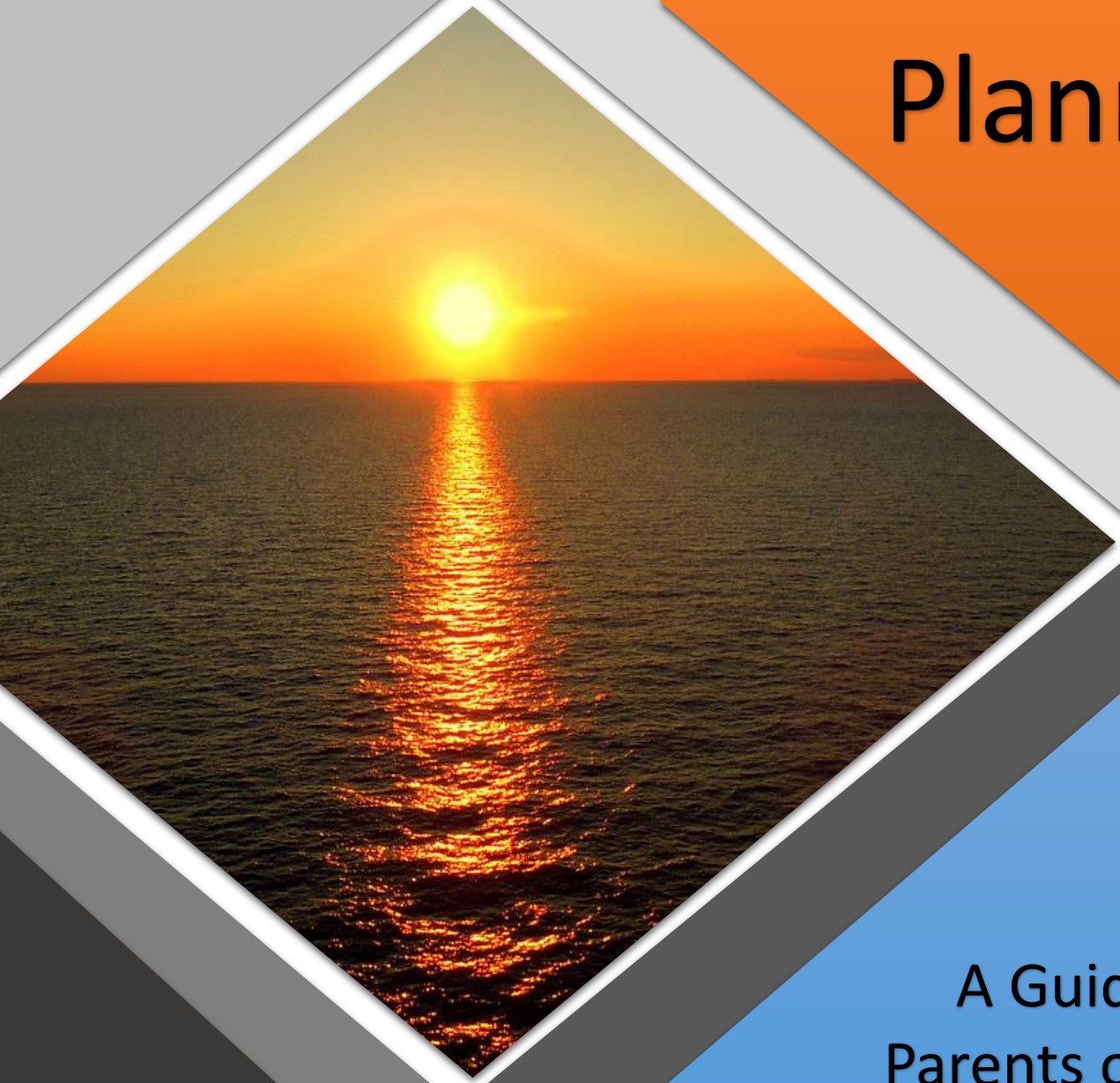
Transition Planning



A Guide for Parents of Young Adults with Disabilities

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“Your kiddos are growing up…”

Your kiddos are growing up! You’ve watched them sprout, now it’s time to watch them bloom! Someday, your child will be an adult, and it’s important to recognize the changes that come with this. What will the future look like for your family?

The Transition from high school into the world of adulthood is a milestone for ALL young people! There are so many possibilities as youth dream and plan for their future! For people with disabilities, this can mean facing challenges when continuing education, seeking employment and independent living situations after high school.

The **Transition to Adulthood** is when a young person completes high school and/or reaches the age of majority (18) and is becoming an adult! There will be a lot of opportunities, but there may also be challenges. Every child is different, and it’s important to plan early to accommodate for their unique needs!

This milestone also means a significant shift in how educational & support services have been provided, as after graduating or aging out of school, they are no longer provided through public school.

Parents and young adults often find themselves sewing together a patchwork of community services, job supports, and post-secondary opportunities to best suit their needs. It’s important to plan early.

Laws Regarding Transition

Special education laws are regulated at the federal level by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, (IDEA)

and at the state level by Maine's Unified Special Education Regulations. (MUSER)

Maine's Unified Special Education Regulations (MUSER), must meet or exceed the expectation set forth in IDEA.

Within MUSER, the language in italics is state language, and shows where Maine's law exceeds the federal law.

These laws are to ensure all children, regardless of disability, are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living

Does your child have an IEP plan, or a 504?

It's important to know the difference moving forward, because they are not quite the same thing. What we commonly call "**504 plans**" are mandated by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which provides reasonable accommodations or modifications for students with disabilities, rather than specialized instruction. The Rehabilitation Act is a civil rights law. Think about this as being the *physical* things you can change to accommodate or modify for a child in their day to day lives.

Ex. Extended time on tests.
Ex. Preferential Seating.

An IEP, or **Individualized Education Program** is developed for public school children who are in need of Special Education services and accommodations. This is mandated by IDEA, a special education law. This could be modifying the coursework or providing specialized instruction to the individual.

By law, an IEP requires a transition plan while a 504 does not. However, the parent can request from the school a transition plan for a student with a 504.

Transition planning is required to be in the IEP by the time the student enters 9th grade or turns 16; whichever occurs first. The transition plan for each student will look different, and parents shouldn't feel shame in asking to begin transition planning earlier if needed.

The Transition Team

The school is responsible for pulling together a team to work on the student's transition plan.

The IEP team is required to invite the student to participate in the IEP once transition plans are considered, but they should also consider inviting them to attend at a much earlier age. This builds self-advocacy skills, and it brings a different perspective to the table. After all it is *their* plan, and *their* future.

If the individual does not attend, or is unable to attend their IEP meeting, then the team must take other steps to ensure the individuals preferences and interests are considered.

The team should consist of the parents, a regular education teacher, special education teacher, an administrator, and a vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor. By law, A vocational rehabilitation counselor must be invited to the table NO LATER THAN 11th grade or age 16.

Any other additional support personnel and community agencies may also be invited to attend, especially if they provide a link to work or independent living opportunities. As always, parents are able to invite who they wish to participate in transition IEP meetings, just be sure to inform the school prior.

Below are some common tasks and requirements of each role in the IEP transition planning process.

Student Roles

- Prepare for IEP meetings before they happen, with a teacher and a parent
- Talk about and discuss personal dreams for the future with family and teachers
- Share strengths and weaknesses with the team
- Learn how to describe their disability and supports that work for them
- Volunteer, job shadow, or work during high school
- Keep track of IEP transition goals
- Participate in discussion, or lead their IEP meetings

Family Roles

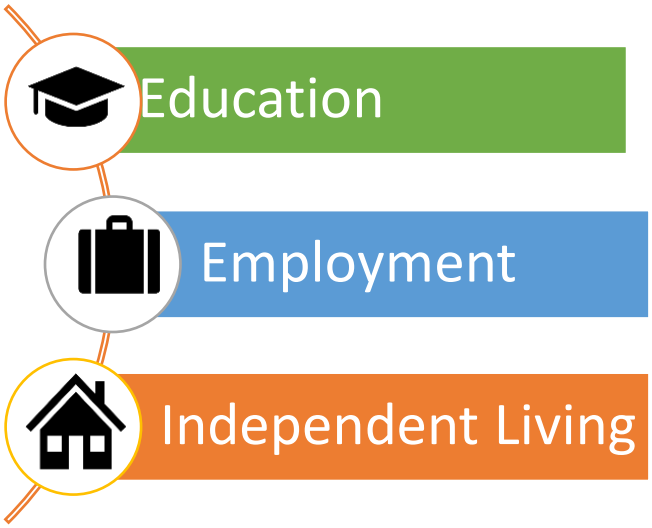
- Offer opportunities for youth to develop self-advocacy skills, responsibility, and independence at home
- Talk with youth about where they see themselves in the future
- Discuss with youth about how and why specific accommodations may be helpful
- Monitor IEP progress on their Transition goals
- Become familiar with post-secondary programs, adult services, and community support programs

School Roles

- Initiate the transition planning process
- Ensure that an appropriate plan is developed, and appropriate services are provided
- Prepare youth to participate or lead their meetings
- Provide assessments to determine student's skills, abilities, and areas of accommodation
- Include the youth in developing goals based on their strengths and interests
- Identify school programming and accommodations
- Initiate the application for Vocational Rehabilitation no later than 11th grade
- Refine goals in IEP yearly to reflect the youth's vision for the future

The Three Domains under IDEA

Under IDEA there are 3 domains that need to be fulfilled in the transition plan; Education, Employment, and Independent Living.



These three domains involve a wide range of skill sets for their life as an adult. Goals for each domain should be clearly stated in the IEP transition plan. Other areas of focus are the individual's relationships, financial literacy, and health and wellness.

While creating the transition plan, it's important to keep the youth at the center of the plan. This is known as **Person Centered Planning** and it's the best way to ensure the transition plan aligns with youth's self-identified interests, strengths, and needs.

Person Centered Planning depends on the commitment of everyone on the team to ensure the young adult is always guiding their goals for the future.

Everyone needs supports

We all need supports in our day to day life. Many of us will ask our friends for their opinion on a big decision we are going to make, whether it be getting a tattoo, or buying a new car.

There are two types of supports; Natural and Paid.

Natural Supports are built off the relationships that occur in everyday life. These are the individuals' family members, friends, coworkers, acquaintances and neighbors.

Paid Supports are the supports who are implemented by the individual and their family to guide and assist. These could be health professionals, case managers employment services or representatives from group living arrangements.

The natural supports should be the majority of the support team, while paid supports are supplementary.

When identifying a good natural support, ask yourself, "Who would you call in an emergency situation?"

Developing the Transition Plan

One of the most important steps for the team moving forward, is to help the student develop a vision for their future.

How do they envision their life just a few years from now?
Where do they see themselves living?
Will they continue their education?
What about work?

The future is closer than it may appear.

Age Appropriate Transition Assessments

Schools use a variety of both formal and informal assessments to show how the student learns, and to gather information about the individual's strengths, weaknesses, and needs. Informal assessments would include interviews and career/goal exploring exercises with the young person and family. While formal assessments range from interest inventories and employment experiences to full vocational assessments, and aptitude testing.

Assessments should show the areas of interest, needed growth as well as how the student learns. This will assist in developing a plan which best meets the student's needs to obtain their expressed life interests within the 3 transition domains.

Setting Goals

Individuals who set specific measurable goals in their transition plan are most likely to reach those goals. These goals need to fall under the three domains mentioned earlier that are required by IDEA: Education, Employment, and Independent Living.

Below is an example for how each domain should be implemented into a transition goal.

Education: "After graduating or aging out of public school student will apply to attend a two-year veterinary technician program at an in-state community college."

Employment: "While still in school and in order to support the student's goal to become a veterinary technician after completing the veterinary technician program the student will look to have a paid work experience within a local veterinary office."

Independent Living: "While attending the veterinary technician program the student will live at home with their parents with the goal of increasing independent living skills to support living in an apartment with a roommate after completing the program."

Choosing the Transition Services

The transition services should be clearly defined in the IEP, along with who is responsible for providing the service, and expected deadlines.

These services can include, but are not limited to:

- Providing ways to acquire self-determination and advocacy skills
- Connecting youth with VR for job-shadowing /potential paid employment opportunities
- Instructing and training on life-skills tasks such as opening a bank account, or using public transportation
- Completing applications for adult service eligibility
- Identifying clubs/recreational activities that will support their interests
- Creating academic goals to support transition goals.

Work Zone

Earning money is nice, and having a satisfying career can be one of the most rewarding aspects in someone's life!

The world of work is changing rapidly! There are many new and exciting jobs that did not exist just a short time ago. Many of these jobs offer flexibility that was not possible before! Innovations in Assistive Technology and well thought out job accommodations can further break down these barriers to employment!

The first step to employment is to identify what job type is the right fit for the youth. A student may have skills and interests and not know what opportunities are available to them in those fields. A vocational rehabilitation counselor can help a young person prepare for, find, and keep employment.

Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational Rehabilitation, also known as VR, is a service that assists people to prepare for, find, and keep employment. VR counselors help to develop an **Individualized Plan** for **Employment** (IPE) that help individuals reach their personal employment goals. The plan might include activities like visiting employers, job shadowing, and paid work experience.

The services offered from VR are time limited, and usually end once a person has had steady employment for 90 days. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has offices across the state and are co-located in Maine's Department of Labor's Career Centers. There is a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor assigned to every high school in Maine.

VR recommends applying for services about age 16, or two years before finishing high school. Starting at age 14 (9th grade), students who are potentially eligible for VR services can apply to receive Pre-Employment Transition Services to further ready them for the world of working. Request an application from your school, or local VR office.

Legally an Adult

In Maine, when an individual reaches the age of 18, they have reached the **age of majority**. This means they are now legally an adult, and with this comes the transfer of rights from the parents to the individual. All

the legal authority of that individual becomes theirs, and in the eyes of the government they are capable of making their own legal and financial choices.

One year before the individual turns 18, there must be a statement included in the transition plan that states the individual has been informed of the transfer of rights that occurs at age 18.

What are SSI and SSDI benefits?

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program that provides monthly income to individuals who are older, blind, or disabled, and have little to no income. Children who receive benefits before the age of 18, must reapply to be determined eligible under the adult criteria and definition of disability. Many families are often worried that a young person will lose benefits by accepting a paying job, but the good news is that for people under age 22, there are protections in place, so the individual can keep SSI, Health Insurance, and other benefits. Young adults who did not receive SSI as children may apply also.

Maine Medical Center offers Benefit Counseling Services to help people receiving SSI who want to work. Their Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICS) are experts in the special rules that apply when working while receiving SSI. In order to receive Maine Medical Center CWIC services, the individual must already have qualified and is receiving SSI or SSDI.

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a program that provides monthly income and benefits to adults who become disabled and are no longer able to work. This requires an individual to have work credits.

Work Credits are credits you earn throughout your work history. Each year you work and pay social security taxes, you earn work credits. You can receive a maximum of 4 credits a year. In order to qualify for SSDI benefits you generally need to have 20 credits, although there are age exemptions.

MaineCare

MaineCare is Maine's Medicaid program. It is a state and federally funded program that provides health care coverage for eligible individuals and families. MaineCare is available to people who meet the income guidelines and are eligible based on age, family situations, and health care needs.

If a person is eligible to receive SSI, they will be eligible to receive MaineCare.

If your child was not eligible for MaineCare under your income, they might be eligible once they become 18, as it will then be based on their income. They should apply for SSI first, and if found eligible, they will be eligible for MaineCare but will still need to go through the application process.

Supported Decision Making and Alternatives to Guardianship.

There is a lack of awareness of guardianship alternatives in our educational and medical institution. They have often urged parents to petition for full guardianship of their children without informing them of their other choices. While guardianship may be the appropriate option for some, it's not a one-size fits all solution. Instead, parents are encouraged to research **Supported Decision Making** and other alternatives to guardianship as first choices.

Supported Decision Making (SDM) is one of the least restrictive paths for guardianship. SDM allows young people to retain their legal rights. In SDM a young person builds a support system of trusted family members, friends, and professionals, which allows them to build self-determination skills and gain independence. This team can meet periodically much like in the IEP process.

Questions to consider.

Use the following questions as suggestions for things you may want to ask your young adult planning for their future.

We are all quick to judge ourselves on the bad things, but sometimes it can be difficult to point out the best features in ourselves. Remind your young adult of some of their latest and greatest achievements.

What are your abilities and strengths?

What are some things you find challenging to do?

What do you like to do for fun? What are your hobbies?

What skills do you still need to learn or improve?

What kind of accommodations do you use at school that you may need when getting a job or pursuing higher education?

What kind of work would you like to do?

Breathe and Smile. It's Okay.

Take a deep breath. Smile. Then reflect on how the questions below pertain to YOUR life.

What are your dreams for your family's future?

Even as adults we never stop dreaming. Talk with your young adult about what they want for their future. Listen for the theme of what they value: family, friends, having a job, independence, self-respect, or maybe something completely unique. Promoting self-advocacy skills at a young age can assist them in asking for help when they need it, and to not feel shame when doing so.

What makes you feel anxious about the future as a family?

Fears your young adult may have about the future, may be different than what you expect. Listen to their concerns, be supportive, but don't bombard them with advice. Speak positively about the future and your current situation. This can encourage them to speak positively about their future also!

Where do you feel your young adult may need the most supports?

Ask your young adult about what areas they feel they may need the most help in. When thinking about the future, who will provide these supports? Often times, youth with disabilities are much more independent than their parents realize. Many youth tend to have a pretty good idea about which areas they need support in, and youth who are taught positive self-advocacy skills at a young age are able to easier utilize these skills later in life.

Transition Checklist

Here is a checklist of some of the key components of a transition plan.

Has the young adult's graduation date been confirmed?

- Will the young adult receive a diploma?
- Will the young adult participate in the graduation ceremony?

Has an IEP transition meeting to develop the student's transition plan been set up by no later than age 16 or 9th grade?

Does the IEP team include the following:

- The student?
- The parents?
- Administrator with fiscal authority?
- General education teacher?
- Special education teacher?
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (no later than 11th grade)?
- any other support personnel or community agencies?

Have age- appropriate assessments been conducted to gather information on the young adult's strengths, interests, and needs?

Does the young adult have a transition plan in their IEP which includes:

- The young adult's goals for education, employment, and independent living?
- Measurable, obtainable goals, and timeframes for when they should be completed?
- Supports and services to reach those goals, along with who will provide what?
- An annual review of the goals put forth by the young adult?

Does the young adult's IEP clearly define the young adult's goals for after high school and does it plan for how they will attain:

- A sustainable job?
- Higher education?
- Daily living skills?
- A source of income?
- Adult Services if necessary?
- SSI benefits if needed?
- Transportation?
- Future living arrangements?

Notes

Notes

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