



Getting Ready for the Future

For Families of Children (any age) with Special Needs

By Rosemary Alexander, Texas Parent to Parent Support Team

Transitions and change are often difficult, so how can we make them easier?

- Prepare to be the advocate for your child for the long haul.
- Create a good record keeping system and use it, clean it out occasionally, but keep on using it.
- Learn about special education law.
- Develop your negotiating and communication skills.
- Learn about community resources.
- Learn about your child's disability and be able to describe it clearly and briefly to others.
- Prepare to be your child's care-provider for the long haul.
- Adopt healthy habits—get enough sleep, exercise, and eat well.
- Build a support network.
- Build opportunities to have fun into your life.
- Learn relaxation techniques.
- Develop a long-range vision for your child and your family
- When possible, start to imagine your child's future.
- Consider what it will take to make that future possible. What does your child need to know how to do in that future?
- Plan now how you will provide opportunities for your child to learn those skills.
- Be the keeper of the vision, hopes, and expectations. At meetings about your child, remind people of your long-term goals. You and your family are the only ones present in your child's life over the long term. You are the consistent force while professionals of all kinds will come and go.
- Prepare for change and transitions.
- Anticipate the transition points—ECI to EC, EC to elementary, elementary to middle school, and so on. Know that you will need to do extra planning at these points, and at other points that are not as obvious.
- Find out all you can about the next step. For example, go to the new school, meet the new teacher or other staff, take your child to see the new school ahead of time, talk to other parents at the new school, or who have made similar transitions. The more you see and know about the new place, the less you will fear it.

Texas Parent to Parent

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- Prepare others in the family for change, such as siblings. If you know that change affects your mood, your child's behavior, etc., get extra support at that time.
- Build in ways to communicate in the beginning. For example, at a new school, request a meeting after the first 3-6 weeks to evaluate the situation. Try to solve problems before they get bigger.
- At any new place, find out whom to talk to when problems arise. What is the hierarchy, the ladder, the structure? Who is in charge?
- Whatever your child's future, you will need extra money! Face it now and plan for it.
- Get on these waiting lists or find out about these services today:
 - *CLASS: 877-438-5658
 - *MRLA or HCS: 800-252-8154
 - *MDCP: 800-252-8023, ext 3061
 - *SSI/Medicaid now if your family meets income/disability guidelines or when your child turns 18 based on his/her income/disability.

(For more info on these programs go to our website: <http://txp2p.org/resources/financial.html>)

- To ensure that your child will be eligible for public benefits at age 18, place his or her assets into a special needs trust. Be sure that your will leaves nothing to your child with a disability. Write a will now with a lawyer who knows about estate planning for families of children with disabilities.
- Know that you will need to find out about getting guardianship for your child when he or she turns 18. Some children need it, others do not, but you need to find out!

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