TRANSCENDERS INC

The Family Navigator Binder

Your college transition binder: benefits, aid, and services, one system at a time.

How to use this binder

Print one handout for each section and file it at the front of its tab. Behind each tab cover, file the documents listed on that cover page. Those documents are the ones schools, agencies, and colleges will ask for, so the binder becomes your proof file as you build it.

Bring the binder to IEP meetings, vocational rehabilitation meetings, and college meetings. When someone asks for a document, you can find it by system, not by searching a pile.

The online Family Navigator (Beta) is the current version. If a printed page and the online version differ, follow the online version at transcenders.app/family-navigator. California and Tennessee are covered in depth today, and other states are being built.

> **What is inside:** seven tabs, one for each system: 1. SSI and Benefits, 2. FAFSA and College Aid, 3. Vocational Rehabilitation (DOR), 4. School Records and Transition, 5. Regional Center and State Disability Services, 6. Veterans Dependent Benefits, 7. Housing, Transport, and Campus Life.

> **Help us build the Beta.** Send feedback to tera@transcenders.app and answer three questions: 1. What state are you in? 2. What did we miss? 3. What confused you? Schools and programs: you are welcome to print and share this packet with families, free.

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TAB 1 OF 7

1

SSI and Benefits

What goes behind this tab

- [ ] Social Security card copy. Keep the original in a safe place.
- [ ] Birth certificate copy
- [ ] Proof of citizenship or immigration status
- [ ] Medical and school records that describe the disability
- [ ] Bank, income, and household resource records
- [ ] Every letter from Social Security, filed in date order
- [ ] List of doctors, clinics, and therapists, with contact details

> **First step:** Read the SSI overview from Social Security, then write down the date you first contact Social Security about applying. Keep that date. It can matter later.

Print the handout on the next page and file it at the front of this tab. It explains the first moves for this system in plain language, with notes for California and Tennessee where they differ.

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HANDOUT 1 OF 7: PRINT AND FILE AT THE FRONT OF TAB 1

SSI and Benefits

Start here

1. Learn what SSI is: a federal program run by Social Security for people with limited income and resources who have a qualifying disability, are blind, or are age 65 or older.
2. Gather proof before you apply: identity, citizenship, medical records, school records, and income and resource records.
3. Apply through Social Security, and keep a copy of everything you submit, with the date you submitted it.
4. File every decision letter behind this tab. If a letter gives a date to respond or appeal by, that printed date controls, so copy it onto your calendar right away.

California: Adds a state supplement to SSI. Ask Social Security how the state supplement appears in the payment, and keep the letter that explains it.

Tennessee: Does not add the same state supplement as California. Ask Social Security what the federal payment includes, and keep the letter that explains it.

File behind this tab

- Decision letters, in date order
- Your application copy
- Medical and school records you sent
- Income and resource records you sent
- Notes from calls, with names and dates

Official resources

Social Security, SSI eligibility: https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/eligibility
Social Security home page: https://www.ssa.gov

My notes

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TAB 2 OF 7

2

FAFSA and College Aid

What goes behind this tab

- [ ] Household tax returns used for the FAFSA
- [ ] W-2 forms and other income records
- [ ] Bank statements
- [ ] Records of untaxed income, if any
- [ ] StudentAid.gov account page for the student and each contributor. Keep passwords private within the family.
- [ ] FAFSA confirmation and FAFSA Submission Summary
- [ ] Financial aid award letters from every college

> **First step:** Create StudentAid.gov accounts for the student and for each person who must contribute information, before you start the form.

Print the handout on the next page and file it at the front of this tab. It explains the first moves for this system in plain language, with notes for California and Tennessee where they differ.

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FAFSA and College Aid

Start here

1. Start at Federal Student Aid and file the FAFSA form there. The form is free. If a site asks you to pay to file it, stop and go back to the official site.
2. List every college and program you are seriously considering, including inclusive programs you found through Think College College Search.
3. After you submit, save the confirmation and the FAFSA Submission Summary behind this tab.
4. Send each college the documents it asks for, then compare award letters side by side before you decide.

California: Students can also be considered for state aid. Ask each college financial aid office, in writing, what state aid you were considered for.

Tennessee: Students can also be considered for state aid. Ask each college financial aid office, in writing, what state aid you were considered for.

File behind this tab

- FAFSA confirmation
- FAFSA Submission Summary
- Award letters
- Tax returns and income records used
- Letters and emails with financial aid offices

Official resources

Federal Student Aid: https://studentaid.gov
Think College College Search (a public resource): https://thinkcollege.net/college-search

My notes

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TAB 3 OF 7

3

Vocational Rehabilitation (DOR)

What goes behind this tab

- [ ] Referral or application confirmation
- [ ] Eligibility determination letter
- [ ] Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)
- [ ] Counselor name and contact page
- [ ] School records and evaluations your counselor asked for
- [ ] Pre-employment transition services records
- [ ] Letters about services, training, or tuition support

> **First step:** Find your home state agency in the federal directory listed on the handout for this tab, and ask how to apply. Cases start in the home state.

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Vocational Rehabilitation (DOR)

Start here

1. Find your state vocational rehabilitation agency. Every state has one, and the name differs by state.
2. Ask about pre-employment transition services. These services can start as early as age 14 to 16, so do not wait until 18 to ask.
3. Apply, complete the eligibility process, and then build the employment plan with your counselor.
4. Tell your counselor about college plans early, and ask what the agency can and cannot help with. Ask for the answer in writing.

California: The agency is the Department of Rehabilitation, called DOR. Start with DOR directly using the link below.

Tennessee: The agency is Vocational Rehabilitation. Find its listing through the federal directory below.

File behind this tab

- Application copy
- Eligibility letter
- Individualized Plan for Employment
- Counselor notes from meetings
- Service authorizations

Official resources

California Department of Rehabilitation: https://dor.ca.gov/Home/GettingStarted
US Department of Education, State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies: https://rsa.ed.gov/about/states

My notes

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TAB 4 OF 7

4

School Records and Transition

What goes behind this tab

- [ ] Current IEP, including the transition plan
- [ ] Most recent evaluation reports
- [ ] Report cards and transcript
- [ ] Summary of Performance, if your school provides one at exit
- [ ] Diploma or certificate paperwork
- [ ] Your written records requests and the school replies
- [ ] Names and contact details for the transition coordinator and case manager

> **First step:** Ask the school, in writing, for a complete copy of the education record, and file the reply behind this tab.

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HANDOUT 4 OF 7: PRINT AND FILE AT THE FRONT OF TAB 4

School Records and Transition

Start here

1. Read the transition plan in the IEP. IDEA transition planning is built around the student goals for education, work, and independent living.
2. Request a complete records file while the student is still in school. Records are much easier to get now than after exit.
3. Check the file for missing evaluations, and ask in writing for anything that is missing.
4. Bring this tab to the college disability services meeting. Colleges ask for documentation, and this tab is where it lives.

California: Ask the IEP team when transition planning begins for your student, and have the answer noted in the IEP.

Tennessee: Ask the IEP team when transition planning begins for your student. If the answer surprises you, ask for it in writing.

File behind this tab

- IEP and transition plan
- Evaluation reports
- Transcript
- Summary of Performance, if provided
- Records requests and replies

Official resources

IDEA topic areas, US Department of Education: https://sites.ed.gov/idea/topic-areas/

My notes

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TAB 5 OF 7

5

Regional Center and State Disability Services

What goes behind this tab

- [ ] Eligibility or intake letter
- [ ] Individual Program Plan (IPP) or person centered plan
- [ ] Service coordinator name and contact page
- [ ] Assessments used for eligibility
- [ ] Notices about services, denials, or changes
- [ ] Self-Determination Program paperwork, if enrolled (California)
- [ ] Hearing or appeal paperwork, if any

> **First step:** Find the agency for your area using the state directories listed on the handout for this tab, and ask how intake works.

Print the handout on the next page and file it at the front of this tab. It explains the first moves for this system in plain language, with notes for California and Tennessee where they differ.

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HANDOUT 5 OF 7: PRINT AND FILE AT THE FRONT OF TAB 5

Regional Center and State Disability Services

Start here

1. Find the state disability services agency for where the student lives. Names and programs differ by state.
2. Ask about eligibility and intake, and keep every notice the agency sends.
3. Build the person centered plan around college, work, and community life, and bring this binder to planning meetings.
4. If a service is denied or changed, keep the written notice. The notice explains the next steps the agency allows.

California: Services run through Regional Centers under the Department of Developmental Services (DDS). San Diego and Imperial County families are served by the San Diego Regional Center.

Tennessee: Families look to TennCare ECF CHOICES for employment and community supports for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

File behind this tab

- Intake paperwork
- IPP or person centered plan
- Coordinator correspondence
- Service notices
- Self-Determination paperwork, if any

Official resources

California Department of Developmental Services: https://www.dds.ca.gov
San Diego Regional Center: https://www.sdrc.org
TennCare ECF CHOICES: https://www.tn.gov/tenncare/long-term-services-supports/employment-and-community-first-choices.html

My notes

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TAB 6 OF 7

6

Veterans Dependent Benefits

What goes behind this tab

- [ ] Veteran DD214 copy. Keep the original in a safe place.
- [ ] VA rating decision letter
- [ ] Chapter 35 application copy
- [ ] Certificate of Eligibility for Chapter 35, if issued
- [ ] CalVet College Fee Waiver letter, if issued (California)
- [ ] College VA certifying official name and contact page
- [ ] Enrollment certification records for each term

> **First step:** Check Chapter 35 eligibility on the VA site. For California public colleges, check the CalVet College Fee Waiver at the same time. They are separate benefits with separate paperwork.

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Veterans Dependent Benefits

Start here

1. Learn the federal benefit first: Survivors and Dependents Educational Assistance, called Chapter 35, is a VA education benefit for eligible spouses and children of certain veterans.
2. Apply through VA, and file the Certificate of Eligibility behind this tab when it arrives.
3. Give the college certifying official a copy of the certificate, and confirm enrollment certification each term.
4. Keep federal and state paperwork separate in this tab. A letter from one does not replace a letter from the other.

California: The CalVet College Fee Waiver can waive mandatory systemwide tuition and fees at California public colleges for eligible dependents. Apply through a County Veterans Service Office, and file the letter here. A new letter is needed for each academic year.

Tennessee: There is no CalVet waiver. Ask the college about state programs for veterans dependents, and keep what the college gives you in writing.

File behind this tab

- DD214 copy
- VA decision letters
- Certificate of Eligibility
- CalVet letter, if California
- Term certification records

Official resources

VA Chapter 35, Dependents Educational Assistance: https://www.va.gov/family-and-caregiver-benefits/education-and-careers/dependents-education-assistance/rates/
CalVet College Fee Waiver: https://www.calvet.ca.gov/VetServices/Pages/College-Fee-Waiver.aspx

My notes

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TAB 7 OF 7

7

Housing, Transport, and Campus Life

What goes behind this tab

- [ ] Housing application and confirmation
- [ ] Housing contract or lease copy
- [ ] Meal plan selection
- [ ] Accommodation request letters and college replies
- [ ] Campus transport, shuttle, and parking information
- [ ] Move in checklist from the college
- [ ] Emergency contacts page for campus life

> **First step:** Ask each college, before you apply, whether students in the program can live in campus housing. Get the answer in writing and file it here.

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HANDOUT 7 OF 7: PRINT AND FILE AT THE FRONT OF TAB 7

Housing, Transport, and Campus Life

Start here

1. Ask about housing early. Use Think College College Search to see which programs list housing, then confirm the details with the program directly.
2. Write down how the student gets to class, meals, and work: walking, campus shuttle, bus, or family transport.
3. Request housing and campus accommodations through the college process, and file the reply behind this tab.
4. Build a daily life plan: laundry, meals, money, medication routines, and who to call when something goes wrong.

California: Ask the college housing office how disability related housing requests are handled, and what documentation the office wants.

Tennessee: Ask the college housing office the same questions. Processes differ by college, not only by state, so get the answer from the college itself.

File behind this tab

- Housing contract or lease
- Accommodation replies
- Transport maps, schedules, and passes
- Move in paperwork
- Daily life plan

Official resources

Think College College Search (a public resource): https://thinkcollege.net/college-search
Transcenders Family Navigator (Beta): https://transcenders.app/family-navigator/

My notes

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