

Transition to Adulthood: The Ultimate Outcome

Moving into adulthood can be a difficult and scary time for any young person. For youth with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and their families, this time can cause great anxiety. But planning early for this change can reduce stress and uncertainty—and even make this a time of excitement.

When should we start planning for the transition?

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Act requires a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) to include a transition plan by age 16 years. Families are strongly encouraged to start planning and setting long-term goals when the child is 14 years old.

What are some areas of our youth's life that should be included in a transition plan?

A plan for transition should include goals for your youth as he becomes an adult. Be sure to get input from your youth on his desires and goals. The plan should address health care, employment options, community participation, and continuing education. Also consider social situations (friends, hobbies, interests); financial planning; long-term care; community, state, and federal resources; and sibling support.

How do we get started with planning?

You may want to start by writing a list of questions to discuss with everyone involved in the transition plan. Actively involve your youth in developing these questions. Siblings and friends should be included when appropriate. Example questions include

- What does your youth like to do? What are her dreams?
- What can your youth do? What are her strengths?
- What does your youth need to explore?
- What does your youth need to learn to reach her goals?
- What are some future education goals?
- How do you and your youth feel about getting a job?
- Where can your youth go to find a job?
- What transportation is available?
- Where will your youth live?
- Where will your youth get health insurance?

- Are supports needed to encourage friendships?
- Do people in the community know your youth?
- Are supports needed to structure time for recreation?
- Does your youth have any interests or hobbies?
- Does your youth have a system for communicating that works well? What strategies are needed to enhance her communication?

The answers to these questions will help you form goals for your youth. And those goals will lead you in putting together action steps to help your youth develop the skills she needs to enter the adult world.

What are some developmental issues we should consider?

When planning for your teen's future, think about his learning skills. This is important when planning for independence and employment. For example, is your young adult a slow learner? Does he have a learning disability? For individuals who have trouble speaking, it is important that they have a way to communicate. Young adults with sensory problems must also have a way to cope with new sights, sounds, and smells they may face in the workplace or community.

What should we know to get ready for educational transition?

If your child has an IEP, plans for transition will be added to it. This transition plan will identify the services that your teen needs to prepare for life after school. For instance, job skills training may be provided to help your young adult get ready for employment. Your school system may work with other agencies to give the support your teen requires. Some teens do not get special education services and instead have a 504 plan. If so, you will want to think about adding some supports that will help your teen develop skills for adulthood.

What should we know to get ready for health care transition?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that families have a health care transition plan before a child is 14 years old. Work with your teen's doctor to make a plan for the health-related skills your young adult will need, how your child will gain those skills, and the timing of transition to adult health care services. Check with your current health insurance plan to find out about extended coverage after your child turns 18.

Where can we get help with transition planning?

Many people will help with your youth's transition plan. These include your doctor or other health care worker, school employees, family members, trusted friends (circle of support), and community agencies. Each of them can help you better understand how to plan for transition and guide you in making decisions. Your state's vocational rehabilitation office and the US Social Security Administration are also helpful sources of information. To find the contact information for your state's vocational rehabilitation office, visit www.jan.wvu.edu/sbses/vocrehab.htm. Information for the US Social Security Administration can be found at www.ssa.gov.

What predicts adult outcomes?

People with ASDs who have good learning and language skills are more likely to have more education or work in the community. But independent of the child's ability, good planning makes it possible for young people with ASDs to work toward goals that will allow them to participate fully in their communities. To improve adult outcomes for people with ASDs, parents can also continue to advocate for community living options, social groups, and support services for young adults after the ages when the schools have to provide them.

Reference

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Academy of Family Physicians, American College of Physicians-American Society of Internal Medicine. A consensus statement on health care transitions for young adults with special health care needs. *Pediatrics*. 2002;110:1304–1306

Resources

Council for Exceptional Children: www.cec.sped.org

ERIC—Educational Resources Information Center: www.eric.ed.gov

DisabilityInfo.gov—The New Freedom Initiative's Online Resource for Americans with Disabilities: www.disabilityinfo.gov

Healthy & Ready to Work National Resource Center: www.hrtw.org

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition: www.ncset.org

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities: www.nichcy.org

US Social Security Administration: www.ssa.gov

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Published as part of *AUTISM: Caring for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Resource Toolkit for Clinicians*.

Adapted from the Autism Society of America: *Living with Autism*. Available at: www.autism-society.org. 800/3AUTISM (800/328-8476)

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