

# For Staff: Group Activities for Youth

## Preparing to Live on Your Own

### Brainstorm and Discussion: 20 minutes

Ask the group to think about living on their own for the first time. What are they looking forward to? What is scary? How do they imagine it will feel to be in their own place? What can they do to make their home feel like home and make their life feel like it's in their control?

Then give everyone a blank sheet of paper. Ask them to draw a line down the middle and label one side: Ways to Prepare Before I Age Out, and the other: Things I Can Do Once I Live on My Own. Have them take five minutes to list both practical things, like getting their NYCHA application submitted two years in advance and learning to cook and clean, or social-emotional things, like learning to reach out for support when they need it, manage stress and negative emotions, and resolve conflicts (e.g., with roommates). When most students are done writing, invite everyone to share. Write their suggestions on the board or easel paper.

### Read the Story: 10 minutes

Have the group read “Unexpected Emotions” by J.G. on p. 18. Go around the room, taking turns reading aloud. Let group members pass if they want to.

### Discussion: 10 minutes

Ask the group if anything surprised them about J.G.’s experience. If nobody says it, point out that instead of feeling free and happy to be out of the system and in a nice apartment, she felt bad about her years in care and unprepared to take care of herself.

Have them turn to the first list: Ways to Prepare. Can they add anything based on what J.G. wished she had done? (Learn how to apply for welfare, how to get health insurance and choose doctors, pay bills, and keep track of appointments.) Then go to the other list and do the same thing—add things from the story. (Put up a wall calendar; figure out what sort of job suits your personality; be polite to workers at public assistance and other offices as well as roommates; take the initiative to figure out what medication works for you rather than waiting for adults to decide for you; help other people by sharing your experiences.) Ask if anyone has any other suggestions to share with the group about how to feel in charge of your life.

### Closing Activity: 5 minutes

Ask everyone to look at their “Ways to Prepare Before I Age Out” list, and circle one item that they can get started on this month. Go around the room and ask each teen to share the item they are going to focus on this month.

## Playing House—Art Activity

Provide construction paper, old magazines, markers, scissors, and tape for everyone in the group. Before the group arrives, draw a big empty room on the board or chart paper, with a few windows.

### Planning and Decorating: 15 minutes

Tell the group they’re going to decorate this living room together, and they’ll have to cooperate the way they would if they lived with roommates or family members. Go in a circle and have each person name one item for the room that they will draw or collage. That could include furniture, art, plants, a pet, TV, stereo, computer, curtains—whatever objects make the room feel like a place they’d like to be (not a person). If, toward the end, people can’t think of anything, let the others help them.

Once everyone has their assignments, have them draw or collage their item and tape it up in the room.

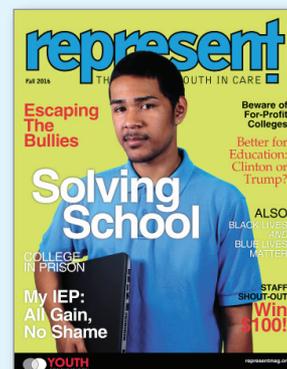
### Read and Discuss the Story: 15 minutes

Have them read “Ease the Transition to Living on Your Own” on p. 21. Go around the room, taking turns reading aloud. Let group members pass if they want to. Afterwards, ask the group what they think of the advice given in the story. What stands out to them? What sounds hard about what the therapists are suggesting? Do they have other advice they’d give a friend who is living on her own for the first time?

### Inhabit the Room: 10 minutes

Have everyone go around and say one thing they would do in the room to make it feel like home (for example, inviting a friend over for dinner, or finding a spot to draw or write or listen to music). They can take suggestions from the story, or share a new thing they like doing. Point out that by doing this, they’re sharing tips with each other on how to enjoy living on their own. ■

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