

## Getting it Right and Learning on the Fly: Prepared for College

**"As a parent you don't realize how much you are doing until that adult child takes over and does it themselves!! [It's] sometimes scary but both parent and adult child benefit and build confidence!! Just finishing the first year of college, I learned to let go of CONTROL!! Very challenging because in high school we do so much and are expected to do so from school in many ways."**

**—Parent Attendee**

### MAINTAINING SKILLS WHEN SCHOOL IS OUT

**Q: How can students maintain the skills they learn in college when they don't have opportunities to practice these skills at home? What are some strategies to avoid skill regression? How can families support their students to keep them moving forward instead of losing valuable skills when they return home, either over the summer or after they graduate?**

**A:** As many parents will attest, college students with intellectual disability (ID) seem to lose some skills when they change from school routines to home routines. This often happens because the routines, motivations, and expectations at home are so different than at school. Parents can focus on some of these areas at home if they are willing to adjust some routines, expectations, and motivations for their college-age student:

- 1. ROUTINE LIST.** Establish a routine list (this can be a picture or word list) that your student is responsible for. It can be on paper, handwritten, printed, or a digital list with apps such as Google Keep, Google Tasks, GTD, 2Do (by Beehive), Any.do (by Any.do), and the one my son uses – Daily Checklist (by Blue Logo). I only had to set it up once. I can create tasks that occur on some days and not others. I can also select different fonts, colors, styles, and more. For about \$5/month it saves to the cloud!
- 2. MOTIVATION.** Ask your student what will motivate them! Ask what reward they want to work for to complete their to-do list. Break the list into chunks and have them reward themselves upon completion of each. My son works for a Coke, going to the YMCA, free time to watch TV, and a nap. Before you say this is juvenile, consider how many times you promise yourself a break after you finish a certain task. We often reward ourselves for accomplishments. We should teach our children to do the same.
- 3. LIFELONG LEARNING.** Build learning activities into their day. My son has to study for 20 minutes before his routine is finished. We define "study" as watching a TED talk, self-advocacy video, or an episode of Tuesdays with Liz (a video series on policy hosted by a woman with an intellectual disability), or listening to a book from the library and writing in his journal about it.
- 4. CHORES.** Develop a list of chores that your student completes each week. Negotiate with them on which days each chore will get done. Even after you have set the chores for certain days, if there is too much complaining, ask what day they want to move the chore to. Give them choices to decide for themselves when, not if, they will do the chore. This list can be a part of the Routine List (see above) or it can be a separate list.
- 5. EMPLOYMENT.** Finding and getting a job and all the new skills and responsibilities that come along with working are excellent ways to maintain and continue learning for any young adult, but especially for those with ID.
- 6. VOLUNTEERING.** Identifying volunteer opportunities that touch on your student's interests can help create a sense of purpose, allow for additional learning, and provide some social engagement. Doing work that helps others can also be good for your student.

## ENGAGING PEERS AND LIVING ON CAMPUS

### **Q: How do students socialize in the dorms and in larger campus social spaces with peers with and without disabilities?**

**A:** Every college and inclusive program has its own culture and unique ways of supporting students with ID and their peers without disabilities. Some programs have established peer mentors who are specifically charged with supporting students with ID to engage in campus-sponsored and club or college-specific activities. Other programs may choose specific activities or campus-sponsored events to support students with ID to attend.

## MANAGING UNSTRUCTURED FREE TIME

### **Q: How do the students handle going from having very structured free time to unstructured free time in college?**

**A:** As with many students who find themselves “free” [from their parents] when going away to college, many students with ID have to learn lessons about staying up too late when they have a required early event or class the next day.

Every college culture is unique. Every inclusive program on each campus is unique, too. Some programs do a great job of supporting students with ID to identify their interests and find an organization, club, or event could help them structure some free time. Some programs require students to join a club and attend a certain number of activities, tutoring, career services workshops, and volunteer or work a specified number of hours. However, there is always some unstructured free time when attending college. It is a crucial skill to learn how to explore and engage in activities of interest.

### **Q: Do you have any tips to get them prepared for this unstructured time?**

**A:** 1. Begin now to instruct your student in how to find high school clubs, extracurricular activities, and community clubs or programs. Have your student try them out once or twice to see if they like it. Allow them the agency to make that choice for themselves.

2. Begin now to help them reflect on the amount of time they are spending in front of a game system, YouTube, or cable shows. Help them identify options and choose how to spend their free time.

3. Teach them how to explore their community through the internet to find an interesting event or activity to attend. My son found a Titanic museum in our area that I had no idea was there. He did this by using Titanic as a search term on the internet! He did that completely on his own, and then scheduled a day with his dad to go visit the museum. If it were closer, it would be a great place for him to volunteer!

## DETERMINING COLLEGE INCLUSION

### **Q: How do you figure out just how inclusive a college program is?**

**A:** The simple answer is to ask. Unfortunately, it is a pretty broad question, and you may not get the answers you really want. Look at the program of study or core curriculum and ask which courses have students without ID who are also enrolled for credit? If the answer is all of the courses, it is a pretty inclusive program. Ask what social activities the students attend. If the answer is Best Buddies and Special Olympics and nothing else, then it is likely to be a pretty exclusive or separate program. Basically, it's best to ask how many courses or events are designed only for students with ID; the lower that number, the more inclusive the program.

### **Q: Classes and classwork. How do they do this part?**

**A:** Wait for it! Every program is unique and even every professor or instructor will handle this differently. For the programs where the students with ID take their courses for credit, all students are required to do all the course work, assignments, projects, and assessments. For the programs where students with ID are auditing the courses or taking them for zero credit, then the professor, instructor, or program staff may be providing accommodations and/or modifications to the assignments and assessments, enabling the students to work closer to their academic level. However, this varies significantly by program. This is another excellent question to ask colleges that you and your student visit or explore virtually.

## PAYING FOR COLLEGE

### Q: What financial resources are available to help pay for college?

**A:** This answer varies tremendously by state, but there are likely to be options at the federal, state, and local levels. There is a web page on the [www.Thinkcollege.net](http://www.Thinkcollege.net) site called Paying for College, with a number of resources and links to explore. Visit both links underlined in blue to begin to identify potential supports.

## NEXT STEPS

### Q: When a student who has completed a 2-year transition program feels they are not ready to be a full-time traditional college student, are there other programs or next steps?

**A:** There are programs that will accept students who have attended a previous transition or inclusive postsecondary education program. This varies widely and can change often. You will need to explore the College Search on the Think College website to identify colleges that interest you. Then, reach out to each college of interest to identify whether it's a good fit for your student.



The questions and answers in this handout are from the webinar held by the Think College National Coordinating Center, presented by Kathy Becht and Dee Sapp. The recording of the webinar and additional handouts can be found here: <https://thinkcollege.net/resource/person-centered-planning-self-determination/getting-it-right-and-learning-on-the-fly>

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