

From: Scott Corcoran [scott@afamilyforeverychild.org]
Sent: Thursday, July 18, 2013 4:44 PM
To: scott@afamilyforeverychild.org
Subject: Helping your child transition into adulthood



Dear ,

For most teenagers turning 18 is exciting. It means they're finally "adults" and are most likely moving out to go to college or live on their own. For a teenager that came from foster care, turning 18 can be scary and may bring up feelings of abandonment. Your child may feel that when they turn 18 you will no longer be their family and they will be on their own. Their desire for independence conflicts with their anxiety of being separated from family. There are a few ways that you can help your child become an adult without feeling like they are going to lose you forever.

Strategies to help your child transition into adulthood

- Prepare for your child's needs and any issues that may arise as a result. This is especially important for teenagers who may have mental issues, learning delays, or developmental delays.
- Let your child know that adoption is forever and they will always be part of your family, even when they are no longer living at home. For most kids in foster care, turning 18 means that their chance at finding a forever home ends because they will "age out". These fears may resurface when a child approaches the age of 18, in addition to their fears of being abandoned. Talk to them about their feelings, and assure them that you will always be there for them, no matter what.
- Be realistic and honest about your child's ability to cope with life in the "real world". A child who has undergone significant abuse, neglect and trauma is not going to experience life the same way as a child who does not have that history.
- Seek out supports and organizations that will help your child transition into adulthood. Make sure to keep diligent records of your child's IEP history, school reports, assessments, any medical visits and diagnoses. You will need all of that information to apply for SSI, SSDI, and Medicare. Determining a child's eligibility for SSI can take months, so make sure to apply early with enough time to appeal the decision if necessary.
- Teach practical life skills that a child will need to know about for when they live on their own. These skills are just as important as the subjects that your child learns in school. Teach your child how to pay bills, grocery shop, eat healthy, practice good hygiene, apply for a job, find a place to live, etc. All children that have IEPs have transition services added to their plan at the age of 16. If you know your child will need more assistance transitioning into adulthood, request that these transition services be added to your child's plan before the age of 16.
- Work with your child on creating a life plan. This plan can outline what they want to do for a living, where they will live, how they will earn money, etc. A life plan can take time, and will require patience and re-evaluation as needed. Having a plan in place will ensure that a transition into adulthood will be smoother, and may calm some of the fears of uncertainty your child may be feeling.

Being a parent after your child turns 18

- Remind your child that you are still there for them. If your child expresses anxiety or fears of abandonment while living on their own, come up with ways to show your child that you are still there for them, even if you are not seeing them everyday. Schedule a time every week to talk on the phone or Skype. Let the child know that he/she still has a room of their own at your house.
- As with any child, you must let go of the things that you cannot control. Your child will make choices that you may not always agree with. Continue to offer advice as needed, and remind them that you are always there to talk and provide support as needed.
- Know your limits as a parent. Children with special needs may require more support, but know where your limit is. Rather than responding to your child's needs by "rescuing" them, lend them emotional support instead. There will be times however,

when your limits may be stretched, so it's important to remain flexible in those circumstances.

- Celebrate your success and find the positives. Parenting comes with its challenges, but focus on the positive aspects and the successful moments.

To learn more, visit <http://www.nacac.org/adoptalk/transitionparenting.html>

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