

Transitioning From School to Adulthood: A Guide for Families & Caregivers

February 19, 2026



Introduction



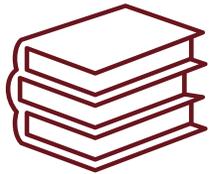
Jessica Kuss
Director of
Community Programs

Mission

*NDSS is creating a world where individuals with
Down syndrome thrive.*

NDSS Core Pillars

NDSS supports and advocates for the Down syndrome community by focusing on four key pillars:



**Resources
& Support**



Research



**Advocacy
& Policy**

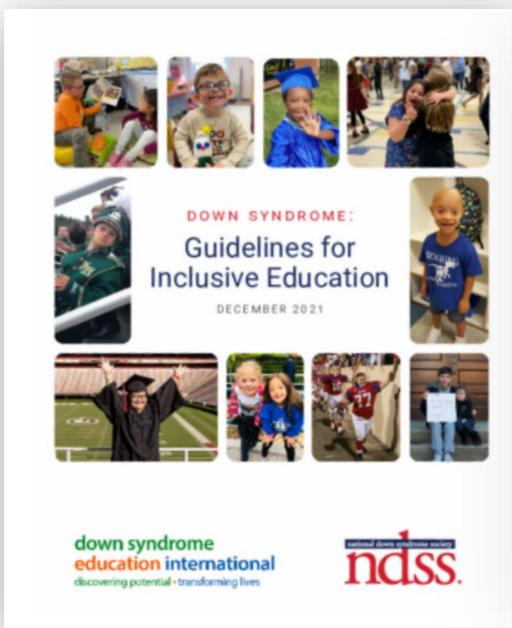


**Community
Engagement**

NDSS Education Program

Education Resources & Support

- Inclusive Education Guidelines
- Transition Guide
- Self-Advocate IEP Tips

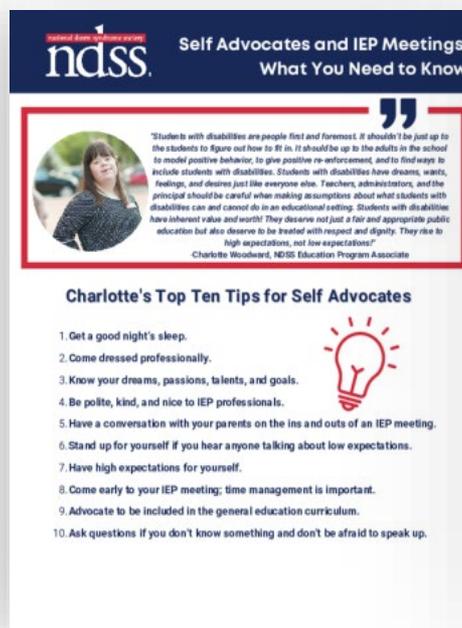


DOWN SYNDROME:
Guidelines for
Inclusive Education
DECEMBER 2021

down syndrome
education international
discovering potential • transforming lives

national down syndrome society
ndss

The brochure cover features a collage of photos showing diverse children and young adults with Down syndrome in various settings, including classrooms, sports, and social gatherings. The title is prominently displayed in the center, with the date 'DECEMBER 2021' below it. Logos for 'down syndrome education international' and 'national down syndrome society ndss' are at the bottom.



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Self Advocates and IEP Meetings:
What You Need to Know

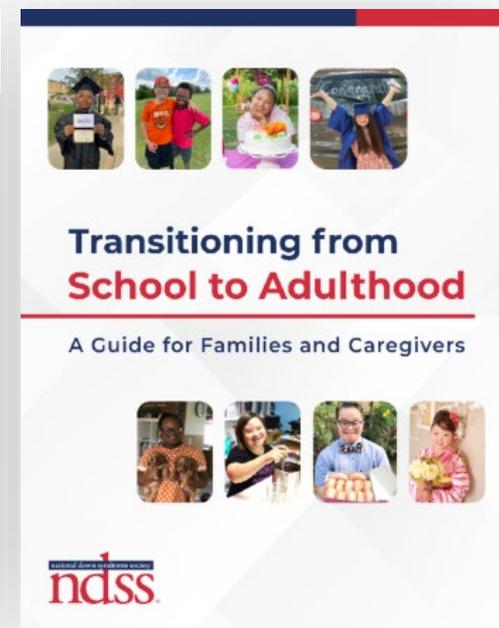
“Students with disabilities are people first and foremost. It shouldn't be just up to the students to figure out how to fit in, it should be up to the adults in the school to model positive behavior, to give positive re-enforcement, and to find ways to include students with disabilities. Students with disabilities have dreams, wants, feelings, and desires just like everyone else. Teachers, administrators, and the principal should be careful when making assumptions about what students with disabilities can and cannot do in an educational setting. Students with disabilities have inherent value and worth! They deserve not just a fair and appropriate public education but also deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. They rise to high expectations, not low expectations!”
Charlotte Woodward, NDSS Education Program Associate

Charlotte's Top Ten Tips for Self Advocates

1. Get a good night's sleep.
2. Come dressed professionally.
3. Know your dreams, passions, talents, and goals.
4. Be polite, kind, and nice to IEP professionals.
5. Have a conversation with your parents on the ins and outs of an IEP meeting.
6. Stand up for yourself if you hear anyone talking about low expectations.
7. Have high expectations for yourself.
8. Come early to your IEP meeting; time management is important.
9. Advocate to be included in the general education curriculum.
10. Ask questions if you don't know something and don't be afraid to speak up.

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The brochure cover has a dark blue header with the NDSS logo and title. Below is a quote in a red-bordered box with a lightbulb icon. The 'Top Ten Tips' are listed in a clean, numbered format. The NDSS logo is repeated at the bottom.



Transitioning from
School to Adulthood
A Guide for Families and Caregivers

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The brochure cover features a white background with a red and blue header. It includes a collage of photos of young adults with Down syndrome in various settings. The title 'Transitioning from School to Adulthood' is in large, bold letters, with the subtitle 'A Guide for Families and Caregivers' below it. The NDSS logo is at the bottom.

Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Today's Goals:

- Understand what “transition” means
- Learn key components of the Transition IEP
- Explore postsecondary, employment, and independent living pathways
- Identify supports available to families

Transitioning From School to Adulthood

“To begin with the end in mind means to start with a clear understanding of your destination. It means to know where you’re going to so that you better understand where you are now so that the steps you take are always in the right direction.”

-Stephen Covey



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

What is transition?

- A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that are:
 - results-oriented focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the student



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Why does transition planning matter?

- Builds skills gradually over time
- Helps youth identify goals and preferences
- Ensures services and supports are in place
- Reduces stress during major life changes



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

When do you start?

- Never too early!
- Elementary School
 - Introduce concepts of work (chores., careers, etc.)
 - Independence skills (hygiene, daily living, self-help)
 - Build relationships & strengthen social skills
- Middle School
 - Career exploration through books, volunteering, watching movies
 - Support teacher efforts to provide job training as part of the school program.
 - Look into different types of education options (inclusive, vocational, etc.).
 - Do chores around the house, volunteer, participate in community projects.

Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Formal transition planning must begin when a student reaches the age 16 according to IDEA. Many states begin sooner, at age 14, which is recommended best practice.

Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Key Laws That Shape Transition:

- IDEA — requires transition planning in the IEP
- Section 504 — nondiscrimination
- ADA — access and accommodations in adulthood

Transitioning From School to Adulthood



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Three Key Areas:

- Post-Secondary Program
- Employment
- Independent Living



Transition Team

- Student
- Parents
- Teachers
- Other school personnel
- Outside service agencies
- Other individuals invited by the family



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Prepare ahead of the meeting:

- Review last year's goals
- Make notes about what you want to keep or change
- Write down questions — and ask them throughout the meeting
- Be prepared to discuss strengths, interests, and accommodations
- Encourage your child to participate — even if it's just sharing one or two preferences

Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Self-Determination: A Core Skill

- Making choices
- Setting goals
- Problem-solving
- Communicating needs



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Questions to ask?

- What do I want my life to be like?
- What goals can I set?
- What support do I need?
- Am I making progress?

<https://www.imdetermined.org/>



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Post-Secondary Pathways

- College or training programs
- Vocational programs
- Integrated employment
- Community participation



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Things to keep in mind:

- Transition plan goals for postsecondary education, employment and housing often overlap
- Make sure goals are SMART
- Short-term objectives can be general or very specific
- The IEP must include a target date for each short-term objective.

Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Education Objective Examples:

- find high school course offerings related goals
- complete courses related to career goals
- research and generate information on entrance requirements for postsecondary schools/programs
- identify and list postsecondary schools that provide training in career field

Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Employment Objective Examples:

- Career Development
 - Create resume
 - Participate in extracurricular activities
 - Practice interviewing
- Work Habits & Behaviors
 - Identify appropriate work-place norms
 - Communicate needs
 - Protocol for asking for assistance
 - Identify dress code for work situations (e.g., interview, warehouse job, office job)



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Employment Preparation

- Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
- On the job training
- Career exploration
- Work readiness skills



Transition Planning

Independent Living Objectives:

- Caring for personal needs
- Leisure activities
- Community participation
- Managing personal finance
- Household responsibilities



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Supports and Services:

- Home and Community Based Services
- Waiver services
- Transportation
- Supported-Living
- Natural supports



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Social, Emotional & Physical Well-Being

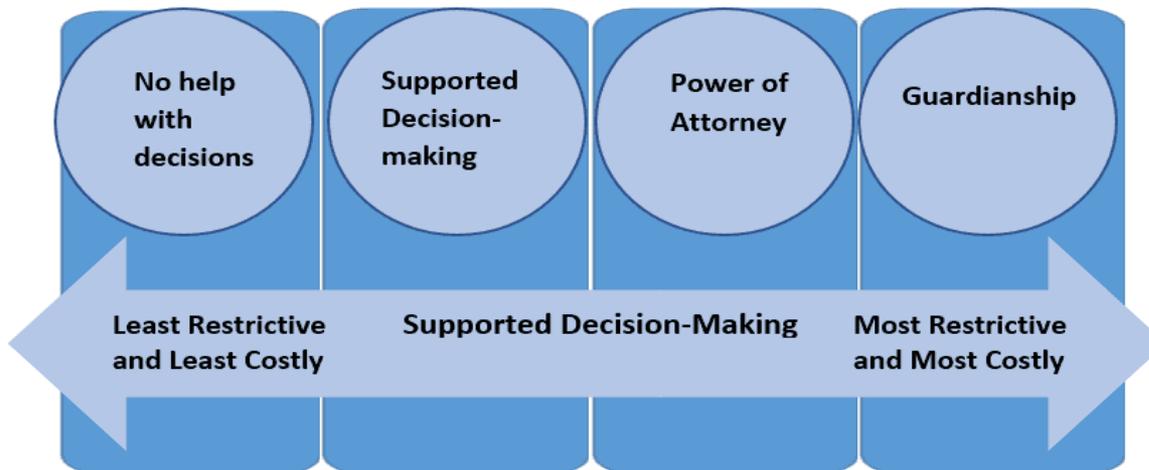
- Coping with stress
- Health and wellness
- Supportive relationships
- Community engagement



Transition Planning

My Child is Turning 18:

- An individual becomes his or her own guardian upon turning 18 years of age. At this point, the student is able to sign legal documents as well as agree or disagree with his or her individual education program (IEP).
- It is best to use the least restrictive option available to you and your adult child if they need help making decisions. That way your child's rights as an adult will be preserved.



Transitioning From School to Adulthood

Agencies and organizations that may be helpful include:

- State and Local Vocational Rehab
- Disability Law Centers
- State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education:
- The Arc
- State Level Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)



Thank you!

Email education@ndss.org