YOUR FAMILY'S ROAD MAP

From early childhood through adulthood, every stage brings new opportunities, services, and important deadlines. This guide helps families know what to expect, who to contact, and how to plan ahead with confidence.

columbia ABILITY ALLIANCE

Ages 0-3

Early Intervention

Get support early

Free home-based services are available from birth. You don't need a diagnosis to call. Enrolling in Early Support for Infants & Toddlers (ESIT) automatically enrolls your child in Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA), a head start most families miss.

SERVICES
- ESIT home-based therapy
- Speech (SLP), OT, PT
- IFSP family planning

WHO TO CONTACT
- Help Me Grow: 1-800-322-2588
- Children's Developmental Center
- SSI, Parent-to-Parent of WA

ALSO CONSIDER
- Request a medical home through your pediatrician
- Start connecting with other families

Start transition planning at age 2.5. A conference is required 90 days before the 3rd birthday.

ESIT enrollment = automatic DDA enrollment. Builds your history from the start.

Ages 4-5

Preschool

Meet your school team

ESIT ends at age 3. Services shift to the school district through an Individualized Education Program (IEP). You have rights, ask for everything in writing and bring support to meetings.

SERVICES
- IEP *(school-based)*
- Preschool special education
- Speech, OT, PT in school

WHO TO CONTACT
- Local school district
- DDA *(re-review before age 4)*
- Parent-to-Parent, PAVE

ALSO CONSIDER
- Learn your rights under IDEA
- Connect with a parent advocate

Kindergarten transition plan must be in place before age 5.

DDA re-reviews eligibility before age 4. Watch for their notice and respond or enrollment can lapse.

Ages 5-11

Elementary School

Build habits and connections

Attend every annual IEP meeting. Apply for DDA now if you haven't. Start thinking about financial protections, gifts over $2,000 can accidentally affect SSI and Medicaid.

SERVICES
- IEP or 504 Plan
- School-based therapies
- Apple Health / Medicaid
- DDA

WHO TO CONTACT
- DDA - *apply early, long process*
- ABLE WA *(savings account)*
- Arc of WA / local Arc chapter

ALSO CONSIDER
- ABLE account or Special Needs Trust to protect benefits
- Respite care through DDA

Start transition planning at age 2.5. A conference is required 90 days before the 3rd birthday.

Financial planning starts now. ABLE accounts and Special Needs Trusts let family support your child without risking benefits.

Ages 11-14

Middle School

Start looking ahead

Transition goals belong in the IEP now. Pre-ETS through Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) is available starting at 14, no DVR application needed. Your teen's voice should be at the center of every plan.

SERVICES
- IEP with transition goals
- Pre-vocational supports
- Pre-ETS through DVR *(age 14+)*

WHO TO CONTACT
- DVR *(Pre-ETS, no application needed)*
- DDA *(confirm or begin enrollment)*
- School transition coordinator

ALSO CONSIDER
- Self-advocacy skill building
- Career interest exploration

DDA application must be complete before age 14.

Pre-ETS starts at 14 - free job exploration, workplace readiness, and self-advocacy training.

Ages 14-16

9th - 10th Grade

Formal transition begins

A transition IEP is required by law by age 16, starting at 14 gives a real head start. Get your teen a Washington State ID now; many adult services require it.

SERVICES
- Transition IEP *(required by 16)*
- Pre-ETS through DVR
- Job shadowing, career exploration
- High School and Beyond Plan

WHO TO CONTACT
- DVR *(Pre-ETS referral)*
- DDA *(confirm eligibility)*
- School transition coordinator
- Columbia Ability Alliance

ALSO CONSIDER
- Get a WA State ID card now
- Apply for housing waitlists early

Connect with DVR for Pre-ETS. Confirm DDA eligibility before it becomes urgent.

Housing waitlists can be years long, apply to your local housing authority now.

Ages 16-18

11th-12th Grade

Real-world experience

Build real work experience now. Benefits planning is critical, working can reduce SSI if not structured carefully. At 18, your child becomes a legal adult. Plan ahead for decision-making.

SERVICES
- Work-based learning *(WBL)*
- Supported employment
- Benefits counseling
- Pre-ETS *(continues through 21)*

WHO TO CONTACT
- DVR, DDA
- Community Rehab Providers
- Disability Rights WA
- Columbia Ability Alliance

ALSO CONSIDER
- Explore Supported Decision Making (SDM) before guardianship
- Register to vote at 18

Apply for SSI at 18. Start benefits planning before graduation, not after.

At 18, parents lose automatic access to records. Supported Decision Making (SDM) is a free, less restrictive alternative to guardianship under WA law.

Ages 18-22

Post-High School

Handoff to adult services

School services end at 22, adult services don't start automatically. Build your adult support system while school still provides structure. DDA reviews eligibility again before age 20.

SERVICES
- Supported employment
- Community inclusion
- Postsecondary education
- Supported / independent living
- IEP services to age 22

WHO TO CONTACT
- DVR, DDA *(long-term)*
- SSI / Social Security
- Local housing authority
- Columbia Ability Alliance
- Community providers

ALSO CONSIDER
- Open an ABLE account
- Begin Special Needs Trust planning
- DDA re-review before age 20

Post-school plan and DDA long-term services must be in place before age 22.

DDA re-reviews eligibility before age 20. Watch for the notice - respond or enrollment can lapse.

Age 22 and beyond

Adult Life

A full life in the community

Supports shift from school-based to community-based. The goal is a self-directed life that reflects your family member's own interests. Family future planning, what happens if something happens to you, matters more than ever.

SERVICES
- Employment & career development
- Supported / independent living
- Day programs, community access
- Respite care for families
- Person-centered planning

WHO TO CONTACT
- DDA *(ongoing case manager)*
- SSI / SSDI, Apple Health
- Disability Rights WA
- DD Endowment Trust *(DDEFT)*
- Columbia Ability Alliance

ALSO CONSIDER
- Update will and life insurance to point to a Special Needs Trust
- Annual benefits review

Review benefits annually, income, housing, and life changes can all affect eligibility.

Estate planning matters now. Make sure wills, life insurance, and accounts point to a Special Needs Trust, not directly to your family member.

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