

Transitions—Growing Up and Away



Besides starting out a new school year, for many families this fall will be a time to get ready to launch a son or daughter into the next phase of life after high school. Think with your teen what they want to accomplish. The excitement and uncertainty your child may be feeling about these next steps may be mirrored in your own feelings of pride, concern, and maybe even relief. Growth and change affect everyone!

Listen to your son's or daughter's hopes and ambitions.

Whether or not these seem practical or desirable to you, listen for clues to your child's dreams. Some are possible; some are exploration, trying out ideas.

Help your teen consider next possibilities—additional training, college, work, military, travel—and available resources. Does your teen's high school offer good information and guidance—counselors, libraries, the Internet...? Take your cues from your child and consider what you can contribute to exploring and supporting ideas. Help think about formal and informal resources, and perhaps especially, personal contacts. Are there other adults or mentors in your child's life who can advise? (Sometimes another adult can say things a parent can't.) Also, remind teens they'll need to come up with a response to that perennially trying question—"So, what are you going to do with your life?"

Learn how your teen hopes to achieve these next steps. Don't take over but ask questions and show your interest. Help teens think about their strengths and how to convey these to people who don't know them well (without sounding egotistical). Think also with teens about back-up plans and other options--sometimes life throws a curve ball. Help teens think about how to judge and handle setbacks as well as opportunities.

Consider best ways to manage problems or special needs your child may have.

What strategies have worked that could be applied to new situations? Ensure your child has as much say as possible over future plans. If your son or daughter will be "aging out" of some services or programs what new resources might be available? Some helpful resources can be found here: www.fv-impact.org/resources/health-well/#Transition





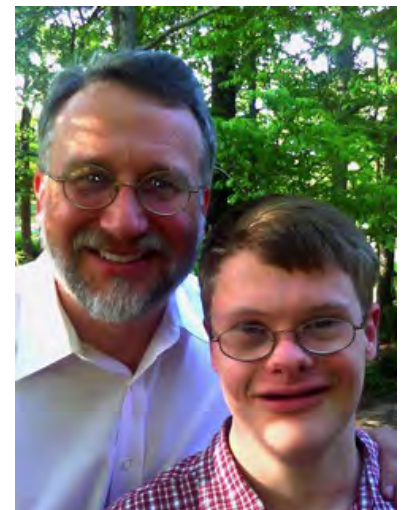
Discuss with your teen how they will manage new and changing relationships with family and friends. Ask what your teen's peers and especially close friends are planning. How will they keep in touch, especially if they're going in different directions? Talk over any concerns about making new friends—discuss possible strategies. While teens are establishing their own identities and separating some from family, help them think through new relationships with you and ways to maintain contact. Remind your teen that you'll want to celebrate successes and be

there for problems or difficulties—that's what families are for.

Besides the big dreams of life, ensure that your son or daughter has some of the practicalities down, especially if they'll be moving out of the house—doing laundry, budgeting, handling credit cards and bills, healthy food shopping and preparation (something in addition to the microwave!), managing time and new freedom. Summer jobs, after school work (in reasonable amounts), volunteering—all of these can offer real-world experience and a beginning taste of independence and responsibility. By this time your son or daughter is likely taking a large role in decision-making and managing the day-to-day details of life—making appointments, handling homework and school decisions, managing relationships. Mistakes and misjudgments will happen, but it's wonderful to have a chance to learn from them while still in a supportive home environment.

Consider ways to move into a more adult relationship with your son or daughter—assuming new roles and tasks or easing up on family rules, for example. This is especially important if your teen will continue living at home, as many do these days. When there is not a clear marker of change such as moving out, think about what would be appropriate symbols of growth and responsibility—more privacy, dropping curfews, or even paying rent!

Ensure your teen's health care is updated; learn about and plan for health care transitions; and check health insurance coverage. For many at this stage, health insurance becomes problematic. Encourage your son or daughter to be current with all health care, dental check-ups and immunizations. Learn whether your teen will still be covered on your policies or the best options to ensure continuous coverage. This may also be a good time to plan a transition from pediatric to adult caregivers. Encourage healthy living: physical exercise; responsible sexual behavior; avoidance of alcohol, drugs, and tobacco—reinforce all those important messages from earlier years. And then, understanding that some experimentation is natural, trust your teen to manage with minimal oversight from you.



Help your teen develop healthy approaches to managing the mental health of daily life—handling stress, strategies to consider when disagreements occur or disappointment looms. As your teen gets ready for the next steps in life feelings of excitement and exhilaration may compete with those of fear of failure or worry over how they'll make friends and manage daily life. Listen to and acknowledge your teens' feelings—you may even want to initiate discussion. Offer other perspectives when your teen seems excessively negative or self-blaming. Let your teen take the lead in resolving personal problems. Ensure your teen has a grounding in the importance of emotional as well as physical health, knows that ups and downs are part of life, and is comfortable turning to you—or someone—for help and support.



Love, support and encourage your child—at this and all stages of life. Let your son or daughter know you'll be there—emotionally if not always in person. Let them know what they can rely on you for (although don't let this get in the way of teens developing their own strengths and strategies). Don't feel this year is your last chance. You've probably spent 18 or more years imparting values and good habits. Trust yourself and your efforts. Finally, find support for yourself as a parent as you navigate new roles with your “becoming-adult children” and your emptying nest.

To see, order, or download FamilyVoices Bright Futures materials go to: www.fv-impact.org Also, check out the FamilyVoices Kids As Self Advocates (KASA) website for materials written by and for youth with special health care needs at www.fvkasa.org

