

# Planning for Transition

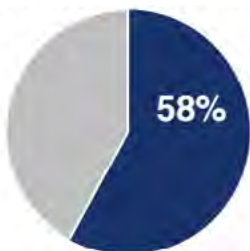
When thinking about the transition process, a great place to start is by consulting with your child's school. Whether it is a school counselor, school psychologist, teacher, case manager or school administrator, a school professional with experience can be very helpful in getting the ball rolling when it comes to planning for the transition to adulthood.

As you have hopefully learned throughout your child's school years, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates a public education for all eligible children ages 3 through 21 (in most states) and makes the schools responsible for providing the supports and services that will allow this to happen.

**It is important to recognize that one of the goals of IDEA is for students to be prepared for employment and independent living.**

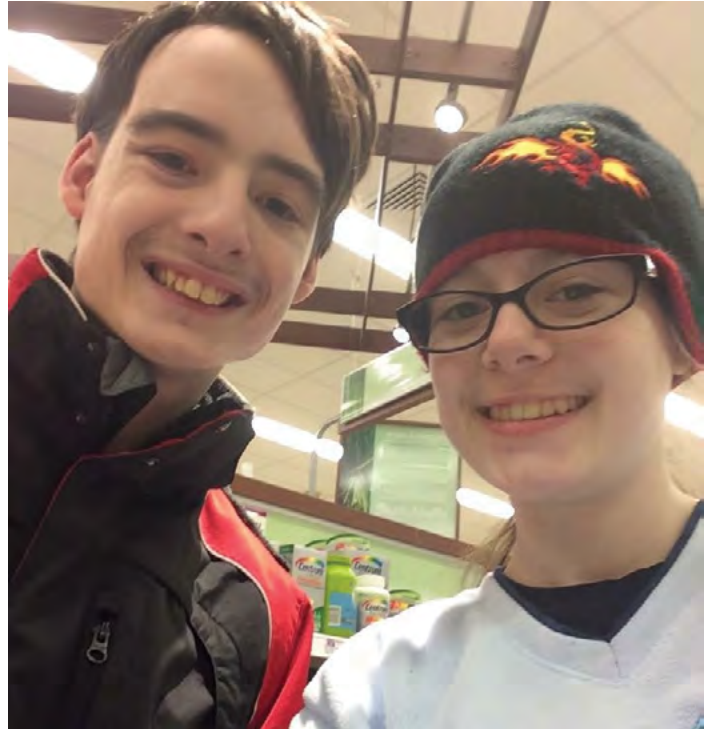
As you may also know, IDEA requirements are facilitated through the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. The IEP process must include transition planning services for all special education students at age 16. Ideally, this should begin a few years before that. The funding and services available through IDEA are not available once the student has received a high school diploma or aged out of the school system, so it is important to take advantage of these services when they are available.

Federal law requires schools to have a transition plan for every special education student exiting high school.



of youth with autism had a transition plan by the required age according to their teachers.

Source: National Autism Indicators Report Transition into Young Adulthood. A.J. Drexel Autism Institute, Drexel University.



## Transition Planning and the IEP

**As outlined in Section 300.43 of IDEA, transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child that...**

- 1. Is designed to be within a results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including:**
  - Postsecondary education
  - Vocational education
  - Integrated employment (including supported employment)
  - Continuing and adult education
  - Adult services
  - Independent living or
  - Community participation

**2. Is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences and interests; and includes:**

- Instruction
- Related services
- Community experiences
- The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives
- If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation

The transition process will continue to evolve, as the transition plan is a work in progress that should be monitored several times a year. You and your adolescent will continue to learn and grow during this process, and you will need to adjust your plan accordingly.

## Getting Started: Preparing for the Transition IEP Meeting

As far in advance of the first meeting as possible, you should talk with your adolescent about what he or she may want to do in the future. While out in the community, you can identify different jobs or activities that may be of interest to him or her. It is important to remember that the future may seem like a scary topic for adolescents with autism to discuss and they may not be ready. Some families have shared that they scheduled a specific day of the week and a specific time to discuss future plans with their young adult. This helped provide structure and a time limit on a sensitive subject. It also provided some time for the young adult to prepare for what he or she was going to share during these sessions.

If you have completed a person-centered plan, or if you would like to implement a person-centered approach, the best time to do this is before the transition IEP meeting. The information generated from the person-centered plan should be shared with

the transition IEP team prior to the meeting. There are also several tools available to help prepare for the meeting – two such tools are *It’s My Choice*, a transition workbook from the Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities; and Chapter 3 of *Keeping It Real* on the Elizabeth M. Boggs Center on Developmental Disabilities website. Both can be found in the resource section of this kit.

**Life for all adults, autistic or not, is very much about this ongoing process of identifying and making adjustments when they need to be made. Every person with autism has a path; making the adjustments is the journey.**

– Valerie Paradiz, Ph.D.

### Assessments

In preparation for the meeting, your school district may also conduct several assessments that should be shared with you and your adolescent in advance. Some of the assessments are outlined below:

#### **Level I Assessment:**

- Parents, students and teachers all complete a questionnaire to help them focus on the student’s long term career goals
- Helps explore possible areas of interest that can be used in the transition plan
- Should be updated yearly

#### **Level II Assessments:**

- Parents, students and teachers provide feedback as to a student’s skills and aptitudes when compared to his or her peers
- Can often help pinpoint areas where further skills can be developed

### **Level III Assessments:**

- Student tries out different areas of work in different settings with the proper supports in place (situational assessment)
- Allowed students to get some hands-on work experience and see what they enjoy and in what fields they excel
- Staff on hand assesses the student's response to each environment
- For students who do not perform well on tests or thrive in testing environments

The Community-based Skills Assessment, developed for Autism Speaks through a contract with Virginia Commonwealth University's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, can help you and your child's team develop a comprehensive personalized transition plan by assessing his or her current skill levels and abilities beginning at age 12 and continuing into adulthood. An app for the CSA is coming soon! Learn more at [autismspeaks.org/csa](http://autismspeaks.org/csa).

### **Preparing Your Adolescent for the Transition Meeting**

The transition meeting is a perfect place for your child to work on his or her self-advocacy skills. Making sure that he or she is involved in the transition process is a great way for your child to learn how to express his or her thoughts and feelings about future plans. Topics you may want to review with your child before the meeting include his or her autism, entitlements and ideas for accommodations to help

**Just as with every other subject, it is important to develop a lesson plan and anticipate questions and concerns that students may have as they work on applying their strengths and challenges to create their own customized education.**

- Stephen Shore, Ed.D., *Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum*



provide the greatest support possible. Make sure he or she understands what an IEP is and what the purpose of the meeting is to the best of his or her ability. For those with limited verbal ability, pictures or written statements may be helpful.

Just as when transitioning to any other new activity, prepare your child in advance of the IEP meeting and describe its purpose. His or her involvement can take place on a sliding scale of responsibility. Initially and/or for students at a lower cognitive or developmental stage, familiarizing your child with the purpose of an IEP can be sufficient and all that can reasonably be expected. The range of involvement might include the following:

- **The teacher brings the student to the IEP meeting for a brief period of time, encouraging interactions with some or all of the team members. This introduction may be as short as a few minutes where the student just says “hi” to one or two IEP team members or helps pass out materials.**
- **The student prepares a short statement that he or she distributes or reads aloud to the IEP team, indicating strengths and difficulties in school.**

- **After obtaining data from IEP team members prior to the meeting, the student writes sections of the IEP for modification and approval at the meeting.**
- **The student co-presents as an equal member of the IEP team.**
- **The student leads the IEP meeting with support from his or her primary teacher.**

## The Transition Meeting

Since your school district is responsible for coordinating transition services for your adolescent, you may want to partner with the school district in advance of the meeting to make sure that any outside agencies or individuals that can offer resources have been invited. As you can imagine, it takes a fair amount of time to coordinate with those who may need to attend the meeting, so you may want to work with your school advisors to start the process as early as possible.

The transition IEP meeting can involve a wide array of people, including:

- **The student (as appropriate)**
- **Parents or guardians**
- **Teachers (special and general education)**
- **School administrators**
- **Related service providers such as speech therapists, behavioral consultants, etc.**
- **Representatives of outside agencies that may provide support to reach post-transition goals such as the state Division of Vocational Rehabilitation**
- **Other individuals who can support your child**

You may feel overwhelmed sitting at a table with all of these people making recommendations about your child's future. Remember, nothing is "written in stone" and the plan continues to be a work in progress. Goals are set in order to move forward and with a proper plan, your child will reach new vistas.

During the meeting, it is important to respect your adolescent's wishes and needs and encourage others to do so as well. Try to model appropriate behavior by addressing questions about your child to your child. If your child is having trouble answering a question, provide visual supports or choices to further encourage him or her to be an active participant in the meeting.

Many parents want to highlight their child's successes, while downplaying struggles. In believing that your adolescent has mastered a skill that may not be possible independently, you are doing him or her a disservice. A mastered skill needs to be done correctly from beginning to end, without prompts or support. This is an important point to keep in mind.

Be prepared to discuss a wide variety of topics at your transition meetings – planning for adulthood requires a focus on employment, housing, community living, postsecondary education, independence and more. Lots of factors go into creating a life that allows your child to be as independent and fulfilled as possible.

## Steps for Creating a Transition Plan

Several steps have been outlined that will be important in developing a transition plan:

1. **Describe the student's strengths and present levels of academic achievement and functional performance.**
2. **Develop measurable postsecondary goals based upon the student's strengths and challenges.**
3. **Develop corresponding IEP goals that will enable the student to meet his or her post-secondary goals.**
4. **Describe the transition services needed to help the student achieve his or her desired post-school goals.**

**Once we started the transition process, I** looked at Stacey’s education with a different focus. Although academics are important, I needed to work with her to make choices as to the best possible use of her high school time. Was it more important for her to identify the predicate of the sentence, or to respond when a peer spoke to her? My husband and I started to think about Stacey’s education by asking the question “is this a skill or information that she will use when she leaves school?”

– Jeannette, Mom of Stacey, age 14

In addition to stating the goals, the transition plan should include logistical information on how the plan will be implemented and monitored, such as: a timeline for achieving goals, responsible people or agencies to help, clarification of how roles will be coordinated and a plan for identifying post-graduation services and supports, including methods to obtain funding to access these.

If you are not in agreement with the transition services proposed, you can try to reach an acceptable agreement with the school district. If this is not possible, you and your family have the right to go to mediation or an impartial hearing.

## Diploma Options

As you plan for transition, it is very important to understand the different types of diplomas available to individuals with disabilities in the public school system. Some learners with autism will be able to receive a general high school diploma, while others may work toward an IEP or Occupational Diploma or certificate. The list below outlines some of the different types of diplomas and what opportunities they may provide for postsecondary education. Remember that each state has different options and guidelines for diplomas, so be sure to check in with your school administrators:

**High School Diploma:** This diploma is awarded to students who have passed required courses and exams in a number of subjects. It is generally accepted for admission everywhere: two- and four-year colleges as well as military and trade schools.

### **General Education Development (GED)**

**Diploma:** This diploma is awarded to students who have passed the GED exam. It is generally accepted by military, trade schools and some junior/community colleges (which sometimes require additional qualifications).

### **IEP/Local Diploma or Certificate of**

**Completion:** This diploma is awarded to students who have reached the goals on their Individualized Education Programs. It is not accepted for admission to any postsecondary degree program without other testing or certification.

## Conclusion

Again, long-term transition planning is an ongoing process that reflects the continuing development and changing needs of your adolescent. Given that the process starts in the early to mid-teen years, there needs to be a great deal of flexibility in the plan. Your adolescent will continue to grow and learn throughout his or her remaining school years and beyond, so the plan needs to be flexible and at times altered to meet his or her changing needs and goals.

**Once the actual plan is completed by the team,** it is a living, evolving document that should be reviewed and updated several times a year to ensure it reflects and meets all of your young adult’s needs and adequate progress is being made to that end. By creating a document with outcome-oriented goals that can be measured, you can more efficiently and effectively monitor your young adult’s progress.

– *Life’s Journey through Autism, A Guide for Transition to Adulthood* from the Organization for Autism Research

## ***Evidence Based Predictors for Post-School Success***

### ***Ohio Employment First Transition Framework Evidence Based Predictors Tool***

[ohioemploymentfirst.org](http://ohioemploymentfirst.org)

#### ***Predictor One: Collaborative Networks for Student Support***

Research shows that youth benefit from having a support network. Both ‘formal’ (agency based) networks and ‘informal’ (friends, family, community members) networks enhanced youth success.

#### ***Predictor Two: Individualized Career Development***

Career Development refers to the process used by an individual to form a work identity. It is ongoing and spans a lifetime. Individualized career development means that the strategies, supports and services are selected to align with how the youth learns and also provides access to careers that reflect the youth’s preferences, interests and skills.

#### ***Predictor Three: Authentic Community Based Work Experience***

During the high school years, participation in real life work experiences that closely resemble adult environments has been identified as a high predictor of successful adult outcomes.

#### ***Predictor Four: Social and Social-Emotional Instruction and Skills***

Social competencies are critical to successful participation in the adult community life. Employers report that inability to meet the social expectations of the community and workplace remains as a top reason why employees (disabled or not) lose their jobs.

#### ***Predictor Five: Academic, Vocational, Occupational Education and Preparation***

Youth with disabilities require a well-designed, coordinated, and unique education and preparation program. The program requires aspects of academic preparation as well as vocational/occupational preparation

#### ***Predictor Six: Supporting Parental Involvement and Expectations***

Parent, guardian or other caretaker participation is essential to an individual’s ongoing success. Involvement means parents/families/guardian are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning. Parental impact also encompasses the expectation of the family.

#### ***Predictor Seven: Self-Determination, Independent Living Skills Instruction and Skill Building***

A successful adult reflects self-management and direction, often referred to as Self-Determination. Many skills can support the development of self-determination such as the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, and take initiative to reach goals, and accept the consequences of actions.

#### ***Predictor Eight: Inclusive Practices and Programs***

Participation in inclusive settings during the school years provides opportunities to prepare for integration into the adult community. Inclusive practices refer to engagement and participation, not simply access to an environment.

[\*\*ohioemploymentfirst.org/up\\_doc/Evidence\\_Based\\_Predictors\\_for\\_Post\\_school\\_Success3\\_25\\_15.pdf\*\*](http://ohioemploymentfirst.org/up_doc/Evidence_Based_Predictors_for_Post_school_Success3_25_15.pdf)