

Transitioning Into Adulthood

As your child enters his or her teenage years, you will begin to think about how you will approach the future. Some individuals with Asperger Syndrome/HFA move on to college, some go right into the workforce, and others have alternative plans. Regardless of the path chosen, making a plan to move forward after high school is the first step on the journey to adulthood.

Putting in place a transition plan for your child will allow you and your family to work with the school to plan for life beyond graduation. Investigating possibilities for the future will familiarize you and your child with different based on his or her unique skills and interests. You will work together with your child's educational team to identify long- and short-term goals. These goals will enable your child and your family to compartmentalize the steps to ensure future success. Playing on the strengths of your child will help you plan for the future successfully.

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was revised and now defines "transition services" as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- *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 post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation,*
- *is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and*
- *includes 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 functional vocational evaluation.*

A successful transition will lead your child with AS/HFA on the path to a fulfilling life that enables him or her to learn and grow. This type of planning should take place around 16 years of age. The transition plan will begin with individuals assessing their own skills and interests with their families. This will allow them the time and space to reflect on the best way to hone their skills on things that interest and excite them. With your family and educational team, your child may look into options such as college, employment, vocational training, life skills training, and residential opportunities.




As you move forward in you planning, it is essential to remember that young adults are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The ADA notes that a child with ASD/AS cannot be discriminated against in school and beyond. The law also provides protections for young adults while in college, noting that supportive services should be available and that all programs should be accessible, including extracurricular activities. The ADA also prohibits qualified individuals from being discriminated against in the workforce.

Some individuals with AS/HFA may decide to move on to college as part of their transition plan. Making this decision will require research to find out which institutions of higher learning offer the best supports for individuals with AS/HFA. Since each individual's needs are unique, it will be important for these young adults to see what their strengths are and what type of environment they will thrive in. Some students choose to go to a traditional college setting, while others may look to go into a non-degree program, or an associate's degree program. It is important that individuals with AS/HFA choose colleges that will help them meet their future goals, but that will also be able to support their specific needs. There is a place for each individual, and before making any decisions, it is essential to find the best match for your child based on his or her strengths, desires, and challenges.

For young adults who go directly into the employment world, it will also be critical for them to focus on their strengths and what brings them the greatest joy. They will want to explore different areas of the job market. Different work environments may help different individuals to excel. There are many opportunities for supported employment, where the employer offers supports to a worker with different challenges. Other individuals will require less support and may do better independently. Each individual has unique skills that will lend themselves to certain jobs, so it is important for your child with AS/HFA to be open to all options throughout the transition to adulthood.

“You should know what you want to do, what you can do, what your interests are, what your capacity for multitasking is. There can be challenges sometimes associated with the diagnosis of AS. But there are potential gifts, and the ability to bury yourself in deep interests and passions is the greatest one we know of. Cultivate this; it is a gift to yourself, and to others.”

-Adapted from Asperger's from the Inside Out, by Michael John Carley

 *The experience of having your child diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome/HFA can be overwhelming and difficult. Staying positive and focusing on the things that make your child with AS/HFA special will help you immensely on this journey with your family. Individuals with AS/HFA can make huge strides with the right treatments and just like other children, can go on to accomplish great things. We hope this kit has helped ease your fears and answer your questions. We have many other valuable resources for your child and your family on our website, www.autismspeaks.org. If you have any additional questions or would like to talk to someone, please contact our Autism Response Team at 888-AUTISM2, or contactus@autismspeaks.org.*

