**The Journey of Transitioning to College from Aaron and Lisa Danielpour**

**STAGE 1: Preparing for Success, 8th – 10th Grade**

**PARENTS:**

The time to help your student

* Find their passions and interests, first for extracurriculars and community service, then for potential vocations
* Navigate the many changes coming
* Work through their disability
* Function as well as possible in the neuro-typical world (e.g. sensory issues, self-talk)

The Parents’ Responsibilities:

* Monitor academic and social success without hovering
* Coach independent living skills
* Transition the IEP process to include your teen
* Coach your child to learn how to self advocate

How Parents Can Help:

* Teach problem solving and decision making process
* Consider summer residential programs
* Have ongoing conversations about drugs, dating, and sex
* Expect the unexpected, improvise as needed
* Keep planning what your teen needs to learn next

Turn to resources you might find useful:

* Network with parents of teens the same age and a few years older
* Ask therapists, interventionists
* Read books, web sites, online forums; seek out conferences/seminars

Partner with school to give your teen best help possible

* Extended time, right to take test in separate room in IEP
* Critical to getting same rights for SAT/ACT
* Assistive technology
* Friendship/social skills groups
* Organizational and studying skills

**TEENS:**

Use every opportunity to get help with your challenges

* Building strong relationships with teachers, therapists, interventionists
* Listen thoughtfully to your advisors’ suggestions
* Attend social skills group
* Turn to tutors and other specialists as needed

Learn strategies for academic success

* Studying, note taking, and organizational skills
* Work through tendency to think literally, e.g. when answering test questions and essays
* Attend academy/teacher office hours
* Understand each teacher has different style, methods, and expectations
* Get a laptop through your IEP if possible
* Use assistive technology (e.g. Inspiration)
* Seek opportunities for extra credit in classes

Find your interests and strengths for extracurriculars

* It’s ok to try something and change your mind
* Speak up if you need support or a leader doesn’t seem to understand your disability
* Get as involved as you can with the activity and try to talk to the other teens there
* Pay attention to what you really enjoy the most

Understand your disability, strengths, and weaknesses

* Researching/learning about my disability
* Reflecting on my strengths and challenges
* Writing a letter to my future teachers

Trying to handle things on your own vs. knowing when to ask for help

Get advice on quirks that will seem odd to neuro-typical world (e.g. sensory issues, self talk) – Ideas include…

* Stress ball
* iPod with headphones
* Isometric hand clasp
* Think inside my head instead of out loud

**STAGE 2: The College Application/High School Graduation Process, 11th & 12th Grade**

**PARENTS:**

* Juggle academics and college prep with functional independent living skills
* Balance how much to help vs. too much
* Decision about when to start learning to drive
* Try to do steps early to give extra time, pace yourselves

Preparing for the SAT and ACT

* Get test accommodations early – extra time, separate room, using a computer for the essay
* Use one-on-one tutor who specializes in ACT/SAT prep and understands the disability
* Practice taking the test for long block of time
* Common to take both SAT and ACT to see which is your student’s best test

Choosing colleges to apply to:

* Focus on schools that will support your student’s needs AND interests
* Partner with high school guidance office
* Do web research, including Naviance
* Start visiting schools by junior year
* Handy Resource: Princeton Review K&W Guide to Colleges for Students with Learning Disabilities or ADHD

Timing tips:

* Start college essays summer before senior year
* Be prepared for time crunch first semester senior year
* Finalize college decision based on where your student will have the best experience

Senior year spring-summer prep for college life

* Help student work with college disability office
* Try to get a single dorm room
* Keep honing independent living skills
* Plan for special quality family time, relaxation
* Be realistic in expectations, focus on positives
* Celebrate your student’s successes, especially as college decisions arrive

**TEENS:**

Preparing for the SAT and ACT

* Start studying vocabulary early
* Watch for impact of literal thinking on test taking
* Take as many practice tests as possible
* Getting test accommodations really helps
* See which test you do better on, retake that one

Choosing which colleges to apply to

* How far do you want to be away from home
* Take tours of colleges of different sizes, settings
* Think about how easy it would be to find your way around
* What kind of campus environment is it – studious vs. partying
* Observe if people on campus look happy, friendly, intense, studious, down, party happy

Ask college students you meet on campus questions like:

* What was your freshman year like?
* What’s your favorite thing about going to this college?
* Are you glad you picked this college? Why?

Prepare for College Interviews:

* Make a list of questions they are likely to ask
* Practice your answers
* Do mock interviews with at least two people
* Use isometric hand exercise if you get nervous

Tips for completing your college applications

* Attend sessions with college representatives at your high school
* Bond with teachers who you can ask for recommendation letters
* Ask teachers for recommendation letters with plenty of notice
* Review your college apps for what they require

**STAGE 2: The College Application/High School Graduation Process, 11th & 12th Grade**, continued

**TEENS, continued:**

Tips for writing your college essays:

* Make list of essay questions and character/word limits
* Think through what will make the most impact
* Make sure you look at all your college applications up front, not all use the common app
* Get advice from high school guidance counselor, tutor

Financial Aid and Scholarships:

* Ask parent to help you complete the FAFSA financial aid forms
* Explore the scholarships to apply for
* Get advice from guidance counselor and the organization College Now

Tips for the Senior Year Count Down:

* Remain dedicated to getting the best grades possible, avoid “senior slump
* List specific independent living skills you want to learn, ask for help
* Think about what else you need to know to live in a college dorm
* Consider asking someone you’re interested in (don’t blush now!) or a group of friends to the prom and after-prom
* Keep working on your organizational and studying skills

**Continuing Asperger Moments to Watch for**

(a.k.a. potential moments of confusion):

* Prepare your student if military approach them (please note how deeply we support and appreciate the military)
* Endless emails and snail mail from prospective colleges
* Credit card applications sent to students, especially during college freshman year
* Help your student learn financial basics, such as checking account

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