



Transition: Advocacy and Social Emotional Preparedness

Becoming an adult brings with it opportunities to advocate for yourself. Foster self-efficacy and goal-setting. Improving goal-setting skills and building self-efficacy (seeing themselves as capable people) are two important themes for students as they approach the transition to adulthood. These two elements also build on each other—that is, when someone knows how to set and achieve goals, they gain an important sense of themselves as a capable person.

Person-Centered Planning

When developing the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or the Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), planning is centered on the interests, strengths, skills, and needs of the student or youth with disability. Person-centered approaches:

- Include in the planning process, individuals who have a deep knowledge of the student’s academic and social history;
- View the student as an individual, rather than as a diagnosis or disability;
- Use everyday language in transition planning, rather than “professional jargon;”
- Ensure that goals are developed based on the student’s unique strengths, interests, and capacities.

Making Informed Choices

The Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency must provide its participants with the opportunity to exercise informed choice throughout the VR process, including making decisions about the following:

- Employment goals;
- Services and service providers;
- Settings for employment and service provision; and
- Methods for procuring services.

The VR agency assists participants by providing information, guidance, and support to make and carry out these decisions. The exercise of informed choice involves communicating clearly, gathering and understanding information, setting goals, making decisions, and following through with decisions. VR counselors provide information through various methods of communication that are helpful to a family in order to assist with identifying opportunities for exercising informed choice from the beginning of the VR process through the achievement of an employment outcome.

Check out Parent to Parent website for “Transition School-Age to Adulthood Guide/Packet” for a lot more information and details. <https://www.islandcountywa.gov/Humanservices/Pages/Parent-to-Parent.aspx>

What does everyday life look like after we finish school?

As we get older, our daily activities change

Work: What support is available for youths with disabilities?

Education: How is postsecondary different from high school?

Other: Volunteering, recreational activities, adult day services and more.

Self-Determination

Self-determination is believing you can control the outcomes of your life. Self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities, such as self awareness, problem solving and self-advocacy skills, that leads to people to set goals for themselves and take the action to reach these goals. It is about being in charge, but not necessarily the same thing as self-sufficiency or independence. It means making your own choices, leaning to effectively solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for ones life.

Developing self-determination skills is a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout one's life. Parents can help prepare their young adults with disabilities by giving them a growing number of opportunities to make their own decisions. Self-determination is important for all people, but it is especially important, and often difficult to learn, for young people with disabilities. Well meaning individuals sometimes "protect" children with disabilities by making all their own decisions for them. Also, sometimes people assume that people assume that people with disabilities can't think for themselves.

Since self-determination skills are most effectively learned and developed by practicing them, students with disabilities should be given ample opportunity in their home life and school to use their self-advocacy, decision-making and socialization skills well before they leave high school to prepare themselves for working and living in their community.

Key characteristics of self-determination are the ability to:

- Speak for yourself (self-advocacy);
- Solve problems;
- Set goals;
- Make decisions;
- Possess self-awareness; and
- Exhibit independence.

Schools help students develop self-determination skills when they:

- Support students in establishing their own transition goals, including postsecondary education, career, and independent living goals;
- Ensure that students are actively involved in IEP meetings and understand their IEPs, including their specialized instruction and related services, the accommodations they receive for instruction and assessments, if applicable, and supplementary aids and services to facilitate their education in the least restrictive environment;
- Help students develop skills to direct their own learning;
- Use person-centered planning; and
- Create and maintain a system that supports family involvement and empowers families to support the self-determination of their sons and daughters.

Addressing Students' Social and Emotional Needs

It is important to address the social and emotional needs of students with disabilities to ensure that they have the skills needed to be successful in a postsecondary educational setting or workplace. Students with disabilities who have well-developed social skills are more likely to be able to successfully navigate employment, community, and postsecondary education settings.

IEP Teams need to take active steps to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to acquire appropriate social skills. Many of these opportunities can be integrated into the student's existing course of study. Specific strategies include:

- Role-playing Schools can create opportunities for students with disabilities to practice appropriate social skills in a variety of contexts, including school-based, workplace, community, and postsecondary educational settings.
- Participation in social and emotional learning programs A variety of specific social skill development programs exist that can help students acquire critical social skills.
- Positive school climate Parents should be aware that a positive school climate is critical to helping students with disabilities develop strong social skills. For example, safe and supportive classrooms build on the students' strengths.

Providing the Student and Youth with Support to Make Their Decisions

Beyond developing social skills, it is crucial for students with disabilities to understand and acquire the skills for self-determination during high school to ensure success in postsecondary education and the workplace. Students with strong self-advocacy skills who understand and fully participate in the development of their IEP and Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) have better transition outcomes.

Developing self-determination and making informed choices heighten students' knowledge of the transition process and success in post-school settings. Self-determination activities can be described as activities that result in individuals with developmental disabilities, with appropriate assistance, having the ability, opportunity, authority, and support (including financial support) to:

- Communicate and make personal decisions;
- Communicate choices and exercise control over the type and intensity of services, supports, and other assistance the individual receives;
- Control resources to obtain needed services, supports and other assistance;
- Participate in, and contribute to, their communities; and
- Advocate for themselves and others, develop leadership skills through training in self-advocacy, participate in coalitions, educate policymakers, and play a role in the development of public policies that affect individuals with developmental disabilities.

Foster self-efficacy and goal-setting. Improving goal-setting skills and building self-efficacy (seeing themselves as capable people) are two important themes for students as they approach the transition to adulthood. These two elements also build on each other—that is, when someone knows how to set and achieve goals, they gain an important sense of themselves as a capable person.

Here are five key steps to follow when helping young adults set goals and build self-efficacy:

1. **Observe, identify and listen to your student's interests,** because interests often lead to goals for the future. Help them explore what each interest means in terms of job skills and environments, connect them with other people who do jobs related to that interest, and explore local opportunities for learning about (or even doing) that kind of work. After your student has looked into several options, you might help them create a graphic chart that compares the positives and negatives of each one.
2. **Model the goal-setting process.** Show your student what you do when you set a goal, decide which steps are necessary to achieve that goal, and develop a timeline for successfully achieving your goal. Also, point out the ups and downs you might have had along the way.
3. **Help them with an action plan.** Once you've established a few things your student is interested in doing, assist your student in creating a plan of action to achieve their goals. Help your student create a visual timeline of small steps they want to accomplish in the future. Seeing small steps checked off will not only help them focus on planning and achieving their goals, it will also build positive energy and confidence.
4. **Use small steps to encourage and support bigger things.** For example, your student might job shadow someone doing the kind of work that interests them, and then volunteer in that setting in some capacity.
5. **Always applaud effort.** Positive feedback is essential. Applaud your students when they make an effort, and look for authentic opportunities to say things like, "I'm really impressed—I can see you are working hard on this!" When young adults recognize these as true statements, it will help them believe in their own competence and see themselves as successful people.

Island County Chapter of People First offers an opportunity for adults to learn about self-advocacy, self confidence, community engagement and a perfect way to meet other adults in your community. Contact Diane for more information Email: pmmdfm@cablespeed.com