

Need to Know Series:  
**Clothing Allowance**



## Youth In Progress

New York State Foster Care  
Youth Leadership Advisory Team

*“The mission of Youth In Progress is to enhance and advance the lives of today’s and tomorrow’s youth by supporting their sense of self and responsibility. To do this, we pledge to educate everyone involved in the various systems Youth In Progress members represent to the realities of this experience.”*

## What is the purpose of the clothing allowance?

New York State requires that a youth's clothing be assessed at the time a youth comes into care to make sure that the youth has the basic clothing he/she may need for school, special occasions, and leisure activities. Clothing should be age appropriate, clean and attractive, and fit properly.

The initial assessment or inventory of your clothing should be done with your input, in cooperation with your county worker, agency worker and/or foster



parent. Once you have received an "adequate basic wardrobe" at your initial placement, replacement clothing is purchased over time based on clothing allowance rates set by your county. Your clothing belongs to you and goes with you should you move to a new placement or return to your parents.

If you need special clothing for religious ceremonies, summer camp activities, to accommodate physical conditions or to replace clothing that has been stolen or destroyed, your local district may approve allowances to cover the costs of these needs.

If you are in a state Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) facility, you will have all of your clothing provided to you in accordance with the resident uniform policy. You do not receive a clothing allowance while residing in an OCFS facility.

## Are clothing allowances the same everywhere in New York State?

Maximum reimbursement rates for replacement clothing are determined by OCFS each year and shared with all local district commissioners and agency executives, but actual clothing allowance rates are set by the county where you reside.

Procedures for distributing clothing allowances vary among counties and agencies. Some counties mail the clothing allowance periodically (such as monthly or seasonally) directly to the youth or to the agency where the youth resides. Other counties include funds for clothing with reimbursement payments for the board rate, which are sent directly to the foster parent(s).

## How can the clothing allowance be spent?

The clothing allowance is for basic clothing needs, including underwear, pajamas, jeans, shirts, and appropriate seasonal items such as winter coats, boots, and gloves.



## What about clothing for a special event?

Each county and agency may have policies and procedures for requesting clothing for special events, like a prom. As soon as you know about a special event, contact your county or agency caseworker to find out about the process and guidelines you may need to follow to receive timely approval.

If the county or agency resources will not cover your expenses, do some creative thinking about how to get what you need through an alternate method. Look in a consignment shop, check used clothing stores, borrow an outfit from a friend, or make your outfit. Consider renting an outfit instead of buying one, and borrow accessories from friends and family members. Many communities have prom dress sharing events. Getting a job to help pay for your prom costs may also be an option.

If you are in an OCFS facility, you will be unable to attend this type of community function (proms, weddings). Prior to your return to the community, you will receive one outfit of clothing from home to wear.

## What if a youth needs special clothing because of a pregnancy, or a height or weight change?

A pregnancy or a drastic change in your body shape or size is justification for a special clothing allowance request. Special clothing needs for youth in these situations should be handled by your county or agency caseworker.

Clothing has a direct impact on your self-esteem and your social interactions with your peers in school, at home and in the community. You need clothes that fit properly to help you feel good about yourself, as well as to protect you from weather conditions.



If you are in an OCFS facility, you will receive a new uniform when yours no longer fits properly or if it is damaged.

## What are considered the basic clothing needs for teens in New York?

Although state regulations advise counties to provide an “adequate basic wardrobe” for a youth in foster care, there is no definitive answer. Youth In Progress (YIP) revised the recommended clothing inventory list in 2006. This list had not been updated since 1989. We have included it here for your reference, but remember that this is only a suggested list.



# Guide to Clothing Inventory List

## Girls: 12-20 Years

Categories	Quantity	Categories	Quantity
<b>Section A – Year-round</b>			
Undershirt ( <i>tank tops, camisoles, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	7	Hat ( <i>cap, fitted hat, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	3
Undergarments ( <i>panties, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	12	Rain Gear . . . . .	1
Sleepwear ( <i>pajamas, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	3	Shoes . . . . .	2
Bathrobe . . . . .	1	Sneakers . . . . .	1
Socks ( <i>dress, casual, trouser socks</i> ) . . . . .	12	Slippers . . . . .	1
Pantyhose ( <i>stockings, knee-highs, tights</i> ) . . . . .	5	<b>Section B – Summer</b>	
Bra ( <i>sports bra, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	7	Lightweight Jacket . . . . .	1
Slip . . . . .	1	Shorts . . . . .	6
Casual Outfit . . . . .	2	Summer Shirts . . . . .	5
*Formal Outfit ( <i>suit/skirt with blazer, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	2	Swimwear . . . . .	1
Tracksuit ( <i>sweat suit, wind suit, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	2	<b>Section C – Winter</b>	
Casual Shirt ( <i>T-shirts, turtlenecks, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	7	Mittens or Gloves . . . . .	1
*Dress Shirt ( <i>button-down, polo, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	3	Winter Jacket . . . . .	1
Casual Pant ( <i>jean, khaki, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	7	Boots . . . . .	1
Dress Pant ( <i>work wear, formal wear</i> ) . . . . .	3	Winter Hat . . . . .	2
Skirt . . . . .	2	<b>Additional Items</b>	
Pullover ( <i>hooded sweatshirt, fleece, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	4	Luggage ( <i>suitcase, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	2
		Wallet . . . . .	1
		Purse . . . . .	1
		Belt . . . . .	2
		Book Bag ( <i>backpack, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	1
		Gym Bag ( <i>duffel, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	1

\* One dress outfit may be sufficient for youth between the ages of 12 and 14 who are not engaged in dressy clothes.



# Guide to Clothing Inventory List

## Boys: 12-20 Years

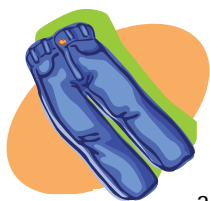
Categories	Quantity	Categories	Quantity
<b>Section A – Year-round</b>		<b>Section B – Summer</b>	
Undershirt . . . . .	10	Lightweight Jacket . . . . .	1
Undergarments ( <i>boxers, briefs, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	12	Shorts . . . . .	6
Sleepwear ( <i>pajamas, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	3	Summer shirts . . . . .	5
Bathrobe . . . . .	1	Swimwear . . . . .	1
Socks ( <i>casual, dress, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	12	<b>Section C – Winter</b>	
Suit Jacket or Sport Coat . . . . .	1	Mittens or Gloves . . . . .	1
Tracksuit ( <i>sweat suit, wind suit, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	2	Winter Jacket . . . . .	1
Casual Shirt ( <i>T-shirts, turtlenecks, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	7	Boots . . . . .	1
* Dress Shirt ( <i>button down, polo shirt, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	3	Winter Hat . . . . .	2
Casual Pant ( <i>jean, khaki, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	7	<b>Additional Items</b>	
* Dress Pant ( <i>work wear, formal wear</i> ) . . . . .	3	Luggage ( <i>suitcase, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	2
Pullover ( <i>hooded sweatshirt, fleece, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	4	Wallet . . . . .	1
Hat ( <i>cap, fitted hat, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	3	Tie . . . . .	1
Rain Gear . . . . .	1	Belt . . . . .	2
Shoes . . . . .	2	Book Bag ( <i>backpack, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	1
Sneakers . . . . .	1	Gym Bag ( <i>duffel, etc.</i> ) . . . . .	1
Slippers . . . . .	1		

aged in employment or educational or vocational programs that would require them to wear



## What is the role of adults in choosing clothing for me? Can my foster parents and staff tell me what I can and can't buy?

One benefit of a teen receiving a clothing allowance is that it can help you learn budgeting and money management skills, as well as how to be a knowledgeable



consumer. You should use your clothing allowance as a way of practicing these skills. For example, a pair of jeans or sneakers that are very expensive will use up a lot of your allowance and make it difficult to purchase other necessary items. Finding a sale or choosing a less expensive option will allow for more flexibility. Best practice suggests that you consult

with your foster parents and caseworker or agency staff to inventory your clothing needs, develop a plan on how to get what you need, and learn how to be a smart shopper.

Learn how to comparison shop, how to make purchases using layaway, or develop a saving plan, and look for sales to extend your clothing allowances. If you shop with an adult caregiver, you may be able to use a county or agency tax-exempt form to stretch clothing dollars.

## What if my foster parents or staff don't let me shop for my own clothes?

Talk with them about your need to shop in youth-friendly stores, and to make decisions about purchases on your own. Discuss your shopping concerns and money management knowledge to help cut down on their fears that you will buy on impulse or purchase impractical items. Offer a compromise, such as bringing home the items you purchased with receipts and tags so your significant adults have a chance to provide feedback to you. Consider it a chance to show off your knowledge and skills in a fun way!

## Do I have to wear used clothes?

You should be purchasing new clothes with your clothing allowance unless you want to purchase something from a used clothing store. It is against the law to sell certain used items, such as underwear.



## What if I have a job? Will I lose my clothing allowance?

No, you won't lose your allowance if you have a job. You can earn your own money to purchase extra items that you may need, special items you would like to have, or even save part of it for the future!

Youth in OCFS facilities do not receive a clothing allowance. However, you may have a stipend job and receive an allowance. This money is deposited in an account for you and you may use it to purchase clothing upon release.

## Learning life skills and preparing for self-sufficiency

Youth in foster care and OCFS facilities who are under age 16 should be learning basic life skills based on age and developmental abilities. This includes money management, laundry, budgeting, and learning to shop and care for clothes appropriately. These life skills should be taught in a placement setting, giving you the chance to learn through trial and error and to receive appropriate feedback from the adults around you. Talk with your adult caregivers about your need to practice these skills before you leave care, as part of your self-sufficiency preparation.

OCFS facilities have programs to provide you with the opportunity to learn and practice independent living skills prior to release.

## What if there's a problem receiving my clothing allowance?

Talk with an adult whom you have a good relationship with – your county or agency caseworker, your foster parent, a mentor, teacher, coach, or religious leader. They can help you come up with ideas, strategies and solutions, as

well as support you in your need to get answers to your questions or problems. Remember, everyone has a supervisor. So if you don't get an answer or you need more information, go up the line of supervision in your agency.



## Whom can I talk to if I have questions?

Your caseworker, agency staff, and foster parents can help get answers to your questions. YIP also has a clothing video that is used to promote discussion between youth and adult caregivers about clothing allowance issues. View it at the YIP website or contact your local YIP group for a presentation to facilitate discussion at your agency or local district.

If you are in an OCFS facility, you should talk to your facility case manager or community care manager if you have questions. You can also obtain a copy of the Resident Manual for additional help.



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