Therapy and other supports for adolescents with cerebral palsy

A guide for teenagers

What is cerebral palsy?

Cerebral palsy (CP) is a group of disorders that affect movement, balance and posture. The word 'cerebral' means to do with the brain. The word 'palsy' means a problem with the muscles. Cerebral palsy is due to an injury in the brain. Once you have CP you always have it. But it can change over time.

Who is Cerebral Palsy Alliance?

Cerebral Palsy Alliance (CPA) is for people of any age who have CP. They offer therapy, programs and other services. They are really good at what they do and have been doing it for a long time. Cerebral Palsy Alliance also gives money to people around the world to research CP. The researchers hope to prevent and cure cerebral palsy one day. They want to improve things for people with CP.

What's in this guide?

This guide is all about cerebral palsy. It will tell you about things that may happen for you when you are a teenager.

The guide will help you to:

- Say what you want
- Make goals
- Plan what is important for you
- Ask for what you need.

You can use the guide to talk with your parents and other people who help you. You can make decisions together.

This guide provides general information only. It is not meant to replace information given to you by your doctors or other people who help you. To make sure you get information that is right for you, talk to you doctor or other professionals. Information is different around the world and each person needs different things. It's important that you have information that is just for you.

This guide has four parts. Each part is about an important area of life. The parts are called:

MY SOCIAL LIFE

This part is about **fun** ways to meet up with people, try new things and work on your goals. It is also about **friends, family** and people who support you. Teenagers want to have fun! It's really important to them.

Jump to page 4 to check it out.

MY BODY

This part is about your body. When you are a teenager your body changes. This guide will help you know what to expect. It talks about how to stay **fit** and healthy. It also talks about ways to work on your **function** (the things that you need to do each day).

Jump to page 9 to check it out.

MY LEARNING

This part is about how you **learn**. It talks about big changes like starting high school and leaving high school. It also talks about help you can get for your learning. You learn new stuff all the time! Some happens at school. Some happens as part of life.

Jump to page 28 to check it out.

MY FUTURE

This part is about your plans for the **future**. There are some big things to think about: what happens after high school? Where do you want to live when you are older? How do you want to do things for yourself? It's good to start thinking about these things early.

Jump to page 34 to check it out.

Hey! Did you notice all those ‘F’ words just now?

Fun, Friends, Family, Function, Fitness and Future?

These are all important areas of your life. They were put together by researchers from a place in Canada called CanChild. CanChild is like Cerebral Palsy Alliance. They help kids and young people with disability. You can read some more about these words if you want to at *canchild.ca/en/research-in-practice/f-words-in-childhood-disability*.

We are going to use the words in this guide. You will see this picture:

If the shapes are highlighted, it means the service we are talking about will help with that area. You can use the guide to talk to people you trust. They can help you learn about CP, set your own goals and make your own choices.

Your parents will also have a guide to read. It is the same as this guide but with some more detail.

What works for teenagers with CP?

Before we go into each part of the guide let’s talk about what the research says is good for teenagers with CP. It’s called **task specific training**.

This means that you to work towards real skills that are important to you. You do this in real life tasks. You have to practice a lot. The people who help you will give ideas about how you can improve.

We use two approaches all the time. They are called:

- **Goal directed therapy or training. We say GDT.**
- **Cognitive Orientation to Occupational Performance. We say CO-OP.**

GDT and CO-OP change the way you think about and do things. They help your brain learn new ways to do things. When your brain learns new ways of doing things we say it is using **neuroplasticity**. It is good when this happens. Let’s learn more about each approach.

Goal directed therapy or training (GDT)

GDT is when you choose a goal you want to work on. Then train yourself to get better at it. It works best when:

- You choose your own goals. They could be about moving around, getting places, looking after yourself, communication, leisure, or school activities.
- The goal is at just the right level. It is not too easy and not too hard. When you start you can break your goal down into small steps. As you improve you can make it harder.
- You have chosen a goal that means something to you. You can work on it in a group or by yourself. But it is important is that you **want** to work on your goal.

Cognitive Orientation to Occupational Performance (CO-OP)

CO-OP helps you plan and talk about the steps that are needed to learn new skills. It helps you improve the way you can do things. There are four key parts:

- **Goal:** choose a goal that you want to work on
- **Plan:** develop a plan for how you will achieve the goal
- **Do:** do the plan
- **Check:** check to see whether your plan worked.

You can speak with your parents and therapists to find out how GDT or CO-OP would work for you.

As a teenager you will have things that you like and don’t like. You will have your own interests. You will want to make your own decisions more and more. Therapy and services work best when they are built around your goals. You and your team make decisions together.

MY SOCIAL LIFE

Having fun

Don't be afraid to have a go at new things. Try it and have some fun!

We think one of the most important word is **fun**. There are lots of ways to have fun. Often it is doing things that you enjoy with friends and family.

Hobbies are things that we like to do in our spare time. Here are some hobbies people do:

- Read
- Play music
- Make art and craft
- Play video games
- Go camping
- Go to a concert
- Have a party
- Hang out with friends
- Play sport.

These are all ways to join in and have fun.

You may find it hard to join in some fun activities. You may need help to work out how to join in more. We call the things that stop you joining in **barriers**.

Barriers can be about:

- What you can do (personal)
- What other people do (social)
- The places and spaces around you (environment).

What will help?

Your family and the people who support you can help you break down the barriers and join in more. Ways you can do this include:

- **Set your own goals**
- **Practise your goals in every day tasks** e.g. when you get dressed, make a sandwich
- **Work out what stops you** from joining in the way you want to
- **Work with others to make changes** so you can join in the way you want to
- If you want to **bring some fun into your therapy sessions**, you could try gaming or virtual reality (VR)
- You can **try a program that helps teenagers** get more involved in activities they enjoy. There is a program is called ParticiPAte CP. Another program is called Pathways and Resources for Engagement and Participation (PREP). You can ask about them if you're interested.

Friends

Friends can be a big part of your life. They help you feel good about the things you can do. They can support you. They are there for you.

Many teenagers with CP have a strong group of friends. They meet them through school and hobbies. Friends are great because they can make you feel good. They can help you deal with hard times. They support you to stay positive and well.

Some teenagers may find it hard to make friends. Maybe you worry that if you need help with things you won't be able to join in with your friends. This is not always true. There are lots of things you can do.

What will help?

There are programs to help you learn skills to make friends. We call them **social skills programs**.

One of these programs is called PEERS®. It means Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills. This is a group for learning about friendships and relationships. You learn about social skills. Your parents can also learn how to help you make friends. Lots of people like this program.

It can also help to talk about your friendship goals.

Your parents and support team can help you:

- Try new activities or hobbies
- Use the internet or social media to talk with friends
- Meet different people, like through a part time job or volunteer work
- Go to social events that you are interested in
- Find the right transport to get to places.

Family

Family is important. They can make you feel safe and secure so that you can push your limits and achieve amazing things.

It can be very busy in a family – especially for parents. Sometimes parents and teenagers don't always get along. This can feel stressful.

Just like you, parents need to look after themselves. Some ideas will work well for one family. Different ideas will work well for another family.

What will help?

- **Short breaks and respite:** this means teens and families have a short break from each other. This can be a great time for you to become more independent and make new friends. Your parents get some time too.
- **Equipment and aids:** these can be used around the home. They can help with things like getting dressed, having a shower and moving from one position to another. Using equipment can help you do things for yourself. It also lets your parents/carers help you in a safe way without hurting their bodies.
- **Disability support workers:** these paid professionals are trained to help with your care needs and life goals. They can support you in your home or out in the community.
- **Parent and carer support:** your parents might join Facebook groups, local community groups, online forums or specific parent support programs.

MY SOCIAL LIFE

My notes about what I liked...

What I learned...

What I want to ask...

MY BODY

Moving around

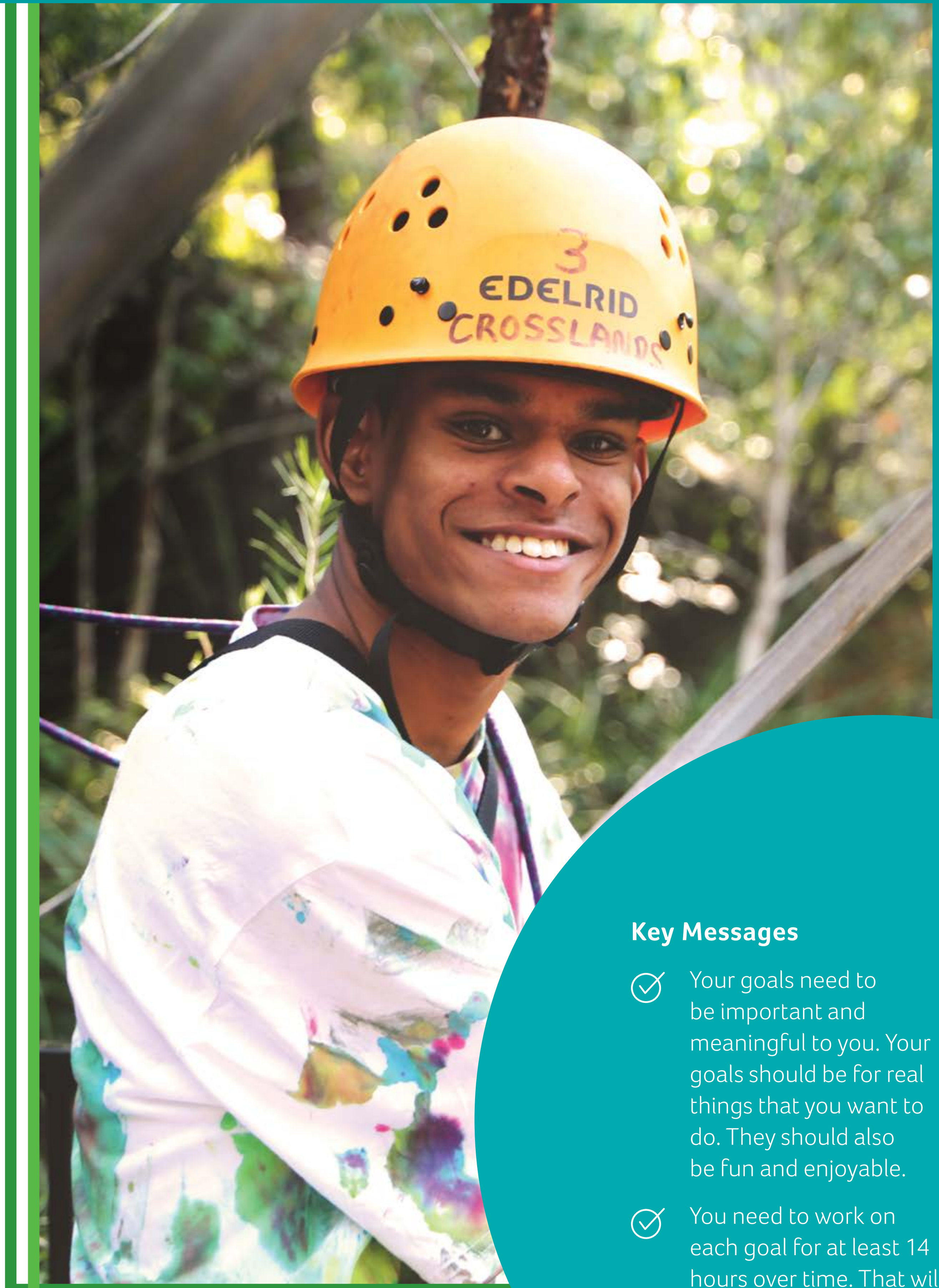
We all have things we do well. You can find ways of doing things that work for you and your life.

By your teenage years you will have learned **90%** of your gross motor skills! But your body and movement can still change as you get older.

There are things you can do to **stay strong**, **keep your skills** and **do things in the best way for you**.

What will help?

- **Gait training:** this therapy helps with walking. It can improve how fast you walk. For some people it can also improve other movement skills.
- **Treadmill training:** this therapy also helps with walking. It can improve how fast you walk. It can also help you to walk further and for longer.
- **Strength training:** this therapy helps strengthen your muscles. Having good muscle strength helps you do all the movement activities you need to do each day. Three 40–50 minute sessions per week is a great start.
- **Hydrotherapy:** you do this therapy in a warm pool. Heat can be good if you have tightness in your muscles. Therapy in a pool can help if you have movement goals as part of your GDT program.
- **Ankle foot orthoses (AFOs):** these are splints that you wear. They improve the position of your foot when you stand and walk. Some people think they are not so easy to wear. You can decide with your family and therapists.
- **Taping:** this therapy uses stretchy or firm tape. It helps to hold your joints and muscles in a good position. Some people find this is better for them than AFOs.
- **Assistive technology:** you may need to use equipment. We call this **assistive technology**. Walking frames, crutches, walking sticks and Smart walkers can help with your walking. You can use different equipment at different times. You can choose what works best for you and your goals.



Key Messages

- ✓ Your goals need to be important and meaningful to you. Your goals should be for real things that you want to do. They should also be fun and enjoyable.
- ✓ You need to work on each goal for at least 14 hours over time. That will give you the best result.

Staying fit

Exercise is important for everyone. There are so many ways to do it.

Exercise and being active is good for your health. There are lots of fun ways to be active.

Sports and active hobbies are great. You can:

- Get fit
- Have fun
- Make friends
- Learn new skills.

You can join in with sport at a level that is right for you. Some teenagers are just looking for a fun activity. Others want to be part of a local sport team. Others may want to be an elite athlete.

You can also do sports at camps, school holiday programs or at school. There are so many different sports out there. You can find one that you like and that you can do.

Disability Sports Australia helps people with a disability find a sport they can do well. You can look at their website at *www.sports.org.au*.

As well as sports, there are also other things you can do to build your skills and fitness. You can talk to your parents and support team about what might work for you.

What will help?

- **Strength training:** this therapy helps strengthen your muscles. Having good muscle strength is an important part of your fitness.
- **Doing weights:** doing weights or other exercises that use your own body weight helps with strength, fitness and bone health. You can start easy and as you get stronger you can do more. An Exercise Physiologist can prepare a program that is right for your level.
- **Whole body vibration (WBV):** when you do whole body vibration you stand, sit or lie down on a machine. The platform vibrates. The small movements make your muscles work. This can be good if you have tight muscles or need to build your strength.
- **Fitness training:** in a fitness training program, you do exercises to work your muscles. You do need to repeat them many times to improve. Doing more exercise and activity helps you set up good exercise habits. Going to a gym with friends or joining a group class can be a fun way to do fitness training.
- **Motivational coaching:** we all need help to stick to our fitness goals sometimes! Working with a coach can motivate you. A helpful plan can be worked out, that fits in with your life and choices.
- **Assistive technology:** you may need to change some parts of a sport, activity or hobby. Assistive technology can include things like adapted bikes, modified equipment, RaceRunners and other devices. You can learn to use equipment as part of a GDT program.

Key Messages

✓ Activity and exercise are good for everyone.

✓ You can find an exercise or activity that is fun and right for you.

✓ You can get help to adapt parts of an exercise or sport, so you can do it well.

Managing pain

Let someone know if something doesn't feel right in your body.

Many teenagers feel some pain caused by their CP. This can be muscle, hip or stomach pain. It can also be other more common types of pain like a headache or pain as you grow.

The feeling of pain is due to a mix of body, mind, social and environment factors. No one feels pain in the same way as you. It is a personal thing. It is also complex. So often there is a team of people who help with pain.

Pain can affect your sleep, your school work and your mental health. It is important to get help from the team of people who support you.

What will help?

- You can talk with a health professional about your pain. Your GP, paediatrician or one of your therapists can help. You can get a plan made just for your needs.
- If your pain is in your muscles there are things you can do. Medication, Botulinum Toxin Treatment (Botox) or surgery may help. Your parents and health professionals can tell you if this is what you need.
- Pain in your hips needs to be checked. Every 12 months is what they suggest for young people. We call it **Active Hip Surveillance**.
- Equipment (like a wheelchair, seating system, AFO, hand splint) needs to fit you well so it does not cause you pain.
- Things like massage, hydrotherapy, heat packs, cold packs and distraction may also help you.

Key Messages

- ✓ Pain is personal. No-one knows what your pain feels like, except you!
- ✓ There are different things you can do to help with pain. These will change based on the type of pain, its cause, where it is and how bad it is.
- ✓ A team of people can help.
- ✓ Stopping pain from becoming bad in the first place is important.

Looking after bones and muscles

You only get one body. Look after it well. It helps you do what is important to you.

It is good to look after our bones and muscles. This is something we should do throughout our whole life.

People with CP can have problems with their hips, spine and muscles. This can become more of a problem as an adult.

So, it is important to start looking after your bones and muscles when you are young.

What will help?

- **Active surveillance:** this means regularly talking with your therapists and medical team about your body and what you can do. This helps to prevent severe problems.
- **Serial casting:** this means a cast on your arm or leg for a short time. It is taken off then another one is put on. This is usually repeated three or four times. A cast can help stretch tight muscles slowly over time. You may find you can reach further or move more easily.
- **Scoliosis surgery:** some people who have problems with the shape of their spine may need surgery. Your parents and medical team will talk with you if this could help you.
- **Manage muscle tone:** for teenagers with CP who have tight muscles (spasticity) there are things you can do. This may mean medication or surgery. You may hear about:
    - **Botulinum toxin (BoNT):** this medicine helps your muscles relax.
    - **Selective dorsal rhizotomy (SDR):** this is a type of back surgery that some people with CP can have to help them walk better.
    - **Baclofen:** this medicine also helps muscles to relax. Some people take it by mouth. Other people have a pump put in their back so the medicine can go straight into the body. Both are good.
    - **Other medications:** there are other medicines that are taken by mouth. You need to swallow them. Medication should always be talked about with a doctor. You need to find the right type for you and your body.

Key Messages

- ✓ Have a check up every 12 months. This is a good way to stop small problems from getting worse.
- ✓ Look after your bones, joints and muscles when you are young.
- ✓ A team of people will help you choose what treatments are best for you and your body.

Using your hands

We use our hands every day. We need our hands to eat, play, work, learn and communicate.

Many teenagers with CP find it hard to use their hands. This may be one hand. We call this **unilateral** (one side). For other people it is both hands. We call this **bilateral** (two sides).

What will help?

If one hand is not as good as the other, there are two really good treatments that can help:

- **Constraint Induced Movement Therapy:** your stronger hand is put in a mitt, cast or sling. Then you work on tasks using the hand that needs to get stronger. You need a lot of practice. About 30–40 hours over several months is good.
- **Bimanual hand therapy:** you use both hands together to do tasks. Both hands get practice. You need a lot of practice with this treatment too. About 30–40 hours over several months is good.

Because both of these treatments work well, you can choose which one will be best for you. Your parents and therapy team can help.

Other things that help:

- **Hand/arm orthoses/splints:** these help your hand, arm and fingers stay in a good position.
- **Taping:** this helps your hand and thumb stay in a good position.
- **Assistive technology for hands:** you can use switches, joysticks, specialised keyboards or eye-gaze technology if it is hard to use your hands.
- **Handwriting programs:** these help to write as neat as you can. They also help you save energy. If writing is hard for you, there are options like note takers that may be better for you.
- **Specialised seating systems:** it's important to sit in a good position so you can use your hands more easily.

Key Messages

- ✓ Task specific interventions for motor and movement goals are the best approach for teenagers with CP.
- ✓ You can improve the way you use your hands with two key treatments. Both need about 30–40 hours of practice.

Communicating with others

We all communicate in different ways. Communication helps us make friends, say what is important to us and learn about the world.

It is so important to be able to communicate. We need to understand what others say to us. We need to share information. We need to have good relationships. This is all about communication.

We all communicate in different ways. We change how we communicate for different people, places and purposes. We might:

- Speak
- Use expression on our face
- Use body language
- Use gestures or sign language
- Point to pictures or symbols
- Speak using a communication device.

Some teenagers with CP find it hard to speak clearly. There are lots of communication options. Your Speech Pathologist can help you work towards your communication goals.

What will help?

In speech pathology you might work on goals for your speech, language, social skills or the way you join in with others. We say **participation**.

Some things that can help:

- **Working on your language skills.** This means the way you share a message. Also, how you understand a message. You can do language therapy no matter what way you communicate.
- **Working on your speech skills.** This means the way you make sounds and words and use your voice. Sessions with your speech pathologists and some home practice can help make your speech clearer.
- **If you have a stutter** there are good programs that can help teenagers. One of these is called the Camperdown Program. Your speech pathologist can tell you more.
- **Work on using different ways to communicate. We call this AAC.** It stands for augmentative and alternative communication. You can learn to use signs with your hands. Or you may use a book or board with picture symbols on it. Or you may type your message on a computer that speaks for you. Your speech pathologist can help you find the best way of communicating your needs.
- **Work with other people to learn how to use your AAC. We call this aided language stimulation.** This is where someone may use your AAC system to show you how to make a message. It's a good way to learn about your AAC. It's your system though. So, people need to ask for your permission before they use your AAC.
- **Get training for the people around you.** We call this communication partner training. People around you need to know about how you communicate. Having training as part of your speech pathology program is a good way to help people learn.
- **Work on your reading and writing skills.** As you get older, being able to read and write is really important for your future learning and independence. You might be doing reading and writing at school. A speech pathologist can also help if you need more support with this skill.

Key Messages

- ✓ Communication is an important skill for life.
- ✓ Clear speech can be hard for some people with CP.
- ✓ Speech pathologists help to develop programs for communication goals that are important to you.
- ✓ There are lots of ways to communicate. Find a way, or many ways, that work for you.

Eating, drinking and swallowing

There is nothing better than sitting down for a good meal with friends and family! Safe, enjoyable and nutritious meals are important for everyone.

It may not seem like it, but eating and drinking are actually very complex skills. Lots of muscles have to work together. Many teenagers with CP find it hard to eat, drink and swallow. This is called **dysphagia**.

Sometimes these problems can feel embarrassing. If you are eating and drinking with your friends or other people it can be especially so! But there are things you can do.

What will help?

A **speech pathologist** can help improve the way you eat, drink and swallow. A **dietitian** can help you with the food you eat. A **dentist** can help keep your mouth and teeth healthy.

There are groups of things we can do to help you eat, drink and swallow safely,

In the first group are things that are not invasive. We call these **non-surgical interventions**, like:

- Sitting in a good position to eat and drink
- Changing the texture of your food and drink to make it easier to swallow
- Using adapted equipment like cups, spoons and bowls
- Keeping your teeth and mouth clean and healthy.

In the second group are things that are more invasive. They may be needed if it is really hard for you to eat, drink or swallow safely. They include things like:

- Putting the food straight into your stomach using a **gastrostomy**. For some people this can be a safer way to take in food.
- Having surgery to help manage severe reflux. This is a called a **Nissen Fundoplication**.

In the third group are things that help you to grow well. We call these **nutrition interventions**. They help you get the nutrients you need. A team of people including a dietitian and GP work together on your nutrition.

In the fourth group are things that help people who find it hard to manage their saliva. We call these **drooling interventions**. Some people do simple things like carry a cloth to wipe their mouth. Other people take medicine to dry up saliva. There are also more invasive things you can do like surgery or Botox. You should talk to your team about what is right for you.

In the final group are things that you can do to help keep your mouth, teeth and gums healthy. We call these **dental interventions**. Clean your teeth at least twice a day to stop problems with your teeth and mouth. If you need special dental care there are dentists who just work with people who have a disability.

Key Messages

- ✓ It can be hard for some people with CP to eat, drink and swallow safely.
- ✓ A team of people can help.
- ✓ It is important to eat and drink safely so you have energy and stay healthy.

Looking after yourself

It is good being a teenager. This is when we try new things. We learn to do lots for ourselves. We start to explore our independence.

All teenagers want to do as much as they can for themselves. We call this **independence**. But, some teenagers with CP will need some extra help with things like:

- Going to the toilet
- Having a bath or shower
- Getting dressed
- Eating and drinking
- Moving from one position to another
- Getting comfortable to sleep.

A goal lots of teens with CP have is to do most things for themselves. But also accept help from other people. It is about finding a balance.

What will help?

The self-care goals you have at this time in your life may be about you doing a task yourself. Or, they may involve help from a parent or carer. You may need to change your goals as you get older.

There are some good ways to work on goals that are important to you.

- **Goal Directed Training and CO-OP:** we talked about these earlier. These approaches can help you learn to complete tasks for yourself in a way that works for you.
- **Assistive technology:** this can help you do as much as you can yourself in a safe and easy way.
- **As a teenager you may want to learn more about sex, sexuality and sexual health**. Having a disability can sometimes change the way a person experiences and expresses their sexuality. You can ask talk to your family or doctor, a teacher or a trusted friend to find information you need.

Key Messages

- ✓ Good self-care is about doing as much as you can for yourself and also accepting help from others.
- ✓ Goal directed training and CO-OP approaches can help.
- ✓ Assistive technology and equipment can support your individual needs and goals.
- ✓ As a teenager you may want to learn more about sex, sexuality and sexual health. You can talk to people you trust to find the information you need.

Keeping a healthy headspace

Everyone has hard times in life. It is good to learn healthy ways to deal with challenges.

All teenagers have hard times sometimes. It may be hard to make friends or keep up with school work. Maybe you have bullying in your life. Sometimes these things can become overwhelming and lead to big feelings like stress, anxiety or depression.

What will help?

You can ask for help from someone you trust. This could be your doctor, teacher, school counsellor, close friend or family member.

The important thing is to let someone know how you are feeling. That way you can find the right approaches to manage what you are experiencing.

The good news is that there many things you can do to help you feel better, like:

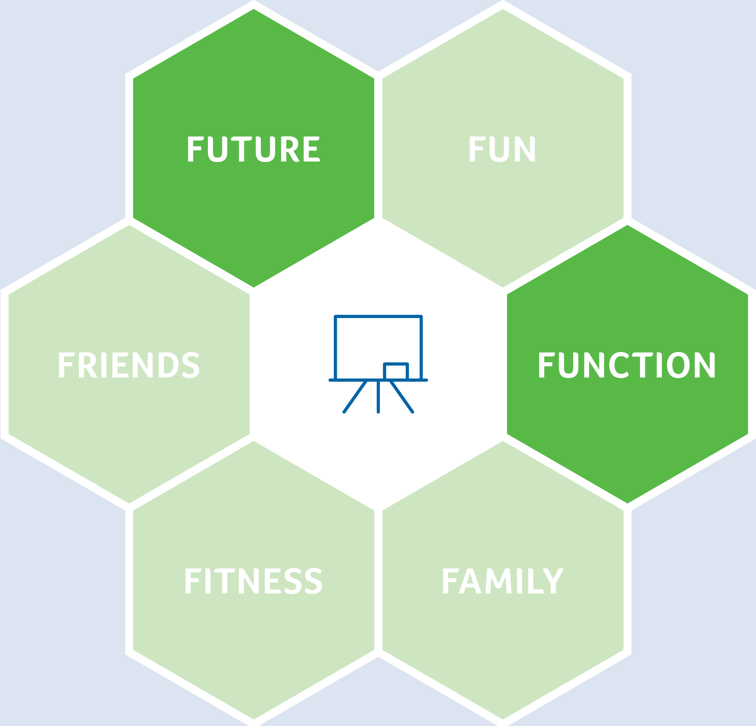
- Eat well
- Get enough sleep and exercise
- Get help from online counselling and mental health services
- Use the school counselling services
- Link in with friends and support networks
- Find relationship support services
- Talk about medication supports with your family and doctor
- Explore family planning support services.

My notes about what I liked...

What I learned...

What I want to ask...

MY LEARNING



Starting high school

Going from primary to secondary school is a big change. Lots happens at high school. It can be exciting and challenging.

You got to know your school well. And the teachers and other kids knew you too. When you go to high school you will need to adjust to a new environment. It may be big and busy with lots of new things to learn. There will be lots of teacher, lots of kids and different class rooms for your classes.

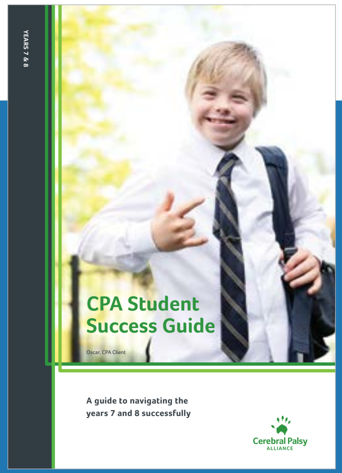
It's natural to feel a bit worried about this big change. Planning for high school early can help you have a smooth change.

What will help?

Work out your physical needs at school. This means how you will move around the school. Also, any equipment you will need and when you may need to use it. An Occupational Therapist and Physiotherapist can come and visit the school. They will help the school make any adjustments that are needed to support you.

Work out your learning needs at school. This means how you will join in classes and learn. This can be as simple as where to sit in the class to learn best. Or it could be how to prepare the class work so you can do your best learning. Your therapy team can work with your teachers on this.

Cerebral Palsy Alliance wrote a guide called the *CPA Student Success Guide, Years 7–8*. It's on the CPA website if you would like to read it: *cerebralpalsy.org.au/cpa-youth/cpa-student-success-guides/*



Your learning supports

Everyone learns in their own way. We all have things we are good at and things we need to work on. It is important to find ways to use your strengths as you work towards your goals and dreams.

Some people with CP will need support with their learning. Often teenagers with CP are surprised to find out that this is quite common.

With CP, it can sometimes be hard to control certain types of thinking skills that are important for learning.

These can include:

- Attention (focusing on a task)
- Memory (holding information in your mind)
- Organising information
- Planning how to do a task
- Thinking of ways to solve a problem
- Managing emotions and behaviour.

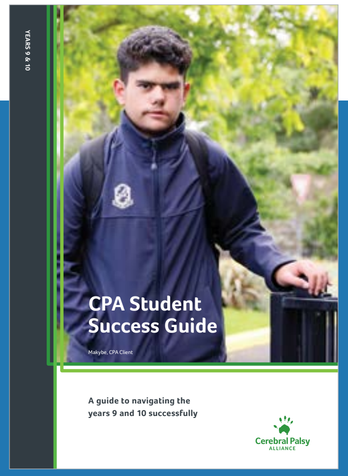
What will help?

There are many things that can help with learning. Some are quite general ideas. Others are more specific to your needs.

- Get enough sleep.
- Manage any conditions like epilepsy.
- Get help with your pain so it does not affect your learning.
- Use ways to help you hear, understand and use information better, including:
  - Reducing noise in the background
  - Sitting near the front of the classroom
  - Asking for information to be broken down into simple parts
  - Asking teachers to use pictures or prompts to help you understand.
- Ask for more time to complete work.
- Ask for a scribe during written assessment tasks. You may also be able to do the assessment task in a different way.
- Dictate (speak out loud) rather than write information if that helps.
- Have an assessment of your learning needs. Your parents and support team can organise this. It will help teachers to better understand what your needs are.
- Activities like yoga can help with attention. It can help you think in a calm and relaxed way.
- Technology can help you with many areas of your learning.

As you move through your teenage years your needs may change. This means the supports you need may also change.

Cerebral Palsy Alliance talk more about this in another guide they wrote called the *CPA Student Success Guide, Years, 9-10*. It's on the website if you would like to read it: *cerebralpalsy.org.au/cpa-youth/cpa-student-success-guides/*



Leaving high school

What are your plans for after school? What can you start to think about now?

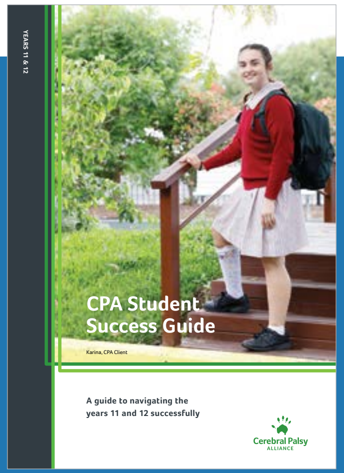
Finishing your last years of high school can feel amazing! It's also a challenging time for students and their parents. You are probably thinking about what you want to do after school and other important life goals.

What will help?

When you plan your life after high school, ask yourself:

- Do you want to do more study?
- Do you want to develop life skills?
- Do you want to get a job?
- Do you want to travel?

Start the conversation now. Explore many options. You may find you want to try a number of different things before you find what works for you.



YEARS 11 & 12

CPA Student
Success Guide

Karina, CPA Client

A guide to navigating the
years 11 and 12 successfully

Cerebral Palsy
ALLIANCE

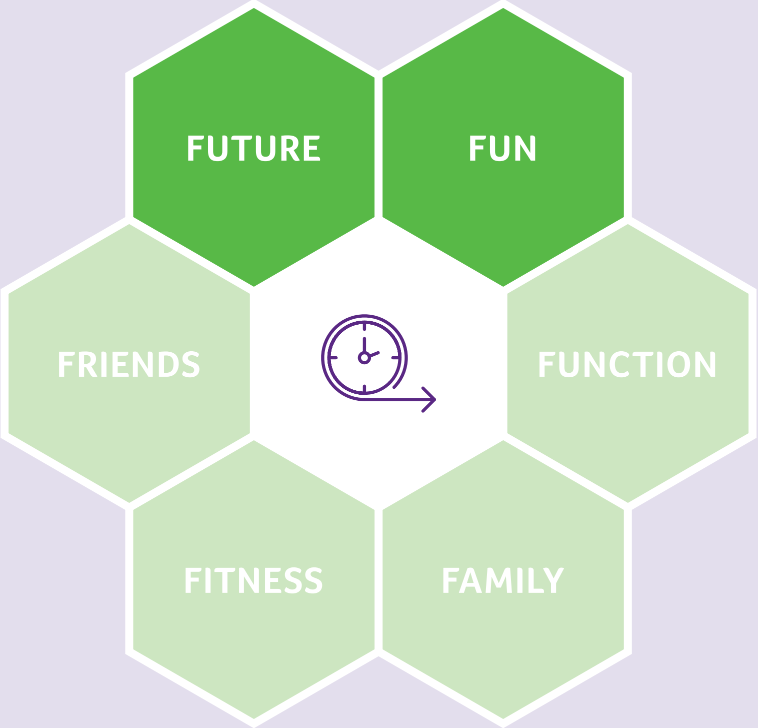
You can find out more about the final years of high school and planning for life after school in the *CPA Student Success Guide, Years 11-12*. It's on the website if you want to read more: ***cerebralpalsy.org.au/cpa-youth/cpa-student-success-guides/***

My notes about what I liked...

What I learned...

What I want to ask...

MY FUTURE



Life after school

It's important to acknowledge and think about your future and the opportunities ahead. What are the possibilities? What are your plans?

During your final years of school, you may be thinking about what comes next. There are popular ideas about what this should be. But this is an important time for you and your family to think about all the possible options and what is right for you.

Some people will love the idea of more study after school. But it is not for everyone. What is important to you? What do you see yourself doing?

What are my options?

More study

If you wish to complete further study there are a number of different things you can try.

You may want a formal qualification. Or, you may just want to learn something new that interests you. There are different types of further learning in Australia.

Tertiary education means formal education that is provided after high school. The options are vocational education and training and higher education:

- **Vocational education and training (VET)** qualifications help prepare students with skills for work. They are usually very practical courses like plumbing, floristry, cooking and community support work. Many people will go to TAFE (Technical and Further Education), but there are also private providers too.
- **Higher education** providers offer higher level qualifications like Bachelor degrees through to a Masters or PhD. Most people will go to a university for these qualifications, but there are also private providers. A wide variety of courses are available. You can also choose the way you like to learn: face to face, online or a mix of both.

Community colleges or community education providers offer qualifications and interest-based courses. If you do not want a qualification but want to learn a new skill or explore a new topic, then community education may be for you. You can choose from topics like art, business, languages, lifestyle, sports and fitness.

You can start to think about your learning and education plans early. Discuss options with your parents and family, teachers, learning support staff and career advisors. They can help you find out what courses you may like and what supports you may need.

Part-time or full-time work

Some people don't want to do more study. They want to get a part-time or full-time job. There are many different jobs depending on what you like, want and can do. It can be challenging to find the right job. Start thinking about this early.

It is a good idea to try to get some volunteering or work experience through your school years. This will help you when you look for a job.

Many organisations offer programs that help you build the skills you will need to get a job. For example, Cerebral Palsy Alliance offers the **CPA School Leavers Employment Support (SLES) program**. In this program you can learn how to:

- Write a resume and cover letter
- Search for and apply for a job
- Communicate well at work
- Handle money and make a budget
- Catch public transport safely
- Understand what your employer needs from you
- Start a new job
- Be safe when you are at work.

This program also includes an assessment of your specific needs and coaching support delivered either individually or in groups.

Community participation and life skills

Some teenagers and young people with cerebral palsy don't want to do any more study. They may also not be ready for work. For these people there is the option to join a community or life skills program.

These programs are about going out, participating in the community, making friends and connections, and pursuing individual interests. For example, a program could include:

- Music
- Visual arts
- Technology
- Home and living skills
- Personal development
- Yoga
- Cooking
- Sports.

There are also workshops and programs offered in the community that build life skills and independence. Being independent means different things to different people. You can design a program of learning and experiences that interest and challenge you.

Moving out of home: is it an option?

One day you may want to live in your own place. What might that look like for you? What can you be doing now to plan ahead?

Very few teenagers move out of home as soon as they turn 18. This is the same of teenagers with CP. But you can start planning for what, where, and how you want to live and what supports you might need.

Ask yourself:

- Will you want to stay living with your parents/ caregivers and family?
- If you are studying do you want to live on campus at university or college?
- Do you have friends that you want to move in with?
- Do you want to live fully independently in your own place?
- Do you want to live in a shared home where you can have support?

You do not need to decide right now what your plans are. But being aware of what is possible and realistic for you is a great start.

Managing your health care

As you get older you may want to take more control of your health care needs and services. A good transition from child to adult health services can help.

Once you turn 18 you will transition to adult health care and hospital services in your local community. This means that your doctor and the therapists you see may stay the same. But specialists you may have been seeing will now need to come from the adult-based health services.

Moving from child to adult health services happens in stages. Often, it starts when a person is quite young.

Early stage

This stage is up to the age of 12 years old. You will receive services from your GP, pediatrician and child specialist services or hospitals.

Preparation stage

Between the ages of 12-16, you and your family will talk to your health providers about making a transition plan. If you and your family think it's a good idea, you may begin to attend some of your doctors' appointments on your own. This will help you communicate with your doctor and learn about how to manage your own health care.

Active stage

Between the ages of 16-19, you may attend more appointments on your own. You will always have help if you need it. But you will have more opportunity to make your own decisions about your health.

More general information about going from child to adult health care services can be found on the **Raising Children website:** *raisingchildren.net.au/teens/mental-health-physical-health/chronic-conditions/teens-with-chronic-conditions-adult-care*

This is a website for parents. But teenagers may also like to read this information.

My notes about what I liked...

What I learned...

What I want to ask...

References

The information in this booklet is based on high quality, published research from the field of cerebral palsy. Two important references include:

Novak, I., Morgan, C., Fahey, M., Finch-Edmondson, M., Galea, C., Hines, A., Langdon, K., McNamara, M., Paton, M., Popat, H., Shore, B., Khamis, A., Stanton, E., Finemore, O., Tricks, A., Te Velde, A., Dark, L., Morton, N., & Badawi, N. (2020). State of the Evidence Traffic Lights 2019: Systematic Review of Interventions for Preventing and Treating Children with Cerebral Palsy. *Current Neurology and Neuroscience Reports*, 20(3), 1-21. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11910-020-1022-z

Rosenbaum, P., & Gorter, J. (2012). The “F words” in childhood disability: I swear this is how we should think. *Child: Care, Health & Development*, 38(4), 457–463. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2214.2011.01338.x

You can ask for a full list of references from *ask@cerebralpalsy.org.au*.

For more information, please get in touch:

Call us on **1300 888 378**

Email us at
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Visit **cerebralpalsy.org.au**

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