

How to be Ready for Their 18th Birthday - Parents' Advice from Experience!

I am writing this as a parent to a strapping 17-year-old man who is currently at Icknield Further Education Centre - he turns 18 really soon.

Regardless of whether you have a social worker or not, you should have a visit with someone from the Independent Futures team at Hampshire County Council (social workers that prepare the transition from children's services to adult services) .

This should happen sometime after their 17th birthday but earlier is better. They will talk you through the process and ask you lots of questions about your child. It is important to engage with this conversation as they are there to help your child as an adult.

We have had support from social care since our son was 12 years old. If you feel you need support with your child at home, I urge you to get in contact sooner rather than later. Having a social worker gives you someone else in your corner to understand and help fight for your child's rights. You can self-refer and talk to school for support with this.

Our son has complex health needs, when he turns 18 he moves over to the adult health team. If your child has complex health needs, it is worth talking to your paediatrician and or specific consultants when your child is 16 or even earlier to discuss the transition. You will need to make sure your family GP surgery is up to date on all your child's health needs so that you feel confident when you move away from paediatric care.

The other option available to ALL families is applying for deputyship of your child. This means that when they turn 18, legally you will be the main person who will advocate and make decisions regarding your child. You can apply for Health & Welfare Deputyship and Finance. This is a costly exercise, but again, it gives you peace of mind for any big decisions that may come up as your child gets older.

I found it all very overwhelming at first, but if I have any advice for you all it would be to start early, ask questions and make sure you know what is available to you and your child as they get older. The staff team at Icknield will be signposting and supporting you through this change and the family support practitioner will guide you.

It can feel really lonely and scary, if you ever feel that I would urge you to reach out to school first and ask for help.

I really didn't know a lot of this before our son turned 17, we are learning as we go. You are not on your own.

Nicola Smith