

Transitioning to Independence



I grew up in a world of confusion.

I never knew my parents, and as I grew up I remember being very rebellious. When I was 14, I started learning my own coping skills that helped me get through the day. I learned to take deep breaths and listen to music to help me remember my past—both the good parts and the bad. I have spent a long time learning how to cope and manage my life day-to-day.

I am now eighteen years old and I can finally say I'm a lot more put together than I used to be. I bring up my age because I believe that age is a step toward maturity. To me, being 18 means you have to start experiencing adult things. But it also means following rules that you set for yourself and that others set for you. For instance, I need to take my medication on my own, and I also need to live up to expectations others set for me like going to work and carrying out my tasks there. It means being responsible, and that's not always easy. Many adults supported me and helped me learn to become responsible for myself. My teachers, my team, my case worker, and my foster parents all helped me learn the things I need to become an adult.

When I do what I'm supposed to in order to prove myself to myself, I find life easier. Even though it's hard at times, I understand that I need to keep taking my medications and go to school and work. Doing all of these things helps me to earn more trust from all the adults in my life that support me. This is what it takes to be independent.

I think my school is where all my independence started. I show maturity by helping other students with their work, and by being a positive role model that other peers look up to. It's a great feeling and I love helping people. In the



future, I would like to be a mentor for kids.

I'm now at the stage where I'm transitioning to adulthood. I'm graduating June 24th and to top it all off, I'm getting my very own apartment. I'm nervous so I'm taking renting classes to prepare myself for living independently.

I've been accepted to be on SSI (Social Security Income). SSI is a program that is paying for my rent. You can get in this program if you have a disability. I am diagnosed with bipolar disorder. For me, it is like always being on the go. I never have time to sleep and my mood swings are more frequent than normal. I've learned to cope with bipolar disorder because I don't want to hurt myself or those around me. One of the ways I cope is by listening to music. It calms my nerves.

I'm proud to say I've learned something as I have grown older, and that is not struggling against those who try to help me. My caseworker, case manager, therapist, teachers and friends have all helped me to grow and become more independent. You might take my recommendation; I know it's not easy to hear others' advice. All I'm saying is, it's OK to make mistakes as long as you learn from them. Avoid holding grudges on others. Then you will find yourself taking steps toward independence.

AUTHOR

Heidi Piercey is a foster care alum and currently volunteers to help feed homebound seniors.