



EMPLOYMENT

EMPLOYABLE

BUILDING AN EMPLOYEE

As we begin to fight for the New Employee Care Act for those with disabilities, we must also take a good look at how parents, schools, counselors are working together to nurture employability. How are we building effective employees?

It should start long before the Transition Plan is developed by the school's Individual Transition Planning Team and perhaps continued through employment opportunities.

The following skills will need to be inspired, mentored, coached and celebrated early in the child's development so they are able to engage in employment opportunities later in their lives.

- 1) Communication skills need to be developed.
- 2) Developing motivation will be important
- 3) Teaching reliability will be needed
- 4) Learning to follow directions will be necessary
- 5) Developing patience and flexibility will be important
- 6) Team work skills will need to be nurtured
- 7) Problem solving skills will need to be acquired
- 8) Emotional regulation will be need to be taught

So, how can parents make sure that these key employability skills are developed?

- 1) Work with a speech and language therapist as soon as you understand your son or daughter's communication challenges. Request an evaluation early and begin early to develop expressive and receptive communication. Remember verbalization is not the only communication medium you can begin with. Teaching pointing and giving skills helps you understand their comprehension level. Providing pictures for them to share with you creates asking and expressing their needs. Taking your hand towards what they desire expresses communication intention. Some children learn sign language faster than verbalization as their visual skills are strong. Finding a speech therapist with assistive technology knowledge will be extremely helpful.

- 2) There are many communication areas to think about. Your son or daughter needs to be able to greet others, express needs and wants and desires as well as feelings. They need to be able to ask for **HELP**. They need to be able to name objects, people, actions in their world. They need to be able to express first in one word, then phrases and finally in sentences and conversation.
- 3) A parent or a teacher must develop patience and give children opportunities to use all areas of communication. If you communicate for them, they will not develop communication. If there is no reason for them to show you, tell you, ask for etc. what they need, don't need they will not develop communication skills.
- 4) Remember, at work, your adult will be required to ask for clarification on a task, ask for an item he or she may need to complete his job, converse with the boss and co-workers. They may need to ask for permission to take a break, a day off or request a different assignment. They may need to respond to questions asked by co-workers or their supervisor.
- 5) So, be sure very specific goals are set in the areas of meaningful receptive and expressive communication all through school years.
- 6) Some kiddos, teens or adults are not necessarily motivated by the approval of others (social motivation) if a past activity was negative and are asked to do something similar, it will be hard for them to try. If they failed at a past activity and are asked to try something similar it affects their motivation for trying again.
- 7) You have to find out what motivates your child. Look at their interests, happy memories, meaningfulness and what routines satisfy them.
- 8) Help develop coping strategies for things that hinder motivation for them (**Depression, Illness, need for perfection, energy, unpredictability, task switching and processing time, negative memories and failures of the past, lack of meaningfulness of activity for them and lack of purpose of activity for them**)
- 9) Working with your son and daughter to be on time to activities, being prepared for school assignments, being someone you or their sibling can count on, helps foster **dependability**. Teaching them that when they are involved in a group project, their team members are counting on them, will help. Make sure they have house chores and that the whole family depends on them completing their part too.
- 10) Make sure your children understand one and two step **directions**, related and unrelated. Practice giving them directions and cheer them when they follow. (turn on, turn off, put in, put on, put next to, find, get, look for, push, pull, walk, run, hop, jump, drink, stir, rinse, wash, dry).
- 11) Their supervisor at work will be asking them to complete tasks that could have two steps or more. They need practice in performing tasks that have more than one step. The laundry is a great task. Making a meal is perfect. Designing a meal, making a shopping list, shopping and paying for items, then putting them away is just the right activity to build instruction following.
- 12) Another area of challenge is flexibility in (thought, opinions, facts, strategies) and in behaviors (routines, schedules, routes) Adapting to change is hard. Considering multi-sources of input is hard. Revising plans on unexpected obstacles is hard.
- 13) So, **change** routines, schedules and routes during their week and help them see there are a variety of ways to get places, that it's okay to change activity times on weekends and that they can try different restaurants and different grocery stores and still enjoy favorite items.
- 14) Teachers, **rotate** learning spaces, lining up spaces, school chores, subject learning and offer a variety of ways to perform a task.

- 15) **Teach perspective taking.** Show them people think differently and have different likes and dislikes. Everyone may like ice cream, but five people might like a different flavor. Have them do research on people and create biographies of likes, fears, interests, feelings. Give them a camera and have them take pictures of objects, people, places from different views (top, bottom, right side, back side, left side). Show them there are different ways to look at things. Have them all start with a story but write 3 different endings.
- 16) It will be important for your son or daughter to be able to identify what causes his/her anxieties and how to self-regulate them during the employment day. Some employment may not be appropriate if noise, smell, lights are so overwhelming that your son/daughter's task cannot be completed. If directions are not clear enough or expectations understood and they become frustrated and give up, a place of employment may not be appropriate. If your young adult doesn't know how to ask for help when they get stuck on a task, anxiety could mount and they may never finish what is asked of them.
- 17) Your son or daughter will need to know how to **self-advocate** for themselves and be able to ask for accommodations. Can they sit in a particular space? Can they wear earplugs or noise canceling headsets? Can they take a few more breaks, somewhere quiet? They made need to work less hours per week to keep stress levels down. They may need to eat alone.

So, as we cheer for the new Autism Employee Act to be passed, let's do our part and get our children, teens and young adults truly ready for employment. We have a great deal of work to do.