Assessment of college readiness in transitional aged youth with autism

Many people with autism spectrum disorder can be successful in college, though some will require accommodations or supports to excel. Understanding areas of need starts with taking stock of supports in high school being offered by the school, family or outside clinicians. Three domains of functioning should be specially considered:

**Domains of functioning in college**

**Academic**
- Motivation and interest in pursuing college
- Abilities with attention/focus and organization/study skills
- Presence of uneven academic abilities (for instance excellence in sciences but struggles in languages)
- Restricted/strong interests that may distract from academics

**Self-care**
- Attention to hygiene, healthy eating and keeping living space clean
- Maintaining a consistent bedtime and waking on time for class
- Regular taking of medications and going to doctor/therapist appointments
- Ability to navigate spread out college campus (classrooms, dorm, dining hall, social area)

**Social**
- Level of interest in social relationships and initiative in seeking out friendships
- Ability to navigate conflict and self-advocate with teachers or roommates
- Understanding of boundaries in social relationships and expectations of behavior in the classroom

In the years leading up to college consider a family discussion of these areas to identify things to work on and build insight into areas where help is needed. Family may need to taper down some of their level of support to identify where youth need help.

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Areas of support to consider

College provided

- **Disability Resource Center**: Organize assistance with accommodations such as note taking, assistive technology and single dormitory rooms. Can the school waive academic requirements for subjects that may be areas of concern?
- **Student Mental Health Centers**: What types of support are provided (therapy, medication management)? How available are therapists?
- **Academic Support Services**: Do schools have executive functioning supports for building study skills including making study schedules? Do professors provide office hours?
- **Student Support Groups**: Does the school have autism or neurodiverse student support groups?
- **Special interest groups**: Are there student clubs/groups that align with areas of interest? This can help with developing friendships and avoiding isolation!

Outside services

- **Tutoring**: May be focused on specific academic areas or more generally on organization/executive functioning study skills.
- **College Navigator**: Clinician that assists students with college functioning including study skills, advocacy for accommodations and liaison between student and school administration. In Massachusetts, may be provided by the Department of Developmental Services.
- **Coaching**: Work toward aiding with independence skills around self-care and self-advocacy.
- **Outpatient Therapist**: Helpful for identifying areas of challenge as they come up and discussion around navigating social challenges.
- **College Training Programs**: Day programs or residential programs. Maybe taken during a gap year/semester in order to prepare for college and identify needed supports.

Consider alternative trajectories for college other than the traditional 4-year experience in the dorms far from home. Commuter student status can be helpful when self-care skills are an area of concern. Taking gap years to work part time and develop independence skills can be invaluable. There is no “one way” to do college. Everyone takes their own route!