

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

The Michigan 5-Step Transition Survival Guide

Five specific steps, in order, for a Michigan family navigating the years around their autistic child's eighteenth birthday. No single one of these is complicated. Doing all five, in time, is what actually matters.

BY JIM PALASTY · 11 MIN READ · FIVE STEPS, IN THE RIGHT ORDER, ON TIME

5

STEPS IN THIS GUIDE, EACH WITH ITS OWN SPECIFIC MICHIGAN TIMELINE

Contact your CMHSP before 18. Apply for the Habilitation Supports Waiver. Apply to Michigan Rehabilitation Services. File for Adult Child SSI/SSDI benefits. Address guardianship or supported decision-making.

How it works

THREE STEPS

STEP 1

Step one starts before the birthday itself

Contacting your local CMHSP before age 18 sets the adult service planning process in motion early, when there's still runway to work with.



STEP 2

Two major benefit applications run largely in parallel

The Habilitation Supports Waiver and Michigan Rehabilitation Services applications each have their own process and timeline, both worth starting early.



STEP 3

Two final steps close out the sequence

Filing for Disabled Adult Child SSI/SSDI benefits and resolving the guardianship or supported decision-making question complete the five-step sequence.

The five steps, with rough timing

Contact CMHSP	Ideally 1-2 years before the 18th birthday
Apply for HSW	As early as CMHSP guidance allows, priority for Children's Waiver families
Apply to MRS	Can often start while still in high school, worth confirming locally
File Adult Child SSI/SSDI	At or near 18, with disability-before-22 documentation ready
Resolve guardianship/SDM	Before 18, since legal decision-making authority changes at that birthday

THE EIGHTEEN-MONTH HEAD START THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

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Rosalind started contacting her son's CMHSP eighteen months before his eighteenth birthday, earlier than most caseworkers told her was strictly necessary. That head start meant his Habilitation Supports Waiver application, his MRS intake, and his guardianship decision all happened on a calm, deliberate timeline instead of the compressed scramble she'd heard about from other families. He turned eighteen with every piece of his adult service plan already in motion.

EIGHTEEN MONTHS OF HEAD START TURNED A SCRAMBLE OTHER FAMILIES DESCRIBED INTO A CALM, SEQUENCED PLAN.

What matters, at a glance

MICHIGAN SPECIFIC

Step 1: Contact your CMHSP before 18

Your local Community Mental Health Services Program should know your child is approaching adult eligibility well before the birthday itself, not after.

Step 2: Apply for the Habilitation Supports Waiver

Michigan's HSW is the primary HCBS waiver for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Children's Waiver participants aging out receive a specific priority pathway.

Step 3: Apply to Michigan Rehabilitation Services

MRS provides vocational rehabilitation services, and application timing matters significantly for a smooth transition into adult employment services.

Step 4: File for Adult Child SSI/SSDI benefits

Disabled Adult Child benefits, tied to a parent's work record, require documentation that disability began before age 22, worth preparing well ahead of filing.

Step 5: Address guardianship or supported decision-making

This decision deserves careful, unhurried consideration of the full range of options, not a default assumption that full guardianship is the only path.

The order matters as much as the steps themselves

Starting CMHSP contact early creates runway for every subsequent step to happen without the crisis-mode compression so many families experience.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

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| ☐ Contact information for your local CMHSP, used well before age 18 | ☐ A submitted or in-progress Habilitation Supports Waiver application |
| ☐ A submitted or in-progress Michigan Rehabilitation Services application | ☐ Disability-before-22 documentation gathered ahead of SSI/SSDI filing |
| ☐ A deliberate, unrushed decision on guardianship or supported decision-making | |

YOUR MOVE

When you're starting the Michigan transition process, here is the order to follow

- 1 Contact your local CMHSP now, especially if your child is 16 or older.
- 2 Ask specifically about Habilitation Supports Waiver application timing and priority.
- 3 Start the Michigan Rehabilitation Services application process.
- 4 Begin gathering disability-before-22 documentation for SSI/SSDI Adult Child benefits.
- 5 Research the full range of guardianship and supported decision-making options.
- 6 Revisit and adjust the sequence as your child's specific situation develops.

None of these five steps is complicated on its own. The families who navigate this well are the ones who started step one before they had to.

MICHIGAN TRANSITION RESOURCES

Michigan Alliance for Families (michiganallianceforfamilies.org) provides free, statewide guidance on the Michigan-specific transition process outlined in this guide.

Michigan Rehabilitation Services (michigan.gov/mrs) and Disability Rights Michigan (drmich.org, formerly MPAS) both provide direct support for specific steps in this sequence.

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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