

## Transition to Adulthood: Where Do We Start?

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The transition your son or daughter will make from being a child to becoming an adult member of the community is an important journey, one that requires a plan to pave the way to a successful future. With that successful future in mind, *it's important to begin thinking about your child's transition to adult life as early as possible.*

### Takeaways from this handout:

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- Begin thinking about transition for your student by age 13
- Begin planning for transition to adulthood by age 15 or 16 at the latest
- Federal law requires transition planning using a specific process involving evaluation and the Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Planning must help the child prepare for life after high school in the areas of employment, postsecondary education and training, and, when appropriate, independent living

**Federal law supports early transition planning for children with disabilities.** Transition planning must begin by age 16 for each student with a disability who receives special education services (has an IEP). *Some states begin this process earlier*, so it's important to know the laws for your own state. The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that all children with disabilities have access to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) that provides special education and related services. These services are designed to meet their unique needs and eventually prepare them for:

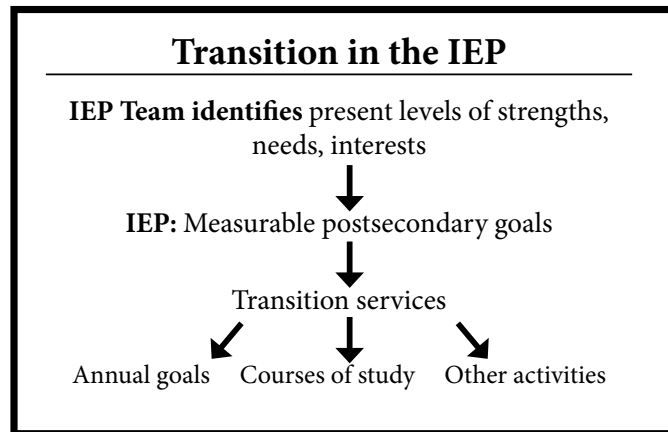
1. Employment
2. Postsecondary education and training
3. Independent living (when appropriate) – this includes recreation and leisure, community participation, and home living

**How Does the Transition Process Work at School?** Using the school's special education transition evaluation, the IEP team (including parents and child) will determine:

- Student's current skills and abilities
- Student's strengths, interests and preferences
- Student's academic and functional (activities of everyday life) needs
- Student's long-term goals for adulthood
- Impact of your son or daughter's disability on reaching these goals

Using this information, the team will develop the IEP to help pave a path from where your child is now to where he or she hopes to be in the future. Think of your child's current skill and experience level as the "here," and his or her hopes for further education or training, employment, and living situations after high school as the "there."

The following graphic shows how the transition process begins with evaluation and leads to goals, services, and courses of study as steps to achieve long-term goals for adulthood.



**What will your son or daughter need to learn to move from “here” to “there”?** Parents of children with disabilities want to help their children achieve their own dreams. This requires early planning and the active involvement of your child as much as is possible in the process. As parents, your involvement in the transition process includes:

- becoming aware of options
- inviting new people into your child’s life
- staying flexible
- asking questions
- sharing what you know about your child
- advocating for your child’s needs

As you plan and help define clear goals and dreams with your child, you will increase his or her chances of achieving those goals and dreams.

**When and how does the public school transition process end?** According to IDEA, the public school transition to adulthood process ends with:

- graduation with a high school diploma
- aging out of the special education system (age determined by your state’s laws)
- dropping out

At the end of special education services, the school district must provide a **Summary of Performance (SOP)**. The SOP includes a summary of academic and functional performance with recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting continuing postsecondary goals. An example of the SOP document can be found here: [wrightslaw.com/info/trans.sop.template.pdf](http://wrightslaw.com/info/trans.sop.template.pdf).