

# POST-SECONDARY TRANSITIONS

## STAFF & VOLUNTEER TIPSHEET



## How to use this document

*This tipsheet offers strategies and tools for youth development professionals who are helping youth (including those with disabilities and those leaving foster care) prepare for the independent responsibilities of life after high school. It includes helpful frameworks and recommended practices for getting to know the youth, exploring their dreams, identifying their goals, and taking the necessary steps to achieve them.*

### What is a post-secondary transition?

A post-secondary transition is when a young person leaves high school, moving from one life stage to another. Whether they're heading to **college**, starting a **job**, engaging in **vocational training**, or pursuing **another path**, this is a big step for anyone.

Often, this is a time when youth learn how to **live independently**, handle their own **finances**, manage their own **time**, and plan to pursue their own **future**.

Every youth's situation is different, so every post-secondary transition process is unique. However, every effective post-secondary transition process supports the young person in achieving **greater self-determination and resilience**.

### What is the educator or leader's role in supporting youth?

If post-secondary transition is a car, then the youth should be in the driver's seat. As adults, we can support by suggesting destinations, helping the youth figure out navigation and expenses, and so on. Ultimately, though, the youth's hands are on the steering wheel, and their foot is on the gas. They get to choose the direction and make the car go!

In other words, adults can offer **suggestions**, point out **potential avenues** and **obstacles**, and help youth **navigate** these in ways that strengthen the youth's **confidence and self-reliance**.

Adults are not alone in providing this support! For more about creating a **network of support** for a young person, see "**Connecting with People and Resources**" on page 5.



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## Approaching post-secondary transitions

To prepare youth for the transition they will make, help them develop skills they'll need. Here are the qualities of an effective post-secondary process:

- **Student-driven.** Put the youth's needs and interests front and center to make the transition planning process as personalized and meaningful as possible. You can do this by asking open-ended questions and creating opportunities for decision-making throughout the process.
- **Strengths-based.** Identify and build on the student's strengths. Tools like strengths assessments, positive affirmations, and self-reflection activities can help youth identify and draw on their existing skills as they develop new ones. It is important to communicate a youth's strengths to parents and guardians.
- **Growth mindset.** Emphasize the importance of learning, growing, and making mistakes. Share examples of times that you made a mistake and what you learned. Show the student that approaching challenges and occasionally failing is an important part of adulthood.
- **Hands-on, interactive learning.** Practical activities such as job or college application support, job shadowing, mock interviews, workplace simulations, and workshops provide youth with real-world experience. Interactive activities such as discussions, worksheets, and games can help young people feel more engaged.
- **Inclusion and belonging.** Support youth in developing confidence and resourcefulness by embracing themselves just as they are rather than trying to fit a mold. Inclusive teaching strategies, accessible materials, and assistive technology can help ensure that every young person can participate fully.
- **Cultural competency.** Be aware of cultural differences that may impact young people's transition experiences, and don't hesitate to research if you are unsure. Different communities may have different expectations around what a successful transition out of high school will look like. Depending on a youth's identity, they may face different challenges when making the shift. It is important for young people to have mentors that share their marginalized identities.
- **Celebrate small victories and accomplishments.** This helps youth view themselves as capable, building motivation and momentum.





## Step by Step

As an adult, your role is to support the young person's sense of agency, resourcefulness, and confidence. You can follow these steps while planning your role in post-secondary transition planning.

### Establishing a relationship

Sometimes, adults make recommendations to youth before really getting to know them. Take time to develop a connection with the young person first to learn how best to support them.

- **Listen and get to know the young adult.** What makes them unique? What brings them joy? The more you know about a young person, the more you can tap into these areas later if challenges come up.
- **Identify interests and goals.** Do they have a vision for their future? If they're uncertain, what kinds of things have they enjoyed in the past, and why?
- **Anticipate challenges.** What, if anything, is the young person nervous or unsure about? Based on their past experiences with school, work, or home, how can you proactively address existing challenges or plan for issues that might come up?



### Dreaming

Carve out time for the youth to brainstorm. Encourage them to tap into their creativity and imagination. They can narrow their ideas down later, but it can be helpful to start by thinking about the big picture. Here are some open-ended questions to use as prompts:

- Describe your **ideal day five years from now**. Where are you? What are you doing?
- What are your **favorite activities and subjects**? What about them do you enjoy?
- **Who do you admire** or look up to? What about them inspires you?
- Think of a **time you felt really proud of yourself**. What were you doing? What about it made you feel proud?
- Reflect on a problem or issue in the world. **What kind of impact would you like to have?**
- Imagine reflecting back on your life when you are much older. **What do you want to have accomplished?** What do you want to feel proud of?

### Exploring and determining a goal

Talk to the young person about options for after high school. Options can include work, college, training, or another path. Here are a few ways youth can explore their options for after high school:

- Career assessment tests
- Interest inventories
- Career counseling services
- Guest speakers
- Career fairs
- Researching college programs and schools
- College visits
- Internships
- Informational interviews
- Job shadowing
- Mentorship programs

Once you have determined a goal to work towards, it's time to start planning next steps!

## Step by step, continued

### Planning a path

When the youth has a clear goal in mind, it's time for transition planning!

The process of transition planning can be a great time for youth to learn life planning skills that they can use in the future. Here are some practices that can be helpful:

- **Set goals.** Share a worksheet or another tool that helps the youth identify one or more goals and break them into smaller goals and steps.
- **Brainstorm support and resources.** Invite the youth to think of people or resources that could help them achieve each goal. A mind map could help them get their ideas out on paper.
- **Microtasking.** Help youth figure out which tasks need to be completed for each goal. Then, by breaking each task into micro-tasks, they can turn bigger goals into achievable targets.
- **Backwards planning.** Backwards planning means setting the final deadline, and then working backwards from that date, scheduling big goals and smaller goals. Help youth use a calendar, planner, and/or to-do list to make sure they meet their goals on time.



### Skill building

A big part of post-secondary transition support is helping youth develop the skills they need to succeed as adults. Some of these will come easily, and others will be challenging. One way you can support youth is by helping them assess where they feel confident and where they might need help, workarounds, or additional tools.

Here are some areas where youth may need to build skills:

#### **Goal-directed skills**

- Personal goal-setting and planning
- Time management and executive functioning
- Self-advocacy and leadership skills

#### **Skills to access opportunities:**

- Writing skills (for college applications, cover letters, resumes, and more)
- Technology skills (online research, email and phone etiquette, software applications)
- Standardized testing
- Employability skills: communication, teamwork, problem-solving, professionalism

#### **Home and self-care skills:**

- Mental health:
  - exercise
  - mindfulness
  - healthy coping skills
- Finding housing & housemates
- Managing household tasks & personal hygiene
- Grocery shopping, cooking, food, and nutrition
- Navigating the healthcare system
- Personal finance, budgeting, savings, and credit
- Interpersonal skills: making friends, compromise, assertiveness, conflict resolution

#### **Skills in accessing support:**

- Accessing financial aid
- Accessing social services
- Securing disability accommodations
- Connecting to community





## Connecting with people and resources

It's important for youth to develop broader networks of support as they go out into the world. As an adult, you can help youth build out these networks.

- **Involve parents and guardians.** Involve parents and guardians in the transition process through programming or individual conversations. Provide resources or simply maintain communication about how to support a young person's transition.
- **Support networking.** Facilitate connections with caring community adults by inviting guest speakers, organizing field trips, or supporting youth mentorship programs. Help youth make connections by inviting professionals from various industries to share their experiences or planning trips to college campuses.
- **Foster connections to community resources.** Connect students with job training programs, internship opportunities, counseling services, or disability support programs. Maintaining a network of community partners can help educators provide students with referrals as needed.

## Conclusion

Adopting these strategies and utilizing these tools can help you support young adults in successfully navigating their post-secondary pathways. This will help them achieve their goals and thrive in the next chapter of their life!

### ABOUT THESE RECOMMENDATIONS

*This information was developed through UW-Madison Extension's Curriculum Jams process. Curriculum Jams bring together people with lived experience to review and recommend learning resources.*

*Check out our website to learn more!  
[youthdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/curriculum-jams](https://youthdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/curriculum-jams)*



### REFERENCES:

<https://beforeage18.org/action-steps/>

<https://beforeage18.org/transition-guide/>

Images courtesy of National 4-H Council Flickr collection and the Wisconsin Photo Library.

# POST-SECONDARY TRANSITION TRAINING

## TEACHING RESOURCES

*These resources have been recommended through the Curriculum Jams process for supporting youth in post-secondary transitions.*

The **Life Skills Curriculum** is a website that includes links to facilitator guides, worksheets, games, slide decks, and sample materials. Topics include career, education, health and nutrition, money management, housing, and risk prevention.

**Format:**

- hands-on activities and discussion guides
- games and slide decks

**Audience:**

- high school youth in foster care

**Source:** Virginia Project Life

<https://youthdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/resources/life-skills-curriculum/>



**Overcoming Obstacles** is a website that includes downloadable and customizable modules with lesson plans on confidence building, communication and conflict resolution, goal setting, problem solving and decision making, resource management, studying, planning the future, developing college and workplace skills, and service learning.

**Format:**

- website with downloadable lesson plans

**Audience:**

- K-12 youth

**Source:** Community for Education Foundation

<https://youthdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu/resources/overcoming-obstacles/>



## BACKGROUND RESOURCE

*This resources has been recommended through the Curriculum Jams process for developing background knowledge about post-secondary transitions.*

The **Before Age 18** website includes action steps and a guide. Topics include:

- transition partners (parents and guardians, school, work, and community)
- essential services (advocacy, benefits, money, health and wellness, and job skills)
- additional resources (accommodations, community living, employment, foster care, guardianship, health and mental health, social security and health insurance, transportation, and voting)

**Format:**

- website with action steps grouped by age
- written PDF guide that can be used without facilitation by youth with disabilities

**Audience:**

- youth with disabilities and adults

**Source:** Before Age 18

<https://ycdiversity.org/resources/guides/icebreakers-for-youth-led-student-clubs/>

