

Developing an Individual Transition Plan (ITP)

Education in the public school system clearly marks many of the transitions students must make. Students transition from preschool to elementary school and from elementary school to middle school; then comes the transition to high school and finally on to adulthood.

For students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, transition may be difficult. Planning is especially important and can make the process smoother. The transition from high school to adulthood can be the most challenging one for students, so planning should begin early.

The federal law IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) requires that an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) be written by the time a student is 16 years of age (14 in NC). Every student's plan is highly individualized and should include planning for further education/training, employment, income, living arrangements, leisure time, and participating in the community. Each student's needs will be different and require different support.

The purpose of the ITP is to prepare the student for life after high school. The document is written by a team of people that outlines the training and support that will be needed for the student to live, work, and participate in the community as an adult.

The team of people should include the following:

- parents
- student
- teachers
- guidance counselor
- transition coordinator
- vocational counselor
- job coach
- employer
- adult service representatives
- anyone who knows the student well, such as friends or relatives

Transition services are defined by IDEA as "a coordinated set of activities for a student which promote successful movement from school to post school activities." The activities may include:

- post-secondary education
- vocational training
- employment
- adult services
- living arrangements
- community participation

To make a good transition plan, it will be necessary for the team to determine the student's needs, strengths, preferences, and interests. Many people, including the student, may provide information. Measurable goals should be written to indicate what the student's life after high school will look like in these areas:

- education/training/continuing education
- employment
- independent living (if appropriate)
- community participation

Based on these goals, the student will then focus on learning skills that will allow him to be as independent as possible. The goals should be reviewed on an annual basis. Assessments may be necessary to establish:

- current strengths/needs
- interests
- academic skills
- physical skills
- daily living skills
- learning style
- preferences for post-school education/training, employment, and independent living

The type of assessments that are needed will vary from individual to individual. The self-assessment results should help develop self-awareness and facilitate goal-setting.

These are the major categories of transition services to be considered:

- **Instruction:** This relates to the academic requirements for the student's chosen course of study, employment skills training, career technical education, social skills, self-determination, driver's education, and/or college entrance preparation.
- **Related Services:** This may include occupational/physical/speech therapy, counseling, special transportation, travel training, exploring Disability
- **Support Services:** College or other professional supports may help to move the student toward post-school outcomes.
- **Community Experiences:** This may include community work experiences, recreation/leisure activities, tours of post-secondary education settings, residential and community tours, volunteering and training in accessing community settings, joining a team/club/organization.
- **Employment:** This may include career planning, job shadowing, guidance counseling, interest inventories, job placement, internship options, on-the-job training, on-campus jobs or supported employment.

- **Adult Living Skills:** This may include referral to Vocational Rehabilitation Services, applying to Local Management Entity for services, researching Social Security benefits/work incentives, registering to vote, filing taxes, exploring residential options, training in renting a home and personal home management, and reading a map of the community or using “Mapquest” on the computer.
- **Daily Living Skills:** This may include self-care training, health and wellness training, independent living training and money management.
- **Functional Vocational Evaluation:** This may include situational work assessments, work samples, work adjustment programs, aptitude tests and a series of job tryouts.

It is extremely important for parents and students to understand the North Carolina requirement for graduation. The course of study selected will depend on the student’s abilities and interests. The student may follow a course of study that leads to a high school diploma or a graduation certificate. Bear in mind that, even with a diploma, a student may be ineligible for admission to a technical school or college without the requirements of algebra or foreign language courses.

Many different people and agencies may be involved to develop an effective plan. Broad networking and creative thinking may be necessary to achieve success. The role of the parents in this process is vital.

Parent should consider these factors:

Will your child....

- live on his own or need assistance?
- work independently or need support?
- attend a vocational/technical school?
- go to college?

What independent living skills does your child have?

- Can he manage his personal hygiene?
- Can he choose appropriate clothes and dress himself?
- Can he buy and/or prepare food?
- Can he manage his medication?
- Can he keep his living space clean?
- Can he manage his finances?
- Can he drive or access public transportation?

What organizational skills does he have?

- Can he set a clock? Arrive at an appointed time?
- Can he use a day planner or calendar?
- Can he make a list of things that need to be done?

What social skills does he have?

- Can/will he initiate recreational activities?
- Can he use the telephone/email?
- Can he make/keep friends?

What self-advocacy skills does your child have?

- Can he ask for help if he needs it?
- Does he know when he needs help?
- Does he know his strengths and needs?
- Can he communicate with health-care providers?

Tips for Parents:

- You know your child better than anyone. If he is verbal, listen to your child's hopes and dreams. If he is not verbal, put yourself in his place and imagine what your child might want his life to be like as an adult.
- Observe your child's skills and behaviors. Think about how these will impact his life in the community without you.
- Don't expect the school to do it all. There are 168 hours in a week; 133 hours are spent at home and only 35 hours are spent in school.
- Encourage your child to be as independent as possible. If possible, teach him to do his own laundry, clean his room, manage his time, pack his lunch, make a sandwich, help with household chores, etc.
- Promote appropriate behavior and good grooming.
- Provide opportunities for your child to explore and enjoy the community.
- Encourage self-advocacy skills. Allow your child to make his own choices when possible. Be prepared to discuss the consequences of those choices. Be sure to have your child participate in any planning meetings, including his IEP meetings, as soon as possible. His participation may be minimal in the beginning.
- Depending on your child's ability, help your child to understand what autism is and how it affects his life. Talk about the things he is good at and the areas where he needs help.
- Consider safety issues. Based on the child's abilities, prepare him for how to respond to unsafe situations and who to go to for help.
- Be clear about graduation requirements.

- Explore information on post-secondary education, vocational training, employment possibilities, residential options, recreation/leisure activities for adults, guardianship laws, financial needs, medical care and insurance, and social skills education.
- Seek out volunteer or summer job opportunities for your child.
- Interview people who work at jobs that may interest your child.
- Visit work/training programs or college campuses.
- If your child is college-bound, investigate the entrance requirements and what support services are available at the college/university you are considering.
- Network with parents and professionals.
- Maintain good communication with the school and program personnel in order to monitor your child's progress toward goals.
- Read books about adults with autism and how they manage to lead productive and independent lives.
- Begin planning for the future now.