

Planning for the College Transition

Start discussing college, major, and career choices as soon as possible. Though your student may be very intelligent, he may be much less developmentally ready to make these types of choices than other students his age.

1. Explore Together (While Assessing For Decision-Making Readiness):

- ✚ Ask questions of your student with the purpose of assessing his readiness for college and career decision making. For example, “What lead to your choice to want to become a teacher?” “How do you imagine you’ll get to class without a car if you attend Big City University?” “What do you think that a forest ranger job will pay?”
- ✚ Encourage your student to keep a record of good experiences and negative experiences, related to school, work, and extra-curricular activities. It is also helpful to record experiences/activities that were particularly difficult and those that came more easily. Then sit down and have a chat with your student about how this knowledge can help her in making career and college decisions. (*See hints for plan making on the next page.*)
- ✚ Career and personality inventories can be helpful in assessing career choice and in developing self-awareness, in general. Some of these can be accessed for free on the internet, but it is also helpful to have your student complete these with a school or career counselor. Some popular inventories are the *Self-Directed Search*, the *Strong Interest Inventory*, and the *Myers Briggs* (which suggests personality type).
- ✚ Ask your student if he completed a career test at school. Schedule a time to sit and discuss the results with the school counselor and your student. **These results are not very helpful to a student if they are not discussed and analyzed.**
- ✚ There are also career choice readiness scales, such as *My Vocational Situation*, and the *Career Beliefs Inventory*. They help to determine the student’s readiness to begin the process of selecting a career.
- ✚ If the planning and assessing process seems overwhelming or if your student is reluctant to sit and talk with you about these things, consider enlisting the help of a private counselor or transition/career coach.

2. AFTER Assessing for Readiness:

- ✚ Start to narrow down the colleges that your student is considering.
- ✚ Make a list, with your student, of the most important aspects of their college choice. Come up with some sort of rating system, based on how important each aspect is, and then rate each college according to the system.
- ✚ Don't forget to consider support services that the college provides to assist with your student's disability. You may have to gently remind the student of why this is important if she is ready to throw off all of the supports she has received for her disability up until this point.
- ✚ Visit the colleges that are the student's (and your) top choices. Ask LOTS of questions of disability services counselors, admissions counselors, advisors, etc. Even more helpful may be to ask questions of other students with disabilities or their parents about their experience at the school.

3. IF Your Student Is Not Quite Ready (*But Wants to Attend College*):

- ✚ Do all of the above, **PLUS**:
- ✚ Help your student choose a major that is flexible and can lead to a wide range of careers. Degrees like sociology can lead to careers in business, social work, or graduate study in many fields, while a degree in pre-veterinary science may not be helpful if your student later decides he'd rather program computers.
- ✚ Choose a college that offers a wide variety of majors and opportunities, in case your student changes his mind.
- ✚ Suggest that your student consider attending a community college, staying close to home, and/or getting some job experience for a year or for a few years.
- ✚ Encourage your student to choose general education classes until she is a little more ready to choose a major.
- ✚ If your student needs a self-esteem boost or has struggled with not liking (or not seeing the relevance of!) high school, help him choose classes the first year that are interesting to him and that match his personality.

General Tips for Making Transition Plans with Your Student

- ✚ **TALK** to your child about their hopes and expectations, as well as what they expect may be difficult about the transition to college.
- ✚ **ASK** them questions to assess how realistic their plans and expectations really are.
- ✚ **FACILITATE** the process of making an actual, “**on-paper**” plan with them, if they are willing.
- ✚ Don't be patronizing. **LISTEN**, show respect, and carefully make suggestions.
- ✚ Be **FLEXIBLE** because plans are just plans; things change. Understand that the challenges that your student will face in college may be very different from those that they faced in high school. Also, they may excel in brand new areas.