What Should Parents Do After Age 16? NorthStar's Age 16–18 Adult Services Transition Roadmap

NorthStar Funding & Benefits Guide

For parents of children with special needs, turning 18 is not an ordinary birthday.

Many child services that have supported a family for years begin to end, while adult developmental services, income support, long-term savings, employment, community participation, and future housing questions arise at the same time.

The best preparation does not begin after the 18th birthday. It begins two to three years earlier.

1. Ages 15–16: Complete the Documents You Will Need for the Future

Families should check whether they have:

- A psychological assessment that includes cognitive and adaptive functioning
- An up-to-date Individual Education Plan (IEP)
- A school transition plan
- A current DTC approval
- A SIN and complete identity documents
- A central record of medical, therapy, and functional assessments

DSO places particular importance on cognitive and adaptive functioning in the psychological assessment. If this information is missing, learn early how it can be added.

2. Age 16: Contact DSO

DSO clearly recommends beginning the application process at age 16.

When the required information is available, eligibility for adult developmental services may be confirmed at age 16, although services generally begin only after age 18.

Do not misunderstand "services begin at 18" to mean "apply at 18."

3. Ages 16–17: Connect School, Family, and Adult-Service Planning

Families should consider holding a transition meeting to discuss:

- The path to high school graduation
- Further education
- Employment and volunteering
- Transportation
- Community participation
- Social relationships
- Daily living skills
- Future housing
- Caregiver support

Adult life cannot be addressed by a single government program. Families need to build life goals and a benefits pathway at the same time.

4. Age 17: Begin Building a Personal Tax Record

For families with an RDSP, or families who want Grant and Bond entitlements to be calculated correctly in the future, CRA information reminds families that the beneficiary should begin filing their own income tax and benefit return every year starting in the year they turn 17. This supports the calculation of applicable entitlements after age 19 based on the individual's or spouse's income.

Even if a child has no employment income, do not automatically assume that filing a tax return has no value.

5. Around Age 17½: Prepare for ODSP

The DSO transition timeline recommends beginning preparation for ODSP income and employment support at approximately age 17½.

Also check:

- The DSO eligibility letter
- Bank account information
- The SIN
- Living arrangement information
- Income and asset information
- Medical documentation
- Tax-filing records

6. Six Months Before Age 18: Learn About the Canada Disability Benefit

A person who meets the other requirements and has been approved for the DTC may submit a Canada Disability Benefit application as early as six months before their 18th birthday. However, the application will not be processed and no payment will be made before the person turns 18.

Families can therefore prepare in advance rather than begin researching the program from the beginning after the birthday.

7. Age 18: The Handover from Child to Adult Services

DSO clearly explains that child services such as the OAP and SSAH end as a person enters adulthood.

After age 18, a family may need to address several areas at the same time:

- DSO adult developmental services
- Passport Funding
- ODSP
- Canada Disability Benefit
- RDSP
- Post-secondary education and/or employment
- Community participation
- Future housing and support

8. After Age 18: The Real Question Becomes "How Will This Person Live?"

Adult planning cannot focus only on "how much funding will be received?"

Where will the person live?
What will they do each day?
Will they have friends?
Can they work or volunteer?
How will they exercise and stay healthy?
Who will help them make decisions?

Who will provide support as their parents grow older?
How will they continue to belong to the community rather than be isolated from it?

This is also a long-term focus for NorthStar.

We hope families can move gradually from "applying for child services" toward lifelong planning:

Childhood → Youth → Transition → Employment → Community Participation → Independent/Supportive Living → Lifelong Belonging

NorthStar Parent Action Checklist

Check these items now:

☐ DTC
☐ Psychological assessment
☐ Cognitive and adaptive functioning
☐ IEP and school transition plan
☐ DSO
☐ Personal tax filing from age 17
☐ ODSP preparation
☐ Passport
☐ Canada Disability Benefit
☐ RDSP
☐ Employment and education plan
☐ Housing and long-term support plan

The goal is not simply to help families find funding.
The goal is to help families build a pathway for life.

Important Notice: Age milestones and program rules may change, and eligibility varies by family. Follow the latest requirements from the relevant government departments and each person's formal eligibility decision.