

WHAT IS TRANSITION TO ADULT CARE?

- “Transition” is the process of gradually preparing youth with mental health and chronic illnesses to successfully “graduate” to the adult health care system.
- The focus is educating youth about their illness and teaching them the skills needed to manage their health when they are adults.
- Parents play a critical role in preparing their child for adulthood and are a central figure in their child’s transition to adult care. The goal of transition is NOT to replace parents, but help them shift from “managers” of their child’s health to “supporters” of their child’s skill development.
- Across numerous mental health and chronic illness populations, transition preparation is associated with better access to care and improved health outcomes.



WHAT DOES TRANSITION TO ADULT CARE LOOK LIKE?

- The transition “process” begins early, generally between the ages of 12-14.
- The goal is to give youth the opportunity to practice independent disease management skills with the safety net of the youth’s family and pediatric medical team in place.
- Between the ages of 12-14, the focus should be on teaching the youth about their diagnosis, medical treatment/prescriptions, and the importance of taking their medication.
- As youth get older, more advanced topics are introduced, such as how to schedule appointments, communicate with the health care team, and the “ins and outs” of health insurance.

SOME SIGNS THAT YOUR CHILD MAY NEED MORE TRANSITION SUPPORT INCLUDE:

- A teenager who cannot explain their illness, name their medications, or is struggling with taking their medication.
- A 15+ year-old who: 1) does not know their medical history, 2) has limited understanding of nutritional and/or reproductive health issues related to their chronic illness, 3) does not meet alone with their medical provider for at least a portion of their visit, or 4) is not primarily responsible for the major aspects of their health care: remembering to take their medication, ordering refills, scheduling appointments, communicating with the medical team.
- A 17+ year-old who: 1) has limited understanding of insurance, 2) has not identified an adult primary care provider or specialty care provider (if needed), 3) does not have plans for how they will manage their illness in the future, including finances and illness management at college/work.

TIPS FOR PARENTS

- **Be patient.** Learning how to manage one's own health is a complex skill.
- **Start transitioning responsibility early.** It is better to transition small responsibilities over time than wait until your child is on the verge of legally becoming an adult and transitioning a lot of responsibility all at once
- **Do not expect perfection.** Just because your child has been taught how to refill their medication/schedule appointments/taken their medicine on their own/etc., does not mean they will be able to do it on their own and without you. Children need support, reminders, and incentives from their parents to manage their health. Always be there as their safety net!
- **Use a stepped approach when transitioning a new responsibility to your child:**
 - Step 1:** Have your child watch you practice the skill you want them to learn. While you are practicing the skill, explain what you are doing and why. Answer any questions your child has and ask them questions afterward to assess how much they understood. For example, when teaching your child how to order refills, talk through the steps necessary to do this and put your phone on speakerphone so they can hear the conversation with the pharmacy
 - Step 2:** The next time that skill is required, have your child be the one responsible for completing it, with you coaching them along as needed. Continue to coach them through future practices of the skill until they can complete the skill with minimal coaching
 - Step 3:** Once your child has assumed full responsibility for a skill, do not assume they will remember to do it on their own. You may need to prompt them or schedule reminders to keep them organized. Be sure to follow up with them to ensure the skill was completed
- **Praise your child for all their hard work in managing their health.** Remember, we are asking our kids to do things kids without mental health or chronic illnesses don't have to do so it is important to acknowledge them for their efforts with kind words, supportive gestures, and small rewards.
- **Prior to each medical appointment, sit down with your child to generate a list of questions to ask.** Write down these questions and encourage your child to ask them.

RESOURCES & RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Got Transition: www.gottransition.org

TIP: Many illnesses have specific materials focused on transition. Talk to your child's medical team for disease-specific guidance and additional information. If you have any concerns about your child's transition skills, do not hesitate to contact your medical team. They will be able to connect you with resources to help support you and your family.