

Involving **young people** in **decisions about their lives**



Adults make important decisions for young children, but rarely ask them to choose how they would like things to be. It can feel reassuring to go on doing so for disabled young people as they grow into adulthood, especially if it's hard to be sure what their views are, or to be clear about whether they are able to think through what's best and make informed choices.

Whatever our fears, young people themselves are the ones most likely to know what they like and don't like, and how a problem affects them. So, it's up to us to listen 'on all channels'.

Person centred planning is about listening to and learning about what a young person wants from their life. It requires commitment from everyone to work together and put young people's wishes central to planning their future.

The law says that thinking about the support that a disabled young person may need to prepare for a successful transition to adult life should begin around the age of 14. A Transition Plan (TP) is an action plan that is updated each year, usually starting at a child's *annual review* in Year 9, drawing together information from a wide range of professionals, parents and most importantly the young person.

TIP! **A TP should reflect the strengths, interests and aspirations** of a young person, identify issues around further education, health, housing, transport, work, relationships and hobbies and map out how to meet these in adulthood. Transition planning should be done with a person centred approach.

TIP! **A young person is more likely to be taken seriously** and listened to if they communicate directly to the others involved in a decision making process. There are lots of ways we can support them to do this.

TIP! **The most important thing we can give disabled young people is the belief that they and their views matter. Don't just think it, say it out loud, often.**

TIP! **Build in opportunities to make everyday choices**, as it's difficult to make important decisions if you haven't had lots of practice making smaller ones.

TIP! **Too much choice can be overwhelming.** It can be useful to discard or reduce alternatives quickly by agreeing what's practical or by grouping options by an important common factor. Take care not to offer an illusion of choice, when really there is none. If you offer choice be prepared to accept they may not make the one that you had hoped for.

TIP! **Talking through practical things** or even thinking aloud are good ways to help a young person understand how to go about problem solving and reasoning.

- TIP!** **Make decisions as a family.** It can help a young person to learn that it's fair for everyone to have a chance to say what they think, that it's okay to have different ideas, to change your mind after hearing what others think and that sometimes we go with a majority decision. Experience of sharing big decisions is useful; some decisions have such far-reaching consequences that it's not reasonable they are made alone.
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- TIP!** **Encourage your child to use advocacy services** if it makes sense for them to access independent support at a meeting.
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- TIP!** **Take time to think about important matters.** Young people rarely make decisions that they are happy with if they feel rushed or haven't been able to give their whole attention to the problem.
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- TIP!** **Encourage young people to take chances and try new things!** Whatever it is, it's hard to express a preference about things you haven't tried.
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- TIP!** **Unpack worries.** Give young people strategies to deal with their worries and build in safeguards to deal with yours. Whether real or imaginary, worries need to be taken seriously. They get in the way of trying new things.
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- TIP!** **Information is power.** Young people need to know about their rights, about the options that are available to them and about preparing for meetings, because that's where recommendations and decisions are made. They need to know what the meeting is about, who will be there, and the sorts of things that they might say. If you aren't sure yourself, you need to find out.
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- TIP!** **Helping young people plan for meetings** doesn't have to happen too formally. Sometimes it's more productive to do 5 or 10 minutes thinking a day over several weeks, rather than a couple of longer sessions.
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- TIP!** **It's always more manageable to ask one question at a time.** If possible, ask open questions, so you get more than a yes or no answer. Reflect back what you think the young person is telling you, to check you have understood them clearly. Avoid making any assumptions about what's important to them.
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- TIP!** **Take care the young person's decisions aren't 'cued';** that options aren't limited for anyone else's convenience, or presented in a way that's likely to lead them to make a choice just to please others. Remember it's not just what is said but how it's said that matters.
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- TIP!** **If it's not easy to be sure what the young person means,** acknowledge that you've got lost and start again. Be patient and resist the urge to rush and fill silences. Let them know you won't be cross, whatever they wish to say.
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- TIP!** **Encourage a young person to choose how they want to record their views.** Think about using photographs, drawings, video and audio tapes as well as observation to catch and record their wishes and feelings. Questionnaires in word, sign or symbol can help many young people to organise their ideas and contribute to their meetings.
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- TIP!** **Make sure copies of the young person's views are circulated** to everyone attending any meetings, along with your advice and those of others.
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TIP!**Meetings are more successful when they take account of a young person's particular needs:**

- check that the venue is accessible and familiar and that the meeting is at a time when the young person is best able to contribute.
- ask which part of the meeting they should be present for and agree what will happen if the young person wishes to leave the meeting or take a break.
- check whether the young person would like the meeting taped or someone nominated to take notes on their behalf.

At the meeting a code of conduct for participants might include:

- encouraging the young person to choose where they sit,
- reminding everyone whose meeting it is (the young person's) and what needs to be discussed,
- introducing the young person to anyone they don't know well and explaining why they are there,
- checking if there is anyone that the young person wishes to be present for just part of the meeting,
- asking the young person who it is okay to ask for help if someone doesn't understand their communication, as it's hopeless if everyone tries to help,
- agreeing not to challenge anything the young person 'says' or interrupt or finish their sentence,
- checking back that the young person feels that their question has been answered, and if not, letting them have another go,
- recapping all of the things that everyone agrees to do,
- checking that the young person has fully understood what has been said or agreed by asking them to say what they think is going to happen.

TIP!**Where to go for more help and information:**

- **Video and handbook *Two Way Street*** challenges the prejudices around communication. It also practical advice to help avoid creating unnecessary barriers to communication with disabled children and young people. Produced by Triangle and the NSPCC it is available from NSPCC. Tel:0116 234 7223.
- **The Transition Information Network – Action 19+** is a consortium of organisations concerned with how services are provided to young disabled adults. Contact them c/o Campaigns Department, Scope, 6 Market Road, London N7 9PW. Tel: 020 7619 7244 or email: bronia.kita@scope.org.uk
- **Locally, Learning Disability Partnership Boards** oversee strategic planning of services for disabled people and should have a framework describing how they are putting Person Centred Planning into practice.

TIP!

- **Connexions Services** have personal advisers who offer individual support to young people with Transitional Planning. Connexions are responsible for co-ordinating Transition Plans for young adults and should check that a young person is not missing out on benefits, entitlements to assessments and services from adult social care, health and housing.

Useful Publications:

TIP!

- **SEN Toolkit Section 10 Transition Planning**; DfES Publications, PO Box 5050 Sherwood Park, Annesley, Nottingham NG15 0DJ

TIP!

- **After 16 – What’s New? Choices and Challenges for disabled young people**; The Family Fund Trust, PO Box 50, York, YO1 9ZX

Books:

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- **People, Plans and Practicalities** and **People, Plans and Possibilities** and video **Getting a Life** from Scottish Human Services. Tel 0132 538 7717.

TIP!

- **Leaving Home, Moving On** about housing options and **Meeting the Emotional Needs of Young People with Learning Disabilities**, both from www.learningdisabilities.org.uk



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