

Preparation for Adulthood

What kind of things do you think about as you plan for your future? Careers? Living arrangements? Who you want to spend your time with? These are all probably things you have thought about as you plan for your life after high school. What about your peers with disabilities? They may very well be making the same plans as you are, however the planning process might be quite different from yours. First—just like you—a student with disabilities needs to think about what types of things he/she like to do for fun, what things make him/her the happiest, what he/she does not like to do, and how independent he/she would like to be. The difference between you and a person with disabilities is that after you think about these things, you are likely making your decisions on your own. Although you will likely discuss your thoughts with your family, for the most part you are making independent decisions about what you want to do with your life. A person with disabilities on the other hand, *may* need more support in identifying and achieving the things he or she wants in life. One way to begin this process is by using a resource called the *Student Survey for Transition Planning: Plans for the Future*. Some questions on this survey are, “What are your fears?” “What are your strengths?” “What are your needs?” “What are three things you would like to work on during the upcoming school year to help reach your transition goals?” Once these types of questions are answered, the individual needs to share his or her ideas with the transition team specifically set up for that person. The team (e.g., teachers, parents, vocational rehabilitation counselor, job coach) will then help the person figure out how to make things happen.

Another strategy that persons with disabilities can use is person centered planning. This process is set up to ensure that the wants and desires of the focus person are heard and met to the maximum extent possible. To review the process of person centered planning, visit the

instructional unit titled, *Person Centered Planning and Life Outcomes*. The unit in this section called “personal futures planning” will take you step by step through the person centered planning process. Yet another planning process that individuals with disabilities use to plan for adulthood is the MAPS process. Like person-centered planning, a full description of this process is located in the *Person Centered Planning and Life Outcomes* unit. Both of these strategies serve to help organize and guide the transition from high school to adult life. The purpose is to create a vision for the focus person and make that vision a reality, as opposed to trying to fit a person into pre-determined jobs, living arrangements, etc.

It’s never too early to start planning for the transition from high school to life after high school. Based upon the dream a student with disabilities has for his or her life after school, the school should coordinate transition activities, and/or services to help that individual begin moving towards his or her dream. Helping a person prepare for life after high school should involve classroom instruction, community based instruction, developing employment objectives, daily living skills, possibly a functional vocational evaluation, and creating objectives for other adult living areas that the person will experience. Learning to function independently and productively in the real world is an important part of anyone’s education. This is especially important for students who have disabilities. Teaching such functional skills as money management, making purchases, safety skills, personal care, and using the telephone, is an essential part of a person with disabilities’ education, just as all of us need to know how to do these skills!

Now that we’ve covered some of the essential things to think about before making that transition to the “real world”, let’s take a closer look at that word “transition”. What does it mean? What does it entail? To find out, continue on to the next unit.

ACTIVITY

Make a list of the different things that need to be taken into consideration when planning for life after high school. What's going to change? In 1-2 pages, describe how you could help your friends or peers with disabilities plan for these changes.

Transition

We all go through many transitions in life. From leaving our home to go to our very first day of school, to leaving home to live on our own for the first time, making transitions is an ongoing part of life. You are likely facing one of your most important transitions as you near the end of your high school career and prepare to move on to bigger things! It is no different for students with disabilities. One of the main concerns of the public schools is to prepare students with disabilities for life after high school. There are several things schools can do to promote their students' successful transition. As a peer tutor, you may very well be involved in some of these things.

- **Providing transition goals in the Individualized Education Program (IEP):** In addition to teaching academic skills, schools should provide education programs that teach such functional skills as daily living skills, and socialization skills. As students with disabilities get older, they should have written goals and objectives that relate to

vocational education and preparation, and community living. These written objectives should be a part of the student's IEP.

- **Providing access to integrated settings:** Students with disabilities generally benefit greatly when working and/or learning with their peers without disabilities. Therefore, as students with disabilities prepare for life after high school, it is important for them to be involved in general education classrooms, and participate in activities in community settings. There has been quite a bit of research that shows students with disabilities are more likely to acquire new skills, and retain those skills, if those skills are learned in an integrated setting—especially in settings where those skills are most likely to be needed.
- **Providing the opportunity to participate in vocational education programs:** Vocational education programs are a wonderful way to provide job training for a variety of occupations. This can help prepare students for employment after high school. It may also be a way to access more opportunities so that employment is not limited to a small selection of low skill jobs.
- **Providing training at employment sites:** There is no better way to develop actual job skills and learn appropriate social and work behaviors than by being in an actual work setting and interacting with the co-workers. Arranging for real-life work experience while a student is still in school is an excellent method of training. And, these experiences can help students decide what they might like to do once they graduate.
- **Providing paid work experience:** Some research has shown that if students with disabilities are employed in competitively paying jobs (that is, jobs that pay the same amount they would pay a person without disabilities), while they are still in school, those students are more likely to remain employed after graduating. Supervised full or part-

time jobs after school, or in the summer, can help a student with disabilities prepare for employment after school.

- **Incorporating job seeking skills in the curriculum:** The abilities to seek and obtain employment are obviously important skills to have if you want to have a job. While students are still in school they can be learning these skills. Schools should offer instruction and practice in the skills that are necessary in order to obtain a job.

So far we have focused mainly on employment. But the transition from high school to the “real world” involves other stuff too. For example, living arrangements. Just as you will make decisions on where you will live and who you will live with after high school, your peers with disabilities face the same questions. Depending on the severity of the disability involved, a person may stay at home with his or her parents, live in a group setting, or rent his or her own apartment. Just as it is for you, there are many options! As you continue through this unit you will come across an entire section on residential options for people with disabilities.

So in a nutshell, transition is a lot of things. It’s change. It’s movement. It’s about facing new things. It’s turning over a new leaf. Students with disabilities need to think about all of the same things that you do as you plan for your transition from high school to that next step. The difference is that some students with disabilities may need more supports than you do and they may need to work with community service providers (such as vocational rehabilitation, or supported employment agencies) to assist them in reaching their goals. Whatever the means are of making as smooth a transition as possible (for both you and your peers with disabilities), moving from high school onto bigger things is a big and exciting step—for everyone!

ACTIVITY

Think about developing a transition plan for a student with disabilities. What skills would you focus on? What behaviors do you think the individual student would want to change? What behaviors would be strengths for the student? How are you going to teach the student to prepare for life after school? Remember to consider the type and severity of the disability when planning. (This activity can be based on a fictional person).

Developing Job Skills

Like anyone else, the first thing a person with disabilities needs to do before finding a job is: (a) have an idea of what type of work he or she wishes to pursue, (b) consider what type of work environment would be the best fit for him or her, and (c) use his or her personal networks as a part of the job search. Once a person has considered these things, he or she then needs to focus on developing, or perfecting, the appropriate job skills needed for successful employment. There are a tremendous amount of skills needed for job searching. Many of us take a lot of these skills for granted. For example, before leaving for a job interview you probably don't even think twice about taking a shower, styling your hair, and finding an outfit that is flattering and professional. But consider a person who has difficulty with hygiene skills. For such a person, this may not be a natural routine. In fact, it could be quite rigorous and aversive. Likewise, some

individuals may not even realize that taking these steps are expected before going to a job interview. In that case, he or she would need assistance in developing, and perhaps performing, those skills. Some other skills that may be taken for granted, but may be more difficult for a person with disabilities are filling out an application (including knowing all of the necessary personal information such as birth date, social security number, address, telephone number, emergency contact person, and references), interviewing skills, and phone skills when inquiring about a job. And these are all just skills to get you in the door! Once you find a job, you have to perform a whole different set of skills, and probably have to learn some new ones. For any job, safety skills are important to have. Knowing such information like where to go and what to do in case of a fire, tornado, or dangerous situation is extremely important. Then, depending on the job, you are expected to know and perform certain technical or job specific skills.

So what does a person with disabilities who needs assistance learning and performing skills on the job do? He or she can get hooked up with a job coach who will accompany him or her to the job site and assist in learning the skills necessary to successfully perform that job. As a person gets acclimated in the new job setting, he or she can then begin to develop relationships with co-workers who may act as [natural supports](#) (see the Supported Employment unit for more information on natural supports). As a person continually interacts with his or her co-workers and perhaps models their behavior, that individual is able to learn and refine those skills.

Some of the most important skills to learn are social skills (e.g., interacting with others, making remarks appropriate to the situation, asking for help when needed). Co-workers can be a valuable source of support in learning and practicing social skills. Without these skills, persons with disabilities are at risk for losing their job, even if they can perform that job correctly.

Personal attendant services may provide an opportunity for a person with disabilities to learn the necessary hygiene skills for going to work. Personal attendant services provide people who need assistance in various activities with someone who can help. In this case, a personal attendant may be required to visit the person's home in the morning to help him or her bathe, get dressed, eat breakfast, and perhaps prepare a packed lunch for the day. Over time, the person may be able to develop these skills and perform these activities on his or her own, either partially or totally.

So as you can see, there are *many* skills that go into finding and performing a job—from getting ready for work, to performing the required job tasks. A person with disabilities may need to utilize such resources as job coaches and personal attendants for some assistance in developing a few, several, or maybe even most of those skills. Then again, that person may not need any assistance at all. It all just depends on the person and his or her particular needs!

ACTIVITY

Let's pretend it is your job to help an individual with multiple disabilities prepare for work in the morning. You want to teach him or her the skills to eventually do this independently. Create a task analysis (write down the "getting ready for work" routine step by step) that the person will follow in order to learn those skills. A sample task analysis data sheet can be found at the following link:

<http://www.circleofinclusion.org/english/formsarticles/forms/7implementIEP/taskanalysis.pdf>

Once you have created your task analysis, ask someone to "perform" the steps to see if there is anything you need to add or adjust.

Supported Employment

Having a job is about more than just making money. It is a chance to be an active part of the community. It provides a feeling of independence and contribution. It also allows one the opportunity to feel good about his or her accomplishments. Not to mention all the little perks—meeting new people, learning new things, job-related social events, etc. So, what do you do when you decide you want to get a job? You find some places that interest you, perhaps see if they are hiring, call to set up an interview or stop by to fill out an application, then wait to hear if you got that job or not. This is a process that you most likely complete independently without much (if any) help. And if you don't get the job you apply for, you take it on yourself to start the process all over again. Well, a person with disabilities may follow the same exact process you do. Or that person may need some assistance in finding a job. In case a person with disabilities does need some help, that person can look into “[Supported Employment](#)”. Typically, this is when an individual uses a supported employment agency to help find a job in an integrated work setting. Supported Employment is intended to help individuals with more severe disabilities who will need ongoing support in order to be successful in their job. Therefore, a supported employment agency is not only helpful in finding a job, but also in providing ongoing support such as job coaching, transportation, assistive technology, and individually tailored supervision. What a great resource!

Like many other service agencies in the community, supported employment services aim to help a person decide what is best for him or herself. The focus is on the person and that person's choices, not on the choices others want to make for the individual. This is a key fact to

remember—the focus should always be on the wants and desires of the focal person, and from there, finding an appropriate and satisfactory position. What should be avoided is trying to fit a person into already existing positions without considering what he or she would like and enjoy doing.

The other important part of supported employment is the notion of *ongoing* supports, like job coaching, assistive technology, etc. For example, a job coach is someone who is hired by the placement agency to provide on-site training to help the employee in learning and performing their job and adjusting to their work environment. There are four major components to the job coach support:

- **Evaluation:** This means devoting time to the person with disabilities to determine his or her interest, skills, and the kind of work that would be a good fit for that person.
- **Job development and job analysis:** This step involves seeking the kind of work desired, perhaps negotiating a customized job that matches both the employer's needs and the person's interests and skills, and supporting the person through his or her interview once a suitable job has been found.
- **On-the-job support:** Once the person has been hired, the job coach introduces him or her, and serves as an advocate by being a bridge that connects the person with co-workers. The job coach promotes the use of the company's typical ways of teaching and supporting all employees and provides supplemental guidance or instructional support as needed.

- **Follow-up:** The job coach keeps in touch with the person and his or her employer to see how things are going, to provide guidance if necessary and to help with job advancements.

Another important support is *natural supports*. Within the workplace, natural supports refer to support from supervisors and co-workers such as mentoring, socializing, friendships, training, and providing feedback on job performance. Building relationships with co-workers is a natural way for a person with disabilities to receive some support on the job. Co-workers are a great resource that can provide not only friendship, but assistance when necessary.

ACTIVITY

Think about the term “natural supports”. On a sheet of paper, provide 2-5 examples of how co-workers could provide natural support in the workplace for a person with disabilities.

Supported Living

Think about moving away from home and into your very own place for the first time. This might be a college dorm, an apartment or townhouse, etc. Are you likely to live alone or have a roommate (or roommates)? Most people have roommates when they move away from

home. Why is this? Why not just live alone? Usually, the reason is because you can't afford it yet! You need a roommate (like they need you) for that financial support. Or maybe you decide to live with your best friend just because it makes the transition from home easier and you both like the idea of having the emotional support that comes with living together. Well, just like you, people with disabilities sometimes need supports when they want to live independently. Once a person with disabilities leaves high school, he or she is no longer eligible to receive services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA (see the Legal Rights & Protections unit to learn more about IDEA). Adult service agencies are now responsible for providing services. There are two such programs in Kentucky that offer residential supports: [Supports for Community Living](#) and [Supported Living](#).

The Supports for Community Living program offers services to young adults after graduation. This program offers a variety of supports including residential. The residential supports offered through this program are designed to allow individuals with more significant disabilities the opportunity to live independently instead of in a residential facility. Because services are not usually available immediately, a person interested in receiving these services should register as soon as possible—even if he or she is still in high school.

Kentucky Supported Living is a program that is specifically geared towards providing residential assistance. The Supported Living program provides individuals with disabilities assistance so that they may live in a residence of their choice, whether it be an apartment, a group home, or with friends or relatives. A team of family, friends, and others who can help is formed. These folks work together to determine a plan for reaching the focus person's goal of where he or she wants to live. A person receiving supported living supports may live alone but may need someone to come into his or her home to assist with bill paying, cleaning, getting

ready for work, cooking, etc. The goal of Supported Living is to offer supports that will allow individuals to live as independently as possible.

So when you think about making the transition from your parents' home to your own home, realize that your peers with disabilities are thinking about the same things. They may need to seek support, just as you may need to seek support. These forms of support just may come in different ways!

ACTIVITY

Pretend you are on the planning team for a person with disabilities and you are trying to determine a plan of action to reach that person's goal to live in their own apartment.

What kind of things do you need to consider? What are your suggestions? Remember to think about the type and severity of the disability. This activity can be based on a fictional person.