

# Transition Planning for Young Adults With Disabilities

*A Guide to Help Families Play a Supportive Role*



# Transition Planning for Young Adults With Disabilities

All children need love and care, yet each child is unique, requiring different supports to achieve their potential. Parents expect their child with a disability to succeed in life, just as they expect of their typical child. A youth with a disability is like any other, except that they may have challenges or difficulties in learning, communicating, or participating in daily activities. The disability is a part of who they are. It is a condition that affects their ability to do something for themselves or for others.

Some parents may be reluctant to seek out disability services for their child. However, support services can be critical to your child's success throughout their school years, during transition to adulthood, and after high school graduation. It is important to work with your youth's school or community resources to identify available support services. Some of these support services are called **transition planning** and are required by federal special education legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

## Transition planning is a process mandated by the IDEA for all special education students.

It facilitates the student's move from school to post-school activities. The transition plan needs to be individualized to the specific youth's needs, and their strengths, preferences, and interests must be considered. Opportunities for developing functional skills, including those related to post-secondary education, employment, community living, housing, and leisure and recreation, must be included.

Transition is tailored to an individual youth's needs, and focuses on what is needed for them to live, work, and participate in the community as fully and independently as possible. Under Minnesota law, transition planning is required to begin by 9th grade, but can begin earlier if needed.



## Meet Ron

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Ron has a hearing impairment. He uses American Sign Language to communicate. Ron graduated from high school and continued his post-secondary education in an auto mechanic program at a local technical college. Ron has been interested in auto mechanics since age 12 when the family car broke down during a road trip. This experience gave him the motivation and desire to be an auto mechanic.

During his transition years in high school, Ron's Pre-ETS team helped him set four transition goals:

- Explore and visit a mechanic program at a local technical college and auto shop to get a full view of the work environment
- Obtain a weekend job at an auto repair shop to gain work experience
- Take academic courses such as English, math, basic electronics, and life skills to fulfill the technical auto program requirements
- Be a self-advocate (communicate his needs, find access to resources, ask for accommodation and program modification)

Ron graduated from the auto mechanic program and found a job at a local car dealer. Along with family involvement, the Vocational Rehabilitation Pre-ETS services were critical for his success. This included:

- Job exploration counseling, which helped Ron define his interests and create a plan
- Accommodation and support that he received in high school, at his auto mechanics program, and at his high school work-based learning site
- Received information about college and technical school options, including application and admissions process assistance
- Encouragement to self-advocate and act on his goals



In addition to what IDEA requires, families should consider the supports their youth may need to hold a job, learn appropriate social and behavioral skills, develop a positive attitude, and maintain cultural values. Youth may learn these skills from school professionals such as teachers and counselors, or from their friends, families, leaders, and elders.

Other key aspects of transition planning include helping youth to express their interests and preferences in education, career preparation, and community living. Setting realistic expectations and goals is important. For example, a transition goal of driving a car means the student must learn the laws about driving, obtain a driver's permit, practice driving, and take a road test before a driver's license can be issued. If they can pass the driver's written permit test but cannot operate a car even with accommodations, this is an unrealistic goal. However, as the student matures and develops their skills, it may become attainable. Knowing what resources are available to help your youth reach their goals is important.

## **Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) helps eligible youth and adults with disabilities achieve employment, independent living, and economic goals.**

VRS provides a specific set of services to youth during high school who are eligible due to disability. These services vary and are called *“Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS).”*

## **Benefits of Pre-ETS include helping youth develop the skills and knowledge to prepare for employment and achieve their career goals.**

These may include vocational counseling, job exploration, workplace readiness training, and work-based learning experiences. These activities are designed to help young adults explore career interests and develop the skills needed to be successful in the workplace.

Skills that are necessary for success at work and in everyday life include time management, communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. Pre-ETS can also help your youth build their self-confidence and self-esteem. By providing opportunities to explore their career interests and develop their skills, Pre-ETS can help your youth feel more confident in their ability to succeed in the workplace.

## Pre-Employment Transition Services include five activities, some or all of which may be relevant for your youth, including:

- **Job exploration counseling** provides information on employment opportunities and making the best career choices based on interests and strengths.
- **Work-based learning** provides work experience at a worksite to connect youth to real-life work activities and to learn skills that will connect them to future career opportunities.
- **Counseling on post-secondary education options** provides information about college, technical schools, and other education options, including details about the application process and admission qualifications needed.
- **Workplace readiness training** provides training in necessary work skills such as punctuality, communication, and interpersonal interactions, along with financial and transportation options.
- **Instruction in self-advocacy** supports asserting their interests or desires, including the responsibility for communicating one's needs and desires to others

Pre-ETS is a valuable resource that is available to all youth with disabilities and can be tailored to meet each person's needs and goals. Pre-ETS can help your youth develop important job skills, build their self-confidence, and explore their career interests. If they are not yet receiving Pre-ETS services, contact your youth's IEP team to begin the process.



## Meet Mai Thao

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Mai Thao is a 17-year-old young adult with a learning disability who received special education services in reading and writing. She has solid artistic skills and wants to attend a computer drafting program at a local technical college like her brother. One of her transition goals is to explore her interests and preferences more fully. She plans to talk with staff at the technical school to learn more about the drafting program and its requirements. Mai will also visit other colleges, including the art departments, financial aid, and student support offices to discuss tuition, accommodations, and modifications she may need.

In addition to the required courses she is taking to earn her high school diploma, Mai is taking computer, life skills, and art courses. Her parents are very supportive and involved in her transition goals and help her manage and advocate for her needs. They are working to ensure she gains all the academic, social, and functional skills she will need for a smooth transition to technical school.

The Pre-ETS team is helping Mai:

- Set up a job shadowing experience at a drafting firm
- Explore additional career options that fit her interests and skills
- Check out technical school programs that offer drafting
- Visit other colleges and technical schools that offer art-related degrees
- Find and apply for summer work experience







## Post-secondary education planning is for youth who are planning to continue their education after high school.

Youth need to prepare for post-secondary education while they are in high school, including taking the classes that will prepare them for their chosen post-secondary educational option.

The many post-secondary options for youth to consider include:

- Four-year colleges or universities
- Technical colleges
- Community colleges
- Apprenticeship programs
- Job skills training programs

Youth will need consider which option will provide the degree or certificate needed to begin their career.

Before applying, youth should talk with staff in the institution's disability service office to ensure that the school offers needed supports or accommodations. Once enrolled, students need to register with this office to receive services such as accommodations. Students may need to talk with each of their professors about necessary classroom supports. Encouraging **self-advocacy** and **self-determination** can help transitioning students succeed as they will be expected to ask for and use the available service.

## Self-advocacy and Self-determination are related concepts with distinct meanings.

Self-advocacy refers to people advocating for themselves. It involves developing and using effective communication and decision-making skills to express their views, preferences, and goals. Self-advocacy can be especially important for youth with disabilities, as they may face barriers or discrimination that make it difficult to access resources or services.

Self-determination is the ability of individuals to make choices and decisions that affect their lives. It involves having a sense of control over one's own destiny and being able to pursue their goals and aspirations. It is the ability to make choices and decisions about one's life, such as setting goals, making plans, and taking action to achieve those goals. Self-determination is a broad concept that includes self-advocacy; individuals who are self-determined are likely to be better equipped to speak up for themselves and assert their rights.

It is important to encourage your youth to develop these skills, and to help them understand and advocate for their rights and responsibilities. These skills help youth be more independent and confident as they navigate the challenges of transitioning to adult responsibilities.

Youth with disabilities who develop these skills are more likely to be independent, confident, and resilient. Here are some ways to help your young adult develop them:

- Encourage them to express their opinions and preferences. This can help youth develop their voice and feel more confident in making decisions.
- Help your youth set goals and make plans to achieve them. This can be a great way to teach these skills and help build self-confidence.
- Provide opportunities to practice decision-making and problem-solving skills. This can help your young adult develop their critical thinking skills and feel more comfortable making decisions.
- Encourage your youth to take risks and try new things. This can help them build their self-confidence and learn from their experiences.
- Finally, be supportive and encouraging. Let your young adult know that you believe in them and their ability to achieve their goals.

By supporting your youth in developing these important skills, you can help them to achieve their goals and lead a fulfilling and meaningful life.



## Parents play an important role in their young adult's transition.

You know your youth best, including how they behave and get along with others. You know your youth's skills, strengths, and weaknesses; for example, their ability to complete a chore if given clear directions on a note card rather than verbally. You also know how they learn, care for themselves, take care of their own bedroom, and how they are responsible for doing chores.

You can help your youth by encouraging them to explore their interests and passions. This can help them identify potential career paths and educational opportunities. Here are some questions to consider as you help your young adult prepare:

- **Planning for the future includes work, living arrangements, and the ability to use community resources and participate in social activities.** For example, can your youth take a city bus, go bowling, go to the library, join other family members for a wedding, or play soccer?
- **Planning for education includes assessing your youth's academic strengths and weaknesses.** Once you know these things, you can help your youth plan for how to strengthen or obtain the academic skills needed to achieve their goals.
- **Planning for work begins with learning the types of jobs and careers that your youth is interested in.** What skills will they need to learn for job success? Which post-secondary educational institutions offer the program they will need to pursue a chosen career?



- **Assessing and acquiring basic life skills includes the skills your youth has, and those they will need to learn or improve upon.** Whether they will be living at home or independently in the community, your youth will need skills such as cooking, shopping, paying bills, doing laundry, cleaning, and taking care of pets.
- **Assessing communication and behavioral skills includes the skills your youth has and those they need to acquire.** How does your youth interact and communicate with others? Are they able to express what they need? Can your youth manage emotions and control or correct their behaviors? Can your youth transition smoothly from one task to another? What supports will help your youth learn and practice these skills?
- **Researching resources available in the community.** What school or community resources are available to assist your youth's transition? Does your youth know how to access these services?

## **In conclusion, it is important to remember that transition is a process, not a one-time event.**

While it can be challenging, with the right support and resources, your youth can successfully navigate this critical period in their life. Remember to start early. The more proactive you are, the earlier your youth will receive the supports and services that best meet their needs.

Each youth is unique and needs a transition plan that meets their goals and needs. As a parent, you can help your youth by providing ongoing support and encouragement throughout the transition period. Professionals and other support people may come and go in your youth's life, but you will always be there.

# Important Legal Rights

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## Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

IDEA is the nation's special education law. IDEA stands for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal law in the United States that governs how schools provide special education and related services to children with disabilities. The law was first enacted in 1975 and has been amended several times since then, most recently in 2004.

Under IDEA, children with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) tailored to their needs. This includes special education and related services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, counseling, transportation, and accommodations and modifications to help them succeed in the classroom. Schools must find and evaluate students thought to have disabilities, and assist in creating an education plan for them.

IDEA also requires that schools provide a comprehensive evaluation process to identify students who may need special education services and that parents are involved in the decision-making process about their child's education. The law includes provisions for due process rights and dispute resolution procedures to ensure parents have a say in decisions affecting their child's education.

IDEA applies to children and youth with disabilities from birth through age 21. It is designed to help ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive an education that prepares them for success in post-secondary education, employment, and independent living.

## Individualized Education Program (IEP)

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a legal document that outlines the educational needs and goals of an individual student with disabilities. The IEP is a collaborative process between parents, educators, and other professionals, and is designed to ensure that students with disabilities receive appropriate educational services and accommodations tailored to their needs and strengths.

The IEP is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a federal law that provides funding to states to help them educate students with disabilities. IDEA defines a disability as a condition that significantly impacts a student's ability to learn and participate in school. Examples of disabilities include learning disabilities, autism, attention-deficit/hyper-activity disorder (ADHD), mental health, and physical disabilities.

The IEP process begins with an evaluation of the student's abilities and needs. The evaluation is conducted by a team of professionals, including the student's teacher, special education teacher, school psychologist, and other specialists as needed. Based on the evaluation, the team (which includes the child's parents and, as the child gets older, the youth themselves) develops an IEP that is tailored to the student's unique needs. The IEP is a fluid document that can be revised by the team (including the parent) as the student's needs change over time. The school district provides the services agreed to in the IEP at no cost to families.

## Americans With Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a landmark civil rights law that was enacted in 1990. The ADA ensures that individuals with disabilities have the same rights and opportunities as everyone else. It prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including employment, transportation, public accommodations, and telecommunications.

The ADA defines a disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Major life activities include things like walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, and performing manual tasks. It prohibits discrimination based on disability in the workplace, post-secondary education, public services, and community settings. Helping your youth understand their protections under the law is essential to transition. Understanding your youth's legal rights and protections will also help you be a strong advocate.



## **Age of majority is an important milestone for any young person, as it marks the transition from childhood to adulthood.**

The age of majority is 18 in Minnesota and in all but three states. Unless parents have a legal document naming them guardians of their young adults, youth aged 18 and older may represent themselves at school, with service providers, at college, and with employers.

For young people with disabilities, this transition can be particularly challenging. They become legally responsible for their actions, including the right to make their own decisions about important aspects of their lives, such as healthcare, education, and finances. This does not mean parents or caregivers are no longer involved in the young person's life. Some young people with disabilities may not be able to make these decisions independently. Parents may continue to advise their children through adulthood; while they may provide support and guidance as needed, the ultimate decision-making authority rests with the young person.



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