

Progress is a Process: A step-by-step approach to change.

During the 13 years that we've published *Represent*, we've seen many teens leave care. Even those who start out well set-up, find that aging out feels like being caught in a cyclone. With every practical change—like starting a new job, or moving in with someone new—strong feelings surface: anxiety about all the decisions they must make; sadness, anger or feelings of abandonment at losing the security and stability of care without having family to turn to; fears about whether they'll be able to achieve their dreams.

From the outside, it's hard to know what might help these young people to manage the swirl of changes. How can you really teach young people to handle such unbelievably stressful circumstances?

When we heard about the "Transitions Framework" that is used by business managers to help employees adjust to changes on the job, we were intrigued. The framework, which

is described by best-selling business guru William Bridges in his book *Managing Transitions*, laid out a step-by-step approach to managing complex practical and emotional changes.

The framework describes three stages to any change: 1) A time to acknowledge what you're losing and say goodbye. 2) A chaotic time of adjusting to the change when nothing feels familiar or solid but new possibilities are also wide open. 3) A time when the change begins to feel comfortable.

With each stage, there are coping mechanisms that can make the transition smoother, either by helping you face what you're losing, order your days during chaos, or celebrate your new start.

The Andrus Foundation thought the framework could help foster youth learn new coping skills they could use when they age out. We thought so, too.

This winter, we ran a 14-week workshop with five teens ages 17-22. Three were in their last year of high school and headed to college. Two were living on their own already. We taught them about the stages and gave them the long list of coping mechanisms (we called them "tools") that could help.

The writers each chose a change they wanted to make, and spent time every week using the tools and recording their process in diaries. We saw real progress.

Over the next year, we'll publish their diaries—as well as information on how teens can use the tools themselves, and how adult staff can help—so that other teens and staff around the country can benefit from our experiences here at *Represent*.

Handling the many changes of growing up and aging out will never be easy, but it can be made easier.