

*Plan ahead for your young adult's transition into adulthood when they have a developmental disability.*

## Adult Services for People with Developmental Disabilities

Most of the time, a young adult's eligibility for adult services and supports is determined before they graduate. When your child is of transition age (16 and older) the school transition team should include a representative from adult services.

### **Designated Agencies (DA)**

Designated Agencies are non-profit organizations which contract with the Agency of Human Services (AHS) to provide services. The agencies are organized by county or service area.

The DA should be involved at least a year before your child is scheduled to graduate in order to plan for funding. It is best to request an intake appointment with your local DA to start the eligibility process at any time. Your child may receive many necessary services through their school program.

### **Flexible Family Funding**

You may also be eligible for Flexible Family Funding, income-based funds which can be used at your discretion. This funding is provided to eligible families of individuals with developmental disabilities to help pay for any legal good or activity that the family chooses such as: respite, assistive technology, home modification, individual and household needs, or recreational activities.



### **Applying for Adult Services**

Contact your local DA and ask for the intake coordinator. An intake coordinator will set up an appointment to meet with you and your young adult. According to law, the intake coordinator must offer to make the appointment within 5 days of your initial contact. If this meeting date/time isn't convenient for you, the intake coordinator will arrange a meeting at a mutually-agreeable time.

The intake coordinator will gather information to determine whether your child is eligible for developmental services. This process may include:

- An interview
- Examining school, medical and treatment records
- Reviewing your child's adaptive functioning level, such as self-care skills, safety awareness etc.

## Qualifying For Developmental Services

A young adult will need to be eligible by meeting the criteria for developmental disability, and a ‘funding priority.’

### Step 1: Eligibility

To qualify for developmental services, your child must meet the definition of developmental disability under Vermont Law. According to the Vermont Developmental Disabilities Act, a developmentally disabled individual is someone who has both:

- An IQ of 70 or below (or up to 75 or below with standard error of measurement) OR is on the autism spectrum and
- An adaptive functioning deficit(s).

Your documentation must show that your child’s disability existed by the time they turned 18. Don’t confuse this with the date of diagnosis; it is not uncommon for individuals with autism to get a diagnosis at an older age. What is important is that there were documented signs that would corroborate that the disability existed in childhood (by age 18). Also, note that no measurement of IQ is necessary for individuals on the autism spectrum.

### How to Measure Adaptive Functioning

A questionnaire is typically filled in by the parent or other caregiver. This form may be somewhat familiar to you if your son or daughter received Personal Care Services. You may recall a questionnaire which asked about how they functioned in different situations and their level of independence.

- Risk and safety are important issues in looking at a young adult’s adaptive functioning. Now is the time to concentrate on areas where safety and risk are a concern.

### Step 2: Meet a Funding Priority

Individuals who are eligible for developmental services must meet a ‘funding priority.’ The funding priorities are found in the System of Care plan, which runs on a three year cycle.

The funding priorities can and have changed from cycle to cycle, thereby widening or restricting entry into developmental services. The Home and Community Based Waiver is greatly restricted for children since the System of Care plan changed in 2001.

There are opportunities for public and written testimony when the Agency of Human Services puts forth drafts of proposed changes for the System of Care Plan every three years. For this reason, advocacy is extremely important in order to keep developmental services available for people in need.

### How are adult services paid for?

In most cases, Medicaid will pay for adult services. If your child is found eligible and meets a funding priority, they must be eligible for Medicaid. Otherwise, they will be expected to pay for services based on a sliding scale. Some of the programs which provided Medicaid to your child will end by age 19 (Dr. Dynasaur or Katie Beckett, also known as Disabled Children’s Home Care.)

Be aware that a delay in services may occur until your child is on Medicaid.

### Financial Eligibility for Adult Medicaid Waiver

Your child must meet the financial eligibility criteria. Financial eligibility includes both:

- A low maximum allowable monthly income and
- A low countable resource limit.

If your child holds excessive resources, you might consider a Special Needs Trust in order for them to meet financial eligibility for Medicaid and Social Security Income (SSI). A person who receives SSI checks will automatically be eligible for Medicaid.

Another way to meet financial eligibility for Medicaid is for the person with the disability to have an ABLE (Achieving a Better Life Experience) account. Balances and distributions from an ABLE account do not affect needs-based financial aid such as Medicaid or SSI.



### Budgets

Designated Agencies must budget well in advance in anticipation of need. At times funding may run out due to unexpected circumstances. In that case, your child may be placed temporarily on a waiting list.

### Tips

- Contact the Designated Agency (DA) by your child’s junior year in high school, even if you expect them to stay in school until age 22. DAs budget well in advance of when they anticipate a young adult will be entering the system. Make sure an agency representative is included on your child’s school transition team.
- Recognize that, unlike special education, adult services are not a federal entitlement. Every state has a great deal of flexibility in how and to whom to provide services for adults with disabilities. As a result, developmental services are frequently targeted for budget cuts. You can help by getting involved with systems advocacy.
- For example, you can attend the public hearings regarding the System of Care Plan. You can also be vigilant about proposed budget cuts at the State House. As a parent, your advocacy can make a huge difference in the lives of many individuals. Your voice counts!

- If your child is on a multi-year Individualized Education Program (IEP), encourage them to stay in a school program until age 22. You may find yourself at odds with the school, which may try to graduate your child once they have met graduation requirements.

Keep in mind that it is equally important for your child to meet their transition goals. Staying in school as long as possible is an extremely important opportunity for your child to continue to learn job skills, academics, and independent living skills while under an entitlement program.

- Remember that disability does not necessarily mean eligibility. Eligibility criteria differ between special education and developmental services. An individual with a significant disability who was on an IEP while in school might not be eligible for developmental services.
- Determine if your child is eligible for Medicaid. Even if your child is otherwise able to get services, the implementation will be delayed until they begin receiving Medicaid benefits. See Vermont Family Network’s publication *Health Care Financing for Your Child with Special Needs: Six Ways to Access Medicaid & Other Health Care Benefits*.
- Be honest about your child’s abilities when asked to complete the functional capacity assessment. The assessment is seeking information on what your child can and cannot do independently. Many parents are tempted to ‘defend’ their child and exaggerate their abilities or others may try to minimize their abilities. Your responses will be compared to records and responses from other sources.

## Conclusion

The world of adult services is very different from what your young adult may have been accustomed to in school. There may be far less engagement with typical peers and fewer opportunities to pursue favorite activities (sports, music, etc.) that were part of the school day. Leaving school will require your young adult to adapt to changes in routine, places, and personnel.

Make sure your young adult is an integral part of the transition planning process. Being actively involved can help them adjust more easily. You may find that while you worry, they look forward to a new phase of life with anticipation. This may be a good point to start letting go a little and not allow your fears and concerns to dampen what can be an exciting time in any young person's life.

## Resources

[Developmental Disabilities Services Division](#)

To locate the Designated Agency for your County/Region and for information on Flexible Family Funding  
**802-241-0304**

[Vermont Developmental Disabilities Council](#)

**1-802-828-1310**

Vermont Family Network  
**802-876-5315**

[Transition Toolkit for Youth with Disabilities](#)



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