



Transition Planning for Success in Adult Life



Growing up is not easy! It is even more complicated for young adults with disabilities. Far too many students with disabilities leave school lacking the academic, technical, and social skills they need to find and keep a job. Often the work they do find is low paying and offers no health benefits. Careful transition planning identifies the challenges students will face as adults, and prepares them to meet those demands successfully. To be most effective, planning should begin at the earliest age possible.

What Does Transition Services Mean?

Transition Services are defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as a coordinated set of activities for a student which promote movement from school to post-school activities. Post-school activities include post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

The coordinated set of activities must—

- be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests
- include instruction related services, community experiences, the development of employment, and other post-school adult living objectives
- include, if appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and a functional vocational evaluation



Transition Services and the IEP

The Individual Education Plan (IEP) for each student, beginning at age 14, must include a statement of transition service needs which focuses on the student's course of study or other educational experiences. The IEP must contain a statement of needed transition services, beginning when the student is 16, including a statement of interagency responsibilities of linkages. IDEA 97 supports transition services for those students younger than 14, if appropriate. Transition services may be addressed earlier, for example, if the IEP team determines that the student is at risk for dropping out of school or when these services would have a positive impact on employment and independent living outcomes.



Transition is an outcome oriented process, requiring long-range planning, that focuses on improving the student's skills related to employment, independent living, and community participation. The transition plan provides the framework for identifying, planning, and carrying out activities which will help the student make a successful transition to adult life. The plan identifies the skills the student needs to learn, which transition services will be provided, when they will be provided, and the party or agency responsible for providing them. The transition planning process focuses on the unique needs and goals of the student, involving a team of people drawn from different parts of the student's school and community life.



The specific needs and goals of the student determine who is invited to the IEP transition meeting. It may be appropriate to have representatives from various adult organizations at the meeting, such as vocational rehabilitation, community colleges, housing, mental health, and employment and training agencies. If the school does not invite representatives from adult agencies, the parent or student should do so. If the agency representatives do not attend the meeting, the school is required to "take other steps to obtain their participation" in planning the student's transition services. Although not specified in IDEA 97, these steps might include arranging for a subsequent IEP meeting to discuss transition issues, contacting a trained advocate, forwarding a copy of the IEP to the agency (with student and parent approval), and maintaining contact with the agency in order to promote their involvement.



The Transition Plan and Graduation

Students with disabilities can remain in public school through age 21 if the student has not met local and state graduation requirements and has not received a regular high school diploma. The IEP team may modify the graduation requirements, if appropriate; any modifications must be documented in the student's IEP. If the student has met all of the graduation requirements, the school may not be required to withhold the diploma. Since the student's right to educational services ends with the receipt of a regular high school diploma, it is important that the team, including the student, is aware of the district's graduation requirements and begin planning for graduation as early as possible.

Age of Majority

IDEA 97 requires that, beginning at least one year before the student's 18th birthday, the student and his/her parents must be informed that most of the rights under IDEA 97 transfer to the student. The parents retain the right to any required notice (e.g. notice of meetings); all other rights (e.g. permission for evaluation) transfer to the student.

How to Begin Transition Planning

Transition goals cannot be achieved in one year. Transition planning, services, and activities should be approached as a multi-year process. Young adults themselves, along with their parents, play an important role in the transition process. Granted, involving the student in his/her own transition planning is required by law, but perhaps the most important reason for student involvement in transition planning is to facilitate the development of his/her self-determination skills. These are essential skills that will make it possible for the student to manage his/her own life.

To begin transition planning, examine your family's values as well as your young adult's interests, skills, and desires for the future. Encourage your son or daughter to talk about their goals for the future. These goals should be the guide for the transition planning process. Involve your child in activities that help him/her become a good decision maker and develop self-advocacy skills. (The Transition Checklist following the conclusion can be used in developing the transition plan).



Conclusion

Throughout public school years, the district has had the responsibility of providing the services for students with disabilities to become successful learners. The transition from school to adulthood may be complicated because the adult system is very different: there are many public and private agencies that provide services for adults with disabilities. However, unlike educational services, there is no absolute entitlement to those services. In other words, different, more restrictive eligibility criteria, long waiting lists, and uncertain funding may keep a young adult from obtaining services upon leaving school. This is why transition planning at an early age is so critical.



Transition services can and should be delivered through curricular and extracurricular activities in many settings - in academic and vocational classrooms, at home, and throughout the community - to practice and reinforce newly acquired skills. The more young adults with disabilities have opportunities to practice their skills in real life situations, the more comfortable and natural they will feel in those settings. Transition services and activities should teach young adults with disabilities the necessary skills to make informed choices and decisions, and gain full social inclusion in many aspects of their lives.

Transition Checklist

The following is a checklist of transition activities that you and your son or daughter may wish to consider when preparing transition plans with the IEP team. Your student's skills and interests will determine which items on the checklist are relevant. Use this checklist to ask yourself whether or not these transition issues should be addressed at IEP transition meetings. The checklist can also help identify who should be part of the IEP transition team. Responsibility for carrying out the specific transition activities should be determined at the IEP transition meetings.



Four to Five Years Before Leaving the School District

- Identify personal learning styles and the necessary accommodations to be a successful learner and worker.
- Identify career interests and skills, complete interest and career inventories, and identify additional education or training requirements.
- Explore options for post-secondary education and admission criteria.
- Identify interests and options for future living arrangements, and possible supports.
- Learn to effectively communicate your interests, preferences, and needs.
- Be able to explain your disability and the accommodations you need.



- Learn and practice informed decision making skills.
- Investigate assistive technology that can increase community involvement and employment opportunities.
- Broaden your experiences with community activities and expand your friendships.
- Pursue and use local transportation options outside of family.
- Investigate money management and identify necessary skills.
- Acquire an identification card and the ability to communicate personal information.
- Identify and begin learning skills necessary for independent living.
- Learn and practice personal health care.
- Apply for long term financial support (e.g. Division of Services to People with Disabilities, Supplemental Security Income).

Two to Three Years Before Leaving the School District

- Identify community support services and programs (Vocational Rehabilitation, County Services, Centers for Independent Living, etc.).
- Invite adult service providers, peers, and others to the IEP transition meeting.
- Match career interests and skills with vocational course work and community work experiences.
- Gather more information on post-secondary programs and the support services offered. Make arrangements for accommodations to take college entrance exams.
- Identify and become informed about health care providers.
- Determine the need for financial support (Supplemental Security Income, state financial supplemental programs, Medicare, etc.).
- Learn and practice appropriate interpersonal, communication, and social skills for different settings (employment, school, recreation, etc.).
- Explore legal status with regards to decision making prior to age of majority.
- Begin a resume and update it as needed.
- Practice independent living skills such as budgeting, shopping, cooking, and housekeeping.
- Identify needed personal assistant services, and if appropriate, learn to direct and manage these services.

One Year Before Leaving the School District

- Apply for financial support programs (e.g. Independent Living Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Personal Assistant Services).
- Identify the post-secondary school you plan to attend and arrange for accommodations.
- Practice effective communication by developing interview skills, asking for help, and identifying necessary accommodations at post-secondary and work environments.
- Specify desired job and obtain paid employment with supports as needed.
- Take responsibility for arriving on time to work, appointments, and social activities.
- Assume responsibility for health care needs (making appointments, filling and taking prescriptions etc.).
- Register to vote, and for selective service (if a male).



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Disability Law Center
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