



After high school: Different ways to thrive



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For many young people with learning and thinking differences, high school may be a struggle. There's also a common belief that a traditional four-year college is the only career path after high school. However, there are many paths that can lead to a happy and meaningful life. Here are the different options for life after high school.

Four-year college or university

A traditional four-year college or university can prepare young people for a wide range of professional careers. College can be a challenge for *any* student. It requires hard work without a lot of structure or support. Also, there are no **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) in college** to help students stay on track.

Before high school graduation, make sure to discuss **what type of college is the right choice**. Students, families, and school staff should be part of this conversation. Smaller schools may offer more attention. Larger ones may have more resources. When looking at colleges, meet with each school's **disability services office** to see what support is available. Some colleges have special programs that offer extra services and support to students with learning differences.

Two-year college

A two-year college can be a great option for young people who are unsure about their career path or who aren't ready for a four-year college. These programs give students the option to move on to a four-year school. Or they can strengthen skills and prepare them for careers.

Two-year colleges may offer tutoring and training to help students move into adult life. They can help students build time management and study skills and get used to college life while still living at home.

Trade and certificate programs

Trade or **vocational programs** offer a direct path toward specific jobs. Many young people prefer this type of hands-on learning. There are programs in a wide range of areas, including things like web design, electronics, and medical assistance. Many colleges offer certificate programs, too.

Programs tend to provide more supervision to help students keep up with their work. Many also offer internships or apprenticeships that help young people move into the workforce.

The military

This can be a good option for young adults who thrive on structure and physical activity. The training involves a lot of practice and repetition. Service in the armed forces can lead to a job or to college-level education.

Before joining, it's important to think about how learning and thinking differences could impact training. The military has rules for qualifying if a young person has taken ADHD medication in the past, or needs special accommodations.

Gap year

Some teens don't feel ready for college directly after high school. One option for them is a "gap year." A gap year is becoming more common among American students. And many colleges will now allow students to defer enrollment for a year. Many students spend their gap year exploring interests through internships, volunteer experiences, a job, or travel.

Work

If more schooling isn't right, **going straight to work** can be a rewarding path for young people. But in a tough job market, young adults may have trouble getting a job, especially

if they have no experience. If that's the case, they might consider volunteering for a while to build skills. School guidance counselors and community centers can help young adults find internships and volunteer work.

Family members and friends may know of jobs, too. As a young person learns solid work skills, independence will follow. And they may discover a career path that leads to further training.

Key takeaways

- A high school counselor or the IEP team can offer advice on paths to consider after graduation.
- It's important for young people to find and follow their own interests.
- Work experience and internships offer a great start to choosing the right path.

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