

*Monthly tips and resources featured in **What's Next?** are created for young adults, their families, and supporters who are exploring options for life after high school in Indiana.*

Mental Health in Transition

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Recent scholarship indicates that those with disabilities experience more mental health challenges than those without. Daily obstacles related to health concerns, stigma, ableism, accessibility issues, and more contribute to stress experiences and mental health challenges. About 32.9% of adults with disabilities—roughly 17.4 million people—experience these challenges 14 or more days in a 30-day period.



Mental health challenges, left untreated, can result in chronic mental illness, alcohol and other drug abuse, poor health choices, and overall poor health outcomes. Everyone, especially persons with disabilities, needs high quality, accessible mental health services.

When to Seek Help

As individuals transition from the security and familiarity of the school system into adulthood and increased independence, the need for mental health services becomes even more vital. This significant life transition brings additional stressors, including social and emotional loneliness and generalized anxiety.

When is it time to seek mental health support? When in doubt, it is always best to reach out for help. To guide your decision making, here are a few tips from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI). Are you:

- Struggling to maintain daily living activities?
- Unable to handle stress with normal coping strategies?
- Using drugs or alcohol to cope?
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviors?
- Experiencing sleeplessness or excessive sleep?
- Having a lack of interest in activities that once brought enjoyment?
- Having panic attacks?
- Feeling guilty or hopeless?
- Thinking of suicide?

Where to Seek Help

Having a disability can present challenges to access mental health services. But the advent of virtual counseling, American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters, close-captioning, and real-time session transcriptions, has served to mitigate those barriers.

When seeking help, ask the right questions before scheduling an appointment. If you need assistance with mobility, communication, hearing, understanding, or speaking, be sure to explore whether the office offers accessible and inclusive services. Ask to speak to a licensed therapist in the office to inquire. Here are some questions to consider asking:

- Could my physical condition or disability be impacting my mental health?
- Can I coordinate my care between my physician and my mental health provider?
- Are treatment locations accessible for me?
- How do I go about requesting an accommodation if I need one?

For students engaged in transition planning, check with the high school guidance or school social work office or the college counseling center for assistance in locating a new therapist. A school-based therapist should be able to provide referrals and assistance identifying a new therapist as students transition out of school.

Insurance providers commonly have lists of available therapists, and many employers offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) at no cost. Ask your employer's human resources department if an EAP is an employee benefit. EAP services are confidential, so the employer is unaware of which employees are receiving services or why.

Community mental health centers are another viable option for transitioning clients, and many offer billing on a sliding scale if clients have no insurance or limited financial resources. Mental health training centers at local colleges and universities have graduate students in clinical psychology, counseling, and clinical social work who provide free counseling (under licensed supervision) as they get close to graduation.

~Written by Kristy Eaton, assistant director of the Indiana School Mental Health Initiative.

Resources

- [Centers on Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [American Association for People with Disabilities](#)
- [Community Mental Health Center Outpatient Mental Health Service Locations](#)
- [Indiana Family & Social Services Administration State Psychiatric Hospitals and Community Mental Health Centers](#)

What's Next? is a project of the Center on Community Living and Careers and the Indiana Department of Education.

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