RAISE guide on disability, mental illness, and transition

Intersection of mental illness and disability during transition

Students with disabilities can also experience co-occurring mental health issues. This is particularly true of children with developmental disabilities with ranges from almost 34% to 59% prevalence.[1] According to a recent Psychology in the Schools article, the "rate of college students with disabilities and co-occurring mental health disorders (D/MH) is steadily increasing across the U.S. However, despite available services and supports, the outcomes of these students lag behind their peers without D/MH."[2]

What the Research Found

The literature review conducted for "Challenges, Complexity, and Developments in Transition Services for Young People with Disabilities, Mental Health, and Long-Term Conditions"[3] detailed the concerns for this population and outcomes. Transition isn't a single event but a process that lasts around 7 years. Some themes including vulnerability vs. risk (especially for medical complexity and families "letting go"), perceptions, readiness, best practices/outcomes, and barriers/facilitators of the transition process. Youth identified effective strategies which includes:
- relationship building
- using strengths and preferences
- meaningful change
- learning styles
- progress of goals
- resource network
- decision-making
- showing abilities

Roadblocks…and what works

Barriers for students

Barriers to transition in planning included attitudes, "one size fits all", not involving family, and not giving youth decision-making opportunities. The largest barrier regarding resources was gaps in providing services. Besides inadequate planning, a strategic barrier was not sharing responsibility.

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[1] https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9899157/

[2] https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.22637

[3] 10.1080/24694193.2023.2245473

What makes transition easier

Facilitating transition under planning included starting early, giving opportunities to problem solve, helping families to support self-determination, and self-advocacy training. Resource issues can be eased by identifying a transition coordinator/navigator, and post-transition outcome data. In summary, best practices are using youth's strengths and goals, finding someone to coordinate transition, starting around at age 12, using a transition plan that's documented, and shared decision-making.

Resources to help students with mental illness/disability during transition

NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) webinars, checklist, and factsheets

Some recent resources include a 2-part webinar from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI-see Resources). The discussion is how transition will be different for a student with mental illness and resources. This includes high dropout rates and lower employment rates for some students. Some additional topics are family fears of letting the child be independent and risks, prevention planning for mental health crisis, portable treatment record, and transition checklist. The transition checklist covers the IEP, post-secondary education, healthcare (both transition to different insurance and to adult healthcare), and employment goals. NAMI also has a factsheet on chronic illness and mental health. This covers stress and emotions when dealing with an illness, mental health warning signs, and supports.

Mental Health transition checklist

Got Transition (healthcare transition) has a transition checklist as well. This includes readiness topics such as the student's awareness of their condition, what helps, how to recognize crisis and what to do. It also covers practical matters such as insurance coverage for therapy, how to set up an appointment, awareness of medications, and how to refill.

National Mental Health Guide

RAISE developed a family guide for children's mental health. This guide includes access to care, avoiding stigma, prevalence data, when to get help, diagnosis, medication, supports/services, resources by age, and advocacy issues.

How families can help during transition

Finally, an excellent article "Parenting Adult Children: How to Support Without Overstepping" from the National Family Support Technical Assistance Center covers family concerns and how they can support self-advocacy and independence.

To summarize, there is complexity during transition process for students with mental illness and disability. Examining what works as well as barriers is helpful. Utilizing resources such as readiness checklists, and involving families in encouraging youth self-advocacy, results in best outcomes.

Resources

NAMI

webinars on transition

Society says "ADULT", we say "they are still our children": The challenges for transition age youth with mental illness and their families
https://raisecenter.org/society-says-adult-we-say-they-are-still-our-children-the-challenges-for-transition-age-youth-with-mental-illness-and-their-families/

The challenges for transition age youth with mental illness and their families
https://raisecenter.org/transition-discoveries-your-voice-your-story-your-future-2/

Factsheet

NAMI Chronic Illness and Your Mental Health factsheet-final
https://www.raisecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/NAMI_Chronic-Illness-and-Your-Mental-Health_factsheet-final.pdf

Transition checklist

NAMI - Checklist for Transition Process
https://www.raisecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Checklist-For-Transition-Process-8-23.pdf

Healthcare Transition checklist

Got Transition

Young Adults Transition Readiness
https://www.gottransition.org/resource/?merged-school-mental-health-resources

RAISE

National Children's Mental Health Family Guide
https://spanadvocacy.org/download/national-childrens-mental-health-family-guide/

National Family Support Technical Assistance Center

Family Caregiver Toolkit: Parenting Adult Children: How to Support Without Overstepping
https://www.familyandcaregivertoolkit.org/_files/ugd/49bf42_e72c26016d084568975d257b8c35
9117.pdf