



WESTERN IOWA & NEBRASKA ASSOCIATION  
ON HIGHER EDUCATION & DISABILITY

# Transitions

## Information for

### Parents

As students transition from high school to college, the role of parents and guardians shifts from advocate to supporter. In college, students are responsible for requesting accommodations and speaking up for their needs. You can help by encouraging independence, teaching self-advocacy, and supporting problem-solving. It's important to step back while still being available as a resource. Learn the key differences in disability laws—IDEA no longer applies, and students must meet ADA and Section 504 standards. While you may not have direct access to college staff, your support remains vital. Encourage your student to take the lead and trust in their ability to succeed.

- ◆ **Empower independence early:** Encourage your student to ask questions and make decisions about their accommodations before leaving high school.
- ◆ **Explore the right fit:** Understand that not all colleges or programs may be a good match, even with accommodations—admission is based on qualifications.
- ◆ **Reinforce responsibility:** All students must follow the college's code of conduct, including those who struggle with regulation or executive functioning.
- ◆ **Support gradual independence:** Work with your student's IEP team to reduce overly restrictive supports if college is the goal.
- ◆ **Know the limits:** Colleges do not provide personal aides or paraeducators—students must manage supports more independently.
- ◆ **Encourage early connection:** Urge your student to contact Disability Services as soon as possible to set up accommodations and supports.

### Step-by-Step: Supporting Your Student's Accommodation Process in College

*Please note: Every college's process is slightly different, but most follow these general steps.*

1. **Encourage Your Student to Reach Out**  
Have your student contact the college's Disability Services (DS) office as early as possible—ideally before classes begin.
2. **Submit a Formal Request for Accommodations**  
The student must complete a request (often online) through the DS office to begin the process.
3. **Provide Documentation of the Disability**  
Your student will need to share current and relevant documentation (IEP, 504 Plan, medical/psychological records) that supports their request.
4. **Participate in the Initial Appointment**  
Your student will meet with DS staff to discuss how their disability impacts them and what accommodations may be appropriate.
5. **Access Letters Are Shared with Instructors**  
Once approved, your student will receive accommodation letters to give to their professors—this step is crucial to activate their accommodations.
6. **Check In Regularly with DS**  
Students should meet with DS staff periodically to review how accommodations are working and request changes if needed.



[Visit WINAHEAD's website for more information](#)



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### Skills for Success

1. **Self-Advocacy:** Students must be able to speak up for their needs, ask for help, and communicate clearly with instructors and staff.
2. **Understanding of Disability and Accommodations:** Students should know how their disability impacts them and what supports are helpful. Parents should understand the college's role in providing accommodations under ADA/Section 504.
3. **Time Management:** Students need to manage schedules, deadlines, and responsibilities without daily reminders.
4. **Independence:** Encourage students to take ownership of their routines, tasks, and problem-solving without relying on adult intervention.
5. **Communication Skills:** Students should feel comfortable emailing, calling, or meeting with professors, staff, and peers.
6. **Executive Functioning Skills:** Organization, planning, prioritizing, and following through are crucial to navigating academics and daily life.
7. **Resilience and Coping Skills:** College comes with challenges. Students benefit from stress-management techniques and knowing when/how to seek support.
8. **Technology Use:** Familiarity with assistive tech, learning platforms (like Canvas or Blackboard), and digital tools is a big plus.
9. **Social Awareness and Behavior Regulation:** Students need to understand appropriate behavior in various settings and how to manage emotional responses.
10. **Team Mindset:** Parents and students should work as a team—parents offer guidance and encouragement, while students take the lead in their college journey.

### *Parent Responsibilities During the Transition to College*

- ◆ **Foster and Practice Self-Advocacy:** Help your student learn to speak up for themselves and explain their disability, needs, and accommodations.
- ◆ **Support, Don't Direct:** Step back and let your student take the lead in meetings and decisions, offering guidance only when needed.
- ◆ **Discuss College Fit Honestly:** Have open conversations about what environments and programs will best support your student's strengths and needs.
- ◆ **Stay Informed, But Respect Boundaries:** Understand FERPA limits your access to academic or disability-related information. Trust your student to communicate.
- ◆ **Be a Steady Support System:** Provide emotional encouragement, check in regularly, and celebrate your student's growth toward independence.

### Additional Support Resources for Parents

#### College Disability Services (DS) Office

- ◆ Reach out directly to the DS office at your student's college to learn about their process, documentation requirements, and available supports.
- ◆ Many offices offer parent information sessions, FAQs, and resource guides on their websites.

#### Resilience and Coping Skills

- ◆ Partner with your College's student resources for additional support. Many campuses offer free mental health counseling, medical services, Food Pantries, etc...

#### High School Transition Coordinators

- ◆ Partner with your student's current school counselor, case manager, or transition coordinator to ensure a strong transition plan is in place.

#### Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services

- ◆ Can help eligible students with transition planning, funding for accommodations or assistive technology, and job readiness.
- ◆ Contact your state's VR agency for more information.