

# The Changing Role of Parents

As the parent of a son or daughter with an [intellectual disability](#), you have likely been providing advocacy and support for their educational needs for many years. You have attended IEP meetings, called and visited teachers, received regular reports on how your child is doing in school, and when things got tough you were there at the school assuring that needs were being met. Now your son or daughter is going off to college, perhaps as part of a transition program or as a high school graduate. You will continue to provide important support, and it is valuable for you to learn about the services that are available at the college. However, since your son or daughter is now an adult learner, it is important for you to become aware of your changing role.

Perhaps one of the most difficult changes you will experience is that your supportive role must be "behind the scenes." You are no longer the spokesperson--your son or daughter must become a self-advocate and not depend on you. However, you still play an important role by encouraging and supporting your son's or daughter's quest to learn self-advocacy skills and become a self-sufficient adult.

There are two major laws, the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act, that outline the way students with disabilities receive services at the postsecondary level. Under The ADA and [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act](#), colleges are required to provide equal access to their programs and activities. These laws are civil rights legislation that prohibit discrimination, unlike IDEA which establishes special education as an [entitlement](#). There are no Individual Education Plans (IEPs) ensuring success as there were in high school. IEPs are not used to document the student's disability and do not dictate accommodations or services at the college level. Even for those students who are attending a transition program on a college campus, the ADA and Section 504, not IDEA, dictate access to college courses.

ADA and Section 504 indicate that it is the student's responsibility to:

- Self-identify as a person with a disability
- Provide appropriate documentation of disability
- Request accommodations that have a reasonable chance of providing him/her with equal access
- Take responsibility for their own success

These new expectations established at colleges both by law and by culture are hard to get used to sometimes. But they also one of the reasons you want your kids to go to college—so that they can have that environment that protects students while still having expectations for them that help them to grow into adults.