

The Changing Role of Parents

The role of parents changes as their children with disabilities move from high school to adulthood. Parents who have spent years advocating for their child in school may find themselves playing a smaller part in their child's postsecondary education or pursuit of employment. As their children become more independent, parents may have difficulty adjusting to this shift in responsibility. A role change starts to take place as the student nears age 18, commonly referred to as “[the age of majority](#)” ([parent brief PDF](#)). Beginning at least one year before the child reaches the age of majority, then, the child's IEP must include a statement that the child has received notice and been told about the rights (if any) that will transfer to them at age of majority under §300.520. At this point, the transfer of special education rights from the parent to the student takes place.

Unless a parent retains [guardianship](#), their child will have new obligations and rights at age 18 and be responsible for making decisions that affect their life. If still in school, they become the decision maker in the IEP process and are responsible for identifying and seeking needed accommodations. They will be in charge of their education, time, and social life.

Planning can make the shift in parental responsibility easier for parents of young adults. Parents can prepare to “let go” by promoting self-advocacy skills and gaining an understanding of their disability and the needs that arise as a result in both postsecondary programs and employment. Self-determination enables young adults to have control over their own destiny, make choices, solve problems, and set goals. Parents play an important role in fostering self-confidence and can continue to play a supportive role during and after the transition from high school to postsecondary education or employment.

During the school years, students with disabilities and their parents have rights under federal and state laws. If the child chooses to attend a postsecondary program, they will no longer have an [Individualized Education Program \(IEP\)](#), and the laws that govern a postsecondary program will now apply to the student. [Section 504 from the Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act applies to both students in postsecondary programs as well as [employment](#). Understanding changes in the laws may help to make transitions smoother, with minimal conflicts.

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Another change that occurs for parents is in getting access to information about their child. The [Family Education Rights and Privacy Act \(FERPA\)](#) gives parents the right to review and access records. FERPA authorizes postsecondary programs to permit parental access to educational records without the student's consent only when a parent claims the student on his or her taxes, and FERPA does not require the college to inform the student. Colleges may choose to release education records with a student's consent, but it are not required to do so.

Students with Disabilities who Qualify for SSI

[Supplemental Security Income \(SSI\)](#) is a federal program that includes monthly cash benefits to qualified individuals with disabilities. Young adults qualifying for SSI and their families need to know about benefits and how they change when the student approaches the age of 18. Information [on SSI and going to work and college](#) is also important to learn.

Planning Tips for Families

- Talk to your child gain information on the variety of employment opportunities that exist.
- Encourage work and volunteer opportunities while in high school.
- Gather information about resources on postsecondary programs and employment opportunities.
- Learn about [Vocational Rehabilitation](#) and the role they can play in the journey to school or work.
- Provide opportunities to practice leading IEP or Section 504 meetings using resources from [I'm Determined](#).
- Visit a college disability office, most colleges have websites that include a separate page for the disability office, sometimes called the ADA (Americans with Disability Act) office or academic support services. Find out in advance who to speak to and talk to other students who use their services.
- Discuss the change in parental role with your child and the requirement for his written consent in order for you to inquire about his academic program.
- Identify the types of classroom assistance and effective strategies that will help maximize academic abilities and accommodate the disability.
- Identify assistive technology needs and advocate for your child to develop proficiency prior to leaving high school.

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- Encourage and support any activity that encourages participation in the new school community. Discuss the social scene on campus, what it will look like and skills needed in order to manage new social challenges.
- Encourage a healthy lifestyle and time and stress management practices. The social adjustment for students with disabilities can also be a significant factor in their future success.
- Identify the skills needed regarding self-care, such as laundry and banking needs.