

IEP Transition Planning: Preparing for Young Adulthood

By Kristin Stanberry

At a Glance

- A transition plan helps a teen with an IEP prepare for life after high school.

- This plan is about more than school; it covers job and daily life skills too.

- Transition planning helps teens develop clear goals and [self-advocacy skills](#).

Many teens look forward to life after high school but may be unsure about where they're heading. If your child has an Individualized Education Program ([IEP](#)), there may be an extra layer of concern about what the future holds.

Good news: All teenagers with an IEP are entitled to a [transition plan](#) to prepare them for young adulthood. Find out what the process involves, what a plan provides and how it may benefit your child.

What Is a Transition Plan?

A transition plan is a section of a high school student's IEP. It outlines a teen's strengths, abilities and goals for life after high school. It's *required* by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is developed by the IEP team and the student.

Transition planning is meant to help teens figure out what they want to do after high school and what they need to do during the school year so they can meet those long-term goals. Teens may have access to counseling, career services, education planning and volunteer work opportunities.

The transition plan is key to making high school relevant to your teen's future. Together, the IEP team and your teen will set postsecondary goals, choose activities, and connect with the necessary resources and services. These details will be updated annually.

When Does the Transition Plan Start?

The law requires that transition services be included in the first IEP that goes into effect when a student turns 16. This usually means that you, your teen and the rest of the IEP team will start discussing transition services when your child is 14 or 15. But you may begin this process when your child is younger if you and the other IEP team members agree that it's necessary.

Who Develops the Transition Plan?

You and your teen will work with the other IEP team members to develop her transition plan. Your teen is now a member of the IEP team. The primary purpose of transition planning is to help teens prepare to be independent young adults, so your child will be encouraged to play a leading role.

In fact, your child may begin attending IEP meetings whenever you think it's appropriate. Some kids begin attending meetings in middle school to prepare for the leadership role they'll be encouraged to take in high school.

The aim is to have your child focus on her strengths and talents and figure out long-range, realistic goals. The circle of people involved in her IEP transition planning meetings may expand to include people from the community. They may include counselors, school-to-work transition program officials and others.

Where Do Transition Plan Activities Happen?

Many transition activities take place at school. But unlike traditional IEP objectives, many of the activities in the transition plan are carried out at home and in the community.

At Home

Giving your teen chores and responsibilities encourages independence and responsibility. Think about the skills she'll need as an independent adult. She may already be doing some of these things. Here are some activities to consider:

- Open a bank account and learn to manage her money.
- Learn to shop for groceries and plan and prepare meals.

- Be responsible for maintaining a car and choosing auto insurance.
- Learn how to use public transportation.
- Schedule her own appointments with the doctor and dentist.
- Set up and use a calendar for school, work, personal appointments and leisure time.

In the Community

Your teen can find opportunities to explore college and career options. Here are some to consider:

- Research and visit local colleges and training schools she's interested in attending.
- Meet with other students who have gone on to college or career. If they have learning and attention issues like hers, talking with them may be extra helpful.
- Go to work with you, taking a tour or shadowing you.
- Network with friends and relatives about their careers. This can also include touring the workplace and going to informational interviews.
- Look into local internships and apprenticeships.

Most communities have a variety of resources to help students with the transition process. Examples are local youth employment programs, summer jobs for youth programs, and WorkAbility and/or Transition Partnership programs (TPP) at their school. Local vocational centers offer training in hundreds of occupations.

Stepping Forward to a Bright Future

Transition planning is more than a hopeful exercise or brainstorming session. It includes concrete action steps to guide and prepare students for college and/or a career, and for living on their own. A good transition plan also helps students plan how to compensate for learning and attention issues in the adult world.

Want more information on teens and the transition planning? Get practical tips on letting your teenager take charge and how to talk to your teen about the importance of self-advocacy. And be sure to connect with our parent community to find support and parent-tested strategies.

Key Takeaways

- A transition plan reaches beyond high school to explore college, career and daily living.

- Teens assume a leadership role on their IEP teams.

- A transition plan can help teens learn to compensate for learning and attention issues in the adult world.

About the Author



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