

ASD—Teen and Adult Years

Teens and adults living with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may have special concerns. Here is information from the American Academy of Pediatrics about improving the quality of life for teens and adults with ASD.

Teen Years

The dominant theme of the teen years is to plan an appropriate transition to adult life in the community. Areas of concern may include

Transition planning. By law, people with disabilities are entitled to an appropriate, free, and individualized education until the age of 22 years. Some individuals with ASD will graduate high school around 18 years of age and others will continue to receive school-based services until the 22-year age limit. Regardless, IDEA specifies that transition planning should begin no later than 16 years of age. However, many states have legislation, which can provide more than IDEA, to start preparing for transition to adulthood earlier. Families can begin planning for transition earlier, between 12 and 14 years of age, with their child's or teen's pediatric clinician to ensure that services and supports are in place for adult-centered health care, further education, employment, and/or supported employment.

During the transition period, social skills, leisure skills, daily-living tasks, selfcare, and hygiene issues, in addition to certain academic subjects, should be addressed in preparation of moving into the adult world. Older teens with ASD also need to transition to adult medical and behavioral health professionals. They need to understand their diagnosis and participate in health care visits depending on their language abilities and judgment.

Self-determination. Teens should know that their feelings and opinions matter. They should be encouraged and empowered to determine how and where they will live as an adult. They must also learn how to seek the support needed to reach their goals.

Behavioral challenges. The teenage years may be a time of changing behavior patterns for those with ASD, just as they are for those who do not have ASD. New behavioral challenges arise from frustration when teens are having difficulty communicating in a positive way or are challenged by the changing social rules of adolescence. It is also important to understand that teens with ASD have typical physical sexual development and they may need to learn what sexual behaviors are appropriate in public settings and private settings.

Adult Years

Many adults with ASD and typical cognitive abilities complete high school and attend college. Some may marry and have families. More children are being diagnosed and receiving appropriate supports and services earlier and may therefore be better prepared for adult responsibilities. It is also important to emphasize that adults with ASD can continue to improve in language, social interactions, and problem-solving. This means that the principles for support should continue throughout adulthood. Areas of concern may include maintaining relationships, employment, and independent living.

Visit [HealthyChildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org) for more information.

Adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics patient education booklet, *Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)*.

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