

Transition Childhood to Adulthood

When a parent of a child with a disability begins to plan for their child's life beyond their home, gathering information can be a daunting experience. At Special Friends, we have put together a guide of relevant information that aims to assist parents in their search.

The concept of transition is simple. It is the process of the child moving to adulthood. Although the concept of transition is simple, the process of planning and providing transition services based on individual needs may be challenging.

The first step is to determine the type of life of the teenager with the disability and his family hopes to achieve after the teenager graduates from high school. As a team, the student, family, teachers, therapists, caseworker, and community providers design the transition plan, as part of the IEP.

The transition plan provides the framework for identifying, planning, and carrying out activities that will help the student make a successful transition to adult life. The key areas to consider when planning for the future are:

- Education/Instruction
- Career/Employment
- Community/Social
- Adult Living

Frequently asked questions and answers:

When do we start planning?

Who plans the future and what are the goals?

What are the steps to an Effective Transition Planning Process?

Why do I need to start the transition process while my child is still in school?

Parents as Resources:

- Education/Instruction
- Career/Employment
- Community/Social
- Adult Living
- Legal/guardianship/trust

- Government Programs

When do we start planning?

It is never too early to start planning. It is important to start making social and educational connections for your child at a young age. It is also important to think about the financial future of your child, such as setting up a trust.

The key milestones are:

Age 14

Begin researching adult living, education and supported employment services. Most agencies have long waiting lists, and the sooner your child's name is on the list the better. Transition goals cannot be achieved in one year. Transition planning, services, and activities should be approached as a multi-year process.

Age 15

Your teenager's IEP must include their post-school outcomes, a statement that describes the course of study needed to help the student reach those outcomes, and statements of specific transition services that are needed by the student. These statements must address needs in education, employment development, community participation, and adult living.

Age 18

Many changes occur at the age of 18. Individuals may vote, sign contracts, get married, make decisions about medical care and be arrested as an adult. In some states, parents maintain those rights defined in IDEA for special education students who remain in public education until the age of 21.

Consider Guardianship / Conservatorship

Guardianship and/or conservatorship should be considered for a child that has a disability that causes him/her to be unable to manage his/her own life. After the age of 18, without being the guardian, you cannot legally make decisions for your son or daughter. It may be necessary for a court to make a legal determination that the person is incapacitated and someone should serve as his guardian. While guardianship provides important protection, it is also very restrictive. Basically, it removes all of an individual's legal rights to manage his/her own life. Under limited guardianship, a guardian is responsible only for specific matters such as money management or medical decisions. Special education service providers or agency personnel may be able to assist parents with this process.

Register for the Draft

Young men must register for the draft at the age of 18 regardless of their level of disability. Registration cards may be mailed directly to the student from the Selective Service Board or may be obtained from the post office.

Eligibility for Supplemental Security Income

Eligibility for Supplemental Security Income, SSI/SSDI, benefits for a child under 18 is based on the income and assets of the parents. Beginning at the age of 18, eligibility for benefits is based on the assets and earnings of the individual student. Students may apply three months before turning 18. Many clients are denied benefits the first time they apply, so parents may need to supply additional documentation and apply a second time. Because eligibility for SSI benefits is based on the assets of the child, it is important that parents plan carefully for the financial security of their son or daughter. Trusts and wills need to be set up by professionals who understand disability law. Your family attorney may not be well versed in this area of the law.

Age 21

The parent's rights defined in IDEA transfer to the student who is still in public education at the age of 21. Even though many other rights are transfer to the student at 18, special education rights remain with the parent until the student reaches 21 as long as the student is in public education. These include permission for assessment and placement. All rights transfer to the student at 21 unless guardianship has been awarded. IDEA requires that school personnel inform the parent and the student of the transfer one year before it will occur.

Who:

- The teenager with the disability
- Parents
- Family
- Teachers
- Therapists
- Case Manager
- Community Providers
- Agency Representatives

The goals of the team are:

(These goals are part of the transition services requirements of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - IDEA.)

- Help students and families think about the future and consider what they want to do after high school.
- Plan how to make the high school experience most relevant to the student's desired outcomes, and
- Help students and families make connection to supports and services that they might need after high school

What are the steps to an Effective Transition Planning Process?

Goals of the Process:

- Provides awareness to students, families, educators, community and adult service providers about what each system and person does.
- Facilitates communication between schools, families and community and adult service providers about students who need services.
- Develops a planning process that identifies a clear path for students to follow from school to adult living.
- Refocuses the school curriculum to include applied academics, career development and daily living skills.
- Utilizes assessment information across agencies, reducing duplication and streamlining the referral and eligibility determination process.
- Establishes a consistent referral system so students can more easily access agency supports.
- Effectively coordinates services between the school and other agencies leading to a successful transition.
- Successfully utilizes the available resources across agencies.
- Creates networking opportunities and expertise across agencies.
- Provides a support system for professionals, families, and students.

Transition Questions to ask:

- Where is the student going vocationally (competitive or supported employment, volunteer work)?

- Will the student need post-secondary education or training?
- Where will the student live and what support will be needed?
- What will the student's transportation needs be?
- How will the student maintain his or her social life?
- What type of leisure activities will the student participate in?
- How will the student meet his or her need for medical care including health insurance?
- What community agencies can help and how will they be accessed?

How is it organized:

The transition plan, as part of the IEP, provides the framework for identifying, planning, and carrying out activities that will help the student make a successful transition to adult life. It includes the long-range post-school outcomes identified by the student, a statement of a projected course of study (at age 14), and specific transition services that the student will need (at age 16), including agency services.

Plans must include:

- What agencies will be involved
- What services each agency will provide
- How all of the services will be coordinated

Why do I need to start the transition process while my child is still in school?

Special educators and families accessing community and adult agencies may feel like they have stepped into an overwhelming and complicated maze of new rules, regulations and requirements. Or, they may not have enough information to know where to begin. Special education services are mandated or required for all eligible students with disabilities in the public education system.

That is not the case in the adult world. While good services exist, the method for accessing these services is different from the school system. Adult and community services may have eligibility requirements, waiting lists and service gaps. With declining resources and incredible demands on the community and adult service providers, partnership between the school, family, and agencies is critical.

Early planning, intentional linkages to appropriate agencies and coordination of services are critical to the successful transition of students with disabilities to the adult world. IDEA requires that the student's IEP include statements of interagency

responsibilities or any linkages that are needed for the student to successfully transition (300.347(b)(2)). To accomplish this, the district must invite a representative from any agency that is likely to provide or pay for transition services to the IEP meeting and take other steps to obtain participation of community agencies in the planning of transition services (300.344(b)(3)). These steps may include arranging regularly scheduled visits of agency representatives to the school, co-sponsoring agency nights for parents and students, sharing written materials with families, facilitating the referral process to various agencies, and arranging visits to community colleges and agency offices.

There are many agencies that serve youth and adults with disabilities. Some offer vocational and residential services, others provide personal support or financial assistance. The agencies that should be involved will vary from person to person depending on individual needs. A good starting place is to begin with the major state agencies. These agencies have services available throughout the state and the counselors will know of other resources available in your local area.

Questions for an Agency:

- Agency Name
- What services does your agency provide?
- What are the eligibility requirements?
- How old does an individual need to be to apply for and receive your services?
- Is there a waiting list for your services?
- Is there a fee for services offered?
- Do you provide vocational evaluation?
- What is my role and level of involvement?
- Do you provide financial assistance toward vocational training or post-secondary education?
- Do you offer tutorial help?
- Do you provide job placement?
- Do you provide on the job training?
- Do you offer individual or family counseling?
- What information and documentation is required in order to apply for services?

Parents as Resources:

As we all know, some of the best information that we receive is from other parents. The primary questions that seem to reoccur as parents take the steps towards assisting their child reach adulthood revolve around:

- Education/Instruction
- Career/Employment
- Community/Social
- Adult Living
- Legal/guardianship/trust
- Government Programs

Please contact Michelle Farrell to add information to these and other topics.

Here are some of the questions and advice from parents who have taken this journey:

Education/Instruction

There are courses at local community colleges that adults with RTS can enroll in. The best way to inquire is to engage in a dialogue with your local community college and one of the school's guidance counselors. They will be able to advise you and your child on how to get the most out of the college setting.

Career/Employment

People with RTS can work. At the state and local level there are many Public/Private Partnerships focused on bringing together people with disabilities to develop skills that can transfer to a more self sustaining life.

Local community colleges will also be able to assist in a young person's job hunt, training and preparing them for a work place environment.

Community/Social

Often times it is difficult for a parent to explain to your adult person with RTS, what RTS is and what it means to them. Parents should know there are support groups that assist them in overcoming these hurdles.

- How do I reach out to and connect with other families who have adult children living with RTS?
- What social opportunities are available and how do you find them?
- Explanation of syndrome that they can understand.

- Can they be a parent?
- Self Advocacy

Adult Living

Some common questions parents might ask when seeking adult living facilities for young adults with a disability.

- What are the options for living arrangements?
- Are group homes or assisted living facilities available?
- Is an in-home caretaker available for disability expenses?
- Can the parent be paid to be the adult with RTS's assistant?

Government Programs

Medicaid's Reference website, TheDesk, provides information about Medicaid for people with cognitive disabilities.

The most common questions when beginning the Social Security application process are:

What is the process, and is my child eligible?

Here you will also find frequently asked questions posed by others, as well as other helpful websites and state by state assistance.

The State by State section assists parents in finding support and service groups from a person within the state and by community.

Case Management and Counseling Services will assist your search in finding supports and services, from a person who works for the state or county and provides help with your child's behavior, feelings and problem solving so your child can live at home instead of an institution.

Adults with disabilities can also receive training to learn daily living skills so they can be more independent.

Transportation to and from medical services and activities in the community is available from the home to work and health care centers.

