



CHAPEL HILL TEACCH OUTREACH

Transitioning into Adulthood

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The transition to adulthood can be a challenging process for all adolescents and parents. For individuals with autism, this transition can be even more demanding. Individuals with autism may bring unique and possibly increased challenges to the already confusing and complicated transition to adulthood; however, the transition also represents increased experiences for learning and opportunities for children to grow, change, and find their place in the world. It's important to remember that while some situations may be complicated by having autism, these individuals also demonstrate many of the same behaviors and reactions as typical teenagers. Nonetheless, there may be some issues that arise that don't have immediate solutions or clear answers. For all of these scenarios, there are a number of helpful resources available to help you through this time. Following are some suggestions for steps to take when preparing for or while in the midst of navigating your way through these often unpredictable waters. It may be further reassuring to remember that the transition to adulthood is temporary, and although ongoing support may be needed, with growth comes increased learning, adapting, and the tendency for everything to become a little easier.

Things Parents Can Do to Address Transitioning to Adulthood

Get a copy of the transition packet from the ECAC at www.ecac-parentcenter.org. The packet has a wonderful summary article put out by the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities called "Transition Planning: A Team Effort."

Start the process of planning for your child's transition to adulthood by age 14. The formal process of transition planning becomes a part of your child's IEP.

Begin early by talking to your child and his/her teachers about achievable goals regarding potential schooling after high school, vocations, skills and interests of your child, as well as life skills, community involvement and ability to live outside the home in various settings.

Have an assessment of your child's vocational and life skills to help clarify what your child's current abilities are and what emerging skills need to be addressed now to achieve future goals.

Contact local agencies regarding applications for services and funding available to your child once he/she reaches the age of 21. Apply for and get on the waiting lists for CAP funding, residential services, vocational services and supported employment.

Start putting together a team of support people, including you, your child's current teacher, vocational rehabilitation counselors, case managers and therapists who can work towards helping your child achieve his/her goals.

Speak with an attorney specializing in estate planning to create a financial plan, including public and private funding sources so that your child is financially covered and decisions are made as to whom will care for your child in your absence.

Newsletter written by
Bethany Keene,
Graduate Assistant

Assisted by
Ruth Thomson,
Parent Support Coordinator

Edited by
Jemma Grindstaff, Ph.D.
Assistant Clinical Director

Ask the Therapist

How do I prepare my child to live independently?



Each individual with autism has unique strengths and weaknesses, and therefore requires support that is individualized in order to help them achieve their fullest potential. When considering your child's future, you may wonder about the amount of continued support that will be needed to help them live and function on their own. We asked several of our therapists for tips and ideas about strategies parents can use throughout the years in order to prepare their child for the greatest degree of independence possible.

My suggestion would be for families to buy the book "Preparing for Life" by Dr. Jed Baker. It is a great book that outlines the things you need to know to help prepare your child for the road to adulthood. You don't need to wait until your child is a teenager to start working on the many "must have" skills that are outlined in the book. Another good book is "The Social Skills Picture Book for High School and Beyond" also by Jed Baker. It shows in pictures many of the skills that are described in the Preparing for Life book. It is never too early to work on social and life skills. —Linda Varblow, M.S., Psychoeducational Therapist

Eyes on the Prize: I think that a key way for parents to plan for their child's eventual independence in adulthood is for them to think about their expectations for how their child will live and work as an adult. Even for those of you whose child is quite young, take time now and then to consider if he were to reach adulthood at his current level of independence, what kinds of supports would be necessary for your child to be successful and happy. Seeing a child in this light can spur parents and teachers to encourage increased independence while alerting everyone to skills that need to be taught. People with autism need assistance in leaving behind skills that were appropriate for childhood while they learn new skills and behaviors that will suit their teen and adult years. It can be helpful for parents to keep firmly in mind that a child with autism may not push away for independence and that parents will have to coax and teach for the level of independence they envision their child demonstrating as an adult. For folks with autism, independence in adulthood doesn't just happen - it must be planned for and taught.

—Elizabeth Byars, M.Ed., Psychoeducational Therapist

If you are thinking about residential options for your child, be sure to check out group homes in your area or across the state. There are multiple levels of support, from full-time care and supervision to providing daily or weekly supervision to folks who are more independent. Some residential programs are designed specifically for individuals with autism, while others serve individuals who have an array of mental health conditions. It is important to talk to the staff at each program, ask for a tour of the home, and most importantly, get on the waitlists of any programs in which you are interested. Even if your child's name is called and you are not ready, you can decline and ask to be put back on the list. Listed below are websites for some of the residential programs in our area:

Group Homes for the Autistic http://www.ghainc.org/GHA_Inc./Welcome.html

Residential Services, Inc. <http://rsi-nc.org/>

Carolina Living and Learning Center <http://www.teacch.com/regionalcenters/clc/clc.html>

—Katie Brady, MSW, P-LCSW, Psychoeducational Therapist

Independence promotes self-esteem and confidence, so it is important for parents to start finding ways to encourage this skill even during the preschool years. What can be misleading for parents is that children on the spectrum may not spontaneously strive for independence at an early age. Often what is more behaviorally compelling for them is to continue familiar routines, which since infancy have naturally dictated having the parent do most things for them. Although young children may not be able to complete all aspects of a self-help activity, parents can start with teaching them to complete one step of the activity and then slowly add on more responsibility. For example, capitalizing on a strength of putting things back where they belong, children can start with putting the toothbrush back in the holder, or clothes in the hamper, or dishes in the sink, or trash in the garbage. Using visual supports that are geared to the child's developmental level of understanding can also assist the child with gaining independence in completing the sequence of steps that are involved in daily living and play activities.

—Janet Martin, Psychoeducational Therapist

Resource Spotlight

The Supported Employment Program

The TEACCH Supported Employment program helps adults with autism find and maintain positions of employment that are both productive and fulfilling. Supported Employment began as a year-long program to demonstrate the application of TEACCH structured teaching approaches for adults with autism in a work-place setting. Finding a large need for its services, Supported Employment expanded beyond expectations and is still going strong more than 20 years later. Within the program, TEACCH strategies are used to make the work environment structured and predictable, and coworkers are educated about autism. To date, the Supported Employment program has served over 400 individuals and currently works with 170-200 people each week to help them maintain successful and satisfying positions of employment. A major factor in the program's success is no doubt due to its effort to match each individual's learning style and specific skills to the right job, the first time. This is evidenced by the program's 85-90% success rate – represented by individuals who remain in their jobs one year post-placement. Another exceptional strength and distinctive aspect of the Supported Employment program is the long-term support each client receives. Based on individual skills, interests, and needs, each client is placed in an employment position that is adapted to fit their needs and then receives on-going support from a job coach. There are different work models based on the level of support needed. From direct 1:1 support to weekly check-ins, the Supported Employment program accommodates individuals with a broad range of skills and needs. Clients of the Supported Employment program work in competitive employment positions with competitive wages and benefits. When considering such a service, an individual needs to have marketable skills and the ability to work for a duration of 1-1 ½ hours before taking a break. Work schedules can encompass a range of hours from 4-56 per week. If you or a family member is considering pursuing supported employment services, there are things that can be done now to increase the chance for success within a job setting. One of these is to work on improving social skills, which are often the biggest obstacle to maintaining a job for individuals with autism. By working to improve social skills now, a person can increase his/her chance of success within a job setting in the future. If you or a family member is interested in seeking out Supported Employment services, contact your local TEACCH center to find out which services are available in your area.

For more details about the Supported Employment Program and to see examples of the various work models available visit <http://www.teacch.com/supportedemployment.html>.

Sam's* Story

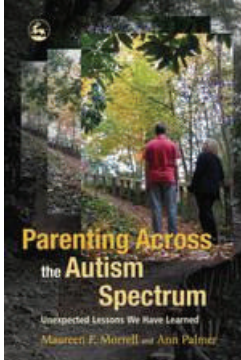


Sam's family had almost given up hope that he was employable. By his early twenties, Sam had been kicked out of several day programs due to “disruptive behavior.” Yet this gentle, tall 250-lb non-verbal man was a perfect match for a pair of jobs, with a 1:1 job coach to provide training and support. TEACCH Supported Employment staff were able to locate two positions for two hours each day. In the morning, Sam worked at a wholesale bakery smiling and humming to himself as he diced pounds and pounds of butter and cracked hundreds of eggs for pastry recipes. Just before lunch, Sam and his job coach traveled to a cafeteria where his job was to back up the dishroom staff during the lunch rush. He stood first on the line as trays stacked with dirty dishes flowed past him. As first on the line, Sam's job was to sort silverware and paper goods from these fast moving trays. Sam loved his jobs and was never disruptive at either workplace. After work each day, Sam enjoyed a brisk walk with his job coach before returning home for the evening, satisfied with a job well done.

*identifying information is changed to protect privacy

Recommended Reading

Parenting Across the Spectrum: Unexpected Lessons We Have Learned By Maureen F. Morrell and Ann Palmer



Maureen Morrell and Ann Palmer are parents of two very different children described as “on opposite ends of the spectrum.” In this book, they candidly account their family life experiences from the beginnings before the autism diagnosis on through adulthood. They openly share the feelings they experienced along the way, recognizing the uniqueness of their own situation, but also offering general advice and reassurance to all parents of children with autism. Maureen and Ann’s heartfelt recall of their emotional experiences and examples of both disastrous and triumphant moments with their sons offer readers a sense of support, encouragement, and most of all, compassion and hope. They vouch that there is reason amidst the chaos and offer hindsight advice on issues related to siblings, marriage, seeking respite relief, working with professionals, and developing vocational skills. Though the stories are in some ways quite different, there are common themes that offer valuable insights to all parents of children with autism.

Summer TEACCH Events

Girls’ Book Club - Meets 5-6:30 pm at a casual restaurant in Chapel Hill

Summer Dates: June 26, July 24, August 28

If interested, contact Katie Brady (katie_brady@med.unc.edu or 919-966-4783) or Carrie Leonardt (carrielee393@gmail.com).



Raleigh Adult Support Group—A group for adults with high-functioning autism or Asperger's Syndrome. Meets two Mondays a month from 6:30-7:30 pm in Raleigh. People who are interested in learning more about the group can contact Laurie Nederveen (lqnederveen@mac.com) or Michelle DeRamus (michelle_deramus@med.unc.edu).

The **Adult Support Group** and **Parents of Adults Support Group** will take a break over the summer and begin meeting again in September. The Parents of Adults support group generally meets the second Tuesday of each month. If interested, contact Elizabeth Byars (elizabeth_byars@med.unc.edu). The Adult Support Group will resume meeting August 31; the contacts for this group are Elif Merkler (merkler@med.unc.edu) and Katie Brady (katie_brady@med.unc.edu).

Community Events



Special Populations Dances - Extraordinary Ventures, Chapel Hill

Third Friday night of each month, 6:30-8:30 pm, for ages 18 & up; Fee: \$1.00 tip for the DJ
Sponsored by Orange County Parks & Recreation Department & Cross Disability Services.
Call 245-2660 for more information.

Special Populations Adult Open Play Basketball - Central Recreation Center Gym, Hillsborough

4th Friday of each month, 2:30-4:00pm, Ages: 18 & up; Free

Join us for a fun afternoon of basketball. Bring a bottle of water and athletic wear. If you enjoy watching, the groups always love a cheerleader. So whether you play or watch, come join us each month for a fun afternoon. For more info on either of these events, visit the Special Populations section of the Orange County Recreation and Parks website: http://www.co.orange.nc.us/recparcs/special_populations.asp

Bowling at Mardi Gras - Mardi Gras Bowling Alley, Tuesday, July 28

Two full games + shoe rental for \$8 a person, ages 15 & up

Put on by the Town of Carrboro Recreation and Parks Department Special Recreation

Programs: <http://www.ci.carrboro.nc.us/rp/gpsrSummer09.htm> Please call 918-7364 to register.

