

# PFA Tips

## Preparing to Transition to Postsecondary Education

Up through your young adult's high school graduation, you probably made many (if not most) of his daily decisions. The college and postsecondary education experience is a completely different life. So how do you help your child prepare for this transition?

### Discuss with your young adult what topics she enjoys learning about

Starting with a class that your child finds interesting may be that positive first step. Explain to your child that, like high school, there will be required classes - but there will be opportunities to learn about subjects that interest them.

### Explore classes outside of the standard curriculum

Investigate the different types of classes available outside of the standard 2- or 4-year college program. Continuing Education, offerings through Parks and Rec, and sessions taught at local stores, including Michael's Arts and Crafts and Home Depot might be viable options that could lead to a traditional college program or employment.

### Help your young adult make the connection between learning goals and real life

A cooking class could help a student become more independent in the kitchen; a cake decorating class could help a student get the job in the bakery at the local grocery store; the Microsoft office class could help a student get a job in an office; classes taken just for fun present opportunities to meet people who have similar interests. (TransCen Inc.)

### Talk about what college is and how it differs from high school

Bells do not indicate it is time to change classes, and some classes may go a little under or a little over the stated time. While students experience more freedom in college, they also have higher expectations to complete work and navigate through classes with minimal supervision.

### Visit a local college

Walk through the campus, see where students congregate, maybe eat lunch in the student union. Pay attention to how long it takes to get from one side of campus to the other, and check if shuttles are available. If possible, ask to sit in and observe a class. Or go a step further and enroll your child in a class while he's still in high school so he can experience the structure and culture before fully committing to a program.

### Start a savings program for college

Regardless which type of education your child opts for, they all have associated costs. For information on ABLE accounts, visit <https://www.marylandable.org/>. For information on Maryland 529 Plans, visit <https://maryland529.com/>.

### Make sure your child has experience sleeping away from home

This is especially important if your young adult will be going away to college. Overnight camps offer an experience most like that of a college dorm.



### Have your young adult become comfortable with electronic communication

Chances are your child has experience using a cell phone and its apps. But what about email? Most colleges use email in their communications and expect students to download/upload attachments. Note - emergency alerts are often sent via text.

### Support your child to manage finances and expenses

You can open a bank account with your young adult at any age. A debit card or prepaid Visa can help your child learn to manage money responsibly. Use everyday experiences as teaching tools. For instance, you could add money to your child's account to cover things you wouldn't typically ask her to pay for. While at the grocery store, have her select the items she wants, but have her pay separately for practice.

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### Empower your child to manage a schedule

Remind your child that in college, they don't move from class to class as a group. Also teachers don't typically coordinate with each other when projects are assigned and due. While for some, a basic phone or written calendar may be sufficient, other students may benefit from a task manager app.

### Develop a system for independent medication management

Whether it's setting an alarm, using a daily pill box, keeping the pills visible as a reminder, writing notes, etc. Help your child determine which method will best help him stay on track with his medication schedule.

### Teach your young adult self-advocacy skills

Step one is to discuss what accommodations your child is eligible for with the college's Office of Disability Services. Bring with you documentation of the accommodations your child received in high school. Step two is helping your child articulate her needs to her professors and teachers. Accommodations only work if your child requests them. Look for natural opportunities to practice these skills: have your child call and make her own medical appointments, order her own food, arrange transportation, etc. Encourage her to make special requests or ask for support when appropriate.

### Empower your young adult to make choices

Begin with small choices, such as what clothing to purchase and wear. In the beginning, present options for your child to choose between. As they become more comfortable, allow them to make open ended choices. Be prepared to allow your child to fail. If we don't give our children opportunities to stumble and make mistakes, we're not allowing them to have the experiences they need to learn good decision-making skills. For guidance on this tactic, visit PFA Tips: Allow Your Child to Fail at <https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/behavior/pfa-tips-allow-your-child-to-fail/>.

### Encourage your child to explore volunteer opportunities

There are multiple reasons this is a good idea. Besides being valuable work experience, volunteering provides a sense of reciprocity and giving back. For more information, read PFA Tips: Giving Back at <https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/home/parent-tips-giving-back/>.

### Teach your young adult how to use public transportation

If your child doesn't drive, or isn't allowed to have a car on campus, your child may need to rely on public transportation. If possible, go with your child the first few times to ensure she knows how to navigate

the system, how to pay for the service, etc. This will help extend your child's freedom to meet friends off campus, seek off campus employment, and possibly travel home.

### Help your child learn to manage down-time

When our children are young and have very few demands placed on them, down-time can feel boring to them. As we get older and face more responsibilities we have less unscheduled time. It becomes more important that we use unstructured time constructively. How much time needs to be devoted to studying? Chores? Work? And when there is true leisure time, how can your child find activities he enjoys? How much down-time can be afforded per day? Task apps and visual schedules can help your child balance her school/work/play time.

### Apply to the MD State Dept. of Education Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS)

DORS has a wide variety of vocational rehabilitation programs that help individuals with disabilities prepare for the future, such as: vocational guidance & counseling; career assessment; job training; college or technical training; job search, placement and job-keeping services; supported employment; and rehabilitation technology. For more information visit <https://dors.maryland.gov/consumers/Pages/about.aspx>.

### Additional Resources

PFA's Autism by Age, 18-21  
<https://pathfindersforautism.org/autism-by-age/birth-5/#1494873813600-0c7f9a7f-c111>

Explore College Options  
<https://pathfindersforautism.org/articles/education/explore-college-options/>

Grants for Students with Disabilities  
<http://www.collegescholarships.org/grants/disabilities.htm>

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*These tips are based on resources from Club  
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