

Getting Students with Learning Disabilities Ready for College

Students with Learning Disabilities, parents, teachers and counselors may use these suggestions as a **reminder of helpful skills and necessary steps** a high school student with a learning disability may take when getting ready for college.

1. **Check to see that your psychological testing is up-to-date before graduation.** P.L. 94-142 (more commonly referred to as IDEA) mandates psychological testing to be reviewed every 3 years for students in LD programs. If you can be retested in high school, it may qualify you for accommodations in college, professional exams, and possibly graduate school.
2. **Obtain all special testing records before high school graduation.** It is important to get these records from your school and/or a qualified professional who administered the testing. Colleges may request these records to assist in providing academic assistance to students.
3. **Take advantage of high school internships and job shadows.** If the student has specific career goals in mind, they will find their classes more meaningful.
4. **Make sure the student has adequate study skills.** While still in high school it may be beneficial for the student to consider individual tutoring or a study skills class.
5. **Consult the high school to get an understanding of the support or special help the student is receiving.** This will help in determining realistically how much LD support may be needed at the college level.
6. **Increase independent living skills in the student.** Help the student learn to use their own checking account and/or credit card, do their own laundry, cleaning, and cooking, among any other skills necessary to be on their own.
7. **If taking medication, the student should understand how they are affected by the medication.** Be aware of the difference in student's functioning as a result of taking the medication. Before the student leaves for college, arrange a time to discuss any problems concerning proper dose, schedule changes, and side effects, with the professional who prescribed the medication.
8. **Encourage the student to get a part-time job or volunteer in the community.** This will help improve social skills and give the student a better understanding of work expectations and situations. Improving social skills will help with students who miss cues and have inappropriate timing in conversation, as well.
9. **Make sure students have a good understanding of their strengths and vulnerabilities.** The student should know and be able to articulate what techniques and accommodations work best for them. They should be prepared to seek help, as academic expectations in college are greater than those in high school.

10. **Encourage students to be their own advocate.** Support the student in discussing their learning disability and the accommodations they need with high school instructors, as preparation for seeking help in college.
11. **Learn about Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.** This law indicates what types of accommodations must be provided and/or allowed at postsecondary institutions if a student requests them. *The responsibility is on the individual to seek out services and accommodations they need (IDEA puts the responsibility on the elementary and secondary schools).*
12. **Get information on special exam arrangements for SAT and/or ACT tests.** Students may get the option of tests with extended time or readers for the test.
13. **Make a copy of all college applications.** Use the first copy to collect the information needed. Type or neatly write that information onto another copy to be sent in.
14. **Contact the Disability Services Office at the colleges where the student is interested in applying.** Get information on the services and support they have available for students with learning disabilities.
15. **Visit colleges before making a final choice.** Look at the communities where the college is located. Is the campus a good fit? Is the city/town too big or too small? What resources are in the area?
16. **Consider starting college in the summer rather than fall.** Summer classes may be smaller and instructors may have more time for one-on-one help. Also, it may help to begin in the summer with one or two classes to adjust to college class work.
17. **Make sure it is the STUDENT'S choice to attend college.** The most successful college students with learning disabilities are those who have high motivation and a good understanding of their strengths and weaknesses. They are committed to spend extra time on studying and to request and use accommodations when needed.
18. **Once at college, the student should understand that they have different educational needs than friends without learning and/or attention problems.** College students with learning and/or attention problems do not fail because of low intelligence. It may be more difficult for them to succeed if they don't structure themselves, use appropriate resources, or seek proper help and accommodations. Therefore, it's important for them to connect with the right resources and find a good support system.

Adapted from: Carol Sullivan, Counselor for LD Students, Northern Virginia Community College, Annandale, Virginia; and the Staff of HEATH Resource Center, One Dupont Circle, NW, Washington, D.C. 20036

Shawn Kuba (1997). Tips for College Bound High School Students with Diagnosed Learning Problems. <http://www.ldonline.org/article/7760>