

Elizabeth C. Hamblet  Jan 23 5 min read

## College Disability Services Directors Offer Advice for Parents

By the time their child is nearing the end of high school, many parents of students with learning disabilities or ADHD have spent years being very involved in their child's education, advocating for their needs and supporting them at home. As students move through high school, however, students who want to move on to the college environment need to develop a level of independence and self-advocacy in order to be prepared. For some parents, this may mean shifting their approach.

When I was developing my book, [From High School To College: Steps to Success for Students with Disabilities](#), I asked college disability services directors how can parents could best help their student to prepare for successful transition to college. In this bonus content not included in the book, they provided advice.



Ward Newmeyer is Director of Student Disability Services at Dartmouth College.

Foster independence, self-sufficiency, and responsibility. Let your offspring, who is transitioning into adulthood, learn from experience, including the consequences of one's actions or inaction. Refrain from pressuring course and major selection; allow your offspring to explore intellectually. This is not easy, and perhaps not so practical sometimes, but I have seen too many awful consequences of students' toiling over subjects they do not

enjoy to meet others' expectations.

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**Stacey Reycraft is Director of Student Disability Services at the University of Mississippi.**

As someone who parented a child with a disability through high school and into college and adulthood, I understand the anxiety and fear involved in sending our student off to college. We want them to have the best experience possible and to succeed academically. We have been so worried for so long about their happiness and well-being that this becomes our default emotion. It is extremely difficult to let them go.

We have to understand, though, that college is supposed to be a challenge, academically and socially. This is when students learn the skills that will follow them into adulthood and beyond. As hard as it is, we have to step back and allow them to experience not just the successes but also the failures of growing up. There is a lot of learning that happens when we fail and we do a disservice to our adult students when we do everything in our power to protect them from failure. As parents, we have to take a deep breath and trust that we did a good job raising them and that discomfort, disappointment and difficult lessons are a vital part of the growing process.

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**Bonni Alpert is Assistant Dean at Western New England University.**

Parents should help their student learn about his/her disability and what its impact is. They should help them learn how to assess what works and what doesn't with regard to study and organization strategies. And they should teach their student how to do things for him/herself rather than doing everything for him/her. For instance, if the student needs assistance, parents can construct email their student can use as a template to email teachers and can roleplay with the student what s/he will say when talking to teachers when they seek assistance. Finally, parents can help their student learn what his/her rights are, gain understanding of him/herself, and inform their student that services at college are focused on providing access, not success.

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**Cindy Poore-Pariseau is Coordinator of Disability Services at Bristol Community College in Fall River, Massachusetts.**

By senior year of high school, students should be ready to self-advocate, which means that parents need to stop doing things for them at some point in high school. When students come in to speak to me at their intake meeting, they should know how to speak simply about their disability; they should not need to look at their parents to provide answers for them. The more students know about themselves, the better I can help them. Parents should not "shield" students from developing an understanding of their disability (though any conversation should also emphasize their strengths, too).

As students move through high school, parents should provide scaffolding at the beginning but pull away supports as they go along. Students need to be able to handle certain things by themselves, including articulating their needs.

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**L. Scott Lissner is the ADA Coordinator at Ohio State University**

My advice is likely to sound pretty typical – if you are not planning to move into the dorm with your son or daughter you need to let them take the lead with the disability services office.

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### Jamie Axelrod is the Director of Disability Resources at Northern Arizona University

When investigating schools, research disability offices early to get as much information as you can about accommodations and services, and also inquire about types of academic support available on campus. Find out how students can get connected with these services when they arrive on campus.

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### Mai Graves is Director of the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at Pratt Institute

Parents should let students take more responsibility for everyday responsibilities, such as self-care (e.g., getting enough sleep and not pulling all-nighters, eating regular, nutritious meals, limiting sugar), laundry, time management, organization, prescription renewal, communicating with teachers, etc. In order to make sure they're making progress with these skills, parents can ask students to check in with them or a counselor on a weekly basis. They should give their student a sense of "best practices" for someone living on his/her own.

Parents also need to make sure that their student understands their disability and how it affects their functioning. If students have been tested at some point during high school, parents can ask the person who did the testing and ask him/her to review it with their student. If students have not been tested that recently, they'll likely need new testing, and parents should make sure that the person who does it discusses it with him/her. Students need to know their own learning and personal strengths and weaknesses. Parents can also help students make a plan for what kinds of supports they'll seek.

Students need this knowledge so that they can self-advocate. Parents should scale back their interactions with teachers and case managers by the time their student is a senior and let the student learn to speak for him/herself.

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The disability accommodation system at college works very differently than it does in high school. Students have to register - staff does not come looking for them. And accommodations and supports are different in the college setting, where there is less structure.

Learn what the research says helps make students with disabilities successful at college, and more. [Read \*From High School to College: Steps to Success for Students with Disabilities\*](#), available from [Amazon](#) and from the [publisher](#). (Look inside the book [here](#).)

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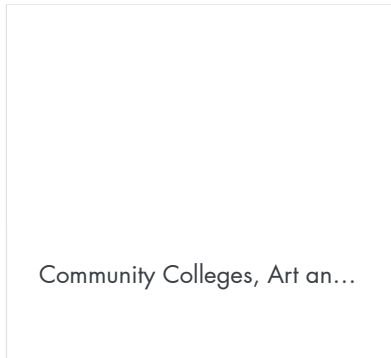
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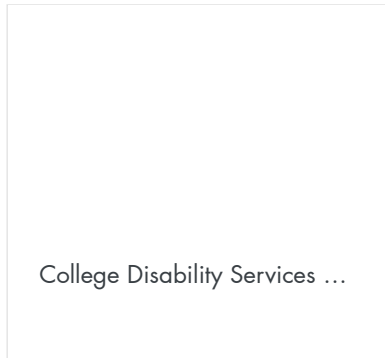
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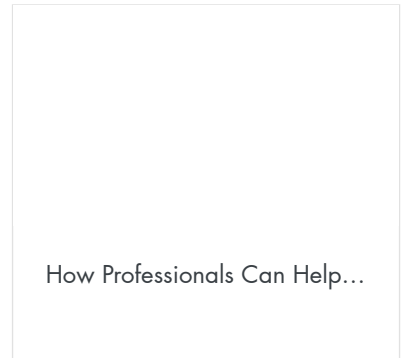
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