



ASPERGER
CENTER FOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Building College Success Skills-It's Never Too Early to Start

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Our society has become completely consumed with getting into college. High schools, guidance counselors, college advisors, parents and students spend thousands of hours and possibly thousands of dollars working on college essays, improving SAT and ACT scores, filling out numerous applications, traveling across the country to visit campuses, agonizing over which schools might be the best match, and then stressing over which method will offer the highest rate of acceptance-Early Decision, Early Action, or Regular Decision.

Before you know it, decisions will be made, and then you will realize that you really are GOING TO COLLEGE! **But are you ready?**

College success depends greatly on Executive Functioning Skills, Social/Communication Skills, and Stress Management Skills, all of which are challenging, especially for students with Asperger's Syndrome or ADHD. The National Institute for Mental Health recently stated that researchers emphasize the need to improve transition planning for youths with ASD or other special education needs as they prepare to leave high school.

Preparing early: If high school students, parents and teachers focused as much attention and time building crucial college success skills as they do preparing students for finals and SAT exams, they

would be doing a valuable service that would prepare students for a much higher rate of success in high school, college and beyond!

Executive Functioning, which regulates an individual's ability to organize thoughts and activities, prioritize tasks, manage time efficiently, and make decisions, affects a college student's ability to use a daily planner, take notes, follow a course schedule, manage time for work, study, recreation and relaxation, budget time for self-care, manage finances, take care of laundry, and set up and attend scheduled appointments.

Social/Communication Skills, which are necessary in order to socialize and make new friends, also affect a college student's ability to live with roommates, engage in dormitory living, explore dating and sexuality, make choices regarding drugs and/or alcohol, resist peer pressure, deal with rushing and pledging sororities and fraternities, communicate with professors, self advocate for accommodations, initiate meetings, etc.

Stress Management Skills, essential for reducing stress, anxiety, and depression (many of which these students experience, and which can be triggered from having to cope with deficits in social and executive functioning), can lead to the student neglecting his/her work, friendships, and health, which can ultimately lead to self isolation and failure.

Important steps to take NOW:

1. Work on strengthening Executive Functioning Skills, Social/Communication Skills and Stress Management Skills
2. Involve the student in ALL discussions and decisions
3. Take a "Ready For College?" survey to evaluate areas of weakness
4. Discuss the student's strengths and challenges to best figure out what, if any, types of support he/she might continue to benefit from while in college
5. Decide if student will disclose their disability and register with the disabilities office on campus. Students who had Individualized Education Plans, or IEP's in high school, may want to request accommodations in college
6. Learn the differences between IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act)

7. Speak to various college disabilities offices and ask specific questions regarding the student's needs to clarify what accommodations might be available
8. Visit different types of college campuses to determine best environment for the student
9. Read articles and books that provide suggestions for improving needed skills
10. Meet with a professional who can suggest strategies to engage the student in building skills and who can coach the student in meeting his/her goals

Suggested Reading

Developing College Skills in Students with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome

Sarita Freedman

Foreword by Tony Attwood

Realizing the College Dream with Autism or Asperger Syndrome

Ann Palmer

Ask and Tell: Self-Advocacy and Disclosure for People on the Autism Spectrum

Foreword by Temple Grandin

Edited by Stephen M Shore

Succeeding in College with Asperger Syndrome A Student Guide

John Harpur, Maria Lawlor and Michael Fitzgerald

Ronni Aronow M.A., M.S. is a College Transition Consultant for Students on the Spectrum. She provides individualized High School Skills Coaching, Transition Planning and College Support for students with disabilities that challenge them in the areas of executive functioning, social communication and stress management. She has offices in NYC and Long

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