Pathways to Independence:

A Transition Guide for Young Adults with Disabilities



The Florida Youth Council

Welcome to Your Transition Guide

The Florida Youth Council (FYC) is a group of youth (ages 15-17) and emerging leaders (ages 18-30) with disabilities or special health care needs that live in Florida. We are a program of The Family Café.

The FYC is all about getting youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy, peer mentoring, and other activities that will improve the quality of life for youth and emerging leaders with disabilities in Florida. The program provides a means for youth and emerging leaders to decide what issues are important to their generation, to express those issues in their state and local communities, and to develop strategies to solve those issues.

The FYC offers many opportunities for interested youth and emerging leaders to participate, including an Annual Youth Summit, program content at The Annual Family Café, a program newsletter in both electronic and print formats, and a comprehensive online outreach program that takes advantage of the power of social networking.

The FYC is always seeking new members, and application materials are available on our website. If you are interested in becoming a leader in the disability community, we encourage you to get involved!

MEMBERS OF THE FLORIDA YOUTH COUNCIL

Niki Germain
(Youth Advisor)

John Howard Baldino

Shevie Barnes

Derek Carraway
(Lead Alumni)

Alexander Gonzalez
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Serena Wetmore

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You can visit our website, floridayouthcouncil.org, or call us at (850) 224-4670 for additional information about the Florida Youth Council (FYC) or the Transition Guide.

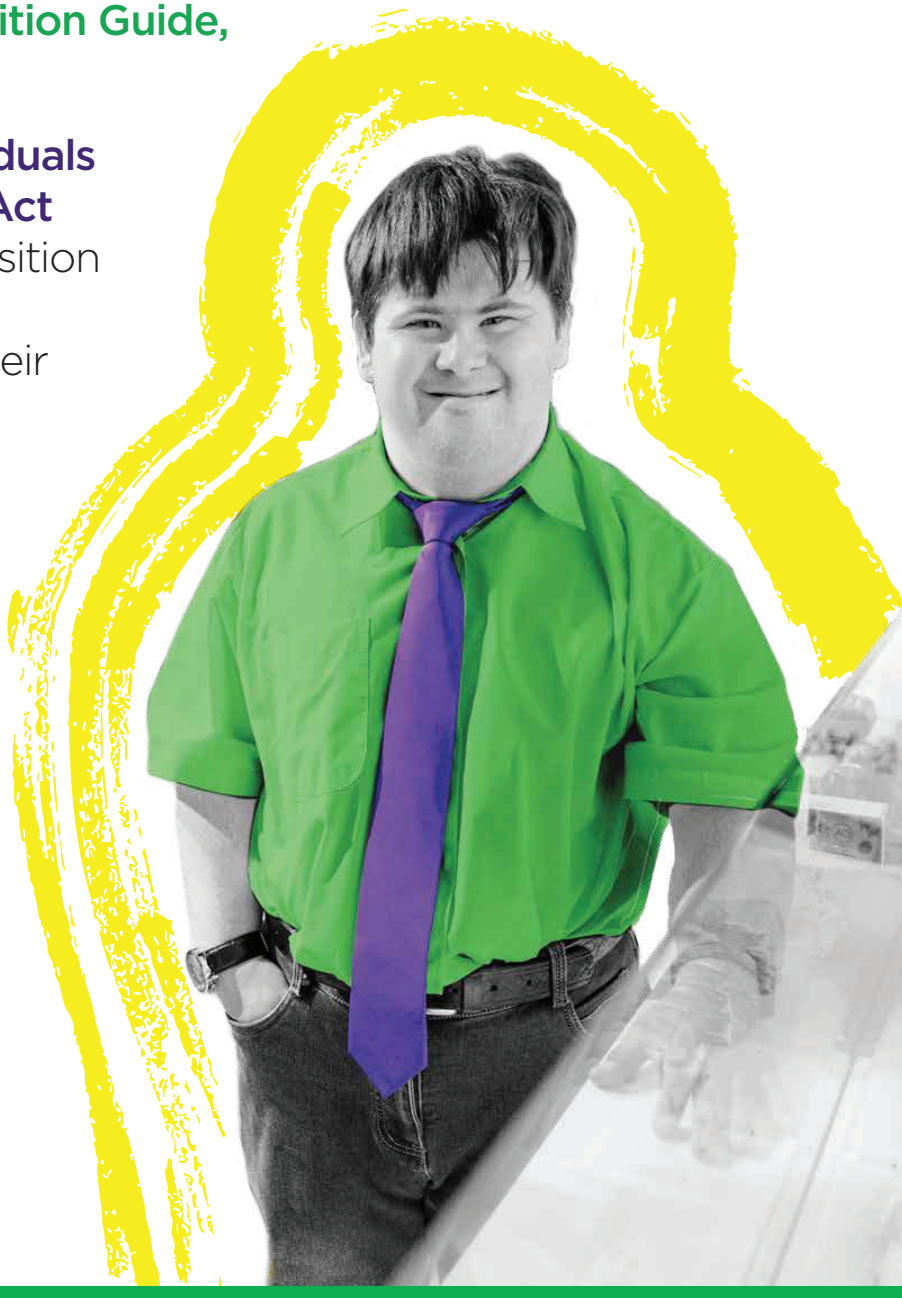
Transition Guide for Florida's Youth with Disabilities

If you are between the ages of 12 and 21 years old, this Transition Guide is written for you. It will help you identify the services you need as you prepare to transition from high school to what's next, including further education, employment, and independent living.

Are you ready to plan your future with this great Transition Guide? Are you ready to become empowered, be involved, and create your own path forward?

Specifically, in reading this Transition Guide, you will learn about:

1. An important law, the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, and its required transition planning process to support youth with disabilities and their families
2. Your **Individualized Education Plan (IEP)** and how it can help you
3. Personal and postsecondary goals
4. School-to-work actions
5. Empowering tips and stories from your peers
6. Resources to help you meet your goals
7. Definitions of words linked to your transition years



IDEA & Your Future

The federal law, **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA),** requires public schools to develop a written document called an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for every student with a disability. The IEP's purpose is to help you set school goals and to be successful in meeting them.

IDEA requires, starting at age 12, schools to invite you, along with your parents, teachers, school personnel, and outside agencies, to the IEP meetings. At these meetings, it is important to fully participate, ask questions, share your thoughts, and ask for what you want. Doing so is the best way to make sure you ATTAIN the knowledge, information, and skills you will need.

Required sections of the IEP that will be discussed:

- Your goals: What you want to complete in school or work
- Ways to better speak up for yourself and your needs
- Ways to be a vocal member of your IEP meetings
- Your course of study leading to a standard high school diploma, including a scholar or merit designation
- Accommodations, e.g., additional time during tests, audio books, text-to-speech software, and other learning aids
- How you are currently doing academically
- Your strengths, likes, and interests
- Essential transition services, e.g., social and work skill development through targeted activities, your interests, going out into the community to learn about different kinds of careers, and work-based learning projects

Be Involved to Have a Strong Future

We know that students who are involved in their education have improved post-school outcomes. This means being involved helps improve your chances of having a strong future. Post-school outcomes include your ongoing education and full- or part-time employment.

Here are seven examples of effective ways to be involved in your transition planning:

1. BE INVOLVED: SET GOALS

During your IEP meetings, it's imperative to talk about your goals. Your goals are written into your IEP along with ways to reach your goals. The school staff are there to help you accomplish your goals and guide your parents, if needed. It can be difficult in the beginning to even know what your IEP goals may be.

Here are some examples of goals other students found important:

- Become more involved in my Transition IEP process
- Learn more about my strengths, interests, and values; how I learn; and my disability
- Improve my grades to have more high school graduation options
- Learn about the high school graduation options
- Learn about career choices and decide which are best for me
- Learn about different kinds of careers
- Become a strong self-advocate and learn how to speak up for myself
- Learn more about self-determination and being dedicated to meeting my goals
- Live independently with the supports I need
- Have a good job that interests me
- Have access to transportation
- Feel connected and cared for

2. BE INVOLVED: KNOW EXAM AND/OR GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Learn about the necessary graduation requirements. The Florida Department of Education offers different graduation options. Each graduation option has its own requirements. Make sure you ask questions and get full information from your school personnel.

3. BE INVOLVED: IMPROVE YOUR SELF-ADVOCACY, SELF-DETERMINATION, AND DECISION-MAKING SKILLS

How do we learn to do things better? Let's say you want to learn to paint. What would you do to learn that skill? Yes, you would take an art class and practice. To advocate for yourself and to make good decisions also require study and practice. Ask your school personnel about self-advocacy, self-determination, and decision-making classes and ask that these classes be included in your IEP.

4. BE INVOLVED: ENROLL IN OCCUPATIONAL COURSES

Occupational courses help students discover their strengths, their interests, and how to begin to develop job skills. See which courses are a good fit for you. Ask your school staff about courses like this.

5. BE INVOLVED: BENEFIT FROM COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES

Community experiences can help you prepare for your future. These may include learning to take public transportation, part-time employment, vocational training, and social activities, etc. Practicing work behaviors and social skills while you are still in school is important to do.

That way, you can keep improving those skills with more in-class instruction and support from your teachers. Ask your school personnel how to have these experiences. Since being involved is so important, what do I do to be involved? What does involvement include?

6. BE INVOLVED: LEARN WITH YOUR PEERS WITHOUT DISABILITIES

Consider participating in general education classes with your peers without disabilities. This is called inclusion. Express your ideas and questions to school personnel on how to be included in school settings with your peers without disabilities.

7. BE INVOLVED: FIND YOUR TRANSITION COMPANION

A transition companion is someone who can help you during your transition years. A transition companion is someone who is dependable and someone with whom you feel comfortable. This person may be a teacher, school counselor, family member, family friend, or self-advocate. A transition companion could help you:

- Stay motivated
- Stay on track with meeting your goals
- Speak up for yourself in meetings and other situations
- Find the resources you need
- Feel good about yourself
- Ask for help and don't worry what others think

Tips from the FYC

Here are some important messages from young adults with disabilities who are meeting their life goals:

- Speak UP for yourself
- Be who you want to be
- Pave your own way toward your future
- Turn your dreams into goals and work toward them
- Stay strong
- Advocate to get the resources you need
- Believe in yourself, work hard, and don't give up

Discover Your Gift and Talents

A famous college professor and historian, Joseph Campbell, taught his students to follow their bliss. This means to discover what you really love, what really motivates you, and let it lead you through life. Here are two young people's stories as examples:

ALEX

It was in 8th grade when Alex realized that his special gift and talent was writing. He already knew he enjoyed writing and was even daydreaming about going to college and becoming a screenwriter. But he wasn't sure his writing was very good, and college seemed far-fetched. He knew having Autism presented a lot of challenges, and no one in his family had received a baccalaureate degree. Then that year his standardized achievement test results gave him the proof and boost he needed. His writing score was tops! He saw himself as a good writer and going to college felt possible.

Alex is now 26 years old, is an active member of the FYC, has two associate degrees, and is about to receive his Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice from Polk State College. His writing continues to be an important part of his life. In addition to helping him pass his college courses, writing helps him grow as a person. Weekly, Alex uses his writing to self-reflect. He writes down his answers to tough questions like: "Where could I have been more helpful? How were my personal interactions with friends and family? Did I repeat past mistakes? Am I on track to reach my goals?" As he writes down his answers, he is taking responsibility for his own life, his happiness, and his success. He becomes more aware of who he is and is able to let go of thought and behavior patterns that block his progress. Alex's love for writing is helping him reach his goals. He continues to hope that one day he will write a screenplay.

SERENA

Serena was a senior in high school when she realized that her gift and talent is mentoring. She discovered her gift simply by befriending a younger student. "Kyle," a freshman at the time, needed someone to listen and guide him through a rough time in his life. Serena showed up day after day with an open heart, good listening skills, and emotional support. Kyle's life improved and so did Serena's.

Perhaps Serena's natural desire and ability to support and mentor others comes from her own struggles. During middle and high school, she often felt that no one really understood her emotional needs. Like many teenagers, she had challenges with depression/anxiety disorder, which has improved greatly over time. Her disability, being born with cerebral palsy, might have also contributed to her gift of mentoring.

Oral communication is sometimes a challenge, and because of her physical disability, she is not able to easily write down her thoughts. Her ability to listen, however, is not only intact but also enhanced.

Serena is 22 years old and has been a member of the FYC for nearly seven years. She explains that it was through peer and family support that she was able to graduate from high school as a member of the National Honor Society and enroll in college. She is in her third year working toward her associate of arts degree. Her dream is to continue her studies in psychology. Currently, she volunteers part time at a job training program in Jacksonville, Florida. There she uses her gift to help other young adults with disabilities stay focused and motivated so they can reach their full potential.



Transition Resources

The resources below can assist you in meeting your post-secondary goals:

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

FAAST is the state of Florida's assistive technology program. Assistive technology activities provided by FAAST include device loans, device demonstrations, device reutilization, device trainings, information and assistance, and a statewide financing program. FAAST serves Floridians who have disabilities and their family members, service providers, educators, therapists, employers, health and rehabilitation professionals, assistive technology vendors, procurement officials, and all other interested parties throughout the state of Florida. **faast.org**

COMPREHENSIVE INFORMATION

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, Florida Department of Education, The Family Guide to Secondary Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities
project10.info/Documents/FamilyGuide_FINAL_PLUS_New_Edits_2.12.21_.pdf

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc., Connections Guide: Tools for Your Adult Life
includes key contact information in all areas related to transition into adulthood **fddc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Connections-Tools-and-Resources-for-Adult-Life-2021.pdf**

Bureau of Exceptional Education and Student Services, Florida Department of Education, Developing Quality Individual Educational Plans: A Guide for Instructional Personnel and Families
fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7690/urlt/0070122-qualityieps.pdf

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.,
Lighting The Way: To Your Choices, Your Decisions, and Your Life
fddc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Lighting-the-Way-Booklet.pdf

Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities at the University of Central Florida
provides information about postsecondary college transition programs for students with disabilities
fcsua.org/E_postsecondary.php

Parenting Special Needs Magazine
parentingspecialneeds.org/contributors

COLLEGE & TRADE SCHOOLS

PACER Center provides videos of students wanting to go to college and/or more life skills training
pacer.org/students/transition-to-life/training-and-college-opps.asp

Florida Consortium on Inclusive Higher Education
fcihe.com/participating-colleges

Florida Center for Students with Unique Abilities at the University of Central Florida
fcsua.org

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc., Stress and What You Can Do About It is an easy-to-read colorful lesson on the basics of stress and stress management for individuals with disabilities, which is also available in audio and Spanish versions **fddc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Stress-and-What-You-Can-Do-English.pdf**

InsightTimer app for sleep, anxiety, and stress **insighttimer.com**

RoundGlass Living app to reduce stress and sleep better
apps.apple.com/us/app/roundglass-meditation/id1520721799

EMPLOYMENT

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Florida Department of Education
rehabworks.org/stw.shtml

My Next Move, What Do You Want to Do for a Living
mynextmove.org

The de Moya Foundation introduces young adults to professional work environments and ongoing peer and professional supports **demoyafoundation.com/about**

United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Handbook provides information on the education and training needed to enter occupations **bls.gov/ooh**

Employment First Florida employment **employmentfirstfl.org**

Agency for Persons with Disabilities provides funding toward supported living and employment and other needs **apd.myflorida.com/about/faqs.htm**

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Florida Department of Education helps individuals with disabilities find and maintain employment **rehabworks.org/index.shtml**

CareerSource Florida has career centers across the state that link employers with individuals seeking employment **careersourceflorida.com/career-services**

The Able Trust High School High Tech (HSHT) is designed to provide high school students with all types of disabilities the opportunity to explore jobs or postsecondary education leading to technology-related careers. HSHT links youth to a broad range of academic, career development and experiential resources and experiences that will enable them to meet the demands of the 21st century **workforce.abletrust.org**.

HOUSING

Residential Options of Florida (ROOF) is an organization that exists to empower individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities to access affordable, inclusive housing **flroof.org**

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc., provides a resource guide to independent living **fddc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Connections-Tools-and-Resources-for-Adult-Life-2021.pdf**

PACER Center features young adults living independently **pacer.org/students/transition-to-life/independent-living.asp**

Casa Familia in Miami-Dade County sponsors affordable housing for adults with developmental disabilities in an enriched community setting **casafamiliainc.org**

Agency for Persons with Disabilities provides funding toward supported living and supported employment and other needs **apd.myflorida.com/about/faqs.htm**

Centers for Independent Living are statewide and provide help in all areas of independent living, including jobs **floridacils.org/find-your-cil**

Noah's Ark of Central Florida **noahsarkflorida.org/housing**

Arc of Florida **arcflorida.org**

LEGAL MATTERS

The Florida Bar, Consumer Pamphlet: What is Guardianship
floridabar.org/public/consumer/pamphlet030

Disability Rights Florida **disabilityrightsflorida.org**

SELF-DETERMINATION & LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

I'm Determined, Virginia Department of Education, How Self-Determined Are You? A ToolBox of Resources to Help Build Self-Determination **imdetermined.org/resources**

The Florida Youth Council (FYC) is a group of youth and emerging leaders involved in self-advocacy **floridayouthcouncil.org**

Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc., Partners in Policymaking (PIP) is a leadership training program for individuals with a disability **fddc.org/partners-in-policymaking**

PACER Center, National Parent Center on Transition and Employment provides written resources and training on self-determination **pacer.org/transition/learning-center/independent-community-living/self-determination.asp**

Florida Self-Advocates Network'D is a statewide network of self-advocates **flsand.org**

Self-Determination Theory Conference, 2013, Richard Ryan, What is Self-Determination Theory is a short video about self-determination and what we all need **youtube.com/watch?v=3sRBBNkSXpY**

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) Center, University of Washington, Taking Charge 2: Two Stories of Success and Self-Determination **youtube.com/watch?v=4tZ7_CIw3ig**

PACER Center, National Parent Center on Transition and Employment introduces you to Jessica in this video: **pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=275**

PACER Center, National Parent Center on Transition and Employment introduces you to Rachel Magario as she talks about the importance of attitude and parent involvement **pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=17**

National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making
supporteddecisionmaking.org

Youth Move National Peer Center
youthmovepeercenter.org

TRANSPORTATION

Community Transportation Coordinators (CTCs) are available in each of Florida's counties, and you can find the CTC in your county at **ctd.fdot.gov/ctcsbycounty.htm**

Employment First Florida provides a list of resources to help you get to school or work **employmentfirstfl.org/transportation/getting-to-you-workplace/#more-1458**



Transition Glossary

ACCOMMODATIONS

Accommodations are changes to the timing, setting, or way information is presented to allow a student to complete a task without changing the task itself. These are documented on the student's IEP. Accommodations are legally binding, which means they are required to be given as an option for the student if written in an IEP.

ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

A device or service that helps a student participate more independently at school, at work, or within the community. Assistive technology may include items such as timers, screen readers, and communication devices. These can be documented on the student's IEP.

COURSE OF STUDY

This section in a Transition IEP clarifies whether the student will pursue a course of study leading to a standard diploma or a special diploma. Examples of courses of study:

- Advanced placement courses to prepare for college
- Career education courses to prepare for a career
- Courses in daily living skills, such as preparing meals, using public transportation, and managing money.

DISABILITY INCLUSION

A workplace or education setting where all individuals, including people with disabilities, are fully included in the work or education community.

DISABILITY SERVICES OR ACCESS OFFICE

Colleges and other postsecondary education institutions have an identified individual or an office where a student with a disability may request support and accommodations for equal and/or physical access to courses and campus experiences.

DISCLOSURE

When a student with a disability shares information about his/her disability with others, often with his/her employer, supervisor, or co-worker.

DISCRIMINATION

Treating people differently on the basis of disability, race, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PLAN OR PROGRAM (IEP)

An education program developed by an IEP team to meet the needs of a student with a disability to have access to the curriculum and make progress. The program is documented in a written IEP plan.

JOB COACH

An individual who provides one-on-one training and support tailored to meet the person's needs for a particular job. The job coach's ultimate goal is to help the person work as independently as possible.

NATURAL SUPPORTS

Social supports that already exist in the workplace that are provided to help ensure success in the workplace. These supports may include mentoring, feedback on job performance, friendship, or socializing outside of work.

OCCUPATIONAL COURSES

Courses for students to discover their strengths and interests and develop job skills.

PERSON-FIRST LANGUAGE

A term that describes how individuals with disabilities prefer to refer to themselves. It is the practice of expressing people first, not their disability. For example, using the term "a person who is blind" instead of the term "a blind person."

SELF-DETERMINATION

Self-determination is making choices and decisions for oneself. It includes setting goals and working toward them and the ability to work on your own behalf. A student's need for self-determination instruction is additionally identified and documented in the student's IEP.

TRANSITION SERVICES

Transition services in a student's IEP focus on improving his/her academic and life skills to help him/her gain the knowledge and skills needed to meet his/her post-school goals. Examples include self-advocacy training, using public transportation, career education, community work, and functional vocational evaluation. The term "transition services" or the term "transition planning" means a coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is results-focused and based on the student's needs.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR)

A state-supported division of services that assists individuals with disabilities in preparing for, finding, and retaining meaningful employment.



Source Guide

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www.FloridaYouthCouncil.org

The Family Café exists to provide individuals with disabilities and their families with an opportunity for collaboration, advocacy, friendship, and empowerment by serving as a facilitator of communication, a space for dialogue, and a source of information. The organization's mission is to facilitate communication, encourage dialogue, and serve as a source of information about available supports and services. Since 1998, The Annual Family Café has brought Floridians with all types of disabilities together for three days of information, training, and networking. With a great range of individual breakout sessions, a packed exhibit hall with dozens of vendors, and a series of special events including keynote speakers and the Governor's Summit on Disabilities, The Annual Family Café offers attendees exposure to resources on a grand scale, unprecedented access to policymaking officials, and a chance to network with other individuals with disabilities and their families.
www.FamilyCafe.net

The Florida Department of Education (DOE) has many goals including raising student achievement, giving all students access to the K-20 education system, and helping students be part of a skilled workforce and part of economic development. **www.fldoe.org**

You can also use the following link to go directly to a list of all of the school superintendents in the state of Florida: **fldoe.org/accountability/data-sys/school-dis-data/superintendents.stml**

The Florida Youth Council

Get Connected

CALL (888) 309-CAFÉ (2233)

EMAIL Info@FloridaYouthCouncil.net

WEBSITE FloridaYouthCouncil.org

FOLLOW

The Family Café

Florida Department of Education
fldoe.org

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