

The Transition to Independent Living: What Parents Can Do Now

When parents think about their son or daughter making the transition to adulthood and living independently, employment is often their first consideration. It may be just as important, however, to give careful thought to the skills your child will need to live as independently as possible.

Takeaways

- Parents have an important role in helping youth plan to live independently in the future
- Independent living includes community participation, home living, housing options, and recreation & leisure

To begin planning for independent living, consider whether your son or daughter will have the skills needed to participate in the community, help manage a home, and take part in recreation and leisure activities. Your child's needs in these areas are determined by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team based on age-appropriate formal and informal assessments. Not all students will require support in this area on their IEP. However, you will want to explore their needs and strengths in the area of independent living regardless of school services.

Community Participation

Being involved in the community is an important aspect of your child's future independent life. If you can help them learn the skills needed to become actively involved in the community, they will be more able to develop and maintain a strong support network. Community participation helps people with disabilities build a sense of confidence and inclusion, and it is also a great way for them to make friends.

Many groups and programs your child is already involved with will carry over into the community after high school. Help them choose activities now by determining available community resources, such as community theaters, museums, art galleries, places of worship, libraries, community education programs, park programs, and youth organizations, including Scouts or 4-H clubs. You should also research places that your child might volunteer, including food shelves, recreation programs, nonprofit organizations, schools, hospitals, and retirement homes. One-time community events, such as a fundraiser, may provide additional volunteer opportunities. It's important to identify activities that your child enjoys in high school that can transfer to adult life, such as art, sports, theater, or movies. As you consider activities, investigate transportation options within the community.

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Home living

It may be difficult to imagine your child living outside your home. However, the skills you teach now will help them become confident and capable of living as independently as possible. Home living means more than a place to live. It takes into account transportation, self-advocacy, financial management, and medical and support services as needed. Your child may develop independent skills in one, some, or all of these areas.

You and your son or daughter will need to explore the areas in which they can and want to be independent. Consider your child's needs in the following areas:

- **Daily living skills:** cooking, cleaning, shopping, personal hygiene
- **Transportation:** public, specialized, driver's license
- **Self-advocacy:** decision making, rights and responsibilities, knowledge of disability, knowledge of available resources
- **Financial support:** work wages, Supplemental Security Income
- **Financial activities:** banking, making purchases, paying bills, insurance
- **Medical and support services:** medications, personal care services, doctor appointments, adaptive equipment, counseling, Medical Assistance

Housing Options

Since housing is such a vital part of independent living, you and your child should discuss all of the possibilities:

- **Living at home:** they can still be somewhat independent in this situation. Families can set rules and responsibilities for every member in the household.
- **Living in an apartment:** If they become a renter, they will likely not be responsible for maintaining the yard or building. However, they will likely need to know how to live with roommates.
- **Living in their own home:** If they buy a house, they will be responsible for all the maintenance and repairs, but there is often more living space and freedom to make changes to the property.
- **Living alone with support services:** Often a rental situation, this option allows for independent living with support staff.
- **Group homes:** This is a place where small groups of people with disabilities live together. Usually an organization manages the home and hires staff to oversee activities of the residents.
- **Subsidized housing:** Section Eight is a subsidized housing program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that allows individuals to make reduced rent payments, and the government pays the remainder of the rent.

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Recreation and leisure activities

Once your son or daughter is an adult, staying involved in recreational activities may require more initiative. That is why it is important for you to pave the way by helping them develop a strong interest in different recreational activities at a young age.

As they acquire a set of recreational interests, consider how they might pursue these as an adult. You can help them by encouraging them to explore a variety of activities available during school, after school, and in the summer.

To explore enjoyable recreation and leisure activities, your child may:

- Talk to a school counselor to find out what activities are available at school. Some activities may include the yearbook, the school newspaper, clubs, student government, choir, band, or sports. Keep in mind that each of these activities has many different levels of participation, one or more of which may be appropriate for your child. Appropriate extracurricular and nonacademic activities must be made accessible for students with disabilities.
- Find activities of interest at home, such as gardening, building projects, music, computer activities, writing poems or stories, arts and crafts, photography, reading, or fitness-related activities.
- Consider recreational programs in your community. Some programs are for everyone, while others are specifically designed for people with disabilities. Examples of places to look for recreational opportunities include summer camps, community recreation programs, community education, Special Olympics, and Centers for Independent Living.