



Transition Planning

**A Guide for Parents of Youth with Disabilities
or Special Healthcare Needs**



For General Information Only

1. Maine Parent Federation is not a legal services agency and cannot provide legal advice or legal representation. The information in this booklet is provided as a public service for general information only and is not a substitute for legal advice about you or your child's particular situation. In addition, the law is always changing, through actions of the courts, legislature, and public agencies; such advice should be obtained from an attorney.
2. The contents of these materials were developed, in full or part, under a grant from the US Department of Education, H328M140006, however those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the US Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement from the Federal Government. Project Officer, Carmen Sanchez



Contents

- 3. "Your kiddos are growing up..."
- 4. Laws Regarding Transition
- 6. The Transition Team
- 10. Developing the Transition Plan
- 14. Legally an Adult
- 17. Activities for Parents and Youth



“Your kiddos are growing up...”



Your kiddos are growing up! You have watched them sprout, now it is time to watch them bloom! Someday, your child will be an adult, and it is important to recognize the changes that come with this. What will the future look like for your family?

The **transition years** are a time for young people to explore opportunities, fortify their identity, and plan for their future.

This milestone also means a significant shift in how educational and support services have been provided. After graduating or aging out of school, a young person will no longer receive services through the public school system.

Parents and young adults often find themselves sewing together a patchwork of community services, job supports, and post-secondary opportunities to best suit their needs. It is important to plan early.





Laws Regarding Transition

Special education laws are regulated at the federal level by the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act** (IDEA), and at the state level by **Maine’s Unified Special Education Regulations** (MUSER).

Maine’s Unified Special Education Regulations (MUSER) *must meet or exceed the expectations set forth in IDEA.*

Within MUSER, the language in italics is state language, and shows where Maine’s law exceeds the federal law.

These laws are to ensure all children, regardless of disability, are entitled to a **Free and Appropriate Public Education** (F.A.P.E.) to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.

Does your child have an IEP or a 504 plan?

An IEP is not the same as a 504 plan, and it is important to know the difference as you prepare for the future.

An IEP, or **Individualized Education Program** is developed for public school children who need Special Education services, as well as accommodations. This is mandated by IDEA, the federal special education law. This should include modifying the educational curriculum or providing specialized instruction to the individual to meet their unique needs.

“504 plans” are mandated by **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** and is a Civil Rights law. This plan provides reasonable accommodations or modifications for students with disabilities. It does not include specialized instruction, or the altering of the educational curriculum.



Reasonable accommodations are changes to the environment or situation that removes barriers allowing the young person to access the general education.

In the school setting, this could include the following examples.

Ex. Extended time on tests

Ex. Preferential Seating

An IEP requires a transition plan while a 504 does not. However, the parents may request that the school provide a transition plan for a student with a 504 plan.

Transition planning is required to be in the IEP by the time the student enters ninth grade or turns sixteen; whichever occurs first. The transition plan for each student will look different and is based on the individual needs and future goals of the student. Parents may ask to begin transition planning earlier if it feels appropriate and should not feel ashamed in making this request.

An IEP ends when a young person graduates with a diploma or ages out on their 22nd birthday. By law, a **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)** has been achieved. However, accommodations under Section 504 can follow an individual into adulthood.

Implemented on January 21, 2021, eligibility for IDEA has been extended until age 22.

... “Effective immediately, Maine will implement the “federal standard” and provide FAPE to eligible students until their 22nd birthday.”





The Transition Team

The school is responsible for creating a specific team to work on the student's transition plan.

The IEP team is required to invite the student to participate in the IEP meeting when the transition planning begins, but they may also consider inviting them to attend at a much earlier age. This builds self-advocacy skills, and it brings the student's ideas, goals, and perspective to the team. After all, it is *their* plan, and *their* future.

If the student does not attend or is unable to attend their IEP meeting, then the team must take other steps to ensure the individual's preferences and interests are considered.

The team should consist of the parents, a general education teacher, a special education teacher, a school administrator, and a vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor. A vocational rehabilitation counselor should be invited to the table NO LATER THAN 11th grade or age 16.

Any other additional support personnel and community agencies may also be invited to attend. Individual supports and agencies that can provide information or access to work or independent living opportunities are especially important at a transition planning meeting. Parents are always able to invite whomever they wish to be present at a transition IEP meeting, keeping in mind that it is always best practice to inform the school beforehand.



Student Roles

- Prepare for IEP meetings before they happen, with teachers, parents, and other supportive people
- Talk about and discuss personal dreams for the future with family, supporters, and teachers
- Share strengths and challenges with the team
- Learn how to talk about their disability, as well as the supports or accommodations that has worked for them
- Volunteer, job shadow, or have work experiences during high school
- Keep track of IEP transition goals
- Participate in discussion, or possibly lead their own IEP meetings

Family Roles

- Offer opportunities for youth to develop self-advocacy skills, responsibility, and independence at home
- Talk with young people about where they see themselves in the future and support their ideas
- Discuss with youth about how and why specific accommodations may be helpful
- Monitor IEP progress on their Transition goals
- Become familiar with post-secondary programs, adult services, and community support programs

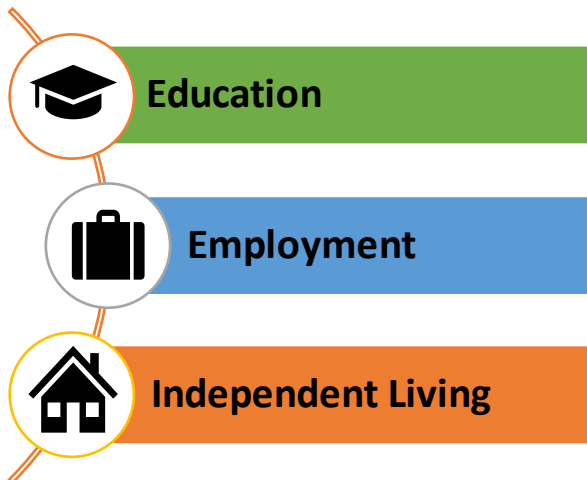
School Roles

- Initiate the transition planning process
- Ensure that an appropriate plan is developed, and appropriate services are provided
- Prepare youth to participate or lead their meetings
- Provide assessments to determine student's skills, abilities, and areas for accommodation
- Include the youth in developing goals based on their strengths and interests
- Identify school programming and accommodations
- Initiate the application for Vocational Rehabilitation no later than 11th grade
- Refine goals in IEP yearly to reflect the youth's vision for the future



The Three Domains under IDEA

Under IDEA there are three domains that need to be fulfilled in the transition plan: *Education, Employment, and Independent Living*.



These three domains involve a wide range of skill sets for a young person to develop as they transition to adulthood. Goals for each domain should be clearly stated in the IEP transition plan. Other areas of focus are the individual's relationships, financial literacy, as well as health and wellness.

When creating the transition plan, it is important to always keep youth at the

center. This is known as **Person-Centered Planning**, and it is the best way to ensure the transition plan aligns with the youth's self-identified interests, strengths, and needs.

Authentic Person-Centered Planning always depends on the commitment of the entire team to ensure the young adult is heard, understood, and guided in their goals for the future.

Everyone needs supports

We all need supports to help us make decisions in our day-to-day life. When making big or life decisions, many of us will ask our trusted friends for their opinion or experience. Examples for a young person may be whether they should consider getting a tattoo, or whether they can afford to buy a new car.



There are two types of supports; Natural and Paid.

Natural Supports are built off the relationships that occur in everyday life. These are the individuals' family members, friends, coworkers, acquaintances and neighbors.

Paid Supports are individuals who are hired to provide personal care or community access supports to a person with a disability, either as an employee or independent contractor. These could be health professionals, case managers employment services or representatives from group living arrangements.

Natural supports should be a majority of the support team, while paid supports are supplementary.

When identifying a good natural support, ask yourself, "**Who would you call in an emergency situation?**" or "**Who has your best interests in mind?**" This may often be a person you talk to about your problems or feelings.



Developing the Transition Plan



One of the most important steps for the team moving forward is to help the student develop a vision for their future. Instead of asking “What do you want to do with your life?” reframe the question with the three transition domains in mind.

How do you envision life just a few years from now?

- *Where do you see yourself living as an adult?*
- *Will you continue your education?*
- *What type of jobs or career opportunities do you think might be a good fit for you?*

The future is closer than it may appear.

Age-Appropriate Transition Assessments

Schools use a variety of both formal and informal assessments to show how the student learns, and to gather information about the individual’s strengths, challenges, and needs.

Informal assessments would include interviews and career/goal exploring exercises with the young person and family. While *formal assessments* can range from interest inventories and employment experiences to full vocational assessments and aptitude testing.

Assessments should define the individual’s interests, areas for needed growth, as well as their learning style. This will assist in developing a plan which best meets the students’ needs to obtain their expressed life interests within the three transition domains.



Setting Goals

Individuals who set specific measurable goals in their transition plan are more likely to reach those goals. The goals need to fall under the three domains mentioned earlier that are required by IDEA: **Education, Employment, and Independent Living.**

Below is an example of how each domain should be implemented into a transition goal.

Education

- After graduating or aging out of public school, the student will enroll in a two-year veterinary technician program at an in-state community college to gain the knowledge and credentials needed for their career path.

Employment

- While enrolled in the veterinary technician program the student will participate in a paid work experience at a local veterinary office to develop hands-on skills and professional experience in the field.

Independent Living

- While attending the veterinary technician program the student will live at home with their parents and actively work on independent living skills such as budgeting, meal preparation and time management, with the goal of moving into an apartment with a roommate after program completion.



Choosing the Transition Services

The transition services should be clearly defined in the IEP, along with who is responsible for providing the service, as well as expected deadlines towards the goals.

These services can include, but are not limited to:

- Providing ways to acquire self-determination and advocacy skills
- Connecting youth with VR counselors for job-shadowing /potential paid employment opportunities
- Instructing and training in life-skills, such as opening a bank account, or using public transportation
- Completing applications for adult services eligibility
- Identifying clubs/recreational activities that will support their interests
- Creating academic goals to support transition goals

Work Zone

Earning money can be empowering and having a satisfying career can be one of the most rewarding aspects of someone's life!

The world of work is changing rapidly! There are many new and exciting jobs that did not exist just a brief time ago. Many of these jobs offer flexibility that was not possible before. Innovations in Assistive Technology and specific job accommodations can further break down these barriers to employment!

The first step to employment is to identify what job opportunities may be the right fit for the young adult. A student may have skills and interests in specific areas but does not know what work opportunities are available to them in those fields. A vocational rehabilitation counselor can help a young person prepare for, find, and keep employment.



Vocational Rehabilitation

Vocational Rehabilitation, also known as VR, is a service that assists people to prepare for, find, and keep employment. VR counselors help to develop an **Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)** that helps individuals reach their personal employment goals. The plan might include activities like visiting employers, job shadowing, and paid work experience.



The services offered through VR are limited and usually end once a person has had steady employment for 90 days. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation has offices across the state and are co-located in Maine's Department of Labor's Career Centers. There is also a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor assigned to every high school in Maine.

VR recommends applying for services about age 16, or two years before finishing high school.

Starting at age 14 (9th grade), students who are potentially eligible for VR services can apply to receive Pre-Employment Transition Services to further ready them for the world of working. Request an application from your school, or local VR office.



Legally an Adult

In Maine, when an individual reaches the age of eighteen, they have reached the **age of majority**. This means they are now legally an adult, and with this comes the transfer of rights from the parents to the individual. All the legal authority of that individual becomes theirs, and in the eyes of the government they can make their own legal and financial choices.

One year before the individual turns eighteen, there must be a statement included in the transition plan that states the individual has been informed of the transfer of rights that occurs at age 18. There are many factors to consider when planning for the transfer of rights; public benefits, income, and healthcare insurance.

Supported Decision Making and Alternatives to Guardianship.

There is a lack of awareness of the guardianship alternatives in our educational and medical institutions. They often urge parents to petition for full guardianship of their young adult without informing them of the other alternatives. While guardianship may be the appropriate option for some families, it is not a one-size fits all solution. Parents are encouraged to research **Supported Decision Making** and other alternatives to guardianship before petitioning for guardianship.

Supported Decision Making (SDM) is one of the least restrictive paths for guardianship. SDM allows young people to retain their legal rights. In SDM, a young person builds a support system of trusted family members, friends, and professionals, which allows them to build self-determination skills and gain independence. This team can meet periodically much like in the IEP process. When the young adult is faced with life decisions, the team of supporters is committed and available to meet with the individual to assist them in making decisions for themselves. The individual *always* makes the final decision.



What are SSI and SSDI benefits?

Financial planning is also an important part of adulthood. Understanding income sources and public benefits can help an individual manage their money to pay for expenses and create independence.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal program that provides monthly income to individuals who are older, blind, or disabled, and have little to no income. Children who receive benefits before the age of eighteen must reapply to be determined eligible under the adult criteria and SSA's definition of a disability. Young adults who did not receive SSI as children may also apply.

Many people believe that a young person will lose benefits by accepting a paying job, but the good news is that for people under age 22, there are protections in place, allowing the individual to maintain SSI, health insurance, and other benefits.

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) is a program that provides monthly income and benefits to adults who become disabled and are no longer able to work. This requires an individual to have *work credits*.

Work Credits are credits you earn throughout your work history. Each year that you work and pay social security taxes, you will earn work credits. You can receive a maximum of four credits a year. To qualify for SSDI benefits, you must have twenty work credits, although in some cases there are age exemptions.

Maine Medical Center offers Benefit Counseling Services to help people receiving SSI who want to work. Their Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICS) are experts in the special rules that apply when working while receiving SSI. In order to receive Maine Medical Center CWIC services, the individual must already be qualified and is receiving SSI or SSDI.



Maine Medical Center
MaineHealth



ABLE Accounts and Financial Planning

An **ABLE** (Achieving a Better Life Experience) **Account** is a tax-advantaged savings account for individuals with disabilities.

ABLE accounts allow individuals to save money (up to \$100,000) without losing SSI or Medicaid eligibility. Funds can be used for qualified disability-related expenses such as housing, transportation, education, and healthcare. Contributions can include earned income, gifts, or transfers from family or special needs trusts, though there may be yearly limits.

Individuals can shop around to find the ABLE account with the features and benefits that will best meet their individual financial goals. Bangor Savings Bank administers Maine's ABLE program.

MaineCare

MaineCare is Maine's Medicaid program. It is a state and federally funded program that provides health care coverage for eligible individuals and families. MaineCare is available to people who meet the income guidelines and are eligible based on age, family situations, income and asset levels, and health care needs.



If a person is eligible to receive SSI, they will be eligible to receive MaineCare.

If your child was not eligible for MaineCare under your income, they might be eligible once they become eighteen, as eligibility is now based on their own income. They should apply for SSI first, and if found eligible, they will be eligible for MaineCare. Because these are separate benefits, they will still need to complete the MaineCare application as well.



Conversation Starters



Use the following questions as suggestions for things you may want to ask your young adult planning for their future.

What are your abilities and strengths?

What are some things you find challenging to do?

What do you like to do for fun?

What are your hobbies?

What skills do you think would be important to learn or improve?

What kind of accommodations do you use at school that you may need when getting a job or pursuing higher education?

What kind of work would you like to do?

We are all quick to judge ourselves on our undesirable traits and it can be difficult to see the best features in ourselves. Remind your young adult of some of their latest and greatest achievements.



Tips for Parents

Take a deep breath. Smile. Then reflect on how the questions below pertain to YOUR family.



What are your dreams for your family's future?

Even as adults we never stop dreaming. Talk with your young adult about what they want for their future.

Listen to the theme of what they value: family, friends, having a job, independence, self-respect, or something completely unique to them. Promoting self-advocacy skills at an early age can assist them in asking for help when they need it, and to not feel shame when doing so.

What makes you feel anxious about the future for your family?

Fears your young adult may have about the future may be different than what you expect. Listen to their concerns, be supportive, but do not bombard them with advice. Positivity is contagious! Speak positively about the future, as this may also encourage them to speak positively about their future!

Where do you feel your young adult may need the most support?

Ask your young adult about what areas they feel they may need the most help in. When thinking about the future, who will provide this support? Often, youth with disabilities are much more independent than their parents realize. Many young people are aware of the areas they need support in, and youth who learn positive self-advocacy skills at an early age can more comfortably utilize these skills later in life.



Transition Planning Checklist

Use this step-by-step guide to ensure all essential components of a student's transition plan are in place and regularly reviewed.

1. Graduation Planning

- Confirm the student's anticipated graduation or exit date
- Identify if the student will receive a diploma or certificate of completion
- Confirm participation in the graduation ceremony

2. IEP Transition Meeting Setup

- Schedule and hold a transition-focused IEP meeting by age 16 or 9th grade (whichever comes first)
- Ensure planning is started early and reflects the student's future goals

3. IEP Team Participation

- Include the student and parent(s)/guardian(s)
- Ensure a school administrator with decision-making authority is present
- Include a general and special education teacher
- Invite the VR counselor by 11th grade
- Involve additional relevant professionals (e.g., case manager, service providers, job coach)

4. Transition Assessments

- Conduct age-appropriate assessments covering strengths, interests, preferences, and support needs
- Use assessment results to shape transition goals and services

5. Transition Goals and IEP Plan

- Include postsecondary goals for education/training, employment, and independent living (if appropriate)
- Ensure each goal is measurable and time-bound
- Identify services, supports, and who is responsible
- Review and update transition goals each year with student input



6. Life After High School Planning

Does the plan prepare the student for:

- Postsecondary education, training, or apprenticeship?
- Employment or job readiness?
- Accessing adult services (e.g., developmental services, VR, behavioral health)?
- Applying for benefits like SSI?
- Managing money and understanding income sources?
- Building daily living and independent living skills?
- Learning and using transportation options?



Notes



Check out all our booklets!





Please Stay Connected!



parentconnect@mpf.org



1-207-588-1933

