

GOING FROM SCHOOL LIFE TO ADULTHOOD

The Secondary Transition Handbook



The Arc.

Tennessee

SECONDARY TRANSITION HANDBOOK

SECONDARY TRANSITION PROCESS

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Secondary Transition Process

Transition is the process of moving from one place or time to another. In school, Secondary Transition is the process of moving from high school to adult life and community living. It is a bridge between the structure schools provide, and the opportunities and possibilities of adult life.

Students with disabilities need help during the Secondary Transition process. Families, educators and the community play roles in student success. Remember: The Secondary Transition Plan is a student's plan for life after they leave school.

Beginning the Journey

The Secondary Transition process should begin with the end goals in mind. It starts with the learning about the student's preferences, interests, needs and strengths.

- Dream!
- Create a vision for the future
- Develop the Secondary Transition Plan
- Implement the plan
- Evaluate the results at the next Individualized Education Plan (IEP) Team Meeting
- Start over if necessary

Identify Student Interests and Needs – Dream!

One way to find a student's dreams is to have a PATH (Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope). A PATH is an example of Person-Centered Planning. Jack Pearpoint and Martha Forest developed this concept. Dave and Faye Wetherow brought it to Tennessee.

During a PATH, the person who is the focus of the PATH, and people who care about that person come together. With the help of a facilitator, they go through a series of exercises to express hopes and dreams for the person's future. The PATH helps the circle decide specifically who needs to be involved, what will keep the group strong, and specific next steps. The PATH is recorded on a big sheet of paper using lots of color and graphics. The individual keeps this very visual record of the plan. It is up to each member of the team to follow-up to make sure they are doing their part to make the dreams and goals a reality. To learn more about PATH and to find out about scheduling a PATH for your family member, visit <http://www.thearctn.org/Assets/Docs/PATH.pdf>

Develop A Vision for The Future

- Long Range Vision – My Life: this must be the young adult's plan
- Work: competitive employment
- Living: where, with whom?
- Transportation: public, own vehicle, get a ride?
- Personal goals: relationships, leisure activities, social groups, etc.

Developing the Student's Transition Plan In the IEP

The student's plan is flexible and focuses on:

- Individual's long-term goals
- Short-term objectives
- Adult services and supports needed
- Locating important programs and personnel
- Actions to reach these goals

Identify Needed Services and Supports

- Instruction
- Accommodations
- Course selection
- Training
- Assistive devices and other needs

How the Transition Affects the Rest of the IEP

- Measurable Secondary Transition Goals
- Info about who will provide services/supports, including outside agencies/organizations

When Should Transition Planning Start?

Tennessee law requires the IEP Team begin Secondary Transition planning no later than a student's 14th birthday - and even earlier if needed. The longer the journey, the longer it takes to get there and the earlier planning should begin.

Who Should Play a Role?

The Secondary Transition Plan is developed during the IEP Team Meeting. The team includes:

- The student (if not present, the student's thoughts about all parts of the plan must be obtained another documented way)
- Parent(s); other family members (attend all IEP Team Meetings – show your support and share what you know that others do not)
- Special Education Teacher (attends all IEP Team Meetings)
- General Education Teacher (attends all IEP Team Meetings)
- Local Education Agency Representative (attends all IEP Team Meetings)

Others Who May Attend

- School Psychologist (interprets psychological evaluation reports)
- Therapist(s)—related services and relevant evaluation reports
- Peers, friends, siblings
- Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor (for postsecondary planning), and others who know the student, or who may be helpful

It Takes Teamwork

Some members of the IEP Team, who help the student create the Secondary Transition plan, will have expanded roles. There also may be new members of the team. The biggest difference is that the focus is now on the student's life after high school and their long-term goals.

For Secondary Transition Planning a Student Needs Support to ...

- Identify career interests
- Complete vocational assessments and interest inventories
- Make choices and decisions about adult life plans
- Learn about needed accommodations and prioritize them
- Make decisions about their future
- Learn to advocate for themselves

For more information about Student Directed IEP Team Meetings visit,
<http://www.thearctn.org/Assets/Docs/Student-Directed-IEP-Training-Brochure.pdf>

A Parent and Other Family Members Can ...

- Help the student discover their strengths, interests and motivations
- Share information about the family's natural supports
- Express support of the student's postsecondary goals and choices
- Keep all records created during this critical time
- Support student in communicating with postsecondary education institutions
- Explore with the student, the possibilities of eligibility for Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) if appropriate
- Help the student register to vote
- Make sure young males register for Selective Service

General and Special Education Teachers

- Help schedule and hold the IEP Team Meeting, including Secondary Transition Planning
- Share samples of student's work
- Identify needed postsecondary accommodations
- Evaluate student strengths, preferences, and interests in: academics, social skills, pre-vocational, vocational and adaptive functioning
 - Apply for accommodations for the student while taking the ACT and/or SAT
 - Help identify and document needed postsecondary classroom and testing accommodations
 - Assist in identifying vocational, postsecondary education and community living goals, including- transportation, money management, independent living skills, housing, training program size and type, work, and social/recreation/community involvement
 - Help with postsecondary education application and visits to postsecondary schools
 - Assure coursework prepares the student for postsecondary education and employment
 - Prepare a summary of the student's academic achievement and functional performance
 - Advise on needed postsecondary assistive technology
 - Teach student and family about transfer of rights, when the student turns 18
 - Teach student to advocate for themselves

A Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor Should ...

- Provide information about VR services, eligibility requirements and how to apply for VR services
- Reviews existing assessments to determine if the student is eligible for VR services
- Assists in gathering documentation of the student's disability to apply for VR services
- If additional assessments are needed, VR may provide them or ask the school to do the evaluations
- Monitors ongoing services, supports and student progress for potentially VR eligible students

Getting a Diploma in Tennessee

Regular Diploma

All students have access to a rigorous curriculum that includes challenging subject matter, emphasizes depth rather than breadth of coverage, emphasizes critical thinking and problem solving, and promotes responsible citizenship and lifelong learning. The curriculum will be tied to the vision of the high school graduate and to the Tennessee Curriculum Standards. Teachers, parents and students will hold high expectations. Schools will communicate high expectations to students, parents, business and industry, and the community.

Occupational Diploma

An Occupational Diploma may be awarded at the end of a student with disabilities' fourth year of high school to students with disabilities who have not met the requirements for a regular high school diploma; has satisfactorily completed an IEP; has satisfactory records of attendance and conduct; and have completed the occupational diploma Skills, Knowledge and Experience Mastery Assessment (SKEMA), created by the Tennessee Department of Education and have completed two years of paid and/or non-paid work experience. The determination that an Occupational Diploma is the goal for a student with a disability will be made at the conclusion of the student's tenth grade year, or two academic years prior to the expected graduation date. Students who obtain the Occupational Diploma may continue to work toward the Regular High School Diploma and/or Alternate Academic Diploma through the end of the school year in which they turn 22 years old.

Alternate Academic Diploma

Beginning with students entering the ninth grade in 2018, an alternate academic diploma may be awarded to students with significant cognitive disabilities at the end of their fourth year of high school who have:

- 1) participated in the high school alternate assessments,
- 2) earned at least 22 credits,
- 3) received special education services or supports and made satisfactory progress on an IEP
- 4) have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct, and
- 5) have completed a transition assessment(s) that measures, at a minimum postsecondary education and training, employment, independent living, and community involvement.

The required credits may be earned either through the state-approved standards or through alternate academic diploma modified course requirements approved by the State Board. A student who earns an Alternate Academic Diploma shall continue to be eligible for special education services under IDEA until the student receives a Regular High School Diploma. They can continue to work toward and/or earn an Occupational Diploma or Special Education Diploma through the school year in which the student turns 22.

Special Education Diploma

A special education diploma may be awarded to a student with an IEP, at the end of their fourth year of high school to students with disabilities who have:

- 1) not met the requirements for a Regular High School Diploma
- 2) have satisfactorily completed an IEP, and
- 3) have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct

Students who obtain the Special Education Diploma may continue to work towards a Regular High School Diploma, Occupational Diploma, or Alternate Academic Diploma through the end of the school year in which they turn 22 years old

Comparison of Diplomas

DIPLOMA	WHO IS ELIGIBLE?	AFFECTS ON IDEA	IN GRAD RATE?
Regular Diploma	Everyone	Terminates eligibility for IDEA services	Yes
Alternate Academic Diploma	Students assessed on the alternate assessment	Student is still eligible for IDEA services through 21	Yes (if completed within 4 years and a summer)
Occupational Diploma	Students with an IEP who will not be able to earn a regular diploma	Student is still eligible for IDEA services through 21	No
Special Education Diploma	Students with an IEP who will not be able to earn a regular diploma	Student is still eligible for IDEA services through 21	No

For more detailed information about diploma options visit:
<https://www.tn.gov/education/student-support/special-education/special-education-secondary-transition.html>.

Post-Secondary Options and Service Providers

Vocational Rehabilitation/Department of Rehabilitation Services

Vocational Rehabilitation is part of the Tennessee Department of Human Services. Since most people use the term Vocational Rehabilitation or VR, VR helps people with disabilities get paying, meaningful jobs.

VR's application process includes:

- Assessments to help identify job interests
- Eligibility determination
- Eligible Client works with VR Counselor to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE)

How Does VR Decide if an Applicant is Eligible?

Eligibility is based on:

- Disability makes it hard to get or keep a job
- Help is needed to get or keep a job that is a good fit; and
- The person can benefit from VR services

The VR Counselor determines eligibility for VR services. This decision is based on medical records, education records, what the VR Counselor thinks and disability decisions made by other agencies.

The VR Counselor has 60 days after the application meeting to make a service eligibility determination. However, sometimes the decision takes longer. If more time is needed, the VR counselor will ask the applicant to agree in writing to let them take more time. The eligibility decision may take longer if the VR Counselor thinks the applicant's disability is too bad for them to get VR services to help get a job. When that happens, the VR Counselor will set up additional assessments, such as trial work experiences or extended evaluations. These help the VR Counselor decide how VR services can help the applicant get a job. Those who receive SSI or SSDI because they have a disability can get VR services if they want to work.

It is important for VR applicants to share enough information from your doctor(s), school records or other sources to explain to the VR Counselor the nature of the disability. If getting all the documentation is a challenge, the VR Counselor can help. To qualify for VR services, having a diagnosis is not enough. The disability must impact "functional capacities." These are:

- Mobility
- Communication
- Work Skills
- Work Tolerance
- Self-Care
- Self-Direction
- Interpersonal Skills

What Does VR Do?

If the applicant is determined to be eligible for VR services, they will work with their VR Counselor to discuss their needs, preferences and interests to develop their Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Everyone will not need the same services. Here are some examples of VR services:

- Diagnosis
- Career guidance and counseling
- Training
- Treatment
- Supported employment
- Job placement
- Self-employment supports
- Vocational evaluation
- Rehabilitation technology services
- Personal care assistance program

Review The Arc Tennessee's "Getting a Head Start with Vocational Rehabilitation" for more information at: <http://www.thearctn.org/Assets/Docs/Getting-a-Head-Start-Voc-Rehab.pdf>

Additional Employment Service Providers

Another Employment Service Provider that might be of service to young adults is the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The WIA receives federal funding and has economic need as a qualification. Once a young adult turns 18, he or she can have access to WIA which considers their income, instead of the entire family's income.

Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

The WIA sets up programs to help individuals overcome barriers to work by providing job training and other services that will result in more employment and earnings, further educational and occupational skills, and less dependency on public assistance..

WIA is a project between government and industry. It is outcome-based, helping participants become self-sufficient through employment. WIA begins with eligibility and assessment and trains the individual, assisting with job search and employment.

To access WIA services, log on to <https://www.doleta.gov/programs/wia.cfm>

WIA Youth Department Programs Programs for adolescents between 14 and 21 years old:

- Limited Work Experience Program provides funds for employment of adolescents with public agencies and non-profit organizations. The participants get basic job skills, while supervised by trained professionals. Participants are paid minimum wage for work up to six months. Participants attend educational classes to be eligible for work. The program works to build work, maturity, employment skills, and specific job skills.
- The Classroom Training Program prepares young adults for employment by training in specific basic/advanced job skills. Young adults must be able to learn the required material and succeed in a job setting. The training is provided at vocational-technical schools or community colleges, and teaches necessary work skills.
- Summer Youth Employment and Training Service lets students work and earn money and learn work skills through work experience in non-profit and public agencies.

American Job Centers

The American Job Centers system provides maximum workforce results from one convenient location. American Job Centers are where people and jobs connect. Tennessee has a network of centers across the state where job seekers can get help and career information. Each center offers job information on computers, internet access, workshops, and job placement, recruitment, and training referrals. For more information about the nearest location, to learn about local job openings, apply for jobs and create a resume, visit: <https://www.careeronestop.org/site/american-job-center.aspx>

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), signed into law in July of 2014, provides the means for students 14 - 22 with a disability to receive certain services through VR or VR contractors. The service areas are:

- Job Exploration: Explore the world of work and career choices
- Work-Based Learning: Get paid/non-paid work experiences in school and/or after school
- Workplace Readiness: Prepare the student for the workplace
- Self-Advocacy: Student learns more about themselves, the disability and how to interact with the world
- Post-Secondary Counseling and Enrollment Assistance: Explore options for students seeking careers that require education after high school

Pre-Employment Transition Services are coordinated in partnership with the local Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, your child's teachers &/or other school professionals who may already be involved in support or service provision. Receiving Pre-ETS services while in school does not mean a student will qualify for VR services later. For more information about Pre-ETS Services visit:

<https://www.disabilityrightstn.org/getattachment/links/transition/Pre-ETS-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

Your Post-Secondary Choices: Pros and Cons

THE CHOICE	THE PROS	THE CONS
Full-time employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time to mature • Develop personal organizational skills • Develop career interests • Broader course of study • Earn income 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited chance for advancement • Possible lack of skills for independent living • Lack of availability of satisfying work situations with limited training • Young adult may lack necessary skills for work situations • Limited income potential
Technical College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-the-job training • Financial aid available • Certificate/applied programs available • Open admissions • Some supported work programs available including workshops and job coaching • May have dual enrollment options at local high school • High placement rates for graduates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No support services guaranteed • Some programs have waiting lists • Student responsibility for managing academic/independent life • Slower development of independence • May be seen as an extension of high school • No on-campus housing • Live at home while friends go away to school
Community Colleges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can use Tennessee Promise • Certificate/applied programs available • Open admissions • Can transfer credits to four-year colleges • No minimum SAT or ACT score needed to enroll • Prerequisite college courses offered • May have dual enrollment options at local high schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be seen as an extension of high school • No on-campus housing • Live at home while friends go away to school • Not as prestigious with peers
Four-Year Colleges and Universities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More prestigious with peers • On-campus living home fosters independence • Bachelor's degree available • Broader course of study • More diverse student population 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cannot use Tennessee Promise • Size of campuses can be very large (varies greatly) • Minimum SAT or ACT score required • Campus housing can be distracting • Diminished family support • No guarantee of individualized support services unless provided by special programs with additional tuition/cost.

Preparing for Postsecondary Education

Rights and Responsibilities

Students with disabilities can continue their education in:

- Colleges/Universities
- Community Colleges
- Postsecondary College Programs for Students Who Did Not Earn A Regular Diploma
- Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCAT)

All colleges, universities, community colleges and TCATs must follow the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act. These laws require them to make services, buildings, curriculum and housing accessible to those with disabilities.

Postsecondary schools have offices to assist students in gaining access they need. These offices are usually called “Office of Disability Services” or “Student Services Centers.” The access offices assist students with documented disabilities, identify their eligibility for services and identify reasonable accommodations and services which will give the student equal access to the university/college.

The U.S. Office for Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which prohibit discrimination based on disability. Almost all postsecondary schools in the United States are subject to these laws. Universities, colleges, technical schools or any other postsecondary training schools are not required comply with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), that means students will not have IEPs unless the postsecondary school has a special program.

Colleges/Universities

There are seven public universities, 47 private colleges and universities, and six for-profit colleges and universities in Tennessee. Colleges and Universities offer the educational degrees: Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, Masters, and PhD degrees that lead to professional occupations such as business management, engineering, nursing, doctors and teaching.

Students with disabilities need to know their rights and responsibilities between them and postsecondary schools. Staying informed will help ensure a full opportunity to enjoy the benefits of the postsecondary education experience.

Community Colleges

There are 13 Community Colleges in Tennessee. At Community Colleges, students can earn Associate Degrees that lead to careers such as nursing, Business and Computer Programming, Early Childhood Education, Paramedic and Mechatronics, or earn college credits that can transfer to state colleges and universities credit for credit and to some private colleges and universities. These degrees are normally achieved in two years.

For more information on Tennessee’s Community Colleges visit:

<https://www.tbr.edu/institutions/community-colleges>

For a list of Community College Student Support Services/Disability Services Office Contacts visit:

<https://www.tbr.edu/academics/disability-services>

College Options For Students Without a Regular High School Diploma

There are five of these programs in Tennessee:

Vanderbilt's Next Steps (<http://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/nextsteps/>)

David Lipscomb's IDEAL (<http://www.lipscomb.edu/education/ideal-program>)

University of Memphis' TigerLIFE (<https://www.memphis.edu/umid/>)

The University of Tennessee's FUTURE program (<http://futureut.utk.edu/>)

Union University's EDGE program (<http://www.uu.edu/programs/education/edge/>)

These programs help students with intellectual and developmental disabilities experience college life. Students direct their program of study. Each student's program is customized to meet their plans for the future including academics, independent living, and university life. Although each program is different, they provide support for student success.

Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology (TCAT)

There are 27 TCATs (Tennessee Colleges of Applied Technology) that provide a framework of industry-aligned training that prepares students for specific careers. They are especially helpful for those who learn kinesthetically. They provide opportunities for students to obtain the technical skills and professional training necessary to advance in today's competitive job market, while ensuring that businesses and industry have access to a qualified workforce. TCATs work with local industry to offer training that is needed locally.

Where Do We Go from Here? Making Choices

Transition possibilities for young adults include moving from:

- High school to work
- High school to postsecondary education
- A combination of work and education

Each choice places the student in a different world, with a new set of rights and responsibilities.

Although families and educators are important supports in making the decision about moving directly into work or postsecondary education, the decision is the student's. The young adult needs valid information as they make these choices.

Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES

Employment and Community First (ECF) CHOICES is a program for people of all ages who have an intellectual or developmental disability (I/DD). This includes people who have significant disabilities.

Services help people with I/DD gain as much independence as possible. People are supported to live with their family or in the community, not in an institution. Residential services are available for adults with I/DD who do not live with family but need supports where they live.

ECF CHOICES can help the person with I/DD explore the possibility of working. Services can help people learn skills for work, find a job, and keep a job. This could be a part-time job, a full-time job or self-employment. Working helps people earn money, learn new skills, meet new people and play an important role in their communities. Work can also help people stay healthy, have friends and build self-confidence.

Other services help people learn and do things at home and in the community to help them achieve their goals. If a person lives at home with their family, the services help the family support the person to become as independent as possible. Services also help people get actively involved in their communities and include peer supports for the person and for their family.

For more information, go to: <https://www.thearctn.org/ECF-Community-Network.php>

How to enroll

There are three ways to begin the enrollment process:

1. Complete it online at <https://www.tn.gov/tenncare/article/signing-up-for-the-program>
2. If you already have TennCare, call the number on the back of your insurance card and ask for help completing the self-referral form for the ECF CHOICES program.

- Amerigroup 866-840-4991
- BlueCare 888-747-8955
- United Healthcare 800-690-1606

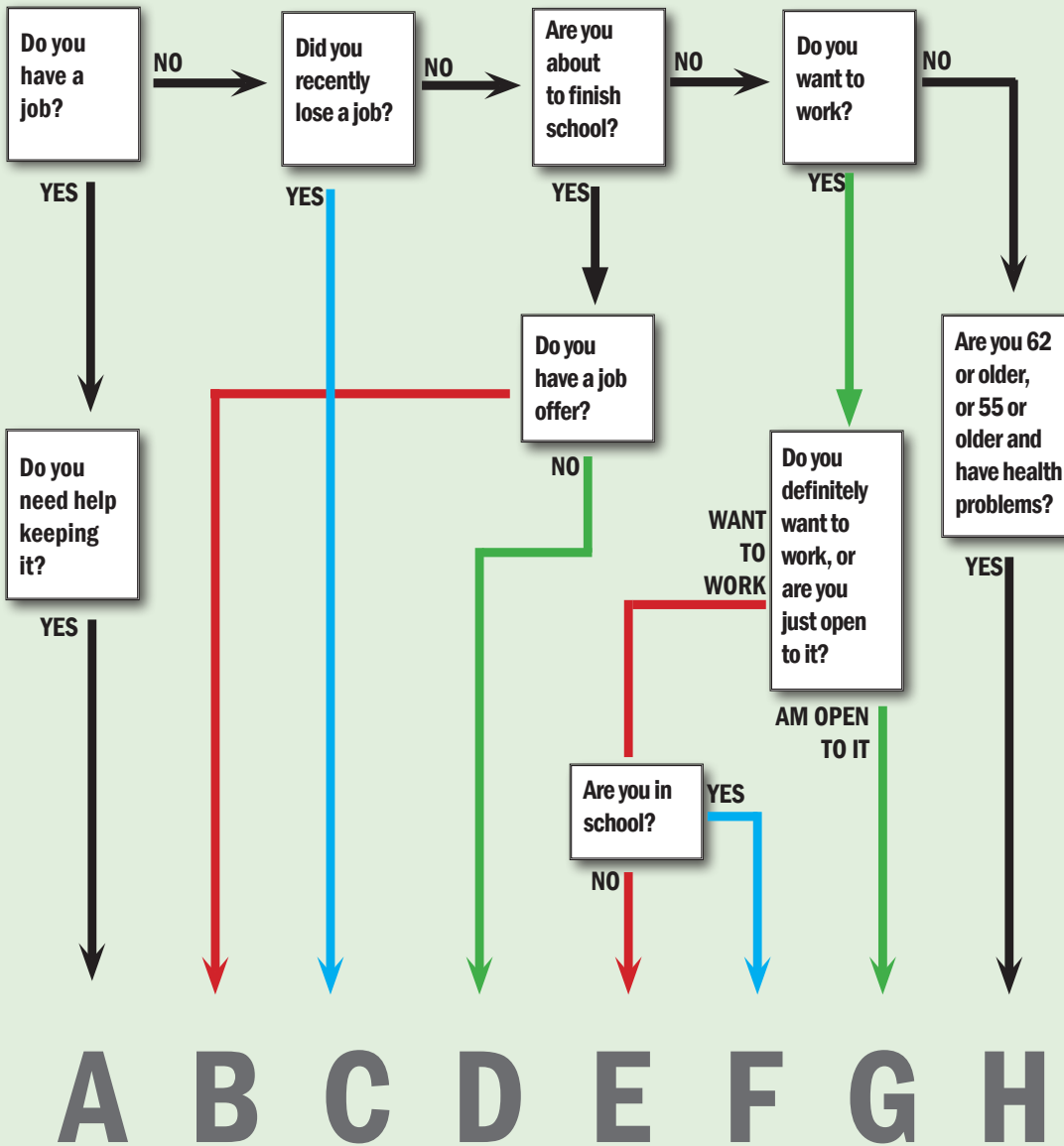
If you do not have TennCare, contact your DIDD Regional Office and ask for help completing the self-referral form.

- West TN Regional Office: 866-372-5709
- Middle TN Regional Office: 800-654-4839
- East Tennessee Regional Office: 888-531-9876

How to determine if you're eligible

There are eight priority categories that are eligible to immediately enroll in the program. To determine which category you might fit it, consult the charge on Page 15.

ECF CHOICES: Where do you fit in?



Explaining the categories

A: You have a job. You need help to keep your job.

B: You're a young adult (at least 18 years old) and about to finish school. This could be high school. Or, it could be college or other training after high school. You have a job offer. But, you can only get the job if you have help on the job.

C: You lost your job not long ago, and you want to get a new one. You need help to get a new job. You may also need help to keep your new job.

D: You're 18-22 years old and about to finish school. You don't have a job offer, but you want to work. You need help to get a job. You may also need help to keep your new job.

E: You don't have a job, but you want to work. You need help to get a job. You may also need help to keep your new job.

F: You're 14-22 years old. You're still in school. You live at home with your family. You're planning to work when you get out of school. But, you need help getting ready for work. You can't get the kind of help you need from your school or Voc Rehab (Vocational Rehabilitation).

G: You're at least 14 years old but not old enough to retire. You're open to exploring the option of working—even part-time or working for yourself, with help from the program. You agree to receive a service called "Exploration." It will help you decide if you want to work and the kinds of jobs you might like and be really good at by visiting job sites that match your skills and interests. It also helps you (and your family) understand the benefits of working and helps answer your questions about work.

H: You're at least 62 years old. You aren't interested in working anymore. You need help to live in and be part of the community.
OR
You're at least 55 years old. Your health problems make it hard for you to work. You need help to live in and be part of the community.

Conservatorships

A conservatorship is a legal process that gives one or more people the right and responsibility to make decisions for another person. It can be difficult to decide whether this is the best option for the person with a disability. Not everyone with a disability needs a conservatorship, but if conservatorship is necessary, it should be tailored to meet the person's needs, respecting their autonomy as much as possible. There are different types of conservatorships:

- Conservatorship of the person
- Conservator of property/estate/finance
- Healthcare Conservatorship
- Temporary/Emergency Conservatorship

There are alternatives to full conservatorship including, Representative Payee, Special Needs Trust, Durable Power of Attorney, Tennessee Healthcare Decisions Act, Supported Decision Making, And Health Care Surrogate, to Name A Few. If a family decides conservatorship is the best way to protect a vulnerable individual, it is important to seek the advice of an attorney.

Legal paperwork may only be filed with the court once an individual reaches the age of majority (18 in Tennessee). Without conservatorship in place upon the person reaching age of majority, all rights and responsibilities of an adult are passed from the parents/guardian to the adult. These rights and responsibilities include, but are not limited to, access to medical and educational information and decision-making at IEP Team Meetings. Conservatorship should not be entered into just because someone says it should be done. This is a serious legal decision.

For more information on conservatorship and alternatives to conservatorship, The Arc Tennessee has a booklet to help understand the process at:

http://www.thearctn.org/Assets/Docs/Conservatorship_Handbook.pdf

Special Needs Trusts

A Special Needs Trust protects an individual who is receiving benefits from state or federal government from losing eligibility for those benefits. For many parents, a Special Needs Trust is the most effective way to help their child with a disability. A Special Needs Trust can protect assets, gifts or inheritance a person may receive, and keep them from losing their public assistance benefits (e.g., SSI, TennCare, Medicaid Waiver).

A Special Needs Trust can also safeguard your family member's assets from anyone who might mismanage their funds and can be set-up either with or without a conservator being appointed. There are several varieties of Special Needs Trusts. Some are created with the beneficiary's money (self-settled) and some are created with someone else's money (third-party). As the name implies, a "Special Needs Trust" or "Supplemental Care Trust" is designed not to provide basic support, but instead to "supplement" someone's care or pay for other comforts and luxuries.

A Special Needs Trust (also known as "Supplemental Care Trust") can be used for a variety of items, such as:

- Medical and dental treatment and equipment not covered otherwise
- Rehabilitative expenses and occupational therapy services
- Extra nursing care
- Special dietary needs
- Eyeglasses
- Books, training or other educational materials or programs
- Trips to museums, movies, shopping, or to visit other family

Empowering Young Adults

What Is Self-Determination?

Self-Determination means making decisions. Students with disabilities can learn to make choices like other students, as they grow into adulthood. It is up to parents and educators to provide opportunities for children and young adults to learn to make choices. It is never too early to start practicing self-determination skills. Most people learning by doing so it is the responsibility of the adults in a child's life to offer opportunities for children to practice making decisions. Steps to decision-making:

- Begin with a simple decision
- Talk about the topic with a trusted adult (parent, teacher, guidance counselor, etc.)
- Get information and study potential choices - make sure the decision is understood
- Make sure the consequences of each possible choice are understood
- Get information and study the options
- Ask for advice from someone the young adult trusts
- Decide!
- Reflect on the outcome of the choice and discuss with the trusted adult

The Principles of Self-Determination

- Freedom to plan a real life: A person, along with their chosen family, and friends, and other supportive people, plans supports rather than purchases a program
- Authority to control resources, to purchase supports as possible
- The person making choices has support to build a life in their community:
 - Arrange formal and informal resources and personnel, formal and informal, to assist a person in living a socially rich life in the community
 - Responsibility to give back to the communities
 - Take a valued role in the community through competitive employment, spiritual development, caring for others, and volunteering, and spending public dollars responsibly to enhance the lives of persons with disabilities
 - Confirmation of the person's central role in leadership and change in their life

It is important to encourage children to be self-determined. Parents will not always be available to make decisions for their children. Encourage young adults to succeed as independently as possible.

Fussell, E. M. & DeMar, T. B. (2005). *Self-Advocacy: Teaching Individuals to Make Their Own Decisions [Instructor's Guide]*. Knoxville, TN: The University of Tennessee.

Self-Advocacy: Speaking Up

Self-advocacy refers to an individual communicating their interests, desires, needs and rights. Self-Advocacy involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions by speaking for oneself in a responsible way that others will be able to hear, pay attention to and understand. It is not about yelling to get attention. Others will not believe a person is ready to make their own choices or speak for themselves if they communicate this way.

In the 1960s, people with disabilities began taking an active role in planning their lives. Important outcomes of the self-advocacy movement include the recognition that people with disabilities are people first.

About Self-Advocacy

When children are young, their parents are their greatest advocates. When children begin to grow up, at some point, someone else will make choices and speak for a child besides their parents. Other adults may make choices for young adults with disabilities. As a child begins to mature, they can learn to begin to be the one to speak for themselves.

All young adults, including those with disabilities, can learn to make thoughtful decisions and speak about their specific preferences, interests and needs. Learning to be a strong self-advocate takes practice. Beginning with making one choice at a time and talking about that is how to start.

Adults with disabilities will have all the rights and responsibilities afforded all other adults, but will not automatically have self-determination and self-advocacy skills the day they turn 18, unless they have had opportunities to practice these skills along the way.

One of the best ways to practice self-determination and self-advocacy skills is for youth to become active participants and even leaders in their IEP Team meetings. For more information about Student Directed IEP Team Meetings visit:

<http://www.thearctn.org/Assets/Docs/Student-Directed-IEP-Training-Brochure.pdf>

The Emotional Challenges of Young Adulthood

Young adults with disabilities face many challenges that may follow them into adulthood. Anxiety or other mental illnesses can emerge with puberty and the transition from school to postsecondary life.

Some young adults may need professional help. There is no shame in mental illness. It is as much a part of health as vision, hearing or any other health concern.

Finding the right doctor and counseling situation is key to success. The doctor or counselor cannot tell what is discussed in a counseling session or other appointment to anyone without permission. Look to family, friends, school, and your family doctor for help finding a psychiatrist or counselor to help with emotional challenges. Another source of information and support is NAMI TN: <http://namitn.org/>

Getting a Driver's License in Tennessee

If a young adult wants to get a driver's license, they may consider taking a driver's education class either in school or community. Taking a driver's education class, along with good grades at school, can will lower car insurance rates.

Information on Tennessee's Graduated Driver License (GDL) Program:

<https://www.tn.gov/safety/driver-services/classd/gdl.html>

Steps to Getting a Tennessee Driver's License

- Go to a driver's license office or web page and get the book that explains driving rules
 - Study the driving rules
 - Practice the tests online
 - Get a parent or other licensed adult to help you practice driving
 - Schedule an appointment to take the road test (can be done online)
 - Take appropriate identification forms and go to your local testing center
 - If you are under the age of 18, you will also need to have:
 - A parent or legal guardian (with proof of guardianship) present to sign a minor/teenage affidavit and financial responsibility form
 - Show proof of school attendance/progress from a TN school or a letter from the school in another state that confirms your attendance/satisfactory progress. This letter must be signed and dated no more than 30 days prior to your TN application
 - Pass an eye exam
 - Pass a computer exam about "Rules of the Road" to get a learner's permit
 - Take the driving test to get your driver's license
 - Obtain insurance coverage for yourself as the primary driver
- For more information on how to get a driver's license in Tennessee visit:

To pass the driving test, you must ...

- Know how to safely operate the vehicle you will be driving
- Know how to read and obey road signs
- Know how to drive on the highway and in town, day or night, and in all kinds of weather
- Pass an exam about "Rules of the Road."

To receive testing and/or driving accommodations, you must self-identify as a person with a disability and provide a doctor's letter to verify your disability and your needed accommodations (i.e. if you need the test read aloud, you must tell the driver tester that you have a disability that affects reading and that you need the test aloud).

How Can Families Help Young Adults?

- Consider how the disability affects school, work, daily living, recreation, and relationships
- Focus on strengths and how the young adult can use them to their advantage as an adult
- Know and encourage student strengths. Help “reframe” self-image
- Help them make a plan focused on strengths and dreams
- Promote and support self-esteem by showing the importance of using positive self-talk
- Help the student develop self-determination, self-advocacy and independent living skills
- Be involved in the local community. Connect with school and community resources such as vocational rehabilitation, school-business connections, and vocational training personnel - all critical components of secondary transition
- Encourage critical thinking, compensating for weaknesses, generalizing knowledge and problem solving
- Minimize stress in the young adult’s life by working closely with school personnel (high school and college), and/or VR counselor to identify available supports and opportunities for success
- College personnel may only speak with parents about a student over 18, if the student gives written permission or is present and gives permission
- Help find a good fit between the young adult’s talents, interests and choices
- Talk about the future
- Help the young adult set realistic goals
- Teach the young adult to see every opportunity as a chance to learn and not to fear failure, but an opportunity to learn and grow
- Encourage independence. Discourage “learned helplessness”
- Help the young adult learn to make decisions and communicate the best they can
- Show and teach the importance of planning and organization in daily life
- Help teach daily living and personal social skills.
- Encourage and help facilitate their social activities with a variety of peers
- Support positive community citizenship and work values
- Reinforce proper work-related and social behaviors
- Provide work-related experiences, including chores at home, a paying job and volunteering
- Promote information about good money management, budgeting and saving
- Provide frequent opportunities for leisure and fun activities
- Emphasize “personal best”
- Celebrate every success
- Look for opportunities to move from being a coach to being a cheerleader