Children and families experience many transitions, large and small, over the years. Some predictable transitions occur: when children transition out of early intervention services at age three, when they move from preschool programs into kindergarten, when they approach adolescence, and when children move from adolescence into adulthood. Other transitions children make include moving into new programs, working with new agencies and care providers, and making new friends. A move from hospital to home is another transition some children and families may experience. Transitions involve changes: adding new expectations, responsibilities, or resources, and letting go of others.

As a parent of a child with special needs, disabilities, and/or developmental delays, you may be caught up in day to day survival. You may ask, “How can I think about tomorrow when I’m just trying to make it through today?” But when those moments come when you can catch your breath it may be helpful to be aware of those transitions and allow yourself to think about the future.

The Transition Timeline for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs may help you think about the future. We hope this timeline will give you ideas to help your child achieve independence in their own health care and other areas of life as he/she grows.
Transition Timeline for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs:
Developmental Disabilities/Delays

**Parent and Child Interactions that Encourage Independence**

- Birth to 3, or according to your child’s developmental ability
  - Assign your child chores appropriate for his/her ability level.
  - Encourage decision making skills by offering choices.
  - Teach consequences of your child’s behaviors and choices.
  - Begin teaching your child about his/her special need.
  - Allow your child to experience the consequences of a poor choice as well as a good choice.
  - Begin teaching your child self-advocacy skills.
  - Begin asking “What will you do when you grow up?”

- By ages 3-5, or according to your child’s developmental ability
  - Assess your child’s perception and basic knowledge of his/her special needs. Build on their understanding.
  - Encourage your child to ask questions and use more descriptive language.
  - Continue to teach your child self-care skills: normal skills and those related to his/her special need.

- By ages 6-11, or according to your child’s developmental ability
  - Encourage your child to take responsibility for his/her medical care.
  - Teach your child about proper nutrition.
  - Help your child to develop a sense of personal responsibility.
  - Assure your infant the world is a good place in which to live. The development of a sense of trust is vital to the development of a healthy personality.
  - Begin asking “What do you want to do when you grow up?”

- By ages 12-18, or according to your child’s developmental ability
  - Assess your teen’s perception and basic knowledge of his/her special need. Fill in gaps in understanding.
  - Continue teaching your teen normal self-help skills as well as skills related to special need.
  - Continue teaching self-advocacy skills.
  - Begin helping your teen keep a record of his/her medical history, including conditions, operations, treatments (dates, doctors, recommendations) and Individualized Education Program (IEP) if on an IEP.

- By ages 18-21, or according to your child’s developmental ability
  - Let your child choose how to spend some or all of allowance.
  - Continue assigning your child chores appropriate for his/her ability level.
  - Take your child shopping whenever possible so he/she can help in choices.
  - Let your child choose how to spend some or all of allowance.
  - Teach your child the consequences of his/her behaviors and choices.

- By age 21
  - Continue helping your teen take responsibility for making and keeping his/her own medical appointments, ordering their own supplies, etc.
  - Encourage hobbies and leisure activities; include exploring community and recreational activities, clubs, 4-H, Scouts, Campfire, YMCA, sports, etc.
  - Assess your child’s perception and basic knowledge of his/her special needs. Build on their understanding.
  - Continue helping your child interact directly with doctors, nurses, therapists, teachers.

**Supports and Services to Consider (see back for contact information)**

- Transition to Preschool: Supports or Services to Consider
  - Birth to 3
    - Contact a Family Resources Coordinator (FRC) for services/programs to help you and your child. If eligible, the FRC will coordinate needed services for your family through an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP). Call Healthy Mothers, Healthy Babies (number on back) for your local FRC contact.
    - Seek a parent program for emotional support and networking.
    - Involve your child and family in community and recreational activities that include children with and without special needs.
    - Begin transition planning if from Early Intervention Program to Early Childhood Special Education Services/Public School Preschool or community program by age 2 1/2: the FRC coordinates this.
    - A transition plan meeting must be held at least 3 months before your child’s third birthday and a written plan developed.
  - By age 3
    - If your child is eligible for Early Childhood Special Education Services an Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be in place by your child’s 3rd birthday – or the FRC will work with you to identify other programs/services.

- Transition to School
  - By ages 3-5
    - If on an IEP, encourage student to participate in IEP meeting.
    - Help your teen identify and be involved with adult education and IEP team, including employment and adult life activities.

- Transition to Adolescence
  - By ages 12-18
    - If on an IEP, you may want to encourage young adult to stay in a school program until age 21.
    - If on an IEP, continue to encourage young adult to participate in IEP meeting and continue transition planning with young adult and IEP team, including employment and adult life activities.
  - By age 18
    - For young adults with developmental disabilities, notify Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) for adult vocational services.
    - Can sign up for DDD at any age, the earlier the better.

- Transition to Adulthood: Supports or Services to Consider
  - By age 14
    - Transition Plan from School to Post-School options begins for teens on IEPs. They must be invited to participate in their IEP meeting.
  - By age 17
    - Help your teen identify and be involved with adult community and recreational activities that include children with and without special needs.
    - Explore support groups, if teen is interested.
    - Begin helping your teen to make health decisions and take responsibility for his/her own medical appointments, ordering his/her own supplies, etc.
    - Help your teen find work and volunteer activities.
    - Continue to allow your teen to help with family chores.
    - Continue to encourage hobbies and leisure activities.
    - Help your teen identify and be involved with adult or older teen role models.
    - Begin, with your teen, looking for an adult health care provider.
  - By age 21
    - Investigate SSI Work Incentives such as Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS).
    - For young adults with developmental disabilities, notify Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD) for adult vocational services.
    - Can sign up for DDD at any age, the earlier the better.