



Navigating Educational Transitions: High School to College

Introduction

Transitioning from high school to college is an exciting yet challenging step. While high school often provides structured support through individualized education programs (IEPs) or Section 504 plans, college requires you to take a more active role in managing your accommodations and support systems. This guide is designed to help you understand these differences and prepare for the increased responsibilities and self-advocacy required in college.

Think college might not be for you or the family member or student you support. Check out thinkcollege.net to learn about Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) programs.

Understanding the Differences in Support Systems

High School Support:

Structured Accommodations:

- 🦁 In high school, accommodations are typically provided through IEPs or Section 504 plans.
- 🦁 Your support team—parents, teachers, and counselors—actively plans and implements these supports.

Built-In Routines:

- 🦁 Daily schedules and classroom routines often provide built-in structure and reminders for assignments and tests.

Law:

- 🦁 Services are mandated by IDEA and Section 504.

Child-Find:

- 🦋 A federal requirement under IDEA that public K-12 schools must identify and evaluate children who may need special education services, ensuring they receive necessary accommodations and modifications.
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College Support:

Law:

- 🦋 IDEA no longer provides coverage for students; instead, Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) now offer protection.

Self-Initiated Accommodations:

- 🦋 In college, accommodations are available through the Disability Services Office, but you must initiate the registration process.
- 🦋 You are responsible for providing documentation and communicating your needs to professors.

Increased Independence:

- 🦋 Unlike high school, college classes may not automatically implement accommodations.
- 🦋 Support is available, but you must advocate for yourself and follow up with the appropriate offices.

Example:

- 🦋 A teacher might automatically adjust test conditions in high school based on your IEP. In college, however, you must contact the Disability Services Office, register for accommodations, and then notify each professor about your needs.
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Preparing for Changes in Responsibilities

Academic Responsibilities:

Self-Management:

- 🦋 College coursework often demands you manage your time, assignments, and deadlines.
- 🦋 Developing strong organizational and time management skills is key.

Direct Communication:

- 🦋 You must communicate directly with professors about your accommodations.
- 🦋 Prepare to explain your needs clearly and concisely.

Building Self-Advocacy Skills:

Practice Early:

-  Start practicing self-advocacy in high school through real-world opportunities, role-playing, and taking a more active role in your IEP meetings.
-  Gradually assume more responsibility for managing your academic support.

Action Steps:

Research:

-  Begin gathering information about the disability services offered at your intended college or contact the program lead if you will attend an Inclusive Postsecondary Education (IPSE) program.

Documentation:

-  Organize your current documentation (IEP, 504 plan, evaluations) so it's ready for college registration. Colleges will only use evaluations, not IEPs, to determine your accommodations.

Plan Meetings:

-  Schedule meetings with college disability coordinators before classes begin to discuss your needs.

Strategies for a Smooth Transition

Before College:

Contact Disability Services:

-  Contact your college's Disability Services Office well in advance.
-  Ask about their registration process, required documentation, and deadlines.

Prepare Your Communication:

-  Develop a clear, concise script for discussing your accommodations with professors and staff.
-  Consider role-playing these conversations with a trusted mentor or family member.

During College:

Stay Organized:

-  Use planners or digital calendars to track assignments, appointments, and follow-up meetings.

Build a Support Network:

-  Connect with other students who have similar experiences.
-  Join support groups or clubs related to disability advocacy on campus.

Monitor and Adjust:

-  Regularly assess whether your accommodations are meeting your needs.
-  Don't hesitate to request adjustments or additional support if necessary.

Tools and Resources

Self-Advocacy Checklist for College Transition:

-  Contact your college's Disability Services Office.
-  Gather and organize your current documentation (IEP, 504 plan, evaluations). In most cases, the full evaluation must be no older than years.
-  Contact the Disability Services Office to understand the registration process.
-  Develop a communication script for discussing accommodations with professors.
-  Schedule meetings with potential mentors or current college students with similar experiences.

Timeline for Registration:

6-12 Months Before Applying to Colleges:

-  Research colleges and their disability services.
-  Gather necessary documentation.

3-6 Months Before Attending College:

-  Contact Disability Services; ask questions about the registration process.

1-2 Months Before Starting College:

-  Complete registration and schedule an initial consultation with the Disability Services Office.

Additional Resources:

Articles & Videos:

-  Look for college transition webinars and videos specifically for students with disabilities.

Campus Tours:

-  If possible, tour the disability support facilities on campus.

Support Organizations:

-  Explore national and local organizations that offer transition support and advocacy training.

