

Navigator PREP at Beacon College

BEFORE THEY LEFT FOR COLLEGE, more than a few high school graduates with ADHD truly believed they were ready to handle the challenge—especially the challenge of living away from home. Once they were actually exposed to these new life demands, however, they were disappointed to learn that they were not. After witnessing firsthand the frustration and demoralization many of these students experienced, staff at Beacon College created a program designed to help.

Known as Navigator PREP, the program reaches out virtually to high school students up to nine months before they start college in order to begin coaching them on how to PREPare for and eventually successfully handle the day-to-day responsibilities of college life away from home. Parents are an integral part of the process, as they too take part in ongoing interactions with Navigator PREP staff. While the majority of students enrolled in the program are planning to attend Beacon College, other students around the United States can enroll as well.

Says Alexander Morris-Wood, MS, director of transition services and outreach at Beacon, “We’re actually the first virtual transition-to-college program for neurodiverse students and their parents. We focus on the gray

are—that period of time when students decide where to attend college, and when they actually step on campus in the fall.” The students who currently benefit from Navigator PREP embrace a range of challenges beyond ADHD and learning differences. According to Morris-Wood, some experience communication and pragmatic issues, some experience anxiety-related or depressive symptoms, or other mild mental health concerns.

All services are also designed around a student’s individual needs, with particular focus on areas of executive function (including initiating, planning, managing time, and organizing materials), social integration (including understanding norms and conventions, friendship skills, and communal living skills), self-awareness (including understanding strengths and weaknesses, perspective taking, identifying resources, and self-advocacy), and independent living (creating routines, identifying support services, and managing medication).

To best meet the needs of each participating student, Navigator PREP staff begin by assessing potential skill-based roadblocks that might impede successful adjustment to college, and what individualized strategies and awareness can be developed in order to create a concrete pathway to college.

Overcoming a young adult’s “failure to launch”

Though Navigator PREP is still in its infancy, the program has grown significantly, with over a hundred families currently enrolled. The program is also gaining increasing recognition for trying to tackle what many experts in the field say is a particularly challenging time for a subset of young adults with ADHD and related differences—that of adjusting to life’s demands after high school.

Referred to in the professional literature as “failure to launch,” this adjustment period represents a significant hurdle for young adults who struggle to adapt to a more independent lifestyle, one required of college-age students or young adults in the workplace. Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than in the lives of young adults with learning challenges who choose to live away from home.



More about Beacon College

Founded in 1989, Beacon College is dedicated exclusively to students with learning differences, including ADHD and learning disabilities. Conceived originally by parents, the college was the first of its kind in the country to award bachelor degrees to students with learning differences. All Beacon students have access to personal and academic support services tailored to their learning needs.

Students also may choose from different on-campus living options, including one-, two-, or three-bedroom apartments. First-year students live in a newly constructed residence hall comprised of single units in five-room clusters. All students also enjoy universal amenities, including in-unit washers and dryers, high

speed internet, cable, private parking, and access to a range of outdoor and indoor fitness and recreational activities. Beacon College's campus is located in historic downtown Leesburg, Florida. **A**

*A clinical and consulting psychologist, **Mark Katz, PhD**, is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center in San Diego, California. As a contributing editor to Attention magazine, he writes the Promising Practices column and serves on the editorial advisory board. He is also a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.*

FOR MORE INFO

To learn more about Navigator PREP or the other services Beacon College provides to its students, readers may contact Alexander Morris-Wood at amorriswood@beaconcollege.edu, or by phone at 352-638-9777.

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