

Supporting your child in their transition to life after high school

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Purpose

This Brief features current research, resources, and tips from the fields of college counseling, education, and psychology to assist your family's thinking and action in better supporting your child's transition to life after high school. It is written for parents and families of all children including those with disabilities, and features research that is applicable to the needs of a broad range of students.

Overview

As a parent you play a key role in assisting your child to consider and plan for their transition to life after high school. You can work with your child's school to create a transition plan which is designed to holistically reach specific goals, be built upon your child's needs and interests, and include instruction, community experiences, employment, living arrangements, life skills, and necessary supports. This important transition can sneak up on many families, and may leave you feeling it is "too late" or overwhelmed and not knowing where to begin, therefore it is important to begin early and work with your child throughout the process. Although your child's school and/or IEP team is designed to play a leadership role in planning and supporting this process, your involvement is essential to the process. Some simple ways to support your child's planning process are to access the resources available through your school and have conversations with your child about their interests and hopes for themselves at home. Research tells us that one of the primary ingredients for successful transition experiences throughout your child's school career is your involvement (Simonelli, 2002). This stage in the process is no exception.

There are many options for young adults, whether they want to go to a 2-4 year college, a university, a trade, technical, or vocational school, or into employment. They will need your involvement in planning and in the process of transitioning from life at home as a high school student into their new life as a young adult. This transition is challenging as both student and parent can have many feelings and it can be a confusing time. It is important to stick with it and do your best to keep talking, as a family, to develop a well-rounded plan based on your child's interests, dreams, and goals.

Transitions and Emotions

Transitions mean change. Although change is one thing we can count on in life, change is also hard. It stirs up our emotions, bringing endings to outgrown ways of life, times of uncertainty, and ultimately new beginnings (Bridg-

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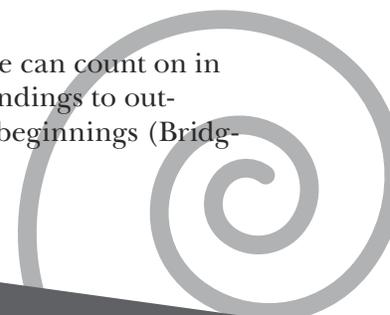
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es, 1997). Many parents talk about the mixed feelings associated with their teens moving through high school, graduating, and taking their next steps into young adulthood. These can include pride, hope, worry, expectations, changing roles, and anticipating of missing their child's daily presence at home. Parents raise their children towards their independence and letting them go can still be difficult. Simultaneously, many adolescents are pushing away from parental controls in an effort to develop greater autonomy and self-identity. Parents can believe this means that their adolescents need less of their involvement, but this couldn't be further from the truth. The level of skill and knowledge needed by young adults to be successful in their lives is increasing. Unfortunately, many youth are experiencing decreasing structure and support just when they are looking to build the skills they need to be successful. (Simpson, 2001; Larson, Brown, & Mortimer, 2002 as reported in Peterson, 2004).

Speaking with other parents and families who are going through this process can be helpful. You might work with your school to organize a parent night or parent coffee hours to share ideas, questions, resources, and support in this transition process.

Planning

Planning is both a partnership between schools and families and a process that requires collaboration, questioning, exploration, information, patience, guidance, and support. Adequate preparation for the transition to adult life at its best is a partnership between schools, parents, children, and the institutions, agencies, or departments that might be providing services and support to your child in the future. Depending upon the needs of your child the transition planning process may begin in early childhood or adolescence (often the case for children with special needs) and intensify as your child gets older. The Post Secondary School Counselor at your child's high school will be a valuable resource to you or speak with their school counselor. As a parent you have the right to contact the counselor to start the process – even while your child is in middle school.

In the 8th grade your child will make course selections for high school, this is important because poor course selection can reduce your child's options without you even realizing it. Research shows that many students do not take the college preparatory courses necessary to get them into college; instead, they enroll in a mixture of courses that do not meet college requirements, with almost 50% of students who enter college never graduating. (Bragg, 1999).

As your child makes their way through high school, ask them what they are enjoying, what they feel they are good at and what they are interested in or curious about. Their answers will help to guide you as you help your child plan for his or her future. Interest inventories and surveys are usually given to students in their first two years of high school to help to fill out this picture, but you may want to supplement this exploration (see Resources below).

For students who have IEPs, families and teams can begin to formally plan for postsecondary transitions at age 14, while it is a requirement by the age of 16, this is a good guideline for all students.

Here is what the current research says all students need as they transition into young adulthood, regardless to what they decide to do:

- Opportunities for learning about themselves, their interests and options. Kids need opportunities to make choices, to explore possibilities in their daily lives, to plan for their future, to take calculated risks, to practice problem solving and to learn how to recover from “bad” decisions (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition [NCSET] 2003 self determination). These are aspects of self determination – which is directing one's own life, along with knowing what options are currently available, making an educated decision, and of self advocacy – which is knowing what one wants and needs and speaking up for it, and evaluating the effects to change or alter the plan. (NCSET, 2003 Self)
- Building a holistic transition plan. Consider various options for life after high school including Post-secondary education options – college, university, adult education, technical/trade school, apprenticeship programs or vocational training programs; Employment options – job shadowing, intern-

ships, sheltered employment, entry level positions, and or work based learning; Independent living skills – see life skills below; Community Participation – voting, participating in school elections and activities, volunteering, service learning opportunities; and Health and Recreation – sports, outdoor activities, the arts, and leisure interests (Adapted from Connecticut Autism Spectrum Resource Center [CT-ASRC], n.d.).

- Life skill development. Provide opportunities for your teen to develop the following skills while they are in high school and at home with you: self-sufficiency skills like doing laundry, shopping on a budget, cooking; self-advocacy skills like knowing what you need and learning to speak up for it; self awareness, communication, and behavior management skills; money management skills like having a bank account, writing checks, balancing a bank account, and constructing a budget; time management skills; and technology skills – particularly important for students with disabilities (Adapted from Stodden et al., 2003).
- Support to evaluate their efforts and change plans as necessary. Any successful planning incorporates reevaluating the plan and making adjustments or revising the plan. This also allows for making “mistakes” and teaches how to recover from “bad” decisions. (NCSET, 2003 Self).

Planning for financial aid

If your child’s plans include continuing their education, there are ways to finance it besides out of your pocket (see Resources below). The schools you are considering will have a financial aid counselor to help you with the basics of applying for Federal student loans (which you and/or your child will have to pay back in reasonable monthly installments once they are done going to school), or work study grants, PEL grants, and others (grants are “free” money and not paid back). In addition to these resources there are billions of dollars in scholarships available.

Resources

Here are a few Internet resources that can assist your child in further discovering their interests and options and aid both your thinking and planning. Interest inventories and assessments can be found on many of the career-oriented sights.

Educational Resources:

Parent Teacher Association http://www.pta.org/parentinvolvement/bts/a4_lifeafterhs.asp

The Admissions Office <http://www.theadmissionsoffice.com>

Campus Tours <http://www.campustours.com>

Peterson’s <http://www.petersons.com>

CollegeNET <http://www.collegenet.com>

College View <http://www.collegeview.com>

Common Application <http://www.commonapp.org>

University of Hawai`i system <http://www.hawaii.edu>

National Center on Secondary Education and Transitions (NCSET) <http://www.ncset.org/publications>

NCSET also has a research based video and workbook that your school might get called: My Future My Plan: A transition planning resource for Life After High School for students with disabilities and their families

Career Resources

Career Information <http://www.wisemantech.com/guidance>

Occupational Information Network <http://www.online.onetcenter.org>

Career/College Info <http://www.variew.vt.edu>

Planning a Career <http://www.adventuresineducation.org>

What to Do With Majors <http://www.uncwil.edu/stuaff/career/majors>

Hawaii Department of Vocational Rehabilitation <http://www.state.hi.us/dhs>

RealChoices <http://www.realchoices.org>

America's Career Resource Network <http://www.acrnetwork.org/parentsguide/parents.htm>
42 Explore <http://www.42explore.com/careers.htm>
South Dakota Department of Education www.state.sd.us/deca/DWCP/links/career.htm
About <http://www.careerplanning.about.com/ad/adviceforkidsandteens>
<http://www.careerplanning.about.com/library/weekly/aa110297.htm>

Financial Aid

Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov>
Financial Aid Information <http://www.finaid.org>
FastWEB <http://www.fastweb.com>
Local Scholarship Database <http://www.hawaii.edu/cash>
Kamehameha Schools Bishop Estate <http://www.ksbe.edu/finaid>
(Adapted from The College Information Handbook, Punahou School, 2003-2004)

Summary

As you talk with your children about their interests and hopes for their future, together you can begin to build the plans and take the necessary steps to make their hopes and dreams a reality. "Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now." Goethe

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