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Ready for Lift-Off: Facing the Transitioning Challenge

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Adoptive parents are masters of juggling many things. Unfortunately, it can be easy to let things fall through the cracks when you are trying to survive daily life while managing a healthy family.

When talking to our moms-in-transition, they agree there are a few things that are critical to know when preparing for the challenge of transition.

Begin the process early. One common mistake adoptive parents make is waiting until a child is 18 to start talking about a transition plan.

It can seem frightening to think about your child moving into adulthood, but a prepared parent knows it's best not to give in to that fear. Fear will cause you to hold back and leave you and your child blindsided by reality. And the reality is that unless there is some kind of guardianship in place, turning 18 means they assume the right to make decisions for themselves—*whether we think they are ready or not.*

Many schools start the transitioning process for kids with disabilities by age 16. A wise parent starts before then, helping their child think through a tentative life plan and working together to secure the right resources so they can be involved to guide the process as it develops. Don't worry if the transition plan changes often; there are great benefits to teaching your child to think forward and problem-solve when life happens differently than planned.

Investigate all necessary resources. If your child has had an IEP, your local school district is a great source for transitioning resources. Many districts have specific transition programs for kids to help them learn life skills, explore vocational options, and prepare for adulthood. Additionally, our moms found many resources available through the school on more complicated topics like guardianship, social security, adult vocational programs, and more.

Even if your child doesn't have special needs, it's important to think through the skills they need to thrive as an adult. Simple things like money management, filling out employment applications, job interviewing, and other basic life skills will require your coaching and often aren't taught in the traditional school setting. And don't forget to teach those simple daily survival skills like laundry, grocery shopping, or meal planning.

Another source of good information may come from other adoptive parents who are ahead of you in the transitioning journey. Don't have any adoptive parent mentors? Contact your local PARC office to see what they have to offer. Perhaps you could even suggest a new training topic to them!

Think through necessary legal options. All of our moms admit this was a tough area. It isn't always clear what is best for your child. You want them to succeed, but what if they aren't capable of simple things like living on their own, getting a driver's license, or managing money?

“While we try to teach our children all about life, our children teach us what life is all about.”

— Angela Schwindt

Do your homework and talk to a legal representative. There are options like power of attorney, representative payees, and partial guardianship. Remember that once your child turns 18, your position as their formal guardian ends unless something is legally in place stating otherwise.

Check into adoption assistance extensions. In some cases, if your child is still enrolled in a high school program at the age of 18, you may qualify for an extension to adoption support subsidy to continue until age 19 or whenever they graduate, whichever comes first. (Note: Children receiving SSI are not eligible for this extension.) Also, children adopted after ages 16 or 17 may qualify for additional extensions. Check with your local PARC office for more information.

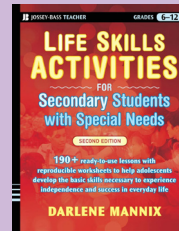
Secure any available funding. If your child will not be able to be financially independent, they may be eligible to collect benefits through the Social Security Administration. While the application process can be cumbersome, our moms did have one great tip: Go to the Social Security Administration office in person rather than try to navigate the process online or by phone. The employees at the office have great expertise in filling out those tedious forms!

Reassure your child (and yourself) of their continued place in your family. Some kids believe that when they turn 18, they will lose their place in your home. Remind them often during

the transition phase that they are part of your family *forever*. Some parents fear their child's reconnection to their birth family. Whatever happens, be supportive without letting fear take over. One mother felt the process gave her a new respect for the tension her child lived in when it came to birth family relationships. Though your relationship changes as they reach adulthood, they will need your consistent love and support as a parent.

No matter how bumpy the transition gets, don't forget that failure isn't fatal. Even though your child may make many mistakes along the way, you can still be their biggest fan, cheering them on from the sidelines *and* their favorite coach believing in them no matter what you see in the transition process.

Suggested reading to strengthen adoptive families:



Life Skills Activities for Secondary Students with Special Needs
– 2nd Edition
by Darlene Mannix

Special educator teacher and best-selling author Darlene Mannix offers teachers and parents a unique collection of illustrated activities complete with student worksheets, discussion questions, and evaluation suggestions to help adolescents with special needs acquire the basic skills they need to achieve independence and success in everyday life. Each activity focuses on a specific skill within the context of real-life situations and includes complete teacher instructions for its effective use, including optional extension activities and guidelines for student assessment.



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Check out postadoptionrc.org for past editions of our newsletter, events, helpful articles, and more information about us and services we offer.

All three Post-Adoption Resource Centers have many family fun events planned, as well as support groups and trainings. Please check your Post Adoption Resource Center region's Facebook page or website, watch for monthly calendars, or give us a call to find out what is available near you.

REGION 2

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