

# REALIZING THE COLLEGE DREAM WITH AUTISM OR ASPERGER SYNDROME

Ann Palmer

[www.annpalmerautism.com](http://www.annpalmerautism.com)

[apalmer@autismsociety-nc.org](mailto:apalmer@autismsociety-nc.org)

## Overview of Presentation

- Introduce Eric – early history
- High school
- Making the decision about college
- Preparation for the transition
- Supports available in college
- Self-advocacy and Self-disclosure
- Challenges and strategies in college
- What we've learned

## Eric



## Diagnosis

- Early diagnosis
- Characteristics of autism
  - Social
  - Communication
  - Restricted interests
  - Insistence on routines



## High School

- More choices
- More acceptance
- Transition Plan
  - Inviting the right people
  - Student participation
  - Testing modifications
  - Functional skills



## Making the Decision to Pursue Higher Education

- Questions we asked ourselves as parents
  - Can he live independently?
  - Will he be safe?
  - Will he fail?
  - Will it make a difference in the long run?
- Helping Eric make his own decision
  - Exposing him to the school and work environments
  - Discuss differences between high school and college

## Differences Between High School and College

- High School
  - School is required to serve student
  - Frequent reminders by teachers
  - Teachers check on student's understanding
  - Tested on reproducing what has been learned
- College
  - Student must meet academic criteria
  - Student expected to keep track of assignments
  - Student expected to initiate asking for help
  - Tested on ability to apply what has been learned

## Options of Higher Education

- Different kinds of schools
  - Community Colleges
  - Technical Schools
  - 2 year and 4 year Colleges
- Part-time versus full-time
- Commuting versus living on campus

## Important Considerations

- Location of school
- Size of school
- Curriculum of interest to student
- Cost
- Level of supports available
- Experience with autism spectrum

## “Lessons”

- Safety - On campus, in dorm room, on the computer
- Academic Issues - Study skills, how to know when he needs help and how to get help
- Health Issues - How to know if he is sick, who to call, when to go to the doctor
- Personal Care - Shaving, showering, laundry
- Time Management

## Resource Notebook

- Information from “lessons”
- Contact numbers for family members
- Contact info for campus services – RA, computer services, Disability Services, Student Health, etc.
- Map of campus and bus routes
- Other- financial, housing info, social opportunities, etc.

## Orientation

- Importance for the student
  - Dorm room experience
  - Develop familiarity with campus
  - Hearing experiences of upperclassmen
- Importance for the parents
  - Reminder of “typical” parent concerns
  - Learning about accessibility of professors and technology on campus

## Possible Accommodations

- Extended time for testing
- Separate setting for testing
- Priority seating in classroom
- Priority registration
- Hard copies of notes
- Tape recording lectures
- Single dorm room

## Disabilities Services Support

- Crucial support for the student
- Make connection as early as possible
- Student needs to develop a comfort level with the office and the staff
- Regular scheduled appointments if possible
- Knowing the right questions to ask

## Self-Advocacy

- Student is an adult- has to initiate
- Student has to understand his/her needs
- Student has to be able to ask for help and explain why he/she needs help
- No information shared with parents unless student requests that in writing

## Preparing the Student for Self-Advocacy in Adulthood

- Increase student's awareness of his/her strengths and challenges
- Help student understand that everyone learns differently; everyone needs help sometimes
- Respect the student's point of view; involve them in everyday decisions and choices
- Allow the student to make mistakes
- Talk about the future; prepare and plan

## Strategies to Build Self-Advocacy Skills

- Involve the student in school meetings and decisions at whatever level is appropriate
- Give student experiences to build communication skills (school jobs, arranging meetings, reporting to teachers, etc.)
- Ask for student's opinions and feelings (verbal or written)
- Make problem-solving opportunities learning experiences

## Self-Disclosure

- "Explaining Who You Are to Those Who Care"
  - Those who need to know
    - Individuals who have authority over your actions and your future (teachers, employers, coaches, police officers, etc.)
    - People with whom you have strong personal relationships (romantic interests, close friends, relatives, roommates, co-workers, etc.)
    - People you turn to for support or advice (religious leaders, counselors, physicians, etc.)
  - Those who might not need to know

Liane Holliday Willey, 1999

## Self-Disclosure

- Personal decision, depends upon:
  - Student's acceptance of differences and desire to share this information
  - Need for the individual or office to know
  - Will it make a difference?
- How to disclose- documentation, verbal, written
- Eric's Learning Guide
- Not an "all or nothing" decision

## Challenges in College

- Organizational problems
- Dealing with surprises
- Knowing when they need help
- Lack of assertiveness
- Not understanding another person's perspective
- Difficulty understanding what is important
- Difficulty with financial and social decisions

## Strategies

- Calendar
- "Rules" to go by
- Notebook to keep track of grades
- Frequent reminders
- Designate who to go to for help
- Regular scheduled appointments with professors
- Asking the right questions

## What We've Learned

- The most difficult parts of college may not be academic related
- Start early involving student in advocating
- Letting go is hard
- Parents have to respect the student's decisions and let them make mistakes
- Our children are always learning and they will surprise you

