

Managing Disabilities

What you need to know to succeed in college

**REMEMBER
THAT EARNING
A COLLEGE
DEGREE IS NOT
A RACE.**

**ENROLL IN THE
NUMBER OF
COURSES EACH
TERM THAT YOU
KNOW YOU CAN
MASTER.**

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

High school students with physical disabilities, learning disabilities like dyslexia, ADD, or ADHD, and/or mental illnesses like anxiety or depression, often struggle in high school as they learn to develop habits, routines, and accommodations that allow them to succeed. Once students find their personal formula for success, it often is left behind when transitioning to college.

There are three areas that you can focus on to maintain this success in college:

- Understanding your disability(ies).
- Developing self-advocacy skills.
- Consideration of the legal landscape as related to disabilities in higher education.

Understanding your Specific Needs

You will likely be in a situation in college where you will need to discuss your disability or learning difference with a college professor, disability officer, or admissions representative.

- Prepare to explain in detail your physical or mental diagnosis and how it affects your learning.
- Review with your parent, doctor, or therapist the appropriate terms to define your condition and needs.
- Clearly articulate your strengths and weaknesses.
- Develop a list of habits, routines, and accommodations that have enabled your success throughout high school.

It is worthwhile to practice your communication skills to become comfortable sharing your disabilities.

Self-Advocacy

Self-understanding is the basis of a strong self-advocate.

As you go off to college, it is important that you not only have a strong understanding of your strengths and disabilities but also the ability to request the services you need to succeed in your classes. You will likely need to disclose your disability to the appropriate campus authority, faculty, and staff in an effort to brainstorm creative ways to meet your needs.

BE SURE TO BUILD YOUR SUPPORT TEAM IN COLLEGE: DISABILITY OFFICE, HEALTH CENTER, STUDY SKILLS TEAM, AND LOCAL SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS.

EMBRACE THE HABITS THAT HAVE ENABLED YOUR SUCCESS IN HIGH SCHOOL ONCE YOU TRANSITION TO COLLEGE.

Consider the list of questions below:

- Should I disclose my disability on my college application?
- Where do I go to obtain the services that I am accustomed to receiving in high school once I am in college?
- What are my rights when it comes to meeting my educational goals?
- What should I look for in colleges to meet my specific educational needs?

Most students find that it is helpful to role play scenarios with a parent or counselor prior to college to help prepare for the most difficult situations in advance.

What are my rights?

The Family Educational Rights Privacy Act (FERPA) affects the way colleges can communicate with parents. FERPA prohibits colleges from discussing confidential information about a student with parents and third parties. Therefore, you are the only one who is authorized to access anything related to your grades and transcript, disability, and even tuition payments! Parents do not share the right to this confidential information unless you sign a release to allow the college to disclose your records with them. Discuss FERPA with your parents and decide what is best for your family situation.

Legal Landscape of Higher Education

There is a big shift in responsibilities when transitioning from high school to college for students with disabilities.

During grade school and high school, your rights are protected by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Once you graduate from high school or are over age 21, you are then covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). ADA protects students with disabilities from discrimination based on disability in education.

Whose job is it? It can be tricky to figure out whose job it is to ensure your success in college. Until now, your parent and high school have likely been responsible for seeing that your accommodations are met. As you can see from the table below, the responsibilities change once you reach college!

Compare the differences in roles and responsibilities in high school versus college:

HIGH SCHOOL	COLLEGE
Parent is the primary advocate.	Student is the primary advocate.
School must identify and test for disabilities and pay for testing and accommodations.	Student is required to pay for any testing and accommodations. School is not required to identify or test.
School must plan for any special educational services.	Student must request special educational services.
School counselor must assist in selecting courses.	Student is solely responsible for selecting courses.
High school is required to monitor progress.	Student is responsible for monitoring progress