

## **Family Involvement during Transition of Youth**

### **All youth need parents, families and other caring adults who:**

- Have a high expectation which build upon the young person's strengths, interests, and needs and fosters their ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency;
- Are involved in their lives and assisting them toward adulthood;
- Have access to information about employment, further education, and community resources;
- Take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners; and
- Have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks.

### **In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families and other caring adults who:**

- Have an understanding of their youth's disability and how it affects his or her education, employment, and/or daily living options;
- Have knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation;
- Have knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports, and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and
- Have an understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives.

## **Parent Tips for Transition Planning**

Successful and meaningful transition services are the result of careful planning. This planning is driven by a young person's dreams, desires, and abilities. It builds a youth's participation in school, home and community living. Transition planning helps to prepare young people for their future. It helps them to develop skills they need to go on to other education programs after high school. It builds skills to live, work, and play in the community. It helps to build independence. Youth learn important adult decision making roles when they participate in this school-based planning.

### **Must transition planning be part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP)?**

Transition planning is required in the IEP for students by age 16. Many students will begin this planning at age 14 or earlier so that they have the time to build skills they will need as adults. Parents should feel comfortable asking for transition planning to start earlier than age 16 if they believe it is needed. Transition planning, goals, and services will be different for each student.

Transition services include instruction, community experiences and building employment skills. They include post-school adult living objectives and, if needed, daily living skills training and functional vocational evaluations. All of these services must be provided in a manner that is sensitive to a student's cultural background and native language.

Transition services are based on a student's strengths as well as needs. They consider a young person's preferences and interests. Activities that are part of transition services must be results-oriented. This means that they are focused on building specific skills.

### **Must students be involved in transition planning?**

Schools are required to invite students to participate in their IEP meetings whenever transition goals or services are considered. Transition services are a required component of IEPs for students age 16 and older, and should be routinely discussed at IEP meetings. These services may become part of discussion and planning as early as the IEP team finds is needed for an individual student. (Some states require transition planning beginning at age 14.)

### **What if my child does not attend his or her IEP meeting?**

If a youth is unable to participate in his or her IEP meeting or chooses not to attend, school personnel must take steps to ensure that the youth's preferences and interests are considered in developing the IEP.

The best transition plans are those that help youth achieve their dreams and aspirations. Youth should be included in all aspects of planning and goal setting, and encouraged to participate at IEP meetings. This participation helps keep team members focused on the young person's individual needs and desires. It also helps the youth to develop the skills for making decisions and becoming a self-advocate. Preparing a young person for his or her role in transition planning helps them to become knowledgeable members of the IEP team.

### **How can I be sure that the IEP meets my child's transition needs?**

Transition services begin with age-appropriate transition assessments. They include student and parent interviews, interest and skill inventories and other tools. In order for an IEP to meet a student's transition needs, both parents and school personnel participate in the assessment. The school does this through assessments and observations. Parents do it through day-to-day knowledge and talks with their child about their goals and dreams. Answering the following questions may help guide how parents and students prepare for and participate in an effective IEP meeting that is focused on transition planning:

*What does the young person want to do with his or her life?*

What are his or her dreams, aspirations, or goals? The youth's answers should be incorporated into all aspects of transition planning. If a young person is nonverbal or has difficulty communicating, parents can still use their knowledge of their child to be sure that transition planning and services reflect the youth's preferences and choices.

*What are the young person's needs, abilities, and skills?*

Parents should be familiar with how much assistance their child needs or does not need to accomplish tasks.

*What are the outcomes that the youth and parents want?*

Parents and their child should bring suggestions to the transition planning meeting. Suggestions might include the kind of services, actions, or planning they believe is needed to achieve desired goals in the transition section of the IEP.

*Will the young person attend the transition IEP conference?*

Parents can help by encouraging their son or daughter to attend. He or she will be invited. Together, parents and youth can prepare for the meeting. If the youth does not attend, parents may represent their desires and wishes.

*How do young people develop self-advocacy skills?* Parents and school staff should encourage self-advocacy in young people. Staff should direct questions to the youth, even when it is the parents who may provide answers. It is important to encourage young people to have and state (by any means available to them) their own opinions. It is important for students to understand their disability and to ask for the accommodations they may need.

*What are the programs, services, accommodations, or modifications the young person wants or needs?* Parents and their youth need to think about and be clear on what they want or need. IEP team discussions address these topics, but often parents and young people have had conversations at home that will be useful in planning.

*What kinds of accommodations will students need when they go on to higher education or employment?* Parents and youth need to think what accommodations will be needed after high school and how the youth will obtain them.

*Who will be responsible for what part of the transition plan in the IEP?*

It is wise for parents and youth to know who is responsible for each transition goal. Each task should have a specific timeline that is included in the IEP.

*Should the educational and transition programs emphasize practical or academic goals?*

Does the young person need a combination of both? This will depend on the goals of each individual student.

*What are the community-based training opportunities the school provides?*

Parents and their child should decide how much to participate in those activities.

*If a student plans on going to college, is he or she taking the courses needed to meet college entrance requirements? When will the young person graduate?*

What kind of diploma option is the best choice?

*Are work experience classes appropriate to reach employment goals?*

Research suggests that youth have more successful employment outcomes after high school if they have had hands-on, work-based learning experiences as students.

*How could the educational and transition program be more integrated into the regular program? Who will attend the IEP meeting?*

Parents and the youth should become familiar with the roles and functions of team members. They should also know what community agencies might be present (vocational rehabilitation, etc.). Parents may request that a specific community agency be invited to the IEP meeting if the youth is or may be using services from that agency. Becoming familiar with adult service systems or agencies now can be helpful in making future decisions.

At times parents may want a family member, friend, or advocate to go to planning meetings with them for support or to take notes. Parents and youth will want to have a copy of the daily school schedule each quarter or semester. It is important to have information on all classes available so that their child can participate in selecting classes and the scheduling process.

A final tip: Parents will need to start thinking about their child's legal status before he or she turns 18. If a youth is not able to make informed decisions about major issues (medical treatment, living accommodations, financial arrangements, etc.), the family may need to learn more about guardianship or conservatorship.

IDEA 2004 requires that students be notified at least one year in advance of the rights that will transfer to the student upon reaching the age of majority (becoming a legal adult in that state). These rights include being the responsible person for planning and agreeing or disagreeing with services in the IEP. It is important that parents understand what this means for them and their role in planning. The age of majority is 18 in most states. By learning as much as possible about the options available for transition planning, a parent can ensure that their young person's rights are protected while they are learning the skills needed to develop independence.

# How Families Can Build Skills at Home

## COMMUNICATION SKILLS

### Does your child need to work on speech communication skills?

According to annual surveys done by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, communication skills consistently rank among the top skills employers look for in a new employee. Helping youth improve communication skills will not only help them get a job, it can help them advance in their careers.

### How to Help:

1. Use a flip cam or cell phone to record your child giving directions for using the microwave or doing something they are good at, such as playing a computer game. Review the video with them. Did they speak clearly? Were the instructions clear? Other family members and friends can provide feedback as well.
2. Help your son or daughter build vocabulary by learning one new word each day by using resources such as Word of the Day (<http://dictionary.reference.com/wordoftheday>) or a dictionary.
3. Encourage your youth to participate in school activities that promote clear communication, such as a debate team.
4. Discuss the different types of communication one might use in different environments such as with friends, in the classroom, in a professional setting, and with family. Doing so, would help your son or daughter understand what might be acceptable and expected in one setting may not be appropriate in another setting.
5. Use a five-point scale to teach appropriate speaking volume or standing distance. For example, if your child tends to use a loud voice, teach him to equate his voice with a number. If the loudest voice is a five and a one is a soft voice teach him that using a two or three level voice is good at work.
6. Suggest programming job-related phrases into your child's augmentative communication device, if he or she uses one. These may include "How may I help you?" and "Please wait while I find the answer to your question."

## **Does your family member pay attention to what others are saying and remember what was said?**

Listening to other's needs and opinions is part of being a good communicator. Understanding and remembering what is said are important skills for the workplace when interacting with employers and customers.

### **How to Help:**

1. Encourage your child to have conversations with family and friends. Listening to others and contributing to the conversation will help him develop listening skills.
2. Model listening skills for your youth. Pay attention to speakers, repeat what was said, and ask questions.
3. Give your family member directions for doing a chore such as laundry, mowing the lawn, or straightening a room, and then have him repeat the instructions in his own words.
4. Have your child take beverage orders when guests visit. If needed, your son or daughter can take notes to remember who ordered what.
5. Consider the accommodations your child may use in school. If your child uses accommodations to help pay attention to and understand the instructors in school, discuss how similar accommodations could be used in employment settings.

## **Does your son or daughter communicate nonverbally in an effective way?**

Much communication is nonverbal. Nonverbal communication is important when interacting with employers, coworkers, and customers. Youth may need to improve aspects of nonverbal communication, such as making proper eye contact. In addition, some youth have disabilities that make it difficult to read the nonverbal communication of others such as facial expressions and gestures. Families can help their youth improve these skills by practicing at home.

### **How to Help:**

1. Have your family member look people in the eye and shake hands when introducing him to other adults. Practice the nonverbal language that would take place at a job interview. Let your son or daughter know that it's important to have eye contact with the person doing the interviewing and to limit fidgeting or nervous movements.
2. Model proper posture, such as standing up straight instead of slouching. Remind your child that proper posture communicates confidence.

3. Show and explain that communication skills and personal boundaries may differ based on the setting and situation. For instance, a friend could demonstrate an acceptable distance between two people who are not related to one another, usually 1.5 to 4 feet. Have your child practice this.
4. Discuss other potential strategies to improve communication skills with a young person's IEP team and include a related goal, if he has a disability. If your child does not have an IEP, discuss strategies and related goals with his teachers and instructors. One strategy could be to have him look at a person's nose or cheek if looking in someone's eye is too distressing. It will appear as though he is making eye contact.

### **INTERPERSONAL SKILLS**

#### **Is your child ready to take direction from and work cooperatively with others?**

Teamwork and the ability to work well with others consistently appear among the highest ranked qualities employers are looking for in an employee in the annual surveys of National Association of Colleges and Employers. In today's world, this includes the ability to communicate and work with people from different racial, religious, ability, and ethnic groups.

#### **How to Help:**

1. Encourage your child to help an elderly neighbor with yard work or volunteer as a family to serve a meal at a homeless shelter. Youth can learn about working with others by volunteering.
2. Play games as a family and encourage team work. Board games help youth build many skills that apply to work: cooperating with others, taking turns, following rules, controlling emotions, and learning new knowledge and skills.
3. Encourage your son or daughter to play a team sport. Sports help youth learn communication skills, decision making, self-control, and self-discipline as well as learning how to work on a team. If your child isn't skilled enough to play on the school team, consider opportunities to play sports at the local "Y", community center, or with a faith-based center.
4. Introduce your child to people who are different from him through taking part in community festivals that feature different cultures, attending various places of worship, or through books, magazines, film, television, or the internet.
5. Start conversations about differences. Acknowledge that some people have

ideas about people who are different from them.

6. Discuss the situation if your family member experiences any type of discrimination. Talk about why discrimination exists. Reflect upon the feelings that come up when someone discriminates against a person and use it as an opportunity to teach the importance of not acting that way towards another.

### **Does your youth know how to handle conflicts?**

Self-control, respecting others, and being able to deal with conflict are important soft skills. Refusing to follow directions and orders and the inability to get along with other people are among the most common reasons people get fired.

#### **How to Help:**

1. Help your child understand how his behavior may contribute to a misunderstanding. If he talks about a social mishap that happened at work, help him reflect on the situation. Ask your child to determine what he did right, and also discuss if there was anything he or his work colleagues could have done differently. If necessary, discuss next steps to address the misunderstanding.
2. Practice how to handle challenging situations with role play. Choose roles and have your son or daughter respond. Talk about appropriate behaviors.
3. Discuss ways that people on television shows handle anger. Many shows involve people fighting or otherwise acting out their anger. While watching one of these shows with your youth, talk about ways people can handle anger appropriately, such as counting to ten, taking a time out, or going for a run. Ask your family member what might work for him.
4. Explain to your son or daughter that taking directions and accepting constructive criticism is a part of being an employee. Reinforce this skill by giving directions in the home for such things as chores. Make sure your child responds appropriately to the directions given, and practice more appropriate responses if she does not.
5. Remind your child to treat others the way she wishes to be treated. Acknowledge that this is difficult when others are being rude, disrespectful, or mean. Talk about when it's important to stand up for oneself, and when it's best to just walk away.
6. Apologize to your son or daughter if necessary. Nothing makes a bigger impression on teens than adults admitting they were wrong.

## **Is your child careful with his appearance?**

Good personal hygiene and appearance promotes social interaction with others while poor hygiene can give employers and co-workers a bad impression.

### **How to Help:**

1. Discuss personal cleanliness, stressing that most workplaces require employees to dress in a specific way and to be clean.
2. Require that your youth be dressed appropriately and have good hygiene when attending school, family functions, shopping trips, restaurants and/or faith based organizations.
3. Model personal hygiene and dress to reflect what dressing professionally looks like.

## **Is your son or daughter friendly, courteous, and tactful?**

Employers are looking for employees with good people skills. While especially important in jobs where employees interact with customers, people skills can also help interactions with co-workers, avoid conflict, and stand out from other job applicants or employees.

### **How to Help:**

1. Teach your child phrases she can use on the phone: “May I please speak to Mr. Smith?” or in the workplace, “I’m Deborah. It’s nice to meet you.” Have your son or daughter answer the phone at home in a professional and courteous manner.
2. Teach your family member to allow others to finish speaking before beginning to talk.
3. Identify areas of social difficulty for your child and role play how to handle new or unfamiliar situations. Role playing gives her an opportunity to practice what she would say and do in various situations.
4. Sign up your child with a disability for social skills trainings at school, independent living centers, disability groups, or self-advocacy organizations. These organizations and others provide youth with a structured opportunity to learn and practice social skills such as taking turns or giving compliments.

## LIFELONG LEARNING SKILLS

### **Does your family member demonstrate personal responsibility, initiative, self-management, and perseverance?**

A strong work ethic, initiative, and decision-making skills are other skills employers consistently rank highly in the annual surveys of the National Association of Colleges and Employers.

#### **How to Help:**

1. Have your son or daughter take responsibility for taking care of a pet or getting ready for school or work.
2. Give your child full responsibility for planning and preparing a family meal at least once a month. Help her at first, until she learns all the steps it takes to cook a family meal.
3. Have your youth take charge of a task. For example, if she is planning to get a driver's license, have her call the Department of Motor Vehicles and make a list of the steps involved (getting a permit, enrolling in driver's education, taking written and behind-the-wheel tests, getting insurance).
4. Help your son or daughter understand the unspoken expectations of employers: showing up on time, avoiding personal calls or texting at work, or if working in a public place such as a retail store or the food court at the mall, not having friends hang out at work.
5. Have your family member visit a parent's workplace, if the job allows this. She can learn different tasks associated with the job or follow other employees to learn what is involved in their jobs.
6. Enroll your son or daughter in a mentor program. Mentors can help youth on many levels: building self-esteem, learning to stick with challenging activities, managing time, and communicating with other adults.

## **Does your youth try to learn new things?**

- Take your child to concerts, sporting events, or encourage participation in activities that match her interests.
- Ask your child to identify a simple, fun skill to learn. This could include cooking a certain recipe, working with a specific computer program, or learning a new game. Have him research information on steps for learning the skill and then help him follow the steps.
- Call or check online to find out about events that are open to the public at local colleges, art schools, music academies, museums or libraries. Family members can attend together and learn something new.
- Help your family member be independent by having him plan an outing using public transportation. Have your youth look up online or call the bus or subway department to find out routes, costs, bus stops, etc. Have your child look into using accessible transportation services, if he is eligible. Make sure your child identifies which bus or subway to take, its departure time, and the right time to leave the house. If public transportation services are not available, have your son or daughter arrange for a ride from a friend.

## **MAKING THE COMMITMENT FOR SUCCESS**

Both at home and at school, families and other caring adults play a vital role in helping young people with and without disabilities build work skills that will help them be successful in employment.

Families, who are aware of the expectations of employers, understand that they are partners in helping youth prepare for and maintain employment, and use everyday activities in the home to build work skills give their youth a much better chance of succeeding in the job search and in the workplace.