

10 Ways to Make a Smooth Transition to Adulthood

1. **Choose a Career.** It is a question that everyone faces when figuring out the next step after high school – what do I want to do? There are many different ways to choose a possible career path. For example, take a self-assessment, like the “What’s My Major?” quiz from Loyola University of Chicago (www.luc.edu/undergrad/academiclife/whatsmymajorquiz) or careeronestop’s Skills Profiler (www.careerinfonet.org/skills/default.aspx?nodeid=20), to help you identify jobs based on your interests and skills. You can also read the digital version of *Careers & the Disabled* (<http://bt.e-ditionsbyfry.com/publication/?m=29024&l=>) or use the U.S. Department of Labor’s “My Next Move” (www.mynextmove.org) tool for ideas. Check out this Career Planning Guide (www.moddcouncil.org/uploaded/Career%20Discovery%20Guide%20-%20Updated.pdf) from the Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council, or if you are planning to go to college, visit The College Board (<https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/explore-careers/college-majors>) to read articles on how to choose the right major, including “10 Questions to Ask Yourself”.
2. **Find a Supportive College.** You can also work with your guidance counselor to decide whether you want to go to a two-year or four-year college, or trade and technical school. Consider factors such as classroom size, cost of attendance and the type of degree or certification you will need for your future job. If you decide college is the best choice for your future, it’s important to look at more than just school spirit or a convenient location. Does your financial aid package make it affordable? Can you get the accommodations you will need on campus? Will career services help you find a job once you graduate? Take a minute to think about these questions and other things you should consider. Then, use the College Navigator (<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator>) to compare schools. You can also browse more than 200 college programs for students with intellectual disabilities on the Think College (www.thinkcollege.net) website. Some comprehensive transition and postsecondary (CTP) programs even offer federal student aid to help students with intellectual disabilities cover the cost of attendance. Once you have made a decision, contact your school’s Disability Support Services to learn about accommodations and supports that are available. Check out NPR’s (www.npr.org) “10 Tips for College Students with Disabilities”. Also, visit Going to College, a website that features advice from other college students with disabilities who have successfully made the transition.
3. **Parents and Caregivers Matter.** Parents and caregivers are often a key influence, providing youth with disabilities the solid foundation they need to succeed during different phases of their lives. The DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) program lists resources for parents of youth with disabilities on a variety of topics to assist them in preparing their children for college and careers (www.washington.edu/doit/national-resources-parents-children-and-youth-disabilities). In addition, the PACER Center has compiled a series of “Transition Parent Briefs” to help families be active and supportive partners as their children make the transition into adulthood. Topics include building work skills, helping youth with mental health needs and the role of parents in dropout prevention, among others. Parent centers, such as Parent Training and Information (PTI) Centers or Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRC), are also a good source of information and support. Visit the Center for Parent Information and Resources (www.parentcenterhub.org) website to find a parent center in your state.
4. **Take Advantage of Mentorship.** Mentoring has many benefits for youth with disabilities, such as teaching new skills and increasing motivation and confidence. Check out the following resources to get started! Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD) offers one-to-one and group mentoring to motivate youth with

disabilities, ages 6 to 24, to reach their personal, educational and career goals. In addition, PYD's National Center for Mentoring Youth with Disabilities provides customized trainings to organizations interested in creating their own disability inclusion programs. "Cultivating Leadership: Mentoring Youth with Disabilities" is an ODEP resource that provides an overview of the basics of mentoring relationships, which can include academic and career guidance, as well as interpersonal and problem-solving skills.

5. **Brush up on Your Soft Skills.** There's more to professional life than simply learning how to do your job. That's why the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) created the "Skills to Pay the Bills – Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success" toolkit. The curriculum, which includes materials and a video series, teaches six workforce readiness skills, including communication; enthusiasm and attitude; teamwork; networking; problem solving and critical thinking; and professionalism. You can download a PDF version of the toolkit or order a hard copy. Parents and caregivers, who want to provide a little extra coaching and work on these skills as a family, may enjoy the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth's (NCWD/Youth) "InfoBrief" on the topic.
6. **Take Control of Your Health Care.** All youth with special health care needs eventually move from a pediatric to an adult health care system. Fortunately, there are number of resources available to help you and your family transition successfully. You may also want to read "*A Youth Guide to Transition from Pediatric to Adult Health Care*" (www.medpeds.org/transition-for-youth-and-young-adults-from-pediatric-to-adult-health-care-a-practice-quality-improvement-approach). This comprehensive resource, developed by the North Carolina Division of Public Health and the Alliance of Disability Advocates, includes helpful case studies and information on the ages and stages of transition, roles and responsibilities of health care providers, as well as how to manage your own health care. For a more interactive learning experience, visit Healthy Transitions, a website that helps youth with developmental disabilities, ages 14 to 25, foster self-determination through new skills, videos and tools.
7. **Get Connected to Resources for Success.** Whether you decide to go to college, attend a vocational school or start working after high school graduation, you need the right tools to help you on your journey to independence and self-sufficiency. The ODEP Youth Team, in partnership with the NCWD/Youth, has created a number of resources for youth in transition. These include "Youth in Action! Leading Your Transition Planning", which provides a blueprint to help you plan and take charge of your future; "Guideposts for Success", which are based on six key principles, to help you and your family through the transition process; and "The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities", which helps you make informed decisions on whether to disclose your disability and the impact your choice may have on your education, employment or social life.
8. **Try an Internship.** Work experience gives everyone the opportunity to learn and practice life skills. The NCLD's (National Center for Learning Disabilities) "Internships: The On-ramp to Employment" is a comprehensive guide for students with disabilities on how to get internships and make the most of them. Topics include interviewing, preparing for the first day, work skills and personal assistance services. A section of the NCLD website is devoted to information for teens on volunteering and paid internships. An About.com article, "Transitioning to Adulthood – Employment", contains practical advice on what to put on a résumé when you have limited work experience. In addition, Disability.gov's "Guide to Employment" includes a section for high school and college students on where to start their job search, as well as other sections on interviewing and résumé tips, job training programs, workplace accommodations and how working affects Social Security disability benefits.
9. **How Personal Assistance Services Can Help.** Many people with disabilities use Personal Assistance Services (PAS) to accomplish daily living activities, such as bathing, dressing, cooking or running errands, so that they can remain independent. Information on PAS can be found on the US Department of Labor's website, or at: www.dol.gov/odep/topics/PersonalAssistanceServices.htm. PAS are typically provided by a hired worker, commonly called a "personal care attendant." Check out Dr. Raymond Glazier's guest blog to learn more (<http://usodep.blogs.govdelivery.com/2011/04/01/employment-supportive-personal-assistance-services-e-pas-facilitate-employment-of-persons-with-serio>). "*A Step-by-Step Guide to Training and Managing Personal Assistants*" contains practical tips on hiring and supervising a personal assistant (<https://fswe.ca/sites/default/files/documents/a%20step-by-step%20guide%20to%20training.pdf>). Another publication by the NCWD,



“Making the Move to Managing Your Own Personal Assistance Services”, offers sample worksheets, questions and charts to help youth with disabilities develop the skills needed for increased independence, as well as personal and professional growth. Workplace Personal Assistance Services (WPAS) help employees with disabilities perform work-related tasks. Examples include the use of a reader for business documents or a sign language interpreter for company meetings. WPAS may also include personal care-related assistance, such as helping an employee to the restroom or assisting him or her with eating or drinking.

- 10. Think about Your Benefits.** Many young people with disabilities may be unaware that they are entitled to certain benefits once they turn 18. The “Benefits for Youth in Transition Fact Sheet” (<http://eri-wi.org/download/YouthTransitionFactSheet.pdf>) is a helpful resource that explains the major Social Security Administration (SSA) benefit programs and how they relate to youth transitioning into adulthood. Young people with disabilities that transition out of foster care can apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) up to 90 days before their 18th birthday. For more information about the requirements, visit the SSA website. For people with disabilities who are at least 18-years-old and receive Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or SSI benefits, Social Security’s “Ticket to Work” program may be a worthwhile option. Through this program you can get a good job, save money and become financially independent, while still keeping your health care coverage for a period of time while you work. Sign up for a Work Incentive Seminar Event webinar to learn more.

Information provided by Disability.gov. Like them on Facebook, follow them on Twitter and use #disabilityconnection to talk to them about this newsletter. You can also read Disability.Blog to learn about helpful programs in your community.



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