



A Middle School Guide to Preparing for the Transition to Life After High School

Introduction

This section empowers young individuals by laying a solid foundation for personal growth and future success. Here, we focus on developing self-awareness, practicing early self-advocacy, exploring beginning employability skills, and connecting with valuable community resources. Whether you're a student discovering your unique strengths, a family member offering support, or an educator guiding your class, this guide provides practical strategies, engaging activities, and resource links to help you build confidence and independence.

How to Use This Section:

- 🦋 **Students:** Use the exercises to reflect on your strengths, set achievable goals, and practice communicating your needs.
 - 🦋 **Families:** Support your child by reviewing the activities together and discussing the importance of self-advocacy and community engagement.
 - 🦋 **Educators:** Integrate these strategies into classroom activities and individualized learning plans to foster a supportive environment.
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Developing Self-Awareness

Understanding Your Strengths and Needs

Self-awareness is the first step in understanding who you are and what you need to succeed. In this section, you'll learn how to:

- 🦋 **Recognize Your Strengths:** Identify your talents, interests, and skills—both in school and beyond.

- 🦋 **Understand Personal Needs:** Reflect on areas where you might need extra support or additional resources.
- 🦋 **Practice Goal Setting:** Begin with small, achievable goals that pave the way for bigger dreams.

Activities & Tools:

- 🦋 **Strengths Inventory Worksheet:** A simple exercise to list and reflect on your personal talents.
- 🦋 **Goal-Setting Exercise:** Step-by-step guidance on how to set and track short-term and long-term goals.

Tips for Families & Educators:

- 🦋 Encourage open discussions about personal interests and accomplishments.
 - 🦋 Celebrate all success to build confidence.
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Early Self-Advocacy Skills

Learning to Speak Up for Yourself

Self-advocacy means expressing your needs and ideas in a clear, effective manner. This section focuses on:

- 🦋 **Communicating Needs:** How to ask for help or express what you need from teachers, peers, and family members.
- 🦋 **Understanding Rights and Responsibilities:** An introduction to your legal rights (like those under IDEA and ADA) and cultural expectations in school.
- 🦋 **Practical Role-Playing:** Engaging in simple scenarios to practice asking for help—for example, during class discussions, doctor visits, family events, in the community, or meetings with a school counselor.

Tips for Teachers & Families:

- 🦋 Model clear, respectful communication that adjusts to the situation.
 - 🦋 Provide regular opportunities for students to practice these skills in supportive settings. Remain open to surprises and allow space for failure (reasonable failure allows for growth).
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Gaining Beginning Employability Skills

Exploring Your Future and Building Soft Skills

Even in middle school, you can start preparing for future work and career interests by developing key soft skills:

- 🦋 **Understanding Soft Skills:** Learn the importance of teamwork, communication, punctuality, and problem-solving.
- 🦋 **Exploring Work Strengths and Interests:** Discover activities and hobbies that might suggest future career paths. Take on volunteer opportunities in the school or community and do chores at home.
- 🦋 **Career Exploration Activities:** Engage in fun, interactive exercises like career interest quizzes and group projects.

Practical Ideas:

- 🦋 Participate in school clubs or volunteer for community projects.
 - 🦋 Try out a "day in the life" activity to see what different roles involve.
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Exploring Local Community Programs & Youth-Focused Disability Organizations

Connecting with Your Community

Community resources can enhance your learning and provide extra support beyond school:

- 🦋 **Understanding Community Programs:** Learn about local after-school programs, summer camps, and organizations that support youth with disabilities.
- 🦋 **Finding Local Resources:** Tips for asking school counselors or family members for recommendations.
- 🦋 **Creating a Community Resource Map:** An activity where you list and locate nearby programs, noting what each offers.

For Families & Educators:

- 🦋 Attend community events together to explore these opportunities firsthand.
 - 🦋 Use these resources as a supplement to school-based support.
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Identifying Support Needs Using Person-Centered Practices

Tailoring Support Just for You

Everyone is unique—so are your support needs. This section helps you identify what works best for you:

- 🦋 **What Is Person-Centered Planning?** A process that helps individuals develop a personalized plan for their lives based on their values, needs, preferences, and aspirations to achieve their goals and enhance their quality of life.
- 🦋 **Self-Assessment Tools:** Guided questions and checklists to help you evaluate what supports (like mentoring or counseling) might be helpful.
- 🦋 **Building Your Support Network:** Learn how to identify and reach out to trusted adults, mentors, or teachers who can help you achieve your goals.

Activity:

- 🦋 Develop your personal support plan by listing the areas where you need help and the people who can provide that support.
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Conclusion & Next Steps

Wrapping Up and Looking Forward

As you complete this section, remember that every step you take is an investment in your future:

- 🦋 **Recap of What You've Learned:** You've begun to understand your strengths, practiced self-advocacy, developed employability skills, connected with community resources, and learned to identify personalized support needs.
- 🦋 **Action Steps:** Choose one or two activities from each section to try out, and discuss your progress with a trusted adult or mentor.
- 🦋 **Transition to High School:** The skills you develop now will grow even further as you move into high school. Stay curious, keep practicing, and continue to seek support.
- 🦋 **Additional Resources:** Check out the included links and additional readings for more information on community programs and self-advocacy.

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