

FUTURE

What we mean by future

It is important to think about the kind of 'future' that makes most sense for the young person. Future can mean the goals and hopes a young person has for themselves as an adult, but it can often be helpful to think about the 'nearer' future – e.g. next month, school term, or next year. It might be helpful to have a bigger, 'overarching' goal the young person wants to reach further in the future and then split this down into more manageable chunks. Other young people may work better with goals which are less far in the future.

Future planning is about helping young people imagine and work towards adulthood in small, manageable steps. Big goals may feel distant or overwhelming without clear guidance. Support means breaking goals into achievable actions, linking them to the young person's interests, strengths and encouraging persistence. Strengths may include things like a strong focus on passions, having a detailed memory, and motivation when goals feel meaningful. Young people should be encouraged to come up with their own goals, hopes and aspirations for the future. It is important to remember that:

- Goals can be big or small
- Goals can change and that's ok (and important)
- Goals should come from the young person, though they may need support to think about goal setting and making manageable plans

When thinking about future planning, the most important thing to keep in mind is to focus on what matters to the young person – this is about helping them to achieve what they want for themselves, rather than meeting the expectations of others

Adults can help young people to take small steps to grow in independence and confidence and to find ways to connect with community in their life - in ways which work for them. We can show young people real-life examples of people, including neurodivergent people, who have taken varied paths to success. We can also encourage young people to think about what 'success' might mean; reminding them that everyone has the right to define this for themselves. Using a neuro-affirmative approach to think about the future means helping young people to discover their strengths and interests; and helping them to imagine and plan their future based on their own values and dreams. We can also encourage young people to revisit their dreams and goals. It's okay for plans to grow and change over time.

Preparation for adulthood

Transition or preparation for adulthood, is the process by which young people who need support or care move between services provided exclusively for children, to services provided for those over the age of 18, can be a time of excitement but also anxiety for young people and those who care for them. People may have had a stable home life and continuity of full-time education and support for many years which they know will change as they become an adult. For young people there may be eager anticipation but also fear of the changes that will happen over the next few years: becoming more independent; developing relationships with others; continuing their education; and entering work.

The law in this area is complicated, largely because different pieces of legislation often overlap, but also because sometimes things 'must be' done, and sometimes they only 'may have' to be done. There are also a series of Codes of Practice which must be followed, unless there are exceptional reasons not to do so, by the bodies involved in providing services or support to the young person. These Codes often use the word "should" alongside "must", although they mean the same. This is not always obvious to the non-lawyer but makes a difference as to how a young adult can complain or seek to take legal action to enforce his or her rights if they are not provided.

Preparing for adulthood is a process often referred to as 'Transition' because it is not a single event. Transition is a period when young people make new choices and have new legal rights to support them to make the choices they need to make. Transitions and dealing with change can be challenging for everyone. They are particularly difficult, however, for people with ASD who often rely on predictability to make sense of their environment and can find it hard to imagine alternatives. The transition from school to adulthood and adult services can be especially testing because children with ASD often receive a very good level of support and understanding throughout school, only to find this is withdrawn, sometimes entirely, when they reach school leaving age.

The areas to consider for a young person are:

- Support to live independently
- Leaving Care
- Supported Internships
- Adult Social Care
- Advocacy
- Employment & Careers
- Funding & Benefits
- Homelessness

Impact

- Reality of the transition process - lack of communication between agencies can exacerbate the problem of complete or partial withdrawal of support at the age of 18
- Falling between the gaps - although people with ASD often have profound needs for support, many (especially those with high functioning autism or AS) do not qualify for support from any of the specialist services offered by a local authority.
- Limited by expectations - 'quality of life' areas are often overlooked though they are critical for good mental health and independence, and include relationship counselling, leisure activities and financial skills.
- Invisible to some services - Planning is made more difficult for local authorities due to the lack of awareness of the numbers of young people with ASD likely to be making the transition to adult services.

STRATEGIES

What helps?

✓ Getting the young person's voice about what is important to them. This may be through talking to the young person when they are calm and regulated, but assistive technology, communication boards, visuals and other modes of communication can be used.

✓ If young people are not able to talk about or show adults about their hopes and ambitions (for example, if that young person is 'in crisis' or very young) then the adults who know the young person the best should be able to advocate in their best interests. This can often be parents, but thinking about setting common goals across all the different settings that young person engages with is important.

✓ Some young people respond well to reminders about their goals and offering different suggestions. For other young people, particularly those who may have a stress response to demands, this may not be helpful.

REMEMBER Support should help young people to:

- Understand themselves better

- Make choices that are right for them
- Learn skills to help them to reach their goals
- Plan their future in a way that works for them

Parent Strategies

It's a good idea to start thinking about a child's future when they're around 14.

As a parent you could:

- speak to any doctors or care teams your child has about what happens when they turn 18
- [apply for a needs assessment](#) from your council – this may help your child get some free care and support when they're an adult
- [apply for a carer's assessment](#) if you care for your child – you may be able to get support and financial benefits
- ask colleges or universities what support they can give your child, if they're planning to go to one

Strategies for Young People

- **Speak to a trusted adult:** A trusted adult such as a parent, carer or teacher can help guide you through this process.
- **Self-Advocacy:** develop confidence in self-advocacy, a trusted adult can support with this.
- **Think about the future:** think about the sorts of things you like to do, maybe write down some ideas for a job and look into the steps needed to get the job
- **Social Stories:** A social story is a story that shares social information with you in an accessible way. Social stories are great at improving the understanding of children and young people with ASD about anything and everything in life. Things are clearer and more predictable if a young person has better social understanding, which helps reduce anxiety with new situations.

A timeline for teaching adult life skills could be used to introduce new skills in phases, this is helpful as practising these skills can improve confidence and be a new part of the young person's routine.

Timeline for Building Adult Life Skills

For Teenagers with Autism



Phase 1: Foundation (Age 14-15)

Goal: Build confidence with basic routines and money awareness

- Practice simple chores (making bed, washing dishes) using checklists
- Learn to handle pocket money and track spending with visual chart
- Role-play greetings and short conversations
- Establish consistent sleep and meal routines



Phase 2: Independence Skills (Age 15-16)

Goal: Expand responsibilities and introduce planning

- Learn 3-5 simple meals with step-by-step picture guides
- Manage a small monthly allowance, save for personal goals
- Use a visual calendar for school, hobbies and chores
- Use clear examples for personal space and online safety



Phase 3: Transition to Adulthood (Age 17-18)

Goal: Build confidence for independent living

- Understand bills and basic banking (with visual guides)
- Plan weekly meals
- Maintain a tidy space
- Role-play interviews and practice workplace etiquette
- Schedule own appointments with reminders



Phase 4: Adult Readiness (Age 18+)

Goal: Maintain independence and adapt to new challenges

- Open a bank account
- Manage income and expenses
- Learn basics of renting and voting
- Read simple contracts
- Engage in safe social activities
- Keep a support network for guidance when needed

RESOURCES

Online Resources

[What does the law say A legal guide for council staff including lawyers and social workers](#)

[Resources for autistic teenagers](#)

[NHS England » Useful autism resources and training](#)

[Home | Spectrum Gaming](#)

[Parent Handouts & Resources | Explaining Brains](#)

[Neurodiversity-Understood-Parent-Guide.pdf](#)

[Words-Matter-Talking-to-neurodivergent-children-and-young-people.pdf](#)

[ADHD in children and young people - NHS](#)

[A quick guide to ADHD | Resources | YoungMinds](#)