

Autism Transitions Roadmap

**Planning for Education, Work, Daily Living, and Supports
For Autistic Teens, Young Adults, and Families**

A comprehensive, step-by-step guide and practical toolkit designed to navigate the shift from child systems to adult independence with confidence and self-advocacy.

Orientation & Overview

Core Philosophy: Transition is a collaborative, phased journey—not a single event. It requires shared effort between the young person, family members, educators, and adult service providers.

For autistic teens and young adults, the transition from high school and child-centered systems into adult life represents one of the most significant milestones. "Transition" encompasses a wide range of life domains: adult healthcare, higher education or vocational training, competitive employment, independent community living, and self-determined social networks.

Good transition planning starts early—ideally around age 14 to 16 within school systems—and happens gradually rather than all at once. By planning ahead, young people and their families can explore options without pressure, build essential self-advocacy skills, and establish connections with adult support networks before leaving the school environment.

Key Shifts During Transition

- **Service Providers:** Moving from school-based IEP teams and pediatric specialists to adult vocational rehabilitation, developmental disability agencies, and adult healthcare providers.
- **Legal Standing:** At age 18 (in most jurisdictions), individuals reach legal majority, meaning they hold the legal right to make their own educational, medical, and financial decisions.
- **Self-Direction:** Shifting from plans created primarily by parents and educators to self-directed goals driven by the young person's personal aspirations and preferences.



Part 1: Knowing Yourself and Your Voice

Self-understanding is the foundation of successful transition. Before a young person can advocate for accommodations in college, request support in the workplace, or explain their needs to a healthcare provider, they must first understand their own neurodivergent profile.

For Autistic Teens and Young Adults

Your autism is a natural part of who you are. Understanding how your brain works empowers you to design a life that fits your strengths and protects your well-being:

- **Strengths and Interests:** What subjects, hobbies, or tasks energize you? What specific skills do you excel at when given the right environment?
- **Sensory Profile:** What sensory inputs help you focus (e.g., fidgets, deep pressure, background hums) versus what environments cause overload (e.g., fluorescent lighting, loud cafeterias, strong smells)?
- **Support Needs:** What tasks require executive functioning support, visual schedules, or quiet processing time? Knowing what helps is a sign of self-awareness, not weakness.

For Parents and Caregivers

Supporting transition requires a gradual shift from speaking *for* your child to supporting them in speaking *for themselves*. Practice letting your young person lead family meetings, order their own food in restaurants, and communicate with teachers or doctors with your backup support.



Self-Advocacy & Self-Awareness Worksheet

Use this worksheet during family discussions or transition planning sessions to articulate your personal profile.

Worksheet: My Strengths, Needs, and Goals

1. Three things I am really good at or enjoy doing:

2. Environments where I feel most comfortable and productive:

3. Sensory tools or accommodations that help me succeed:

4. One major goal I want to achieve in the next two years:

Part 2: Planning at School (IEP/504 Transition)

Special education law mandates that transition planning must be formally integrated into a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). This planning starts well before graduation to ensure a seamless bridge into post-secondary life.

Core Elements of an IEP Transition Plan

- **Measurable Post-Secondary Goals:** Clear, outcome-oriented goals established in the areas of education/training, employment, and independent living skills.
- **Transition Services and Activities:** Coordinated activities that help the student achieve their post-secondary goals, such as job shadowing, resume building, campus tours, and assistive technology training.
- **Course of Study:** High school classes aligned directly with the student's post-high school ambitions (e.g., vocational tech courses, foreign languages, or independent living math).

Student Involvement in IEP Meetings

Students should be actively encouraged—and prepared—to attend and lead their own IEP meetings. Even starting small by presenting a short review of their strengths and goals builds invaluable self-advocacy experience.



Transition IEP Checklist

Use this checklist during IEP meetings to ensure all transition domains are thoroughly addressed.

Transition IEP Question	Status
Are transition goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments?	☐ Addressed
Does the student participate in setting meeting agendas and sharing goals?	☐ Addressed
Are outside adult agencies (e.g., Vocational Rehab) invited to meetings?	☐ Addressed
Have accommodations needed for post-secondary testing or work been identified?	☐ Addressed
Is there a clear plan for graduation track and diploma type?	☐ Addressed

Part 3: Education, Training, and Work Options

After high school, young adults face a diverse landscape of educational and vocational pathways. There is no single “right” path—many adults combine part-time work with community college courses or vocational certificate programs.

Post-Secondary Education Paths

- **Universities and Four-Year Colleges:** Focus on academic degrees. Accessible via Disability Support Services (DSS) offices which provide accommodations like extended time, note-takers, and quiet testing environments.
- **Community Colleges:** Offer flexible associate degrees, certificate programs, and seamless transfer pathways with lower student-to-teacher ratios.
- **Trade and Vocational Schools:** Hands-on technical training for high-demand careers in IT, culinary arts, automotive technology, digital media, and healthcare support.

Employment Options & Job Search Skills

Employment success often hinges on matching job tasks with an individual’s unique cognitive profile, sensory preferences, and executive functioning strengths.

- **Competitive Integrated Employment:** Working in the general workforce alongside non-disabled peers at standard wages.
- **Supported Employment & Job Coaching:** Jobs that include on-site coaching, specialized task breakdown, and employer training provided by state vocational rehabilitation agencies.



Education & Career Exploration Worksheet

Evaluate potential post-secondary pathways to determine the best fit for your interests and support needs.

Worksheet: Exploring Education & Career Paths

Option I am most curious about:

Pros / Why I like it:

Potential challenges / Support needed:

Next action step (e.g., attend open house, talk to counselor):



Part 4: Daily Life Skills and Where You Live

Transition to adulthood includes building confidence and competence in managing daily life tasks and determining the ideal housing environment that balances independence with necessary support.

Key Daily Living Skill Domains

- **Self-Care & Health:** Managing personal hygiene routines, organizing medications, scheduling appointments, and preparing balanced meals.
- **Money Management:** Understanding basic budgeting, using debit cards or banking apps responsibly, paying bills on time, and tracking expenses.
- **Transportation:** Mastering public transit routes, rideshare services, bike safety, or learning to drive where appropriate.

Housing Options

Housing arrangements should reflect the young adult's level of independence, desired social contact, and support requirements:

- **Family Home:** Remaining at home while building independent living routines and saving finances.
- **Shared Housing / Roommates:** Renting an apartment with peers or roommates, supported by visiting independent living skills coaches.
- **Supported Living & Group Communities:** Dedicated residential programs offering 24/7 or scheduled staff support for daily activities.



Daily Living Skills Checklist

Assess current proficiency across essential daily living tasks to identify areas for growth and coaching.

Checklist: Daily Living & Independence Skills

- ☐ Can prepare 3–5 simple, nutritious meals independently
- ☐ Manages personal laundry and basic clothing care
- ☐ Understands how to create and stick to a weekly budget
- ☐ Navigates at least one public transportation route independently
- ☐ Holds keys, emergency contacts, and identification securely
- ☐ Schedules own appointments and manages medication reminders
- ☐ Resolves minor household conflicts or maintenance issues



Part 5: Healthcare, Benefits, and Legal Basics

Navigating adult legal, financial, and medical systems requires careful preparation as pediatric care models transition into adult systems.

Healthcare Transition

Pediatric doctors specialize in children, while adult physicians require patients to take a more active role in their health management. Young adults should learn to:

- Describe their own medical history, allergies, and daily medications.
- Answer doctor questions directly during appointments.
- Carry a medical summary card and health insurance details.

Financial Benefits & Legal Adulthood

When an individual turns 18, legal rights automatically transfer to them. Families must explore decision-making support options early:

- **Supported Decision-Making (SDM):** An arrangement where the individual makes their own decisions with trusted advisors helping them understand information.
- **Power of Attorney (POA):** Legal document delegating financial or healthcare decision-making authority to a trusted agent.
- **Guardianship:** A formal court process where a guardian is appointed to make decisions; considered a restrictive option that should be evaluated after less restrictive alternatives.



Legal & Healthcare Planning Checklist

Disclaimer: This guide provides general informational content only and does not constitute legal or medical advice. Families should consult with qualified attorneys, medical professionals, and benefits counselors in their local jurisdiction.

Adult Transition Domain	Status
Identified adult primary care physician accepting new patients?	☐ Complete
Created personal medical summary card with emergency contacts?	☐ Complete
Explored adult disability benefits or SSI application timelines?	☐ Complete
Discussed adult legal decision-making options (SDM, POA)?	☐ Complete

Part 6: Building a Support Network

Independence does not mean doing everything alone. A thriving adult life is built on a resilient, multi-layered support network consisting of natural supports, peers, mentors, and professional services.

Types of Support

- **Natural Supports:** Friends, family members, neighbors, and colleagues who provide mutual encouragement and social connection.
- **Peer Support Groups:** Connecting with other neurodivergent adults who share experiences, coping strategies, and community.
- **Professional Mentors & Therapists:** Job coaches, occupational therapists, counselors, and vocational rehabilitation specialists.

Balancing Support and Autonomy

A crucial part of adult development is learning when to ask for help and when to decline unwanted assistance. Respecting the young person's boundaries fosters genuine self-determination and self-confidence.



Support Network Mapping Worksheet

Map out the key people, organizations, and professionals across your support ecosystem.

Category	Names / Organizations / Contact Info
Family & Friends	
Professionals & Mentors	
Community & Peers	
Emergency Contacts	

Master Transition Planners

Annual Transition Action Plan

1. Education & Training Goal:

2. Employment & Career Goal:

3. Independent Living & Housing Goal:

4. Health & Self-Care Goal:



Master Transition Timeline (Ages 14–25)

Age / Stage	Key Milestones & Action Items
Ages 14–15 Foundation	• Explore personal interests, sensory preferences, and strengths. • Begin participating actively in IEP meetings. • Build basic home living and self-care independence.
Ages 16–17 Exploration	• Conduct job shadowing and career interest inventories. • Tour post-secondary education and vocational programs. • Connect with state vocational rehabilitation agencies.
Ages 18–21 Bridge & Transition	• Review adult legal rights at age 18 and evaluate support options. • Transition to adult healthcare providers and specialists. • Secure competitive employment or higher education placement.
Ages 22–25 Adulthood	• Consolidate independent living routines and community networks. • Participate in adult peer support and advocacy groups.

Resource Directory: Services & Housing

Connecting planning to real-world resources is essential for successful transition outcomes. Use the AutismHearts verified directory to locate specialized providers in your region.

Adult Services, Housing, and Employment

- **Adult Services & Independent Living Programs:** Find day programs, executive functioning coaching, and residential support services designed specifically to foster autonomy while providing personalized safety nets.
- **Housing Support Providers:** Explore apartment living programs, roommate matching services, and supported living communities that respect individual choice and self-determination.
- **Employment & Vocational Rehab:** Connect with neurodiversity-affirming employers, vocational training centers, and expert job coaches who assist with resume building, interview prep, and workplace accommodations.
- **Adult Healthcare & Specialists:** Locate primary care physicians, mental health clinicians, and multidisciplinary specialists experienced in adult autism care and patient self-advocacy.



Platform Guide: Using AutismHearts

Transition planning can feel overwhelming, but you do not have to navigate it alone. **AutismHearts** connects autistic teens, young adults, and families with verified directory categories, expert toolkits, and community resources designed to turn planning into concrete action.

Explore Our Directory Categories

- **Adult Services & Life Skills:** Find independent living programs, day programs, and executive functioning coaching.
- **Employment & Vocational Rehab:** Discover neurodiversity-friendly employers, job coaching agencies, and vocational training programs.
- **Adult Healthcare Providers:** Locate primary care physicians, mental health clinicians, and specialists experienced in adult autism.
- **Support Groups & Community:** Connect with peer groups, family networks, and neurodiversity-affirming advocacy organizations.

Visit www.autismhearts.org to access our complete directory and digital toolkits.



About This Roadmap & Disclaimer

The **Transition to Adulthood Roadmap** is part of the AutismHearts Professional Series, authored by leading autism therapists, educators, and advocates dedicated to empowering autistic teens, young adults, and their families.

Professional Disclaimer: This guide provides general informational content and educational frameworks only. It does not constitute formal legal, medical, or vocational counseling advice. Because laws, service eligibility criteria, and benefit structures vary significantly by region and jurisdiction, families should consult with qualified local attorneys, medical professionals, and benefits counselors for individualized decisions.



AutismHearts

Empowering Independence, Self-Advocacy, and Community Connection

www.autismhearts.org

Thank you for utilizing the Transition to Adulthood Roadmap. May this guide serve as a valuable companion and practical toolkit on your journey toward a self-determined, empowered adult life.

