

Table 6.1 Top 10 Tips for Providing Transition Support Services

<p>Tip #1: Start Early</p> 	<p>Current practice and legal requirements (i.e., IDEA) stipulate that transition planning should be initiated as early as possible and no later than the age of 16. It is recommended, however, that students begin the process in middle school by participating in job fairs, being introduced to work-study programs, and attending Career Day events that help them to begin thinking about life after high school.</p>
<p>Tip #2: Identify a Goal</p> 	<p>Assist the student in identifying goals that are specific and can be broken down into measurable steps. A good place to start is to ask the student to write a paragraph or record a short statement about “what do I do well?” and “what I want to do when I graduate from high school.” Look for key words and phrases with which the student seems to personally identify and are not prefaced with “My mother says I should....” Once the goal has been stated in specific terms (“I want to go to college”), identify specific steps that need to be taken to achieve the goal. As a counselor, this is a good place to find out what the student does or does not know about what steps need to be taken. Along with the transition specialist and special educator, a plan can be developed to assist the student with gaining knowledge and completing each step.</p>

**Tip #3:
Focus on
Strengths**



Students with disabilities need to understand their disability-specific issues so they can become powerful self-advocates. Each of us has a number of challenges and limitations, but we also need to know our strengths and capabilities. As counselors, we know how to do positive asset searches; use your counseling expertise to encourage and support students in being actively involved as self-advocates so they can understand their challenges and limitations as well as their strengths and capabilities to develop a lifestyle across all life roles. These life roles include relating to others, working either as a volunteer or an employee, managing life skills, having fun with extracurricular activities and avocational pursuits, and valuing what is important that will provide a meaningful lifestyle.

**Tip #4:
Resources**



As school counselors, we need to remember this is a collaborative team approach and there are a variety of resources that can be utilized. There are people resources (e.g., teachers, parents, classmates), technology resources (e.g., computer-assisted guidance, web sites), and community resources (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation, Junior Achievement, Boys/Girls Clubs, Scouts). Search your community to identify a variety of resources that you can call on as a part of the team.

**Tip #5:
Involve the
Student**



Unfortunately, oftentimes we do things “for students” and talk “about students”—of course with the very best of intentions. We need to involve students at appropriate times and in a developmental context that encourages them to understand disability-specific issues, to recognize strengths and capabilities, and to become active participants in their academic experience. Students with disabilities are provided self-advocacy training by the special education team, and counselors can be a source of support as well as an empathic encourager who knows when to appropriately challenge a student and when to offer positive reinforcement.

**Tip #6:
Involve the
Parents**



Federal law as well as best practice mandates that parents be involved in their student’s education. Some parents are well informed, some are overinvolved, some are overwhelmed, and some are unsure of how to allow their children to move on to independence. Part of the transition process is to help parents understand the possibilities for the future while at the same time to begin in earnest the process of letting go. Some parents have played an active part in the IEP process and have interfaced with school staff; they now will have to allow and assist their children to do it on their own.

**Tip #7:
Be Culturally
Sensitive**



There is an overrepresentation of minorities in special education. It is important for school counselors to find culturally sensitive approaches and be willing to challenge stereotypes so that students are provided with the services that are needed.

**Tip #8:
Attend to
Deadlines**



Whether students are transitioning from middle school to high school or high school to postsecondary pursuits, deadlines are a critical part of the life journey. Missing a deadline can mean a student may lose out on an opportunity. Finding multiple ways to post reminders about deadlines will help students to know where to look for this important information. The school web page, school counselor's web page, e-mail, bulletin board, school newsletter, and personal reminders are just a few of the ways to post reminders.

**Tip #9:
Individualize
the Services**



Caseloads for counselors seem to grow larger each year. Where can you find the time to meet the needs of each and every student? First, the collaborative team approach is one good way to muster the resources of many “experts” to best meet the needs of our special education students. Second, disaggregate your data so you can identify smaller groups of students that can benefit from your professional services through the school counseling program. Third, find a system for being able to keep track of the information on your caseload. Fourth, periodically review your caseload to be sure no one is “falling through the cracks.” And finally, does every student on your caseload have a postsecondary plan?

**Tip #10:
Use a
Collaborative
Team**



Postsecondary planning for special education students requires a team approach. Work with special education teachers, transition specialists, classroom teachers, and administrators.