

## Mary Korpi, *Guiding Your Teenager with Special Needs Through the Transition from School to Adult Life: Tools for Parents*

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In facing the daunting task of planning for the future of an adult child with a disability, even parents who are well-seasoned advocates for their children can experience feelings of fear and helplessness. In response, *Guiding Your Teenager with Special Needs through the Transition from School to Adult Life* offers a comforting, get-down-to-business perspective on navigating the uncertainty of adult services that is at once informative and empowering. Make no mistake about it, there's lots of work ahead, but the short time you spend reading this book will pay great dividends in the inspiration it provides and the practical solutions it offers. Drawing from a career supporting and educating individuals with disabilities and their families as a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Mary Korpi provides a compassionate and thorough instruction manual full of the nuts and bolts parents will need to effectively prepare and guide their teenage children through this important stage of life. Parents and professionals alike will benefit from the cogent way Korpi integrates a broad understanding of adult-service systems with practical guidelines for building opportunities for independent functioning into daily home, school, and community routines.

Widely considered one of the most critical times in the education of children with disabilities, the transition out of the school system into adulthood presents significant challenges to families and professionals. In terms of the heavy demands on parent advocacy skills, Korpi likens this transition to the early intervention period, when stress is often high as families cope with a new diagnosis and with

the urgency of implementing appropriate interventions. Parents who have worked for well over a decade to become effective advocates for their children within school systems face new challenges as their children transition into the unknown world of adult services. Particularly when children have already struggled significantly to meet the academic and social demands of childhood, families often worry how to incorporate new goals for independence and functional skills.

Korpi responds to this concern. With an understanding of state-of-the-art techniques for working with individuals with disabilities, Korpi draws upon positive behavioral strategies that are philosophically strengths-based and person-centered. Emphasis is placed on involving the individual teenager in taking responsibility for decision-making, while also calling on all those who have a stake in that individual's development to find creative ways to promote independent functioning. To me, the greatest asset of this book is the plethora of techniques that can be employed throughout adolescence to effectively prepare the teenager for adult living. In fact, though this book is certainly relevant to families of older adolescents and young adults, it would also be a highly appropriate recommendation for families of children in their early teens to help them think about priorities for supporting their children throughout adolescence.

Next, Korpi attacks the issue of service access for adults with disabilities. Her book is a timely contribution in light of growing national concern in this area. In fact, over the last several years increased media attention to the "autism epidemic" and the experiences of families coping with this disability has shone a spotlight on the struggles encountered by all families of children with disabilities as these children transition to adulthood. Called a national crisis by the Autism Society of America (ASA 2007) and similarly

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reflected in the Newsweek cover article “What Happens When They Grow Up” (Kantrowitz and Scelfo 2006), the shortage of services available to adults with disabilities in the United States is receiving increased public attention. In spite of significant accomplishments in the field of special education for students under 21 (IDEIA 2004), there is no legal mandate that these individuals be provided similar services as adults. Many are clamoring for political change, arguing that this tremendous burden should not be carried by parents alone.

Korpi takes a pragmatic approach, believing that in the absence of such services, well-informed parents with skills to achieve results consistent with their own family values are the key to effectively navigating adult-service systems. Appropriately, her discussion focuses first on the federally required, special education-based process of transition planning as a critical opportunity for prioritizing meaningful goals that promote independent adult functioning. Maintaining the compassionate and practical tone that dominates this book, Korpi then elucidates the legal and financial considerations inherent in futures planning. Her extensive knowledge of federal service programs for adults allows her to present this complex information clearly and

make recommendations for accessing relevant state-specific resources. Again, parents are offered concrete strategies for effective advocacy and specific advice for preparing their teenager to access these systems.

As I put down this book I realize that Korpi has conjured up an image that has stuck in my mind: that of the school bus stopping by a family’s house for the last time. Read her book and you will see a potentially stressful transition conceptualized as an opportunity for new growth. Me? I appreciated her refreshing perspective. I hope you will too.

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