

Ten Tips That May Help Ease Your Child's Transition To Adulthood

Planning for your child's transition from adolescence to adulthood is one of the most important things you can do to pave the way to a successful future. In Minnesota, special education transition planning and services begin when your child with a disability is 14. From then on, you and your child will start learning new skills side-by-side. Your child will begin to take on more responsibility, and you will find new ways to provide support.

It can be a challenge. Depending on your child's disability, you may need to consider everything from post-secondary education to employment, from housing to finances. As you and your son or daughter plan for the future, consider these tips to help build a successful transition.

1. Help build your son's or daughter's self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

All young people should have a strong sense of their strengths, abilities, and interests. If students have a disability, they should also be aware of how it might affect them at work, in the community, and in their educational pursuits. Transition is a wonderful time to explore how youth will talk about their disability in different settings and ask for any support or accommodation they will need.

2. Help develop your child's social outlets.

Social relationships and recreation are more than fun; they are important tools that help tie people into the community and provide a wider network of support. Although social isolation can be an issue for many young adults with disabilities, transition planning that addresses opportunities for social relationships and recreation can build a bridge to success.

3. Expand your network and explore

community supports.

As children with disabilities become adults with disabilities, they may need support from a variety of sources. Start now to develop helpful networks for your child. Who do you know in your family, social group, professional circle, religious community, or other sphere who could help provide social, recreational, work, or volunteer experiences for your young adult? Look, too, at adults in the community who have the same disability as your child to learn what kinds of supports they use.

4. Make sure your son registers with Selective Service at age 18.

All males—including those with disabilities—must register with Selective Service within 30 days of their 18th birthday. (Exceptions are made for young men in institutional care.) Failure to do so can affect a person's ability to receive federal and state benefits, including student loans, job training, and government jobs. Learn more at www.sss.gov or link through PACER's site at www.PACER.org.

5. Explore post-secondary accommodations.

Students who receive academic programming and support in high school through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and 504 plans will not automatically have the same support after they graduate. Although post-secondary institutions are required to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities, they are not required to modify course work, if it would substantially change program requirements. When you and your student visit a prospective school, visit the campus's Disability Services Office to:

- explore how to document your student's disability;

- ask if you can talk with other students and families about their experiences in this particular program;
- inquire about what accommodations are available. In addition to note takers, extended time, and alternative testing environments, are other, less common services offered?

6. Investigate SSI programs.

Financial planning is an important part of transition. Many people with disabilities are beneficiaries of Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a federal program that provides a monthly benefit check that can help pay for living expenses. A lesser-known program of SSI, called Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS), may be helpful to some SSI recipients. It allows a person with disabilities to set aside income and resources in order to reach a work goal. These goals could include such things as enrolling in an educational or training program; obtaining supported employment; starting a business; or purchasing a vehicle to commute to work. PACER published parent briefs on SSI in conjunction with the National Center for Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET). The briefs are available online at www.PACER.org/publications/transition.htm. Social Security information on SSI is available at www.ssa.gov/work/ResourcesToolkit/pass.html.

7. Encourage your child to build a résumé by volunteering.

Many young people struggle to find work experiences that help them compete in the job market. Volunteering is a great solution. Young adults can gain skills and build a résumé

that shows a prospective employer their abilities, initiative, and dedication to work. Volunteering can also help develop additional social skills, especially if it is done along with a parent, friend, or group of peers.

8. Help your child learn “soft” employment skills.

In addition to the work skills people need for their jobs, they also need “soft skills.” These include such things as being able to accept direction, ask for help, deal with conflict, and engage in interpersonal communication. They also include being prompt, having appropriate hygiene, and dressing properly for the workplace. An employer is more likely to be patient with an employee learning the technical aspects of a job if soft skills are in place. You can help your young adult develop these skills by practicing them at home.

9. Plan for health care management.

Like most people, young adults with disabilities need to manage their health care and insurance. You should develop a clear plan on how to address health care needs once your child reaches adulthood.

10. Call PACER Center for information and resources.

The transition staff at PACER Center can help you prepare your son or daughter for the adult world. Trained advocates can help you understand your rights and find resources to help with all aspects of transition. To speak with a transition expert, call PACER at (952) 838-9000. You may also visit www.PACER.org/publications/transition.htm for online transition resources.