and foster families. Find out about *vouchers*, which are like coupons that help you get free or reduced housing, food, and other necessities.

Also find out about the programs in your community to help teens leaving care. On page two, there's a list of the services various counties have—maybe your community has something similar. Take all the help and support you can get. We all get by with a little help from our friends.



More Suggestions for Resources to Help You with Your First Place

To find out how other teens who have been in care, read real stories written by kids who have been in care and how they handle living on their own from [Represent Magazine](#).

[ToughNickel website](#). You will find some suggestions for furnishing your first apartment as well as a list of places to buy used furniture and household items.

[I Can Do It! A Micropedia of Living on Your Own](#), is an easy to use guide for older youth about living on their own, including budgeting, housing, daily living, and relationships. You can borrow from [our library](#).

[Resources for Youth in Transition](#) has several additional [links and articles written for youth who are leaving care](#).

[Keys to Independence: Finding Your First Apartment](#), a FCARC tip sheet.



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Checklists

Bedroom

- Mattress and mattress pad protector
- Pillows
- Dresser or chest
- One or two sets of sheets, with: pillow cases, bottom and top sheet
- Comforter or blankets
- Alarm clock/radio
- At least one lamp
- End table

Bathroom

- Shower curtain if there is no shower door
- Shower bar and shower rings to hang curtain
- Towels (two large, two small, and wash cloths)
- Wastebasket
- Hamper or laundry basket or bag
- Tissues
- Toilet paper
- Soap and shampoo
- Toothpaste and Toothbrush

Appliances

- Refrigerator
- Toaster
- Microwave
- Stove
- Window fan
- Extension cord

- Hair dryer
- Coffee pot
- Iron
- Ironing board

Kitchen

- Pot holders
- Mixing spoon
- Cutting board
- Strainer/colander
- Dish cloths/sponges
- Dish towels
- Rags/paper towels

For food preparation

- Glass measuring cup for liquids
- Plastic or metal measuring cups for solids
- Measuring spoons
- Mixing spoon and/or electric mixer
- Metal and rubber spatulas
- Bottle opener
- Mixing bowls—at least one big one and a smaller one
- Salt and pepper shakers

For eating

- Dinner plates
- Glasses
- Cups/mugs
- Silverware
- Cereal/soup bowls
- Serving dishes

For Cooking

- Two quart casserole with lid
- Loaf pan
- Big pot (preferably a six quart pot)
- Cookie sheet
- Frying pan
- Large and small sauce pan with lids
- Cake pan
- Big knife, serrated knife, and paring knife
- Can opener
- Vegetable peeler
- Pot holders
- Mixing spoon
- Cutting board
- Strainer/colander
- Dish cloths/sponges
- Dish towels
- Rags/paper towels

Furniture and decorations

- Table and/or desk
- Kitchen chairs
- Couch
- Upholstered chair
- Coffee table/trunk/end tables
- Stackable crates or shelves
- Large rug
- Smaller rugs for bath, kitchen, entry
- Drapes, curtains, shades, or blinds for windows

General supplies

- Bucket
- Mop
- Rags
- Waste baskets
- Light bulbs
- Hangers
- Duct tape and other tape

Storage

- Plastic wrap and plastic bags (save your store bags)
- Sandwich bags
- Storage containers
- Aluminum foil
- Garbage bags
- Hammer and nails
- Pliers
- Screw drivers with Phillips and straight edge
- Measuring tape or yard stick
- Scissors
- Basic sewing kit
- Basic cleaner
- Toilet brush
- Drying rack
- Picture hanging kit

Electronic equipment

- Telephone or cell phone
- Television
- Antenna
- Radio
- Computer

