

7. NOW YOU ARE READY TO START

This section provides you with some practical tips on getting started now. Some of the suggestions include:

- Create your family vision – turn to Table 8 in the Tools & Resources section for further information;
- Create your vision for your child – a completed sample vision is highlighted in this section. You can also turn to Table 5 and Table 7a and 7b;
- Develop your plan – turn to Table 12; and
- Timeline of important activities – a list of suggested activities is outlined for you as your child progresses to adult life.

There is a lot of information in this guide. This section provides you with a short summary of the activities to consider now that you are ready to get started with your planning.

Create Your Family Vision

Knowing where you and other members of your family want to be in the next five years or ten years is an important part of developing a vision and plan for your child. For most parents, the responsibilities of raising a child are close to being complete once their child reaches adulthood. Children take on more and more responsibilities for themselves. When raising a child with a developmental disability, parental responsibilities often continue on much longer, if not for life. You will need to consider how to manage these responsibilities within the context of how you see your life changing as you enter your retirement years.

For example, do you see your child continuing to live at home and for how long? At some point you will likely need to consider alternate living arrangements. It may not be right away but it is something that you need to consider as part of your plan.

tip # 24

Tool 8 in Part 2: Tools and Resources sets out a family profile that can be useful in creating your family vision.

You will need to ensure that your financial situation can manage the demands of supporting yourselves in retirement as well as any additional demands needed to support your child in the future. You may want to consider contacting a financial advisor to determine if you are receiving all the tax benefits you are entitled to as a parent of a child with a developmental disability and to ensure you are taking advantage of the appropriate investment tools that can help you meet your financial goals (e.g. Registered Education Savings Plans, Registered Retirement Savings Plans etc.)

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tip # 25

In Part 2: Tools & Resources under Financial Resources there is a list of tax benefits, credits and rebates as well as investment vehicles that may help you in making some financial decisions about the future.

Create Your Vision for Your Child

As discussed in an earlier section, the vision for your child is an opportunity to highlight all of the gifts, strengths and abilities they have to offer. Being positive in establishing a vision can make a difference in how the planning for your child is approached and the way in which your child is perceived by others – define them by their abilities not their limitations.

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tip # 26

Below is a brief version of the tool you will find in Tool 5 in Part 2: Tools & Resources which will help develop your child's vision. Use this along with Tool 7 to help complete your child's profile.

My name is:	My age is:
<p>What I like to do and what I can do...</p> <p>At home:</p> <p>At school:</p> <p>At work (if working):</p> <p>In the community (outside of home, work or school)</p> <p>For fun (hobbies and interests):</p> <p>What I would like to do or learn to do...</p> <p>At home:</p> <p>At school:</p> <p>At work (if working):</p> <p>In the community (outside of home, work or school)</p> <p>For fun (hobbies and interests):</p> <p>When I grow up:</p> <p>Summary...</p> <p>My strengths/gifts are...</p> <p>My interests are...</p> <p>Some limitations that I need to talk about are...</p> <p>In my vision for the future, I would like to...</p>	

It is important to remember that all individuals have unique abilities that make them the person they are. Keep these in mind as you go through the steps of transition planning. The following example shows how you can create a vision for your child based on the positive attributes and unique abilities your child has to offer.

ONE PERSON'S VISION...

The following is an excerpt from one parent's description of their daughter's adult life reflecting the vision of inclusion they held for their daughter.

“She has an extremely vigorous calendar of commitments. On Mondays she listens to Grade 1 students read at her old elementary school. This exercise helps the little ones gain confidence in their reading ability. Sue cannot speak and for the children this means they are able to read freely with no expectation of criticism, simply the reassurance of a smiling face. Sue is also a facilitator at the Royal Ontario Museum in the Bio-Diversity Hands-On exhibit, helping people discover things that they might otherwise not notice. My daughter also brings hope and inspires the vulnerable and dispossessed through her own vulnerability, when she volunteers at the Mustard Seed drop-in center with its community kitchen, library, sewing room, etc. Salt and Light TV is another place that Sue contributes her gifts. As well as helping with editing, her presence reminds this Catholic community who can sometimes get wrapped up in the hustle and bustle of film making, of the values that form the foundation of their faith. Most inspiring to many, is the fact that Sue is a dancer. She dances with the Spirit Movers liturgical dance group and testifies to her strong faith using this medium. How does a person who is non-verbal and wheelchair bound living within the constraints of others ideas and expectations of people with disabilities do all these things? Her success in overcoming obstacles is mainly due to the deep and committed relationships she has developed with family, friends, her support circle as well as collaboration with community groups that she comes in contact with regularly such as church, schools and other venues. Her support circle, who have been meeting regularly for the past 13 years, help interpret her goals and dreams. Sue does not speak, so those around her ensure that she has many other ways to express her feelings and desires. It is imperative that she have long-term relationships both paid and unpaid who can help build the capacity of the community to welcome her gifts. In return, Sue helps them create a better world for all. This is citizenship, and Sue is an esteemed educator in this regard.”

Get Your Plan Going

These next steps in the process will involve a lot of work on your part. Identify your transition team and select someone to be the coordinator. This is likely going to be an unpaid position, so if no one will take on this responsibility, it will be up to you to take it on yourself. Hold meetings, network, fill in the worksheets, network, update and monitor progress and network some more. The more connected and supported by creative people you are the better. Keep track of everyone you come in contact with over the years – networking is very important to developing your plan for the future.

A graphic for 'Tip # 27' with a background of clouds. The text 'tip # 27' is written in a cursive font. Below the graphic is a grey box containing text.

tip # 27

Tool 12 in Part 2: Tools & Resources provides sample transition plans for you to review as you develop your own. One shows an example of a plan for a youth with high needs and the other is for a youth with moderate needs.

Timeline of Important Activities

As you make your way through the transition planning process, there are many things to remember and some important timelines to keep in mind. As your child moves through their teenage years, you will need to clearly understand which services will change and which will remain the same and at what age these changes will take effect. You will also need to understand what you need to apply for and what is required for each application. For example, you will need to obtain a diagnosis of your child's disability for the Ontario Disability Support Program. You should apply for this benefit prior to your child's 18th birthday (at least six months prior) which means the formal diagnosis documentation is needed by the time they are 17.

The following is a list of activities and events that you should take note of as your child progresses towards adulthood. Again, activities should be undertaken that are consistent with your child's abilities and where such activities make sense for you as a family.

ACTIVITIES FOR PARENTS TO CONSIDER TO PLAN FOR TRANSITION

Age 0-2

- Obtain a birth certificate and/or proof of citizenship.
- Begin financial planning. Set aside money to assist your child in the future.
- Apply for the Canada Child Tax Benefit and the Universal Child Care Benefit.
- Apply for other federal benefits for children with disabilities, as appropriate based on eligibility requirements.
- Start a file for records like medical records, assessments, report cards, community certificates, records of completion.

Age 3-6

- Talk with parents of children with and without disabilities. Begin developing a network of friends and supports early.
- Apply for Special Services at Home through the Ministry of Community and Social Services.

Age 7-11

- Begin asking your child what they want to be when they grow up.
- Begin developing a vision for your child for life after high school.
- Begin developing a vision for your family for the future.
- Network with others who have recently experienced transition planning.

Age 12-16

- Open a bank account for your child, if you haven't already done so.
- Include your child in meetings about their education through the IEP process and transition planning.

- Find a parent's group or transition planning group to join. If none are available, consider starting one.
- Consider carefully your child's options for high school education. Encourage community-based job training (co-op programs) and life skills if these are appropriate activities for your child. Involve your child in all decision-making.
- Continue to talk about career interests that are consistent with your child's interests and strengths.
- Look at the Ontario Skills Passport website for helpful information on developing employment skills at:
<http://skills.edu.gov.on.ca/OSPWeb/jsp/en/login.jsp>
- Have your child do volunteer or paid work in the home, neighbourhood or community. Assist your child in developing good work habits.

Age 17-21

- By age 17, obtain a diagnosis of disability in preparing for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) application. Surrey Place or your child's pediatrician can be helpful sources.
- Begin thinking about health care services that need to change as your child reaches adulthood, i.e., changing from pediatrician to family doctor.
- Contact the Office for Students with Disabilities on campus of a college or university your child is interested in attending.
- Contact ODSP for Income Support before age 18 (six months before turning 18).
- Contact ODSP Employment Supports for help with job search and training in their last term of school.
- Contact your local developmental services agency or Community Living Association for resources and training opportunities.
- Take on the role of coach on the sidelines and let your child become the decision maker.
- Apply for the Passport Initiative

8. SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

This section will leave you with the key messages communicated throughout the Guide in each of the previous sections.

You are going to have to work hard to help your child prepare for adult life. The system is not going to do this for you. The best transition plan is not going to guarantee that the supports and services you would like for your child will be available at the conclusion of your transition process. You will need to be creative and consider ways to support your child beyond the traditional service system.

These are some of the key messages that this guide will leave you with as you begin the transition planning process with your child.

- It is never too early to start planning - start thinking about your plan before your child is in high school. There are many things you can do from an early age to prepare for the changes ahead.
- From a very young age, you can begin building self-reliance skills to encourage a move to a more independent life as an adult.
- Your vision should be a long-term objective – one that is achieved in incremental steps by identifying activities to complete on a year-by-year basis. Most importantly, this vision should be done with the active involvement of your child.
- Establish a vision for your family. Your plans for the future need to be considered and factored into the development of the plan for your child.
- Be prepared to have to initiate things for yourself. Do not wait for the education system to create a plan for you. Do not wait for your service providers to create a plan for you. Do not assume that the service system will provide support when your child turns 21. It will be up to you to create your child's future.
- Calls to agencies and professionals that you may not have spoken to before could be intimidating at first but being organized and prepared before you call will make the task seem less daunting. Use the tools and the resources provided in this document to help you get started.

- Find creative people, energetic people, positive people that will surround you with the type of support you need as you enter this major time in your child's life. Speak to your child's teacher to find a parent in your area or speak to an access agency. They will connect you to other parents or parent groups. If you do not find an appropriate group, then consider starting your own.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS FROM EXPERIENCED PARENTS...



"Do your research and know what you are asking for."

"You can't rely on the system - government funding isn't secure and it won't ever replace the importance of valued relationships."

"You have got to start to think differently and figure out something for the future or you and your son or daughter are going to be sitting at home together all day watching TV."

"Get yourself connected to some parent groups through an agency – stay involved – in whatever way you can including volunteering your time – it's a great way to get connected with others. Get newsletters – it's a way of getting information."

"Everyone has the capacity to dream and to see their child as a person with gifts - you have to find the way to change your view point."

