

Money Matters for Care Leavers

Practical money tips for moving towards
independence



Leaving care and becoming more independent can feel exciting, but it can also bring new responsibilities. You may be managing benefits, wages, rent, bills, food shopping, travel, education costs or your first home. This leaflet gives practical steps to help you stay in control of your money and know where to ask for support.

1. Know What Support You Can Ask For

- Speak to your Personal Adviser or social worker about what money support you may be entitled to.
- Ask for your Pathway Plan to include your income, housing costs, bills, education or training costs, and any support you need with budgeting.
- If you are moving into your own place, ask about your Leaving Care Allowance or Setting Up Home Allowance for essential household items. Also check your Care Leaver Offer for information about subsidised council tax.
- Check whether you can access local support, such as help with food, travel, clothing, education costs, driving lessons or emergency payments.

★ **TOP TIP:** Ask your Personal Adviser to write down what support you can get, when you can get it, and who to contact if something goes wrong.

2. Make a Budget Before You Spend

A budget helps you plan for the essentials first, so you do not run out of money before your next payment. Try writing down what comes in, what must be paid, and what is left for flexible spending.

Money In	Essential Costs	Flexible Spending	Savings
Wages, benefits, Universal Credit, student finance, bursaries, allowances	Rent, food, gas/electric, water, phone, travel, council tax if payable	Clothes, takeaways, socialising, subscriptions, gaming, treats	Emergency fund, replacement items, future goals, education or work costs

★ **TOP TIP:** Pay essentials first. If rent, food, gas, electric and travel are covered, it is easier to stay safe and avoid stress later.

3. Make Your First Home Money Go Further

- Before buying anything, list what you need straight away and what can wait.
- Prioritise basics such as a bed, bedding, cooker or microwave, fridge, curtains, cleaning items and safe kitchen equipment.
- Keep receipts and check whether your council needs proof of purchases.
- Compare prices, look for discounts, and consider good-quality second-hand items where safe.

- Talk to your PA about what you can spend your Setting Up Home Allowance on and they will support you to make the purchases. Don't buy anything without checking with them that it can be included.

★ **TOP TIP:** Before spending your Setting Up Home Allowance, make a “must-have now” list and a “can-wait” list.

4. Pay Priority Bills First

Some bills are more urgent than others because missing them can affect your housing, heating, phone access or credit record. Put rent, food, gas/electric, water, travel and essential phone costs before flexible spending. If you are struggling, ask for help early rather than waiting for debts to build up.

★ **TOP TIP:** If you think you will miss a bill, tell someone early. Asking early can stop a small problem becoming a bigger debt.

5. Borrow Carefully and Avoid Debt Traps

- Be careful with credit cards, overdrafts, loans and “buy now, pay later”. They can make money problems worse if repayments are missed.
- Always check the total cost, repayment dates, interest and late payment charges.
- Do not borrow money for someone else or let anyone use your bank account. Be careful about who you lend or give money to.

- If someone asks you to move money through your account, say no and speak to a trusted adult or your Personal Adviser.
- If you cannot afford the repayments, do not sign up.

★ **TOP TIP:** If someone pressures you to borrow, lend, or move money for them, pause and speak to a trusted adult before doing anything.

6. Keep Your Money Safe

- Never share your bank card, PIN, passwords or online banking details.
- Be aware of scams, fake job offers, loan sharks and “money mule” requests.
- Open letters, texts and emails from your bank, landlord, council or benefit office.
- Tell your Personal Adviser quickly if your money is missing, your benefits stop, or you cannot pay rent or bills.

★ **TOP TIP:** Your bank details are private. Real banks will never ask you to share your PIN or password.

7. Think About Making a Will

Making a will is a way of saying what you would want to happen to your money, belongings and any important possessions if you died. It can feel like a big topic, but it can help reduce confusion for the people you care about and make sure your wishes are clear.

- A will can say who you want to receive your money, savings, belongings or special items.

- You can choose someone you trust to sort things out after you die. This person is called an executor.
- If you have children, a will can include who you would want to care for them.
- Your will needs to be written down, signed and witnessed properly to be legally valid.
- Ask for support from your Personal Adviser, a trusted adult, Citizens Advice, MoneyHelper or a solicitor if you are unsure what to do.
- Keep your will somewhere safe and tell your executor or someone you trust where it is kept.

★ **TOP TIP:** You do not need to manage this alone. If you want to make a will, ask someone you trust to help you find free or low-cost advice before you sign anything.

Care Leaver Money Checklist

- Ask your Personal Adviser what financial support you are entitled to.
- Make sure your Pathway Plan includes money, housing, education, training and employment support.
- Check whether you have a Junior ISA or child trust fund that you can access from age 18.
- Set up a bank account and keep your details safe.
- Pay rent, food, utilities, travel and phone costs before non-essential spending.
- Save a small amount for emergencies, even if it is only a few pounds.
- Ask for help early if you are worried about rent, bills, benefits or debt.

Where to Get Help

If you are worried about money, speak to your Personal Adviser, social worker, Leaving Care Team, trusted adult, college support worker or housing worker. You can also look for free money and debt advice from services such as MoneyHelper, Citizens Advice and StepChange. If you are unsure what support you should receive, ask your Personal Adviser to explain your leaving care status and your local council's Local Offer.

Remember: you do not have to manage everything alone. Asking for help early is a responsible money choice.