

## Let's Talk About...

# Transitions for Children and Adolescents with Special Healthcare Needs

## What are transitions?

Transitions are not one activity that suddenly happens. Transitions are the process of growing up and gradually taking more responsibility. All children transition from one stage to another whether they have special healthcare needs or not. For children with special health care needs, transitions have more issues and responsibilities.

Independence is different, depending on a child's development. Your child may only need a little support to move into adulthood or your child may need more support, such as a guardianship and a supportive living environment. Because every child is different, this handout offers a range of guidelines. You and your child can decide which guidelines apply to you.

Transitions involve a lot of change, and this can be challenging. There are many professionals ready to support you and your child's growth into adulthood. If you have questions about transitions, ask your healthcare providers. They can help you and may refer you to people who understand what you are experiencing.

This handout divides transitions into six age groups. Each group explains what to expect in normal childhood development, medical issues, and education issues.

If you would like more information, your healthcare provider can help you find more information specific to your child's needs.

## Birth to 3 Years-Old

### Development

- Respond to your child's need to build trust. Play with and enjoy your child.

- Allow your child to develop at his or her own rate. If you have concerns or notice delays, you may contact your local Early Intervention Program.
- Parents need short breaks. Breaks renew energy and help you enjoy your child more.

## Medical

Start keeping records of:

- Immunizations
- Medical history
- Early Intervention Program plans
- Developmental history

## Education

- You are your child's first teacher.
- Discuss referring your child to an Early Intervention Program or other developmental program with your child's healthcare provider or specialty clinic. Each state has these programs. Contact the department that handles health services or the office for children with special healthcare needs.

## 3 to 5 Years-Old

### Development

- Give your child chores he or she can do. This may include:
  - 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.

- Ask, “What kind of job do you want to do when you grow up?” (There are no right answers!).
- Teach your child about relationships. Teach your child about his or her body and personal space.

### **Medical**

- Help your child understand his or her special healthcare needs.
- Teach your child self-cares and general skills. Teach skills related to his or her special health-care needs.
- Help your child interact directly with doctors, nurses, therapists, and teachers.

### **Education**

- Consider enrolling your child in a preschool or a Head Start program. Your local school district may have a program.
- Contact your local school district the spring before your child will attend kindergarten. Talk to the school’s staff about your child’s special healthcare needs.
- Encourage new activities like:
  - Keyboarding or using a mouse with a computer
  - Sports activities
  - Turn-taking and sharing

## **6 to 11 Years-Old**

### **Development**

- Discuss personal and online safety with your child.
- Encourage hobbies and leisure activities such as computer skills, art, or dance.
- Encourage decision making skills by offering choices.
- Give your child chores that he or she can do.
- Give your child a chance to earn and spend or manage money.
- Teach your child the outcomes of his or her behaviors and choices.
- Ask your child, “What job do you want when you grow up?”

### **Medical**

- Teach your child general self-care. Teach skills related to his or her special health needs.
- Help your child to be involved with his or her medical care.

- Teach your child to voice his or her needs and concerns:
  - At school
  - With friends
  - At medical appointments

### **Education**

- Find out what, if any, accommodations your child needs at school. These may relate to healthcare or learning needs. Discuss your child’s needs with school staff.
- Discuss your child’s healthcare needs with your local principal or school nurse.
- Consult with your state’s education resource center for parents. In Utah, the parent education resource center is the Utah Parent Center (801.272.1051).

## **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 his or her strengths and skills. Encourage independence!
- Actively involve your teen in family chores.
- Encourage hobbies and a variety of recreational activities.
- Encourage friendships.
- Help your teen identify and interact with adult or older teen role models.
- Encourage volunteer activities.
- Talk about transportation awareness including:
  - Pre-driving skills like reading signs and understanding rules of the road
  - Reading bus route maps and schedules
- Encourage and discuss how to apply for a job.
- Communicate with your teen as much as possible.

### **Medical**

- Ask your teen what he or she knows about his or her special healthcare needs. Fill in gaps in understanding.
- Support your child and have him or her practice self-care skills. Support your child’s independent skills related to his or her special needs.

## Education

- If your teen has a health plan, a 504 Health Plan or an IEP (Individualized Educational Program) encourage him or her to participate in the planning meetings and implementation.

## 15 to 18 Years-Old

### Development

- Continue the activities for previous age groups.
- Help your teen identify his or her strengths and interests.
- Explore support groups, if your teen is interested.
- Help your teen prepare for independent living including:
  - Household tasks
  - Budgeting and shopping
- Explore recreation and leisure opportunities
- Check out assistive technology and computer resources.
- Help your teen get key documents such as 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).

### Medical

- Encourage your teen to take responsibility for his or her medical needs.
- Teach your teen how to keep a record of his or her medical history.
- Begin to explore future healthcare needs like obtaining insurance and finding an adult healthcare provider.
- With your teen, check eligibility for SSI the month he or she turns 18 (At age 18, the teen's financial resources are evaluated, not the parent's or guardian's).

### Education

- Talk with your teen about life plans after high school.

- Explore job support or training at vocational or technical schools or colleges or universities.
- Contact the school's disability center to discuss available and proper accommodations for your teen.

## 18 to 21 Years-Old

### Development

- Be a resource for your young adult.
- Encourage your young adult to join in groups or activities relevant to his or her special healthcare needs and interests. This may include:
  - Support groups
  - Mentoring opportunities
  - Online communities
  - Community activities
  - Social opportunities
- Young adults may register to vote! Contact your county clerk for more information.

### Medical

- Continue moving medical care to an adult healthcare provider. Find a healthcare provider who meets your adult child's needs.
- Once your child is an adult, parents may only access medical information with the child's permission. Some parents need to obtain legal guardianship for their adult-age, special needs child.

### Education

- Encourage your young adult to find out about the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation services.
- Some young adults may continue to receive school-based services from their local school district through their 21st year.
- If your young adult plans to attend college, encourage them to contact student services for any needed accommodations.

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