

How to Successfully Transition Autistic Adolescents into Higher Education

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Abstract:

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is neurodevelopmental disorder that is exhibited through common symptoms including social interactions, communication deficits, limited interests, and repetitive behaviors (e.g., stimming). The prevalence of autism amongst children and adolescents continues to grow with 1 in 36 diagnosed annually (CDC, 2025). Individuals diagnosed on the autism spectrum often comes with a myriad of comorbidities (e.g., sleep disorders, seizure activity, nutritional imbalances, gastro-intestinal issues, and mental health disorders) with adolescents often prescribed medications and/or treatments to help with the management of these chronic diseases. Croen et al., (2006) found that adolescents are six times more likely to be hospitalized than their neuro-typical peers. Managing autism takes a multi-disciplinary approach. Navigating a large university system, academics, and being away from home can be challenging for any teenager. But, adding the complexity of managing a chronic neurodevelopmental disorder on top of the new environment could potentially be overwhelming for the autistic adolescent. It makes sense to use all available resources when transitioning into a college setting. Registered Nurses (RN) and Advanced Practice Nurses (APN) are employed at university clinics to help manage student healthcare issues including acute healthcare problems (e.g., viruses), traumatic issues, and chronic healthcare issues. This poster presentation will examine how nursing professionals can assist autistic adolescents when they are entering into a college environment by managing medications and other treatment modalities while being a student advocate within the multi-disciplinary team.