

All parents want their children to have happy, successful adult lives. Planning for the future of a young person with disabilities is complicated by the need to accommodate the child's special needs.

There are many decisions about transition to adult life that must be considered by parents and the teen/young adult with disabilities. Educators and agencies can provide information about the issues. The decisions are up to the student and family.

All young people face choices as they leave high school – about post-secondary education, careers and where they want to live, work and recreate.

One aspect of transition planning the family must consider is how much independence and self-determination is realistic to expect of the individual. Parents must also decide how much they are willing and able to let go, and allow independence and self-determination. If parents have been thinking and planning for transition, they will have been giving their child opportunities to make choices, to reach decisions and to experience consequences – the forerunners of independence.

As families plan for transition into the adult world, they are often stunned to discover that the adult service system does not have the guarantees they have become accustomed to under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Many parents assume that the transition of their son or daughter into adult services is a natural progression – that the services will be there when the young adult is ready for them; and that if their child is on the Children's Medicaid Waiver, they will naturally progress to the Adult Medicaid Waiver.

Age of Majority

In the State of Wyoming the Age of Majority is 18. It is sometimes a surprise to parents to learn that, under Wyoming law, parents have no legal responsibility or control over their child with disabilities after he or she reaches 18 (the Age of Majority), **unless** the parents apply for guardianship.

Selective Service

All males, regardless of disability, are required to register for selective service within thirty days of their eighteenth birthday, unless they are institutionalized or hospitalized. Registration forms are available at the local post office or may be completed on-line at www.sss.gov.

Guardianship

Guardianship is one of the least understood forms of assistance for adults. It can be a valuable means of protection for an individual, 18 years of age or older, who lacks understanding or capacity to make or communicate responsible decisions. Families should carefully consider their child's needs with regard to guardianship.

In Wyoming, three types of guardianship can be used to protect the person, property and needs of an individual with disabilities.

- ♦ **Full guardianship** is the court appointment of one individual to care for the personal well-being of another individual.
- ♦ **Conservatorship** is the court appointment of one individual to care for the property of another individual.
- ♦ **Limited guardianship** is available only to adult persons with developmental disabilities. It is the appointment of a guardian to provide limited protection or assistance to the ward. The ward is not declared to be an incompetent person, and keeps many liberties curtailed by full guardianships. Limited guardianships may last no longer than ten years, therefore are not generally appropriate for individuals whose disabilities are significant and permanent.

Sex Education

Very few disabilities impair sexual function. Parents must assume that their children with disabilities will mature sexually and need help understanding and managing their sexual functions. Families should consider how much and what kind of sex and birth control education they feel is useful and necessary. Parents must be aware that by law, young adults, whether they have disabilities or not, may marry when they have reached the legal age (18) and complied with state requirements.

Transportation

Getting a driver's license is an important goal for most young people. If driver's training is offered in the high school, students with disabilities are eligible for such instruction and must be accommodated if they have potential for learning to drive.

If a young adult is unable to obtain a driver's license, then the student should be assisted in learning how to use alternative means of transportation.

Another important issue for a person who cannot get a driver's license is the need to get a State Identification Card for personal identification purposes. These can be obtained at the local driver's license office. A certified birth certificate and original social security card must be presented for identification.

Graduation

Parents must not wait until the last half of their child's senior year to ask about graduation. Part of the purpose of transition planning is so that the high school program is structured in such a way that both the school and the family are working toward the same goals. If the student is on an academic program and parents are expecting him/her to graduate, then certain course requirement and educational standards must be met.

Wyoming law requires school districts to serve students with disabilities until the end of the school year in which they turn 21. In many districts policies are written such that, if a student **participates** in graduation, the school district considers their responsibility completed. If parents want their child to receive independent living and employment training after the regular academic program is completed, they must find out early what their district's policy is toward graduation. Another consideration is to find out whether or not a student with special needs will be allowed to participate in the graduation ceremony – some parents have had to do battle over this.

Education – Work – Adult Services

Transition planning for students with disabilities should include discussion of continuing education. For many youngsters with disabilities a lack of planning and expectation is the largest barrier to continuing education.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 provided guarantees of equal access to people with disabilities, allowing that no otherwise qualified person could be excluded on the basis of disability. Most colleges and universities have special services such as tutoring, textbooks on tape, etc. The most important thing to consider when looking at whether your child may be able to attend college if they get assistance from special service is that accommodations may be made, however **curriculum and requirements may not be altered**.

Many young people with disabilities attend technical schools or training programs to learn the skills needed for a particular job.

Transition planning should also include work/employment experiences and training. It is important for a student to experience different job opportunities to give them an idea of what kinds of jobs they enjoy and want to pursue.

Parents must be aware that **adult services** for a person with disabilities **are not mandated by law** as has been their child's education. Parents must think and plan ahead – not waiting until just before graduation – because that is **TOO LATE!** The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) should be included in a student's transition plan and a part of the IEP team.

Student should also be learning independent living skills. Many high schools provide this training and some contract with local Adult Service Providers to give students an opportunity to experience living in a group home and supported employment. Adult services are governed by funding and ability to pay – and they are expensive. Parents should explore the adult service providers in their areas and discuss the costs of these services and means of funding.

Funding

Some adults with disabilities will be able to become self-sufficient, having jobs and living arrangements that make it unnecessary for them to have financial assistance. However, most adults who have disabilities need some kind of financial assistance, or will in the future, because they are not able to make enough to support themselves.

Parents must educate themselves about the various funding sources available to adults with disabilities, and in most cases, find creative and assertive ways to get needed services.

Some parents want to find ways to make their adult children with disabilities financially secure. This must be handled carefully. Parents must talk to a financial planner or attorney to find the best ways to provide for the future of a person with disabilities.

For more information about TRANSITION PLANNING

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The contents of this brochure were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

TRANSITION TIPS FOR PARENTS

Disability Brochure #13



Planning for Happiness and Success After High School

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A project of
Parents Helping Parents
of Wyoming, Inc.