



transition planning

*Helping Students with Down Syndrome
Prepare for Life After High School*

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This Brochure:

- Provides an introduction to transition planning.
- Presents various options available after high school.
- Describes why, when and how transition planning should be initiated.
- Identifies the components of a successful transition plan.
- Explains when and how to evaluate and modify the transition plan.

About the NDSS *Transition Series*:

The National Down Syndrome Society (NDSS) has developed the *Transition Series* to help individuals with Down syndrome, parents and professionals understand the options available after high school, and to provide answers to many of the important questions about this next stage of life. While this series is most relevant to teenagers and young adults, it is never too early to begin thinking about and preparing for this transition.

The NDSS *Transition Series* will consist of four brochures: *Transition Planning*, an introduction to the transition planning process; *Post-Secondary Education*, an exploration of the various educational options available after high school; *Employment*, a discussion about how to prepare for and find the right job; and *Housing*, a guide to selecting the most suitable living arrangement.

Each brochure in the series will be supplemented by a regularly-updated resource list that provides additional details and assistance on the topic.

transition planning



about transitioning

We are all constantly transitioning throughout our lives. We go from one grade to the next, from one job to another, or from living at home to living on our own. While all of us handle change in our own way, major transitions often give rise to conflicting feelings. For example, we might look forward to new experiences, yet worry about the unknown. Taking adequate time to prepare and planning well are the best ways to alleviate the stresses that can accompany transition.

With that in mind, NDSS has developed this brochure to help individuals with Down syndrome and their families begin thinking about one of the most important transitions of all — the move from high school to life after high school — and to encourage them to start making plans as early as possible.

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What will change after high school?

While in school, most, if not all, of the resources that make up a student's principal support system of special education and related services are mandated by law. Upon graduation, the student will no longer be eligible for many of the services, and the responsibility of identifying, locating and coordinating appropriate resources will fall mainly upon the individuals and their families.

With proper planning, many important resource links can already be in place by the time the student graduates. There are many options available to individuals with Down syndrome after high school, but the best way to ensure a successful transition is to start planning for it long before graduation.

"Transition planning can never start too early. Children with Down syndrome want the same things in life as their typical siblings, such as moving away from home into their own housing, finding a job, or going to school. This was the expectation of our two sons with disabilities. We started planning early to make the transition as smooth and successful as it could be for everyone involved. Due to early planning, both boys are participating members of their community and have an enriched quality of life."

– Michael Remus, Director of Special Education, Portland, OR, Public Schools

What does transition planning involve?

Transition planning involves looking towards the future and envisioning all the skills and preparations that will be needed to lead the most fulfilling life possible. Looked at in this way, all training and education received during childhood and adolescence are part of transition planning.

However, formal transition planning involves a document called a **transition plan**, which is required by law to form part of a student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) starting at age 14.

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Initially, the IEP can include general transition goals, but by age 16, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the IEP contain a statement of “transition services,” or post-secondary agency or services links, that the student needs in order to transition successfully.

Transition planning is, therefore, a right that exists for all students with disabilities. It is important that individuals with Down syndrome be as involved as possible in making decisions about their future. Transition goals should reflect a student's interests, abilities and dreams, and the plan should outline specific objectives to help him or her achieve those goals.

What kinds of opportunities are available after high school for individuals with Down syndrome?

There are many opportunities for individuals with cognitive disabilities after graduation, but the three areas most frequently considered are: post-secondary education, employment and housing. Today, there are more opportunities than ever before for individuals with Down syndrome to pursue goals in these areas.

Successful transitioning will not only depend on a good understanding of the individual's personal strengths and interests, but also on knowledge of what options and services are available in the community.

“The primary concern was planning for Kim's life situation, employment, and where she would ultimately live. We wanted there to be a continuation of the programs, stimulation and activities that she had enjoyed. Even though graduation was still a few years away, we knew we had to start thinking about the process.”

– Eglon Simons, Parent

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Photograph by Clara Link, courtesy of The Down Syndrome Community 2004 Calendar, Living it Up!
www.downsyndromecommunity.org.

post-secondary education

Individuals with Down syndrome have the opportunity to participate in a variety of post-secondary education programs, such as:

- **Academic programs** or courses at a community college or other college or university;
- **Vocational or training programs**, such as apprenticeships and trade schools; or
- **Innovative programs** that combine these two types of education.

Programs and schools vary widely in terms of what they offer with respect to academics, independent living skills training, residential options, and the type of diploma or certificate earned. And even though IDEA requires that all schools make proper accommodations

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for their students with disabilities, it is very important to find a school whose staff clearly respects the student's learning style and is willing to go the extra mile to meet his or her needs. As many of these post-secondary education programs have eligibility or entrance requirements and are not necessarily located in your community, it is important to start researching early. Knowledge of existing programs and entrance requirements can help identify specific goals to include in the transition plan. For example, students can plan to take certain courses in high school as preparation for particular programs. Or, they might secure part-time jobs or volunteer work in a specific field of interest.

Deciding which program to enroll in is just like researching any college or program. It is important to find a good fit between the individual and the school. The upcoming NDSS *Transition Series* brochure *Post-Secondary Education* will include more in-depth information for students and their families to help them identify a program that fits their interests and needs.



"I used the Internet to research the community colleges near where I live, and then my mom and my mentor and I visited them. You can tell when a school is willing to support your needs to help you succeed. I feel very proud of myself for graduating from college. Given the opportunity, individuals with learning challenges can achieve their goals with the right support and appropriate modifications and accommodations."

– Nicolle, 21

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employment

In general, there are three types of employment options available to individuals with Down syndrome: competitive, supported and sheltered.

- In **competitive employment**, the individual secures employment in the community — for example, by responding to ads or job postings or proactively approaching businesses — and works independently without any support services.
- More common is **supported employment**, in which the individual works in an integrated setting and receives support services from a job coach. The job coach accompanies the individual to the workplace to enable him or her to learn the necessary job skills and to prepare to work independently. Usually, the job coach works with the individual full-time at first, and moves toward the goal of providing only periodic support such as visiting the job site to assist in training the individual for new assignments.

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- In **sheltered employment**, individuals work in self-contained settings with others who have disabilities without the integration of non-disabled workers. Sheltered employment is often obtained through agencies, and wages for this type of work are typically lower than for other types of jobs. Sheltered employment usually involves manual labor tasks such as assembling goods.

In addition to these types of employment, there are also many innovative programs that focus on business ownership and entrepreneurship for individuals with disabilities. These businesses may include artistic or creative ventures that allow the individual to focus on a specific talent or ability, such as photography or public speaking.



Regardless of the type of employment that is pursued, the challenge will often be locating a job and coordinating appropriate support services. There are laws and government agencies that aid individuals with disabilities in defining their employment goals, locating jobs, and obtaining the services they need to perform those jobs successfully. The NDSS

Transition Series brochure *Employment* will provide more information on these laws and organizations, as well as additional information about employment options for individuals with Down syndrome.

“My boss is a very good friend of mine. When I first came in, he showed me around the building and about getting the mail to every department ... If I need any help, I will ask my co-workers or my boss. I'm happy. I'm having fun at work.”

– Kim, 29

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housing

Individuals with Down syndrome and their families often explore possible changes in living arrangements as part of the transition to adulthood and the move towards greater independence. Not every student will want, need or be able to move from the family's home to more independent housing. Still, the question of where the student will live must be addressed in transition planning.

There are many housing options available:

- The individual might maintain the **status quo** and continue living with his or her family.
- Individuals enrolled in post-secondary education programs may reside in **student housing**, such as dormitories.
- Some individuals may choose **supportive living** arrangements, in which they can live in a home of their own, with or without roommates, and receive support services as needed.

transition planning

- Others may choose a **group living** situation, in which they share a home with other individuals with disabilities and have a 24-hour support staff.

The transition plan should identify not only where the student will live, but also which skills he or she will need to develop to successfully manage that arrangement. Such skills can include caring for personal hygiene, managing finances and preparing meals. They might also include learning how to drive or how to navigate public transportation to get to and from school, work or other activities.



In making decisions about living arrangements, families must weigh the desires of the individual, his or her independent living skills, and available resources. The NDSS *Transition Series* brochure *Housing* will provide guidance for families considering the various options.

“My parents and I talked about me moving to my own apartment. I liked the idea, but I was afraid I'd be lonely and would miss my family too much. I worked with my parents and some professionals on grocery shopping, managing money, using good judgment, doing my laundry, and other things. Now, I can tell you I love my apartment and my independence there.”

– Elizabeth, 29

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When should transition planning begin?

In accordance with IDEA, formal transition plans start at age 14. However, as previously mentioned, families can begin planning for transition when the student is very young, and there are many helpful resources available to guide them through the process. One good planning tool is the *Transition Timeline* created by Alan M. Goldberg, Ph.D. The timeline identifies appropriate post-secondary education, employment and housing goals for the various stages in a student's life. To be most effective, this information should be supplemented and personalized to reflect the specific needs of the student.



Transition Timeline

Elementary School Age

- Introduce the concept of work into everyday activities.
- Become familiar with all types of careers.
- Develop self-care and daily living skills and routines.
- Focus on good relationships and social skills at home and school.
- Explore vocational opportunities at the upper grade levels and beyond.
- Make your child a productive part of the household. Introduce chores and an allowance.

Middle School Age

- Begin career exploration, watch movies, read books, go to work with adults, etc.
- Support the teachers' efforts to provide job training as part of the school program.
- Find out about the types of educational program options such as inclusive, vocational and combination.
- Help the student explore careers by completing chores around the house, volunteering in the community, and participating in community service projects.

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14 Years Old

- Parents should participate in a transition program for parents.
- Attend a Transition Planning Committee meeting for your area.
- Ensure that vocational training is built into your child's IEP.
- Explore recreation and leisure interests.
- Attend every IEP meeting and provide your input.
- Find out how funding sources (i.e. Department of Human Services), case coordination agencies and financial assistance programs (i.e. Social Security) can help.
- Write transition goals into the IEP.
- Develop independent living skills.

15 Years Old

- Ask school staff about programs the Department of Human Services/Office of Rehabilitation Services (DHS-ORS) has to offer.
- Write transition goals into the IEP.
- Discuss home services and assistive technology.
- Request that DHS-ORS adult service providers be invited to IEP meetings to address questions. (Many will come even if you are not currently working with them.)
- Attend meetings that offer information about future planning such as residential, guardianship, employment and recreational needs.

16 Years Old

- Help the student find and hold a part-time job in school or in the community.
- Incorporate knowledge gained through the transition planning process into the IEP meetings.
- Invite adult service providers to IEP meetings.
- Discuss how long the student will attend high school (four years or until age 21).
- Contact the DHS-ORS regarding available services.
- Attend meetings that offer information about future planning.

transition planning

17 Years Old

- Have the student enroll in vocational education classes.
- Establish a graduation date.
- Write transition goals into the IEP.
- Invite adult service providers to IEP meetings.
- Investigate guardianship procedures and determine what is in the best interest of the student.

18 – 21 Years Old

- Apply for Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid.
- Apply for residential or case management assistance.
- Research and apply to an adult service provider.
- Schedule a vocational evaluation to help determine interests and set vocational goals.
- Write transition goals into the IEP. Discuss services needed to transition from high school to adult services.
- Attend a job fair.
- Establish legal guardianship if deemed necessary (based on the best interest of your child and consultation with a lawyer specializing in disabilities and guardianship).
- Schedule vocational education.
- Remain in close contact with the adult service agency chosen to serve the student after graduation.
- Introduce budgeting and the real cost of living on your own.
- Find suitable employment that offers the desired work hours and salary.
- Ensure that all necessary support services are ready to provide services immediately following graduation.

Special thanks to Alan Goldberg, Ph.D., for permission to use the *Transition Timeline*.

transition planning

What are the components of a transition plan?

The IEP's transition plan is the creative roadmap that a student will follow to prepare for life after high school. It identifies the individual's post-secondary education, employment and housing goals, and outlines specific steps to achieve them.

There are no hard and fast rules regarding transition plans, but in general, the transition team should set out to achieve the following:

- **Assess**, or identify the student's strengths, needs and preferences in terms of post-secondary education, employment and housing;
- **Develop** an awareness of various options in these areas and of the skills needed;
- **Match** the student to a desired post-secondary educational program, job and/or living arrangement;
- **Train and prepare** the student for the planned course of action; and
- Help the student **achieve a successful placement** and ensure that appropriate support services are in place.



To accomplish all of this, the transition plan needs to describe specific long-term goals and identify smaller, measurable steps that will help achieve each goal. A good plan will include strategies to learn specialized skills such as operating a particular piece of equipment or completing a certain course, as well as basic skills such as punctuality and working well with others. Transition plans also identify who is responsible for each step and set target dates for each objective.

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Sample IEP Transition Plan Goals & Objectives

Long-term post-secondary education goal:

Student would like to enroll in a teaching assistant certification program at community college.

<i>Possible Short-Term Objectives</i>	<i>Person/Agency Responsible</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit or contact local colleges to learn about course/program offerings 	Student, guidance department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research entrance requirements and pre-requisites 	Student, parents
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure student is enrolled in courses that will prepare him/her for college requirements 	Teacher-advisor, guidance department and student

Long-term employment goal:

After graduation, student would like to have paid employment, but is not yet sure what kind of work he or she would like to do.

<i>Possible Short-Term Objectives</i>	<i>Person/Agency Responsible</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enroll student in a career investigation course 	Teacher-advisor, guidance department and student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Locate volunteer opportunities in one or more area(s) of interest 	Student, parents, guidance department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Or, find part-time employment that will give student a chance to develop general job skills 	Transition service provider, student, teacher-advisor, parents

transition planning

Long-term housing goal:

Student wants to eventually live on his or her own and share an apartment with a roommate.

<i>Possible Short-Term Objectives</i>	<i>Person/Agency Responsible</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enroll student in course that will help him or her develop independent-living skills 	Teacher-advisor, guidance department and student
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student will take on new responsibilities/chores at home 	Student, parents



Things to keep in mind:

- Transition plan goals for post-secondary education, employment and housing often overlap.
- Short-term objectives can be general or very specific. However, it is important to set measurable goals.
- The IEP must include a target date for each short-term objective.
- It is very important to make sure that all related factors be considered in planning for a goal. For example, a goal of working part-time must address the question of how the student will get to and from work. Similarly, a student's goal to live on his or her own must address how expenses such as rent, utility bills and groceries will be paid for.

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Who is responsible for developing the transition plan?

Because parents are in the position to know their child best, and to be their child's greatest advocate, ultimate responsibility for good transition planning falls on them. However, since the transition plan is part of the IEP, the entire IEP team works together to develop the document.

The IEP team includes the student, teachers, parents (or legal guardians), school administrators and representatives of any other agency that may be responsible for providing transition services.

The process of developing a transition plan requires both creativity and coordination. It is a cooperative venture that requires input and participation by the entire team. While the role of each team member is important, the individual with Down syndrome should be as involved as possible in all decision-making, and efforts should remain focused on his or her needs and desires.

What general skills should the transition plan address?

The National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities identifies the following four skills as critical for individuals making a successful transition to life after high school:

- The ability for self-assessment
- An awareness of the accommodations that they need because of their disability
- Knowledge of their legal rights to these accommodations
- Self-advocacy skills to express their needs in the workplace and the community

Parents can get their children off to a good start by helping them begin to develop these general skills at an early age. The transition plan should reflect specific strategies for further strengthening the skills the individual has developed over time, and for helping him or her acquire those missing or underdeveloped skills.

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Can a transition plan be changed?

Yes! A transition plan must be flexible. It is designed to be a working document that can change as needed. Changes may be the result of any number of reasons - an individual may have already acquired certain skills and is ready to focus on new ones, or he or she may have developed different interests and goals.

To make the best decisions as to when and how to modify a transition plan, it is important to develop solid evaluation criteria and to regularly review the individual's progress against these criteria.

How do I know if the transition plan is working?

The goals and objectives stated in the plan should be clearly measurable in order to determine success. Evaluation of the plan may include observation, discussion and interaction with the student, team members, and relevant professionals.

The input of all team members and most importantly, the individual with Down syndrome, is key to making the determination of how well the plan is working. This input will provide valuable insights into the kinds of modifications that may need to be made to ensure that goals are met.

Conclusion

The period of time following high school graduation can present many challenges. But it can also be a time of excitement, productivity and great satisfaction. Planning for this transition from an early age can help the individual with Down syndrome mature into an adult who is as independent as possible. A well-developed transition plan ensures that the student has steps in place to reach his or her goals after high school.

The National Down Syndrome Society envisions a world in which all people with Down syndrome have the opportunity to realize their life aspirations.

The National Down Syndrome Society is committed to being the national leader in supporting and enhancing the quality of life and realizing the potential of all people with Down syndrome.



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*For additional information and resources on transition planning,
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