

*Assistive Technology Resources for Children and Adults with Disabilities*

# Closing The Gap

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## *Solutions*



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# The Art of Letting Go:

## LD and ASD Students Guide to Transition

So, you're off to start the next chapter in your life. You're going to a school, college or a program away from your home and your family, possibly for the first time in your life. In your heart you know that you are ready for this change, but naturally you are filled with mixed emotions.

Your parents have done much to advocate for you. They have provided you with a safe and loving environment in which you could grow. You have depended on them for many things that you will now have to do for yourself (food, shelter, clothing, budgeting and transportation, just to name a few). You may still depend on them in ways that other college students are more independent (such as emotional support, decision making and advocacy).

### BREAKING THE DEPENDENCY

How do you break this dependency on them? How do you build interdependent relationships with others in order to

accomplish your goals? How do you deal with loneliness and isolation at college? How do you deal with the feelings you have about leaving home? Can you take the steps to write your feelings down? How about sitting down with your family members to share these new feelings with them? There can also be other people in your life with whom you can share, and that conversation will help you realize they go through these same feelings of separation. This is a big change, but not everything in your life will change of course.

### CHANGING RELATIONSHIPS

What will change for you? The amount of time that you spend with your family members or your other friends at home will change. Your family and friends will still be there for you, you'll see. They will want to hear about any new people you choose to meet. They will be interested to learn about the classes you have cho-

sen to take. Perhaps, there are some other activities that interest you like sports or theatre that you can tell them about. Those conversations are important and will make a real difference in staying connected with your family.

This is an opportunity to create a different kind of relationship with your family, a relationship that will be long lasting and meaningful to all of you. Your family may go through "withdrawal" when getting used to not making decisions for you. If you do not rely on them, then whom do you rely on? It's important to find mentors who have good values that you can rely on for advice when you have questions about what to do.

### HOW MUCH COMMUNICATION IS ENOUGH?

Remember to trust in yourself and your ability to make decisions, but do not be afraid to ask for advice from mentors, advisors, resident assistants (RAs), etc.



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He is licensed as a Psychologist by the State of Massachusetts. Prior to Founding CIP, he worked for state, private and non-profit organizations in several states and was certified as a family teacher through the Boys Town Center in Nebraska.

During his over 40 years of experience with students with Learning Differences and Asperger's Syndrome, Dr. McManmon has worked on Curriculum Development, Staff Training, Program Evaluation, and Administering Community Based Programming. He speaks and presents at professional conferences nationally and internationally.

He has a unique perspective as he himself was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome and grew up in a large family with several individuals on the spectrum. He has six children and 17 grandchildren, and is an avid artist, swimmer, gardener and traveler.

Dr. McManmon has books published by Jessica Kingsley Publishers: [Autism and LD: An Active Learning Teaching Toolkit](#) (2015), and ["Made for Good Purpose"](#) (2012). He is on the board of [Asperger Syndrome Training & Employment Partnership \(ASTEP\)](#), [US Autism & Asperger's Association \(USAAA\)](#), and a member of [Autism Society of America \(ASA\)](#), [Asperger's Association of New England \(AANE\)](#), [National Association of College Admissions Counseling \(NACAC\)](#), and [Learning Disabilities of America \(LDA\)](#). He also has his new job readiness workbook entitled *Mploy?* Website: [cipworldwide.org/mploy-workbook](http://cipworldwide.org/mploy-workbook)





Students practice residential skills doing laundry at a local laundromat.

You wouldn't be at school if your family thought you couldn't make decisions away from them. When you do contact your family, remember to ask about their activities also. It's a good way to stay connected to your family and they would like support from you also. Just to know that you are interested in their activities will mean a lot to them.

It will also send them the message that they can back off and let you have your own life. If you don't communicate enough with them, they may constantly hover over you to make sure you are okay. They have done a lot for you your whole life, and leaving home can be just as hard for them as it is for you.

If you are the overly-dependent type, see what it would feel like for you to not contact them as much as you might be tempted to do. See if those feelings go in a different direction than you've experienced before. Is there a feeling of independence and growth for you? Is that a positive feeling? Do you now trust yourself with your decision making ability more than before? These are helpful questions to ask yourself. Know that when you do communicate with your family, that

they will be there for you and interested in you and what you are doing.

If you are calling or emailing your parents several times a day, you will not form relationships with your peers at college and your social development will suffer.

If your parents are doing this to you, you will have to be clear and advocate with them not to do this. It may help if you tell them that you will be in touch at certain times, once or twice a week.

As you become more aware of the decisions you are making everyday for yourself, you might encounter some situations where you feel the need for additional support. You might remember from interacting with savvy grownups that the ones who have positive relationships in their lives seek assistance from others. The President has a cabinet and numerous advisors to consult with on decisions. As a student, you need to know how to ask for help or guidance from those around you who are qualified to give it to you.

### USING THE SUPPORTS YOU NEED

You continue to realize that yes, your family will be here for you, but this time you want to approach different kinds of

support. These various kinds of supports specialize in working with students on your campus. They are free and available to all students:

Learning disability supports such as tutors, un-timed and additional time testing, note-takers and academic advising

Counseling services  
Internship or Employment services

Medical Services  
Nutritional Services  
Counseling.

Since you're already paying for these services, do not be afraid to use them. If you're too proud or think that you can handle everything yourself, you may end up suffering the consequences. Realistic consequences include getting your parents involved again in "running your life," academic probation or worst case having to leave college.

### THE STEEL UMBILICAL CORD

Your parents have had to take a more involved role with you than most parents do. They have been involved in advocating for you with school officials and teachers. They have acted like social workers and activity directors for you all along the way. It's almost like there is a "Steel Umbilical Cord" between you and your parents. This has to be cut from both sides (both you and them) and you have to use a diamond blade!

They've had more to say about your life than the average student's parents. Until this point, this has been beneficial to you. After high school this type of dependency actually has a negative effect and will hinder your progress and stifle your personal growth. Depending too much on a parent, even just for emotional support, can be damaging to your development.

You may have developed a very close relationship with one of your parents and it almost feels like it is "symbiotic" (like you have the same thoughts or mind). This relationship will take some time to alter into a healthier one. They may hold on and want to direct your life on a daily

basis. Now you will have to take this role over for yourself.

You can help yourself make the break from your parents by seeking assistance from others available to you at the college and using mentors that you advocate for yourself. This process of “individuation” is vital for you to feel like you have control over your life and can make decisions for yourself. Just keep in mind that you cannot go “cold turkey” from your parents. You need to surround yourself with other advisors and pro-social mentors who can provide you with the feedback and guidance to make really good decisions for yourself.

## USING THE DONKEY RULE

The Donkey Rule is a simple rule which can help you to make good decisions for yourself and separate from your family in a healthy manner. If you have a decision to make then you can take a poll of four or five people you respect and know will steer you right (you may want to use one of your parents or siblings depending on the type of decision you are making). The poll will indicate to you what other people you respect think you should do. Basically, if five people think it is a donkey and you are still thinking it is a horse, then you should probably just do what they say to be successful.

The critical element here is having good, honest social mentors and advisors whom you trust to ask the questions to, so that you can trust the opinions they give you. Sometimes there is a lot of rigidity associated with Asperger’s and nonverbal communication disorder and we often try to “go it alone” in decision making, and get ourselves in lots of problem situations. Using the Donkey Rule can assist us in making good decisions for ourselves.

## ALL QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ARE INTELLIGENT

You may have been a quiet intelligent student who had difficulty speaking up for yourself. You may have gotten by because people knew you at school or teachers advocated for you. Your parents



CIP interns learn to mix and measure ingredients in a chemical lab.

may have felt the need to speak up for you to answer questions. You may have become comfortable with this and have formed a dependency of sorts.

You may be fearful of asking a question or answering one due to past mistakes or a fear of not having the right answer. Maybe you have a need to be precise or perfect and can hardly tolerate partial correctness. This can be a feature of your learning difference that you will have to learn to deal with to be successful.

Asking or answering any question leads you closer to the correct answer and thus makes you smarter in the end.

Edison did not succeed at making the light bulb the first time. He had to ask and answer many questions until he could figure out the right combination of materials to have it work. There are no mistakes, just approximations to the right answer.

Each question you ask, will get you closer to an understanding of the solution and each answer you try to give, you will do the same. Everything in life is a question and answer game and a conversation. If you want to move forward you need to get comfortable with participating in it.

Students can be successful if they have the willingness to ask questions to professors or other students and if they have the willingness to go to an advisor and tutor and talk to them and figure it all out. This

is the single most important thing that you need to learn to do to be successful in college and in life thereafter.

## RESIDENTIAL LIFE

You probably have met your resident advisor when you first moved into the dorm or you most likely have an academic advisor that would like to hear from you. There is also the health center on campus that has counselors for any student interested in speaking with someone professionally trained and then there is always the school chaplain to talk with, for students from any religion.

Any of these choices are available to you at school and although they are not your family, you will find that they can offer you a special kind of support that will apply to your specific school experiences. This will be part of the process for your problem solving skills that you are learning to develop all the time as you live away from your family. You are learning to take responsibility for your own needs but, at the same time understanding that there are supportive people in your life.

Balancing Nutrition, Sleep and Exercise

The foods you have to eat, the amount of sleep you get nightly and the clothes you choose daily may all seem repetitive. But you’re making those choices and decisions on your own. Remember to look and feel your best through healthy food





choices and grooming habits. Eating a good variety of foods and mixing in vegetables and fruits with good proteins will help you to stay alert and keep you from getting overweight.

Be mindful of showering daily and changing your clothing as your roommate may not appreciate a lot of odor coming from your side of the room. Also, if your dirty laundry accumulates, it will also cause a stench that may be offensive to your roommate. Your mom may have been the one who did all of this for you at home and now you will need to do this for yourself. You have the power to determine how you take care of your body, but remember to smell good and look good so that others will want to be around you.

Remember that others around you might be making other choices that do not seem right for you. You know how you feel if you don't get enough sleep or if you eat too much sugar or junk food. Treating your body well is the most important tool you have to help you to do well in all the other areas. By going for a walk with friends or by taking a swim in the campus pool will also help your mind function more clearly. These are all choices that you as an individual have to make.

Regulating your emotions by having good physical outlets will lessen your stress (anything from taking a jog to a game of pick up basketball). Using the student fitness center to work out a couple times a week can improve your adjustment and ability to concentrate on your studies. You may also find some friends to hang out with. You will come to recognize when you make the right choices for yourself, you will continue to develop those skills for ultimately needed for independent living. Remember to share the ways in which you are making those choices with your family. They will be eager and interested to hear about your new sense of independence and it will help foster new growth and communication for you and your family.



CIP students deliver a presentation at the CIP Berkshire Convocation ceremony.

## GETTING THE LAY OF THE LAND AND BEING SAFE

The school campus is generally a safe place to explore but, using smart ways to navigate through these new places and experiences will make for smoother sailing. The campus is a smaller version of the larger world around us all. On campus safety concerns are an excellent practice for those lifetime skills of awareness and decision making. You may have heard

this before from your family or from other people who care about you, but don't stop reading just because it sounds familiar.

Your new surroundings make it necessary for you to use some familiar skills and to also introduce some new ones. Getting a campus map and taking a walk or a hike is a wonderful way to get some outdoor time and exercise at the same time as familiarizing yourself with the physical

plant. Please keep in mind that venturing out into unknown, isolated places by yourself is not always the wisest of practices. By asking a friend to join you there is always strength in numbers and it's a good opportunity to share an adventure with a friend who may have similar interests.

There are also indoor places on campus that can sometimes be considered somewhat isolated like student lounges at night, where in the day they might be bustling with activity or the lower levels in the building where sometimes the laundry is located. Why not consider doing laundry as a group activity and plan ahead for it with some people who live on the same dorm floor as you? If you have to walk between buildings that are more than a ten minute walk or so at night, consider asking a friend or fellow classmate to walk together, especially if they are in your class or going in your direction. Always keep your cell phone charged and bring it with you when you go out. It is a good idea to program emergency numbers in it as well.

There are other kinds of awareness skills that you can build and apply for your own safety both on campus and off, wherever you live. When you leave, a locked door is safer than an unlocked

door. Do not invite unwanted people into your dorm room when you are not there. You also house some important and valuable items in your room that might be of interest to others without your noticing. For example, leaving your laptop on your desk while going down the hallway might be a reason to lock your door. You will have to get to know the dorm environment in which you live. Remember to also trust your own inner guide that will help you to determine the best practices you choose to follow. You cannot trust everyone with your personal belongings and they need to prove their honesty to you over time.

## COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

In many cases, your parents were your activities director and have prodded you to join a certain organization in high school or in the community. Now you have to find your own way and you must develop the willingness to try new things and make new choices. Developing choices that will help you to feel in charge of your own life will come when you use your skills to enhance your community involvement.

When you become involved in activities on campus that include other people who share your own special interests,

you will find a sense of belonging to the bigger picture. Try to find something on campus for yourself that matches an interest of yours or something that you've been interested in learning more about. By joining something you automatically become a part of a larger group. This experience will last a lifetime because you will know that wherever you go there will be similar organizations and people who are attracted to the same things that you.

Open yourself to the world by choosing something that has meaning and interest to you. You will learn to do your academic work and stay involved with your interest as well. You may have been told that you are really good at something or your family has praised you for a certain talent, but this is the time for you to expand your horizons and try new areas that you think you may like. Don't be afraid to try something new, you will not lose your other special interests, but you may become more open to the world and all it has to offer.

Share with your family your new interests and that you have joined this new activity. Speak with them in a positive sounding way to let them know that you can in fact get your academic work done and be active in this new activity at the same time. Be careful to not get caught up in your new activity/friendship so much that you do not spend adequate time on your studies. You want your family to be supportive about your having joined this group or have this new friendship and they need to hear it from you that you can balance doing both.

We all have different ways of balancing work and other activities in our lives. This is a good place for you to begin because there is a built in support team for you on campus. Try to remain kind and patient with yourself as you find your way through these new experiences. All of us stumble and fall through these new waters. We all just need to keep on swimming even when the current gets a little choppy.

As you start to become involved in activities besides your academic classes,



Students perform cake cutting duties during a convocation ceremony at CIP Long Beach.



you will notice your feelings of belonging to your school become stronger. You will naturally look forward to making a difference in small ways when you contribute to the group, sport or organization you have chosen for yourself. Look for notices on bulletin boards around campus for opportunities, talk with your resident advisor or perhaps look on the school website where there will be listings.

There will be other choices for you to make and you can take your time deciding in which direction you will turn. Communication will be one of the most important areas for you to practice and to use everyday. Making those contacts with mentors, advisors, etc., for your communication needs will be important to keep balance and be successful. Using the skills that you have learned will help you to find your way in new situations.

## RELATIONSHIPS

Some of us find this a lot harder than others. A lot of us had little or no experience in high school with relationships. We may have had some experiences with dates set up by our parents or a friend down the street to have over once in a while. Or, at the other extreme we got desperate and hooked up with the wrong crowd to be accepted. Generally group activities are safer for starters. Inviting someone to go to the football game with you or study at the library may be a good start.

If you have been sheltered at home, you may feel the need to make up for lost time. Be careful not to get absorbed in someone's attention and over commit without taking the steps in building an honest relationship. Heed the warnings you have heard from your family—go slow! At the same time, do not isolate and be afraid (even if rejected several times). Keep reaching out. The best relationships seem to develop from friendships built around common interests that you share. Do some community service that you care about and meet friends there. Most of all, be yourself and do not be ashamed of who you are. Remember: the genuine



Mastering cooking skills during a CIP residential module.

evokes the genuine. You will attract to you, someone who is similar to you.

There are now several really good books out which can be very helpful in understanding how your learning differences interact in the process of trying to form intimate relationships. The Asperger Love Guide, written by Genevieve Edmonds and Dean Worten can be very helpful.

## DEALING WITH ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

One area that will need your particular attention will be where alcohol or drugs may present themselves in new situations at school. You will need to use your built in radar to detect the best way for you to stay healthy, alert and safe. Remember that what is a good and smart choice for you may not be the next person's choice. If it feels uncomfortable to you, leave the situation. You can always follow up with a conversation with one of the advisors or counselors that you have already connected with on campus. Making those connections early on in school life will lay the foundation at a later time when you might really need someone to talk with about a particular experience that you have had. There are other choices for your safety that will remain important and helpful to you all along the way.

## TOLERANCE AND DIVERSITY

Whether you have a roommate or not, your new school environment will be filled with people who are your age. You will be living in a community where more people are students than not. That will be the basis for sharing things in common, but there will also be many differences that you will come to recognize and hopefully appreciate and embrace. There are many opportunities to learn about the larger world by taking the time to find those differences and nurture those interests around them. Students from other countries may feel far from home and just a question about their homeland may strike a friendly conversation there.

You might be in a class where the discussion turns to religion. You might be surprised to find that there are students who practice different religions from your own. Or that you have never practiced a religion and that you have a new interest in the subject. Accepting others views on religion does not diminish our own values or beliefs. With today's various political viewpoints, you are sure to come across students who are on the other end of the spectrum politically from one another. Don't be afraid to express your viewpoint, just make sure that you give the other person the time that they need to express theirs too. Varying perspectives on a range of topics can make for eye opening

experiences and lead to consensus and growth.

This is your time to recognize and embrace diversity. The more able you are to become a tolerant person the more people's differences will become acceptable to you in a peaceful way. This acceptance and tolerance is also called growth. Your willingness and ability to accept tolerance will become a lifetime practice for your own evolution as an individual.

## HANDLING YOUR OWN FINANCES

You've had some experience with money matters, but this may be your first time handling money on a daily basis. Before you go off to school suggest to your parents that you sit down with them to get an understanding of what your budget will be. Work with them to create a budget plan for yourself, so you can be a part of that initial step. See if there is something that you can offer to pay for like your books or food for nights out with friends. When you take the step to be a part of your own finances, you will gain an understanding of how making your own decisions will impact your life in a positive way. This can also be a gradual process that will occur throughout the year.

If you have your own credit card, it may be the time to discuss with your parents how placing limits will work for all of you. Don't wait to have that conversation when you have already used the credit card too much. You may also receive applications for you to apply for other credit cards in the mail. Credit cards companies sometimes prey on students. Do not go ahead and apply for new credit cards without first checking with your parents. Nowadays there seems to be ATM machines at every corner. If you have relied on the use of ATM machines in the past, remember that you now have a firm budget. Use the ATM with discretion and try to hold out as long as you can before you return there for more funds. Using this machine can quickly become a habit, like anything else. Except here, you are the one to control your visits to the machine. See if you can only go once a week and stick to your

plan, just remember to be realistic and don't place unrealistic expectations upon yourself.

Once you have established a comfortable level of financial stability for yourself it might also be helpful to see how you can become more effective in your own role. Is there an office on campus where you can get information on financial aid or scholarships? Once you have the information, this may become part of a future plan for another semester. Share the research you have done in this area with your parents. They will no doubt be surprised and happy that you took the initiative to lay the groundwork for this financial piece in your own life. Money matters at school are filled with steps along the way to prepare you for the inevitable role that money will play in your adult life.

## HANDLING SCHOOL BREAKS

Once you are settled at school and you have gained a sense of independence, vacation time will be right around the corner. Your return home during vacation will be filled with the prospect of combining the new vision of yourself with being under your parents' roof again. At school you have become accustomed to making

decisions without the approval of your parents. You have also developed a different schedule for yourself based upon the classes that you take and how you spend your free time with your friends.

Once you are back at home, your parents will most likely expect you to revert back to some of your old behaviors and schedules. The most helpful thing that you can do is to ask them to meet with you and talk about their expectations and your own. Both parties need to be sensitive to each other's point of view without getting discouraged. All of this is new terrain to navigate and both of you are coming at it from different vantage points.

Explain to your parents how you hope to be treated by them. Let them know that they need to trust the decisions that you make especially when you are at home now. Let them know that if a concern arises that you are capable of sitting down with them to address the situation. Don't wait for the inevitable to arise either. Make a list of the possible scenarios that could develop between you and your parents, such as coming home later than they want you to or spending too much time with your friends or having different food preferences than you did before you



Student works as an office assistance learning pre-employment skills.



went to school. Let them know that you have thought about possible solutions to these repeat episodes.

Your parents need to be treated with respect and kindness, after all they were the ones that helped make it possible for you to go to school in the first place. You may recognize that you have grown and evolved and they seem to have stayed the same. Well guess what, nothing stays the same, life is always about change. You just need to take the time to see the changes in your parents as well. Perhaps even comment about some of the more positive changes you see in them, even if you have to finesse the situation a bit.

The more communication you have with your parents the more you'll end up on the same wavelength together. The more space you put in between "you and them," the more it will end up looking like "you and them" rather than a family. Take the time to let your parents know how much you've grown but, that you still need them. Actually you need each other and always will, just in different ways that have never before presented themselves to either of you.

When you return to school after vacation, be prepared to revisit some of the same feelings from when you first came onto campus. In some ways you will feel a sense of familiarity and that will be reassuring like where things are; recognizing people and places; returning to the community activities that you joined; knowing how to budget your finances; remembering the communication you established with your parents and knowing who is available to you for your assistance and the support you may need. Give yourself a chance to resettle back into your school environment and use the resources that you worked hard to develop earlier in the year. ■