Planning Your Future: Transitioning to Adulthood

Turning 18 is a big deal! When you turn 18, you are considered an adult in North Carolina. You can make choices in your life about your education, where you live, what doctor you see, what to do with your money, and many other things. Below are some things to think about as you become an adult. There are links at the end of each section for you to click on to learn more about each topic. If you have a printed copy of this fact sheet, scan this QR code with your phone's camera to see this fact sheet on your phone and to be able to click on the links.

Photo ID – You need a valid photo ID, such as a driver's license (if you meet the requirements), or a DMV issued ID card (like a REAL ID with a star). School IDs may not be accepted for official use now that you are an adult. You will need this ID to get a job, visit the doctor, set up a bank account, vote in elections, or board an airplane within the United States. https://www.ncdot.gov/dmv/real-id-wizard/Pages/default.aspx

Bank Account – A bank account is a safe place to keep your money instead of carrying cash. You can use a bank account to save money, get paid from a job, buy things with a debit card, pay bills, and keep track of how much money you have. If you are under 18, or if you would like help managing your money, you may choose to have a trusted adult (such as a parent or another person you trust) added to your account. If you receive benefits like Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid, there are rules about how much money you can keep in your bank account. There are special savings programs, like an ABLE account, that let many people with disabilities save money without affecting their benefits. See information on ABLE accounts here: https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/spotlights/spot-able.html

Register to Vote – At age18, you can register to vote. You can vote in local, state, and federal elections. This includes voting for the President of the United States. You still have the right to vote even if you have a guardian. Click here to learn how to register to vote in NC: https://www.ncsbe.gov/registering/how-register. Click here if you need help getting an identification (ID) card to vote: https://voteriders.org/freehelp/

Selective Services – If you are born a male, you must register with Selective Services, even if you have a disability. A parent or caregiver can help you with this process. You can register online at: https://www.sss.gov/register

Transition to Adult Health Care – As you get older, you will change from doctors who care for children to doctors who primarily care for adults. This is called transitioning to adult health care. As you grow, you can learn more about your health and be part of making decisions about your care in ways that work best for you. You can bring a parent, caregiver, or another trusted support person with you to your appointments if you would like. Your family and caregivers can continue to support you as you become an adult. Your doctor or clinic will explain who can see your health information and who can help make health care decisions. Depending on your age, state law, and whether a parent or another person is your legal guardian or has your permission, your parent or caregiver may be able to access your health information and stay with you during appointments. If you have questions, ask your health care team and they can explain your rights (including Health Insurance Portability and Privacy Act or HIPAA) and help you decide who you want involved in your care. See more information on transitioning to adult health care here: https://www.gottransition.org/

Work – Having a job is a great way to earn money, learn new skills, meet people, and become more independent. If you need help finding a job, learning job skills, or starting your own business, the Division of Employment and Independence for People with Disabilities (EIPD) (formerly Vocational Rehabilitation) can help. Some people are not able to work full-time or need extra financial support. You may qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or other benefits. If you receive SSI or Medicaid, it's important to learn how working could affect your benefits. You can also learn about programs that help you work and save money. Learn more at North Carolina Disability Benefits 101: https://nc.db101.org/. You can also explore Work Together NC's Employment Toolkit: https://worktogethernc.com/resource/an-employment-toolkit-for-people-with-intellectual-and-developmental-disabilities/

College – Sometimes people will refer to college or education you receive after you graduate high school as "post secondary education". Going to college can be a great experience and can help get the skills you need to get a job. You can learn a trade that can prepare you for a job in certain fields of interest like plumbing, cybersecurity, and many other areas. Explore various jobs or interests and connect with a community college to learn more. You can also study to earn a degree in fields such as business, nursing, and many more. If you want to go to college, look at different schools, go on campus tours, and connect with the Disability Services Office if you need support to help you succeed. Work Together NC has a Post Secondary Education toolkit on their website. You can see it here: https://worktogethernc.com/resource/whats-next-college-a-guided-exploration-of-nc-inclusive-postsecondary-options-for-students-with-disabilities/

Making Choices – As an adult, you will make choices about many different parts of your life, such as where you live, where you work, your health care, and your money. There are many different ways to get help with making decisions about your life if you need it. If you only need some support, a Supported Decision-Making (SDM) Plan may be a good option. With a SDM Plan, you choose people you trust to help you understand your choices, think through your options, and make decisions. You are still the person making your own decisions. Some people need more support than a SDM Plan can provide. In those situations, other options, such as a Power of Attorney or guardianship, may be appropriate. These options give another person different levels of legal authority to help with decisions or, in some situations, make decisions for you. Your needs may change over time, and the amount of support you need can change too. Talk with a trusted adult, such as a family member, friend, teacher, case manager, or another professional, to learn about your options and decide what type of support is right for you. You can read more about Supported Decision Making, Power of Attorney and other alternatives to guardianship here: https://rethinkingguardianshipnc.org/wpcontent/uploads/sites/3/2025/04/Supporting-Choice-and-Self-Determination-Resource-Guide-03-21-25.pdf. You can read more about the guardianship process here: https://www.nccourts.gov/help topics/guardianship/guardianship

If you have additional questions or would like to talk with a parent educator, please fill out this contact a parent educator form, https://www.ecac-parentcenter.org/contact-a-parent-educator, or contact ECAC:

ecac exceptional children's assistance center
Empowering Families★Improving Lives

1-800-962-6817
ecac@ecacmail.org
www.ecac-parentcenter.org

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES
Improving Systems of Care for Children and Youth with Special Health Care Needs in Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston & Lincoln Counties

This initiative is supported through the NC Division of Child and Family Well-Being, Whole Child Health Section

ECAC is not a legal services agency. We cannot and do not provide legal representation or advice, and information contained in this document should not be considered as such. This document is supported by the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) as a part of an award totaling 96,750 with 0 percentage financed with non-governmental sources. The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, not an endorsement, by HRSA, HHS, or the U.S. Governments. For more information, please visit HRSA.gov.