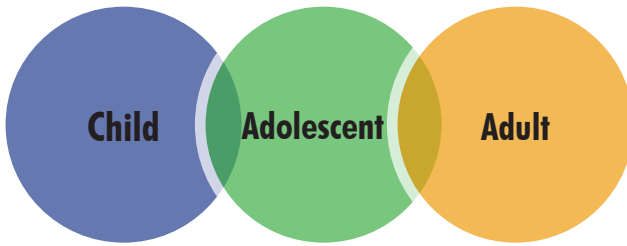


*A Guide for
Transition Age
Youth*

SAN DIEGO REGIONAL CENTER
www.sdrc.org

*Serving Individuals with Developmental
Disabilities in San Diego and Imperial Counties*





INTRODUCTION

Now that your son or daughter is an adolescent, an important life transition is just ahead. This is the transition from adolescence to adulthood – from school into the world. The move to adulthood is an exciting time that will provide new opportunities for your son or daughter.

Transition also presents challenges. As the parent of a teenager with a developmental disability, you may be dealing with the usual challenges of adolescence as well as additional challenges related to your child's disability.

Transitions require decisions. We encourage you to start thinking about transition long before it is time for your child to leave school. Age 12 or 13 is not too early. To make good decisions, you and your family need to have enough information about all of your options. Gathering the information, thinking things through, making decisions and trying out options—all these things take time. Now is a good time to begin.

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 San Diego Regional Center service coordinator, will assist in making this transition go smoothly.

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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 wondered what your child's life will be like when he is an adult. Parents of teenagers often have concerns and thoughts such as:

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 she 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 thoughts. In it, we answer five questions frequently asked by parents of adolescents:

Question 1: How will my child get services and supports after leaving 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 I need to deal with as my child gets older?

Before we address these five questions, take a moment to ask yourself how you will know which of the 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, what he does well and what he needs assistance with.

RECOGNIZING MY 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 providing opportunities for your child in 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 booklet 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 form you can use to record how your child reacts to things that he sees in the community.

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

One of the biggest challenges of transition is finding the supports and services you need after your child leaves 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 a disability 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 that he will live in the community, have a job, or participate in meaningful activities during the day and have access to community resources just like his peers without disabilities.

Your son or daughter will have opportunities for:

- continuing his or her education at a university, community college, trade school or specialized training programs
-
- 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 group 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, the services are there. Now, how do you find out about them?

HOW MY SDRC SERVICE COORDINATOR CAN HELP

The primary responsibility for providing your child with most services while he remains in school rests with the school. An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) has been guiding your child's academic progress since he first began to attend school.

Starting at age 14, each child's annual IEP has an Individualized 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 San Diego Regional Center (SDRC) service coordinator will work with you, your child, the schools, and service providers in the community to help smooth the transition from school. He or she will help you and your child learn about the different education, work, and community living options.

Before your child leaves school, your SDRC service coordinator and planning team can suggest programs that you and your child can visit to see which ones might best meet his or her needs.

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 graduation. If you find a specific service that would be right for your child, your service coordinator may help you find funding for that service. In these ways, your service coordinator will be your guide through the transition years.

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 it 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. Local communities sometimes offer social and recreational activities designed for young people with developmental disabilities. Sometimes other programs, such as regular youth sports leagues, can be adapted to support a boy or girl with special needs. This is particularly true if a family member, friend, or peer without a disability is available to give the child extra support.

Getting involved in social activities with peers without disabilities 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 peers without disabilities, he is more likely to understand the norms in behavior and dress and want to adopt them. This may make it more likely that he will be accepted by peers without disabilities. It also makes it less likely that he will be exploited by people who would take advantage of someone who appears different.

Your child may also benefit from having a friend who can take him into the community or go with him to particular activities. This friend might be a brother or sister, a neighbor of the same age, or a volunteer from the community. Ask your SDRC service coordinator about other ways that your child may find a friend.

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

More and more people with developmental disabilities are entering the job market. Employers are hiring them because they have found that people with disabilities make good employees. They are reliable, they work hard, and they take pride in their work. Often these people 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 the job. Once they've learned these things, they are excellent employees.

Special services, called supported employment services, 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 are available in a wide variety of settings. SDRC clients work in many different places, such as Target, Home Depot and Sea World.

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. The most common one is an organized day activity. Most day activity services offer individuals a variety of things to do during the day. They range from volunteer activities, activities in the community, or activities at a center-based location. These activities are designed to allow them to increase their skill levels. Your service coordinator can give you information on the kinds of day activities that are available.

For more information on different supported employment opportunities, visit the SDRC Community Services Department or ask your service coordinator for a copy of the brochure, "A Client Guide for Adult Day Program Options."

WHERE WILL MY CHILD LIVE AS AN ADULT?

Some parents expect their child to continue to live at home after leaving high school while others expect their children to move into homes of their own when they become adults. The age at which a son or daughter with a disability actually makes a move will depend on things such as what the individual wants to do and what is common in the family's culture.

A number of living options are available for individuals with developmental disabilities. These options differ in how much independence and self-determination they offer clients. The most common types of arrangements are licensed homes, supported living and independent living.

Licensed Homes

Licensed homes are residences for a small group of people with developmental disabilities. Usually between four and six people live in these homes. Residents receive 24-hour supervision from trained staff according to their individual needs. Adults living in licensed homes receive training in self-care, in activities required to look after a home (cooking, cleaning, etc.), and in a range of other skills they need to be more independent at home and in the community. Some licensed homes are designed for people who have special needs, for example, those who have serious medical needs or who have challenging behaviors.

Supported Living

Supported living services attempt to maximize freedom and self-determination for adult clients. They may live in apartments, condos, or houses in the community. They often live with roommates and receive training in the skills they need to live on their own. They also receive ongoing support in those areas where it is needed. Skills training can help adults learn things such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, menu planning, personal hygiene and health care, money management, and use of public transportation and other community resources.

Independent Living

People may receive Independent Living Skills (ILS) services to help them live in their own apartment, home, or other type of unlicensed setting. Such services allow them to receive assistance from an ILS instructor. ILS services are designed to assist adults to develop skills in areas including cooking, cleaning, budgeting, shopping, transportation, and community awareness so that the highest level of independence can be reached and maintained.

For more information on different potential living settings visit the SDRC Community Services Department or ask your service coordinator for a copy of the brochure, "A Client and Family Guide to Living Options."

A Final Note

Parents and their children often tell us that one of the most difficult things about transition for young adults is leaving friends that they may have had for many years. This is especially true when students leave school. Often they express sadness or signs of loss when they are no longer surrounded by the school structure they have enjoyed since age three. 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 acclimated 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 ISSUES WILL I NEED TO DEAL WITH AS MY CHILD GETS OLDER?

When they turn 18, individuals with developmental disabilities gain the same rights and responsibilities as other adults. Many of these adults routinely make decisions on their own behalf with guidance from their family, service coordinator, advocate, or trusted friends. We at the San Diego Regional Center encourage families to involve their sons or daughters in decision-making, allowing them to practice self-determination to the extent they are able.

Some adults with developmental disabilities have limited ability to make informed decisions. Often, families tell us that their biggest concern is that their son or daughter will be unable to provide informed consent for medical care. 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 aspects of their child's life. Arrangements that families most often use are limited conservatorships, trusts, and powers of attorney.

Limited Conservatorship

A conservatorship takes away some of an adult's basic rights and gives those rights to another individual, often either a family member or a professional conservator. A conservator may make decisions about things such as the conserved person's health care, living arrangement, and finances. A conservatorship can only be established in a court of law, and it is the court that decides what the conservator will be allowed to make decisions about. Because it takes away a person's basic rights, a conservatorship should be used only when a less restrictive arrangement does not give the person with a developmental disability enough protection.

Trust

A trust is a legal arrangement that gives an independent person, called a trustee, control of a disabled person's assets such as money and property. A trustee may be a relative, family friend, or independent agent. He or she is responsible for making sure the assets are handled responsibly and in the best interests of the person with a disability. A trust is particularly useful if parents or other relatives wish to leave a person with a disability money or other things of value in their will. The assets are placed under the control of the trustee, who gives payments to the person with a disability at regular periods. The payments can be adjusted so they provide financial support over the individual's lifetime. They may also be limited so they do not affect the person's government benefits.

Social Security

Once a person turns 18 years of age, he may be eligible for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medi-Cal. Whether or not an adult qualifies for these programs depends on two things: his personal income and the severity of his disability. When your son or daughter turns 18 (if you have not done so already), 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 the San Diego Regional Center. With your signed consent, we will forward these records to the Social Security Office 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 in a month and still receive his full SSI check. For every two dollars a person earns over \$85, the government deducts \$1 from the person's SSI check. 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 cash SSI benefits. This is true as 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 their regular SSI 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 also be eligible to receive IHSS.

You can get more information on the IHSS program by asking your SDRC service coordinator for contact information to your local Social Services office.

A GUIDE FOR TRANSITION AGE YOUTH QUESTIONNAIRE

LOOKING AT MY CHILD

1. My child's greatest strength is:

2. My child truly loves to:

3. My child tries to avoid:

4. My child's favorite class(es) and hobbies is(are):

5. My child's chores at home include:

Circle the number that best describes how true each statement is:

My child:	Always True	Often True	Not True
Prefers to be outdoors	1	2	3
Prefers to work as part of a group	1	2	3
Prefers to work with people	1	2	3
Prefers to work with animals	1	2	3
Prefers to work with plants	1	2	3
Prefers to work with things	1	2	3
Prefers to keep neat and clean	1	2	3
Repeats a task without losing interest	1	2	3
Enjoys learning new things	1	2	3

(Any other strong preference)

WORK AND LEISURE OPTIONS

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

Kind of job:

Understanding of job duties:

Likes about this job:

Doesn't like about this job:

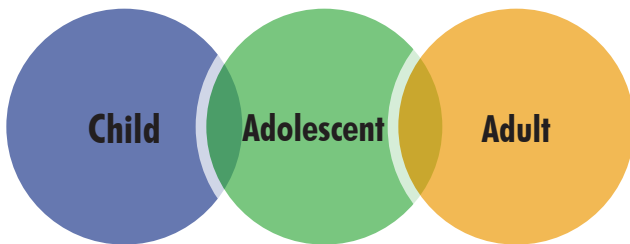
Complete the following items for each social, leisure, or creative activity you explore with your child:

Social, leisure or creative activity:

Previous experience with this activity:

Likes about this activity:

Doesn't like about this activity:



◆◆Text adapted with permission from Harbor Regional Center.◆◆

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