

Transition to Adulthood

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Life is full of transitions, and one of the more remarkable ones occurs when we get ready to leave high school and go out in the world as young adults. When the student has a disability, it's especially helpful to plan ahead for that transition. In fact, IDEA requires it.

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A Quick Summary of Transition

Transition services are intended to prepare students to move from the world of school to the world of adulthood.

Transition planning begins during high school at the latest.

IDEA requires that transition planning start by the time the student reaches age 16.

Transition planning may start earlier (when the student is younger than 16) if the IEP team decides it would be appropriate to do so.

Transition planning takes place as part of developing the student's [Individualized Education Program](#) (IEP).

The [IEP team](#) (which includes the student and the parents) develops the transition plan.

The student must be invited to any IEP meeting where postsecondary goals and transition services needed to reach those goals will be considered.

In [transition planning](#), the IEP team considers areas such as postsecondary education or vocational training, employment, independent living, and community participation.

Transition services must be a coordinated set of activities oriented toward producing results.

Transition services are based on the student's needs and must take into account his or her preferences and interests.

Not enough detail? We can fix that! Keep reading...

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IDEA's Definition of Transition Services

Any discussion of transition services must begin with its definition in law. IDEA's definition of transition services appears at §300.43. It's rather long but see it in its entirety first, and then we'll discuss it in parts.

§300.43 Transition services.

(a) **Transition services** means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—

(1) Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(2) Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and includes—

(i) Instruction;

(ii) Related services;

(iii) Community experiences;

(iv) The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and

(v) If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.

(b) Transition services for children with disabilities may be special education, if provided as specially designed instruction, or a related service, if required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education.

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Considering the Definition

A number of key words in the definition above capture important concepts about transition services:

- Activities need to be **coordinated** with each other.
- The process focuses on **results**.
- Activities must address the child's **academic and functional achievement**.
- Activities are intended to smooth the young person's movement into the post-school world.

You can also see that the definition mentions the domains of independent and adult living. The community... employment... adult services... daily living skills... vocational... postsecondary education. This clearly acknowledges that adulthood involves a wide range of skills areas and activities. It also makes clear that preparing a child with a disability to perform functionally across this spectrum of areas and activities may involve considerable planning, attention, and focused, coordinated services.

Note that word—***coordinated***. We italicised it above because it's very important. Transition activities should not be haphazard or scattershot. Services are to be planned as in sync with one another in order to drive toward a result.

What result might that be? From a federal perspective, the result being sought can be found in the very first finding of Congress in IDEA, which refers to “our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities.” [20 U.S.C. 1400(c)(1)] Preparing children with disabilities to “lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible” is one of IDEA’s stated objectives. [20 U.S.C. 1400(c)(5)(A)(ii)]

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Students at the Heart of Planning Their Transition

For the students themselves, transition activities are ***personally defined***. This means that the postsecondary goals that are developed for a student must take into account his or her interests, preferences, needs, and strengths. To make sure of this, the school:

- must invite the youth with a disability to attend IEP team meeting “if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals for the child and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals under §300.320(b),” and
- “must take other steps to ensure that the child’s preferences and interests are considered” if the child is not able to attend [§300.321(b)].

As you keep reading below, keep the importance of student involvement in mind, because there are many excellent materials and guides available to help students become involved in their own transition planning... and many good reasons to do so. To connect with that info:

- Visit our separate webpage called [Students Get Involved!](#)

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When Must Transition Services Be Included in the IEP?

What’s not apparent in IDEA’s definition of transition services but nonetheless critical to mention is the timing of transition-related planning and services: When must transition planning begin?

The answer lies in a different provision related to the content of the IEP. From §300.320(b):

*(b) **Transition services.** Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually, thereafter, the IEP must include—*

(1) Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent

living skills; and

(2) The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.

So, the IEP must include transition goals by the time the student is 16. That age frame, though, is not cast in concrete. Note that, in keeping with the individualized nature of the IEP, the IEP team has the authority to begin transition-related considerations earlier in a student's life, if team members (which include the parent and the student with a disability) think it is appropriate, given the student's needs and preferences.

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A Closer Look at What to Include in the IEP

Breaking the provisions at §300.320(b) into their component parts is a useful way to see what needs to be included, transition-wise, in the student's IEP. This is also where the rubber meets the road, so to speak, because what's included in the IEP must:

- state the student's postsecondary goals (what he or she hopes to achieve after leaving high school);
- be broken down into IEP goals that represent the steps along the way that the student needs to take while still in high school to get ready for achieving the postsecondary goals *after* high school; and
- detail the transition services that the student will receive to support his or her achieving the IEP goals.

Writing goal statements can be a challenging business, because it's not always obvious what needs to be included in a goal statement. Goal-writing is a topic worthy of an entire discussion on its own. To shed light on how to write transition-related goals statements—both postsecondary goals and the corresponding IEP goals—we prepared just such a page.

To connect with info and examples on writing transition goal statements:

- Visit [Transition Goals in the IEP](#). You'll find the examples there illuminating, we hope. They're drawn from the work of NSTTAC, the [National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center](#).

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The Domains of Adulthood to Consider

The definition of transition services mentions specific domains of adulthood to be addressed during transition planning. To recap, these are:

- postsecondary education,
- vocational education,
- integrated employment (including supported employment),
- continuing and adult education,
- adult services,
- independent living, or

- community participation.

These are the areas to be explored by the IEP team to determine what types of transition-related support and services a student with a disability needs. It's easy to see how planning ahead in each of these areas, and developing goal statements and corresponding services for the student, can greatly assist that student in preparing for life after high school.

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Need more info about any one or all of these domains?

Try our separate pages on:

- [Adult Services: What Are They, and Where Are They?](#)
- [Education/Training Connections](#)
(for info on postsecondary education, vocational education, and continuing and adult education)
- [Employment Connections](#)
- [Independent Living Connections](#)
(for info on independent living and community participation)

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Types of Activities to Consider

Remember that IDEA's definition of transition services states that these are a "coordinated set of activities" designed within a results-oriented process? Specific activities are also mentioned, which gives the IEP team insight into the range of activities to be considered in each of the domains above:

- Instruction;
- Related services;
- Community experiences;
- The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and
- If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.
[§300.43(a)(2)]

Confused by all these lists? Putting them together, what we have is this: The IEP team must discuss and decide whether the student needs transition services and activities (e.g., instruction, related services, community experiences, etc.) to prepare for the different domains of adulthood (postsecondary education, vocational education, employment, adult services, independent living, etc.) That's a lot of ground to cover!

But it's essential ground, if the student's transition to the adult world is to be facilitated. A spectrum of adult activities is evident here, from community to employment, from being able to take care of oneself (e.g., daily living skills) to considering other adult objectives and undertakings.

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Resources of More Information

Transition is a huge topic. Its treatment here is necessarily brief, given all that can be said on the subject. Perhaps it would be most useful now to connect you with the "transition experts"—the organizations and

centers that focus with great purpose on transition planning for students with disabilities. You'll find those experts identified throughout the transition pages listed below.

Where would you like to go next—employment connections, education/training connections, independent living? Pick your path below!

[Transition “Starters” for Everyone](#)

Start with these beginning links to transition resources, divided into resources for general audiences, for parents, for professionals, and for students.

[Transition Goals in the IEP](#)

What kind of information might you include in a student's IEP as part of transition planning? Here's a closer look at writing transition-related IEP goals.

[Students Get Involved!](#)

Very important! Come here if you're looking for resources about involving students in transition planning, person-centered planning tools, or materials and connections made just for students themselves.

[Adult Services: What Are They? Where Are They?](#)

Representatives of outside agencies may be invited to the IEP transition-planning table. Read about four of the primary agencies in adult services: Vocational Rehabilitation, the Social Security Administration, state-level agencies, and independent living centers. And, of course, there's an “other” category—other players and groups you may want to involve, too.

[Potential Consultants to the Transition Team](#)

In addition to the main players at the transition planning table, have you thought about inviting any of these potential consultants to join the discussion?

[Education/Training Connections](#)

Learn more about postsecondary education options such as college, trade schools, adult or continuing education, and vocational education. Connect with resources and helpful organizations.

[Employment Connections](#)

What about work? What about preparing for a career? What career? Who can help? Find out here.

[Independent Living Connections](#)

Independent living involves so very much—making choices about how and where we live in the community. It involves everything from setting an alarm clock to getting out of bed, to self-care, to getting to work and back home again, to what to eat for dinner. Lots to think about and get ready for!

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