

Let's Talk About...

Transitions for children and adolescents with unique healthcare needs



Transitions are the processes of growing up and gradually taking responsibility. Children with unique healthcare needs may have trouble transitioning from one stage to another. These guidelines explain normal childhood development and medical and education issues so you can help your child.

Birth to 3 years old

Development

- Build trust by responding to your child's needs.
- Allow your child to develop at their own rate. If you have concerns or notice delays, contact your local early intervention program.
- Remember to take short breaks to renew your energy and help you enjoy your child more.

Medical

Start keeping immunization records, early intervention program plans, and a medical and developmental history for your child.

Education

- Talk with your child's healthcare provider about a referral to an early intervention program or other developmental program.
- Begin teaching your child shapes, colors, and letters. You are your child's first teacher.

3 to 5 years old

Development

- Teach your child about their body and personal space.
- Give your child chores they can do, including:
 - Picking up toys
 - Helping set the table
 - Helping with laundry
- Encourage your child to make decisions by offering choices.
- Teach your child the natural outcomes of behaviors and choices.
- Encourage activities that include children with and without special needs.
- Teach your child about relationships.
- Ask what kind of job your child would like when they grow up.

Medical

- Help your child understand their unique healthcare needs.
- Teach your child self-care and skills related to their healthcare needs.
- Have your child interact directly with doctors, nurses, therapists, and teachers.

Education

- Consider enrolling your child in a preschool or Head Start program through the local school district.
- Contact your school district the spring before your child starts kindergarten and tell staff about your child's unique healthcare needs.
- Encourage activities like typing, using a mouse and computer, playing sports, taking turns, and sharing.
- Read with your child every day.

6 to 11 years old

Development

- Discuss personal and online safety with your child.
- Encourage hobbies and leisure activities, such as computer skills, art, dance, or sports.
- Help them develop decision-making skills by offering choices.
- Give your child chores they can do.
- Give your child a chance to earn, spend, and manage money.
- Teach your child the outcomes of their behaviors and choices.
- Ask your child what job they'd like when they grow up.

Medical

- Teach your child general self-care and skills related to their unique healthcare needs.
- Help your child be involved with their medical care.
- Teach your child to voice their needs and concerns at school, with friends, and at medical visits. Make sure they feel comfortable talking to the doctor.

Education

- Find out what, if any, help your child needs at school for healthcare or learning needs. Talk about these needs with school staff.
- Discuss your child's healthcare needs with their school principal or school nurse.
- Contact your state's education resource center for parents.

12 to 14 years old

Development

- Discuss relationships, sexuality, online safety, and personal safety with your teen.
- Explore and talk about possible career interests.
- Help your teen recognize their strengths and skills, and encourage independence.
- Actively involve your teen in family chores.
- Encourage hobbies and a variety of recreational activities.
- Encourage friendships, and help your teen find and interact with adult or older teen role models.
- Encourage volunteer activities and talk about applying for a job.
- Talk about transportation awareness, including:
 - Pre-driving skills, like reading signs and understanding road rules
 - Reading bus route maps and schedules
- Communicate with your teen as much as possible.

Medical

- Ask your teen what they know about their special healthcare needs. Teach them more about what they don't understand.
- Support your child and have them practice self-care skills. Talk about your child's independent skills related to their special needs.

Education

If your teen has a health plan, a 504 plan, or an IEP (individualized education program), encourage them to participate in the planning meetings.

15 to 18 years old

Development

- Continue the activities for previous age groups.
- Help your teen identify their strengths and interests.
- Explore support groups if your teen is interested.
- Help your teen prepare for independent living by doing household tasks, budgeting, and shopping.
- Explore recreation and leisure opportunities.
- Check out assistive technology and computer resources for your teen.
- Help your teen get key documents, including a driver's license or ID card, birth certificate, and Social Security card.
- Explore living options (independent, assisted, dependent, with family or friends, a group home, or skilled nursing facility) for your teen.

Medical

- Encourage your teen to take responsibility for their medical needs and keep a medical history.
- Find a healthcare provider who'll meet your teen's needs as an adult and explore health insurance.
- Check your teen's Social Security eligibility the month they turn 18. At 18, the government evaluates the teen's financial resources, not the parent's or guardian's.
- Get legal guardianship for your teen if needed. Once your child reaches legal age, parents may only get their medical information with permission.

Education

- Talk with your teen about life plans after high school.
- Explore job support or training at vocational or technical schools, colleges, or universities.
- Contact the school's disability center to discuss appropriate help for your teen.

18 to 21 years old

Development

- Be a resource for your young adult.
- Encourage your young adult to join groups or activities relevant to their unique healthcare needs and interests. These may include:
 - Support groups
 - Mentoring opportunities
 - Online communities
 - Community activities
 - Social opportunities
- Help your young adult register to vote. Contact your county clerk for more information.

Medical

- Have your young adult continue to meet with their new adult healthcare provider.
- Make sure your young adult continues to update their medical history.
- Consult with a case manager if needed to answer insurance and healthcare questions and address any concerns about your child's care.

Education

- Encourage your young adult to identify services provided by the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Find out if your young adult can continue to receive school-based services from their local school district (some offer this through age 21).
- Encourage your young adult to contact student services for help if they plan to attend a vocational or technical school or university.

While transitions can be challenging, your child's healthcare provider can refer you to professionals who can help them adjust and grow. They can also provide more information and offer support.

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