



: Special Needs Children

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First Five Things to Do to Prepare for Your Child's Transition to Adulthood

Two specialists in family support tell you how to get started

By Terri Mauro, About.com Guide

Whether your child graduates high school on schedule after four years or stays until age 21, you won't want to wait until the transition out of the school system is imminent before making plans for the next stage. If your child is within a year or two of that milestone -- or you just want to get thinking early -- family support specialists Barbara D'Amico and Naimah Johnson of the Block Institute in Brooklyn, New York, suggest five quick ways to start preparing:

1. Organize That Paperwork. "As an important aid for transition planning, keep copies of triennial evaluations along with medical and clinical reports that substantiate and document your child's diagnosis," D'Amico advises. "Start a life book for your child with all school, medical, and entitlement records." **To get started:** Assemble a Care Notebook, or find another way to organize all those forms for easy access.

2. Investigate Benefits and Entitlements. "Before your child turns 18 years of age, explore guardianship, health-care proxy, and special needs trust -- research and decide which of these legal options make sense for your family member," says Johnson. "Before age 21, explore entitlements such as Social Security, food stamps, and Medicaid." **To get started:** Visit the benefits and health sections of the Disability.gov site for an overview of what's available and what's required.



Barbara D'Amico and
Naimah Johnson of the
Block Institute in Brooklyn,
New York

*Photo courtesy of The Block
Institute*

2. Seek Out Your Child's Transition Coordinator. According to D'Amico, "Children receiving transition services often have a specific coordinator assigned who assists your child in accessing adult services. Work closely with your child's transition coordinator, assigned through the Department of Education, to discuss options for adult services. This coordinator can link you to case management services and assist you in contacting programs for tours and more information." **To get started:** If you've never met the transition coordinator or heard of such a person, your child's school case manager or the special education department should be able to point you in the right direction.

4. Explore Program Options. "Start exploring educational, training, and employment options," Johnson suggests. "If your child is capable of attending college, check your local city and private colleges to see what services they offer for special needs students. For vocational and employment supports, contact the agency in your area that provides job assistance for adults with disabilities." **To get started:** The Disability.gov site has information on [work programs for youth](#), or search for resources in your state using the drop-down menu in the site's lower-left column.

5. Do Some Legwork: "Go on tours of programs; seek information about programs through Internet searches and by attending parent-information and advocacy workshops and events," says D'Amico. "School transition coordinators hold outreach events. Also, several programs offering services through the state and nonprofit voluntary agencies serving people with disabilities will allow you to tour their program or will meet with you to share information about their services upon request." **To get started:** Place a phone call, send an e-mail, make an appointment. Get going, one step at a time.

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