

Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorder: College Transition Fact Sheet

ASD & College

The number of post-secondary students with ASD is on the rise. Estimates suggest that 44% of emerging adults with ASD enroll in some form of post-secondary education following high school. College students with ASD are at increased risk for dropout before completing their degree and tend to experience underachievement even when adequately academically prepared. Programs that help promote successful transition from secondary to post-secondary education can improve enrollment and graduation outcomes.



Common Challenges Faced by Students with ASD

Students beginning post-secondary education face increased social, emotional, and organizational demands. These demands create additional challenges for students with ASD. Individuals with ASD often display difficulties with change, daily living skills, and executive functioning, which impacts their ability to succeed in the college environment. College students with ASD also report more difficulty integrating into the campus community, increased feelings of isolation, and higher levels of stress, anxiety, and depression compared to peers.

Post-secondary students with ASD can receive accommodations through their school's disability office consistent with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Receiving supports requires self-advocacy; students must disclose their diagnosis to support staff and provide documentation of their diagnosis

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What help is available?

Accommodations are available through college disability support offices, but are not typically sufficient to address major areas of difficulty encountered by college students with ASD. Students with ASD report wanting additional or improved services in the areas of social support/peer mentoring programs, career planning, accommodating housing options, and psychological services. Disclosing the diagnosis to educational support staff within the first year of college is linked to improved graduation rates.

Transition planning should begin early while the student is still in high school

- Work on building self-knowledge about ASD and student strengths and difficulties
- Practice self-advocacy skills
- Teach stress management techniques, problem solving, and goal setting
- Address openness to receiving support
- Parent involvement in the transition process is often essential for success.
- Identify a high school staff member that can help encourage transition planning, such as a special or general education teacher or case manager
- Plan immersion experiences - tour the prospective campus, meet with the disability support office, attend a college class, and learn how to navigate the campus
- Consider counseling supports if needed

Select References

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The Binghamton Regional Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders (BRCASD), located on the Binghamton University campus in Binghamton, NY, is one of the seven regional centers affiliated with the New York State Regional Centers for Autism Spectrum Disorders (NYSRCASD). Our mission is to provide low-to-no cost evidence-based education and training for families, educators, and community professionals to improve services and outcomes for youth with ASD (ages 4-21). We serve Broome, Chemung, Chenango, Cortland, Delaware, Otsego, Tioga, and Tompkins counties.