

United States Department of Education
Keys to Success: Attitude, Self-Advocacy, and Preparation –
Postsecondary Education Guiding Questions

The key to the success of youth with disabilities in postsecondary education is their attitude, ability to self-advocate and preparation. The following are some guiding questions and recommendations for families of youth with disabilities to help prepare them for postsecondary education (Office for Civil Rights, U.S. Department of Education (2011)).

1. Does your youth understand his disability?

Youth with disabilities need to know the nature of their disability and how their disability impacts their learning. Youth should also know their strengths, interests, and which accommodations have helped them be successful in learning. They will need to be able to explain these things to the disability office coordinator and staff. These skills can be learned while in school and practiced during the IEP process, so that youth are prepared to describe their disability and advocate for supports that will help them success in college.

2. Does your youth accept responsibility for his success?

Youth with disabilities who want to go to college will move from a school system where adults advocated for and directed their learning and accommodations to a postsecondary education system that requires them to advocate for themselves and be responsible for their own learning. As stated by OCR, “Students with disabilities need to understand that, while federal disability laws guarantee them an equal opportunity to participate these laws do not guarantee that students will achieve a particular outcome, for example, good grades” (p. 1).

3. Is your youth taking an appropriate preparatory curriculum?

Students who plan to go to college when they graduate will need to complete a course of study that will adequately prepare them. In Florida, ALL students, including students with disabilities, are expected to graduate with a standard diploma. There are courses of study that prepare students for college (see section on graduation requirements). It is important for youth to meet with their high school guidance counselor to make sure their on the right course of study. It is also important for youth with disabilities to learn study skills and be able to write well; taking advantage of tutoring and workshops while in school can help prepare youth for the demands of college.

4. Has your youth learned time management skills?

Youth with disabilities typically receive a high amount of guidance and direction in high school to follow schedules, on where and when to go to classes, and what to bring to class. This level of monitoring and support will not be provided in the postsecondary setting; rather, youth will be responsible for managing their own time, schedules, and assignments. It is critical for youth with disabilities to develop time management skills while in school so they can be successful once they are on their own in college.

5. Does your youth have computer skills?

Youth with disabilities will need to have good computer skills to be successful in college, so they should be learning computer skills while in school. There are many postsecondary tasks that must be completed using a computer, including: applying to college and for financial aid, registering and paying for classes, completing assignments and research, accessing grades, and email correspondence – just to name a few. Assistive technology can help students who have visual, hearing, physical, or other disabilities use computers. Youth with disabilities can work with the college’s disability services office, as well as computer lab and library staff, to coordinate technology tools that will help them use computers.

6. Have you and your youth considered supplemental postsecondary education preparation programs?

Many colleges and universities have summer programs for students who are still in high school so they can experience campus life. Living in a dorm, socializing in the student center, instruction in certain areas (e.g., math, technology, study skills), and dining in the food court or cafeteria are just a few of the experiences typically provided. Parents can work with their youth’s high school teacher to identify preparation programs at their local college or university.

7. Have you guided your youth in researching postsecondary education programs?

It is important for youth with disabilities and their families to research colleges and universities and learn about available supports and services, as well as the process and requirements for arranging needed accommodations. Meeting with student disability services office to learn about what they provide and documentation requirements can be very helpful when deciding which college or university to attend.

8. Have you and your youth considered getting involved on campus?

The first year of college can be very challenging, especially if your youth will be living far from home. New student or freshman orientations are a great place to begin learning about the campus, making friends, and deciding in which activities to participate. Many colleges and universities have special offices (e.g., student life, student engagement) that have staff available to help students find the organizations that best suits their needs, talents, and interests.

To access the full publication entitled, “Transition of Students with Disabilities to Postsecondary Education: A Guide for High School Educators,” visit <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html>