

Executive Summary

# The Journey to Life After High School

## A Road Map for Parents of Children with Disabilities

The transition from high school to adulthood is challenging enough for most teenagers; however, for those with special needs, including autism spectrum disorders, developmental and intellectual disabilities, it can be even more so. Families are often faced with difficult decisions and limited knowledge of available resources. Many of the systems that have been in place to support both child and family are poised to disappearance once school services end. Building a new support structure requires sorting through a maze of options while also learning about a variety of new laws, systems, benefits, and requirements.

At the same time, young people with special needs are grappling with the physical and emotional changes brought about by adolescence just like their typically-developing counterparts. Their feelings about the future may be complex or even contradictory. Parents too may feel pushed and pulled – not sure how to help their child move into the wider world.

For these families, preparing for their child's impending adulthood can feel challenging – even overwhelming. Regardless of the path they take, not every teenager with special needs will go on to a four-year college. Some will choose community college. Some will get vocational training. Some will work. Some will go into day programs. Some will stay home. In any case, the transition brings profound physical, emotional, social and legal changes. For parents, that means addressing challenges in nearly every aspect of their children's lives – and for a sea-change in their own role as well.

"The years between adolescence and adulthood are uncharted territory for families with special needs children," says [Best Buddies](#) Founder & Chair Anthony K. Shriver.

*"AbilityPath's guide provides a much-needed roadmap to this critical time of life and is an invaluable resource for families and the professionals who work with them."*

Whether for a middle schooler, a high schooler, or even a young adult, "Life After High School" is a tool to chart a child's transition into adulthood. While it can't cover every detail or every situation, the report gives an overview of what lies ahead and a detailed list of resources for where to go for support. "Life After High School" is the third in a series of original reports published by AbilityPath.org, an online forum of Community Gatepath dedicated to serving the families of individuals with special needs and the professionals who work with them. It is available for free download at [www.abilitypath.org](http://www.abilitypath.org).



### REPORT GOALS:

- To **inform** families about the components of the transition to adulthood
- To **encourage** families who are daunted by the transition process to dive in as early as possible
- To **explain** the choices and changes that make up the transition process
- To **connect** families with the many resources available for helping them transition

### REPORT INCLUDES:

#### First Steps:

- Getting Organized
- Who Are You and Who Are You Going To Be?
- Person-Centered Planning
- Six Simple Things You Can Do To Make Transition Easier

#### Planning for the Big 5:

1. Education
2. Employment & Day Programs
3. Housing
4. Medical, Legal & Financial Benefits
5. Building a Lifelong Support Network

#### Contact Information

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