

Post-Secondary College Tool Kit



Choosing a college or other postsecondary schooling option that is right for you and preparing for the transition paves the way to success. This tool kit provides you with steps to finding a good college match and planning for your unique needs, focusing on the following options:

- Four Year College or University
- Two Year College or Community College
- Vocational-Technical Schools and Certificate Programs

This tool kit is an abridged version of the complete Post-Secondary/College Tool Kit found on milestones.org.

Milestones provides consultation services to all family members, professionals, and self-advocates. Services include connecting participants to resources and providing general information and assistance. We also offer a free Autism Help Desk. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact us at 216.464.7600.

Part 1. How can you prepare for post-secondary education?

Transitioning to college can feel overwhelming, but building independent living and academic skills gradually throughout the teen years helps smooth the way.

How does college differ from high school?

- **Expectations of independence.** Most colleges expect students to communicate directly with their professors, teachers and college staff, and to be prepared to live independently (unless commuting from home) as well as handle their academics independently. This includes waking up, getting to class on time, handling daily living needs, and keeping track of assignments.
- **Disability services vary widely.** While colleges are required to have some disability services, the breadth and depth of them vary. Some schools have more supportive services or partner with special programs that provide extensive support usually for an additional fee. Other schools, including the most selective academically, may provide limited disability services. Exploring what those differences are based on your needs is vital to finding the right match.
- **Colleges follow the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), not the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that high schools abide by.** FERPA is a federal law that governs the privacy of student records and limits what can be shared with parents of students who are 18 or older without written permission from the student. This is a helpful comparison of ADA vs. IDEA from Eastern Oklahoma State University:
<https://eossc.edu/sites/www/Uploads/files/Downloads/IDEA%20vs%20ADA.pdf>

Skills to develop include:

- Self-regulation, the ability to express emotions and manage behaviors in healthy ways.

- Personal hygiene and self-care (i.e. getting enough sleep, preparing or accessing nutritional food, trimming nails, washing and combing hair, doing laundry)
- Health management (knowing when to seek medical care, take cold medicine, or to rest)
- Executive functioning
- Living with people you don't know and sharing a space with others
- Time management (i.e. homework vs. home time)
- Leisure interests
- Self-advocacy, including communication skills and the ability to reach out to the appropriate people when needed (i.e. Resident Advisor (RA), professors).

Part 2. What are the best ways to teach as much self-advocacy and self-management as possible in the years leading up to graduation?

- The student should be involved in their own IEP meetings starting at the age of 14.
- Students may benefit from attending overnight camp(s) starting early in their adolescence. It helps to develop skills for independence and allows them to become comfortable with different living situations.
- Another option is attending a college prep program through a college catering to students with special needs, such as the ones Notre Dame College in South Euclid, OH, and Mercyhurst University in Erie, PA, offer.
- Students should begin handling teacher communication and the relationship as a way to prepare for the transition to college. When the student has an issue or question that arises in school, coaching them to speak with their teacher about it will help them prepare to talk directly with professors and instructors at their college.
- Gradually managing homework and schedule independently. For example, do you:
 - Wake up early enough on weekdays, allowing enough time to get to school promptly?
 - Have your backpack ready with everything you need?
 - Have a system such as online tasks list and calendar to keep track of important assignments and deadlines?
 - Turn in your homework on time?
- If you take regular medications, do you take them on time without someone reminding you at the proper time and dosages? Do you know how to refill your prescriptions?

Part 3. Transition Planning with Your High School Team

- If you are on an IEP, make sure college is included in future goals and transition planning is documented early on.
- During the senior year of high school get an updated Evaluation Team Report or ETR and IEP with accommodations that might be used in post-secondary education. List what those are (i.e. extended time, alternate test locations). Identify the types of supports you might need. While colleges do not use IEPs, they will look at these documents to help determine the accommodations they will provide.
- It is important to understand the difference between an accommodation and a modification. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) only allows for accommodations in college. If the individual had a modified curriculum, that would not carry over into a college accommodation. Here is a useful chart

and highlights of the differences between accommodations and modifications, courtesy of Understood.org: <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/the-difference-between-accommodations-and-modifications>

- Seek shadowing, internship or work opportunities while in high school during the summers. In senior year, many high schools offer a senior search, internship or project option to do for a few weeks.

Part 4. Potential Accommodations Colleges May Offer

While every college is required to provide some basic disability accommodations, the depth and breadth of what is offered varies widely.

Be sure you understand the procedures for how to access each type of accommodation you are given. For example, are you required to notify a professor within a certain number of hours or days of the class missed so you can use your flexible attendance accommodation?

Listed below are a few of the possible accommodations you can ask about, understanding that they may not all be available at your university:

- Testing accommodations providing a separate quiet testing location, extended time and/or scribing or using a computer to take the exam.
- Access to professor or teacher's PowerPoints or notes.
- Accessing textbooks as e-books or using assistive technology such as listening to an audio version of your textbook spoken out loud. The college disability office may provide advice on different software, apps or tools for different needs such as auditory processing issues.
- Access to a disabilities officer or counselor to meet with regularly for advice on adapting to college and being successful academically and socially.
- Social or support group for people with autism which may have a facilitator to focus on social and academic skills.

Part 5. What are tips for college orientation and the beginning of school?

- Walk around campus learning where things are such as the disability office, campus bookstore and student union. Once you have your courses selected, walk your schedule at least twice before school starts so you are confident about where you are going.
- Schedule consistent meetings with the disability office to ensure any problems can be handled in a timely fashion. Begin the first meeting with asking how you will access accommodations for classes and for residential living and activities, if needed.
- Before you and your parent(s) say goodbye for the semester, visit the disability office and have them sign a consent form so the office can talk to them as your parent(s).
- Make sure you understand whether you need to give each of your professors or teachers official notification of your accommodations from the disability office with paper forms or through an online portal.

- Visit each of your professors or teachers during their office hours to introduce yourself briefly and find out a bit about their class and guidelines. Go to office hours whenever you need extra help and before each exam to get advice on how best to study. Ask if there are copies of previous midterms and finals available to give you a feel for what past exams looked like.
- Explore clubs and activities that interest you and other opportunities to socialize in ways that are most comfortable for you. If commuting, try to join one club or group to stay social and active on campus. Some universities have special services for commuting students.
- Transitioning to college is an exciting, busy time that includes nervousness and anxiety. Learning how to plan your time in what may be the most independent environment you have experienced can be stressful. Take advantage of college counseling and academic supports. Use coping strategies that have comforted and relaxed you in the past. Sensory toys and items like squeeze balls can be helpful.

Part 6. How can I select the best school or program option?

- If your high school has a guidance counselor who can help you with the college process, meet with them by the beginning of junior year to ask for advice.
- Use these two college search tools to narrow your list based on location, size, majors, services, cost, etc.:
 - **The K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Differences** - Borrow this from your local library through inter-library loan if you can. This book is your go-to resource on what services each college in the country offers.
<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/586331/the-kandw-guide-to-colleges-for-students-with-learning-differences-14th-edition-by-the-princeton-review-marybeth-kravets-and-imy-wax/9780525567899/%5D>
 - Visit the National Center for Education Statistics College Navigator
<http://nces.ed.gov/collegenavigator/> online to utilize their college navigator tool. It allows you to search colleges by everything besides their special needs programs. Location, majors, graduation rates, size. This is an unbiased source to use when searching for a college or program.
- Many high schools also provide all students with Naviance, a college and career readiness online tool.
- It can be helpful to visit the college's websites to research further. Use the Guiding Questions for Post-Secondary Education to keep track of the answers for each college you research.
<https://www.milestones.org/files/assets/guiding-questions-postsecondary-education.pdf>
- If you are looking for a technical or vocational program, visit the Ohio Technical Schools Directory.
<https://www.ohiohighered.org/students/find-a-career/career-technical-professional-and-vocational-schools>
- You may also want to check on the new Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD) program [<https://ood.ohio.gov/>] Ohio College2Careers offered at 15 public colleges and universities in Ohio to help students with disabilities. <https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/ood/individuals-with-disabilities/services/students-14-plus>

A Note about Special ASD College Programs

There are a growing number of colleges and universities that have ASD specific programs. They usually have an additional cost but have enhanced supports and services. This is different than non-degree programs a number of universities are offering for students with ASD.

This website [<http://collegeautismspectrum.com/collegeprograms/>] provides a list of college programs that have support services.

When and how should I plan my college visits?

- Once you have selected a handful of schools and programs that you feel is the right fit, it is now time to plan a visit.
- Start visiting colleges junior year of high school including the summer before senior year and into the fall of senior year.
- Plan a college campus tour or attend the schools/programs open house to get a better feel for what that campus life is like.
- Before your visit, schedule a meeting with the **Disability Services Director** to make sure that you and your teen are comfortable with that person. We recommend that the student run the meeting with the director. (They may need some coaching first to feel comfortable doing so). Running the meeting means describing the supports that the student has needed in the past and what their area of special needs are. Allowing the student to run the meeting is important for building the self-advocacy skills they will need in college.
- You can utilize our Guiding Questions for Post-Secondary Education for ideas of questions you want to ask during this meeting. <https://www.milestones.org/files/assets/guiding-questions-postsecondary-education.pdf>
- We also suggest becoming familiar with all of the supports offered at the school/program so that you can connect with them as needed. These would include tutors, math and writing centers, study groups, “success coaches”, social groups, additional ASD support programs, etc.
- You should visit the departments of interest and talk to their professors/teachers and students. You can also request to sit in on a class and talk with students prior or following. You could also ask the disability services department to pair you with a fellow student for the tour, and if possible to speak with a fellow student who is accessing disability services to hear about their experience at the college.
- If you will be living in a dorm, you can usually take a campus tour that includes seeing a typical dorm.

Part 7: I know what school(s)/program(s) I want to apply to, how do I go about doing that?

- The application process is different for each college, university or program. Make sure you have a good understanding of what is needed to apply, including high school transcripts, teacher recommendations and what essays you will need to write.
- Start working on your college applications early, ideally the summer before senior year of high school. Keep track of application deadlines carefully to plan ahead. Also note that many colleges give preferential admissions to those who apply early.
- Draft your college application essay(s) the summer before your senior year of high school, if your potential colleges require them. Look at the essay prompts and think through what topic and approach you want to use. Get feedback from teachers, your guidance counselor, and leave plenty of time for revisions.
- Many colleges require you to start school at the beginning of the school year, not mid-year.
- Most colleges require a minimum SAT/ACT test score to be accepted into their school. After taking a sample test or the real test the first time, you may want to work on college test prep to try to improve your SAT/ACT scores for your preferred school or program. Be realistic about how much a test score is likely to improve. Some colleges take your best SAT or ACT test score, while some schools average multiple test scores.
- Work as a team on the application, references and transcripts to make sure that you turn them in on time. Allow plenty of time for school staff, teachers and guidance counselor to provide any needed information or recommendations.
- Prepare for the cost of applications which may influence how many colleges you apply to. Some colleges may waive the application fee in various circumstances such as if you ask while visiting the college. Ask your guidance counselor for advice for the specific colleges you are interested in.

Part 8: I have been accepted to a college/program! What do I need to do next?

- Complete your high school year successfully. Being accepted to a college/program does not guarantee admission if you are not able to graduate high school. Stay on top of your high school assignments and preparing for tests.
- If you have been accepted into more than one college, take time to make a list of how each school ranks with one another in terms of what are priorities for you.
- Sign up for the college's admitted student visits. Overnight stays, observing classes and talking to more students and professors will help you decide which is the best college for you.
- Send in an acceptance letter to the school/program of your choice, a deposit, and any other required items. Carefully read your financial aid letter that tells what you are being offered that may be a combination of scholarships that do not need to be paid back and loans that will and what the terms for payment and interest rate are.

- Begin to plan for the financial needs based on the aid provided by the school. Meet with a financial aid officer at the college for assistance. Make sure you understand any forms before you sign them.

Part 9: What are tips for starting the college transition?

Starting Spring and Summer of High School Senior Year

- Register with your college's disability services office, providing them with a copy of the most recent Evaluation Team Report (ETR) and Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The college disability office may require a letter from your medical professional that provides your official diagnosis of autism and any other medical conditions and how they may impact your functioning in school and/or living on campus. This letter can help pave the way for receiving accommodations.
- Schedule a meeting with the disability office to ensure you are properly registered with them, that they have all the documentation they need and to find out which accommodations and services you can receive and how to access them. Establish who your main contact is including if you have a disability staffer you can turn to for counseling.
- If your college does not offer an accommodation you feel you need, ask if it is possible. Check out this list of potential accommodations to help you think of things you can ask for. [See accommodations list below]
- Watch for various forms the college/school is likely to ask you to complete over the summer, usually through a secure online portal with a user ID and password. They are likely to send you reminders via email.
- If you are requesting housing accommodations like having a single dorm room (rather than having a roommate), ensure you are clear on the process and what you need to do. This usually involves both the disability and housing offices.
- Ask Disability Services if they offer priority registration so that you can register earlier and get the classes you need.
- Find out when class registration for the first semester is and who you can meet with for advice on courses to take, and online registration and useful web pages to help you plan. Registration for fall semester may be early in the summer depending on the school.
- Think about your capacity for class load in terms of how many and which kinds of classes you can handle, especially at the beginning when you are adjusting to school. Do you have a timeline for how fast you want/need to graduate that will be a factor in your number of credit hours per semester? How many credit hours minimum per semester you need to take in order to satisfy you loan or scholarship requirements?
- Find out if your school offers counseling services which can be helpful during stressful times including the transition, how to access them and whether there is a cost or a limit to how many sessions are provided.

- Find out when college orientation is held and if you need to register for specific events. If college is out of town, check on dorm accommodations for the orientation or if your family will travel together and stay in a hotel.
- Consider transportation to and around campus. If you do not drive, will you take public buses? Are there campus shuttles? You can also practice using an Uber or Lyft service.
- Get to know your campus, practice how you will get there and to your specific class locations once you know them. Plan your routine and how long it takes to walk from building to building.
- Decide on your meal plan. Will you eat all your meals in campus dining halls or will you want to have some food in your dorm? Check out the varied dietary options and where they are offered.
- Start shopping now! What are things that may be of particular importance to make college life more comfortable and successful? Perhaps this means making sure that you have an area rug for the dorm room if your teen is extremely bothered by cold floors. Or this could be making highly organized binders and folders to help deal with possible executive functioning issues. Sensory toys and items like squeeze balls may be helpful.
- Work on independent living skills, for example, doing laundry, budgeting spending money, taking any routine medications on a schedule and waking up on time. Try to keep your dorm room organized and clean so you can find things and feel comfortable.
- If you have prescriptions, make sure you have a plan for getting them during the school year, especially if you are away from home. Also for making doctors appointments if there are specialists you see regularly.
- Meet with your college's Student Health Services to share your medical history and any issues you are concerned about. Is there information they should know about your medications, co-existing medical conditions, allergies, etc. ahead of time? Does the Student Health Service provide basic routine care such as for sinus infections, testing for strep throat, providing flu shots and do they charge for it? Is there a way to have medicine or soup delivered if I get a cold?

Part 10: Possible Accommodations

While every college is required to provide some basic disability accommodations, the depth and breadth of what is offered varies widely.

Be sure you understand the procedures for how to access each type of accommodation you are given. For example, for flexible attendance, are you required to notify a professor within how many hours or days of the class missed that you needed to use your flexible attendance accommodation? To receive an air conditioning unit in your dorm room, how does that unit get ordered by which department and do you need to follow up? These are possible accommodations you can ask about, understanding that they may not all be available at your university:

- Testing accommodations providing a separate quiet testing location, extended time and/or scribing or using a computer to take the exam.

- Single dorm room without a roommate. The single room may be in a suite that shares a bathroom. Note that a single dorm room usually costs significantly more than a shared double.
- Air conditioning unit for your dorm room if the dorm is not air conditioned.
- Access to professor or teacher's PowerPoints or notes.
- Does the college have any lectures videotaped for viewing later? This can be helpful for students who benefit from watching lectures additional times or certain segments on concepts they are struggling with. If not, ask if you can audio record the class.
- Accessing textbooks as e-books or using assistive technology such as listening to an audio version of your textbook spoken out loud. The college disability office may provide advice on different software, apps or tools for different needs such as auditory processing issues.
- Ability to drink water during class, or food if there isn't a sufficient break between classes for lunch.
- Transportation service for those with disabilities in addition to regular college shuttle, sometimes available within a certain amount of time and/or by setting up a schedule.
- Access to a disabilities officer or counselor to meet with regularly for advice on adapting to college and being successful academically and socially.
- Social or support group for people with autism which may have a facilitator to focus on social and academic skills.
- Priority registration giving you earlier time slot to register to provide best opportunity possibility to get the courses you need and want to take. You will also want to think through the best time slots for your needs.
- If there is a P.E. requirement and that poses challenges for you, ask if they offer an exemption or a "no sweat" course replacement option. You may need a doctor's note for this.
- Many colleges offer academic support including free peer tutoring and study groups, in addition to professor/teacher office hours, T.A. (teacher assistants who are usually graduate students) study sessions, and practice exams.

Part 11: What are tips for college orientation and the beginning of school?

- Walk around campus learning where things are such as the disability office, campus bookstore and student union. Once you have your courses selected, walk your schedule at least twice before school starts so you are confident about where you are going.
- Learn what your meal options are in relationship to where your classes and dorm are. If appropriate, which food options are part of your campus meal plan? If you have tight turn around time between classes, ask if there are quick eating options nearby such as a boxed/bagged to-go lunch.
- Schedule consistent meetings with the disability office to ensure any problems can be handled in a timely fashion. Begin the first meeting with asking how you will access accommodations for classes and for residential living and activities, if needed.
- Before you and your parent(s) say goodbye for the semester, visit the disability office and have them sign a consent form to talk to them as your parent(s).

- Make sure you understand how to access each of your accommodations and whether you need to give each of your professors or teachers official notification from the disability office of them with paper forms or through an online portal.
- If a roommate is assigned, get to know them and discuss responsibilities and expectations. Try to contact them ahead of school starting.
- If you are getting a single room as an accommodation, ensure that there are planned ways for you to regularly interact with others so that you don't end up sitting in your dorm room all semester.
- Plan on buying or renting each of your textbooks and if available, whether you prefer them in printed vs. e-book version. Some schools offer an accommodation to obtain books in e-version or through adaptive technology, which usually starts with asking your disability services office.
- Visit each of your professors or teachers during their office hours to introduce yourself briefly and find out a bit about their class and guidelines. Go to office hours whenever you need extra help and before each exam to get advice on how best to study. Ask if there are copies of previous midterms and finals available to give you a feel for what past exams looked like.
- Think about your personal needs as you start attending classes, such as wearing comfortable clothes, having a water bottle and snacks, etc.
- Explore clubs and activities that interest you and other opportunities to socialize in ways that are most comfortable for you. If commuting, try to join one club or group to stay social and active on campus. Some universities have special services for commuting students.
- Balance time for studying, social activities and quiet time to unwind in addition to your time in classes. Think about what works for your needs and best functioning while meeting your school requirements and goals.
- Plan your sleep schedule so that you get ideally 7 to 8 hours of sleep a night. It can be tempting to stay up late whether studying, socializing or gaming in the college environment, but will you be able to get to your first class on time and function well the next day?
- Transitioning to college is an exciting, busy time that includes nervousness and anxiety. Learning how to plan your time in what may be the most independent environment you have experienced can be stressful. Take advantage of college counseling and academic supports. Use coping strategies that have comforted and relaxed you in the past. Sensory toys and items like squeeze balls can be helpful.

Additional information:

Milestones has Guiding Questions (<https://www.milestones.org/resources/guiding-questions-for-a-new-resource>) that can help you determine if the college or university you are interested in will work collaboratively with you to ensure long-term success. This printable guide can go with you to an appointment and prompt you with questions that can help you make a decision.

General College Guides

Finding Your Way: A College Guide for Students on the Spectrum (downloadable guide) by the Organization for Autism Research <https://researchautism.org/findingyourway/>

Accessible College: A Guide for Students with Disabilities, Part I by Red Tree House, a program of the Ronald McDonald House of Cleveland <https://www.redtreehouse.org/content/accessible-college-a-guide-for-students-with-disabilities>

Navigating College: A Handbook on Self Advocacy Written for Autistic Students from Autistic Students, from ASAN, the Autistic Self Advocacy Network <http://www.navigatingcollege.org/download.php>

A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, United States Department of Education <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/transition/products/postsecondary-transition-guide-2017.pdf>

Executive Functioning

Executive Function Skills by CHADD (Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder) <https://chadd.org/about-adhd/executive-function-skills/>

Executive Function & Self-Regulation by Harvard University Center on the Developing Child <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/executive-function/>

Understanding Executive Functioning Issues by Understood.org <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/understanding-executive-functioning-issues>

What Are Executive Functioning Skills? by Understood.org <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-thinking-differences/child-learning-disabilities/executive-functioning-issues/what-is-executive-function>

Executive Functions by National Center for Biotechnology Information <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4084861/>

General Teen and Transition to College Resources

Post-Secondary/College planning from Milestones.org <https://www.milestones.org/get-started/for-individuals/post-secondarycollege>

Grown and Flown Blog <https://grownandflown.com/>

Your Teen for Parents <https://yourteenmag.com/teens-college>

How to Succeed at College: Congratulations, You're in College! Now What? From NPR <https://www.npr.org/2019/08/30/755801847/congratulations-youre-in-college-now-what>

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors, and may not reflect the official position of Milestones Autism Resources. The publication is designed to provide guidance concerning the subject matter covered. It is published with the understanding that Milestones Autism Resources is not engaged in the rendering of legal, medical, or professional services. If legal, medical, or other expert advice or assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.