

# Transition: building independence and resilience

Heather Wright  
DIFFERabled Scotland



**Being independent does not mean that we do not need others, just that we have the opportunity to make choices and implement those choices.**



**Executive skills and central coherence are important skills in all independence tasks.**

**Physical Health** requires good practices in self hygiene, dietary knowledge and understanding your own body and how to read it and protect it.

**Strategies** include routines and structures that ensure physical needs are met. This may mean using visual prompts or reminders, lists or apps, checklists or post-its. There will be daily, weekly or maybe monthly tasks and these can be put into phone reminders or calendars.

**Recognising** changes and problems with our bodies is important and for some people it can be done with a literal checklist where points can be listed to prompt action. Being able to link abdominal pain to possible out of date food eaten, or headache to dehydration because you have not drunk today, is important. Some people register pain differently and being able to look for physical signs such as swelling, redness, etc., is a way of identifying a need for assistance.

**Processes** to deal with health issues will be dependent on circles of support – is there someone trusted to ask, is there someone who is likely to observe problems and trigger action, or is there no one like this?

Does the individual know how to contact professional help such as NHS24, doctor, dentist, etc., and do they know how to report for emergency care at hospital A&E or minor Injury unit?

**Health and safety** covers so many areas but knowing how to assess risk accurately and make decisions that keep you safe is very important and a learned skill.

**Mental health** can be an issue in a world where the system seems to be 'so wrong'.

**Circles of support**, whether family, friends or professionals, are needed to support questions, fears and advice on everything from "what did he mean by that?" to "I just don't know what to do". Forming robust circles of support with trusted people (possibly within different walks of our life or for different issues) is vital for everyone.

**Positive thinking** can be a difficult thing to gain and active training in mindfulness and 'self-heal' or positive thinking is of great benefit. Knowing how to recharge our batteries and switch off negative thinking is a much needed skill.

**Identifying symptoms** of poor attitude and deteriorating mental health is difficult for most people and often it is others around them that notice, but being aware of your own mental state and when to seek support is a great boon if it can be learned.

Anxiety is unfortunately a common problem within the neurodiverse population who live in a world that seems out of step and illogical. Trying to fit in or work out what is or isn't safe can be difficult and many tend to be fearful of everything. Techniques to accurately assess risk (likelihood v consequence) and how to reduce risk is a skill well learned.

Arousal is often hard to moderate in this anxious state and being able to accurately assess your arousal state and then have strategies to regulate it are best learned young and honed as teenage and adulthood progress.



**Food** covers everything from making shopping lists to finished meals. How to menu plan, form lists and carry out shop, how to safely store and then prepare food and how to maintain food hygiene are all important and can be learned from the first steps of snacks at home to the full process.

**Personal care** also comes under domestic skills with laundering, shopping for self-care items and care and maintenance of clothing and belongings. Purchasing, care and storage of items relating to interests and roles. It is important to have a budgeting balance of necessities v interests.

**Cleaning and tidying** requires a lot of executive skills with time management, sequencing skills and task management (and occasionally problem solving skills) required. Schedules and checklists are very useful for these and the use of visual prompts in hard copy or electronically are valuable. Understanding the need for tidying and cleaning is important and being able to allocate regularity with some jobs needing daily attention while other may only need weekly or even monthly care.

Forming schedules to do these less frequent jobs in a timely fashion avoids them being overlooked if it is hard to see the signs of need – for example cleaning ovens or the fridge.

**Household maintenance** is an extension of the cleaning and tidying routines as well as repairs. Simple repairs like changing a light bulb is a sequence that can be learned but repair to a washing machine requires a very different sequence of contacting a professional. Circles of support are particularly useful for these types of events.

**Health and safety** includes everything from cold callers to building security, fire safety to hygiene. How to contact emergency services and how to identify risk.

**Financial management** covers all aspects of adult independence and financial insecurity can have dire consequences. How to budget and manage/protect money is important throughout the 3 areas of independence. Even if the individual has a financial appointee it is important to build an understanding of budgeting and managing the money allocated (this can sometimes prevent tensions between appointee and individual if they understand how money is managed).



**Circles of support** are vital for all of us. Understanding how to identify trusted individuals and form circles of support within a range of aspects in our lives help us to move forward with confidence. Although many will see their family, often parents, as the main circle of support, it is wise to extend this where possible and to identify the individual who will provide supports across the wider spheres of our lives. Although there can be barriers along the way, we can often find allies to help us reduce or overcome these.

**Identifying roles and relationships** is very important as we progress into adulthood and these become more complex. Peers, friends, workmates, people in authority, professionals involved in our lives all have different roles and the interface changes accordingly. Understanding these roles and interfaces are vital to create smooth social interaction. Social skills can sometimes need practice and strategies and these can be enhanced with support and practice by working with theory of mind (Double Empathy) and central coherence (Monotropism).

**Managing study and work routines** are a matter of strengthening executive skills. Strategies to create routines, structure and sequencing are required to enable efficient work habits.

**Independent travel** often has to be expanded as new activities and commitments occur with transition. Being able to negotiate new routes, new forms of travel and possibly within tighter or busier timeframes requires planning and preparation.

**Time management** is a major issue in many with weak executive skills. Work and study commitments, and domestic tasks, require good time management skills. These can be built in to executive skills training and strategies.

Arousal management is a major issue in a world that rarely accommodates 'the individual'. Being able to identify your arousal state and apply strategies to stabilise is important. It is also useful to identify your needs and work with allies to ensure that environmental and structural supports are in place wherever possible.

**Group working skills and interview skills** can be learned in workshops or social story enactments and as in roles and relationships will probably need the assistance of circles of support to master.



**Support** can come from the home/family network but increasingly requires those within the extended world for the individual. Forming allies and identifying trusted individuals are important for both the individual and their carers as increasing amounts of time is spent out of the family home and influence.

Supports may come from friends, professionals or organisations. Circles of support are vital to avoid anxiety and crisis for the individual and avoid burn out for carers. It is important that the individual feels comfortable with support and understands that this is not a failing but a strength, and that there are mechanisms in place for this support to function (adults who wish advocacy support require to have this formally stated and arranged as systems tend to assume they will function independently and exclude others unless pre-arranged).

**Resources** can come in the form of training opportunities, hard copy materials (schedules, visuals, books, diaries, support plans, etc.), electronic supports (apps, diaries, reminders, etc.) and resources from the web (websites, videos, etc.) – also from organisations or professionals who can offer support and advice.

**Targets** need to be phased and realistic. A gradual build-up of skills is how most of us progressed into independence and planning for the future and building skills can prevent a lot of stress and anxiety down the line. Identify new skills and the amount of work needed to achieve these, plus the demands at present before setting a target(s). Try to prioritise skills to ensure they are addressed in a timely manner.

**Monitoring progress** and identifying success and barriers is important. If a skill is proving difficult analyse the possible causes and then a possible change in approach. Do not assume it is not achievable until alternative approaches have been tried.

## References and Resources

- ❖ Physical Health
- ❖ Mental Health
- ❖ Sensory Issues and Arousal Control
- ❖ Executive Skills
- ❖ Relationships

## Heather Wright

DIFFERabled Scotland,  
Flemington House,  
Office S4,  
110 Flemington Street,  
Springburn,  
Glasgow G21 4BF

**Website:**  
[differabledscotland.co.uk](http://differabledscotland.co.uk)

- **Email:** [differabledscotland@gmail.com](mailto:differabledscotland@gmail.com)
- **Facebook:** **Differabled Scotland**
- **Twitter:** **@DifferabledScot**

