

TRANSITION TO HIGH SCHOOL; AGES 13-22 YEARS

The transition to the teen years are difficult enough without the added challenges of ASD. More than ever inclusion is happening in schools and students with various disabilities are attending inclusive classrooms and having inclusive recreation time. With some planning including school teachers, utilizing a one-pager and having an introduction period, this transition can be eased with some understanding and assistance with inclusion in social activities.

Along with social needs, annual review of the IEP process is important to ensure planning and growth through transition periods.

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The transition from federally mandated services provided through the school system to adult services can be a challenge. While entitlement to public education ends at age 21, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that transition planning begin at age 16 and become a formal part of the student's [Individualized Education Plan \(IEP\)](#).

This transition planning should include the student, parents and IEP team members working together to help the student make decisions about his/her next steps. An [Individualized Transition Plan \(ITP\)](#) should be developed to outline transition services, which may include education or vocational training, employment, living arrangements and community participation, to name a few aspects.

The first step in transition planning is to look at the individual's **interests, abilities and needs**. For example, what [educational needs](#) must be met? Where can the young adult find [employment](#) and training services? What types of [living arrangements](#) are best for him/her? How will he/she [socialize and pursue relationships](#)?

Entering adulthood is challenging and exciting. Advance preparation and plenty of support are needed so the young adult with autism can get a good start to the next chapter of his/her life.

EMPLOYMENT

Employment should take advantage of the individual's **strengths and abilities**. [Temple Grandin, Ph.D.](#), suggests that "jobs should have a well-defined goal or endpoint," and that your "boss must recognize your social limitations." She recommends that parents begin helping their children find jobs before they leave grade school, to prepare them with job skills and experience. The authors of *A Parent's Guide to Asperger Syndrome and High-Functioning Autism* describe three types of employment possibilities: competitive, supported, and secure/sheltered.

- **Competitive employment** is the most independent, with no support offered in the work environment. Some people might be successful in careers that require focus on details but only limited social interaction with colleagues, such as computer sciences, research or library sciences. It could also help to ask for accommodations, such as a workspace without fluorescent lights, to feel more comfortable at work. For more about attaining competitive employment, [read this article](#).
- (Self-employment is also an option some people with ASD pursue. This requires strong motivation but can be more flexible than working for a company.)
- In **supported employment**, a system of supports allows people with ASD to pursue paid employment in the community, sometimes as part of a mobile crew, other times individually in a job developed for them.
- In **secure or sheltered employment**, an individual is guaranteed a job in a facility-based setting. People in secure settings generally receive work skills and behavior training as well, while sheltered employment might not provide training that would allow for more independence.

To look for employment, begin by contacting agencies that may be of help, such as state employment offices, vocational rehabilitation departments, social services offices, mental health departments and disability-specific organizations. Many of these agencies, as well as other valuable services and supports, can be found in the Autism Society's nationwide online database, [Autism Source](#). Search or call today to find programs in your area!

For more information, read these *Autism Advocate* articles:

[Adult Employment: Digital Imaging Leads to Job](#)

[Moving Into the World of Employment](#)

[Off to Work for Individuals with Autism: A Supported Employment Approach](#)

[When the School Bus Stops Coming](#)

DEPARTMENT OF REHABILITATION

The California Department of Rehabilitation (DOR) administers the largest vocational rehabilitation program in the country. They have a three-pronged mission to provide services and advocacy that assist people with disabilities to live independently, become employed and have equality in the communities in which they live and work.

DOR provides consultation, counseling and vocational rehabilitation, and works with community partners to assist the consumers they serve. <http://www.dor.ca.gov/services-to-youth/index.html>

HOUSING

Whether an adult with ASD continues to live at home or moves into the community is determined in large part by his/her ability to manage everyday tasks with little or no supervision. Can he/she handle housework, cooking, shopping and paying bills? Is he/she able to use public transportation? Many families prefer to start with a supported living arrangement and move toward greater independence.

SUPERVISED GROUP HOME

A **supervised group home** usually serves several people with disabilities. These homes are typically located in average family houses in residential neighborhoods. Trained professionals assist each resident based on individual needs. The residents usually have jobs away from home during the day.

SUPERVISED APARTMENT

A **supervised apartment** might be suitable for those who prefer to live with fewer people, but still require some supervision and assistance. There is usually no daily supervision in this setting, but someone comes by several times a week. The residents are responsible for getting to work, preparing meals, and meeting personal care and housekeeping needs. A supervised apartment is a good step in transitioning to independent life.

INDEPENDENT LIVING

Independent living means just that – individuals live in their own apartments or houses and require little, if any, support services from outside agencies. Services might be present but limited to helping with complex problem-solving issues rather than day-to-day living skills. For instance, some people might need assistance managing money or handling government bureaucracy. It is also important for those living independently to have a “buddy” who lives nearby and can be contacted for support. Coworkers, friends, local business employees or other community members could be integrated into a support system, whether informally through social interaction or as part of a more organized effort. Many people think of adulthood in terms of getting a job and living in a particular area but having friends and a sense of belonging in a community is also important. People with ASD may need assistance in encouraging friendships and structuring time for special interests. Many of the support systems developed in the early years may be of continued use, as they can provide consistency and a framework for expansion.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Although young children with autism sometimes seem to prefer to be by themselves, one of the most important issues, especially for older children and adults, is the development of friendships with peers. It can take a great deal of time and effort for people with ASD to develop the social skills needed to interact successfully with others, so it is important to start [developing social ability](#) early. Furthermore, bullying in middle and high school, not to mention at the workplace for some adults, can be a major problem for people with autism, and the development of friendships is one of the best ways to prevent it.

Personal friendships generally are built on one or more shared interests. Personal friends share their thoughts and feelings as well as experiences. Some people on the autism spectrum tend to be very open, honest and willing to share themselves with others – traits close personal friends will value.

Close personal friends will stick up for each other in front of others, answer questions honestly (in a kind way), help each other when there is a need, and enjoy spending time together. Most people, whether neurotypical or on the autism spectrum, only have a few friends who meet this definition of a close friend.

Casual acquaintances and coworkers, however, might not want to share or be shared with as much. They might not be as ready to be open and honest and share personal information about themselves with you, so they feel uncomfortable when you share too much about yourself too soon. Some neurotypicals like to develop friendships slowly. When someone asks you questions about yourself, such as where you were born or went to school or what things you like, they are indicating that they have a possible interest in becoming your friend. That doesn't mean they will become your friend, only that they are interested in finding out whether the two of you share enough interests to possibly become friends.

Making friends has less to do with whether people like you than it does with whether you have interests or experiences that are like theirs, and whether you are also willing to share in their interests that are different from yours. It's easy to lose potential friends if you share more than they want to hear, or if you don't give them equal time to share their interests with you.

Many people with autism have particularly strong interests in certain areas. Unfortunately, it might be that very few other people share those interests. Clubs where people with your special interest are likely to gather are excellent places to find friends. You could find people who share your special interests at museum workshops on your favorite topic, while volunteering to take care of your favorite animal at the zoo or animal rescue, in classes in your field or subject of interest, or at local events centered on your special interest. For example, some universities open their star observatories for special community nights. The type of people who attend such an event likely will be as interested in stars as you are. The Internet might also be a place where you can find people who share your special interests. They might not live near you, but you can still exchange ideas and [discuss your favorite topics virtually](#). One popular forum for people on the spectrum is [Wrong Planet](#), and many others are out there.

It is important to self-advocate, to let others know what makes you happy or uncomfortable. Most neurotypicals are willing to respect these differences if they know about them. If you struggle with verbal communication, you can carry a card in your wallet or purse that explains what you need and share it with others as you choose.

Miscommunication can make it harder for people on the autism spectrum to make and keep friends, too. The reason for this is our autism neurology, meaning that unlike typical people's, our brains are not wired to automatically pick up, incorporate and effectively use the often elusive and transient social information all around us. This information is called the "[hidden curriculum](#)." Whether for boys and men or [girls and women](#) with the social learning challenges of autism, the rules can be vague and confusing. Getting social experience and discussing social rules are good ways to clarify the hidden curriculum and make socializing easier and more rewarding.