



# Transition to Adulthood:

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## The Big Picture for all Ages

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So what's the big deal about transition? Why do we all keep talking about it? When should it happen?

Transition is the natural process of your child's moving from childhood to adulthood, but that process for a child with disabilities involves many decisions and changes that may concern families. The goal of transition is having services, a structure, and a life ready when your child graduates from public school. If you don't do the planning and preparation, your child may have nothing to do and no one to do things with after graduation. A good life after graduation happens when parents, the child, the school and others do the planning and preparation. So how do you make this happen?

### The emotional hurdles of transition

Parents often feel anxious about their child's future, overwhelmed by decisions and changes, and afraid of the unknown; these emotions can stop parents from working on the future. Here are some ideas that have helped parents prepare emotionally for their child's transition:

- Find someone to support you through this process; connect with a parent group or another parent or find a teacher sympathetic and knowledgeable about transition.
- Learn all you can about what comes next.
- Create a positive vision of your child's adult life.
- Have faith in your child and yourself.
- Start planning, no matter how you feel.
- Contact organizations that provide support and information about transition, such as the Texas Parent to Parent Pathways to Adulthood program.

### When should you get started?

Begin whenever you become aware of the issues, whatever your child's age. Of course, you'll have a different focus depending on your child's age and disability. Transition is continuous and evolves over time. Even after your child is an adult, the process still goes on as his needs change.

One concrete thing you can do now is get your child's name on the interest lists for the Medicaid Waiver programs; the wait for these helpful programs in Texas is many years long. (For more information on Medicaid Waivers, go to [www.txp2p.org](http://www.txp2p.org), Pathways to Adulthood, Services and Supports.)

### What should you do while your child is still in elementary school and early middle school?

## Texas Parent to Parent

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Most parents want their children to work as adults, so start at a young age preparing your child to be ready to work. Encourage her to do household chores and notice what he is good at and when he needs extra assistance. Your observations can help in future planning.

Encourage the social skills that will help your child to make friends, get along with co-workers, and live with a roommate. Also encourage your child's interests, which can provide a link to work and social opportunities later on. Notice what motivates him or her.

### **What should you do in the teen years (later middle school and high school)?**

A good starting point is to participate in a planning process of some kind; spend a few hours with your child and school staff, friends, relatives, or anyone who can contribute to a discussion about your child's future. During this discussion, you can look at where your child is today and then what goals your child might want to accomplish and the steps needed to accomplish them.

Remember, in a planning process, begin with your child; give him or her the time and opportunity to voice his interests and desires, what she is good at, what her goals are. If your child is non-verbal, include him or her as much as possible and turn to the other participants for answers; encourage them to speak for your child based on their observations of his behavior in a wide variety of situations.

Even if you don't hold a formal planning process, start the conversation with your child about the future. Now is also the time to encourage your child to take a more active role in decision making and self-help, as far as is possible, and give your child the opportunity to try out new skills.

Many parents are concerned about financing the future and need to learn about what services are available after age 18. For most government funding, a person must show that he or she has low-income/few resources and has a disability. Income and resource eligibility is based on a family's before age 18 and the individual's after age 18, so a youth may qualify for such assistance as SSI and Medicaid after age 18 who did not before. Someone who was receiving this assistance through their family before age 18 must reapply after 18, when the basis for eligibility changes. (For more information on funding programs, go to [txp2p.org](http://txp2p.org), Pathways to Adulthood, Services and Supports.)

Ensuring that your child will be eligible for public funding at age 18 requires that you look at family financial resources. The goal is to be sure that no resource, such as a banking or savings account, exists in your child's name. Estate planning can help you consider this issue.

Age 18 is also a legal milestone: our society views a person at this age as competent to sign documents, make medical and financial decisions, and speak for himself. Parents must be prepared to decide if their child at 18 can make his own decisions or if you will need a legal arrangement to speak for your child, such as guardianship or power of attorney. (For more information on estate planning and guardianship, go to [www.txp2p.org](http://www.txp2p.org), Pathways to Adulthood, Legal Issues.)

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You are learning more about your child during these years, and you'll begin to see where your child is headed. This knowledge will help you to prioritize your transition efforts. Here are some transition issues you may need to consider (more information on all these issues at [www.txp2p.org](http://www.txp2p.org) , Pathways to Adulthood.)

- Adult services
- Guardianship or an alternative and estate planning
- What to focus on in remaining public school years
- Post-secondary education
- Medical transition
- Employment
- Home
- Social opportunities and networks of support

### **How to get started**

What many parents who have gone through transition have found is that it helps to talk about the future. Start a conversation with school staff, friends and relatives, and your child. Sharing your hopes and fears and starting to build a concrete picture of the future will lower anxiety and build optimism. Imagine your child living a good life after graduation—now start to put the pieces in place for that life.

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