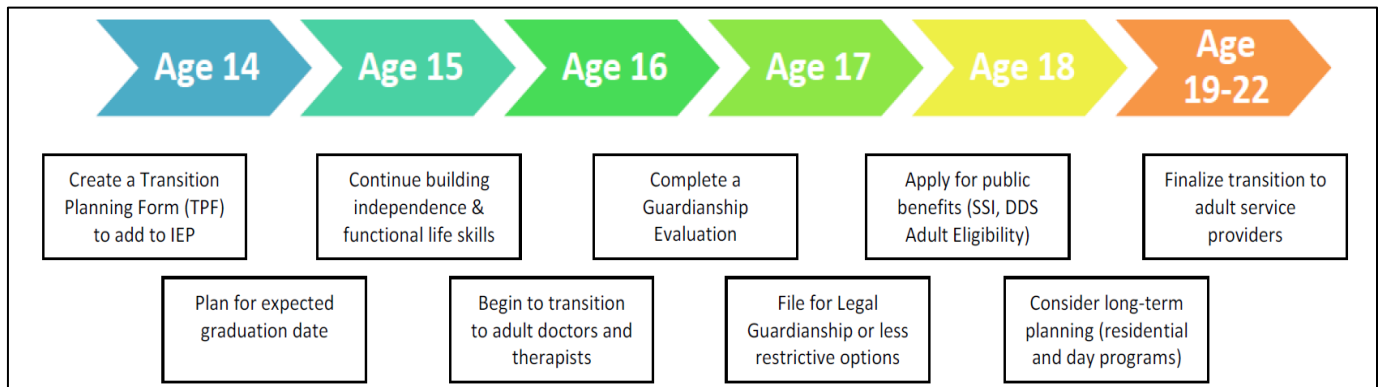


“They Grow Up So Fast!” - Transitioning From School-Age to Adulthood

The transition to adulthood can be a challenging time for parents and their kids. For parents of children with autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability, and/or other neurodevelopmental disabilities, this time can be especially challenging to navigate as it means a transition from school-based services to adult services and supports. In Massachusetts, under special education law, transition planning officially begins when a child turns 14 years old, however, many families find it useful to begin thinking about transition planning even earlier. Learning about the process empowers you and your family to understand your options and make the best decisions for your family.

Transition planning is a multi-year process (see timeline below) that will involve many people, including you as the parent or guardian, your child’s IEP team members, your child’s treatment providers, community agencies, private consultants, and, most importantly, your child themselves. It is always helpful to discuss your plans and any concerns you have, with your child’s healthcare providers and teachers and to include them in the planning process.



General timeline for Transition Planning starting at age 14 years old.

Domains to Consider When Transition Planning

As you learn about the process of transition planning, you will encounter many different “domains”. Here are some areas you may want to learn about.

Legal and financial planning

- In Massachusetts, 18 years old is the “age of majority”, meaning the age that your child is legally considered an adult, with adult rights and responsibilities.
- There are many different types of arrangements for continued parental involvement, depending upon what is best for your child’s needs. For example, parents may obtain the legal authority to participate in decision-making for their adult child. There are also

different levels of guardianship and “Supported Decision Making,” which is in the process of becoming law in Massachusetts.

Special education

- Federal law (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act/IDEA) requires schools to provide transition services.
- Transition Assessments occur after a child turns 14 years old and provide a comprehensive picture of a student’s interests, strengths, challenges, and needs for supports and services. Transition Assessments inform the transition services and supports on the student’s IEP.
- The Transition Planning Form (TPF) is a tool that must be revisited annually by the IEP team beginning at age 14, as part of a discussion of disability-related needs and goals. The TPF informs the student’s IEP.
- A comprehensive neuropsychological evaluation after age 16 can provide updated diagnostic, cognitive, and adaptive functioning profiles that will help inform and support transition planning, including eligibility criteria for public benefits from state agencies.
- Chapter 688 (known as the “Turning 22 law”) provides a planning process for young adults with disabilities who are on an IEP and who will require adult services when they leave special education at age 22, or earlier. The referral to the adult agency ensures a transition planning process and alerts the state of the need for funding.

Accessing public benefits and state agencies

Below are some examples of government benefits and programs that parents will learn about during transition planning:

- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits
- Medicaid (MassHealth) insurance (automatically enrolled if eligible for and obtain SSI)
- Department of Developmental Services (DDS), the state agency that provides a range of supports for adults who have intellectual impairment and/or autism spectrum disorder (e.g., community, day, family support, residential, and employment supports)
- Department of Mental Health (DMH) provides a range of supports and services for adults with mental illness who meet eligibility criteria
- Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)
- Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH).

Vocational and employment supports

- Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) helps individuals with disabilities to live and work independently.
- MRC is responsible for Vocational Rehabilitation, Community Living, and Eligibility determination for Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI).

Housing

- The Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly known as Section 8 Housing, is the federal government's program for assisting low-income families, the disabled, and the elderly to afford housing. Participants can choose housing that meets the requirements of the program and receive housing vouchers to offset housing costs.
- Local Housing authorities, like the Boston Housing Authority or the Cambridge Housing Authority, support housing needs for their geographic areas and often provide vouchers for Section 8.
- State and Federal Programs provide housing options or financial assistance towards housing (e.g., DDS provides residential options, Massachusetts Alternative Housing Voucher Program provides rental assistance to people with disabilities under the age of 60, who either live in, or are eligible to live in elderly/disabled state-assisted public housing)
- Skill building and support (home care programs through MassHealth: Personal Care Assistance or Adult Family Care)
- There are currently seven housing models in Massachusetts, as illustrated in this [infographic](#) from [Autism Housing Pathways](#).

Workshops at the Lurie Center for Autism

Family Support Clinician, Julie O'Brien, LMHC, regularly holds workshops as part of the Lurie Center's [Parent and Caregiver Workshop series](#) to help families understand the transition process and transition planning.

- Transition to Adult Services workshop
 - The workshop is appropriate for caregivers whose children are 13 years of age and older. It is held monthly via zoom (\$35 attendance fee).
- Guardianship workshops (101-104)
 - The Guardianship 101 workshop is appropriate for caregivers whose children are 15 years of age and older who would like to learn about legal decision-making options when their child turns 18. This workshop is held bi-monthly via zoom (\$35 attendance fee).

Resources

We encourage you to educate yourself about the transition process. Listed below are some of our favorite resources, many of which have been translated into multiple languages:

- Books/Handouts (some are available online):
 - [Legal Planning for Special Needs in Massachusetts \(Attorney Barbara Jackins\)](#)

- [Special Needs Planning Guide, 2nd Edition \(Cynthia Haddad & John Nadworny/ Affinia Financial Group\)](#)
 - [Turning 18 Checklist - Autism Housing Pathways](#)
 - [Coming of Age in Massachusetts: A Legal Resource Guide 3rd Ed \(Fletcher Tilton, LLC\)](#)
 - [Autism Commission Transition Resource Guide](#)
 - [The Road Forward and Transition Fact Sheets \(Department of Developmental Services, DDS\)](#)
 - [Transition Information Fact Sheets](#)
- Web Resources:
 - [The Link Center – Federation for Children with Special Needs \(fcsn.org\)](#)
 - [Got Transition- Health Care Transition \(HCT\)](#)
 - [Exceptional Lives: Transition to Adulthood Guide](#)
 - [Federation for Children with Special Needs \(Family Guides to Transition Service in Massachusetts\)](#)
 - [Guardianship & Conservatorship of Incapacitated Persons | Mass.gov](#)
 - [Massachusetts | Supported Decision Making](#)
 - [The Arc of Massachusetts - Achieve With Us](#)
 - [Homepage - Autism Housing Pathways](#)
- Additional Special Education Resources:
 - [Disability Law Center: “Planning for Life After Special Education” A Transition Services Online Manual](#)
 - [Transition Services at NESCA – NESCA \(nescanewton.com\)](#)
 - [Video Resources – NESCA \(nescanewton.com\)](#)

Given the number of factors to consider, it is normal to feel overwhelmed during transition planning. While the process can feel daunting, one of the best things you can do as a parent is to start learning about the process early and to understand you are not alone in the process. There are many resources out there, and we encourage you to attend Lurie Center workshops when they are appropriate for your family. Workshops are a great way to ask questions about the process and to connect with other parents who are navigating the transition process with their child.