

# When to **START** thinking about transition

It's never too early to start thinking about transition.

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**S**uccessful transition into adulthood is something to think about, discuss, and practice throughout your child's life. Children with neurological conditions will need a thoughtful and detailed approach to their transition planning.

Far too often, transition conversations begin too late.<sup>13</sup> "Although IDEA dictates that comprehensive transition services need not be addressed until the student is 16, there is little justification for waiting until then to begin this conversation, particularly given a context of the IEP as a strategic transition plan. Age 14 typically signals entry into high school, and students and families need to develop an awareness of graduation requirements and diploma options."<sup>14</sup>

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires the transition IEP to be in place by the student's 16th birthday at the latest.<sup>15</sup> However, most states require transition planning to begin earlier than age 16 (check your state regulations).<sup>16</sup> Federal law allows the IEP team (which includes the parent/guardian and the student) to begin transition planning even earlier in a student's life, based on the student's needs and preferences.<sup>17</sup> Best practices suggest that the process should begin much younger than age 16.<sup>18</sup>

Transition planning is mandatory for any child with an IEP to prepare the child for what comes after aging out of special education or earning a

diploma.<sup>19</sup> High school may be too late to begin transition planning for a child with complex medical, academic, social, emotional, and functional needs. Insist that transition planning begin at least five years before graduation. However, even if your child is a senior in high school, they should receive a thorough transition assessment before they graduate.

Believe it or not, as early as kindergarten is not too soon to start. You can start by researching federal and state laws and regulations that relate to transition and considering what skills will be needed to prepare your child for their future life.

If your child has significant challenges in academic or functional skills that they will need in order to live and work independently, they may need more than a few years to build those skills. School teams might not know what is needed for students who are so complex. Programs or services may need to be modified – or even created – to support your child's unique needs. It's important to involve outside agencies as early as possible; while some may not have services until the child ages out, some may have services that could be valuable along the way (see *APPENDIX: Outside Service Agencies* at the end of this guide). Some programs may have years-long waitlists and the services or funding may not be available when your child needs it most.

**Start right now!**