

Transitioning to CTY Summer Programs for Students with Asperger's Syndrome (or other Autism Spectrum Disorders)

Email: cty-disabilities@jhu.edu

Call: 410-735-6215

The combination of a rigorous academic course and new social environment, in addition to a residential experience for some students, requires preparation for most CTY students and their families. This preparation may be even more helpful for students with Asperger's or other autism spectrum disorders. This document seeks to provide some tips for facilitating your child's transition into the program and having a successful experience once there.

The environment of CTY Summer Programs is very different than that in a typical school or home. Three key aspects make the CTY environment unique:

- **Students spend extensive time with peers and staff.** Nearly all students and staff at residential sites live there. Thus, meal time, class time, and residential activity time is spent together. This can lead to an increased possibility for sensory overload and for teasing. At day sites, the entire day is spent in the company of peers and staff. Unless requested, students may not have time to spend by themselves.
- **Students have an increased responsibility for attending to their own needs.** At home, and even in their home schools, students are often surrounded by people that have known them for an extended period of time and know what supports they need to be successful. At CTY, staff members take great efforts to get to know each student quickly; however, students also need to take responsibility for knowing who to go to with questions or concerns and asking for this assistance when needed. Staff members are always available to assist students, but students will need to take initiative to seek out that assistance.
- **Students have multiple transitions throughout the day and little unstructured time.** Students at CTY have a full schedule of academics and activities each day as well as a little unstructured time with friends. Sites typically encompass large portions of campus, and there will be various boundaries, buildings, and spaces for students to become familiar with. Transitions at CTY might involve 5-10 minute walks across campus, changing groups and clothing for activities, or waiting for events to start. The schedule can require significant focus and energy. Students must comply with strict lights out and meal times, which may be different from what they are accustomed to at home. In addition, students are studying one subject for 5-7 hours a day.

Before the program begins:

After your child has registered and been assigned to a course for the summer, contact CTY Disability Services at 410-735-6215 or cty-disabilities@jhu.edu to discuss your child's needs.

By providing CTY Disability Services with as much information as you can, you will help the summer staff best serve your child and allow for a positive experience. The more information you can provide, the more likely it is your child will have a more successful experience. Documentation will need to be sent to CTY Disability Services following the documentation guidelines explained during your conversation with a CTY Disability Services staff member.

To aid in deciding which accommodations may be helpful in the CTY setting, here is a list of commonly requested accommodations and supports for students with Asperger's and other autism spectrum disorders that have helped students transition into the program smoothly and find success.

- An assigned seat
- Posted agendas in the classroom and the residence hall
- A syllabus providing the basic class schedule for the session
- A quiet place/time when the student can be alone (i.e., having a time and place to sit and listen to an iPod each day)
- A single room (this may not be possible at all sites)
- Modified assignments or extended time
- Copies of notes from class
- Opportunity to visit the site ahead of time to "get the lay of the land" (not possible at all sites and must be planned in advance)

Tips For Helping To Ensure A Successful CTY Summer Experience:

Contact CTY Disability Services as soon as possible. If you complete a Request for Accommodations form through the committee, think about the program holistically (not just in the classroom.) Talk with your child about how he or she can best be supported. Have your child talk to CTY Disability Services staff about his or her needs.

Ensure that adults working with your child are aware of specific difficulties your child faces and the strategies implemented to help with these to date as well as your child's strengths. This needs to be communicated to CTY Disability Services ahead of the session. The more information you can provide to help us be helpful to your child, the better. By informing CTY of known strengths and weaknesses, staff can better to play to strengths while working to ameliorate weaknesses.

Consult with appropriate school personnel and professionals knowledgeable about your child. Talk with them about your child's upcoming CTY experience and ask for recommendations they might have. These individuals have often seen your child in academic and social situations when you are not around and may have valuable insights to offer about your child's attendance at CTY.

Read through the Site Information Packet and any other CTY-related materials with your child. Discuss the Honor Code and student expectations for behavior. Talk about how these rules and expectations may be different from those in school or at home and how this may relate to his or her daily routine and behaviors. Have your child start practicing meeting the expectations (that may be different than what he or she is used at home) so he or she can get used to the environment.

Review the campus map provided in the Site Information packet you received with your student's course assignment packet. Read this to determine the key locations of buildings such as dormitories, classrooms, the dining hall, and the main offices. If this kind of detail is not provided in the Site Information packet, you will want to discuss that with CTY Disability Services or the site program manager or assistant program manager listed on the front of the packet. Your child will not have to navigate the campus on his or her own, but it may be helpful for him or her to get a mental map of the lay of the campus to feel more at ease upon arriving.

Think about the social, academic, and organizational skills that are required in the CTY setting that may not be needed in the home or school environment. For example, if your child typically spends a lot of time organizing materials outside of class time, this may not be possible at CTY due to the full schedule of the program. Discuss how your child might be able to keep up with organization within class time with support from the instructor or teaching assistant, if needed. In addition, if your child is participating at a residential site, discuss how he or she will share living spaces with others, will have to be responsible for getting ready in the morning and at night, will need to do laundry, etc. You may want to consider providing your child with some basic hygiene and housekeeping pointers, such as how to do laundry, how to make healthy food choices, how to keep possessions clean and organized, and how to share personal space with a roommate. Your child's Resident Assistant will also be on-hand to provide guidance and supervision in these areas.

Talk about ways to keep possessions organized and accounted for in this new setting especially if this is the first time your child will be living away from home in his or her own room. Think about this responsibility when packing as well. Pack only the necessities for the three weeks. More possessions mean that your child has more to keep track of. At day sites, think about what organizational strategies best work for you child in regards to bringing home homework and materials needed and ensuring this gets back to the site the next day.

Think about the situations that will be new that may cause your child anxiety. Discuss these with CTY Disability Services and your child in advance to prepare as much as possible. For example, if using the residence hall or classroom toilets can be a cause of anxiety (e.g. that an alternative toilet can not automatically be used when the designated one is out of action, or

that there are problems with going to the toilet when others are present), strategies for dealing with this and making the site staff aware of it can help to lessen the anxiety once on site.

Discuss strategies for dealing with anxiety in the CTY setting with your child and share this with CTY Disability Services and the academic counselor on site. What does your child normally do to cope in stressful situations? Will this be possible at CTY? (If you're not sure, discuss this with CTY Disability Services). Talk with your child and CTY Disability Services about what else your child can do to handle stress and anxiety on site.

Plan how your child will best be supported during unstructured times. Activity time at both day and residential sites is often less structured than class time. At residential sites, when students are in their dorm rooms, there is not always an adult in the room with them. The RA will be near by and within eyesight or ear shot.. Think about recess at school and extracurricular activities and what may be helpful for your child in similar environments at CTY. Write down and communicate your plan and thoughts with CTY Disability Services. This information will be passed along to site staff who will work with your child.

Talk to the academic counselor the week prior to the start of the program (**Please note that the counselor will call you. If you do not hear from counselor within a day or two of the start of your child's program, please feel free to contact the site office and ask to speak with the counselor). The academic counselor is the point person for you on-site to discuss any accommodations or information that will help your child have a successful experience on site. Take this opportunity to share further information and ensure you both understand the Accommodations and/or Support Plan developed through CTY Disability Services. Have questions prepared that came up in any discussions with your child in preparing him or her for the program.

Talk to your child about where he or she can go for assistance while on site. Make sure that before your child is without you on-site that he or she knows who to talk to if he or she is feeling stressed or anxious.

During the program:

On Opening Day/Registration Day be sure to meet with the academic counselor on site. The academic counselor will most likely be stationed at the medical table at registration. If not, ask the health or other staff where to locate the counselor.

Check-in with your child and the academic counselor regularly. You may want to let the academic counselor know on Opening Day/Registration Day that you would like to speak with him or her at some point during the first week so that you know how your child is progressing in the program. It is easier to address any issue that may arise as it is developing rather than after it has surfaced. You know your child best, so site staff members appreciate any information you can update them with during the summer.

After the program:

On Closing Day, you'll have the opportunity to discuss your child's academic progress in a conference with his or her instructor. You may also want to check in with the academic counselor. Use any challenges faced as a learning experience and celebrate your child's successes in the program.

After the summer, you may be asked to participate in a survey about you and your child's experiences for the summer. Any feedback is appreciated to help improve future CTY summer experiences for students (and parents).

Further Resources:

Your child's CTY experience can help to prepare him or her for a residential college experience. The resources below may be helpful for you to help in preparing your child for the CTY Summer Programs, transitioning into middle or high school, and making the transition to college.

SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR KIDS WITH ASPERGER'S SYNDROME:

Written by Rich Weinfeld, this has some good material, especially in the successful classroom strategies section, to give you ideas both for accommodations or supports to request and talking points with the academic counselor on Opening Day.

ASPERGER SYNDROME A GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS AND PARENTS:

This has several chapters that may be of use to you. Chapter three offers some great strategies for teaching and structuring academic content as well as the barriers Asperger's creates for learning. Chapter four addresses strategies for behavioral and social success. It includes an observational assessment form as well ideas for planning and structuring a day so a student knows what to expect. It also discusses strategies for social success including social stories and peer medication. Behavioral issues are also accounted for. Finally Chapter five addresses planning for life after school and has some good information on transitioning in various stages of life.

AHEADD:

<http://www.aheadd.org/about.html>: *The AHEADD organization helps students with Asperger's and high-functioning autism adjust to life in college, especially in residential setting. It does this through four main components: Professional staff involvement—AHEADD staff meet twice weekly with students to discuss personal and academic goals (set each semester); Development of campus and community support network—AHEADD staff work with Disability Services to make sure that accommodations are being implemented and all staff involved with student (including professors); Utilization of campus resources—AHEADD staff help students make connections with staff members in important campus offices (Disabilities Services, Work-Study, Student Health, etc.); and Peer mentoring—AHEADD staff seek empathetic students to help students with Asperger's and high-functioning Autism with social aspects of the college adjustment.*

NAVIGATING COLLEGE:

<http://navigatingcollege.org/index.php> From the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, this website offers a free download of a handbook written by college students with autistic spectrum disorders about navigating college specifically for other students with ASD. It also includes a blog written by students with ASD relating to college transition.

SMART BUT SCATTERED:

Written by Peg Dawson and Richard Guare, this book addresses executive function struggles and offers tips for parents (and educators) to help identify a child's strengths and challenges and then tips for helping address weaknesses in areas such as getting organized, resisting impulses, staying focused, using time wisely, planning, following through, being resourceful, etc.

HELPING THE CHILD WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES FIND SOCIAL SUCCESS- IT'S SO MUCH WORK TO BE YOUR FRIEND:

Written by Richard LaVoie, this book addresses how to assist students that might struggle socially due to their learning disability. It addresses anxiety and its impact on social situations, language difficulties, ADHD, social skills at home, social skills at school (including handling bullying), and social skills in the community.

2E NEWSLETTER AND BLOG (<http://2enewsletter.blogspot.com/>) and (<http://www.2enewsletter.com>):

Both the blog and the newsletter provide current articles and information related to all things "twice exceptional." The bi-monthly newsletter has a subscription fee, but the blog and news briefings (a collection of links to twice exceptional articles sent monthly) are free. Past newsletter themes have included ADHD, dysgraphia, transitioning to college and more. You can see a complete listing of past newsletter topics on the 2eNewsletter website.