

Life Journey Through Autism:

A Guide for Transition to Adulthood

IDEA, SECTION 504, ADA, AND THE TRANSITION PROCESS

The following lists summarize how these laws specifically impact your young adult during the transition process. **Handout 1-1: Comparison of ADA, IDEA, and Section 504 Legislation** (on page 11) provides more detailed information.

- ▶ IDEA requires a transition plan once your child reaches age 16 (certain states require it at age 14). This plan must have the following characteristics:
 - ▷ An outcome-oriented system based on your child's strengths, areas of interest, and accommodations
 - ▷ A transition plan that is monitored and revised as your child gets older
 - ▷ A team approach based on the specific services your child needs
 - ▷ A process that cannot be changed or modified without your knowledge and consent (that is, until your child reaches the age of 18 and can independently make changes for themselves)
 - ▷ Involvement of the autistic learner to ensure their goals and needs are addressed
 - ▷ Services that help address the skills and accommodations needed to prepare for transitioning post-high school
 - ▷ A summary of services acquired during the transition process to assist post-high school
 - ▶ Section 504 and ADA work together to ensure that an autistic learner cannot be discriminated against in school and beyond by providing:
 - ▷ Equal opportunities to students with disabilities
 - ▷ Access to supportive services (such as an in-classroom aid)
 - ▷ Protections for the young adult post-high school (in college or at work)
 - ▷ Accessibility to all programs, including extracurricular activities
 - ▷ Protections for autistic learners in education and employment
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TRANSITION PLANING

PLANNING TO PLAN – REFLECTING ON AND GATHERING INFORMATION

THE TRANSITION PLAN

IMPLEMENTING AND MONITORING THE TRANSITION PLAN

Step One: Assessment

As you begin the transition planning process, think about the “big picture” of your young adult’s future:

- ▶ What do you want your child’s life to look like 5 years, 10 years, or 20 years from now?
- ▶ What do you NOT want your child’s life to look like in 5 years, 10 years, or 20 years from now?
- ▶ What will your child need in order to achieve the desired goals and avoid the undesired outcomes?

Personal Interests
Strengths (Capabilities) and Weaknesses (Challenges)
Past Learning History
Support Structure

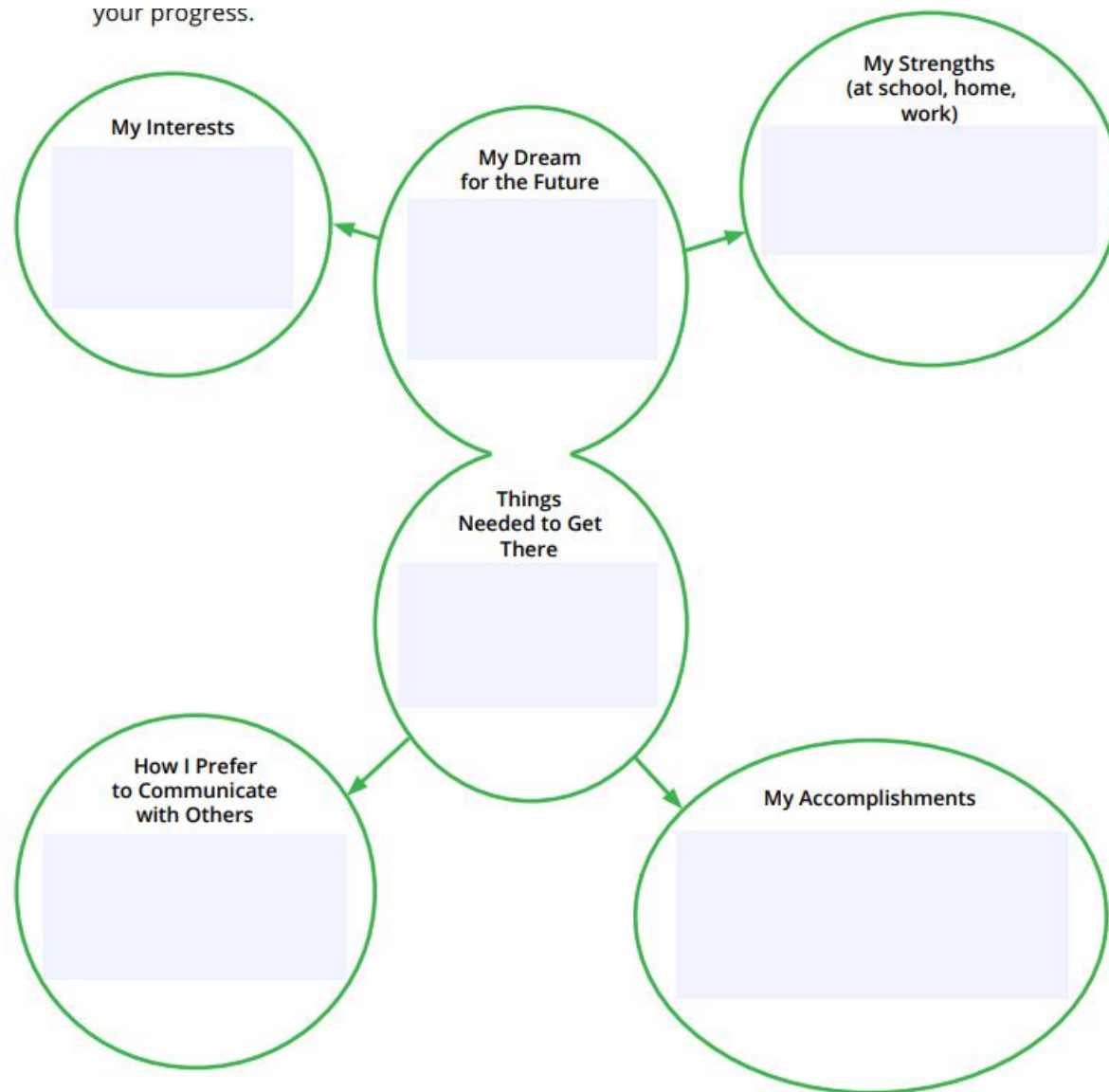
Step Two: Writing Overarching Goals

EXAMPLES OF OVERARCHING GOALS

- My child will be able to live independently.
- My child will be comfortable and safe in a supported living situation.
- My child will have two or three close relationships.
- My child will contribute to the community.
- My child will find satisfaction in several of their daily activities.

Step Three: Anticipating Obstacles

your progress.



THE TRANSITION PLAN

Characteristics of a Sound Transition Plan

IDEA specifies that transition planning is a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is:

- ▶ **Outcome-oriented** – a process with clear goals and measurable outcomes
- ▶ **Student-centered** – based on the specific skills that the student needs and reflective of the student's interests and preferences
- ▶ **Broad-based** – including instruction and related services, community experiences, development of employment and post-school living objectives, and acquisition of daily living skills and vocational evaluation
- ▶ **A working document** – outlining current and future goals, along with the specific strategies for achieving these goals, and changes over time

Early Planning Leads to Success

Planning for your autistic young adult's future and exploring the world of postsecondary education or employment can seem daunting or even a distant prospect. However, starting to plan early and building goals related to particular life skills, postsecondary education, or employment into your young adult's transition plan/IEP breaks the process into manageable steps and helps engage an accessible, ongoing support system of transition team members.

The chapters that follow review important information related to the transition process and will help you maximize your planning:

- ▶ Student-Centered Transition Planning
- ▶ Postsecondary Education
- ▶ Vocation and Employment
- ▶ Life Skills

Now where do we focus our energy for for students on the spectrum?



STUDENT-CENTERED TRANSITION PLANNING

Student-centered planning, also called “person-centered planning,” is an approach to transition planning that prioritizes the interests and aspirations of the individual student. Specifically, the focus is on helping students develop the tools and skills necessary to design their own goals for their career, education, living situation, and other aspects of adult life. The team builds the transition plan around the student’s goals by equipping the student with the tools and resources needed to reach those goals.

Student-centered planning involves students meaningfully in all aspects of the transition process and helps them develop the skills they need to live an independent life once they no longer have an IEP and transition team to support and guide them. **In addition to helping the team create purposeful and specific plans for their life after graduation, your young adult’s involvement in the transition planning process also provides them with an excellent opportunity to advocate for themselves.**

SELF-DETERMINATION SKILLS

In order to be an active participant in the transition planning process, your autistic teen needs to develop **self-determination skills** – the skills that enable individuals to speak up for what they want, what they're interested in, and how they would like to accomplish it. Self-determination skills also allow individuals to have a strong understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, feel in control of their own lives, make important decisions, and figure out creative solutions to problems.

CENTERING THE STUDENT IN TRANSITION PLANNING

Self-Determination

- Self-determined behavior refers to actions that are identified by **four essential characteristics**:
- (1) the person acted autonomously,
- (2) the behavior(s) are self-regulated,
- (3) the person initiated and responded to the event(s), and
- (4) the person acted in a self-realizing manner” (Wehmeyer, 2007, p 3).

Implications for Professionals and Parents

Self-Awareness

- Individuals w/AS
- Professionals

Self-Advocacy

- Modeling
- Experience

Social Interactions

- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Self-Management

Goal Setting

- Structured
- Small Steps

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

PREPARING FOR POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION – WHERE TO GO AND WHAT TO STUDY

Choosing the Right School

SELF-ADVOCACY: A KEY SKILL IN A COLLEGE ENVIRONMENT

Once your young adult is accepted into college, the role of advocate needs to fall less on you and far more, if not fully, on them. In fact, self-advocacy skills are considered so critical to success in college that many institutions don't even have a mechanism by which you, as the parent, can advocate on their behalf. In college, the student is the main advocate. Therefore, it is essential that your young adult is prepared with self-advocacy skills to help them communicate their needs to the appropriate person in the appropriate manner. (Public universities generally have an office of Disability Support Services, which is the best place to begin.)

SKILLS ESSENTIAL TO COLLEGE SUCCESS

In addition to self-advocacy skills, your young adult needs to rely on many key skills to succeed in the college environment, such as organization, time management, and independent living skills.

- ▶ *Organization and time management:* Identify these skills (generally referred to as “executive function skills”) as goals in your child’s transition plan so there is time to develop them before college. Knowing how to organize assignments, manage time, set priorities, and break larger projects down into steps is critical for success in a post-secondary setting.
- ▶ *Independent living skills:* If your young adult is living on their own at college, tasks such as laundry, money management, cleaning, problem solving, health and wellness, transportation, stress management, etc., will take on a greater relevance than they had in high school. These skills can be developed before the first day of college with the help of occupational therapists or other service providers.

SETTING UP – AND USING – SUPPORT SERVICES

- ▶ Locate an experienced guidance counselor or student services staff member who can advocate for your young adult throughout their college career. Such support may come in the form of information about services on campus, introductions to groups on campus with shared interests, recommendations of professors who may be more willing than others to provide accommodations, and so on.
- ▶ Provide the college (professors, counselors, resident assistants, etc.) with information about autism and how it affects your young adult, specifically challenges they face and strategies that can be used to assist them. Developing a one-page “fact sheet” about autism and characteristics specific to your young adult may be helpful.
- ▶ Be sure your young adult discusses the options for taking exams with their professor at the start of the semester. Exams may be modified based on your young adult’s particular needs; for example, professors may provide extended time or make exams untimed.
- ▶ Suggest that your young adult continue to use the strategies that worked in high school, such as written schedules, visual aids, recording lectures, and other accommodations.
- ▶ Explore student organizations on campus that may be of interest to your young adult (gaming club, recreational sport, etc.). This may be a place where they can make friends and talk to trusted peers about navigating college life. Some campuses have clubs led by and run by autistic students. If such a club doesn’t exist, your young adult may consider starting one.

VOCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

PLANNING SEQUENCE – STARTING EARLY

Starting in middle school or early in high school, you and your child should:

- ▶ Start having conversations about work and jobs. These conversations will tie in well with your discussions from Chapter 2 about interests, goals, future ideas.
- ▶ Explore job sampling, job shadowing, informational interviews, and experience through volunteering. Through such experiences, your child can learn about the wide variety of jobs and careers that exist, and perhaps gain skills through similar tasks at home, at school, or in the community. Completing chores or other activities around the home can build responsibility and work-related skills.
- ▶ Participate in vocational assessment activities at school or in the community, such as DVR or a related agency.
- ▶ Seek opportunities for your child to develop competency in independence, self-monitoring, and life skills outside the classroom.
- ▶ Identify training and skills that will support their needs.

In high school, you, your autistic child, and the transition team should:

- ▶ Reaffirm and reassess life and work goals related to interests and capabilities.
- ▶ Break down employment goals into realistic pieces and identify the steps and skills needed.
- ▶ Identify strengths and weaknesses relative to work interests and focus on skill development for work tasks.
- ▶ Identify and find tools and resources to support self-regulation, stress management, and time management. These skills are important in the workplace and can be enhanced in high school, with the help of occupational therapists and other service providers.

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF WORK

The career and employment opportunities available to an autistic individual reflect the breadth of the entire job market. In addition, the flexibility of some workplaces and the evolving nature of work can provide additional options that are especially suitable for an autistic young adult. Where and how people work is ever changing, which opens up different types of opportunities for autistic individuals, depending on their needs, interests, and job match.

Traditional

A traditional work environment includes jobs that may be part-time or full-time, based on a 40-hour work week. Some jobs are temporary or seasonal, where the length of employment is based on a specific time period.

Vocational

Vocational work refers to more hands-on or technical jobs, which may include car repair, culinary arts, graphic design, and many others. Vocational training – a type of organized program that prepares individuals for paid or unpaid employment – may be a part of transition services. Check out your state's VR website to gain more information about core services offered and services like trial work experience/apprenticeship, assistive technology, benefits analyses, and other job search costs covered by VR.

Self-Employment

Through self-employment, an individual owns their own business and earns income for themselves; income may come through contracts and/or freelance work as part of this business.

Remote – Telework

Remote work (telework, telecommuting, working from home, flexible workplace, etc.), where employees can work from anywhere and don't have to commute or travel to a central place, office, store, or building, has become much more common in recent years. Different types of employers and jobs offer unique schedules or opportunities for remote work certain days of the work week or full-time.

LIFE SKILLS

Life Skills

Life skills, also known as “daily living skills” or “activities of daily living,” include a range of tasks people use on a daily basis, such as maintaining proper hygiene or cooking a meal. How well your young adult develops these critical life skills by the time they are ready to transition to adulthood will help determine the type of living arrangement they will thrive best in. For example, individuals who need hands-on support to use the toilet, bathe, or dress themselves on a daily basis will likely start with a group home as opposed to living in a less supportive environment such as supervised living.

Health and Safety Skills

In addition to daily and functional living skills, it is important to prepare your young adult with the skills necessary to maintain their health and safety. Certain skills, such as responding appropriately to a fire alarm, may need ongoing practice to ensure they are retained over

Functional Skills

So-called functional skills refer to skills we all need to navigate the daily mechanics of living independently, regardless of living arrangement. The nature of these skills varies even more widely than daily living skills, and may include household maintenance, money management, shopping, or other tasks that your child may not need to learn yet.

Sexuality and Relationships

Autistic individuals are very often left out of the conversation about sexuality, almost as if they are incapable of having sexual thoughts, feelings, and needs. In reality, many autistic people are sexual beings, and all autistic people need the information and skills necessary to make healthy decisions about sexuality. In discussions of this nature, it is important to address your young adult based on their actual age, instead of their cognitive age, to ensure they are receiving accurate and age-appropriate information.

Hobbies and Recreation

Many autistic learners have certain areas of interest or specific topics that they really like, for instance, math, Lego®, animals, computers, transportation, video games, or a specific movie or TV series. As part of the transition planning process, consider how your young adult’s special interests can be used to help them make friends outside of the classroom. For some interests, there are related organizations that meet socially – anime clubs, science fiction clubs, computer/technology clubs, chess clubs, robotics clubs, and so on. Introduce your young adult to these

Living Arrangements

- 1- Independent Living
- 2- Supervised Living
- 3- Supported Living

Cooperative

Supervised Apartment

Supervised group Home

Adult Foster Care

Institutional(Residential)

**LOOKING
AHEAD**

**PEOPLE INVOLVED
DEVELOPING A LIFESTYLE PLAN
LEGAL PLANNING
FINANCIAL PLANNING**

