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TRANSITIONING YOUR TEEN TO ADULTHOOD

While parents of teens with autism face many uncertainties as their teen grows and matures, one of their biggest concerns is how the teen will transition into adulthood. Good planning that starts early and is individualized can make a big difference. There are five keys to a successful transition.



First, it's never too early to start **thinking about the future.** The earlier the planning, the better the outcomes will be. Any teen with an IEP at school should start planning at age 14. You should work with your teen's school to come up with a plan that focuses on vocational, life, and social skills.

Second, set short-term and long-term goals and **help develop skills to meet those goals.**

It is very important that the teen is the one setting the goals and leading the transition. If not, he or she will be less likely to have the motivation to meet the goals. You can help him or her identify steps to reach the goals and make sure they have support available through family, friends, and community resources.

Fourth, you need to make sure to think about **how involved your teen is socially.** Sometimes parents don't put as much emphasis on having friends or other social relationships because they are too



focused on college or work. However, being engaged socially is important for overall well-being. Therefore, a heavy emphasis on social interaction and community engagement should be part of the transition plan.

Third, you should **look at available resources.** Services are covered until your teen graduates from high school at age 18, up to age 21. Once he or she graduates, government-based services may be limited and harder to receive. You also need to model for your teen how to advocate for him or herself.



Fifth, you need to **know the strengths and weaknesses** of your teen. It's a good idea for you to give your teens as much responsibility as you can while they are still at home to help them learn about their strengths and work to improve their weaknesses. Parents are often so used to making decisions for their children that they may struggle with transitioning that power over to them as they grow. However, it's really important to do so. The best way to see if they can handle power is to give them power, see what good and bad decisions they make, and build from there.

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