

Integrated transition planning for youth with disabilities creates a path to living a full, meaningful, and connected life as a community member. It means planning for what will change as your child becomes an adult. We know that every child is different, so every idea might not be right for your family. This fact sheet explores safety planning in the community for youth with disabilities.

Learning to be safe while being part of the community takes planning and education for children and youth with disabilities. It may take focused time, intentional practice and support from school staff, parents and other caregivers.



The Dignity of Risk

If we want our children to become as independent and resilient as possible, we need to learn to be comfortable with them having the dignity of risk. This means that we give our youth the opportunity to have new experiences, which might lead to taking some risks.

The dignity of risk is the idea that all people, including those with disabilities, have the right to take risks. Being allowed to take risks is a big part of personal growth, self-esteem and quality of life. Learn more about the dignity of risk at WI BPDD Living Well Project, [youtube.com/watch=FwlpzSunvgw](https://www.youtube.com/watch=FwlpzSunvgw).

Include Safety in the Transition Plan

A youth's IEP team can include community safety as part of transition planning. These goals might look like:

- Identifying unsafe situations and what to do.
- Understanding travel and street safety.
- Knowing how to find trusted people when they are needed.

Many transition programs include life skills like home and kitchen safety, using public transportation, and the basics of first aid. Families can advocate for including these same skills as part of a youth's transition plan.



Build Community Connections

Adults with disabilities who are involved in social activities, employment, community supports and services, and have a variety of people in their lives, build a community around them. This creates a safety network, or circle of support, for the person as well as an important protective measure.

People with strong community connections have lower rates of abuse and neglect. Unfortunately, adults with disabilities, and limited communication, who rely on adults for care may be more likely to be abused or neglected. Being an active member of a community and avoiding isolation can benefit an adult with disabilities in so many ways, including making them safer. Learn more about safety through community connections at [Healthy, Safe and Connected Toolkit](#).

Tip for Families

There are low-tech and high-tech ways to increase safety for your youth. One low-tech idea is to make an ID card for your youth's backpack with their name, parent's cell phone number, and basic information about their disability or health condition. For teens who use a cell phone, a high-tech choice is an app with this information. There are a lot of phone apps available for communication, GPS location and transportation. These apps are tools for you and your youth to use as a team.



Safe Interactions with Police and First Responders

For youth with invisible disabilities like autism or mental health concerns, encounters with police may be stressful and cause safety issues. You can help prepare your youth for this by connecting them with local law enforcement to talk about their diagnosis and the behaviors that they use that police and other first responders might misunderstand.

- Find ways for youth to interact with police and other first responders like visiting police and fire stations at community events. These experiences build trust if youth need their help.
- Share information about your child's condition with local law enforcement. Local departments have a form (Many of them are online.) to explain a person's special needs or accommodations.
- Work with your child to become comfortable with self-disclosure. Sharing their diagnosis with first responders is an important safety skill in emergencies.

For more ideas on safety with police and first responders read these articles.

[Autism and Law Enforcement: Strategies for Safer Interactions](#)

[Safety on the Spectrum: Law Enforcement](#)

Tip for Families

It's Never Too Early to Start! Allowing a young person to make choices, understand consequences, and be part of decision-making doesn't have to start in high school. Building a child's choice-making skills is important for self-esteem, advocacy and safety. [Early Choices Matter](#) includes videos, worksheets and other resources to guide parents on practicing choice-making with their child.



Know Your Rights

Part of independence is knowing your rights and you can teach your youth about them. This knowledge increases safety and decreases the instances of abuse or isolation. For adults who take part in long-term support programs, federal regulations include rights like "privacy, dignity and respect" as well as the right to have visitors at any time.

To learn more about personal rights see [Living Well Rights Guides \(wi-bpdd.org\)](#).

Teach Self-Advocacy Skills*

Families and school staff can talk with youth about healthy boundaries and effective communication. Practice communicating messages such as: *No; Leave me alone; I need; or I want*. For those who use assistive technology, these messages can be added to their devices.

(*Source: Pacer Center, pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c122.pdf)

Common Sense is for Everyone!

Safety tips are good for everyone to learn, regardless of disability. Talk as a family about safety, model these activities, and repeat them regularly:

- Lock your doors when you're home, and when you go out.
- Know what to do and where to go if there's a weather emergency or natural disaster like a tornado, flood or fire.
- Don't give out your personal information to anyone—especially online.
- Know when (medical help, fire or other) and how to call **911**.
- Know who to go to and how to ask for help if you're being bullied or abused in any way.



Learn about Safe Relationships

Interest in romantic relationships is normal for youth with disabilities, like their typically developing peers and like them, some may want a romantic partner. The issue for youth with disabilities is that the adults in their lives do not talk with them about relationships or sexuality. Beginning at the appropriate developmental age, parents can teach them about their body, changes during puberty and new emotions and feelings. Parents can also request that school includes them in activities and discussions about healthy relationships.

Parents should explain what is socially appropriate behavior in public and what should be done in private, at home in the bathroom or bedroom, within the framework of your family's culture and beliefs. Parents can talk with their child about intimacy, what it means to give consent and how they can say no to a peer or an adult. Typically-developing youth may learn these concepts from friends or peers, but youth with disabilities may need to learn these ideas in different ways from parents, caregivers or health care providers.

Learn more about healthy relationships [Talking to Youth with IDD about Sexual Health and Relationships](#)
Resources to Learn More

[Emergency Preparedness Resource Toolkit for People with Disabilities](#)

[Family Voices Video, Emergency Preparedness: Make a Plan](#)

[Health and Human Services: Tips for Talking to Your Youth with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities About Sexual Health and Relationships](#)

[Healthy Bodies Toolkits](#)

[Healthy, Safe and Connected Toolkit](#)

[Keeping Children with Disabilities Safe in Emergencies](#)

[People with Disabilities and Chronic Diseases: Information about Bullying](#)

[Talk with Your Kids](#)



INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

familyvoiceswi.org/resource-library

integratedtransition.waisman.wisc.edu/resources



Learn more about transition planning on the Family Voices website

familyvoiceswi.org/resource-library



Each family has a voice. Together, our voices will be heard.

familyvoiceswi.org