

How to Choose Your Own Adventure to Success!



This publication was co-written by members of the Youth Action Council on Transition (YouthACT). YouthACT is a national initiative to get more youth with disabilities and their allies involved as leaders who partner with adults and organizations to improve opportunities for youth to succeed in life. YouthACT is led by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) with funding from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP).

INTRODUCTION

When considering the options available to you after high school, you may feel a bit overwhelmed. There are many career paths and educational or training programs out there, and it's okay if you haven't figured them all out yet. Whether you're still in high school or have transitioned out, it's never too late to explore your options and the supports around you.

When thinking about your options, it's important to plan ahead and be thoughtful rather than hurrying through major decisions that can affect the course of your life. Some people choose to go to college, but that may not be the best fit for everyone. Some people dream of being a barber, hairstylist, mechanic, or artist and can find training programs like apprenticeships to achieve their goals. The job of your dreams may not require you to go to college, instead leading you to one of the other options described in this resource.

As you learn about your rights, responsibilities, options, and potential supports, you will gain confidence in your ability to make choices based on your goals. Caring adults, peers, and resources like this one, which was developed by youth across the country, can help you make these decisions. Take a look at the four sections below to help guide your way:

1. How can I learn to make choices that are right for me?
2. What activities can I do during high school to help me get ready?
3. What are my options after high school?
4. How do I access other supports to be successful?



"I TRIED COLLEGE BUT DIDN'T FINISH. I FOUND OUT ABOUT YOUTH SPIRIT ART WORKS, LEARNED TO DO ART, AND NOW I MENTOR AND TEACH HOMELESS YOUTH ABOUT ART. MAKE SURE YOU HAVE A DREAM. THIS WAY YOU FOLLOW YOUR HEART AND YOUR DREAM JUST MAY COME TRUE. HAVING A DREAM WILL HELP YOU ACCOMPLISH YOUR GOALS WHETHER YOU GO STRAIGHT TO COLLEGE OR WORK FULL-TIME." –BRANDON, AGE 25, YOUTHACT BERKELEY TEAM

HOW CAN I LEARN TO MAKE CHOICES THAT ARE RIGHT FOR ME?

As you're making choices about your life after high school, it's important for your voice to be heard. Through a valuable skill called self-determination, you can learn to make the right choices for yourself and exercise your voice based on your interests, needs, and preferences. Self-determination means that you are the one driving decisions that affect your life rather than letting others make these choices for you. You can practice self-determination by talking with adults and family members about your goals, what you need in high school, and what you want for your future.

These steps can help you practice self-determination when setting your goals and making choices for life after high school:

- Know yourself and your needs. What are your interests and skills? You can write them down one-by-one and talk with others.
- Consider other options.
- Make a choice that is right for you. You may find that your first choice doesn't work out, so it's good to keep other possibilities in mind.
- Think about the people and resources that can help you achieve your goals. What do you need to do to get ready?

As you think about the goals that you set for yourself, speak up with your own vision for your future. Not everyone has the same goals, and that's okay. Setting your own goals is a big part of self-determination, and you can find more information about it from Mind

Tools at http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_90.htm.



“SOMETIME[S] IT’S HARD TO KNOW HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES THAT ARE RIGHT FOR YOURSELF. BUT [IT] IS NEVER IMPOSSIBLE TO FIND THOSE CHOICES.” –JOSÉ, AGE 19, YOUTHACT OPEN MINDS



WHAT ACTIVITIES CAN I DO DURING HIGH SCHOOL TO HELP ME GET READY?

Now that you know more about making your own choices, you can start to take action and get ready for your life after high school. There are many activities you can participate in while still in high school. Even if you have already left school, the skills you can learn from these experiences remain valuable.

Self-advocacy is one of these skills. You can practice self-advocacy by communicating your choices to others along with the supports you need to be successful. In school, you can advocate for yourself by participating in planning your transition from high school, including by asking for supports like accommodations that you may need in classes. For youth with disabilities, this may mean contributing to your Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning process.

In many states, youth may also participate in an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) to help them prepare for the world of work (check out an informational comic and toolkit at <http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/youth/index-Youth.htm> and learn more at <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/ilp>). It is helpful to start this planning early while you are still in school. Give yourself time to think about career options that are the best fit for you and the steps you will need to take to achieve your goals and practice self-advocacy. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), your IEP must include a transition plan with postsecondary goals and transition assessments beginning no later than when you turn 16.

By participating in this transition planning process, you can set academic, personal, and professional goals during high school that are right for you. You can also choose the activities that help you prepare to achieve these goals after graduating.

The following is a list of tips to help you get ready for life after high school:

- Know what you need to do to graduate from high school.
 - ◇ To learn about the graduation requirements in your state, ask a counselor at your school or contact your state's Department of Education. You can find contact information and website links for the Department of Education in each state at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/contacts/state/index.html>.
- Develop your personal, academic, and professional goals and identify what you will need to do to achieve them. To do this, you can
 - ◇ Take classes that challenge you and help you prepare for reaching your goals after high school.
 - ◇ Consider taking classes that will count towards college credit.
 - ◇ Participate in volunteer experiences, job shadowing, internships, paid work experiences, and extra-curricular activities. You can include these on applications for jobs or educational programs.



“I PARTICIPATE IN MY IEP MEETINGS SO I CAN TELL MY TEACHERS WHAT I NEED AND DON'T NEED. THIS WILL HELP ME AFTER HIGH SCHOOL. IF I DON'T GO TO THE MEETINGS THEY WILL MAKE DECISIONS WITHOUT ME THAT AREN'T RIGHT FOR ME. WHEN YOU ARE AN ADULT YOU HAVE TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT YOUR LIFE, SO YOU SHOULD PRACTICE NOW.” –PRESTON, AGE 14, YOUTHACT DC TEAM

- Network with supportive adults, older peers, and people from different higher education programs or jobs to learn more about these settings and what is available.
- Advocate for accommodations that you need in high school. Doing so is good preparation for doing it later in life and understanding what you need to be successful at your job.

Participating in a range of activities, including your transition planning, helps you practice self-determination and become independent. Ultimately, the goals you set during high school and the activities you participate in to prepare yourself will lead you to the postsecondary options that are right for you.





WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL?

There are many options after high school. Learning about these options helps you figure out which ones best suit your needs, circumstances, and dreams while empowering you to make choices. Not all options have the same supports or accommodations, so it's important to do your research, ask questions, and try different options if necessary. Talking to peers who are already in some of these settings can help you get a better sense of what it will be like.

College is a popular option. Different types of college options include the following:

- **Public or Private Four-Year College or University**—Pursuing a Bachelor's degree or advanced degree can be a challenging and rewarding way to focus more on specific subjects you may have studied in high school that really interest you. College is often expensive for many families because there are living expenses like housing, food, and transportation in addition to tuition. Public four-year colleges and universities receive

some level of government and state funding that private schools do not get. Although both types are also funded through tuition, fees, and donations, tuition is often more expensive at private colleges because of this lack of public funding. Scholarships are a great way to offset the cost and may be available through the school itself based on need or merit or through outside organizations.

- **Public Community College**—Community colleges can serve as a transition period between high school and four-year colleges. If you want to stay close to home, experiment with different classes, or fulfill general education requirements at a lower cost, this could be a good fit for you. Earning a two-year Associate's degree here can also set you up for many careers if you decide not to continue towards the four-year Bachelor's degree. With an Associate's degree, you can become an air traffic controller, radiation therapist, dental hygienist, funeral service director, computer network support specialist, web developer, cardiovascular technologist, and much more. Scholarships to attend community colleges may be available. Many community colleges also provide job-training certificate programs.
- **Private Two-Year College**—You can also earn an Associate's degree from a private two-year college, which is similar to community college but may cost more because it is not public. Scholarships may be available.
- **Certification Programs**—Some postsecondary training programs help you earn a certification by providing training in a specific occupation and helping you prepare to pass a certification exam. For many occupations, there are career pathways that lead you from certification to a two- or four-year degree. Learn more about certifications at <http://www.careeronestop.org/FindTraining/Types/certifications.aspx>.

If college isn't right for you, there are other education and training programs to consider:

- **Training Program**—Also known as career, vocational, or technical programs, these training programs prepare you for a career in a specific trade by focusing specifically on the skills you need for a certain job. This could include a number of trades like auto repair, plumbing, retail, and tourism management.
- **Apprenticeship**—This option allows you to earn a salary with on-the-job training as you receive some classroom instruction to prepare you for a specific job. Apprenticeships are available in a large range of professions, including audio-visual technician, real estate manager, jeweler, and computer information technology specialist. Pre-apprenticeship programs also exist to help you prepare for an apprenticeship. Learn more by visiting the U.S. Department of Labor's website at <http://www.dol.gov/apprenticeship>.



- **Job Corps**—This program is free and helps young people with low incomes prepare for a career, earn a high school diploma or GED, and find a job. Along the way, you also learn about career development and skills that will help you find a job. To learn more, visit the Job Corps website at <http://www.jobcorps.gov/home.aspx>.
- **YouthBuild**—This program teaches skills related to a high demand job to young people who have dropped out of school and are otherwise unemployed. It traditionally focused on construction careers, but now there are many other options. Learn more at <https://www.youthbuild.org>.

Employment after high school is another option:

- **Job**—Taking a job after high school allows you to earn an income immediately if you have living expenses to think about. If you decide to take a job, it might be good to consider the education and training programs above to gain additional skills and enter a career field that interests you and will help you advance. For example, you may decide to work either part-time or full-time and participate in a training program at night.
- **Internship**—Similar to a job, an internship is a temporary position that provides you with experience in a specific career. Internships are often combined with college attendance or other education and training programs to build your work experience. Some internships are paid, and others are not.



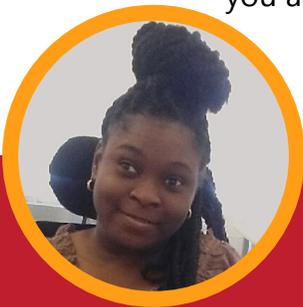
Service, whether to your community or country, is another good option:

- **Volunteering**—Like an internship, participating in community service allows you to experience a specific career field and expand your network. One program you can consider after high school is AmeriCorps NCCC (National Civilian Community Corps) as well as options in your community. More information about AmeriCorps NCCC can be found at <http://www.nationalservice.gov/programs/amicorps/amicorps-nccc>.
- **Military Service**—Serving your country through military service might appeal to you after high school, and you may be eligible to enlist in the military. Research your options online and see if this is a good fit for you.



HOW DO I ACCESS OTHER SUPPORTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL?

Whatever path you choose, there are a number of supports and services available that will help you access and maintain success throughout your time in a postsecondary setting.



“IT IS IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS TO WORK WITH REHABILITATION SERVICES ADMINISTRATION (RSA)

BECAUSE RSA CAN HELP THEM LEARN HOW TO DRESS SUCCESSFULLY AND PRESENT THEMSELVES, LEARN HOW TO GET TO WORK, LEARN HOW TO GO INTO THE WORKPLACE PREPARED, REFER THEM TO TUTORS FOR HELP, HAVE JOB OPPORTUNITIES, AND BE SUCCESSFUL.” –TERIANA, AGE 21, YOUTHACT DC

TEAM

In high school, the rights of students with disabilities are protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). If you have a disability, you are entitled to certain services while in school. However, when you are no longer in high school, your rights will be protected under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This means that to access supports and services you will have to advocate for yourself and, in some cases, apply and be found eligible.

Below are some areas and relevant resources that you can explore to be successful:

- **Independent Living**—Independent living skills help you to continue practicing self-determination throughout your life. When living independently in new environments, you will have to think about housing, transportation, how you will eat, whether you will cook, where you will do laundry, and more. Connecting to a Center for Independent Living (CIL) in your area may be helpful as you think through concerns about housing and if you need any personal care at home. To find out more about CILs, visit <http://www.ncil.org/about/aboutil>. Additionally, this online directory can tell you where the closest CIL is to your community: <http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory>.
- **Finances**—Being financially independent is an important part of adulthood. Connect to providers that can help you understand financial literacy, social security benefits, and scholarships. You can ask staff at CILs for help. You can also talk to a vocational rehabilitation counselor about services that help people with disabilities gain the skills they need to work. To find a vocational rehabilitation agency near you, visit <https://rsa.ed.gov>. Other financial literacy resources can be found at <http://www.mymoney.gov/Pages/default.aspx>.
- **Health**—Connecting with physical and mental health services as an adult is also important. You will need to learn to manage, understand, disclose, and advocate for your health and wellness and social and emotional health. Life after high school can be stressful, so self-care is important. Some helpful resources include Got Transition’s Youth and Family page at <http://www.gottransition.org/youthfamilies/index.cfm>.
- **Postsecondary Education Services**—To get accommodations in postsecondary settings, you will have to ask. Many schools have a disability services office that can help you, but it is your responsibility to disclose your disability if you want to request services (learn more about disclosure at <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>). It will be very different from high school. Postsecondary schools are “required to provide appropriate academic adjustments as necessary” but, unlike your

high school, they are not required to provide a free appropriate public education.* Make sure you contact the schools you are interested in and ask what documentation you will need to provide to them to determine your eligibility for services. To see examples of the types of accommodations that postsecondary educational institutions may provide, review the list of accommodations that Sacramento State provides by visiting <http://www.csus.edu/SSWD/services/services.html>.

- **Employment Services**—Regardless of the postsecondary path you choose, your goal will eventually lead you to employment. It is important to prepare now for work. For helpful information on pathways to employment and tips for finding a job, check out American Job Center Youth Services at <http://jobcenter.usa.gov/youth> and Tips for Job Hunters with Disabilities on the Mission Empower website at <http://www.missionempower.org/youth/tips-for-job-hunters-with-disabilities>.
- **Vocational Rehabilitation**—If you need supports and services to help you get a job, consider connecting with vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, which are available in every state. You must go through an application and eligibility process first. For application requirements, contact the VR agency in your state. If found eligible, you will work with a counselor at the VR agency in your state to create a plan that includes your employment goal and the services they will provide to help you reach this goal. To find a vocational rehabilitation agency near you, visit <https://rsa.ed.gov>.

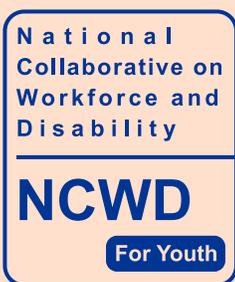
It is great that you are planning for and taking charge of your future. As you are considering your options, be sure to learn about your rights and responsibilities. This includes finding out who to go to if you aren't getting the results you want. Things may not go exactly as planned, and sometimes you may want to give up. People in your support system may not agree with the choices you make for your life.

Remember, this is your life. Advocate for what you want and need to be successful!

* Students with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities. Office for Civil Rights (OCR) in the U.S. Department of Education. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>



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