



Steps to a Quality Adulthood for your Child with a Disability

By Rosemary Alexander, TxP2P Staff & Austin ISD Parent & Teacher Support Team

1. Use, to the utmost, your child's time in school.

Make all decisions in secondary school based on whether or not a given option will help your child after graduation.

Get involved in the planning process. When will your child graduate? What are his or her goals for after graduation?

Be sure your child's teacher is aware of your child's long-term goals. How can you use school time to prepare your child to fulfill these goals? Look at all aspects of life, not just work.

2. Prepare your child to have a job.

Build up a resume with volunteer work after school or in the summer, and jobs on and off the school campus. Request vocational training that includes off-campus experience. Get to know your campus staff who work on transition and work opportunities. Find out about job opportunities on campus and near the campus. Be sure your child is linked up with Texas Rehabilitation Commission during his/her last year of school.

3. Plan ahead for financial security.

If your child will never be able to earn a living wage, how will he or she meet basic needs? Get on the waiting list for CLASS and MRLA. Link your child with SSI/Medicaid and MHMR.

*Medicaid Waiver programs –eligibility based on disability; programs provide support services. (CLASS, MRLA, Deaf Blind/Multiple Disability Program, etc)

* SSI/Medicaid and MHMR—based on disability + income (family income before your child is 18, child's income at age 18); SSI provides monthly payment for room, board and clothing; Medicaid provides health insurance; MHMR provides a variety of support services.

4. Plan your estate so that your child can maximize government funding and services.

When your child applies for SSI/Medicaid at or after age 18, she or he must have assets below \$2000. So you need to look carefully at your will, insurance policies, the wills of other family members, etc. to be sure that your child does not directly inherit and lose government benefits. You can set up a special needs trust to shelter assets over \$2000, but this money cannot be used for the basic necessities paid for by SSI. Seek out a lawyer who has relevant experience in this area to learn the details and set up a trust, or use the Master Pooled Trust at The Arc of Texas. The CRISP organization has a list of experienced lawyers.

Texas Parent to Parent

1805 Rutherford Ln. ★ Suite 201 ★ Austin, TX 78754 ★ 866-896-6001 ★ 512-458-8600

website: www.txp2p.org ★ Email: info@txp2p.org

5. Consider whether or not your child will need guardianship and plan accordingly.

When a child turns 18, society assumes that he or she is competent to make his or her own medical and financial decisions. If your child is not able to make such decisions, you have to “sue” the state to become his or her guardian. Then you are empowered to sign for him or her in any financial or medical situation. You can also get partial guardianship, so that you make decisions in only one of these areas.

You should find an experienced lawyer to represent you and another to represent your child to go through the process of appearing in probate court to become the guardian. The preparation usually takes 2-3 months and you will not be granted guardianship until the day your child turns 18. It may cost up to about \$3000.

6. Plan for where your child will live and how he or she will spend the day.

Even if you plan for your child to live with you forever, you won't live forever! Or perhaps your child plans to live independently, out of your home. In either case, get creative and consider co-operative living, roommates, foster families, or other shared living arrangements. Link up with the agencies that can help you marshal resources for the big move, such as Disability Assistance of Central Texas, Austin Resource Center for Independent Living, The Arc of the Capital Area, Austin Housing Authority, Texas Home of Your Own, MHMR, Marnie Paul Arts Center, McBeth Recreation Center, etc. Plan for basic expenses (rent, utilities, etc.) plus such things as transportation, personal support as needed, safety, social and recreational needs, and work and other daytime activities.

7. Go through a focused planning process.

Consider doing a person centered plan, which helps you and your child to write down long-term goals, map a strategy for attaining them, and build a support team. A similar approach is described in *A Good Life*, a book from Canada available at www.plan.ca. Help your child to become as independent as possible through learning about self-determination and self-advocacy, and by encouraging independence through your daily routine. Use the Internet, the school, friends, and parent groups to find out about resources, gain support, and create a safe and enriched life for your young adult!

Resource Phone Numbers (as of 4/29/2003)

- Texas Rehabilitation Commission—800-687-2676 (job supports after graduation)
- CLASS--877-438-5658 (long-term supports for person with a disability)
- MRLA (for Travis Co.)—483-5804 (long-term supports for person with a disability)
- All waiver programs (supports for person with a disability) at www.dhs.state.tx.us/handbooks/ccad/5000/5100.htm
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)—916-5404, 800-772-1213
- Arc of Texas —454-6694 (for Master Pooled Trust)
- Home Of Your Own—800-988-4696 (helps people buy their home)

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