



Where Autism
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Transition from Secondary School

Where are we now?

The transition from secondary school can be one of the biggest and most life-changing events a young person and their family face and the process itself is often difficult and confusing. The prospect of life after school is extremely daunting and there are many differences between child and adult services. It is vital that transition is planned early and effectively to avoid unfair representations of young people during assessments and individuals being left with services that are unable to meet their needs or with no service in place at all.

In September 2014, new legislation came into force in England that reformed the SEN system, including the transfer from Statements to Education Health Care Plans which can now be in place for young people in education until the age of 25. More recently in April, the Care Act 2014 was implemented in England, which has simplified the previous patchwork of legalisation and works alongside the Autism Act 2009 to help individuals with autism to get the support they need. The Care Act 2014 looks at how services at transition should be aimed at moving a person into work/adult life in such a way as to promote their independence and reduce their long term needs for care and support.

By giving young people and their families information on their rights and entitlements under new legislation we can help them to get the transition process right and ensure that the young person is placed at the centre of the plan and it is not only a smooth, well managed transition but that it also has a positive impact on their future and quality of their life.

What makes a good transition and where to start?

Early planning is paramount and the process should begin in Year 9 in England. The SEN code of practice in England states that schools and colleges should help young people and their families with more detailed transition planning.

For example:

In Year 9

The school should aim to help children explore their aspirations and how different post-16 education options may help them fulfil these aspirations.

In Year 10

The child and their family should be supported to explore more specific courses or places to study (e.g. through taster days and visits) so that provisional plans can be prepared.

In Year 11

The child and their family should be supported to firm up their plans for their post-16 options and familiarise themselves with the expected new setting. This should include contingency planning and the child and their family should know what to do if plans change (e.g. due to poor exam results).

It is also important that the young people themselves and their families are ready to begin the process at this early stage in order to make well informed decisions about their future. Decision making can be one of the most difficult areas of the transition process and young people and their families need to be aware of all the options.

There may be a variety of services available in their local area as well as possible preferred specialist services (such as autism specific residential colleges or homes) that should all be explored and viewed as part of the process. At least 3 services need to be viewed in order to make a well informed decision.

When visiting services there are many things to consider including:

- what specialist practice and behaviour management training the staff team have
- is the environment and peer group suitable for the young person's needs?

A service that is pleasing to the eye needs to be further explored to ensure it will meet the individual's needs so it is important for parents ask lots of questions and carry out some research (e.g. inspection reports).

The changes in care legislation requires that councils must ensure that any adult with an appearance of care and support needs receives an assessment to identify:

- the extent of their need
- how this affects their wellbeing
- whether they have eligible support needs.

Councils must assess regardless of:

- where a person is on the spectrum
- their IQ

- their financial situation.

Ensuring families and young people are being appropriately assessed and making early and well informed decisions can help ensure that there is no gap in services and the process is smooth for the young person regardless of whether they are already receiving support or not.

With early decision making we can also help to address any anxieties the young person may have throughout the process and put in strategies and support during the actual transition to manage these anxieties and reduce any risk of a failed placement.

This may include:

- having the new team shadow and work with the young person prior to the move
- visits to a new property
- Social Stories™ / photos
- meeting new staff/ peers.

The young person should always be placed at the centre of any plans/decisions being made; their opinion is significant and should always be considered. Everyone involved in a young person's transition should ensure they are involving them in a way that is meaningful and relevant to them. For example, if it is felt a young person does not have the capacity to make a choice about where they live, professionals and families should still look at creative ways to support them to advocate their preference. This may involve taking them to a variety of empty properties / showing them a selection of photos and recording their reactions as evidence to why it is felt they have shown a preference or dislike.

A successful transition plan needs a holistic approach and should involve everyone in a young person's circle of support. The Care Act 2014 gives local authorities a legal responsibility to co-operate with partner organisations such as local NHS bodies. It also requires local authorities to ensure there is co-operation between adult care and support services, housing and children's services.

When there is more than one local authority involved there is a duty for each local authority to work co-operatively. Co-operative working is important to ensure:

- the necessary people work together
- the right information and advice are available
- assessments can be carried out jointly if appropriate.

Case study

Yash was attending the National Autistic Society (NAS) Radlett Lodge School and as he approached adulthood his mother began looking into what support options were available for Yash as a young adult. The Transition Development Team at the NAS supported him and his family through the process once it was identified that the NAS could best provide a support package tailored to his needs, this included:

- exploring what services the NAS could provide

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- working in partnership with the local authority and health services to develop a service for Yash.
- completing a triad assessment for Yash looking at his support needs and designing a plan for him.
- supporting Yash and his family in designing the service through to implementing it.
- A transition officer attending reviews with the family for the young person.
- once the service was set up, regular reviews took place to ensure that the service was maintained to the highest standard and continued to be built around a person centred approach

Previously Yash's mother was finding it very difficult to manage.

"Yash is very high functioning and was an unmanageable young man; up and down, eating the entire time, aggressive if he wasn't listened too, pulling hair..... until he got support from Radlett Lodge School. He started staying there and came home for 2 days. It was ok at home during holidays, but he was not easy to manage and I couldn't meet his needs as a single mum. This really impacted on his siblings.

Yash now lives in his own home, in a bespoke supported living service and he has a 24 hour care package provided by the NAS.

He's settled, I see him happier, and he was never like that. He's getting into a routine which is personalised to Yash so it's comfortable. Support staff know exactly what to do. He's really understood, that's why he's happier.

For me I feel it's a different world since Yash has been living in his own home. I've taken up a basic IT course and hoping to get a part time job which I'd never dreamed of and I feel bad saying that but it was always about keeping him calm in the house. Life has changed we can go out as a family – we never went out together and I can see him anytime.

I'm always keeping fingers crossed it works out for Yash. Yash deserves the place he has now. Anyone like Yash deserves a place like he has"