

Cutting Edge

Thinking About College for Individuals with ASD

By the Oklahoma Autism Network

In middle school and high school, teens begin their educational preparation for college. For students on the autism spectrum, college preparation may look a little different. Planning ahead is one of the most important things parents can do to help their children transition to life at college. One of the first steps is researching what colleges provide support for individuals with ASD. Parents may want to consider college programs with available personal and social skills counselors, and emergency assistance. If major colleges in the area do not offer support programs, it may benefit the student to start at a local community college before they move to live on a college campus. Certain colleges provide precollege programs for students with learning differences.

Students may become overwhelmed with all the challenges that college life presents. Their routines will change, and some assignments will have ambiguous instructions. Students with campus support systems can have greater success managing these challenges. Some colleges provide academic assistance to help with the development of routines, time management, and understanding assignments and steps to complete them. Students need to feel comfortable asking for help if they need it and speaking with their professors/faculty about their disability. Making new friends and interacting socially is a part of college life, and this may be difficult for the student with ASD. Counselors may be available to assist with social interaction with teachers and peers. Participating in campus activities can help students practice their social skills and engage in activities that they are interested in. The living environment may also pose challenges. Most college students share a dorm room. If external stimuli are an issue or the student has difficulty interacting with the roommate, private rooms may be available upon request.

Parents can take steps now to prepare their children for the college experience. Independent living skills will be crucial to success in college life. Students will have to get to class on time, manage their schedules, and maintain the upkeep of their hygiene and living space. Parents can assist their children by helping them develop skills like waking up to an alarm clock instead of by a parent and working with a day planner. It is also important to start working on self-advocacy early. Students need to be able to speak up for themselves, know where to find help, and have the confidence to ask for help when they need it. Developing and maintaining a routine to manage things like medications, schedules, assignments and records independently will be a key skill. When a college is chosen and time nears for the child to transition to their new environment, they will need assistance orienting to the campus including, dorm, cafeterias, library, classrooms, and emergency and support services. If the school is too far for a visit, then visit the college website and review campus maps become familiar with the school. Students will need safe and reliable transportation and guidance on what to do in emergency situations.

The okautism.org website has recently added a new section on [resources for college](#) that parents and young adults may find beneficial.