



NEW JERSEY
PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

5 Strategies to Help Prepare Children with Learning Differences for College

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Increasing numbers of students with learning disabilities, ADHD, and Autism are attending college. Although those conditions often last across one's life span, there is a large difference between the interventions available before and after graduating high school. To best support students with learning differences for the transition to college, preparations should begin well before that time. Five approaches that parents can utilize to support their children include:

1. **Shifting Responsibilities:** During elementary school, parents often need to advocate for their young children's needs, as well as to provide support around homework and organizational skills. To prepare their children for college, parents should start giving responsibilities to their children when they are in middle school or early high school. This not only prepares children for the greater independence they will have in college, but also provides them with the opportunity to learn from their mistakes early on when they have more support if needed.
2. **Building Advocacy Skills:** Students need to be able to independently advocate for themselves while they are in college in order to obtain accommodations. If they are reliant on their parents to get them support in school, starting to speak out about their needs for the first time in college will likely be a daunting task. To prepare for that time, students

should begin advocating for themselves in middle school or their early high school years.

3. **Avoid Major Changes in Services:** Many interventions available in schools are not an option in college, which becomes an issue if students rely on them. To prepare for college, students should begin to cut back on services in high school that they cannot obtain later in life. For example, having an aide or using a resource classroom is not an option past high school so college bound students will benefit from removing those interventions early in their high school years.

4. **Determine Requirements for College Applications and Tests:** Researching the expectations of different colleges early on has many advantages. Students with learning differences will benefit from extra time to plan out how they will meet the requirements for obtaining admission to colleges. In addition, obtaining extra support in college and standardized tests often requires a documented history of relying on certain interventions, such as extended time. Therefore, families should investigate the requirements for obtaining accommodations in college and standardized tests, including whether neuropsychological testing, as well as a history of a 504 Plan or Individualized Education Plan (IEP), will be needed.

5. **Determine Future Goals and Needs:** By early high school, students should begin exploring what their goals are for when they graduate and what is needed to obtain them. Families should explore what interventions are offered for students with learning differences in various post-secondary education programs to ensure that they are a good fit. Attending a four-year college is not necessary for every student. Students may benefit from researching alternative options, such as attending a two-year college or vocational program, to see if they might be a better match for their goals and way of learning.

By supporting students with learning differences in taking these steps during the middle and high school years, parents help them to be prepared and successful in their post-high school educational experience.

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