



THINKING ABOUT COLLEGE OR HIGHER EDUCATION

Student Resource

**Considerations, Skills, and Supports
for Students with Intellectual and
Developmental Disabilities (IDD)
and Autism Spectrum Disorder
(ASD)**

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Some students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who leave high school plan to attend college or higher education. This document contains information about skills needed for college, considerations for talking with colleges, additional supports that may be needed and available, and resources which may be helpful in transition and college or higher education readiness. Some resources discuss supports for autistic students. Note these resources may be helpful to students who are or are not autistic and can be applied to any student for learning.

Contents

High School and College and Higher Education Differences

An overview of the differences in high school and college services related to supporting individuals with disabilities. Once people with disabilities graduate from high school, where they are entitled to support through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to higher education, which provides accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), services must be sought out by the student and eligibility will be determined based on the educational institution's requirements.

Student Self-Assessment in the areas of Self-Advocacy, Social Communication, and Executive Function

The skills covered are important for success in college. The student does not need to be proficient at all of the skills listed, but understanding whether they currently have the skills can reflect on areas for teaching and learning and being more prepared to enter college. This provides a brief self-assessment of important skills which are important for success in college including self-advocacy, social communication, and executive function skills. Extensive research and data support the need for these skills for increased success in college and higher education.

What to Think About When Planning for College or Higher Education

Considerations when talking to colleges related to their levels of support, expectations, etc. Sometimes additional supports are needed at college and higher education settings. Working with the disability services department at the college can be helpful for certain accommodations. Included are considerations for potential students to think about prior to selecting a college or higher education option.

Autism Specific Support Considerations

Many autistic students have great strengths in their ability to learn and excel academically. In college, there are many academic and other skills called upon daily to navigate the college or higher education experience. These include executive function skills such as organization and planning, flexible thinking; social communication skills such as working with peers in classes, interacting with professors, being proactive and requesting supports, and more; and self-advocacy skills related to making requests for supports you need, living independently and caring for yourself, staying safe and transporting on campus. Many of these considerations are outlined in this section.

Other Resources

Several resources are provided from credible organizations supporting people with autism and other intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDDs). There are also transition guides, training resources, and other information available on higher education and transition planning.



Considerations for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Planning for College or Higher Education

When students with ASD are considering college as an option after high school, there are a number of actions they can take ahead of time to work on skills to help them be more successful in their college program.

It is also important to understand the difference between high school and college before going to college. Here are some considerations.

IEP (K-12): Entitlement

- Must have one of 13 special education eligibilities
- Disability impacts ability to access general education curriculum (adverse impact)
- Schools identify and evaluate
- Set annual goals
- IEP Team facilitates progress
- *Specialized instruction* to access
- Accommodations given to support accessing general education curriculum
- Governed by US Department of Education

504 Plan (K-College): Eligibility

- Students self-identify and are responsible for evaluations
- Difference is getting in the way of their learning in gen education classroom- accommodations (changes to environment) in general education classroom (extra time for testing or to complete homework)
- Student must initiate support and self-advocate
- No specialized instruction
- Accommodations must be requested by the student
- Student must register with Disability Supports
- Governed by US Department of Civil Rights



Considerations for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

Planning for College or Higher Education

Skills Review (Student Completes)

Respond to the following skills areas and descriptions as honestly as you can. These are skills most students use at college and higher education experiences after high school. The skills you rate “no” or “sometimes” may be areas to work on now for greater success in the educational experience you choose.

Skill Area	Description	Rate yourself on how often you do the activities listed: Yes=most or all of the time Sometimes=half or more of the time No=rarely or never do it		
Executive Function <i>(organizing, planning, getting started, being flexible)</i>	I get myself up in the morning with my own alarm, usually with no help from my parents or others.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I use an online or physical calendar to keep track of classes, appointments, tests, work commitments, or other recreational activities.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I use a checklist or other tool for keeping track of what I need to do at work (if I work), for homework (at school), to plan my day, set priorities, and keep track of things I need to do.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I usually get started with homework without reminders from my parents or others.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I work well in groups, such as team assignments at school, and can complete a project with them without many issues.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I usually can work through changes to the schedule or routine pretty without much problem.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	It's easy for me to get started, for example on homework, chores at home, tasks at work.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I can get overwhelmed or frustrated pretty easily if I have too many things to do.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I can calm myself down if I get too frustrated (such as taking a walk, a break, counting to 10, or something else).	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I finish what I start, even if I'm bored or not sure of how to finish.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I sometimes just have to say an answer or thought that comes to mind.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I get super bored sitting and listening to lectures.	Yes	Sometimes	No



Skill Area	Description	Rate yourself on how often you do the activities listed: Yes=most or all of the time Sometimes=half or more of the time No=rarely or never do it		
	I have a hard time paying attention for over 30 minutes at a time.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I really like structure and routine, and have a hard time if plans change or things do not go according to the schedule.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	When I don't understand how to do something (like homework or a work task), I usually wait to see if I can figure it out before asking for help.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I know how to problem-solve, look at options, and make a decision on my own.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I sometimes need information broken down to fully understand what I am supposed to do.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I know what to do when I get stuck on something.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I can get super focused (stuck) on a thought, activity, idea, etc. and it's hard to get unstuck.	Yes	Sometimes	No
Social Communication <i>(interacting with other people, working with school peers, understanding non-verbal and verbal communication)</i>	I know what a 2-way conversation is and give other people a chance to talk about their topics of interest.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I know how to find a common interest with someone.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I get along well with my peers at school or co-workers (if I am working).	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I like to follow rules and make sure other people are following the rules too.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I am comfortable approaching someone I don't know if they are talking about a topic I am interested in.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I think non-verbal body language is mainly the person's facial expression.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I know people are reading my non-verbal body language.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I would know if someone did or didn't want to talk to me by their body language.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I am comfortable with being able to get into and out of conversations with groups.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I get frustrated if people don't understand me.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I think other people see things mostly like I do.			
	I stop and think about how someone might feel if I say something.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I talk about some sensitive or personal topics with people I don't know well, as long as I know a lot about the topic or it's important at the moment (examples: their marriage, their age, why gender or political preferences are or are not okay).	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I think it's okay to tell the same joke time after time if it is super funny.	Yes	Sometimes	No



Skill Area	Description	Rate yourself on how often you do the activities listed: Yes=most or all of the time Sometimes=half or more of the time No=rarely or never do it		
	I pay attention to the tone of voice of others during conversations.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I may keep texting, emailing, or calling someone who is not responding, because they may not be getting my communication or messages.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I ask open-ended questions during conversations.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	It is important for me to set goals.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I have social anxiety around other people so it's just easier to not talk to them.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I hang out with friends at least once a month.			
	Most of my friends are online.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I can tell when a conversation is private.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I stay away from web sites that are risky and could cause a problem for me with my parents, the school, or the law.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I know hygiene is a form of non-verbal communication and people form impressions about me by my hygiene.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	It sometimes takes me a little longer to process what someone says, but I usually can understand if I have time.	Yes	Sometimes	No
Self-Advocacy (knows supports and how to ask for them, knows how to get needs met by being proactive, knows how to ask for help, understands differences in high school and college, etc.)	I did or do take part in my Individualized Education Program (IEP) at school.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I helped set goals in my IEP (or my vocational rehabilitation plan) and input to my strengths, preferences, interests, and needs.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I go to (or went to) teachers or resource people at school for help on homework or test issues, if I do not understand something, or to ask for help.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I prefer to wait for my teachers, resource people, parents, or boss (if I work) to come to me first because it's too hard to ask for help or I might not be sure what to say.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	It's better if my teacher or boss comes to me if there's a problem as I may not be sure what to say to them.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I do my own laundry at home and know how much soap to use and how operate the washer and dryer.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I prepare my own meals at home for lunch or dinner at home.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I get groceries for myself or my family.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I make a list of food I need to get.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I have used cleaning products to clean a bathroom at home (sink, shower or tub, toilet, floor).	Yes	Sometimes	No



Skill Area	Description	Rate yourself on how often you do the activities listed: Yes=most or all of the time Sometimes=half or more of the time No=rarely or never do it		
	I make my own doctor or dentist appointments.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I do most of the talking at my doctor or dentist.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	If I take medication, I know what I take and why.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	If I take medication, I reorder my own refills.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	If I have a headache or needed an over-the-counter medication (like Tylenol or Advil), I know how much to take and how often.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I get myself around to places by driving, riding a bike, or taking a bus.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I mainly depend on my parents or someone else to get me around.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I have a bank account and can use an ATM card.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I know how to check the balance in my bank account.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I have some sensory reactions and know how to manage them.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I am comfortable asking for accommodations or help (such as help with note taking, more time on tests, clarification on an assignment).	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I take showers or bathe every 1-2 days without reminders from my parents.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I wash my hair every 1-2 days.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I comb or brush my hair every day.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I wear deodorant every day.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I brush my teeth daily without reminders.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I make my own haircut appointments every 4-8 weeks and follow through with getting my hair cut.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I clip my finger and toenails when they get too long without reminders from my parents or others.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I think it's okay to wear clothes in public with food stains on them.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I know what disclosure means and when it may be helpful to disclose a disability.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I can tell if someone is trying to take advantage of me.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	If I am really stressed out, anxious, or depressed, I have some strategies to relax.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	If am anxious or depressed, I know who to talk to for help and advice.	Yes	Sometimes	No
	I would meet up with someone I met online if they showed me a picture of themselves first.	Yes	Sometimes	No



What to Think About When Planning for College or Higher Education

1. Assure the school is a good match

- Distance from home
- Type of location (city, rural, geographic area)
- Large or small community—where would I be most comfortable
- What do I want to study? Are there specific program for autistic students?
- What are my goals for college? A degree? Classes? Social benefits?

2. Talk to the disability support office to see what they offer for supports. Make a list of questions to ask and **BE CLEAR** as to what you need

- Does the school have dormitory/living accommodations (like single units, low noise)?
- What supports are available other than academics?
- Does the faculty support and communicate with students who need additional support?
- How many students with disabilities complete their program (associates, bachelors, etc.)
- How does the college support mental health issues or crisis?

3. Start Planning for College

- Complete requirements for school paperwork on:
 - Housing, tuition and fees, forms for disability support services, required health forms
 - Sign the FERPA form (permission for parents, guardians, or other who provide supported decision making to speak with the school and look at school records on your behalf)
- Take action on academic needs:
 - Meet disability services advisor and notify them of your disability
 - Consider and request accommodations and find out if you need to speak directly with your professors
 - Find out about other academic supports on campus such as writing or math labs, libraries, tutoring or supervised/supported homework periods, etc.)
 - Get class schedule, room assignments, textbooks and other required material, other supplies
 - Create a daily plan and follow it
 - Transportation-how you will get around (bus, walking, bike, driving)
 - Create a class schedule on a physical or electronic calendar adding study time, classes, free time
 - Create a DAILY checklist with what you need for each class, study sessions, labs, etc.
 - Transportation-how you will get around (bus, walking, bike, driving)
 - Create a class schedule on a physical or electronic calendar adding study time, classes, tests, free time
 - Create a DAILY checklist with what you need for each class, study sessions, labs, etc.

Adapted from [Organization for Autism Research \(OAR\) College Central](#)



Autism Specific Support Considerations

All students with or without disabilities have an adjustment when starting college. Many autistic students are academically ready for college but there are other challenges upon beginning the college experience. It is important to prepare during transition time and before starting college. Additional supports may be needed in addition to what the college disability support office will provide. The following are some examples which may be helpful in transitioning into a college as a freshman. Sometimes the college offers a robust program to support individual on the spectrum and sometimes other agencies are involved in providing supports such as autism specific agencies, education agencies, and vocational rehabilitation supports.

- Individualizing or helping with YOUR specific needs
- Advising weekly and review of homework, testing, acclimation and campus assimilation, social activities, class expectations, check-ins with professors, college major discussions, connecting to other resources who can provide information and support
- Homework labs with supports available
- Seminars to learn about expected college classroom behavior, time management, self-advocacy and having your voice heard and needs met in college; building skills in writing, test taking, studying effectively, tracking homework, working and communicating with professors; using and managing email for communication at college; using public transportation to get around and parking if driving; social communication skills and social group activities (such as game nights, reading, watching movies, etc.)
- Personal needs such as eating, meal plans, health and fitness needs, and safety on campus
- Managing free time and college interest-based social groups
- Peer mentors or assistance
- Paying for college or additional supports

Find out more information at Indiana Resource Center for Autism: [Academic Supports for College Students with an ASD](#)



Other Resources for Transition, College, Higher Education

- [Autism Goes to College](#): provides resources, a podcast, preparation tips for navigating college, etc.
- Autism Speaks: [Transition Roadmap to Postsecondary Education](#) (free download)
- Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN): [Roadmap to Transition: A Handbook for Young Autistic Youth Transitioning to Adulthood](#) (free download)
- Got Transition: [National Resource Center for Health Care Transition](#)
- Indiana University Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana Resource Center for Autism: [Academic Supports for College Students with an Autism Spectrum Disorder-Quick Overview](#)
- Michigan Alliance for Families: [Transition to Adulthood Topics](#). Training in self-determination for self-advocates and families. Michigan Alliance for Families [Upcoming Events](#) page.
- [Michigan Bureau of Services for Blind Persons \(BSBP\)](#) (vocational rehabilitation)
- Michigan Department of Education (MDE), Office of Special Education (OSE), [Secondary Transition-Catamaran Training Site](#).
- Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS), [Developmental Disabilities Council](#), [Self-Advocates of Michigan](#).
- [Michigan Rehabilitation Services \(MRS\)](#) (vocational rehabilitation).
- [National Parent Center on Transition and Employment \(PACER Center\)](#): many downloadable, free resources and videos related to higher level education, employment, self-advocacy, and more
- Organization for Autism Research (OAR): [College Central](#)
 - OAR College Central Online hubs for:
 - [Self-Advocacy](#)
 - [Academics](#)
 - [Campus Life](#)
 - [Career & Money](#)
- Organization for Autism Research (OAR): [Life Journey Through Transition](#) (free download)
- Organization for Autism Research (OAR): [SexEd for Self-Advocates](#) (free online, self-paced modules)
- National Technical Assistance Center for Transition-the Collaborative ([NTACT-C](#)), [Postsecondary Education](#).
- Statewide Autism Resources and Training (START): [free secondary transition self-paced learning](#) in student empowerment, education, employment, agency collaboration, and independent living. Free online monthly [Transforming Transition Together \(T3\) transition-related webinars](#).
- [Transition Tennessee](#): free online resources for students, families, educators, and providers and includes assessment and curriculum databases, tip sheets, live and recorded webcasts, and more. Students going on to higher education from high school can go to: [I Want to Continue My Education](#).
- [United States College Programs for Autistic Students \(2020\)](#). College Autism Network. This list is reflective of colleges and universities featured in their search throughout the US which offers supplemental supports to support individuals with ASD, conducted from August 2018 – August 2019.
- US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, [A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities \(August 2020\)](#).