School-Age Programming

Transition to Adulthood

SECOND EDITION

GUIDELINES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

What Is Transition to Adulthood?

"Transition to adulthood" is a complex and ongoing process that starts as soon as a child is born and continues as the child becomes an adolescent, to early adult life and then through the stages of adulthood. While this process is complicated at best for any person, the individual with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) faces unique challenges that require specialized considerations. This set of guides will help the user understand these challenges and raise awareness of these important considerations

A critical time for transition planning is in the early years of middle school through the first few years following graduation from high school. This time period is the focal point of the *Transition to Adulthood* guides and will assist the individual with ASD and his or her team in reviewing the issues of adulthood related to employment, postsecondary education and adult living during these years. Implications for the individual with ASD to consider are highlighted throughout. Identification of resources and many active links to important information are provided. Use this set of guides as a reference and resource and to help frame a way to think about the issues related to adulthood.

Introduction to School-Age Programming

In this volume, *School Age Programming to Prepare for Transition to Adulthood*, the user will take a close look at important elements of educational programming for transition-age youth and the implications for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). While academic achievement is a required area of focus of an educational program, other areas of skill development that must be considered as well in order for students to achieve a successful adult life. For students with ASD, this includes issues such as social competency and life skills development.

The goal of this guide is to assist the team to understand these issues, to offer strategies and to suggest additional resources that can enhance the development of a secondary education program that prepares the student for a successful adult life.

Introduction

Implications and Strategies

Next Steps

Summary

Introduction

Adult Outcomes as the Focus of Educational Programs

School-age programming for students with disabilities, including ASD, should consider the transition to adulthood process as early as possible. In Ohio, this is mandated by age 14, which means that teams must be engaging in age-appropriate transition assessments and developing statements related to transition planning no later than age 14. These ongoing assessments lead to the creation of transition goals and objectives that support the outcomes the student desires following high school. (See the *IEP Transition Components* booklet for more information.)

The resulting IEP process for the transition-age student focuses on provision of instruction and experiences during the middle and high school years that will likely lead to the desired adult outcomes. The school, in partnership with the family and community agencies, is the primary provider of instruction and skills that will help the student with ASD be successful after graduation.

Focus of Adult Goals

Postsecondary (adult) outcomes (goals) in the IEP transition component must focus on:

- Employment
- Education
- Community (independent) living

Course of Study

The school program for a transition-age youth should reflect the necessary instruction, experiences and services that prepare the student to achieve the desired adult life goals. A description of these components, outlined as a multi-year educational package, is referred to as the student's "course of study".

Nina's Vision for Employment

Nina is a high school freshman. She is a pleasant but quiet student who has a small group of friends she seems to be comfortable socializing with at school. She rarely initiates conversations and social interactions with people outside of this group because she has a difficult time in social interactions, body language and the conversations of her peers. She is described as academically "average" but struggles to understand math concepts. Nina's favorite activity is to be with animals, caring for them and enjoying their company. Her goal for the future is to work with animals in a veterinarian's office. She is planning to attend a veterinary technician program at Lakeside Community College after graduation from high school.

Course of Study

Nina's course of study in high school needs to prepare her to meet the academic requirements to enter college, as well as to prepare her to function socially and to improve her adaptive problem-solving skills. Nina has difficulty in both social and problem-solving areas, which can be related to her diagnosis of ASD. In order to prepare her for adult life and to achieve her goals, the IEP team determined that the following course of study is necessary.

Freshman	Sophomore	Junior	Senior
English I	English II	English III	English IV
Math I (with tutoring)	Math II (with tutoring)	Algebra I (with tutoring)	Math credit (TBD)
Physical Science	Biology	Earth Science	Applied Sciences
U.S. History	World History	State History and Government	College Technology and study skills
Study Skills	Art	Community Based Skills II (2 Periods)	Community-Based Skills III
Career Exploration and Transition	Technology tools for study	Job shadowing	Internship with vet
Social competency instruction through services of speech-language pathologist	Community-Based Skills I	Social competency/ employability skills instruction	Social competency/ community and college
	Social competency instruction with speech-language pathologist		

Academic Achievement

All students need thorough academic instruction to succeed in college and in the workplace. Additionally, all students must participate in meaningful learning related to the common core. This activity is supported by the predictors of post-school success identified by the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center. Participation in general education activities has been shown to improve success in both postsecondary education and employment. However, the critical feature of the instruction in the common core is to provide a meaningful education related to the student's individual goals and learning style.

Areas to Consider in Course of Study

The following areas should be considered and reflected in the course of study for students with ASD:

1. **Academic Achievement**
2. Social Competency and Life Skills Development
3. Self-Determination Skill Development
4. Authentic Community-Based Experiences

Considerations

"Applied" Academics

In some academic courses, for some students with ASD, instruction is focused primarily on the purpose or use of the academic concepts. This type of course may be referred to as "functional" or "applied academics." This means the student is provided instruction that allows her to understand and apply the basic curricular concepts to meaningful life experiences. This is supported by the common core extensions which describe how the academic content standards can relate to all students, including students with disabilities. Some states, including Utah and North Carolina have identified and published common core extensions for students with disabilities.

Academic and Lifespan Supports

Students with ASD may need additional supports to succeed. These supports include both academic accommodations or modifications and vocational adaptations. Students and educational teams should consider the needed supports when identifying postsecondary goals. For example, a student with ASD may need an organizational system for homework assignments to break down large projects into manageable tasks, or visual supports like time lines and schedules to complete an assignment. A student who likes to work with his hands but is very sensitive to loud noises may need to explore vocational choices that do not require working in the loud environments that cause him stress and poor concentration.

Academic Instruction: A "Window to the World"

Participation in the common Ccre is also one way to offer students with disabilities an opportunity to explore and be exposed to information and experiences that lead to careers, leisure activities and continued adult learning.

Evidence-Based Strategies for ASD

Instructional strategies shown to be effective for students with ASD can be helpful when planning instruction. Several free resources provide information on effective strategies for instruction of individuals on the autism spectrum, including the Texas Autism Guide for Effective Teaching and the Autism Internet Modules.

Educators should consider the instructional strategies proven to be effective for students with ASD when designing an academic program and course of study.

Social Competency and Life Skills Development

In some regions, schools may offer non-academic instruction in areas related to independent living such as driver training, drug education and sex education. Teaching students these functional life skills is a high-evidence secondary transition practice.[1] Studies demonstrate that when students learn practical skills, they are more likely to be successful in life after high school. This implies that IEPs and transition plans should extend beyond the typical "life skills classes" to include direct instruction in social competency and independent living.

[1] (Test, 2007)

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Test, D. W., Fowler, C., Kohler, P., & Kortering, L. (2010). *Evidenced based practices and predictors in secondary transition: What we know and what we still need to know.* Charlotte, NC: National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center.

Considerations

Social Competency and ASD

Social and life skills are especially important for individuals on the autism spectrum, including those with high communication and cognitive skills. Social challenges and difficulties with socialization are hallmark characteristics of the autism spectrum. This suggests that instruction in understanding different relationships such as acquaintances, friends, boyfriends or girlfriends may be a priority focus of school programming for a student with ASD.

Life Skill Resources

A link to a list of strong and moderate evidence-based life skill instruction practices developed by NSTTAC (National Secondary Transition and Technical Assistance Center) may be found by clicking here. Many downloads are available that describe the evidence to support the practice and links to strategies for teaching the skills.

Life Skills Across the Spectrum

Life skills instruction includes teaching skills such as purchasing and shopping, cooking, budgeting and banking, mobility (crossing the street) and safety (first aid). Other important life skills involve the "soft skills." Examples here include interpersonal relationships with coworkers such as learning to recognize moods or emotions and understanding the importance of punctuality, privacy and hygiene. Attention to "soft skills" should be reflected in transition planning. An Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment will assist in determining needed transition instructional services. For example, a student with Asperger Syndrome who receives good grades in computer science classes but does not know how to make a phone call or engage in a social conversation in the school cafeteria, needs life skill and social skill instruction.

Parent Involvement

Parents can also teach life skills by modeling skills and providing opportunities, training and support in performing and practicing skills. These activities should begin when the student is very young and continue into the young adult years. Educators can partner with families by providing ideas and help with organizational or communication supports. For example, video and peer modeling have been used to learn activities of daily living such as grocery shopping and making change.

Self-Determination Skill Development

Self-determination (SD) can be defined as knowing oneself, one's goals and how to achieve those goals. It includes knowing strengths and acknowledging areas of challenge.

Self-advocacy is associated with self-determination. This is an important skill because it is not enough for students or individuals with ASD to know their goals and strengths. In environments such as college or the workplace, they also have to know how to ask for accommodations or supports when needed.

For example, teaching students with disabilities how to lead their own IEP meetings is a research-based self-determination practice. In a self-directed IEP meeting, students learn how to actively participate in making decisions about their own future and how to present their interests and goals to the IEP team. Research shows that in teacher-directed IEP meetings, students talk only 3% of the time. But after self-determination training for student-led IEPs, students spoke 13% of the time and their IEP documents had more comprehensive post-school goals and vision statements.[2]

[2]Martin, J. E., Van Dycke, J. L., Greene, B. A., Gardner, J. E., Christensen, W. R., Woods, L. L., & Lovett, D. L. (2006). Direct observation of teacher-directed IEP meetings: Establishing the need for student IEP meeting instruction. *Exceptional Children*, 72, 187-200.

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Developing Self-Determination

Becoming self-determined is a process of developing and implementing a realistic plan for one's life. It requires an awareness of one's strengths and challenges along with the knowledge and skills needed for adult life. This process takes time, and most students need teachers, family members and others to provide them with opportunities to become self-determined. Tools to support this development include free materials created by the Zarrow Center.

Association with Improved Outcomes

NSTTAC reports that teaching self-advocacy and self-determination skills is a strong and moderate evidence-based transition practice to improve adult outcomes. On their website, NSTTAC provides free guides that include ready-made Power Points, scripted notes (included in the Power Point), and other materials to provide professional development to a group or individual.

Individualized Instruction

Individualization is critical. In the article, "Developing Skills and Concepts for Self-Determination in Young Adults with Autism", Fullerton and Coyne (1999) report that instructional methods were successful if they were tailored to fit the learning needs of the student. Temple Grandin, a successful professional who is diagnosed with ASD, believes that youth with autism, whose thinking is different and have communication challenges, may have difficulty understanding the concepts of life planning and self-determination in the same manner as people without autism (Fullerton & Coyne). Helpful instructional methods to consider include:

- Visual organizers and drawings to help understand time periods, sequences, concepts and social situations
- Small-group modeling, role play and practice (conversational turns, entering/leaving conversations, listening) to include roles, procedures, scripts and purpose of interaction
- Video modeling
- Social narratives and cartooning

Parent/Family Role

Parents play a critical role in the development of self-determination by acting as models of self-determined behavior and by interacting with their children in ways that promote self-determination. Home environments can provide safe opportunities for exploration, choice, taking risks and exercising control.

Authentic Community-Based Experiences

Students who have community job experiences prior to leaving high school are more likely to become employed as adults. Whether a student plans to continue in postsecondary education or pursue employment following high school, longitudinal transition studies (such as the National Longitudinal Transition Study) strongly suggest that transition plans promote community-based experiences. For example, summer and after-school jobs can help students develop employability skills, like being on time, following directions or learning a sequence of tasks.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

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School Support

School programs for transition-age youth should provide real-life, authentic and meaningful opportunities for career exploration and learning adult skills. Consider assignments or activities such as the following:

- Job shadowing
- Volunteering
- Visiting, interviewing and mentoring with local employers
- Community-based vocational instruction
- Exposing students to a variety of career paths

These activities can allow employers to become mentors to youth, and become familiar with the potential of the youth, and can also assist with career planning for the student.

Community Support

Community-based activities such as career and transition fairs are opportunities for employers, colleges, agency personnel and community members to interact with students and families well before the student leaves high school. Potential employers, college representatives and service providers can provide feedback on resumés, participate in mock interviews, and most importantly, get to know the talents and abilities of the youth with ASD. Not only will these opportunities help students prepare for the adult environments they face when leaving high school, they will also help others develop an awareness of accommodations that will support the student to become a participating community member.

Partnerships

School programs that reach out to or partner with those in the community can provide the bridge to success that many students with ASD require. Such partnerships can pave the way for students to volunteer, participate in internships and access summer employment experiences. These opportunities may provide students with ASD their only opportunity to gain vital real-life experience in a supportive environment. "Service learning" is another term to describe these valuable volunteer opportunities.

Characteristics of ASD – Sensory

Students with ASD frequently cope with challenges that result from a fragile sensory processing system. At times, their sensory processing systems are extremely sensitive to even commonplace experiences, resulting in strong avoidance reactions such as the student avoiding large groups (i.e., cafeteria or gym) due to the noise, lights or lack of space. On the other hand, the student may have strong sensory preferences and seek out desired experiences. For example, the student may have a strong need to move and be unable to sit through an entire class, or the student may have the need to repeatedly touch materials and objects. When encountering sensory challenges, the person may find he is only able to focus, sit or listen for short periods of time. He might become very active, or conversely may shut down and be unable to respond. At the same time, the student with ASD may not be able to explain these difficulties to others or respond to questions about his actions.

Considerations

Sensory Stress and School

Students with ASD often have sensitivities to the sensory environment that result in responses and reactions that can be difficult for others to understand and that may appear as willful "behavior." Be aware that these sensitivities can intensify in situations encountered frequently in the school environment such as:

- Transitions to new environments or people
- Changes in schedules and routines
- Stresses caused by school deadlines, illness, sleep disturbances or difficulties outside of school

Assessing Sensory Needs

When assessing a school environment, consider the following:

- What do you know about the sensory issues for this individual? How do they affect school performance?
- Are these sensory triggers in the school environment or in specific classrooms?
  Noise or specific sounds
  Bright or dim lighting
  Smells/odors
  Visual clutter
  Lack of personal space
- Can adaptations be made to the environment that reduce or eliminate the sensory challenges?
- Could the individual benefit from calming or alerting activities to deal with the sensory issues that remain?

Strategies

Make Environmental Adaptations

Often strategies and environmental adaptations to address sensory issues are found in the IEP and directed by the occupational therapist. The occupational therapist is a valuable team member when assessing for sensory issues and providing interventions for a specific student. In addition, consider adaptations that focus on the environment (classroom and other school environments) such as:

- Schedule student's lunch time 10 minutes earlier or later to reduce crowding when entering the cafeteria.

- Schedule breaks or allow the student to use a "take-a-break" card. Teachers can also give the student a "take-a-break" card when they see the student is getting upset. This time may give the student a chance to calm down.

- Allow the student to listen to soothing music if this helps with panic in crowded spaces or when exposed to unpleasant sounds.

- Allow the student to select a location in the room that is comfortable rather than assigning a location. For example, some people prefer a seat that provides more space such as in the back or side of the classroom rather than by a door or in the middle of a group of students.

- Use dividers to create personal space if the student is easily distracted when doing assignments. These may be as simple as file cabinets, room screens, curtains or bookshelves.

- Allow desirable air fresheners or avoid placing the individual near students who use heavy perfumes or colognes.

- Experiment with different types of lighting. Some students prefer natural lighting, some indirect lighting and some are fine with overhead lights.

- Explore opportunities during the school day that allow the student who needs to move or pace to do so in a natural manner. Jobs such as delivering messages or packages or cleaning shelves and floors allow for a natural sensory break. Active movement is calming to many individuals.

Keep in Mind That Sensory Challenges Intensify with Stress

Sensory processing challenges and sensitivities often intensify in stressful situations, unfamiliar routines and with unfamiliar people. Create predictability by using visual strategies, such as pictures, video, social scripts and clear explanations of what to expect at school, especially when changes are to occur.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Characteristics of ASD – Communication and Socialization

Social competency is critical to success in all aspects of adult life. However, students with ASD typically struggle with the social competencies of school, community, employment and leisure activities. Bridging the gap between the social skills that a student with ASD demonstrates and the skills needed for successful adulthood almost always requires intervention. Therefore, social instruction is a critical component in the education of youth with ASD.

Considerations

Impact of Social Success

Students with ASD typically struggle to respond to and understand the social aspects of a situation within the educational program. Poor social and communication skills can result in the student with ASD being isolated from peers. Intervention and support surrounding socialization and social skills is critical in order to promote effective communication and social relationships with teachers and peers.

Spectrum of Social Skill Development

Social competency is critical to success as an adult and, therefore, cannot be overlooked in preparing students for adulthood. Needed competencies may range from the very basic social skills expected of a young adult to the complex aspects of reading social cues and accurately interpreting another's perspective or point of view. This includes understanding the school culture, nonverbal body language and peer feelings.

Social Communication Needs

Social instruction may need to address conversational skills such as how to initiate, sustain and end a conversation. Students with ASD may make seemingly irrelevant comments or focus on their special interests to the exclusion of other topics if they are not taught and cued by others. Typical conversations and vocabulary of the school culture may also need to be taught. Further, vocabulary of the targeted adult environments may need to be taught as part of a student's transition plan.

Teaching the Hidden Curriculum

In school, students with ASD may need more time and direct instruction to learn the social rules that most students intuitively understand This is called the "hidden curriculum." This includes many situations and skills. For example, understanding who to go to with questions or who to ask for help may not be natural or easily figured out. Understanding the differences between interacting with teachers and peers may be lost on the student with ASD. Educational teams should not assume the student will just "figure it out." Instead, systematic instruction may be necessary.

Strategies

Review Assessment Information

Review the information in the Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment related to social competency and communication. Note the types of social and communication concerns that were identified, as well as the types of supports and interventions identified as being effective. Include these interventions (or modified versions of the supports) in all support plans, including behavior support plans. (If social competency was not addressed in AATA, determine how assessment should be completed.)

Increase Supports Initially

In a new situation, social supports often need to be intensified initially. Such interventions can later be reviewed, revised and modified as the situation becomes more familiar and predictable.

Reinforce Social Skills

Reinforcement can be a very effective way to teach new skills. Provide meaningful reinforcement when the student demonstrates a desired skill. Remember, reinforcement must be specific to the individual and not a generic item or activity. Individuals with ASD may require very unique reinforcement.

Establish a Safe Place

Establish a "safe place" where students can go for help, to calm or to work through how to successfully navigate a situation. This is often a useful strategy when people feel out of control.

Provide a Well-Planned Environment

Provide a consistent, structured classroom environment. Give advance notice if a change in activities or schedule will take place.

Serve as Models

Teachers and other adults can provide peer awareness and understanding by modeling how to socially interact and communicate with the student with ASD in a respectful and meaningful manner.

Characteristics of ASD – Communication and Socialization

Students with ASD need a variety of supports, services and interventions related to communication and socialization. However, identifying the types of supports needed, knowing what skills and competencies to target and what to prioritize in a student's course of study must be individualized. Assessment, using both formal and often informal methods, is helpful and often necessary.

Considerations for Assessment of Social Environment

What is the "hidden curriculum" of:

- The general school environment
- Individual classrooms
- Non-structured settings such as the cafeteria, bus, and library
- Future environments that the student will be entering as an adult

Does the student understand the unseen, sometimes unpredictable and yet critical messages or information in these environments?

How will the student best learn the social communication skills and competencies?

- Direct instruction
- Modeling
- One-on-one
- With peers
- A Combination

What types of instructional methods are the most effective for this student?

- Video
- Discussion
- Reading
- Pictures
- Role play
- A combination

Will the student's social communication skills and competencies be a significant barrier to developing friendships and peer interaction?

Does the student understand and is he able to follow the directions and instructions given by the teacher?

Does the student require directions in alternate or multiple formats: verbal, visual, demonstration? What supports are necessary?

What types of social instruction, social supports and social cueing does the student need to successfully complete assignments? What is required to successfully engage in social interactions with fellow students and teachers?

How will the student's progress in the area of social skills and social competencies be measured?

How will the information regarding the student's communication style, level of social competency, need for instruction and types of supports and interventions be communicated throughout all environments and from year to year, including the transition to adult environments?

Provide Visual Supports

Visual supports promote understanding and expression, as well as assist in learning new tasks and skills. The skills that may be the most difficult for the individual to master include social communication competencies. Strategies and supports that may be considered for a school and transition program include:

- Visual/written scripts to teach and support social interaction.

- Visual reminders of the rules or social norms in terms of what "to do" and the "hidden curriculum." More information about resource for the hidden curriculum are found at this link.

- Subtle cues between the student and the teacher, job coach or other support person to remind the student when she is too close, too loud, needs to respond, etc.

- Priming: Directly before entering a situation, use visual supports to review with the student the skill that is to be used. This can include for example, reminders of the order of classroom activities and breaks, expectations of behavior in cafeteria, or the hidden curriculum of the bathroom.

- Video modeling: Videos of self or others performing a task or using desired social skills.

Offer Technology Supports

- Use email to communicate clearly and concisely with a student who is competent with the technology. This may allow her time to focus on and better understand the message.

- Use iPads, iPods and Smartphones to provide a quick, portable way to present video modeling, social scripts, reminders and other social and communication supports.

- Several documents that identify helpful apps are available for download at this link.

- If the individual uses an augmentative communication device, make sure the needed vocational vocabulary is programmed in the device. Provide low-tech alternatives in case of failure.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Characteristics of ASD – Executive Function and Organization

Students with ASD may have difficulty with organizing the physical environment as well as mental planning and maintaing attention. This challenge can have great impact on learning, generalization of skills, problem solving and independence. For example, difficulty with organization, attention and mental planning can affect the ability to quickly learn and complete activities, assignments or tasks, even in an area where the student has great talent.

Considerations

Cues to Executive Function Challenges

Challenges may appear as:

- Appearing overwhelmed by a relatively simple task
- Having difficulty getting started or knowing what to do when finished – even with a routine task
- Becoming easily distracted and having difficulty returning focus or re-engaging with a task or activity
- Shutting down or becoming anxious when faced with a change in the normal activity or class routine
- Viewing a simple problem-solving situation as insurmountable
- Having a messy or disorganized desk area, even if the individual appears to desire routine and predictability

Long-Term Supports

Even after the initial transition to a new environment, a student may continue to struggle to mentally organize and problem-solve. Environmental organization and strategies may be necessary throughout the person's life to achieve independence and success.

Environmental Assessment

Assess the environment to determine the likelihood of a "good fit" for the student. Look for indications of:

- Distractibility
- Physical organizational and clarity
- Requirements for mental planning and problem solving
- Opportunities for modification and adaptations

Provide Transitional Supports

Develop lists of items or materials that the student needs to take to school, to a work experience and/or home. The list may be presented in pictures or words and used as an organizational checklist that is available throughout the day.

Help With Environmental Organization

Create organizational supports to assist the student in understanding:

- The assignment to be completed
- Where it is to be completed
- How much is to be completed
- Where to begin and end tasks
- The time allotted for completing the work
- What to do when the work is finished

Provide Maps

Provide maps of the school area labeled with bathrooms, lunch areas, offices, etc.

Engage in Long-Term Planning

Post and review calendars or timelines of deadlines and important tasks. Assist the student in breaking down a long-term task/assignment into planned steps over the course of several days/weeks/months. Use of online email reminders may also be helpful.

Establish Visual Routines

Make available visual routines/checklists (words or pictures) of frequent routines encountered at school. These may be used extensively on some days and not at all on other days. Routines to consider include:

- Arrival and departure routines
- Lunch activities
- Specific class routines (a student may have several activities that can be reflected in a step-by-step visual routine)
- Template/diagram for organization of desk area (e.g., photograph of desk organization)
- Templates that assist a student in completing a written task by offering a visual "roadmap" throughout the task (some templates provide an example of each step of the task like an outline)

Provide Quick Reminders

Develop "to-do" lists or use sticky note reminders.

Teach the Tools

Introduce and continue to teach environmental strategies. Adult cueing/prompting may be necessary in the early stages of using these tools in order to teach the skill . Once a student becomes familiar and competent in the use of the tools, prompts can be limited or faded completely.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Next Steps

Agency Collaboration and Funding Related to School-Age Programming

As the saying goes, "It takes a village." This is never more true or more important than at the time in a student's educational career when the focus shifts from the school years to adult life. Community agencies and partners can begin not only to provide information and community opportunities, but in some cases, financial support is available to assist in preparing the student as he enters and moves through the transition to adulthood.

Collaboration Is Vital

Agency Partners

School-age programming identified on the IEP for transition to adulthood is the responsibility of the local education agency. However, some students may be eligible for Medicaid waivers or Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation vocational services that can be used to reinforce transition goals and objectives. Other agencies that may provide services and collaborate with the school transition team to reinforce and expand transition services include mental health agencies, disability advocacy groups, private adult service providers and Social Security Administration. Transition teams should explore all local resources and providers to make connections while the student with ASD is in school. Inviting agency personnel and employers to IEP meeting may be appropriate.

National Initiatives

A variety of national organizations and agencies are focusing on the need to better prepare students for adult life and, therefore, have invested in providing information, programming, grants and other supports to improve access to information and improved adult outcomes. For example, High School High Tech and DO-IT are two national organizations that emphasize careers in science, math and technology for students with disabilities. High Tech has local programs in some areas, and DO-IT offers many online resources and opportunities for mentoring.

"Bridges to Transition" Assists Youth to Transition from School to Work

One example of agency collaboration is the "Bridges to Transition" initiative. The Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission, the Ohio Association of County Boards, and local County Boards of Developmental Disabilities work with local school districts to increase access to transition services and support for youth. This initiative decreases waiting lists for school-to-work transition services and provides youth ages 14-22 valuable experiences while in high school. Bridges to Transition focuses on supporting students to obtain employment in the community and/or post-secondary training prior to leaving school in order to bypass the traditional workshop or continual "readiness" assessment and training route. A combination of local, state and federal dollars made this collaborative and innovative program a reality.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Next Steps

Activities or Interventions to Facilitate School-Age Programming for Transition

School transition activities will be individualized, based on a student's transition plan and should be outlined on the IEP. However, other activities during the school-age years will benefit students, family and staff of transition programs.

These activities include:

Transition Fairs

Transition "fairs" or "expos" are frequently held to help provide information about transition to adulthood. Adult agencies (Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation [BVR] and Department of Developmental Disabilities [DODD]), colleges/universities, Social Security Administration, adult service providers, local employers and others come together in one location to offer information, talk with families and students and answer question. Students can be prepared ahead of time by deciding who they want to talk with and writing questions for the representatives of the various organizations present.

Work Experience

Part-time employment, summer jobs and volunteer experiences have been documented as the foundation for successful post-school employment. Agency partners from BVR and DODD can assist in locating work experience opportunities.

Career Development

Organized group activities such as clubs, hobbies and community organizations can assist students with ASD in solidifying their strengths and interests, which can be linked to future work opportunities. School transition teams can assist by being knowledgeable about community resources and by providing contact information for families.

Self-Determination/Self-Advocacy

Create and support opportunities for students to take responsibility for promoting the development of self-determination. Examples of activities include promoting choice-making, self-directed school projects, scheduling appointments (medical, hair cuts, etc.), budgeting allowances and making purchases. Other activities for students to practice self-advocacy skills may be instructing and supporting students to lead their own IEP. These are all situations where students can plan, make choices and decisions and that allow them to use skills that will be necessary for future independent living.

Promoting Self-Determination in Daily Activities

Caryn was given the responsibility to independently select her lunch with a goal of a healthy selection and maintaining a healthy weight. To assist her in making nutritious selections, she was give instruction on healthy foods and the nutritional value of the foods on the menu; however, her choices were not directed or corrected. Caryn also monitored her weight regularly. During the semester Caryn's weight began to increase. She was assisted to review her lunch choices, and she determined she would replace the high-calorie/low-food value desserts with fruits and limit her breads to one serving. This was a self-determined experience for Caryn and was also part of Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment as this activity provided the team with valuable information about Caryn's ability to make decisions that benefit her health and well-being.

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition has created a brief on Promoting Self-Determination in Youth with Disabilities: Tips for Families and Professionals.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Career Development Is a Life-Long Process

Starting at a young age, students need to explore and learn about a variety of careers, job requirements and working conditions. Students with ASD specifically need to determine how to match their unique interests and aptitudes with potential careers, job clusters and the occupational outlook for that area of employment.

Balancing Skill with Academic Instruction

Include attention to both the necessary adult life skills and meaningful academic instruction in the school programming and course of study. For example, the NSTTAC skill practice descriptions provide examples of how and where the life skills have been implemented along with an explanation of how life skills connect to a quality transition IEP and to national academic standards.

Aligning Outcomes with IEP Goals

Transition planning often requires a variety of scheduled team meetings in addition to IEP meetings. The team should include teachers, community agencies, family members and, most important, the student. The team should have access to transition assessment data, the student's interests and abilities and knowledge of community resources.

Self-Determination Skills Have to Be Developed

Students need training and opportunities to learn self-advocacy skills and how to participate meaningfully in their IEP meetings. Making choices and decisions is also part of self-determination and is an important life-long skill. Teaching self-advocacy and self-determination skills is an evidence-based transition practice.

Families Need Training and Support

Family-focused training and empowerment help families work effectively with school personnel, other agencies and professionals. Families need to be knowledgeable about the transition process, eligibility and funding for services and, most important, how to advocate for services for their child.

Community-Based Learning and Work Experiences Are Essential

Hiring practices are often influenced by prior work experience. Many individuals with ASD graduate from college and high school without internships or any work or volunteer experience and, as a result, face great difficulty obtaining or maintaining a job in their chosen field. Information in Chapter 4 of the OAR transition guide Life Journey through Autism reviews the importance of this experience. Additional information available on the Ohio Department of Education work-based learning site.

Life Skills Instruction: An Important Part of Transition Programming

Social competency is an important component of life skills instruction. Lack of social skills impacts employment, relationships and integration into the community, and many individuals with ASD struggle to understand and use the expected skills for a specific situation. Once students leave school, situations requiring social competence tend to far outnumber those requiring academic skill. Individuals with cognitive disabilities are able to master social skills with direct and structured instruction, along with opportunities to generalize these skills to new settings and with practice (CITEd, 2008).

Tools & Resources

This list of helpful resources is included to assist the user in accessing additional information.

Autism Internet Modules (AIM)

The Autism Internet Modules provide comprehensive, up-to-date, and usable information on autism for educators, families and other professionals who support individuals with ASD. These free modules are written by a variety of experts from across the U.S.

Texas Autism Resource Guide for Effective Teaching

The Texas Autism Resource Guide for Effective Teaching is a free web-based product designed to assist schools in developing practices with a strong evidence base. Evidence-based practices are clearly described with accompanying examples and additional resources.

National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders

The National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders website provides information on evidence-based practices for children and youth with ASD. The site offers an overview, implementation directions, implementation checklist and the associated evidence base for each practice.

Life Journey Through Autism: A Guide for Transition to Adulthood

This free manual contains chapters on student-centered transition planning for the individual with ASD. The appendices include a variety of helpful planning forms.

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) Products and Resources

NSTTAC has developed a number of resources to help with meeting the requirements of Indicator 13 while improving transition services for students through their local school systems.

Learn and Earn: Tips for Teens

Prepared by DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology), this website includes advice on how high school students can prepare for careers, a fact sheet and link to a free online video. This project encourages students with disabilities to enter careers in math and science and provides information and resources about using technology as an accommodation.

Learn and Earn: Supporting Teens

This fact sheet describes why teens with disabilities should be involved in work-based learning. It is also a product of DO-IT and includes a link to a free online video.

Picture Set

This is a collection of downloadable visual supports that can be used by students for both receptive and expressive communication in the classroom, at home and in the community.

NICHCY: Students Get Involved

Resources and materials for student involvement and student center planning are provided by the National Center for Students with Disabilities.

Preparing for a Career: An Online Tutorial

This is a compendium of career planning resources geared towards teens with disabilities. There are resources for resumé writing, interviewing and finding out about careers, interests and aptitudes.

Going to College

"Going to College" is an online resource designed for teens with disabilities to learn about college life and what to do to prepare for it. It is also a resource for parents and professional to help the student learn about college and prepare for success.

Rubrics for Transition III: For Autism Spectrum Students

Software and manuals to help assess students in a variety of transition skills (ex: following directions, working cooperatively with others) and provide customized rubrics to train and evaluate needed transition skills. Visit the OCALI library to access these and other assessment tools.

Summary

Youthhood

This website was built to help students plan for the future and participate in goal-planning activities.

VCU ASD Career Links

The purpose of the project is to conduct evidence-based research on vocational rehabilitation (VR) service models for individuals with ASD. This site offers information and webinars related to preparing for, obtaining and maintaining employment for individuals with an emphasis on youth and young adults with ASD.

Work-Based Learning: Ohio Department of Education

This resource is designed to assist students, educators and business representatives in designing and implementing career-related experiences for learners.

Your Employment Selection (YES)

This is a web-based collection of career videos to determine work interest. There is a small fee to view.

Zarrow Center

The Zarrow Center offers transition planning and self-determination assessment and training material geared towards the student with a disability.

JobTIPS

JobTIPS is a free program designed to help individuals with disabilities such as ASD explore, obtain and maintain employment. This practical program provides printables, assessments and videos and may be used as part of a transition program to prepare youth for employment.

Life After High School Transition Tool Kit

Developed by the Parent Information Center with funding from NH Department of Education, this Tool Kit was designed to help families of youth with disabilities to understand the concept of transition planning and to provide resources, strategies and tools to support the development of effective transition plans in the IEP. Most resources and examples are appropriate for those in any state.