

Parent & Family Handbook

Mason LIFE
George Mason University



President's Welcome

Dear Mason LIFE families,

Welcome to George Mason University, Mason LIFE, and the Mason Family. Selecting a postsecondary program is a difficult and important decision, and we are honored that you and your student selected the Mason LIFE program. Rest assured that you made a wise choice. As a part of the Mason Family, you will be joining one of the world's most diverse, innovative, and inclusive universities.



As your student is preparing for the transition to college, so are you. Please use this handbook as a guide to assist you throughout the years to come. Inside are important tips, policies, and contact information for various resources at Mason. I hope that this guide will serve as a reference and answer many of your questions about what to expect over the upcoming years.

In addition to this guide, I strongly encourage your active participation in your student's Person Centered Planning meetings and attendance at other university-sponsored events. You and your family are especially encouraged to come back to campus for the Mason LIFE reunion hosted during Family Weekend each year and for your student's Senior Celebration at the conclusion of their time in the program. Your engagement in these programs and activities contributes so much to the vitality of the university and to your own connection with Mason and your student's experiences.

Once again, welcome to the Mason Family! If you have questions, or if we can assist you in any way, please do not hesitate to contact the Mason LIFE program at (703) 993-3905 or by email at gmulife@gmu.edu.

Best wishes for a wonderful year,

Ángel Cabrera
President, George Mason University

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Director's Welcome

Dear Parents and Families,

Welcome to the Mason LIFE program at George Mason University. This is a day that I know you and your student have long anticipated. Your student's recent graduation from high school was a huge accomplishment, and this new journey to college is exciting! We are so happy that you and your student have chosen the Mason LIFE program and are excited to spend the next few years supporting your student's academic, social and developmental journey.



The Mason LIFE program strives to be a model postsecondary education program that focuses on research, academic progress, campus integration, employment opportunities, and the development of independent living skills. None of this could be possible without the support of parents and family members like you. We understand the important role you play in your student's success and believe in fostering positive relationships with our student's families.

As your role changes during this transition, we hope this handbook will serve to support and guide you. Throughout, you will find various tips and talking points to use with your student and well as guidelines on Mason's policies and procedures. While our main focus is on supporting your student's growth and development, we recognize how your involvement contributes to our mission and continually strive to better support you as well.

Let me congratulate you once more as a parent or family member of a student who is now entering a new phase of life as a college student. This will be a challenging, exciting time, but we will be here to guide you and your student through it. Welcome, and thank you for all that you do to support your student.

Sincerely,

Dr. Heidi Graff
Director, Mason LIFE

Mason LIFE Program Overview¹

The Mason Learning into Future Environments (LIFE) Program is a supportive academic university experience that offers a four-year postsecondary curriculum of study to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) who begin the program between 18-23 years of age.

Mission

The Mason LIFE program has a dual mission. The first part of the program's mission is to educate students with IDD through programming in academics, employment, residential living, and behavioral and community health as these areas foster the inclusion of Mason LIFE students in all aspects of the university. The second part of the program's mission is to provide opportunities for other Mason students to work directly with individuals with disabilities. This experience of learning, working, and living together mutually benefits all students and is the basis of the Mason LIFE Program.

Overview

Students who complete their four years with the Mason LIFE Program will graduate with a George Mason Certificate of Completion with a catalog concentration and a work specialty area. As a federally approved Comprehensive Transition Postsecondary program, the Mason LIFE Program is mandated to promote inclusive opportunities by having Mason LIFE students participate in catalog classes. Per the student's Person Centered Planning meeting (described on p. 19), programs of study are developed with the Mason LIFE students to participate in or audit catalog or special topics classes. A support staff member attends the class with the student and the student is also enrolled in a two-hour support class for additional assistance. It is this process that creates a catalog concentration.

Another important aspect of the certificate is the work specialty area. Most students are placed on-campus with a support staff member in their first year and gradually have the opportunity to explore off-campus placements. It is through these experiences that students begin to cluster skills to form the work specialty area. In addition, Mason LIFE students are encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities such as student government, student-led organizations, intramural clubs, and sports. Generally 80% of the Mason LIFE student body is integrated into student life and they are viewed by all as integral members of the Mason Nation. As such, all student rights and campus privileges are bestowed upon Mason LIFE students, including access to all facilities and services. From the moment students begin their education with Freshman Convocation to the CEHD Graduation Ceremony, Mason LIFE students are Patriots of George Mason University.

¹ Content adapted from masonlife.gmu.edu for consistency with program descriptions.

Your Student's Experience

The Mason LIFE Program is part of George Mason University's College of Education and Human Development. The program has four components, which foster the inclusion of Mason LIFE students in all aspects of the university:



Academics

The Mason LIFE program offers a vast array of courses, which vary from semester to semester. Beginning the second semester of their first year in the program, students are also able to participate in or audit catalog and special topics courses at the university. During each student's Person Centered Planning meeting (detailed on p. 19), a program of study will be developed which will outline and structure the student's catalog concentration (similar to a major).

Exploration

Through exploratory courses, students will learn academic skills, build autonomy, and learn to apply their knowledge. Support staff will attend exploratory courses with the student, and the student will also be enrolled in a two-hour support class for additional support. A sample list of exploratory courses can be found at masonlife.gmu.edu. Students who complete their four years with the program will graduate with a Certificate of Completion from the university.

Employment

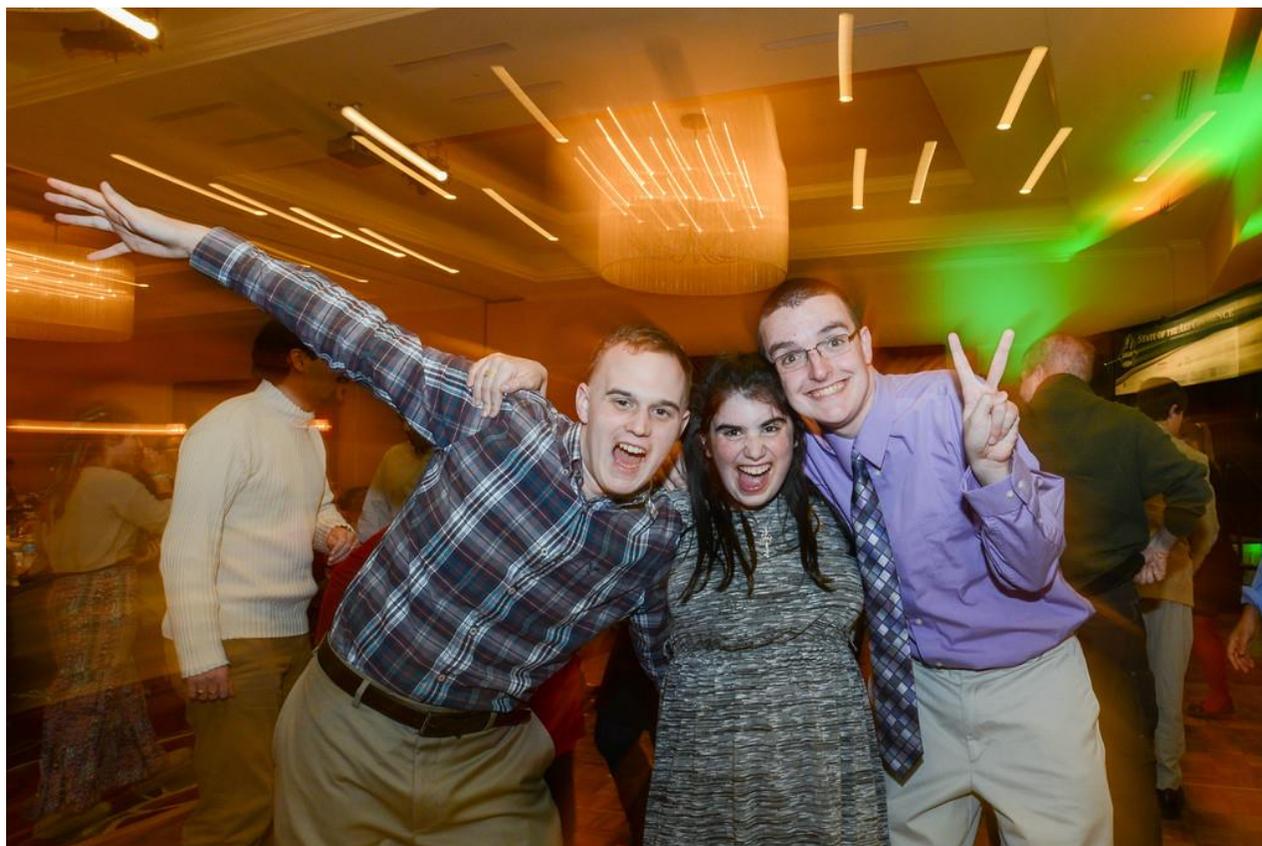
During your student's Person Centered Planning meeting (detailed on p. 19), a work specialty area will be defined. These areas include office/clerical work, child development, senior living services, library services, therapeutic recreation, animal care, community outreach/public works and more. Based on your student's work specialty area, they will generally have the opportunity to complete an on-campus internship and gradually move to an off-campus internship. These opportunities should serve to improve skills development, employee conduct and responsibility, social appropriateness, networking skills, and self-advocacy.

Residential housing

Approximately two-thirds of Mason LIFE students participate in the residential housing component of the program. Doing so serves to develop your student's independent living skills and provide more weekend and educational activities. The Mason LIFE program has a robust support staff, but there will be times when students are not supervised in their on-campus housing units. For more information about residential housing, please review the Mason LIFE Residential Housing Handbook at masonlife.gmu.edu/life-residential-program.

Behavioral and Community Health

Students in the Mason LIFE program are encouraged to participate in on-campus involvement opportunities including student organizations, intramural clubs and sports, and attendance at university-wide events. After-hours events, specifically for Mason LIFE students, are also hosted regularly. Opportunities for involvement vary from semester to semester, so encourage your student to consistently seek out ways to engage with Mason Nation.



Achieving the Certificate²

Graduation and Certificates Policy

Students who complete their four years with the Mason LIFE Program will graduate with a George Mason Certificate of Completion with a catalog concentration and a work specialty area. Achieving the Certificate of Completion is contingent upon three main areas of importance.

Timely Completion

First, the Certificate of Completion is only awarded to those students who have been enrolled in the Mason LIFE Program for four years or eight semesters within a five-year period. The coursework is determined through Person Centered Planning meetings with the following courses required for at least one semester: Human Sexuality and Personal Relationships Fundamentals, Mason Exploration, Developing Self-Regulation Strategies, Employment, Independent Living, Fitness, Literature, Writing, Mathematics, and Banking. These are all offered in the fall semester of the freshman year and comprise each student's first semester in the program. A sample freshman schedule for the fall can be found on p.10. Community Access can be taken any time during the eight semesters. Those students who have mastered travel training can opt out of the Community Access class and the requirement can be waived. The last requirement is the Senior Seminar class, which is mandatory the spring of senior year. Students must make sufficient academic progress as marked by their equivalent grade point average to maintain enrollment at the university.



² Adapted from masonlife.gmu.edu to maintain consistency with program policies.

Graduation and Certificates Policy Continued

Catalog Concentration

The second area of importance is the catalog concentration. Students participate in or audit catalog or special topics classes beginning the second semester of their first year. Some students will participate in one course a semester while others will be enrolled in two classes. This is contingent upon the student and their goals. With successful completion of each course, as noted by test scores, work products, performances (when appropriate), and homework, the grade will be entered on the academic record or transcript. The selection of each special topics class is determined at the Person Centered Planning meetings with the goal of establishing an area that the student would like to study while at the university. These classes enable students to explore areas of knowledge. A support staff attends the class with the student and the student is also enrolled in a two-hour support class where homework and projects can be accomplished. It is this process that creates the catalog concentrations. There are three-, four-, and five-class concentrations noted on the Certificate of Completion. For example, if a student audited three classes in the discipline of theatre, the student would have the three-course Theatre and Performing Arts Concentration noted on their Certificate. If a student participated in four communications classes, the student would have the four-course Communications Concentration noted on their Certificate. A five-class concentration is denoted as a Comprehensive Concentration. Students are permitted to have more than one concentration.

Work Specialty Area

The last important component of the certificate is the work specialty area. During the first semester, students are enrolled in a classroom-based employment class, to refine their resumés and work behaviors as well as discuss various positions. Following successful completion of the employment class, students begin to have work experiences. Most students are placed on-campus with a support staff member and by their third and fourth year, the students have the opportunity to explore off-campus placements. It is through these experiences that student begin to cluster skills to form the work specialty area. Examples of specialty areas pursued by past Mason LIFE students are Public Works, Community Outreach, Office/Clerical, Customer Service, and Child Care.

Sample Mason LIFE Student
Mason LIFE Classes: Fall Freshman Schedule

*Offered, Not Required

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
9:00-10:15 Math: Geometry  Krug 16	9:00-10:15 Literature: Mystery  Krug 17	9:00-10:15 Literature: Mystery  Krug 17	9:00-10:15 Literature: Mystery  Krug 17	9:00-10:15 Math: Geometry  Krug 16
10:30-11:20 Banking  Krug 17	10:30-11:20 Writing: Mystery  Krug 17	10:30-11:20 Residential Housing  Krug 15/16 Dorm	10:30-11:20 Writing: Mystery  Krug 17	10:30-11:20 Self-Regulation  Krug 15
11:30-12:00 LUNCH	11:30-12:00 LUNCH		11:30-12:00 LUNCH	11:30-12:00 LUNCH
12:00-12:25 LUNCH CLUB	12:00-12:25 LUNCH CLUB		12:00-12:25 LUNCH CLUB	12:00-12:25 LUNCH CLUB
12:30-1:20 Human Sexuality and Relationship Fundamentals Krug 17	12:30-1:20 Human Sexuality and Relationship Fundamentals Krug 17	1:30-2:45 Mindfulness Krug 14	12:30-2:45 Independent Living: Meal Planning and Preparation  Whitetop	12:30-12:45 Wrap Up
1:30-2:45 Mason Exploration  Krug 17	1:30-2:45 Employment Skills Krug 17		1:00-3:00 Fitness: Water Aerobics  Krug 15/AFC	
2:50-3:00 Wrap Up	2:50-3:00 Wrap Up	2:50-3:00 Wrap Up	2:50-3:00 Wrap Up	
3:00-4:00 S.M.A.R.T.		3:00-4:00 S.M.A.R.T.	3:00-4:00 S.M.A.R.T.	3:00-4:00 S.M.A.R.T.
P.I.K.E.	Expressive Movements	Yoga/Pilates	Book Club	

Transitioning to Adulthood

Transitioning from adolescence to adulthood is challenging for all young people, and this is especially true for students with IDD (Wehman, Smith, & Schall, 2012). While each student experiences transition and change differently, if we consider how most young people generally experience their emerging adulthood, we can better understand how to support them. In the following section we will provide an overview of educational theories that serve to help understand how your student may experience transition while in college.

Theory of Emerging Adulthood

According to Arnett's (2014) theory of emerging adulthood, there are five main components of a student's transition to emerging adulthood that distinguish it from other life transitions:

1. Identity exploration: answering the question "who am I?" and trying out various life options
2. Instability: feeling uncertain about work, place of residence, and/or sense of purpose
3. Self-focus: with few obligations to others, students can focus intensely on self-development
4. Feeling in-between: students are in transition, neither adolescents nor adults
5. Possibilities/optimism: the student experience provides an unparalleled opportunity to transform

Arnett (2014) makes it clear that young people do not all experience emerging adulthood uniformly. Rather, they experience it in their own "cultural, economic, and personal contexts" (p. 26).

As the Mason LIFE program utilizes a non-categorical inclusive model, students will vary greatly in terms of their abilities and disabilities. This means that each student may experience these components of emerging adulthood in conjunction with a variety of their own unique challenges.



Transition Theory

Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson's (1995) transition model also provides context for how your student may experience the transition from high school to college and from year to year as they advance through the program. This model stresses that the resources and support available to students have a substantial impact on their ability to progress through the transition. These resources include your student's "situation, self, support, and strategies" for coping. Considering how your student may be experiencing these factors can provide guidance on how you can better support them through the transition process. Below are some factors specific to how students with IDD may experience Schlossberg et al.'s "4 S's."

Situation

When considering your student's situation (the transition to postsecondary education) it is especially important to identify how the transition aligns with their own developmental timeline. Additionally, your student's own assessment of the transition should be considered. This is how your student views "who or what is responsible for the transition" (Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson, 1995, p. 57), which can impact how they react throughout the transition.

Self

"Self" in this case refers to your student's demographic characteristics and psychological resources (Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson, 1995). As a family member, you are likely the most knowledgeable of these characteristics and how they might influence your student's transition.

Support

Support refers to the relationships, networks, communities, and institutions that may play a role in supporting your student through the transition process. Support systems may help your student cope with transition by providing "affect, affirmation, and aid" (Schlossberg, Goodman, & Anderson, 1995, p.68). The relationship between a student and their family members is often interrupted during the transition, so it is essential that resources be in place to help both you and your student cope with such changes (Francis et al., 2016; Grigal et al., 2014).

Strategies

Schlossberg et al. (1995) described strategies as the behaviors your student uses to cope before, during, or after a transition. Coping strategies should be considered and discussed on an individual basis with your student to assist them in identifying strategies that will work best for them while they transition to a postsecondary program (Roberts, 2010).

Self-Determination Theory

While the previous two theories describe transitioning to adulthood in general terms, Wehmeyer and Schwartz's (1997) theory of self-determination is specific to young people with IDD. It recognizes that a focus on self-determination is essential for students with IDD to achieve positive outcomes after they finish postsecondary education (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997). The researchers identified several factors that are associated with self-determination:

Autonomy

Your student acts according to their own “preferences, interests, and/or abilities, and independently” from external influences (Wehmeyer & Schwartz, 1997, p. 246).

Self-regulation

Your student is able to assess a situation and make decisions about which skills are appropriate to use at any given time. They also recognize when adjustments need to be made, and make a plan to enact such changes.

Psychological Empowerment

Your student is confident that they are able to influence the outcomes of their environment.

Self-realization

Your student has a reasonable amount of confidence in their strengths and limitations and is able to use this knowledge to their benefit.

Mason LIFE is structured to instill these qualities of self-determination, support each student through the components of emerging adulthood, and ease the transition to college. However, it is critical, that you as a parent or family member also understand this transition in order to better support your student. It is likely that your student has looked to you for guidance and direction in the past, and this will be especially true as they progress through the program. In the following sections, we provide more details on how you can best support your student and encourage self-determination.



High School vs. College

Some differences between high school and college are more obvious than others. The comparisons below should be useful in defining what differences to expect in your student's collegiate experience at Mason.

High School	College
<p>Students are protected by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IDEA (2004) • ADA • Section 504 	<p>Students are protected by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ADA • Section 504 <p>IDEA (2004), the law that mandates Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for students, no longer applies.</p>
Students' disabilities are identified by the school and supported by teachers and parents.	Students are responsible for self-identifying their disabilities to the school and requesting their own accommodations.
Teachers will generally reach out to a student if they believe they are in need of assistance.	Instructors are generally supportive and helpful, but usually expect the student to initiate requests for assistance.
Parents and family members advocate heavily for the student.	Students are expected to develop self-advocacy skills and take the lead on decision-making.
Parents have access to their student's records.	Parents do not have access to their student's records without written consent from the student.
Parents and family members are generally in frequent contact with school faculty and staff.	Faculty and staff are limited in what they can communicate about a student's record, and do not generally reach out to communicate with parents.
Students can generally expect daily interaction with their teachers and regular support.	Classes meet less regularly, so students may not interact with their instructors as often. Instructors likely provide less support to students and rarely communicate with family members.
Parental permission is required for students to participate in most extracurricular activities.	Students are adults and make participating decisions by themselves. Parental permission is not required.

Your Changing Role

The transition to postsecondary education can be anxiety inducing for all students and family members involved, but this is especially true for you, the families of students with IDD (Forte, Jahoda, & Dagnan, 2011). Many of you have dedicated your lives to advocating for your students, and when your student transitions to college, your role will shift along with your student's (Francis et al., 2016). In essence, you are encouraged to try and resist the role of caretaker and instead strive towards supporting your student as they learn to self-advocate and become independent (Francis et al., 2016). You want your student to succeed, so your support is instrumental in fostering a sense of well-being for your student (Francis et al., 2016; Reay, 2000).

Now that your student is pursuing postsecondary education, your supportive role will be more important than ever. It will, however, look different than it has in the past. You will be challenged to transition from your current role as a deeply involved **advocate** to a less involved **advisor** to your student. This will be an important part of developing your student's self-advocacy skills and independence.

The remainder of this section will serve to guide your changing role and provide support as you experience your own transition. Please refer to it often and contact the Mason LIFE program at gmulife@gmu.edu with any questions.



Communication Strategies

You are likely accustomed to communicating with your student face-to-face on a daily basis. This will change as your student transitions to college and advances through the Mason LIFE program, especially if they participate in the residential living component.

Often, students and their family members will have varying expectations around how often, when, and how they will communicate once the student transitions to college. Because of this, it is suggested that you set expectations and develop a communication plan between your family and your student ahead of time. This will help to maintain communication while also setting barriers for what is most appropriate as your student grows into adulthood and develops self-advocacy skills.

Below is a sample communication plan you can use to start the discussion with your student around expectations for communication. To be most effective, family members and students should complete the expectations agreement separately at first, and then have a discussion to decide on an agreement that satisfies everyone.

Family Communication Expectations

1. I would like to communicate _____ times per week.
2. My favorite way to send/receive communication is via:

a. Texts	c. Emails
b. Phone calls	d. Other _____
3. I would like to communicate regularly about:

a. Classes	d. Struggles
b. Friends	e. Other _____
c. Work	
4. The best time of day for me to communicate is:

a. Mornings	c. Evenings
b. Afternoons	d. In-between activities
5. How do you (student or family member) feel about calls/texts/emails just to say hello or check-in?
6. If you (student or family member) feel like there is too much/not enough communication, how would you like to address that?
7. If I (student) stop communicating because I'm feeling overwhelmed, I want my family member to...

Communication Dos and Don'ts

Do:

- Listen. Sometimes your student will just need to vent. They do not always need you to solve a problem, but instead may need you to serve as a sounding board so they can try to work through a problem on their own.
- Encourage self-advocacy. If your student contacts you about a problem they are having, encourage them to take steps towards handling it themselves, instead of doing it for them.
- Encourage your student to seek support. At the conclusion of this handbook, you will find a list of Mason LIFE staff that your student can reach out to if they ever need support. Try to resist contacting Mason LIFE staff yourself, and instead encourage your student to do so.
- Focus on your student's strengths and abilities. You are your student's biggest supporter and can often see their strengths even when they cannot. Remind them of their capabilities in order to promote their own self-awareness and lessen their dependence on family members.
- Reach out to other Mason LIFE family members. This transition can be challenging, so we encourage you to connect with each other as a source of information and support.

Don't:

- Panic. In the event of an emergency, you will be contacted immediately. If you have not heard from your student in a while, do not assume that something is wrong. They are most likely just enjoying their time at college!
- Project your worries on your student. This is a challenging time for you and your student alike, but remember that you are their support system. Instead of communicating these worries with your student, connect with Mason LIFE staff or other Mason LIFE families as a source of information and support.

Involved vs. Engaged

Your involvement in your student's educational journey until this point most likely positioned you as an advocate, working to ensure accommodations, access, and pathways to success. During your student's time in the Mason LIFE program, you will be challenged to transition from this role as a deeply involved advocate to a less involved advisor to your student. In other words, you will be challenged to make a shift from an *involved* parent or family member to an *engaged* parent or family member. Below are some comparisons between these two forms of interaction.

As an INVOLVED parent or family member...	As an ENGAGED parent of family member...
Your role: advocate.	Your role: advisor.
Described as "doing to."	Described as "doing with."
You make decisions about your student's educational pathway.	You work with your student and their support team to help them determine an educational pathway.
You contact school administrators to advocate on your student's behalf.	You encourage your student to contact school administrators to solve problems and gain support.
You solve your student's problems for them.	You challenge students to find ways of solving problems. You provide support when needed, but ultimately allow your student to find solutions.
You set goals for your student.	You communicate with your student to help them set goals for themselves.

Your role as an advisor to your student will be essential throughout your student's time in the Mason LIFE program, especially during your student's Person Centered Planning (PCP) meetings. In the following section of the handbook, you will find information about what to expect and how to prepare for your student's PCP meetings.

Person Centered Planning Meetings³

Person Centered Planning meetings are required for all students. Parents and family members are engaged participants in these meetings, which are held on Tuesdays at 10 a.m. or noon. Parents or family members can participate in person or by conference call (George Mason University, 2018).



The purpose of these meetings is to hear the ambitions of each Mason LIFE student and work with Mason LIFE staff and parents or family members to determine a plan for success. The meeting's discussions will focus on your student's strengths and gifts and work to discover individualized housing, education, and work options based on your student's dreams, preferences, and capacities.

A typical Person Centered Planning meeting will focus on the following areas of your student's experience:

Topic Area	Possible related questions for the student
Academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your favorite and least favorite classes? • What do you want to learn about?
Social Life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activities have you participated in? • What do you like to do in your free time?
Independent Living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you help out (preparing meals, laundry, chores, etc.)? • How do you manage money?
Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you liked about previous work experiences? • What other kinds of experiences do you want?

By discussing these topic areas with your student and Mason LIFE staff, future goals and a plan of action can be determined to promote your student's success in the program. Prepare for your student's PCP meetings by coming ready to listen and provide feedback about your student's strengths and capabilities.

³ Adapted from masonlife.gmu.edu to maintain consistency with program standards.

Policies and Procedures

As mentioned earlier in the handbook, a number of policies and procedures will vary from those you might have experienced while your student was in secondary education. Many of these changes revolve around your ability as a family member to access your student's records. In the following section, we will outline some important policies to be aware of during your student's time in the Mason LIFE program. For more information and to view various other policies, please visit <https://masonlife.gmu.edu/policies>

Family Notification Policy⁴

All Mason LIFE students will be expected to abide by the student code of conduct as outlined at <https://studentconduct.gmu.edu/university-policies/code-of-student-conduct>. Mason LIFE students will follow the policies of the judicial system and the recommendations of the Dean of Students. Any resulting disciplinary action will follow in accordance with Mason policies to include the permanent or temporary expulsion of the student.

When there is a student conduct code violation, Mason LIFE will follow University policies with caveats. We recognize our student population and their challenges so therefore our first step will be to work directly with the student to remediate any skill deficit. Should the situation occur again, we will notify the student's family. The severity of the problem and the student response to re-teaching will determine the immediacy of family involvement. Below are the stages of our follow up process in the event of a conduct code violation:

- First stage: Work with the student to remediate any skill deficits
- Second stage: Administrative staff will inform family with the student's permission
- Third stage: Potential judiciary action through the university

FERPA (U.S. Department of Education, 2018)

George Mason University operates as a public institution and is therefore regulated by rules of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). This federal law provides rights to students 18 years and older to have exclusive access to their educational records. Such protected records include those maintained by the university that contain information directly related to the student. Family members may gain access to their student's educational records if the student submits a FERPA waiver. FERPA rights will be exempt during PCP meetings and if a student code of conduct violation has reached the second stage. More information about FERPA can be found at www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpco/ferpa/index.html.

⁴ Adapted from masonlife.gmu.edu to maintain consistency with program policies and procedures.

Scope of Services for Mason LIFE Students⁵

The Mason LIFE Scope of Services policy, which you were required to sign, was included in the application for your student's participation in the program. For your reference, we have included a copy of this policy below.

Student and Family Support - All students and families will follow and support the tenants and policies of the Mason LIFE Program. Any concerns may be brought up in yearly Person Centered Planning meetings by the student in order to advocate for individual academic needs and goals.

Research - As part of the College of Education and Human Development, educational research projects are often conducted within the Mason LIFE Program. These opportunities offer another level of understanding in supporting specific areas of student development and moving the postsecondary field forward in identifying characteristics and practices that are effective with this population. Research is conducted at the undergraduate, Master's, and PhD levels. Parental consent or informing will be sought for PhD and program evaluative research when the scope of work is beyond the parameters of Mason LIFE Program curriculum framework.

Participants in the Mason LIFE Program are certificate status students of George Mason University. The Mason LIFE Program is designed to address the unique needs of all the individuals attending and as such, the Mason LIFE program will provide in-house mental health services for situational issues. For continuous or acute mental health emergencies students, the university and the program will seek the assistance of 911 or an outside referral will be required.

Areas of concern for Mason LIFE students will be examined through Person Centered Planning meetings and, when deemed necessary, will be referred to the appropriate off-campus service for assistance. All emergencies will be handled by calling 911 and if an individual needs an ambulance, that person/family will bear the transportation cost. Beyond each Mason LIFE student's program of study, integration into the campus community via engagement of special topics classes, clubs, and organizations is encouraged.

All Mason LIFE students will be expected to abide by the student code of conduct. Mason LIFE students will follow the policies of the judicial system and the recommendations of the Dean of Students. Any resulting disciplinary action will follow in accordance with Mason policies to include the permanent or temporary expulsion of a student.

⁵ Adapted from masonlife.gmu.edu to maintain consistency with program policies and procedures.

Mason LIFE Sick Policy⁶

If your student awakens and does not feel well, the following procedures should take place:

- The student must call Mrs. Atkins at 703-993-3905.
- The student's parent(s) or guardian(s) will be called and informed of the student's sickness.
- The student will be allowed to rest until 11 a.m.
- The student and the parent(s) or guardian(s) must decide whether the student is well enough to go to class, a physician, or home.
- By noon, if the student is not well enough to go to class, the student will be escorted to Urgent Care or SHS. Charges may apply and are the responsibility of the family/student.
- Mason LIFE staff will follow the recommendations of Urgent Care staff to determine if the student needs to go back to on/off campus housing, home, or to the Emergency Room.
- If the student is allowed to return to on/off campus housing, the student will be alone between the hours of 8:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. It then becomes the family's responsibility to either let the student remain alone or to come pick them up and take them home.

There is no resident assistant on duty between 8:30 a.m. and 3 p.m. and George Mason University is not equipped with a Sick Bay. In the case of an emergency, 911 will be called.

Mason LIFE Transportation Policy⁷

All Mason LIFE students are expected to have a current MetroAccess card and an accompanying Personal Care Assistant (PCA) card. These cards will be used throughout the year by both your student and their support staff to enter the Metro at a waived or reduced cost. Any student that does not have a MetroAccess and PCA card will be responsible for paying for the Metro fare for themselves and their support staff. If a student has a MetroAccess card but does not have a PCA card, they will be responsible for paying for the support staff's Metro fare.

You may obtain a MetroAccess application by visiting <https://www.wmata.com/service/accessibility/metro-access/upload/MetroAccess-Application-March-2017.pdf> or by calling 202-962-2700 and selecting option 1.

You may also email eligibility@wmata.com or send a written request to: Metro Transit Accessibility Center, 600 Fifth St., NW, Washington, DC 20001

⁶ Adapted from masonlife.gmu.edu to maintain consistency with program policies and procedures.

⁷ Adapted from masonlife.gmu.edu to maintain consistency with program policies and procedures.

Financial Information⁸

Funding your student's education is important and can be complicated at times. To clarify this process, we have provided some information related to costs and opportunities for funding on the Mason Life website <https://masonlife.gmu.edu/financial-information-life>.

George Mason University Academic Tuition (Academic Year 2017-2018)

- In-State: \$20,500/year, \$10,250/semester
- Out-of-State: \$27,500/year, \$13,250/semester

On-Campus Residency Program Fees

- Room fee: \$10,350/year
- Support fee: \$11,750/year
- Total: \$22,100/year

The Support fee provides residential day support staff as well as overnight support staff.

Payments

Mason LIFE program payments should be made through the Student Accounts office at George Mason University. Bills will be provided electronically through your student's account and are due by the first day of classes of each semester. Please visit studentaccounts.gmu.edu for more information and to view payment plan options.

Resources for Funding at George Mason University

To take advantage of Financial Aid opportunities, complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and submit it to the federal processor by March 1 of every year. More information about financial aid can be found at gmue.edu/admissions-aid/financial-aid.

Mason LIFE Scholarships

A call for assistance requests is sent every year on June 1, and awards are announced by June 25. Financial awards are based upon the number of families that apply, a consideration of families who support other students enrolled in college, and total program funding. All applicable and posted deadlines apply. Any questions about Mason LIFE scholarships should be directed to Stephanie Atkins, Mason LIFE Office Manager at satkins5@gmu.edu.

⁸ Adapted from masonlife.gmu.edu to maintain consistency with program policies.

Next Steps

Your student will be on their way to Mason before you know it! This is a very exciting time for you and your student and there are a number of tasks you will do together over the summer in preparation for this new experience. Below are a number of things to think about working on with your student before they depart for their journey in the Mason LIFE program.

Cell Phone Usage

Make sure that your student has access to a cell phone and knows how to utilize it to make phone calls and send text messages. Also work with them to ensure they remember their phone number and can communicate it to others.

Money Management

Over the summer, be sure to set up a bank account for your student that you may also have access to. Work with your student to ensure they are able to access the bank account and withdraw money, if needed. Help your student decide on a way to remember how to log into the account and check it regularly.

Laundry

Whether or not your student decides to participate in the residential program, this is a good skill to begin developing. Work with your student to teach them how laundry should be sorted and what steps should be taken in the laundry process.

No-Cook Meals

Work with your student to help them find enjoyable options for meals that require little to no cooking. This will provide a helpful foundation in food preparation for on- and off-campus students alike.

Using Appropriate Language

Talk with your student about how to best use appropriate language and express emotions. Help them to recognize which words and phrases may not be appropriate and which ones can be used to help them express certain feelings.

Packing and Preparing

Have fun with your student choosing supplies and preparing for the logistics of their transition to the Mason LIFE program. For residential students, a packing list can be found online at <https://housing.gmu.edu/resources/what-bring>.

Mason LIFE Contact Information

Mailing Address:

Mason LIFE Program
Division of Special Education and DisAbility Research
College of Education and Human Development
4400 University Drive, MSN 1F2
Fairfax, VA 22030

Phone: (703) 993-3905

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Administrative Staff

Dr. Heidi Graff, Director: 703-993-8036

Dr. Robin Moyher, Assistant Director: 703-993-5806

Mrs. Stephanie Atkins, Office Manager: 703-993-3905

Ms. Kudy Giwa-Lawal, University Coordinator: 703-993-5136

Mr. Permon Mitchell, Residential Housing Coordinator: 703-993-3889

Mr. Robert LeSueur, Community Integration Specialist: 703-993-5184

Ms. Caroline Foster, Academic Specialist: 703-993-9593

Ms. Emily Jackson, Employment Specialist: 703-993-1902

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