

A Family Guide to Transition Planning: *From School to Adult Life*

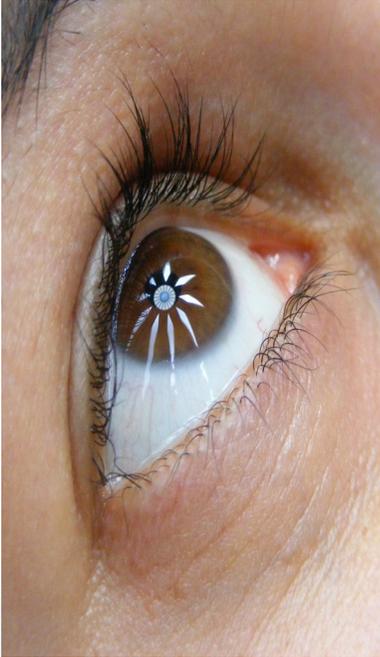
This booklet was designed to help you and your child prepare for transition. In it, we answer questions most often asked by parents about this stage of their child's life. We also tell you where to get additional information that adolescents and their families frequently ask for. We hope that this information, as well as the help and support you get from your child's Alta California Regional Center (ACRC) Service Coordinator (SC), will make this a smooth transition.

Additionally, our agency's website: www.altaregional.org has information and updates you may find helpful. You can register your email to automatically receive agency news.



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“What will my child’s future be like?”



If you are like other parents of children with developmental disabilities, you have probably often wondered what your child’s life will be like when they are an adult. Parents of teenagers often have conversations with themselves that sound like this:

“I’m worried about my child’s future. He’ll soon be an adult but he’s not like other adults. Up until now we’ve depended a lot on the schools. What happens when he’s no longer in school?”

“All my child’s friends have been at school with her. How will she find new friends or keep her old friends when she no longer goes to school?”

“What if my child wants to move out on his own? How will he find a place to live or a roommate? How will he be able to look after himself if he lives in his own place?”

“My child’s friends are talking about getting jobs. What if my child wants to get a job? How will we even know what jobs are available for her?”

“What if my child does not want to have a job? What will I do if she doesn’t have something to keep her busy during the day?”

“Who will look after my child after I die? How will he support himself when I’m no longer here?”



This booklet is for all parents who have had these kinds of conversations with themselves. In it, we answer five questions frequently asked by parents of adolescents:

Question 1: *How will my child get services and supports after he leaves school?*

Question 2: **How will my child make friends after leaving school?**

Question 3: *How will my child find a job or something else to do during the day?*

Question 4: *Where will my child live as an adult?*

Question 5: *What legal and benefit issues will my child need to deal with as she child gets older?*

Before we address these five questions, take a moment to ask yourself how you will know which options are right for your child. For example, once you know what kinds of jobs or living arrangements are possible, how will you know which one will be best? ***The answers to such questions lie within your child.*** Answers will depend upon his strengths and preferences. So, a first step for you and your child is to begin finding out what he likes or doesn't like and what he does well.

RECOGNIZING YOUR CHILD'S STRENGTHS AND PREFERENCES

People are happiest when they are doing things they like and things they do well. Your teenager is no different. Help him find greater success and happiness by identifying these strengths and preferences now and helping him find activities that will let him take advantage of them.

People cannot know what they do well or what they like to do without being exposed to different options. Options include places to live, jobs, recreational activities, hobbies, or anything else. It is very important for you to help your child learn what options exist in the world. This means taking him into the community to see how people live, how they work, and how they spend their time.

Whenever you go out with your child, pay attention to jobs or other activities that you see people doing. It may be especially helpful for your adolescent to see people with disabilities who have already made the transition from school. Ask your child if he knows what the person is doing and what he likes or does not like about that particular activity. This will allow you to gather information that you can use in the future to make decisions.

In the back of this guide is a simple form that will help you and your child begin to identify what he likes and what he does well. It has sections to write observations about your child and to rate how much he likes different activities and places. There is also a second form you can use to record how your child reacts to things that he sees in the community

HOW WILL MY CHILD GET SERVICES AND SUPPORTS AFTER SHE LEAVES SCHOOL?

One of the biggest challenges of transition is finding the supports and services your child needs leaving the public school system. You may have wondered what's out there for an adult with developmental disabilities who has left school.

The good news is that many supports and services already exist, and new options are opening up all the time. This is especially true now that people with disabilities are taking a more active part in the community. Many of the social and physical barriers that in the past kept people with disabilities from making full use of the community are being broken down. The emphasis now is on giving people the support they need to live as active, involved members of the community. When your child becomes an adult, the chances are very good that she will live in the community, have a job, and have access to community resources just like her non-disabled peers.

Your child will have opportunities for:

- Continuing their education at a university, community college, trade school or specialized training program
- Paid or volunteer work, with special supports as needed
- Living in their own home or apartment, with or without roommates, and with supports as needed – or living in a licensed care home
- Learning new skills, such as how to manage money, how to get around on the public buses, how to cook, and how to take care of a home
- Socializing with friends and making new friends

So there are services. Now, how do you find out about them?

Working With Your Child's School

The primary responsibility for providing your child with most services while he remains in school rests with the school. An Individual Educational Plan (IEP) has likely been guiding your child's academic progress since he first began to attend school. Starting at age 14, the child's annual IEP will have an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) component which then becomes the driving force of the IEP. The ITP addresses the knowledge and skills that you decide your child will need once he leaves school.

Your child's ACRC SC will work with you, the schools, and service providers in the community to help smooth the transition from school. The SC will help you and your child learn about the different education, work, recreation, and community living options.

Before your child leaves school, your ACRC SC can suggest programs that you and your child can visit to see which ones might best meet your child's needs. Your child's SC can also give you a tool that will help you know what questions to ask when you visit the programs. If you find a program that you believe may meet your child's needs, you may be able to have someone from the program attend your child's ITP meeting near the time of high school graduation. If you find a specific service that would be right for your child, your child's SC may help you find funding for that service. In these ways, your child's SC will be your guide through



HOW WILL MY CHILD MAKE FRIENDS AFTER LEAVING SCHOOL?

When your child leaves school, he may choose to be involved in some type of daily activity where he will be able to make friends, just as he did in school. He may want more education or training (for example, at a community college), he may want to get a job, or he may choose to get involved in some other kind of organized day activity. In any case, he will probably be doing these things with his peers.

To help prepare your child to make friends in these new settings, you can give him opportunities to practice meeting people while he is still in school. A good way to do this is to involve him in community recreational activities or volunteer opportunities. Local communities sometimes offer social and recreational activities or volunteer jobs, designed for young people with developmental disabilities. Sometimes other programs, such as regular youth sports leagues, can be adapted to support your child with special needs. This is particularly true if a family member, friend, or non-disabled peer is available to give the child extra help.

Getting involved in social activities with non-disabled peers is a good way for your adolescent to develop behaviors that are appropriate for his age. Teenagers have a great need to be accepted by their peers, and looking and acting like their peers is a sure road to acceptance. If your child has opportunities to interact with non-disabled peers, they are more likely to understand the norms in behavior and dress and want to adopt them. This may make it more likely that they will be accepted by non-disabled peers. It also makes it less likely that they will be exploited by people who would take advantage of someone who appears different.

Your child may also benefit from having a “special friend” who can take them into the community or go with them to particular activities. This special friend might be a brother or sister, a neighbor of the same age, or a volunteer from the community.

For some teenagers, being with non-disabled peers, having a special friend, or other typical social or recreational interactions may not be enough to help them learn the social behaviors they will need to get along with others. Some adolescents may need extra help. Disruptive behavior can be a barrier to social acceptance. It can also interfere with the child’s ability to be successful in school or other settings. Your child’s SC can discuss strategies for accessing available resources to meet these needs.

HELPING YOUR CHILD UNDERSTAND THEIR SEXUALITY

As your teenager approaches adulthood, you may want help teaching her about human sexuality. Training in human sexuality involves learning about one's own body, how it functions, and how it changes as a person ages. This training helps adolescents understand their feelings about themselves and how they relate to others. It teaches them about grooming, nutrition, and health needs. Finally, it helps them learn to take more responsibility for themselves and to make good, safe decisions so they can avoid exploitation. Your child's SC can help you identify available resources for your son or daughter.

HOW WILL MY CHILD FIND A JOB OR SOMETHING ELSE TO DO DURING THE DAY?

California has embraced Employment First efforts so that more people with developmental disabilities have the opportunity to enter the job market. Many employers have come to see the value of hiring individuals with developmental disabilities: reliability, willingness to work hard, and taking pride in their work are among the reasons. Individuals with developmental disabilities may need extra support to learn a job, learn to get along with others in the work setting, and learn related skills such as using public transportation to get to a job.

Specialized services are available to help people with disabilities find a job, learn the skills required to do the job, and provide the direct support they need to be successful on the job. This support may be time-limited or it may continue as long as the person keeps the job. Jobs for ACRC clients are available in a wide variety of settings. Your child's SC can provide information and support.

If employment is not the best option for your son or daughter, there are other formal and informal opportunities for things to do during the day. Your child's SC can give you information on the kinds of day activities that are available, including post-secondary education opportunities.

WHERE WILL MY CHILD LIVE AS AN ADULT?

Where an adult with a developmental disability lives varies from person to person depending on factors such as the desire and skill level of the individual, and what is common in the family's culture.

In addition to remaining in the family home, the two most common types of arrangements are licensed homes and living independently with support.

Licensed Homes

Licensed homes are residences for a small group of people with developmental disabilities. Usually between two and four people live in the homes. Residents receive 24-hour care and supervision from trained staff according to their individual needs. Some licensed homes are designed for people who have special needs, for example, those who are technology-dependent, have other serious medical needs, or have challenging behaviors.



Independent/Supported Living

For clients who desire to live in apartments, condos, or houses in the community, either alone or with roommates, there are services available. They can receive ongoing training in the skills they need in order to live successfully on their own such as: cooking, cleaning, shopping, menu planning, personal hygiene and health care, money management, and use of public transportation and other community resources.

Depending on the level of support needed, Supported Living Services (SLS) is another option that offers ongoing support in addition to training.

Family Support

Having a son or daughter with a disability move from the family home can be difficult for parents. Your child's SC understands that planning for such a move may be stressful for your family. He or she will help you prepare long in advance for this transition.

A WORD ABOUT TIMING...

Transition can be difficult for clients when they are no longer surrounded by their friends and the school structure they have enjoyed since they were young. To help lessen the impact of this type of loss, you may want to limit the number of changes that your son or daughter makes at any one time. For example, if he or she is moving from school to a day activity or supported employment, you may want to delay any change in his or her residence until he or she is used to the new environment and has made friends there. Making changes gradually will help ensure that your son or daughter always has a circle of support made up of people he or she knows, trusts, and can talk to.

WHAT LEGAL AND BENEFIT OPTIONS WILL I NEED TO BE AWARE OF AS MY CHILD GETS OLDER?

When a person turns 18, he becomes an adult and gains the same rights and responsibilities that other adults have, regardless of whether or not he has a developmental disability.

Voter Registration

Citizens 18 years of age and older have the right to vote! To find out more about what the requirements are, contact your local County Registrar of Voters office or review the California Secretary of State website at www.sos.ca.gov . Your child's SC can provide him with a California Voter Registration Application and help complete it.

Selective Service System

With few exceptions (for example, persons continually confined to a residence, hospital or institution or hospitalized or institutionalized for medical reasons), all male U.S. citizens and male immigrant aliens residing in the U.S. and its territories must register with the Selective Service within 30 days of their 18th birthday. For more information call 1-888-655-1825 or check out

HELP WITH DECISION MAKING

Some adults with developmental disabilities have limited ability to make informed decisions. For families who have concerns about their child's ability to make decisions, there are several legal arrangements that allow them or a third party to retain responsibility for some or all aspects of their child's life. Arrangements that families most often use are powers of attorney, assignments of educational decision making rights, representative payeeship, conservatorships, and trusts.

Assignment of Educational Decision-Making Rights

If a client is unable to make his/her own educational decisions past age 18, a client can sign a form assigning his/her educational decision-making rights to his/her parents. This allows the client's parents to make educational decisions for their child from ages 18 up until age 22, when individuals age out of the public education system.

Power of Attorney

If your child wants to have your assistance with making health care or general financial decisions, he may appoint you or another individual as his attorney in fact or agent to make either health care decisions, or specific financial decisions, or both. This is accomplished through signing a power of attorney forms which must either be witnessed, or notarized. This can be a relatively easy and inexpensive way for a client to permit his/her parents to assist in important decision-making. The power of attorney form can be changed or revoked by the client at any time, and cannot be used to make decisions with which the client does not consent.

Conservatorship

A conservatorship is a legal process which removes or limits an individual's rights and grants them to another individual, most often a family member. A conservator may make decisions about things such as the conserved person's health care, where he resides, who he spends time with, and his finances, among other things. A conservatorship can only be established in a court of law, and it is the court that decides what type of decisions a conservator will be able to make. Because it removes a person's basic rights, conservatorship should be used only when a less restrictive arrangement does not give the person enough protection.

Representative Payeeship

If your child needs assistance with managing their income and benefits to ensure all of their bills are paid, a “representative payee” may be appointed for him/her with the responsibility to receive and manage their income and benefits. A client may appoint a friend or family member to serve as representative payee. Alternatively, ACRC has vendored agencies that can provide representative payee services.

Social Security

Once a disabled person turns 18 years of age, he can become eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which is a monthly benefit payment, and Medi-Cal, which provides health care coverage. Whether or not an adult qualifies for these programs typically depends on two things: his personal income and the severity of his disability. When your son or daughter turns 18, you should contact your local Social Security Office to begin the process of applying for SSI and Medi-Cal. Be sure to let them know that your son’s or daughter’s records are available from Alta California Regional Center. With your signed consent, we will forward these records to the Social Security Office and/or Medi-Cal so they can be used in determining eligibility.

Until recently, people receiving SSI and Medi-Cal who went to work risked losing one or both of these benefits once they began to get a paycheck. The government recently changed this to give people more of an incentive to work. Under the new rules, a person may earn \$85.00 in a month and still receive his full monthly SSI payment. For every two dollars a person earns over \$85.00, the government deducts \$1.00 from the person’s monthly SSI payment. The person remains eligible for Medi-Cal to pay for doctor visits, hospital care, and medicines even when he earns too much money to receive SSI benefit payments, so long as the person’s savings do not go over a certain level (currently \$2,000). People working under these new rules may go back to receiving full SSI benefit payments if they stop working or if they don’t earn enough income.

In-Home Supportive Services

The In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) program, operated by the California Department of Social Services, helps provide care and supervision for people with disabilities in their homes. It is intended for people who need care to remain safely in their own homes. Your son or daughter could receive IHSS support while living with you or while living on his or her own in an apartment, condo, or house.

To qualify for IHSS, your son or daughter must be a lawful resident of California with low income and limited resources (such as would make him or her eligible for SSI) and must need care to remain safely in his or her home. Minor children may be eligible to receive IHSS when their parents are out of the home



WHERE CAN WE FIND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION?

We know you want to help your child make the best choices. Notice that we say the “best” choice, not the “right” choice. No one can tell you what the “right” choice is. Only you and your son or daughter can decide that. The best choice for another family may not be the best choice for your family, even when your circumstances are similar.

We also encourage you to get to know your local Family Resource Center (FRC). The FRC is staffed by family members, just like you, who can direct you to resources available.

Remember that you and your child are not alone as you navigate transition.

Your child’s regional center Service Coordinator and other staff are here to assist you and your family. We will continue to provide you with the information you need to make good choices and support you in those choices. We encourage you to call your child’s Service Coordinator to begin planning for the transition years ahead.

LOOKING AT MY CHILD

1. My child's greatest strengths are: _____

2. My child truly loves to: _____

3. My child tries to avoid: _____

4. My child's favorite class(es) and/or hobbies are: _____

5. My child's chores at home include: _____

Have a conversation with your child, then check the column that best describes how true each statement is.

My child:	Always True	Often True	Not True
Prefers to be outdoors			
Prefers to be indoors			
Prefers to work as part of a team			
Prefers to work alone			
Prefers to work with animals			
Prefers to work with plants			
Prefers to work with things			
Prefers to keep neat and clean			
Can repeat a task without losing interest			
Enjoys learning new things			
Gets along well with others			
Is able to use public transportation			
Prefers part-time work			17
Prefers consistent hours			

LEARNING ABOUT WORK OPTIONS

Complete the following items for each type of work you discuss with your child.

1. Kind of job: _____

2. Understanding of job duties: _____

3. Likes about this job: _____

4. Doesn't like about this job: _____

Notes: _____

LEARNING ABOUT LEISURE OPTIONS

Complete the following items for each social, leisure, or creative activity you explore with your child.

1. Social, leisure or creative activity: _____

2. Previous experience with this activity: _____

3. Likes about this activity: _____

4. Dislikes about this activity: _____

Notes: _____
