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UNDERSTANDING TRANSITION SERVICES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: *A Parent Guide*

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Understanding Transition Services in Special Education: *A Parent Guide*

Transition services are a coordinated set of activities designed to help students with disabilities move smoothly from school to life after high school. This may include further education, employment, and independent living. These services are part of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

When do transition services start?

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), transition planning must begin by age 16 (or younger if appropriate) in the IEP. However, many states encourage schools to start as early as age 14.

What's the purpose of transition planning?

The goal is to prepare students with disabilities for life after high school. This includes:

- Post-secondary education or vocational training
- Employment (competitive or supported)
- Independent or supported living
- Community participation and adult services

Who is involved in the transition process?

Transition planning is a team effort. It typically includes:

- Parents or guardians
- Special education and general education teachers





- School counselors or transition coordinators
- School administrators
- Representatives from community or adult service agencies (when appropriate)
- Most importantly, the student as the key decision-maker

What is included in a transition plan?

The transition plan is part of the IEP and must include:

- Post-secondary goals based on age-appropriate assessments in areas like education, training, employment, and independent living
- Transition services and activities that help the student reach those goals
- Course of study—a coordinated set of classes or experiences linked to the student's goals

What kinds of services or supports are considered transition services?

Examples of transition services include:

- Job exploration and work-based learning (e.g., internships or job shadowing)
- Life skills training (e.g., cooking, budgeting, or using public transportation)
- Assistance with college or vocational program applications
- Interview and resume-writing skills
- Learning how to advocate for oneself
- Connecting with adult service agencies (e.g., vocational rehabilitation)

What role do parents play in transition planning?

Parents are critical partners in the process. You can:



- Help your child explore strengths, interests, and future goals
- Advocate for services that support those goals
- Connect your child with real-life experiences (e.g., chores, jobs, volunteering)
- Collaborate with school staff and outside agencies

Are there supports after high school?

Once a student exits high school, the protections and services under IDEA end. However, other adult programs—like Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) or Developmental Disabilities (DD) Services—may offer continued support.

What if my child is not planning to go to college?

The transition plan should reflect your child's individual strengths and preferences, whether that involves:

- Employment with support
- Trade school
- Community-based day programs
- Living independently or with support
- Volunteer work or other meaningful activities

What should I do now as a parent?

Here are some steps you can take:

- Ask your IEP team when transition planning will begin (or request it sooner)
- Encourage your child to participate in IEP meetings
- Explore career and life skills with your child at home
- Learn about adult services and community resources





- Stay involved and informed—it's a journey

Transition planning is about empowering your child to build a meaningful, adult life. The earlier you start, the better prepared they'll be.

Can I get help with transition outside of the school in my language?

Social service agencies typically provide language access services.

Inquire about how you request an interpreter.

You can also ask the IEP team leader to invite representatives from the social service agency you may work with in the future. The interpreter at the IEP meeting can help with communication.

