

# Post-Secondary Educational Opportunities

There are several post-secondary education models that young adults with autism may want to consider. Each model offers supports and classes that will provide young adults with the skills that they may need to reach their goals and dreams.

Three main types of Post-Secondary Education models include:

1. **Mixed/hybrid model:** Students participate in social activities and/or academic classes with students without disabilities (for audit or credit) and also participate in classes with other students with disabilities (sometimes referred to as "life skills" or "transition" classes). This model typically provides students with employment experience on- or off-campus.
2. **Substantially separate model:** Students participate only in classes with other students with disabilities (sometimes referred to as a "life skills" or "transition" program). Students may have the opportunity to participate in generic social activities on campus and may be offered employment experience, often through a rotation of pre-established employment slots on- or off-campus.
3. **Inclusive individual support model:** Students receive individualized services (e.g., educational coach, tutor, technology, natural supports) in college courses, certificate programs, and/or degree programs, for audit or credit. The individual student's vision and career goals drive services. There is no program base on campus. The focus is on establishing a student-identified career goal that directs the course of study and employment experiences (e.g., internships, apprenticeships, work-based learning). Built on a collaborative approach via an interagency team (adult service agencies, generic community services, and the college's disability support office), agencies identify a flexible range of services and share costs.



As described by the Institute for Community Inclusion:  
[www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article\\_id=178](http://www.communityinclusion.org/article.php?article_id=178)

Different post secondary educational institutions may offer one or more of the models listed above that may meet the needs of a young adult with autism. Post secondary educational institutions include:

## Four Year College or University

There are more and more colleges that do provide support services for students with disabilities. However, students and their families are encouraged to research to make sure that the supports offered meet the needs of the student. College students with autism may need assistance learning the advocacy skills required to ask for supports and accommodations. A counselor or peer-counselor may be able to assist with this, or someone from the school's office of disability services.



In rigorous academic classes, a student may want to request the assistance of a tutor. Tutors are often available through the university and can be located through various avenues. A good place to start is the office of disabilities.

## *Cooperative Education*

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■ An option offered at some colleges and universities is cooperative education. In a cooperative education program, the student alternates between taking academic classes and working in the field of their choice. If available, this type of education can oftentimes be a good choice for students with autism, as it allows them to develop both academic and work skills at the same time.

## *Community College*

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■ Several community colleges are developing programs to meet the needs of young adults with developmental disabilities. For some students this may include life skills such as money management, problem solving, and housekeeping. For others it may be more academic subjects and for others, it is a combination of both. The good news is that community colleges recognize the needs of individuals with developmental disabilities and are tailoring programs to meet these needs. The Consortium of Community Colleges for Autism and Intellectual Disabilities has approximately 40 community colleges in its membership and they are developing best practices in supporting individuals with developmental disabilities.

For a list of some community colleges with programs geared toward individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities, visit the Autism Speaks Resource Guide:

[AutismSpeaks.org/community/fsdb/search.php](http://AutismSpeaks.org/community/fsdb/search.php)



## *Vocational or Technical Schools*

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■ Vocational or technical schools can provide individuals with disabilities with the opportunity to experience hands-on learning in a variety of fields. There are some career and technical education programs that provide this hands-on training along with academic skills such as reading, writing, math and problem solving skills. These programs also provide workplace experience such as internships and mentorships. It has been reported that participating in vocational or technical classes during the last two years of high school, especially classes that offer occupational-specific instruction, is a successful transition strategy. It may be helpful to work with your school district to find out about programs in your area.

Even for those who may not want to attend college fulltime, or who do not possess the standard high school diploma, young adults with autism have the ability to audit classes.



## 504 Plans

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Most colleges and universities have a department that ensures the school's compliance with both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. It is important to become familiar with the school's disability-related resources so that your young adult can be sure to advocate for the services and supports they are entitled to.

*“The Section 504 regulations require a school district to provide a ‘free appropriate public education’ (FAPE) to each qualified student with a disability who is in the school district’s jurisdiction, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. Under Section 504, FAPE consists of the provision of regular or special education and related aids and services designed to meet the student’s individual educational needs as adequately as the needs of non-disabled students are met.”*

*- Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities:  
Requirements Under Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973  
[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html)*

Section 504 and ADA are civil rights laws. They are designed to help protect individuals with disabilities from discrimination in school, work and public accommodations. Section 504 applies to any school that gets federal funding. Students with disabilities cannot be denied appropriate services or supports that may be necessary to meet their needs, or that would be available to students without disabilities. In order to be eligible for Section 504 protections, a student has to have a physical or mental impairment that limits at least one major life activity, as well as a history of this impairment in a major life area. Reasonable accommodations can include: taped books, readers or scribes, note-takers, access to the instructors notes, extended time for assignments and tests, the use of a calculator, preferential seating and other similar supports.

You may want to keep in mind that Section 504 does **NOT** require an institution to compose a written plan, but most places will do this. In order for a student with autism to receive accommodations under Section 504, the student or his or her advocate must request them. Even if young adults with autism had services in high school, this does not ensure that they will have them if they go on to a post-secondary educational setting. Some post-secondary educational institutions will provide supports usually through an office set up to aid students with disabilities. However, the level of supports as well as the efficiency and effectiveness vary from school to school. It is important that you and your young adult research the supports available and determine if they will be appropriate for success in this educational setting. It is essential to remember that once your child has left high school and is enrolled in an institution of higher education, IDEA requirements no longer apply. Section 504 and ADA will protect the student, but it is the young adult’s responsibility to make sure appropriate accommodations are requested in college.



This is the best opportunity to self-advocate. Young adults with autism would be best served by speaking up for themselves and articulating their needs. College counselors are more readily willing to listen when the student, not their parents, approaches them. Some individuals with autism will go on to college after high school. The number of 2-year and 4-year college opportunities for young adults with autism has been growing in recent years. There may be no greater opportunity for self-advocacy than during this process. You may want to remind your young adult that his or her “voice” will make a difference. It is very important to share anxieties or areas where he or she needs help. You also may want to help your young adult with autism make a list of his or her most significant concerns about college. Young adults should be encouraged to share these concerns with their advisors. Creating a solid support system may lower the chances of future problems.

## *Differences between High School and College*

*Adapted from Kay McVey, Faculty Development Specialist, PROJECT CONNECT, Henderson State University ([www.uml.edu/student-services/disability/transition2.html](http://www.uml.edu/student-services/disability/transition2.html))*

<i>High School</i>	<i>College</i>
All students have the right to an education	College education is a privilege, not a right
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act Americans with Disabilities Act	Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act Americans with Disabilities Act
School district is responsible for identifying the disability	Student is responsible for providing documentation that establishes verification of the learning or other type of disability
School district designs the IEP	Student identifies his/her needs in collaboration with his or her counselor.
School district ensures that the IEP is implemented	Student is responsible for their own progress.
Teacher functions as advocate	Students must advocate for themselves.
Fundamental alterations to program of study are made	Fundamental alterations of programs are not allowed. Classroom accommodations may not alter the fundamental nature of a course of impost an undue burden on an instructor/institution.
Personal services are provided (ex: aide) Success is more of a right	Personal services are student's responsibility. Only the opportunity to succeed is provided.
Transportation to and from school is provided.	Transportation to and from school is NOT provided.
Parent or guardian is the primary advocate. Students learn ways to become their own advocate	Students are expected to be their own advocates.



# *Preparing for College While Still in High School*

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 If your young adult is planning to go to college, it is essential to remember that in order for a student to apply to college, he or she will need to obtain a high school diploma or a General Education Diploma (GED). An IEP diploma will not be recognized by institutions of higher education.

Make sure that all standardized tests have been taken, both ACT and SAT, and SAT subject tests. Some colleges will require these for admissions. If you think your child may need extra support taking standardized tests, oftentimes accommodations can be arranged. In order to ensure that the right accommodations are in place, you and your young adult should work with the school to fill out the necessary disability paperwork to make these requests. Be mindful that this needs to be done several months in advance of your child sitting for the examination.

Find out if colleges that your child may be interested in require IQ or achievement test scores to receive accommodations under Section 504 (see below). The high school may be able to arrange for this while the student is still under IDEA.

Assess if the individual needs any remedial classes before going on to college. Some students do this at college, while others spend an extra year in high school. Summer courses may be an option for your student with a college in your area. These classes can help to prepare the student for the upcoming transition.

Work closely with your guidance counselor to begin to explore all available options. One option is *Dual Enrollment*. A dually enrolled student is a student who is still officially a student at high school, but is also taking one or more classes at a college for credit. Transition teachers from the school will work with your young adult outside of school. His or her weekly schedule might include taking classes, looking for a job or working, learning to use public transportation, and working out at a health club. Dual Enrollment allows the student to begin to get used to the college setting, life and workload, while still in high school.



# Choosing the Right School

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It is essential to ask the right questions as you explore post-secondary education options. *The Autism Transition Guide: Planning the Journey from School to Adult Life* by Carolyn Bruey and Mary Beth Urban gives the following advice:

- Talk to the guidance counselor at your school.
- Attend local college fairs and ask about disability support services.
- Ask your child's teacher about where some of their past students have attended college.
- Ask other parents of students with ASD.
- Consult local autism organizations to see about listings of colleges that offer supports.
- Make sure to arrange visits to any potential schools where you can speak with staff and students. The school may also be able to help connect you to other students with ASD and their families.
- Investigate if the school has the proper supports and services available for your child to have the most successful and rewarding experience possible.
- Keep in mind that there are many different types of institutions that your child could possibly attend. These include: vocational school, community college, technical institutes, state schools, liberal arts schools and also the variation of 2-year versus 4-year programs.
- Factors that come in to play when selecting a college can also include location and finances.
- Students and their parents should not hesitate to visit the selected college and the one they will eventually attend as many times as they need to in order to familiarize the student with the college.

Below is a checklist of topics that families may want to take into consideration when discussing transition from high school to college. The checklist is adapted with permission from Jerri Roach Ostergard, Transition Specialist, Worcester MA Public Schools as found on the *Think College* website. You can also see the checklist at: <http://thinkcollege.net/for-families/transition-checklist>.

- Help your student know what choices they have. Visit programs, talk to other students, families, watch videos, etc.
- Set post-secondary education and career goals through the use of person-centered planning.
- Ensure that your son/daughter is enrolled in academic courses throughout high school, which will prepare him/her for college courses. While not a requirement, experience tells us that students with more inclusive academic experiences in high school do better once in college.
- Know the difference between the laws that govern education at the secondary level (IDEA = entitlement) and at the college level (ADA = otherwise qualified). Encourage your son/daughter to participate in and, if possible, lead their own IEP. Participation means planning the meeting, working with a teacher to identify their own goals and supports, presenting their goals at the meeting, welcoming the team, learning about the forms.
- Help your son/daughter learn to advocate for him/herself while in high school, which will prepare him/her for when it needs to be done in college.



- Obtain college catalogue(s) and review them carefully with your son/daughter and with support from high school staff (e.g. guidance counselor, transition coordinator) as needed. Visit campus activities while in middle or high school, sports, recreational, entertainment activities. Have a currently enrolled student get involved in the campus visit or activity.
- Ensure that documentation of your son/daughter's disability is up-to-date. This may be required by the college.
- Discuss with your son/daughter the nature of their disability and how it affects their school work. Practice how they refer to their disability and identify what supports they need.
- Encourage teachers to document what accommodations and technology your son/daughter uses now and what they may need in college (e.g. reader, note taker, scribe, books-on-tape, speech-to-text software, screen reader, tape recorder, PDA, etc.) Create a list of these accommodations and supports.
- Visit colleges together so that your son/daughter has good information to make a final choice.
- Your son/daughter should meet with college Disability Services Office (DSO) staff to talk about documentation and learn about how accommodations in college are different from high school.
- If there is a specific program on the campus for students with intellectual disabilities, arrange to meet with the staff. Find out how participants in the program participate in general college life and academics.
- Discuss goals, learning needs, and how to access specific accommodations, including academic supports, that are available for all students (e.g. tutoring, writing support) with your son/daughter and DSO staff before classes begin. Figure out and setup transportation prior to the start of school (e.g. driving, car-pooling, learning to use public transportation, travel vouchers).
- Be aware of financial aid resources available to your family and make sure that funding for all costs is arranged before school starts (e.g. tuition, books, fees, transportation).  
Identify how financial support your child may receive impacts other benefits (e.g. SSI, SSDI).
- Know what services are available through adult human service agencies (e.g. vocational rehabilitation – tuition, books, transportation, employment supports; One-Stop Career Centers, Individual Training Accounts, Developmental Disability agencies). Representatives from these groups should be at the transition IEP, PCP, etc. Your son/daughter should have the phone numbers for relevant agencies in their cell phone.
- Be prepared for the fact that you, the family member, need written consent from the student to obtain access to their records at the college level.



# *Key Skills, Common Issues and Concerns*

## *Self-Advocacy and Post-Secondary Educational Opportunities*

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Once your young adult with autism had been accepted into an educational institution, he or she needs to start relying on his or her own self-advocacy skills. Most institutions do not have a way for parents to advocate for their young adult. This leaves the responsibility in the hands of the students.

Leaving high school and participating in new educational opportunities may be challenging, partially because the mandatory supports that were in place are no longer there. In addition, as a parent you may have advocated for your young adult throughout his or her school years, and will no longer be able to do so. Young adults with autism in college become solely responsible for themselves. It is now up to them to ask for what they need in all situations, both academic and social. It may be a good idea to review the types of services that were helpful in high school to prepare your young adult for what will be helpful in college. This transition is most likely a major change for both you and your young adult, so it's important to develop self-advocacy skills while still in high school.

Aside from the necessary services, there will be other areas in which young adults with autism need to communicate and advocate for themselves. These areas can include: knowing how and when to disclose their autism diagnosis, understanding their rights, and asking for assistance when necessary.

While in college, the ability to ask for what you need, find out about new situations, and navigate the complex social world can often be difficult. Working on these skills and ideas in advance can help students use them when necessary. Some things that students have found helpful are:

- Creating a disclosure letter with disabled student services.
- Learning when, how, and how often to ask for accommodations.
- Seeing professors during office hours.
- Talking about what is not working, giving/receiving feedback.
- Resolving problems.

Stephen Shore outlines the four main components to think about before entering college and work on while you are there:

- Coursework
- Living
- Organization
- Social



## *Independent Living Skills*

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■ Many students may worry about living skills such as organization and time management upon entering college. It is important for you to work with your young adult to begin to develop these skills in the transition plan while still in high school. These skills can include: managing time, setting priorities and organizing assignments and free time.

It is very important for your young adult with autism to maintain structure in his or her life in college. Structure is still there in college, but it needs to be more self-imposed. There is quite a bit more free time in college. Very often, the amount of time spent on homework and studying exceeds the amount of time spent in the classroom. Young adults with autism need to be able to create new routines to adjust to the many changes in daily life that happen between high school and college. Self-advocacy is essential.

Young adults with autism living on their own may need to cultivate skills relating to independent living skills such as cleaning, managing finances, solving problems and doing laundry. It is essential to note that these types of independent living skills should be worked on prior to leaving high school.



*This is a blog entry written by Autism Speaks staffer Kerry Magro. Kerry, an adult who has autism, is a rising senior at Seton Hall University, majoring in Sports Management. He started an Autism Speaks U Chapter: Student Disability Awareness on campus to help spread awareness and raise funds for those affected by autism. Autism Speaks U is a program designed for college students who host awareness, advocacy and fundraising events, while supporting their local autism communities.*

One issue, in my opinion, that isn't addressed enough on college campuses, is accommodations within the residence halls for those with disabilities. Yes, from time to time you will see a residence hall with an elevator, maybe bed shakers for those who are hearing impaired, but does that make a residence hall "disability friendly?" I don't think so. A disability friendly residence hall should be accommodating to all disabilities, especially autism.

For people just starting college, living away in a dorm can be a difficult transition. For an individual with autism who is affected drastically by change it can make that transition almost impossible. The argument to this, is that those affected by autism who actually attend college are just a small enough quota where it doesn't really matter. The thing is, most accommodations for those with autism in the dorms just rely on having a good and understanding friend. It's easy in college to fall into a pattern of anti-social tendencies when work builds up on you.

I have seen this from every angle imaginable. My freshman year in the dorms, I was a resident. During my sophomore and half of my junior year, I was a Resident Assistant (RA) who helped residents while living in the dorms. Living in the residence halls wasn't much of a difficulty for me, but that was because I had great friends early on who supported me in everything that I did. Being able to socially get my way through that first year, where I was seen as enough of a leader to be one of the only autistic RA's not only in New Jersey, but in the country.

So what can autistic individuals living in the dorms do to make themselves ready for the transition? Firstly, strongly consider requesting a single room. Most colleges are very willing to give someone with a registered disability a single. I have lived alone and have loved the benefits. Mainly, the best benefit is that you have your own place to unwind. You don't have to worry about whether you get along with other individuals. The pros outweigh the cons in most cases.

Secondly, make sure you get yourself out there. Most residence halls have programs within the first couple of weeks of school to get people meeting your fellow peers. Most residence halls will also have a peer support group for those with disabilities where you can interact with others who have similar difficulties within the dorms. We also live in a technology related world, so if you don't feel comfortable with face to face conversations, virtual communication (Facebook, instant messaging, texting) is a great way to practice your social capabilities. Just make sure it doesn't become a habit, if you are never leaving your room!

Take some time to meet with the director of your dorm. If you are open with them about having a disability, they can't turn you away, and have to give you proper accommodations. You need to force yourself out of your comfort zone because that's where the most progress can be made.

Now, this is a process. There is no game plan to every disability. You have to create your own plan of attack. Independence is not learned overnight either, so take the steps needed to make your own personal plan and then follow through.



# Post-Secondary Education Resources

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*Think College! College Options for People with Intellectual Disabilities*  
[www.thinkcollege.net](http://www.thinkcollege.net)

*College Coach: Excellence in Educational Advising*  
[www.getintocollege.com](http://www.getintocollege.com)

*WNY Collegiate Consortium of Disability Advocates*  
[www.ccdanet.org](http://www.ccdanet.org)

*U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights: Protecting Students with Disabilities*  
<http://ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html#interrelationship>

*The Autism Transition Guide: Planning the Journey from School to Adult Life*  
by Carolyn Thorwarth Bruey, Psy.D. and Mary Beth Urban, M.Ed.

*Living with Autism: Life After High School*  
Autism Society  
[www.education.com/reference/article/Ref\\_Living\\_Autism\\_Life](http://www.education.com/reference/article/Ref_Living_Autism_Life)

*The Health Resource Center at the National Youth Transition Center*  
Online Clearinghouse on Post-Secondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities  
[www.heath.gwu.edu](http://www.heath.gwu.edu)

*Free Appropriate Public Education for Students with Disabilities: Requirements Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*  
[www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html](http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html)

*The Syracuse Community-Referenced Curriculum Guide for Students with Moderate and Severe Disabilities*  
by Alison Ford

*Understanding Asperger Syndrome: A Professor's Guide*  
[www.researchautism.org/resources/AspergerDVDSeries.asp](http://www.researchautism.org/resources/AspergerDVDSeries.asp)

*More General Transition Resources*

*Transition to Adulthood: Guidelines for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD)*  
by the Ohio Autism Task Force with the support of the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (OCALI) Transition to Community Task Force  
[www.umcard.org/files/Trans\\_Guide\\_5.pdf](http://www.umcard.org/files/Trans_Guide_5.pdf)



*Guiding Your Teenager with Special Needs Through the Transition from School to Adult Life: Tools for Parents*

by Mary Korpi

*Life's Journey Through Autism, a Guide for Transition to Adulthood*

Organization for Autism Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center and Danya International, Inc.

[www.researchautism.org/resources/reading/documents/transitionguide.pdf](http://www.researchautism.org/resources/reading/documents/transitionguide.pdf)

*Growing Up on the Spectrum: A Guide to Life, Love and Learning for Teens and Young Adults with Autism and Asperger's*

by Lynn Kern Koegel, Ph.D. and Claire LaZebnik

*Autism Into Adulthood — Making the Transition*

by Jennifer Van Pelt, M.A.

*Social Work Today*

[www.socialworktoday.com/archive/090208p12.shtml](http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/090208p12.shtml)



