

Translating Evidence for Successful Transitions (TEST)



PARTNERING WITH COMMUNITY AGENCIES IN TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH EMOTIONAL BEHAVIORAL DISTURBANCE

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Foreword

Young adults with mental health difficulties are capable of successfully engaging in school, training, and employment. The support these individuals receive as they progress through secondary education can help them realize their potential in life after high school. Many times teachers see different results for these students such as high school drop-out, lower rates of post-secondary education and employment, and even higher rates of involvement with law enforcement, poverty, and homelessness upon their exit from high school; however, with the right information, resources, and determination teachers can make a lasting impact on these students.

In order to help students with EBD experience post-secondary success, teachers need resources to assist them with planning and preparing for student transition from high school into education and training programs and employment in young adulthood. This practice guide will offer practical ways to plan for these students' successful transition from high school to post-secondary life, which can lead to the positive outcomes for students with EBD.

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About this Guide

What is it?

This guide is for special education teachers and transition planners who serve students with EBD. For the purposes of this guide, EBD includes: students that are formally identified as having an EBD, students identified as having Other Health Impairment (OHI); students with IEPs who have behavioral goals; and/or students with 504 plans for whom teachers are providing extra behavioral and emotional support. This is a guide for involving adult community agencies during the critical period of transition out of high school for students with emotional or behavioral disturbance. Many high school students may not be aware of the community agencies available to them upon graduation. Community agencies may include state and local agencies, grant-funded foundations, institutions of higher education, vocational training programs, non-profit organizations, religious groups, private businesses, and privately funded organizations.

This guide is intended to be used by special educators involved in the transition component of the IEP planning process. It can be used as roadmap and reference for steps and activities that can assure the collaboration of secondary education with the community agencies who will be serving the student next. This can include a range of agencies critical to student outcomes such as Institutes of Higher Education or training, or Departments of Mental Health or Vocational Rehabilitation. Note: The best way to ensure the participation of community agencies with high schools may be commitments and policies developed at the district or even the state level. Such agreements could spell out terms for collaboration and communication. This guide however is written for special educators and assumes that no such inter-agency agreements are in place. While this can make the work harder for teachers, the person to person on the local level can sometimes be more efficacious for the student.

Who is it for?

This guide is for a variety of educators who support and serve students with EBD such as special education teachers, transition planners, guidance or mental health counselors, as well as other related service providers who serve students with EBD. For this guide, “students with EBD” includes students formally identified as having an EBD who receive special education services, students identified as having Other Health Impairment (OHI), or students with IEPs who have behavioral goals. Students with 504 plans for whom teachers are providing extra support would also benefit from the content and lesson plans included in this curriculum.

Why is it important?

Students with EBD often face a cliff during the transition period as child services end and adult services may or may not begin. Students can fall off a cliff after high school and may find themselves:

- “Graduated” out of foster care with no housing
- Having lost SSI benefits with no other benefits
- Suddenly independent with few independent living skills
- Pregnant
- Unemployed with no employment experience and no prospects
- At a loss for pursuing post-secondary education
- Severity of their experience with EBD coincides with the last part of high school and planning for transition was not effectively targeted to assist with the unique needs the student is developing

Consider This:

Students who have a representative from technical schools, community colleges, or 4-year colleges involved in their transition planning are 29 times more likely to be engaged in post-secondary education! (Wagner & Newman, 2012; 2014)

Students who receive transition assistance from between three and six community agencies are more likely to be engaged in post-secondary employment than those who receive assistance from two or fewer community agencies (Test, Mazzotti, Mustian, Fowler, Kotering & Kohler, 2009).

However, students who receive targeted support while still in high school planning for transition in partnership with representatives from community agencies, colleges, and technical schools, are more likely to experience success in finding employment. Youth with EBD also participate in postsecondary education less frequently and have lower rates of post-school employment than many other categories of students with disabilities. Missed early employment and educational opportunities can result in individuals achieving little economic progress, a pathway that can be difficult to modify later in life.

How can Community Agencies be of Assistance?

- Providing information about community/agency/post-secondary-based services available and eligibility requirements
- Brainstorming/collaborating with other transition team partners to identify appropriate services
- Clarifying differences between school program entitlements (particularly the services and assistance provided during their K-12 years as required by IDEA to ensure that students receive a free and appropriate education- FAPE- as required by law for all children in this country and adult services which are provided based on a different set of eligibility criteria
- Providing continuity and implementation support of transition plans across transition years
- Aiding in planning that braids together services received in child/adolescent settings and those offered in adult settings to facilitate a seamless transfer from youth to adult systems
- Assisting in assessing needs for school supports between the ages of 18 and 21 when students may continue in their secondary education as provided by IDEA (states may provide special education services beyond the age of 21, but IDEA requires services be continued through students' 21st year (if deemed appropriate)
- Assisting in the application process for community, agency, and college supports and services as appropriate
- Alerting students and families about potential waiting lists for services
- Provision of agency or organization services and supports for students, as appropriate, before the student exits the school system

What are you going to find inside?

This guide describes key steps to involve adult community agency staff as partners in the transition process. Included are information about community agencies, action plans for involving them, and checklists for tracking your progress. This guide is designed to be used with the transition planning component of the IEP, and should be implemented when a child turns 16 (as indicated by federal law) or earlier (depending on state law). The guide can be used by transition planners and special education teachers in partnership with students with EBD, their parents, and other relevant stakeholders. Although the steps are presented sequentially, we recognize that life is not always linear and steps may occur in other orders.

I. Planning for Community Partnerships

- ✓ Identify current involvement of adult service agencies/organizations in the transition planning process.
- ✓ Identify new potential service agency/organization partners
- ✓ Assist the student and family to identify new or additional community partners to include in their transition planning

I. Planning for Community Partnerships

For students with EBD, it is especially important to identify potential challenges the student may encounter between high school and the first years of postsecondary life, such as those involved in moving from child/ adolescent services to adult services. For example, by connecting with a student's current service providers and identifying who and where the similar provider in the adult service system is, a teacher could potentially involve both parties to plan for a seamless transition from one organization to the other.

Who is already involved?

- ✓ **Identify current services agency/organization involvement in transition planning process.**

A first step in planning for community partnerships is to review the current IEP and its transition planning component, to identify currently involved services agencies/organizations. In doing so, teachers can become familiar with and understand the history, successes, and challenges involved with those agency relationships. They can then work with students and parents to assess whether these partners continue to be appropriate and relevant.

Who could become involved?

- ✓ **Identify new potential services agency/organization partners.**

New agency and community partnerships may be needed as students' circumstances evolve. For this step, teachers can work with the student and parents to identify new appropriate and relevant agency partners, help them think about the upcoming transition to post-secondary life, and potential supports that could ease that transition. The teacher, student, family members and current community partners can identify appropriate adult serving agencies to reach out to in order to develop relationships. This could involve introducing the student and family to the mission, eligibility criteria, and service models of relevant agencies. The appropriate and desired new adult services agencies/organizations could then be identified in the IEP and subsequently included in transition planning.

It is important to acknowledge that service agencies/ organization partners vary in prevalence and quality across regions and communities. You may not have all desired community partners within easy reach. The fact that this is out of your control can be frustrating. There are ways to become creative to address this, e.g., consider entering into resource-sharing agreements with neighboring towns, counties, or states. Also, do not be afraid to advocate for access to community resources that do not currently exist. You can engage stakeholders in the community and advocate together with others as a team (there is strength in numbers).

Don't be discouraged if there does not seem to be an obvious way to connect students or access services that are not currently available- just let these ideas help make you alert to opportunities that may present themselves or keep questions in your mind about ways to make things work.

Post-secondary goals of a given student could span the domains of education, employment, and independent living; consequently, familiarity with a wide variety of possible community and governmental agencies is advisable. The matrix on page 6 is an example of one way to document possible agencies and

organizations to contact about services. These organizations and individuals may be involved in service provision, providing access to their own resources, and connecting with other resources. Once created, the document can assist with building a network of groups and individuals involved in youth and adult serving agencies at the local and state levels that may be helpful in the transition process. An example of a completed resource matrix can be found in Appendix A.

Matrix for Including Community Agencies, Technical Schools, and Community Colleges

Matrix for Including Community Agencies, Technical Schools, and Community Colleges						
Contact Information			Transition Domain(s)			Notes
Agency/ Organization	Contact Person Phone Number Email	Post- Secondary Education or Vocational Training	Employment	Independent Living	Community Participation	

The following is a list and description of community and governmental adult-serving agencies to consider when planning for community partnerships. Across the country many service providers have, or are, moving towards divisions geared to providing services for this age group. Because of the relatively recent addition of services targeted to this group, the age of entry at which adult services can be accessed may vary. What this means is that some child serving agencies will provide services beyond the typical age at which youth age out (usually 18). Since this is becoming more common, it is a good idea to check the websites of agencies or organizations to find guidance about their services and age requirements.

1. Mental Healthcare Services

- **What they do:** Services can include accessing the expertise of psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, and counselors specializing in mental healthcare (Mental Health in America, n.d.).
- **How they can be involved:** Mental health care providers can be represented in the IEP meeting when a student has goals within the transition component of the IEP related to self-care, independent living, or medication management. The IEP meeting can include outlining a plan for how mental healthcare services will assist a young person in achieving these goals. During the meeting, there also can be an acknowledgement that good mental health is the foundation needed for a young person to be able to pursue their work or postsecondary education goals.
- **Example:** If a student intends to work a 9-5 job after graduating from high school, an agreement can be made between the student and his/her counselor that a weekly appointment will be made available to during the evening hours so the student will not have to give up regularly engaging in counseling to achieve her employment goal.

2. Healthcare services

- **What they do:** Provide services that involve the diagnosis and treatment of disease or improving or maintaining health (Health Services, n.d.)
- **How they can be involved:** Having a representative from local healthcare services can help insure that students have the proper diagnosis or diagnoses moving forward and the proper corresponding treatments. A student's diagnoses and needed treatments can be taken into account as part of establishing transition goals during the IEP meeting. Thus, it is very helpful to have healthcare professionals attend the meeting. A young person also may have an independent living goal that involves managing his/her own healthcare. A discussion can address how a young person can communicate with his/her healthcare professionals moving forward.
- **Example:** If a student has a goal to independently manage needed prescriptions, the student can be taught how to set up refill reminders as well as reminders for picking up prescriptions through the pharmacy's online app. Additionally, the student could practice calling to schedule an appointment with their provider before they fill their last refill of their prescription.

3. American Job Centers (One-Stop Centers)

- **What they do:** Established by the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration and the Department of Education, One-Stop Centers provide a "full range of assistance to job seekers under one roof" (American Job Centers, n.d.). They offer referrals to job training opportunities, career counseling, job listings, and similar

employment-related services to all individuals, short-term training or tuition assistance for in-demand careers, and can provide financial support during training, i.e., day care, certification fee assistance, uniforms, and books (American Job Centers, n.d.).

- **How they can be involved:** One-Stop Centers can work with students to ensure that they do not drift aimlessly after graduation. By being involved in IEP meetings, a One-Stop Center representative can share with the student and family members the job training activities or employment opportunities a young person could participate in while still in high school in order to start building up skills and a resume to support post-high school career success. A One-Stop Center representative also can outline how they can be helpful after graduation if he/she is looking for further employment or training opportunities.
- **Example:** A young person may have a transition goal of pursuing an interest in the medical field through becoming an EMT. A One-Stop Center representative can share with the young person and other IEP meeting attendees the resources that are available through the Center that could help the young person achieve this goal. Perhaps the young person could meet with a career counselor at their local One-Stop Center to set benchmarks toward becoming an EMT. For example, if a program requires CPR certified before enrolling, a young person could enroll in an EMT basic training program at a community college or training institute and take a state exam upon completing the program. (See the TEST guide on Career and Technical Education for more on this). A career counselor also could discuss how they could be of help throughout this process, such as covering the fee for the CPR course or locating tutoring services to aid the young person in passing the state exam.

4. Government Benefit Offices

- **What they do:** Provide assistance through disability programs that provide cash benefits. Social Security Income (SSI) provides cash payments to youth with disabilities and others based on income and assets and their need for financial assistance (work experience is irrelevant). Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) covers individuals with disabilities who have worked a certain number of hours in the past and who have made contributions to the Social Security trust fund. Many people who are eligible for SSI or SSDI also are eligible for other government assistance that is designed to assist individuals to pay for food, healthcare, and other necessities. These income benefits can include food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program—SNAP-- benefits); Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), also referred to as welfare; and Medicaid or Medicare health insurance coverage (Government Benefits, (n.d.); Laurence, (n.d.); Childhood Disability, 2001).
- **How they can be involved:** representatives of different government benefit programs can inform a young person if he/she is eligible for any programs and about any work incentive programs that accompany these benefits. The representative also can explain how benefits may be affected by future circumstances (e.g. the number of hours one works impacts the amount of SSDI money received).
- **Example:** A Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach representative can let a young person who is eligible for SSI know if he/she also is eligible for the Plans for Achieving Self Support (PASS) program. PASS is a work incentive program that provides an individual with payments that can be used in their efforts to achieve a career goal, such as paying for transportation to and from college courses or for a job training program. A Benefits Planning representative can confirm eligibility and assist in writing a PASS plan (Katz, n.d.).

5. Federal Housing Assistance Programs

- **What they do:** Federal housing assistance programs that are relevant to transitioning students with EBD are:
 - *Section 8 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities Program* - provides supportive housing for very low-income persons with disabilities who are at least 18 years of age. Housing options usually include small group homes, independent living projects, and units in multifamily housing developments, condominiums, and cooperative housing. Tenants pay 30% of their income toward rent, and federal rental assistance covers the rest of the cost to the landlord to operate the housing. Each project must have a supportive services plan which could include case management, training in independent living skills and/or assistance in obtaining employment (Federal Housing Assistance Programs, 2007).
 - *Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program* – assists very low-income families, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities to afford “decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market.” Families or individuals receiving Section 8 are free to choose their preferred housing as long as the landlord agrees and the property meets the eligibility requirements of the program. Housing choice vouchers are distributed to eligible individuals through a person’s local public housing agency (PHA). The local PHA pays for a portion of the rent, and the family or individual receiving a Section 8 voucher is responsible for making up the difference owed to the landlord. Long waiting lists for housing vouchers are common (Housing Choice Vouchers Fact Sheet, n.d.).
 - *Section 8/Single Room Occupancy (SRO)* – residential buildings, many of which were formerly residential hotels, YMCAs, or YWCAs that have been rehabilitated and provide small private rooms for single individuals. Bathrooms, kitchens, laundry, and living spaces are traditionally shared. The government covers some of the rehabilitation costs for the landowner. Tenants pay 30% of their income toward the rental cost typically (Federal Housing Assistance Programs, 2007).
 - *Public Housing* – housing made available to low-income individuals and families at rents that are affordable to them and that provide technical and professional assistance. Rent is based on the highest of either 30% of a resident’s monthly adjusted income, 10% of their monthly gross income, their welfare shelter allowance, or a PHA-established minimum rent of up to \$50. There often are long waiting lists, but once granted public housing, a person can stay as long as necessary (Federal Housing Assistance Programs, 2007).
- **How they can be involved:** A federal housing program representative can be beneficial to an IEP meeting in discussions of independent living goals. The representative will know which housing options a young person is eligible for upon graduation if he/she is interested in living away from the parent’s home.
- **Example:** A young person may be wondering whether it would be a smart choice to live alone or whether he/she would benefit from living in a supportive group setting. At the IEP meeting, the housing program representative can answer the young person’s questions, such as “What are my options for living independently or in a group setting?” The results of such discussions can guide next steps in setting and attaining a student’s independent living transition goals within the transition component of the IEP.

6. Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Pre-employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

- **What they do:** State VR agencies provide services to people who are eligible due to a disability that impacts employment, including a psychiatric disability. VR services generally include development of individualized plans for employment (IPE), vocational counseling, job development help (resume prep, job search help, skills training, etc.), post-employment services, and provision of funding for young people to access other needed services to find work. Of special note are the VR “pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS)” that have recently been mandated under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunities Act (Marrone, 2016), and require that VR agencies set aside 15% of their federal funds to support students with disabilities who are eligible or potentially eligible for VR services. Most public high school students with an IEP will be eligible for VR Pre-ETS services. These include:
 - o job exploration counseling
 - o work-based learning experiences (including in-school or after school opportunities)
 - o counseling on opportunities for enrollment in comprehensive transition services or post-secondary education programs
 - o workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living
 - o instruction in self-advocacy
- **How they can be involved:** The transition component of the IEP can mirror a young person’s IPE. An IPE includes a young person’s chosen career goal and the services needed to achieve that goal. Meanwhile, the transition component of the IEP outlines post-secondary goals, including career goals, and often the benchmarks needed to achieve them.
- **Example:** A VR counselor can be invited to participate in the student’s IEP meeting where goals can be written that involve filling out an application for VR services and submitting the related paperwork. IEP and IPE goals can be written so they are mutually supportive. An IEP goal may be to explore schools that provide cosmetology training, an IPE goal can include services that would facilitate accessing the training, and Pre-ETS services can be accessed to fund that activity.

7. Community Colleges

- **What they do:** Community colleges are a less expensive option for postsecondary education than typical four year institutions, and allow for part-time or full-time coursework. Community colleges offer associate’s degrees, usually targeted toward specific career skills. Many students also use community college as a stepping stone to further education. They may attend community college for a limited time as a way to obtain credits for prerequisite courses and then transfer to a 4-year university to obtain a Bachelor’s Degree. This strategy can reduce the costs of postsecondary education significantly for students and their families (Preparing for Columbus State Community College, n.d.).
- **How they can be involved:** representatives from a community college’s Admissions Office and/or Disability Services Office can attend an IEP meeting to explain the process required for a student to enroll in community college and to get needed supports and accommodations there (Preparing for Columbus State Community College, n.d.).
- **Example:** a community college representative can let a student know during the IEP meeting that he/she should expect that parents will not be as involved in their educational activities once they enter community colleges; instead community colleges prefer to communicate with a student directly (Preparing for Columbus State Community College, n.d.). Becoming aware of this at an IEP meeting can encourage a student to begin

practicing self-advocacy skills in preparation for their community college experience.

8. Four-year colleges and universities

- **What they do:** provide education leading to the achievement of a Bachelor's Degree – a degree that is increasingly becoming required for higher-earning, white collar occupations.
- **How they can be involved:** A representative from a college or university of interest to a student could convey the required high school GPA and standardized test scores for admission, the academic skills needed to succeed, whether there is a degree program that seems to align well with the young person's interests and skills, and the pros and cons of living on-campus vs. commuting to classes. A representative from a four-year college or university also can discuss the expectations from the school has for its students, so a potential applicant could work toward making themselves a strong candidate for admission or decide to steer their goals in a different direction.
- **Example:** A college representative at an IEP meeting may let attendees know that their college requires a score of 1300 on the SAT exam for a student to be considered for admittance. As a result, the student and those present at the IEP meeting may decide that completing an SAT prep course would be an appropriate transition goal.

9. Job Training Programs

- **What they do:**
 - *Job Corps* – provides education and training to help young people finish their secondary education, learn a career, and find and keep a good job. Individuals who are at least 16 years of age and qualify as low-income are eligible to participate in job corps (Job Corp, n.d.).
 - *YouthBuild* –provides opportunities for young people with low incomes to learn construction skills while helping build affordable housing and other buildings like schools and community centers (Rebuilding our Communities, n.d.).
 - *AmeriCorps Programs* – provides young people with opportunities for intensive community service activities in non-profit organizations, schools, public agencies and faith based groups across the United States (Americorps, n.d.).
- **How they can be involved:** program representatives can be present at a student's IEP meeting to convey options other than work and higher education that can be pursued after high school graduation. Representatives from these programs may be particularly helpful to have in attendance if a student could benefit from job training before pursuing formal employment or higher education.
- **Example:** A student with EBD may be interested in pursuing a postsecondary degree but be lacking the emotional maturity and focus to dive into life on campus immediately after high school graduation. A student could search for AmeriCorps positions that align with possible areas of interest to pursue in the year after graduation. This could help the student define a focus and prepare to make the best use of a college experience. A service year with AmeriCorps and facing social issues within the community also can greatly increase a young person's emotional maturity.

10. Gap Year Programs

- **What they do:** A gap year is a planned break from schooling between high school and college. Gap years can be spent abroad or in work experience programs based in the U.S.

Gap years are often tools for “increasing self-awareness, learning about different cultural perspectives, and experimenting with future possible careers” (Whats a Gap Year?, n.d.). Gap years can help avoid academic burnout.

- **How they can be involved:** A representative from an organization offering gap year programs can make a student and other IEP meeting attendees aware of that organization’s offerings. This may provide the student and other attendees with information to determine whether a gap year would be a good fit for the student and if so, which of the available programs would be most appropriate for the young person.
- **Example:** Perhaps a student is very active and has a hard time focusing in a classroom environment. There are many wilderness gap year programs that include outdoor adventures while also teaching young people valuable leadership skills. If a student is interested in a career that would involve spending time outdoors, this may be a good opportunity for a young person to explore his/her passion and build skills.

11. Independent Living Centers

- **What they do:** these centers, run primarily by individuals with disabilities, provide information and referrals, peer counseling, training in independent living skills, and individual and system advocacy (Koyanagi & Alfano, 2013). Independent living centers are part of many vocational rehabilitation programs. Each independent living center targets a certain population and has certain eligibility criteria, with some focusing on transition-age youth (Koyanagi & Alfano, 2013). Although most independent living centers do not serve many people with serious mental health conditions (they tend to have a focus on individuals with physical disabilities), they still can be a potential resource for young people with EBD (Koyanagi & Alfano, 2013).
- **How they can be involved:** independent living center representatives are particularly well suited to address transition goals in the independent living domain. If it is determined a student could benefit from assistance in that domain, a representative can talk about the programming and supports available through a local center and whether the young person is eligible.
- **Example:** A transitioning young person who is planning to move away from home for the first time following high school may have an independent living transition goal of being able to prepare his or her own meals. This young person can take a cooking class offered at the local independent living center.

12. Local Transportation Services

- **What they do:**
 - *Public transportation* – “buses, trains, subways, and other forms of transportation, that charge set fares, run on fixed routes, and are available to the public” (“Public Transportation,” n.d.).
 - *Para transit* – a type of public transportation made available to individuals with disabilities that supplement the routes of public transportation systems. The availability and flexibility of para transit services vary upon location.
 - *Ride share services* – can be used to arrange shared rides on short notice. Typically, rides can be requested and paid for using cell phone apps. Ride share drivers can be rated for users so that passengers can be assured of the quality of their riders before getting in the car if desired. Popular options for ridesharing including the companies Uber and Lyft.
- **How they can be involved:** A representative from public transportation services could inform a

student with EBD and their IEP team about the extent of local transportation services in order to meet the transportation needs necessary for a student to meet their work, school, and/or independent living goals.

- **Example:** Perhaps a student has successfully arranged for a job post-graduation. This is very exciting for the young person and a satisfying achievement, but the job is located across town from where the young person will be living and he/she does not have access to a car. Because the job has a fixed schedule, it is very important for the young person to arrive on time each day. The job also requires that the young person work into the late evening hours some nights. A representative from local transportation services could communicate at the IEP meeting reliable public transit options that would make it realistic for the young person to take the job and provide confidence that they can abide by their work schedule.

13. High School Guidance Counselors

- **What they do:** high school guidance counselors work with students and parents to help guide students' academic, behavioral and social growth (What is the role of a school guidance counselor?, n.d.). A high school guidance counselor has a particular focus on supporting students prepare for postsecondary life.
- **How they can be involved:** a high school guidance counselor could provide insight on paths they have seen students with similar interests or backgrounds follow and community organizations that have been helpful to other students as they prepared to graduate
- **Example:** A student may not have a particularly high GPA and may not meet many four-year colleges' GPA requirements, but this student may still be interested in pursuing a four-year degree. A high school guidance counselor can suggest attending community college for two years and then transferring to a four-year institution. This might be something she has advised students in similar positions to do and has seen this work out well for others in the past.

14. Mentoring Programs/Mentors

- **What they do:** Mentors are individuals a student can look up to as a role model and ask for advice. Mentors are individuals who have expertise in an area that is helpful to their mentees. Some mentors have faced the same challenges as their mentees and have found ways to be successful; these mentors can share their lived experience with mentees to inspire them to overcome challenges as well.
- **How they can be involved:** Mentors or representatives from mentoring programs can be involved by absorbing a student's goals during the IEP meeting and providing insight that would aid the student in reaching their postsecondary goals.
- **Example:** A student may be a gifted musician and have an interest in pursuing a career playing music in the local area. A mentor or mentoring program may be able to connect this student with a role model who is working in the local music industry who could assist the student in networking for job opportunities and also advise the student on the skills needed to succeed as a musician.

15. Foster Care System Representatives

- **What they do:** The foster care system provides housing and other essentials to youth who are in the custody of the State. Foster home placement can include institutions, group homes, or sharing a home with foster parents.
- **How they can be involved:** a Department of Family Services employee or a Juvenile Officer could attend a transition planning meeting as a representative from the foster care system (Who can

represent the interests of a Special Education Student? 2006). A foster care system representative does NOT have the same authority as a parent in terms of decision-making related to a student's transition plan, but still can be invited to participate in transition planning meetings (Who can represent the interests of a Special Education Student? 2006).

- **Example:** A foster care system representative can share with meeting participants what changes in living arrangements for the student will look like as they phase out of the foster care system and become an adult. This is a big transition for the student as the expectation of supporting themselves becomes a reality.

16. Advocacy Agencies (e.g. court appointed special advocates)

- **What they do:** advocacy agencies champion the needs of various populations – including young people with EBD. These agencies work to shift policy and public perception towards young people with EBD and also work to protect and defend the rights of individuals with EBD.
- **How they can be involved:** Advocacy agency representatives bring an air of authority to an IEP transition planning meeting. These representatives are typically well-versed in the legal rights of students with EBD as they transition out of high school (Do I really need to bring a Special Education Advocate to all my IEP meetings?, 2016). Also, the advocacy agency representative at will likely be able to remain less emotional than a parent might be able to during challenging discussions (Do I really need to bring a Special Education Advocate to all my IEP meetings? 2016). Advocacy groups may provide a representative for free or for a minimal charge or their attendance may be quite pricey.
- **Example:** An advocacy agency representative can interject during a conversation if school officials are making incorrect claims about what educational resources can be made available for a student. A school may at times try to argue that an appropriate resource cannot be made available. The representative can bring forward mandates included in IDEA legislation to defend a student's legal rights to appropriate resources and as a result, overcome push-back from the school.

II. Engaging with Current, Previous, or New Adult Services Agency/Organization Partners

- ✓ **Suggestions for involving community partners in transition planning**
- ✓ **Checklist for including community partners in transition planning**
- ✓ **Invite community partners to the meeting**

II. Engaging with Current, or Previous, or New Adult Services Agency/Organization Partners

Clear, regular connections between services youth identified with EBD receive and those adults are eligible to receive are not routinely established and when students with EBD stop receiving special education services upon exit from secondary school they often “fall through the gaps” between youth and adult services if plans are not made to connect them to appropriate adult serving agencies or organizations.

When collaborating with community partners, it is helpful to remember that the work with these groups begins before the IEP/Transition planning meeting and continues after it. For community partner participation to be most meaningful, it needs to involve an ongoing connection between the representative of the community organization, the student, the student’s family (if the student is below the age of majority), and the high school staff working with the student - this may include guidance counselors, the special education teacher who is responsible for the student’s IEP, or a transition coordinator. It is important to identify and connect with potential community partners early in the course of the student’s high school career in order to be able to work and plan together over the course of 2 to 3 years (ideally 4 or more years). By working together with the student and family to identify the student’s strengths, needs, interests, and goals, the involved parties can locate and begin to connect with these partners.

How Do I Connect With Community Partners?

✓ **Suggestions for Connecting with Community Partners**

Connecting with community partners can be done in a variety of ways. Suggestions are to:

- Host a “Transition Fair” for students and parents to learn about resources in your area
- Contact the local One Stop Center to learn about resources in your area
- Establish the student as a client with agencies that can provide appropriate services

Once the initial steps of connecting to the right resources have been completed, transition planners can begin to facilitate conversations between these community representatives and the student and his or her parents.

Transition Fairs

Transition fairs can be a helpful step for creating valuable connections with community partners. These events involve a variety of different community agencies visiting the school to talk with students and their families. It can be a successful way of introducing multiple community agencies to students and parents and providing an idea of the potential partnerships available. Transition fairs should be designed for students as well as parents to build awareness of the different agencies that a student can access. Transition fairs can also be a successful means of involving community partners prior to the IEP meeting and to ensure support at the beginning and throughout a student’s transition planning.

How Do I Facilitate Conversations With Community Partners?

✓ Checklist for Including Community Partners in Transition Planning

1. Establish the following to involve community partners in transition planning.

- a. A point of contact with community partners
 - i. If agency representatives are unknown, communicate with a - transition team member beyond the school setting and/or use the resource matrix to identify appropriate agency contacts
- b. When and how communication and meeting involvement takes place
 - i. Identify optimal communication mechanisms (phone, email)
 - ii. Identify scheduling preferences for transition meetings
 - iii. Attempt to build communication and partnership throughout the year and not only for the IEP meeting.

2. Relationships between school(s) and/or parents and community representatives

- a. Share information with planning partners about student's goals and needs for advance planning, including agency specific goals.
- b. Once a community partner has indicated a willingness to be involved, send an informational letter to parents and students about the opportunity this new partner in the transition process. Include information about the agencies and potential ways in which they may be helpful during the transition planning process.
- c. To help parents understand why this might be a good idea, encourage them to think about their student going forward in the next few years into life as an adult- it may be hard for them to see their children this way, but agencies and laws recognize them as adults fairly quickly after transition planning starts. Helping the parents and students think strategically about what the student may need in the next 3-5 years and identifying and establishing relationships with those adult serving agencies may make life easier going forward.
- d. Communicate with parents or involved adults, about inviting community partners to the transition meeting, secure permission to include them in planning.
- e. Share information with planning partners about students' unique goals and needs for advance planning.

How Do I Extend the Invitation?

✓ Invite community partners to the meetings

The last step for engaging community partners is to invite them to the meeting. Utilize a method for arranging the meeting date like a doodle poll to maximize attendance of as many participants as possible. Once a date has been agreed upon, contact invitees to confirm the meeting date, time, and place. Where appropriate, the student can extend invitations to representatives from transition services and request RSVPs for the meeting and confirmation of whether they would like to be participants. If some can't attend in person offer to use speaker phone and/or teleconferences to involve partners by phone. Ensure the meeting space is appropriate for the invited community partners. If your school has the technology, consider using virtual meeting software so that documents can be viewed and webcams set up so that you can see speakers and attendees. Suggestions for how to conduct the meeting are in the next session.

Specific Steps to Invite Community Partners

1. Establish contact with the agency representatives in your area using the introductory letter found in Appendix B, where there also is documentation about involving outside partners to meetings that can be generated from the IEP software packages.
2. Include Brief for Community Partners with your letter establishing contact, also included in Appendix C.
3. Follow the letter with a phone call to discuss transition planning and the activities that they may be helpful in completing.
4. Once a community partner has indicated a willingness to be involved, send an informational letter to parents and students about the opportunity to involve community people in the transition process. Include information about the agencies and potential ways in which they may be helpful during the transition planning process.
5. If parents and students are interested in making these connections, send appropriate documentation securing permission to invite relevant community partners to participate in the IEP planning process and meeting.
6. Communication should be ongoing after the initial agreement is reached about the Community Partner's involvement.
7. Community partners need to be notified about the student's post-secondary goals and academic and employment strengths and needs.
8. Information that is relevant to the services provided by the community partner needs to be provided him/her in a timely way.
9. A meeting that includes the special educator, student (and parents), and community partner(s) is an important opportunity to discuss available services and supports and identify which ones might be helpful to the student.
10. Send invitations to Community Partners to participate in the transition planning.

III. Making the Meeting Work

III. Making the Meeting Work

For the IEP meeting time to be invested well and produce a well-made plan for enabling the student to progress in the general curriculum and toward their transition goals, several things need to be considered and planned for before, during, and after the meeting. In order to prepare the student to participate in the meeting as much as possible, please refer to the TEST guide for The Student Led IEP. This guide provides specific guidance about assisting the student with participation in their own meetings- up to and including leading the meeting themselves.

- Prior to the meeting: Ensure that all preliminary work has been completed including gaining permission to invite outside agency reps, setting and confirming the meeting date and time, preparing with the student for the meeting, and preparing the meeting space including any technology needed during the meeting.

Starting the meeting

- Have everyone introduce themselves and their roles
- Review the meeting sequence and main topics that will be addressed
- Describe what needs to be accomplished during the meeting
- Explain the role of the partners and the expectations for their involvement
- Review any acronyms that will be used during the meeting to ensure all participants will be able to follow the meeting's conversation
- State any “ground rules,” such as how the student should be addressed and their disability referred to

During the meeting

- Involve the student in conducting the meeting to the extent possible (see TEST guide on Student-led IEP meetings).
- Discuss the ways in which participants or their agency/organization will be involved with the student during the term of the IEP.
- Discuss the various opinions about the provision of or need for services and reach consensus about the IEP's statement of goals, services provided, and timing of service provision.
- Agree on a method for assessing the student's progress toward annual goals and a timeline for reviewing that progress.
- Agree on target dates for reviewing student progress and adjusting activities as needed
- Agree on target dates for accomplishing activities specified in the IEP.
- Have all participants sign the IEP If no changes to the IEP as written are needed.
- As the meeting is closing, the action items developed during the IEP meeting and who these action items are assigned to should be clearly defined and communicated to all meeting participants. Meeting participants should make a commitment to achieving their assigned action items.

After the meeting

- If there were changes made to the IEP during the meeting, participants should leave the meeting with a plan for signing the IEP as soon as the changes are made and it is practicable to obtain all signatures.

- Meeting participants should communicate with one another (according to the plan agreed to during the IEP meeting) regarding student progress, availability of services, required meetings to accomplish tasks related to community partners process for provision of services. This is an opportunity to continue the relationship post the meeting. Establishing this relationship can help with next student.
- Student should be asked how they felt the transition planning meeting went. The student can be asked this in general, and specific follow-up questions can be pursued afterward (e.g. “Did you feel heard during the meeting?”, “Were you pleased with the plan we created during the meeting?”, “Did you find any of the community representatives helpful?” “Do you think there are any additional people we should invite to your next transition planning meeting?” Asking the student for feedback will further empower them to take initiative in planning for their post-high school life.
- If possible based on a student’s comfort level, a student should take initiative to follow-up with all meeting participants after the meeting to thank them for attending and communicating if and how their attendance contributed to a student feeling more empowered to reach their goals. Also, the student should take an active role in holding all participants accountable to completing their assigned action steps.

Special Considerations for Students with EBD

If a student experiences instability of moods, this can be an hindrance to forming relationships with community agency representatives if these individuals do not understand the student’s EBD and how it manifests itself. A special effort should be made to help community agency representatives to understand how an EBD or mental health condition can present itself, and this should not dissuade these community agency representatives from doing the best they can to offer a student services that can support them during their transition to post-high school life.

General tips to help students manage anxiety generally and during meetings

Adjusting to new situations can be challenging, especially for students who are prone to experiencing general and social anxiety. Some students may avoid or even refuse to participate in activities or events that make them anxious. Below are some general tips to help support students who experience anxiety.

- **Modify expectations and praise small accomplishments.** It can sometimes seem like a student is uninterested or underachieving when exhibiting avoidance behaviors, but the opposite might be true. Students with anxiety may avoid situations because they are afraid of making a mistake or being judged. To combat this, try your best to refrain from expressing frustration or punishing mistakes. You may need to adjust your perceptions of success or progress according to the student or situation. Every success — even something small or simple — merits praise.
- **Prepare for the situation.** Help the student feel prepared by giving them a general sense of an event or situation beforehand (where it will be, who will be there, and what might happen). Scripting, role-playing and previewing are all excellent tools. Preparation will help an activity or event feel less new and scary. Students with social anxiety may benefit from arriving to an event or situation early for this reason. Make sure to account for extra time for this preparation if needed.
- **Reframe negative thoughts.** Students with anxiety are often overwhelmed by negative beliefs that reinforce their anxious thoughts (e.g., assuming the worst-case scenario, believing that others see them through a negative lens). Help a student to recognize negative thoughts and replace them

with positive, realistic ones. If a student tends to say things like, “My teacher thinks I’m stupid because I’m bad at reading,” help the student recognize the negative thought, ground it in reality (a teacher’s job is to help students learn, not judge them on what they already know), and replace it with a positive thought (“I’m having a hard time reading but my teacher will help me get better.”)

- **Use relaxation techniques.** It is nearly impossible to accomplish a task or engage in an activity while dealing with intense physical symptoms of anxiety. Deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation are helpful tools used to calm the body’s anxious response.

Deep breathing can calm rapid heart rate, shallow breathing and feeling dizzy. Instruct the student to count each breath to help slow the breathing (4 in, 4 hold, 4 out).

Progressive muscle relaxation, or the act of tensing and releasing muscles, can relieve some of the built-up tension in the body. Beginning with hands, have the student make a fist and hold it tight for five seconds then slowly release. Move on to the arms, neck and shoulders, and feet and legs.

- **Facilitate Peer Support.** If possible try to connect your student with another student with EBD or similar challenges who has gone through an IEP meeting. Facilitate an opportunity for them to meet each other to talk about their mutual experiences . Sometimes an encouraging word from a friend who’s “been there” can help to alleviate worries.

IV. Sustaining Connections with Community Agencies

IV. Sustaining Connections with Community Agencies

“Often what we find is that at 18 young people with mental health diagnoses fall off the map and then reappear a few years later and their lives are a train wreck”.

- Service Provider (Stone, Ellison, Huckabee, & Mullen, 2017)

One issue that people who work with transition age youth talk about is the difficulty they have helping them move smoothly from high school to young adult life after they graduate. By establishing connections for student with EBD who are transition age agencies and organizations after leaving high school. Listed below are some things that will help to ensure continued involvement and collaboration among partners and foster a broader connection between the school or district and the agencies.

Involvement with the Individual Student

- The special education teacher establishes a routine for communicating with agency members by email, phone, or in person
- Communicate regularly regarding waiting lists for particular services
- Keep the special education teacher and student/family informed about applications to be completed for supports and services at colleges, training institutions, or adult service agencies
- Maintain communication with partners regarding tasks and target dates for completion
- Plan for and provide monthly updates about progress on IEP transition goals

Collaboration and Relationship-building between Schools and Agencies

- Schedule regular times to meet with agency representatives and make referrals, e.g., monthly, quarterly
- Provide beginning of the year and mid-year updates on all students who may benefit from community partners services
- Provide school space for agency representatives to meet with parents, students, and other teachers
- Become familiar with agency services, eligibility requirements, and the referral process
- Obtain printed materials from agencies to share with parents and students
- Co-sponsor a Transition Fair for parents and students to meet with agency representatives and other transition service providers in their communities
- Invite agency representatives to be available at Back-to-School nights or at Parent Teacher Conferences
- Involve agency representatives in classroom or “School to Career” activities (mock interviews, video-taping, preparing for job shadows, discussing employer needs)
- Connect with local interagency teams personally or through a district representative. Although you as a teacher are not responsible for inter-agency coordination at the district level, forming a relationship with a local agency representative or counselor can help

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Appendix A

The following pages provide a sample completed template for listing agencies, points of contact, transition domain addresses, and room for notes as the process is followed.

Contact Information	Transition Domain(s)				Notes
Contact Person Phone Number Email	Post-Secondary Education or Vocational Training	Employment	Independent Living	Community Participation	
Able State: Charlie Walters cwalters@able-sc.org Local:			X	X	
Center for Disability Resources TASC State: Joy Ivestor Joy.Ivestor@uscmed.sc.edu Local:	X	X	X	X	
Department of Disabilities and Special Needs State: Rhonda Mumford rmumford@ddsn.sc.gov Jennifer Quin jquin@ddsn.sc.gov Local:		X			
Department of Employment and Workforce State: Amanda Lucas, State Youth Coordinator alucas@dew.sc.gov Local:		X			
Department of Juvenile Justice, Director of Job Readiness Training Center State: Harold B. Mayes hbmaye@scdji.net Local:	X	X	X	X	

Contact Information	Transition Domain(s)					Notes
Department of Mental Health (Division of Children, Adolescents and Families)	State: Sylvia Senbel School Based Services Program Manager http://www.state.sc.us/dmh/caf/ Local:			X	X	
Developmental Disabilities Council	State: Valerie Bishop Valerie.bishop@admin.sc.gov Local:	X	X	X	X	
Family Connection of South Carolina	State: Amy Holbert, Exec Dir aholbert@familyconnections.sc.org Shelley Nowicki, Parent Training & Information Manager snowicki@familyconnections.sc.org Local:	X			X	
Goodwill Industries	State: http://www.goodwill.org Local:	X	X			
National Collaborative on Workforce & Disability for Youth			X			

Contact Information	Transition Domain(s)				Notes	
Post-Secondary Education Institutions		X				
Protection and Advocacy						
South Carolina Assistive Technology	State: Carol Page Carol.page@uscmed.sc.edu Local:			X	X	
SC Commission for the Blind		X		X	X	
South Carolina Department of Education	State: Mary Etta Taylor metaylor@ed.sc.gov Local:	X	X	X	X	
Vocational Rehabilitation	State: Deirdre Cato Dcato1@scurd.state.sc.us Local:	X	X			
Walton Options for Independent Living	State: Robbie Breshears Community Work Incentives Coordinator rbreshears@waltonoptions.org Local:	X	X	X	X	

Appendix B

Letter of Introduction and Invitation to collaborate around Transition Planning for Students with EBD

Dear (Community Partner),

I am _____ from _____ High School. Part of my job is to help students with emotional and/or behavioral disabilities (EBD) plan for the transition from high school to their post-secondary life. This transition planning is a required part of their special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004). Research has shown that planning well for the transition from high school to post-secondary life improves the outcomes of these students.

We are interested in involving members of the community as we work to connect students with services, programs, and educational and work experiences they can participate in after high school. We would like to avoid gaps in services during the period when a young person is exiting from high school and beginning adult life. As a part of this involvement, we invite you to work with us to connect students to appropriate community resources, to be involved in the transition planning for the post-school outcomes included in the their annual Individual Education Programs (IEP), and support the school, the students, and their families.

Working together to support students throughout the year in working toward their annual IEP goals would enable them to acquire the skills necessary to reach their post-secondary goals. As the primary point of contact with the students, I will work to keep us connected and to monitor the students' progress toward their goals. I will contact you periodically to communicate about the students' needs and progress and be available to assist in connecting your organization with students, families, and other education-based personnel and resources, as provided for in the IEP plan.

I will be following up with a phone call to provide further details and determine your availability and willingness to partner with us in supporting our students as they enter young adulthood. Thank you for your attention, I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Sincerely,

(Signature of teacher, administrator, transition coordinator)
(Name of high school)
(Name of school district)

Appendix C

Brief for Community Partners

The following is a compilation of information regarding the IEP, the transition planning process, and suggestions for how community partners might work with transition planners and Students with EBD.

Planning for the transition from high school to post-secondary life:

Individual Education Program (IEP): a legal document reviewing the child's current level of performance and guiding the services and supports specially designed to meet the unique needs of a child with a qualifying disability under IDEA. The plan is meant to help the student learn information and skills being taught in order to progress in the general curriculum with the students' same age peers.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): legislation requiring schools to meet the needs of students identified as being in one of thirteen qualifying disability categories: autism, deafness, deaf blindness, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impaired, serious emotional disturbance (emotional and behavioral disturbance), specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (including blindness).

The Transition Planning Component of the IEP: transition planning is a requirement for students receiving special education services under IDEA and must be developed by the time a child with an IEP turns 16 (or earlier, depending upon state law). This component of the IEP is a coordinated set of activities created for and with students to prepare the student to achieve their desired post-secondary goals intended to prepare students to work, live, and participate in their communities as independently as possible. The plan must include: age appropriate assessments; measurable goals for post-secondary life based on the student's strengths, preferences, and interests; how progresses toward these goals will be measured; and who will collect data to measure this progress. Once transition goals are developed they are linked to goals in the student's annual Individual Education Program (IEP). IEP goals are particular activities conducted in support of the post-secondary goals articulated by the student and his or her special education teacher.

How Community Agency Representatives can be of assistance:

- Provide information about services available and eligibility requirements
- Brainstorm/ collaborate with other partners to identify services
- Help other transition team members understand the difference between school program entitlement and adult services eligibility
- Maintain continuing involvement in implementing transition plans across transition years
- Aid in planning that braids together services received in child/ adolescent settings and offered in adult settings to facilitate seamless transfer from youth to adult systems
- Assist assessing need for school support between the ages 18-21
- Assist in the application process for community, agency, and college supports and services as appropriate
- Alert students and families about potential waiting lists for services
- Provide services as appropriate before student exits the school system