



COLLEGE OR EMPLOYMENT: WHAT'S RIGHT FOR ME?

There is no one way to determine if employment or college is a better choice for any student. Students, with input from their families, should consider their goals for the future and determine how best to reach them. In doing so, students and families should make sure goals are realistic and attainable, in light of the individual's abilities and needs.

Though most students who graduate from high school do not fully know what they want to be "when they grow up," they should have some idea about what they like and what they are good at. Evaluating likes and talents (as well as dislikes and deficits) can help guide you as you begin to think about what you want to do with your life.

In some respects, students receiving special education have an advantage over many of their typical peers in that they have a formalized process, called transition, which helps them to plan for their futures beyond high school. Take advantage of the transition process by being an active member of your Individualized Education Program (IEP) team and by availing yourself of any vocational and educational opportunities that are available to you. Many students take part in work trials in the community during high school, which allow them to "try out" a particular job to see if they like it and are capable of doing it. Other students take courses at the local community college or a technical school while still in high school.

As you probably know, if you are a student receiving special education services, you may remain in high school until you are 21. Don't worry, though! This doesn't mean that you will be stuck forever in your 12th grade rotation. Instead, consider using the extra time to try out some of your options for the future, while you have some of the supports in place that have made you successful in high school. If you are not in a special education program, consider getting an after school job or taking classes in the summer at a local college to help you evaluate your options

before you graduate.

As you begin to narrow down a job or type of job that you are interested in having, think about what the prerequisites are for that job. While some jobs definitely require a college education or even an advanced degree, many jobs are available to individuals without higher education. Instead, these jobs may require certain skills or experience – which you can acquire in a high school transition program or even after you finish high school through a vocational training program or on-the-job training. Too many students go to college believing it is the “thing to do,” only to find that their college degree is irrelevant to the job they eventually obtain. They often spend tens of thousands of dollars and may even take out student loans, which they are unable to pay back on the paycheck they receive. Good planning and honest reflection can help to minimize unnecessary expenditures, time, and worry.

If you are considering college or another post-high school educational program, recognize that there will be many important differences between higher education and high school. For example, in college, your schedule may be different day-to-day, and you will have large blocks of unstructured time. Homework in college often consists of vast amounts of reading, and grades may be determined by a single exam or a major research paper. For the most part, once you enter college, you won't have checks in place to make sure you understand material as you go along, which can make for major disappointment after exams. If you need help during the course, you will be expected to recognize for yourself that you need help and seek it out on your own, either from the professor or from a student academic support program. Additionally, if you had significant accommodations for academic coursework in high school, you may be surprised to find that many of these are not available to you in college. Professors are only required to make reasonable accommodations, and only if you ask for them and demonstrate a need. Course materials in college will not be modified.

If you decide that higher education is right for you, consider beginning at a community college or in a two-year program. These programs generally have smaller campuses and class sizes, and they usually cost less money. Taking classes outside of a traditional four-year program may help you to refine your career goals, and it does not prevent you from applying to a four-year college or university later (and perhaps with several credits to apply towards your college degree). Also make sure to take advantage of the office of disability services at

whatever school you choose. Some schools even have specialized autism support programs, which can help students navigate both the academic and social demands that you may face. To find college support programs for students on the autism spectrum, visit the Resource Directory contained within the CAR Autism Roadmap™.

Related Articles:

- [IEP Requirements Related to Transition to Adulthood](#)
- [Accommodations in Higher Education](#)
- [Education After High School: What are the Options?](#)
- [College Support Programs: Going Beyond What is Required](#)
- [Finding a Job: Measuring Your Interests and Aptitude](#)
- [Assessing Needs for Supports in the Workplace](#)

Recommended Link:

- [CAR Resource Directory \(Select Transition Services and Vocational Programs\)](#)
- [Students in Transition, Thinking about Life After Graduation](#)

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