

*If college is the right choice for you or your child, the next step is to find the right institution. The priority factors in selecting potential colleges to apply to should be related to whether you think you or your teen can learn in this environment, whether there are supports available to foster success, and if the available coursework and majors are targeted to the subject area or areas in which you or your teen may want to study.*



## College and ADHD

The good news is that more and more students with ADHD are attending college in record numbers. In fact, students with hidden disabilities like ADHD are the largest and fastest growing segment of the disabled population on college campuses across the country. For many students with ADHD, college might be a better match than high school was for their interests and learning preferences. Picking your own courses, spending less time in class, having more free time in between classes, meeting new people who don't know your past and having many extracurricular opportunities can all make college an exciting adventure.

However, the not so good news is that all these same circumstances can also make adjusting to college extremely difficult for those with ADHD. College is dramatically different

than high school, with increased academic demands, differences in teaching methods and grading procedures, and less available accommodations and supports. In addition, the sudden expectation to balance classes, social opportunities and being "in charge" of it all can result in students with ADHD experiencing more stress and greater academic difficulty than those without ADHD.



To achieve success at this level, students with ADHD can get a head start if they come to college with the following attitudes and skills:

- an acceptance and understanding of ADHD and how it uniquely affects them
- an openness to facing challenges
- actual experience with many of the planning and daily living skills they will need in college
- previous practice using resources

### Is College the Best Next Step for You? Now? Ever?

It is important for students (and their parents) to seriously consider these questions before deciding to apply to college and investing their time and money in a traditional 4-year college experience. Here are some reasons that a traditional 4-year college may not be the best choice:

- not independent enough to move away from home and manage all aspects of their lives
- lack time management, planning and academic skills that college will require
- other co-existing emotional issues that
- might be worsened by being in college
- great grades but only because of the amount of supervision and support from parents and teachers
- strong dislike for traditional classroom learning and environments
- talents or interests that would be better matched by a technical or specialty training experience rather than a traditional college
- no clear goals or reasons for attending college except that everyone else is



Some students with ADHD find that the best route may be to take a gap year to grow and mature while participating in meaningful work or a volunteer activity. Others decide to work and get help before going to college fulltime to lessen their dependence on parents and/or to grow important academic, self-determination and self-management skills. They may take courses on a part-time basis to try out college. Some decide to postpone moving away from home and to start out at a community college where the instruction may be similar to high school and they can still have parental guidance. One caution if you are considering this route is that national studies suggest that community college students who transfer to a 4-year college are at risk for experiencing significant challenges during this transition—even those without ADHD. To deal with this issue, many community colleges have programs with 4-year colleges to better prepare students. If choosing the community college route, it is important to find out what programs are available.



To sort out whether college is the best next step, consider working with a professional who specializes in teens and young adults with ADHD. Taking some time to evaluate critically what is really the best next step for you or your teenager can be a valuable activity.

### **Finding the Right College**

If college is the right choice for you or your child, the next step is to find the right institution. Many students with ADHD mistakenly select colleges based on the fact that other family members are alumni; the sports teams are great; the campus is beautiful; or it is close to or far from home. The priority factors in selecting potential colleges to apply to should be related to whether you think you or your teen can learn in this environment, whether there are supports available to foster success, and if the available coursework and majors are targeted to the subject area or areas in which you or your teen may want to study.

This factsheet can help you ask the right questions to determine which college is best for you or your child.

### **Applying for College**

Once you've narrowed the number of colleges to apply to, going through the application process can be quite stressful. Knowing the deadline for each institution is crucial. Plan ahead and start early. Requesting test scores and transcripts should be done ahead of time, since these are dependent upon the issuing organization's time table. Most colleges now use the Common Application, known as the Common App, which can be filled out and then sent to multiple colleges. Check to see if the colleges you wish to apply to

use the Common App, but be aware that some institutions require supplemental information.

Many students and their parents are worried about disclosing ADHD when applying for college. However, doing so can be useful if any aspect of a student's academic record is not competitive and was affected by a disability.

The decision whether to disclose your ADHD during the admissions process is yours to make. For more information, see the Disclosing ADHD during the College Admissions Process factsheet.

### **Succeeding in College with ADHD**

By practicing college readiness skills before going off to college and using supports and accommodations proactively, college students with ADHD will be more likely to set goals, create effective action plans and master coping strategies that provide a greater opportunity for success.

Students who have greater access to learning services and academic support to help manage ADHD issues tend to experience lower levels of stress, frustration and more academic success. Working with an ADHD coach or other professional can be critical to fostering both academic and social success for students with ADHD. When students are aware of and involved in addressing ADHD issues, they are better able to deal with both the academic and social pressures of college. College is a time of extraordinary growth and an opportunity for increased self-awareness and positive feedback. See the Succeeding in College with ADHD factsheet for strategies you or your teenager can use.

The following two directories may be helpful in locating a college and can be found through your child's school library or the local community library:

Peterson's *Colleges with Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorders*, sixth edition. An online directory can be found at [www.petersons.com](http://www.petersons.com).

*The K&W Guide to Colleges: For Students with Learning Disabilities or Attention Deficit Disorder*

### **Other Resources**

College Board ([www.collegeboard.org/students-with-disabilities](http://www.collegeboard.org/students-with-disabilities)). Information on seeking accommodations for tests administered through the College Board. These include SAT, SAT Subject Tests, PSAT/NMSQT, PSAT 10, and Advanced Placement® Exams.

Educational Testing Service Disability Documentation Policies ([www.ets.org/disabilities/documentation/](http://www.ets.org/disabilities/documentation/)). ETS administers the GRE and related graduate level exams.

GED Testing Service Accommodations ([www.gedtestingservice.com/testers/](http://www.gedtestingservice.com/testers/))

accommodations-for-disability). GED Testing Service is committed to ensuring access to the GED® test for all individuals with disabilities and supports the intention of the Americans with Disabilities Act as Amended.

Heath Resource Center ([heath.gwu.edu](http://heath.gwu.edu)). The Heath Resource Center at The George Washington University is the national clearinghouse on post-secondary education for individuals with disabilities.

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