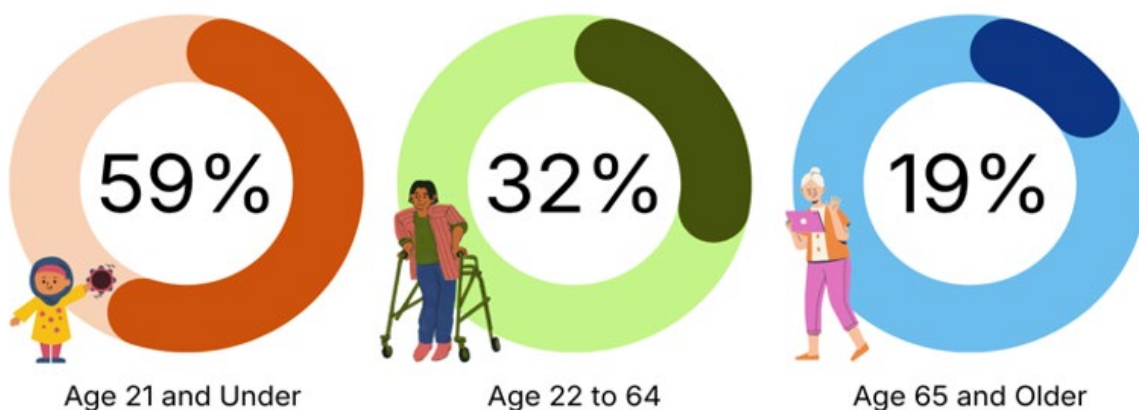




# Bridging the Gap from Classroom to Community

## Transition Resources Related to Communication

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Independent Monitoring for Quality, 2024

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Independent Monitoring for Quality (IM4Q) results showed that 59% of people aged 1 to 21 who do not communicate with words have a system for communication. However, for adults aged 22 to 65+ only 19-32% have a system in place.

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# What is Transition Planning?

Transition planning helps students with disabilities and their families get ready for life after high school. It includes planning and preparing for employment, further education or training, and living independently. It involves a partnership between the youth, their family, educational staff, school-age services, post-school services, program providers, and others.



## Transition Planning in Pennsylvania

Transition planning in Pennsylvania is part of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) during the year a student turns 14; however, transition planning can begin at any age. Once a student ages out or graduates from high school, they are no longer eligible for services through the educational system. If desired, the youth must apply for and meet eligibility requirements for adult services.

Transition planning helps bridge supports between youth and adult service systems and promotes continuity of services. Ensuring access to communication is essential in successful transition planning, and this resource provides tips for supporting communication during the transition process.



**This resource bundle includes:**

**[Augmentative and Alternative Communication \(AAC\)](#)**

**[Visual Gestural Communication \(VGC\)](#)**

**[American Sign Language \(ASL\)](#)**

**[Blind/Visual Impairment](#)**

**[Tactile Communication](#)**

**[Limited English Proficiency \(LEP\)](#)**



## Tips for Transitioning from School to Adulthood with Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC)

### What is AAC?

**Augmentative** means to add to someone's speech (using gestures, pictures, or letter boards). **Alternative** means to be used instead of speech (like speech-generating devices).



### Start Planning:

At least a year before transition, start planning. Where will the individual be when they were typically at school? It's important to get a clear picture of what the new environment will look like.

Many children use school-owned devices. Start the process of getting a device that can be used outside of school.

Request copies of any language proficiency and communication assessments completed by school staff.

Document any supplementary communication tools used in school, so they can continue to be used and/or modified if necessary. Include any tools that were tried but were not effective, too.

Have copies of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure important information is transferred.

Learn how to access resources in the adult system.



### Connect with Specialists:

Develop a relationship with a local Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) outside the school setting. The school SLP and the new SLP can assist with developing a transition plan.

Things change, we change, and technology changes. Have a specialist available if a new evaluation is needed.



### Provide Pre-Transition Support to the New Setting:

Communication partner training with the new people in the individual's life can be extremely beneficial.

Consider what training will be given to new staff that supports communication. A good, free training on AAC is available at <https://aacccommunity.net/aac-essentials/>.



### **AAC and How to Troubleshoot:**

Identify what tools and devices need to be considered and who will be responsible for purchases and emergencies.

AAC users and their support people should learn how to use functions within an AAC system (such as editing and backing up vocabulary).

Always have a backup system in place. One quick and easy way to create a backup system is to print screenshots and assemble those into a book or binder.

Regularly test devices and ensure updates are completed.

Ensure that if something malfunctions or breaks, the individual and their support people know how to fix the problem or who to contact.

Know the phone number, e-mail, or social media for technical support. Some companies may also provide resources with troubleshooting tips.



### **Create Person-Centered Communication Resources:**

A **Communication Dictionary** outlines what an individual does (behavioral signals, signs, etc.), what we think it means, and how a communication partner can respond effectively.

The **Communication Profile** highlights important parts of an individual's unique communication (how they share and take in information, how to support their communication, things that may interfere with their communication, and what they like best).

Share these tools with new support people to help them become familiar with the individual's unique communication so they can be an effective communication partner in the individual's life.

**For questions about this resource, please  
contact: [ra-pwspecialpopunit@pa.gov](mailto:ra-pwspecialpopunit@pa.gov).**



## Tips for Transitioning from School to Adulthood with Visual Gestural Communication (VGC)

### What is VGC?

A method of communication that bypasses vocabulary and strict grammar rules of a language, and instead involves gestures, facial expression, and body language use and analysis.



### Start Planning:

At least a year before transition, start planning. Where will the individual be when they were typically at school? It's important to get a clear picture of what the new environment will look like.

Request copies of any language proficiency and communication assessments completed by school staff.

Document the meanings of the individual's gestures, body language, facial expressions, and if they use any unique sign language.

Document any supplementary communication tools used in school, so they can continue to be used and/or modified if necessary. Include any tools that were tried but were not effective, too.

Have copies of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure important information is transferred.

Learn how to access resources in the adult system.



### Connect with Specialists:

Develop a relationship with a local Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) outside the school setting. The school SLP and the new SLP can assist with developing a transition plan.

Things change, we change, and technology changes. Have a specialist available if a new evaluation is needed.



### Provide Pre-Transition Support to the New Setting:

Communication partner training with the new people in the individual's life can be extremely beneficial.

Consider what training will be given to new staff that supports communication.



## Teach and Model Supplementary Communication

### Tools:

Communication tools need to be taught and modeled. Exposure, repetition, and practice are important to reinforce learning. Involve the individual in the process of creating and reviewing their communication tools.

Ensure that all support people take the time to learn the individual's tools and work together to ensure consistency.

Respond to any communication attempts to reinforce communication and shared meaning. When an individual makes a communication attempt, affirm that you understand, and assign meaning.



## Learn and Use Supplementary Communication Tools:

A **Visual Schedule** is a tool that uses pictures, symbols, and words to help individuals understand and follow tasks/routines. It can be used for one specific activity or for an entire day, week, or month.

A **Choice Board** is a tool that uses visuals or objects to allow individuals to select from various activities, tasks, and things.

A **Photo Gallery** of important people can be used to display their personal identifiers such as name signs. It can be used to share the schedule for who will be there and who will be doing which thing.

Some people benefit from using objects as a reference, starting with concrete objects and slowly moving to more abstract objects to augment nonverbal communication.



## Create Person-Centered Communication Resources:

A **Communication Dictionary** outlines what an individual does (behavioral signals, signs, etc.), what we think it means, and how a communication partner can respond effectively.

The **Communication Profile** highlights important parts of an individual's unique communication (how they share and take in information, how to support their communication, things that may interfere with their communication, and what they like best).

Share these tools with new support people to help them become familiar with the individual's unique communication so they can be an effective communication partner in the individual's life.

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## Tips for Transitioning from School to Adulthood with American Sign Language (ASL)

### What is ASL?

A complete, natural language that has the same linguistic properties as spoken languages, with grammar that differs from English. It has its own grammar and syntax, and its own rules for making sentences. ASL is expressed by movements of the hands and face.

ASL



### Start Planning:

At least a year before transition, start planning. Where will the individual be when they were typically at school? It's important to get a clear picture of what the new environment will look like.

Request copies of any language proficiency and communication assessments completed by school staff

Document any supplementary communication tools used in school, so they can continue to be used and/or modified if necessary. Include any tools that were tried but were not effective, too.

Have copies of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure important information is transferred.

Learn how to access resources in the adult system.



### Connect with Specialists:

Develop a relationship with a local Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) who signs outside the school setting. The school SLP and the new SLP can assist with developing a transition plan. Understand how and when the individual uses Video Relay Services (VRS).

Evaluate where/when the individual may need an ASL interpreter, and request and arrange interpretation services as early as possible. It is also important to assess the individual's ability to use an interpreter effectively.

Connect the individual with the PA Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH) for resources.

Contact the Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) Deaf Services

Coordinator at [RA-](mailto:RA-ODPDeafServices@pa.gov)

[ODPDeafServices@pa.gov](mailto:ODPDeafServices@pa.gov) for questions, resources, and support.



### Provide Pre-Transition Support to the New Setting:

Consider what training will be given to new staff that supports communication.

Ensure that new people supporting the individual are aware of Deaf culture and can effectively communicate with the individual using the individual's preferred method of communication, as well as other communication modes used.



### Advocate for Accessibility:

Understand all methods of communication that the individual uses in addition to ASL and make sure they have access to their preferred method.

If the individual uses captions, ensure that the individual's support people are familiar with the platforms used and that they understand how to use them.

Assess situations where an individual may need Communication Access Real-time Translation (CART) for more accurate captions and make sure support people know how to request these services.



### Technology and How to Troubleshoot:

Many ASL users also use a variety of technologies for communication access, such as video phone. Identify what technology is needed and ensure the individual and their support team know how to use it.

Ensure that if something malfunctions or breaks, the individual and their support team know how to fix the problem or who to contact.

Know the phone number, e-mail, or social media for technical support. Some companies may also provide resources with troubleshooting tips.



### Socialization:

Ensure that the individual has meaningful socialization opportunities by encouraging them to participate in programs and events that support ASL, to maintain and improve their language. Continuous access to others who use ASL is important.



### Create Person-Centered Communication Resources:

A **Communication Dictionary** outlines what an individual does (behavioral signals, signs, etc.), what we think it means, and how a communication partner can respond effectively.

The **Communication Profile** highlights important parts of an individual's unique communication (how they share and take in information, how to support their communication, things that may interfere with their communication, and what they like best).

Share these tools with new support people to help them become familiar with the individual's unique communication so they can be an effective communication partner in the individual's life.

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## Tips for Transitioning from School to Adulthood with a Vision Impairment or Blindness

### What is a Visual Impairment or Blindness?

A **visual impairment** is partial or total loss of vision that cannot be corrected with glasses, contact lenses, or medical treatment. **Blindness** is a complete darkness or absence of any vision.



#### Start Planning:

At least a year before transition, start planning. Where will the individual be when they were typically at school? It's important to get a clear picture of what the new environment will look like.

Determine what accommodations are needed in the new environment to provide safety, mobility, accessibility, and equal opportunity.

Document any supplementary communication tools that have been used in school, so they can continue to be used and/or modified if necessary. Include any tools that were tried but were not effective, too.

Request copies of any language proficiency and communication assessments completed by school staff.

Have copies of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure important information is transferred.

Learn how to access resources in the adult system.



#### Connect with Specialists:

If the individual benefits from Speech Therapy, develop a relationship with a local Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) outside the school setting. The school SLP and the new SLP or consultant can assist with developing a transition plan.

Things change, we change, and technology changes. Have a specialist available if a new evaluation is needed.

Connect the individual with the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) for resources.

Set up services with a local Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialist to assist the individual with navigating their new environment.



### Provide Pre-Transition Support to the New Setting:

Consider what training will be given to new staff that supports communication. A good, free resource on vision loss is available at <https://home.myodp.org/2026/07/09/communicating-with-individuals-who-are-blind-or-have-a-visual-impairment/>.

Ensure that new support people understand the individual's unique vision loss.



### Advocate for Accessibility:

Ensure that the individual and their support people know how to request accommodations.

If the individual uses text-to-speech, install the appropriate software on the individual's devices in advance. Test the software in different environments to ensure accuracy and responsiveness.

Use vivid, sensory-rich language that engages the individual's other senses.

Prepare for where/when the individual needs access to tools that will convert visual information into auditory or tactile formats, such as screen readers or Braille displays, to ensure they will have access.



### Technology and How to Troubleshoot:

Understand all methods of communication that the individual uses to make sure they have access.

Ensure that individuals and their support people know how to use tools and devices. Always have a backup system in place.

Regularly test devices for proper functioning and maintenance.

Ensure that if something malfunctions or breaks, the individual and their support people know how to fix the problem or who to contact.



### Create Person-Centered Communication Resources:

A **Communication Dictionary** outlines what an individual does (behavioral signals, signs, etc.), what we think it means, and how a communication partner can respond effectively.

The **Communication Profile** highlights important parts of an individual's unique communication (how they share and take in information, how to support their communication, things that may interfere with their communication, and what they like best).

Share these tools with new support people to help them become familiar with the individual's unique communication so they can be an effective communication partner in the individual's life.

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## Tips for Transitioning from School to Adulthood with Tactile Communication

### What is Tactile Communication?

The exchange of information, emotions, meaning, or messages through respectful physical contact or touch.



#### Start Planning:

At least a year before transition, start planning. Where will the individual be when they were typically at school? It's important to get a clear picture of what the new environment will look like.

Determine what accommodations are needed in the new environment to provide safety, mobility, accessibility, and equal opportunity.

Document any supplementary communication tools that have been used or tried in school, so they can continue to be used and/or modified if necessary. Include any tools that were tried but were not effective, too.

Request copies of any communication assessments completed by school staff.

Have copies of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure important information is transferred.

Learn how to access resources in the adult system.



#### Connect with Specialists:

Evaluate situations where the individual may need a tactile ASL interpreter, and request and arrange interpretation services as early as possible.

Develop a relationship with a local Speech and Language Pathologist (SLP) outside the school setting. The school SLP and the new SLP can assist with developing a transition plan.

Connect with resources such as the Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS), the Office for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (ODHH), and the Helen Keller National Center (HKNC).

Set up services with a local Orientation and Mobility (O&M) Specialist to assist the individual with navigating their new environment and recommending any modifications (such as bump dots to identify a specific door or trailing rails for navigation).

Connect with groups to find mentors who have experience with transitioning their own family member(s) into adulthood. Things change, we change, and technology changes. Have a specialist available if a new evaluation is needed.



### Provide Pre-Transition Support to the New Setting:

What training and information will be given to staff? Ensure the training or information is provided to anyone that may interact with them.

Ensure that new support people can effectively communicate with the individual using the individual's preferred method of communication such as tactile signing, object symbols, braille, as well as other communication methods used.



### Advocate for Accessibility:

Make sure that the individual and their support people know how to request accommodations and services (such as Braille).

Prepare for situations where/when the individual needs access to tools that will convert information into tactile formats such as Braille displays, to ensure they will have access.



### Technology and How to Troubleshoot:

Identify what tools and devices need to be considered and who will be responsible for purchases, maintenance, and emergencies. Ensure that individuals and their support people know how to use any equipment or technology.

Always have a backup system in place.

Regularly test devices and technology for proper functioning and maintenance.

Ensure that if something malfunctions or breaks, the individual and their support people know how to fix the problem or who to contact.



### Socialization:

Ensure that the individual has meaningful socialization and intellectual stimulation, both at home and in the community, such as programs where staff are experienced with tactile communication, social groups and events, etc.



### Create Person-Centered Communication Resources:

A **Communication Dictionary** outlines what an individual does (behavioral signals, signs, etc.), what we think it means, and how a communication partner can respond effectively.

The **Communication Profile** highlights important parts of an individual's unique communication (how they share and take in information, how to support their communication, things that may interfere with their communication, and what they like best)

Share these tools with new support people to help them become familiar with the individual's unique communication so they can be an effective communication partner in the individual's life.

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## Tips for Transitioning from School to Adulthood with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)

### What is Limited English Proficiency?

Individuals whose primary language is not English and who have a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English.



#### Start Planning:

At least a year before transition, start planning. Where will the individual be when they were typically at school? It's important to get a clear picture of what the new environment will look like.

Document any supplementary communication tools used in school, so they can continue to be used and/or modified if necessary. Include any tools that were tried but were not effective, too.

Request copies of any language proficiency and communication assessments completed by school staff.

Have copies of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure important information is transferred.

Learn how to access resources in the adult system.



#### Provide Pre-Transition Support to the New Setting:

Consider what training will be given to new staff that support communication.

Ensure that new support people understand the individual's culture and know the individual's background and preferred language.

Ensure that new support people can effectively communicate with the individual in their preferred language.

Make sure support people are aware of environmental and cultural stressors that might affect communication and behavior.



### Technology and How to Troubleshoot:

Identify tools and devices that may need to be considered.

Ensure that individuals and their support people know how to use any equipment or technology.

Always have a backup system in place for when an individual's main system is broken or not available.

Regularly test devices and technology for proper functioning and maintenance.

Ensure that if something malfunctions or breaks, the individual and their support people know how to fix the problem or who to contact.



### Advocate for Access:

Use plain language for all written documents to reduce confusion and to make communication clear. Avoid using jargon and slang.

Evaluate situations where the individual may need an interpreter and assess the individual's ability to use an interpreter to ensure effective communication.

Request and arrange interpretation services as early as possible and if the individual needs remote interpreting services, ensure that support people know how to request these services.

Utilize visual aids such as pictures, diagrams, and written words to support communication.

Provide documents in the individual's preferred language and ensure that translations are accurate and culturally appropriate.



### Socialization:

Create opportunities, resources, and tools for conversation practice and social interaction, such as translation apps, English as a Second Language programs, and peer tutoring, to assist with English language development, if interested.



### Create Person-Centered Communication Resources:

A **Communication Dictionary** outlines what an individual does (behavioral signals, signs, etc.), what we think it means, and how a communication partner can respond effectively.

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Share these tools with new support people to help them become familiar with the individual's communication so they can be an effective communication partner in the individual's life.

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