

Transitioning Smoothly

The transition from high school-to-college will likely be one of the toughest transitions for a person on the autism spectrum; if not the toughest transition of them all. Going from high school-to-college has been the toughest transition ever in my life. Here are the Top Five Reasons why the transition from high school-to-college is tougher for people on the autism spectrum and Top 10 Tips for a successful transition.

Top Five Reasons for the Struggles in Transition

1. It is uncharted territory.

People who are on the autism spectrum love their routines, patterns, and few disruptions as possible. For the first 18 years of their life, they have most likely been going to the same school district, daily see the same people in their community, & be nurtured & loved upon by their family & friends.

2. Accountability drops off.

Once a student graduates from high school, most people view them as an adult who can finally make their own decisions. For a person with autism to be thrown in the wolves to be an adult is very scary and challenging for them. Looking back during my struggles as a freshman & sophomore in college, I believe a stronger accountability through family and friends would have helped my transition from high school-to-college be much smoother process.

3. Life is much more than obtaining an education.

Majority of people think the transition from high school-to-college is based on academics. There are several transitions involved once a person graduates from high school.

- **Psychologically:** Stressful demands take a toll on person which leads to depression and often results in suicide which is the second leading cause of death for college aged students.
- **Social** aspect with people coming and going in their lives.
- **Mentally:** Stress builds due to trying to stay balanced as all-around person through prioritizing time spent through studying, our relationship we make, organizations we join, and as well as possibly having a job.
- **Emotionally:** Difficulty staying stable with all the chaos around the world and in the new college environment.
- **Physically:** Our metabolism usually slows down immensely especially with the Freshman 15. Students miss mom's home cooked food and have difficulty finding time for recreational activities.
- **Spiritually:** can range from the complications such as fleeing away from temptation, finding a church home, & building better rapport with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

4. We lack resources and tools.

After my freshman year of college, I remember saying to my teachers, family and friends, “My high school didn’t prepare me well for college.” The irony of telling this to my teachers after a year of college was they actually were in agreement. During my time in high school, what impressed me was the teachers actually prepared us well academically, but they didn’t prepare us well in other aspects of life. It is imperative for person with autistic to have the resources and tools especially during times of adversity in their life. For a person with autism having the inability to find the resources they need to succeed immensely decreases their hope for success.

5. We haven’t been able to find our niche in society.

It is very imperative for a person with autism to have some sort of plan after graduating from high school. My advice for people with autism is to have several plans in place just in case some of them are closed off. To be able to have Plan B, C, D or even possibility to Plan L is very crucial in staying resilient while finding their niche in society.

Top 10 Tips for Successful Transition

1. We need people willing to keep us accountable.

Proverbs 27: 17, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” I am extremely blessed to have my mother, teachers, pastors, & my godmother as a few examples who have kept me accountable throughout my life. It is very difficult to have successful journey going solo. It is good to have several people push you along the way.

2. KISS Method (Keep It Simple Silly) will make your life easier.

Sometimes keeping everything simplified is the easiest way to having maximum results. KISS Method will be different for each person with autism. Here are several examples: understand how to control the controllable, take and complete one task at a time, and step back when you need rest and time to evaluate things.

3. Preparation is an important element to person’s success.

Basketball legend, John Wooden has quote that sticks with my mind. “Failing to prepare is preparing to fail.” My preparation has been huge part of my success whether my task was graduating from college or running marathon. Preparation has helped me significantly in knowing how to work harder and smarter toward excelling in life. Preparation has increased my ability to modulate my stress while dealing with adversity and increased my smoother process during transitioning.

4. “What have you done for me lately?”

During my sophomore year in college, I watched the NFL Fox Pregame show and Terry Bradshaw said, “What have you done for me lately?” That helped me snap out move past my success in high school and move forward to the next phase of my life. His statement was based on superstar players being recently been cut from their team. Bradshaw’s statement helped me

understand that people usually don't care about your previous success; the only production that matters is at the current moment. Another quote similar to Bradshaw's statement is, "Don't let your past dictate your future."

5. Having a balanced life benefits our overall well-being.

There are many people who are balanced intellectually, who can have conversations on eclectic topics, but are nowhere close to being balanced all-around. You have many people in life who are incredible in their jobs, but their family/personal life is horrendous. Life isn't all about intelligence. Life is about finding interest and hobbies you enjoy or involving yourself into. While being involved into hobbies and interest, find people to relate to in those activities.

6. Change is Inevitable.

I heard of those words for the first time during the summer before my senior year of high school. There are some people who love change and some who despise change, but during some time of our lives we all have to go through it. My advice for a person with autism is to see change as an opportunity to grow.

7. Finding out "Who you are," is more important than determining your career.

Most people go to college so they get an education and find what they want to do for a career. However, most people should view going to college for the opportunity to gain experience in their lifetime. Going to college needs to be a time about finding yourself. The more we understand ourselves, the easier process will be toward excelling into our careers. Jeremiah 29:11-13 mentions, "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

8. We need our daily and steady routines.

Finding a steady routine is crucial for autistic person during their time in college. If they are able to have a routine schedule, then this will be helpful in maturation process. During the last few years in college, I was able to find a routine in my everyday schedule. Knowing what time each of my classes started, who to meet up with for lunch or group projects, & time to release stress by playing racquetball or basketball helped me immensely in my maturation process. Being able to find my routine in college decreased my anxiety significantly and increased my confidence immensely.

9. Simplifying your goals will simplify your life.

During the summer before my junior year in high school, I learned a valuable lesson pertaining to setting goals at a tennis camp in Austin. What I remember most from my valuable lesson is striving on setting goals within your control. Having goals in life is crucial to success, but not everybody knows the secret to learning while being resilient in setting goals. The emphasis on

goal setting should be towards achievable and controllable goals within your grasp. The end result will most likely be success.

Examples of my simplified goals during my time in college:

- Try focus less on getting straight A's and place more emphasis towards on being on top of assignments.
- Worry about what needs to be done for today and today only.
- Avoid setting a certain amount time for studying on each subject such as one hour on biology. Put more emphasis on studying in terms of the amount of work put into it. A recreational example would be playing 3-on-3 basketball or running three miles; instead of emphasizing working out for specific amount of time.

10. We should be going to college for the journey.

No matter what is going in our lives, we need to make consistent effort to enjoy the journey. College is fraction of our lifetime in this world. An interesting perspective is if the average person takes five years to graduate from college; they would have spent only about 6-7% of the lifetime in college. About three years ago, Nola Ochs was 95 years old while graduating with her bachelor's degree in History at Fort Hays State University. Her yearning to learn is what intrigued her on the idea of going to college.

Life is Journey, Just Embrace It!!!!