

TRANSITIONING FROM CLOSE TO HOME (CTH) PLACEMENT

INTRODUCTION

As the Coach starts the process of building a relationship with the young person, it is particularly important to address the sometimes untapped emotional aspects of returning home -- either the home where they lived prior to going into placement or a new home they will go to after placement. Hereafter the term “home” will be used as shorthand for a non-residential, post-placement living arrangement.

While in placement, and especially as the time to go home approaches, young people often develop an idealized vision of what home life will be like that can get easily disrupted by changes that have been made to their former home, such as where people sleep and moved pictures, or by the reality of a new home not fitting the mental picture the young person had anticipated.

Additionally, it is not uncommon for young people leaving residential placement to experience a “honeymoon” period where everything is going well at home (e.g. little to no family conflict, keeping up with referrals and appointments). This period can last a month or longer, but there will come a time that old “habits” or “temptations” will resurface and challenge the young person; when this happens, they will need to be able to apply the skills they may have developed while in placement to the challenges they face in the community.

The young person may also feel ambivalent about disclosing the challenges because the young people sometimes judge themselves when faced with those situations as “not good enough”/“not on top of things.” They put pressure on themselves to handle everything on their own.

Therefore, the Coach needs to “check in” regularly about this potential tendency toward perfection and remind the young person that struggles are normal and part of the process of growth. It is also helpful for the Coach to know and understand the precursors to the former delinquent behavior and specifically the challenges the young person faced that led to them to being placed away from home. That way the Coach will be able to know what specific areas the young person may struggle with once they’re home.

What follows is a guide to navigate these topics, to make sure that the young person can have the smoothest transition home and the support they will need to face challenges and/or setbacks. The topics or areas of engagement can be addressed or discussed via conversations, by creating one or more vision boards, writing, music or any other creative outlet. The Coaches should adapt the vehicle by which to address these issues to the youth’s preferences of expression.

PREPARATION:

To ensure that the young person does not get entangled in the justice system any further, the Coach needs to have a full understanding of the behavior and circumstances that led up to the young person's placement – the young person's legal history, what happened that probation did not work or what the young person's understanding is of why a judge might have sentenced them directly into a Close to Home facility bypassing a period of probation.

Thus, it is highly recommended that the Coach speak with the following people (*listed below*), aside from the DYFJ or Close to Home staff, to get a full picture of the delinquency history of the young person. These conversations are not intended to be shared or directly discussed with the young person; they are intended to give the Coach the context of the young person's situation and a sense of the factors that could contribute to the young person's continued involvement in the justice system.

It is recommended the Coach speak with:

- The young person's lawyer and/or social worker
- The young person's prosecutor
- The young person's probation officer, if applicable
- Program staff of any program in which the young person participated while at the facility
- Passages Academy teachers and staff, including getting the educational history of the young person
- The parent/caregiver's perspective of what led to the placement

To be able to speak with some of these individuals, Coaches may need the young person and their families/caretakers sign release of information forms. Coaches would then explain to the young person and family that these are background conversations to have a full understanding of the past so that they can move forward to a life outside the justice system.

TRANSITION TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

In terms of unpacking the often unexplored expectations of going home, it is recommended that Coaches engage the young person around the following topics, in no particular order. Also, the subtopics are a guide and not a script. Coaches will tailor the conversations to the specific young person's situation:

UPCOMING HOME LIFE

Explore what they are most looking forward to going home and what they are most concerned about. Is there anything at home that would upset them if it had changed?

It is recommended that the Coach facilitate a conversation between the young person and their parent(s)/ caretaker(s) regarding their mutual expectations about the return home once the Coach has had time to explore the various topics contained herein with the young person.

FACILITATING A CONVERSATION BETWEEN THE YOUNG PERSON AND THEIR PARENT(S)/ CARETAKER(S)

In terms of facilitating a conversation, the Coach would first discuss the topic with the young person to ascertain the level of comfort that the young person would have in addressing the issue with the parent(s)/caretaker(s) and begin the Coaching process to empower the young person to take the lead in such a conversation (*if the young person is not ready to do this, the Coach might need to play a more active role in the family conversation*).

The Coach would then speak with the parent(s)/caretaker(s) to flag the topic as one that would be good to discuss together so that everyone can be on the same page. The Coach would let the parent(s)/caretaker(s) know what tends to happen when young people return home from placement as noted above: the likelihood that the young person will notice all the changes in the home and that some of those changes could be upsetting; that young people coming home can experience a "honeymoon period" so that they might have a hard time asking for help if they end up struggling at any point; and so on.

The Coach should also encourage the parent(s)/caretaker(s) to think about their own expectations of the return home so that they can all share their thoughts and feelings. It will be up to the Coach to determine if they should have a discussion with the parent(s)/caretaker(s) about these topics or just flag the topics.

The ultimate goal is to get everyone together to talk through these issues prior to the young person returning to the home, with the Coach as a supportive participant but knowing that they might need to help out in managing the more difficult aspects of the conversation.

After the conversation the Coach would debrief the experience with the young person and work with the young person to plan further, as needed.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

Assess the young person's level of knowledge of what the living arrangements will be and what their feelings are about those living arrangements (i.e. who is sleeping where, any changes in household composition, etc.).

It is recommended that the Coach follow the same steps as above if this is another conversation that should be had among the family/caretakers.

In the alternative, this topic could be part of the conversation outlined above.

EXPLORE UPCOMING CHANGE(S) WITH YOUNG PERSON:

If the young person is returning to the home in which they lived prior to being placed:

- ☐ Explore the household's prior routines during the week and during the weekends, and their expectations about future routines.
 - Will they want to see changes in those routines, stay the same?
- ☐ Explore with the young person what they think their parent/caretaker will be expecting/thinking about their return home
- ☐ Explore the level of conflict that may have existed in the home and/or how the family dealt with limit setting, which is particularly important for situations in which the parent/caretaker expressed a desire to have the young person placed or where the delinquency history shows that the young person was getting arrested very late at night while out without permission.
- ☐ Explore the young person's relationship to each household member to get a sense of who they're excited to see and who they might have conflict with. Family conflict is not uncommon as a source of delinquency cases.

If the young person will be living with a new family or a new home:

- ☐ Explore what they would like the household routines to be like.

It is recommended that the Coach facilitate a discussion between the young person and their family/caretakers regarding what their mutual expectations are for the actual day that the young person comes home and come up with at least one family ritual that can mark the occasion.

OVERALL ECO-SYSTEM

- ☐ Explore any/all areas of interest (sports, creative arts, culinary, for example) of the young person that the Coach has learned about to plan for ways to develop those interests further when they return home.
- ☐ Explore any activities/programs in which the young person participated that the young person believes has given them skills they can apply when they go home to counteract any situations that could cause them to return to the juvenile justice system.
 - Explore how the young person anticipates using the skills when they return home.

Useful exercises include a discussion of "where I've been, where I am, where I'm going"

This exercise could take the form of creating vision boards, drawing, or using other creative media to explore the topics – and a speculative discussion along the lines of *"five years (or whatever time frame makes sense) from now someone will write an article about you/make a movie about you, so what would this article say/this movie be about."*

- ☐ Explore the young person's relationship to formal schooling and to education more broadly, focusing on what the expected education plan will be for when the young person goes home.
- ☐ Explore the presence of "champions" for the young person – are there people who the young person believes is there for them no matter what?

If there aren't any champions at the time the young person goes home, it will be important to foster such relationships in addition to the Coach.

- ☐ Explore the young person's perspective on their neighborhood and what neighborhood assets can help keep the young person on a path to success.

This would include a conversation about policing in their neighborhood and its effect on the young person's life up to now and projecting into the future.

Coaches should explore plans to manage interactions with police in the young person's neighborhood and then support and guide the young person when they get home.

- If the young person lives in a neighborhood with a strong crisis management organization (a.k.a. Cure Violence), Coaches should connect the young person to the organization so that there is further support for the young person in the community.

- ☐ Explore the young person's circle of friends/acquaintances, particularly if the young person has been arrested in groups.

It is critical that the Coach explore the young person's relationship with those they've been arrested with to be able to guide the young person in managing those relationships when they go home (especially if the young people they were arrested with are also in the community).

- ☐ Explore developing a safety or emergency plan to use when confronted with a challenge or temptation to do something that could get them back into the system ([See Appendix 37-1_Emergency Card](#)).
- ☐ Explore anything learned from the conversations with the stakeholders mentioned above that would be important to address to guide the young person in avoiding further system involvement.
- ☐ Explore strategies for dealing with stress when they return home so that the Coach can provide guidance and support when the young person goes home in activating these strategies.