

SUPPORTING DEAF STUDENTS WITH AUTISM AFTER HIGH SCHOOL

By

Dr. Christina Yuknis, Gallaudet University

Dr. Raschelle Theoharis, Gallaudet University

Introduction

As youth prepare to leave high school and enter college or the workforce, it is an exciting and stressful time for parents. This is especially true when the youth is deaf and has autism, since high school often provides many supports that may not be available in the community, workplace, or college.

This transition to post-secondary life is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA). Although IDEA requires transition plans for youth with disabilities who are at least 16 years of age, little research has been done on the transition needs of deaf youth, especially deaf youth with autism. This article will provide an overview of the transition process and offer tips for helping your child in the transition to adult life.

Transition Plans

Legally, a transition plan must be a part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) beginning the year the youth turns 16. However, it is recommended that transition planning begin earlier. The purpose of a transition plan is to help prepare youth for adult life and responsibilities, and it should account for the youth's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests. It is critical that the youth be actively involved in all aspects of the transition plan.

Transition plans include a number of services, which are defined as:
A coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and

functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities. (US Department of Education, 2007)

There is a wide range of services that may be included. Possible services that may be considered are academic instruction, related services, community-based experiences, vocational training, and independent living skill development.

IEP Teams should not only discuss transition plans for the school year, but they should also consider the summer months. Though the youth may not qualify for Extended School Year services, there are still many opportunities that could be beneficial and should be part of the transition discussion.

General Tips

This section will provide tips that apply to several areas of adult life. These tips can and should be taught and practiced frequently and in different settings to support generalization.

Practice communicating with familiar and unfamiliar people frequently. One of the greatest areas in which deaf children with autism struggle is communication, and this should be a significant part of the transition plan. "Communication and language concerns are central to a number of employment and transition issues for deaf students" (Theoharis & McKenzie, 2008 p.).

Build self-advocacy skills. Self-advocacy skills include expressing needs and wants, making decisions, having strategies to gather information, seeking assistance, and knowing rights and responsibilities. Without these skills, children will have limited educational or vocational opportunities. For deaf youth, it is critical to know their rights when it comes to interpreters, and they need to be taught how to request interpreting services when they need them. Self-advocacy skills are linked to more successful post-high school outcomes (Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

Provide opportunities to develop self-determination. Self-determination is the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, and exert authority over one's life. Youth with disabilities need explicit instruction in weighing options, and deaf youth with autism need additional attention on how to communicate those choices to others.

Participate in the Deaf community. Deaf youth with autism have significant communication and social needs. There are limited opportunities in the hearing community to meet both of these needs. Participating in the Deaf community gives them a social outlet that offers access to language.

5 Tips for Independent Living in the Community

Independent living skills are aspects of life people do daily and often take for granted. These skills need to be explicitly taught to deaf youth with autism in order for them to be successful adults. This section will provide tips to help prepare for adult life and responsibilities. These suggestions cover activities such as managing a household and participating in recreational living.

Develop strategies for managing money. Money management is a skill in which people without disabilities frequently struggle. For example, saving money to make a large purchase and managing credit cards. Money sense is an area that needs to be covered at home and school in order to encourage successful independent living. In addition, deaf children with autism need strategies for monitoring their bank accounts, using ATMs, setting a budget, and paying for items in a store or restaurant.

Learn how locate house. Finding a place to live is a very daunting task, and it is a complex process. Deaf children with autism need strategies for sifting through listings, making appointments to see apartments, and understanding contracts and leases. Part of locating the

perfect place to call home may also include selecting a roommate and establishing boundaries for living together.

Take a course in home economics. Home economics is more than just cooking and sewing, although those are important aspects of running a household. Home economics teaches other important household skills such as shopping, nutrition, meal planning, and budgeting. For deaf youth with autism, it is also important to include household safety in the course such as, turning off the stove, changing batteries in smoke detectors, and locking doors.

Develop good hygiene skills. Good hygiene includes brushing teeth, showering, using deodorant, and hand washing. Less obvious aspects of hygiene are visiting the dentist and doctor regularly, washing clothes, and using sanitary methods to prepare food.

Explore recreation and leisure activities. Having enjoyable activities to do during free time is an important way for people to unwind. Deaf children with autism need to explore and experiment with different types of activities that will encourage socialization in a safe environment.

5 Tips for the Workplace

For most individuals work is essential to a fulfilling livelihood, sense of worth and accomplishment, and overall quality of life. However, this is not the case for most individuals with disabilities. Even with the legal mandates, there is still a disproportionate number of students with disabilities that do not exit high school and experience employment that brings them satisfaction and allows them to have meaningful participation in society. Below are tips to encourage Deaf children with autism to take an active role in locating a job, applying, interviewing, and maintaining employment.

Set realistic goals for work. Deaf youth with autism need to gain an awareness of themselves and their abilities, interests, and values. They also need to begin developing a realistic understanding of career expectations. Many over or underestimate job requirements and are unable to match their skill sets to employment opportunities. Transition teams need to help individuals set attainable and realistic goals. If for example a child wants to become a doctor, but the transition team knows the child does not have ability to go to college, the team may suggest other jobs within a hospital or doctor's office that would more attainable (Levinson & Palmer, 2005).

Participate in community-based learning while in high school. The transition from high school to the workplace can seem baffling. Community-based learning offers on-the-job training, that helps individuals become familiar with the expectations of the work force, how to call in sick, follow directions, and socialize with co-workers. Participating in community-based learning while still in high school means that deaf youth with autism will have the support of his or her IEP team.

Use summer months to help develop job skills. Summer is a great opportunity to focus on developing job-readiness skills for youth with disabilities. In addition, there tends to be more varied experiences. It is a time when individuals can explore their interests, strengths, and preferences. Since the regular school year is over youth have greater flexibility in their schedules and are able to work additional hours. There is typically more time to emphasize and build the skills that the youth will need when entering the workforce.

Practice job-seeking. There are many intricate components to finding a job. Deaf youth with autism need to practice searching for jobs, completing applications, and answering interview questions. Each of these areas requires a different set of skills and knowledge. For

example, before going on an interview, it is important to have a conversation about how to dress for the event. Once a job has been obtained, youth will also need to know where to find necessary personal information such as photo identification, social security card, and birth certificate.

Develop occupational skills. Work environments have their own set of underlying rules, both explicit and implicit, that must be followed. It is important that these rules and customs are clearly reviewed with the deaf student with autism. Several topics to discuss include calling in sick, requesting time off, knowing when to take a break, understanding appropriate topics to discuss, recognizing professional and social boundaries, attaining the proper dress code for work, and giving and following directions.

5 Tips for Success in College

For youth who decide to attend college, the transition can be overwhelming. Research indicates youth with disabilities encounter a number of barriers when they enter college. In addition, the drop-out rate for these students is much higher than for youth without disabilities (Wolf, 2006). To ease the transition process and increase the chances of success, follow the tips outlined below.

Take a college course while in high school. The transition from high school to college can be a scary one. To help become familiar with how college courses operate, encourage the youth to take a course while in high school. Deaf youth with autism will still have the support of his or her IEP team when trying to navigate things such as registering for courses, understanding the syllabus, studying for exams, joining study groups, advocating for needs, and addressing difficulties with the professor.

Take a study skills class while in high school. Learning in college is different from learning in high school. In high school, there is a lot of support from members of the IEP team. In college, students are expected to do much more independently. Having study skills in place will make the academic side of college smoother.

Know the rights of college student. College students with disabilities have different rights and protections than children in K-12 schools. The biggest difference is that IEPs are not a part of the college experience. In fact, IDEA no longer applies when a student leaves high school; students are protected from discrimination by Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act and by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Colleges and universities are required to provide accommodations for students with disabilities, but they do not develop plans or goals for students. Every college or university has a disability support services office, and it is important to connect with them before you arrive for classes.

Take advantage of tutoring services. Colleges and universities frequently offer some type of academic or tutoring service for students who need additional support in their courses. Encourage youth to seek out the center, ask about the types of services available, and how get started before the services are needed.

Get involved. A significant part of the college experience is social. There are a variety of ways to be involved on a college campus such as fraternities and sororities, student government, clubs and organizations, and athletics. Encourage youth to explore and participate in activities related to their interests.

Conclusion

Though little research has been done on the supports deaf youth with autism need to transition from high school into independent living, workplace, and college, this article offered

tips to support their move into adult life. Just remember that the transition process is all about the youth, and he or she must be an active participant in all aspects of the plan.

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