

The Transition to Employment: What Parents Can Do Now

Interviewing, finding a job, and going to work every day may seem like distant goals for your child right now, but you can still do things today to prepare youth for future employment.

Takeaways from this handout:

- Parents have an important role in helping youth plan for future employment.
- There are four basic steps parents can take to support their youth's development of employment skills and to investigate employment options in the home and community.

The first step in thinking about employment is to explore interests, skills, and dreams.

- Write down tasks, responsibilities, and interests your youth has at home, in school, or in the community. Those skills and interests can help define a career.
- Encourage your son or daughter to explore a variety of jobs or volunteer activities while in high school. Doing so will help him or her be better prepared to decide on a career path, identify needed job supports, and be successful at work.
- Ask your youth to think about jobs he or she would like. Talk about different careers when you see people working at the grocery store, near an office building, when passing a fire truck, or while watching TV. Remind youth that many people are needed to make a product or supply a service. For example, to buy bread in the grocery store, someone needs to bake it, slice it, bag it, label it with a price tag and deliver it to the store, where it needs to be put on the shelf. Talking about the many jobs available in

the world will keep your child's mind open to all types of career opportunities and possibilities.

- If you have a computer, you might help youth complete an online assessment and create an interest inventory. Many exist but you can start with jobcenter.usa.gov.

The next step is to discover how interests, dreams, and skills relate to employment possibilities.

- Talk about what you do at your job. If appropriate, invite your youth to your place of employment.
- Visit local businesses with your youth to explore career opportunities.
- Have your son or daughter observe essential functions of an occupation by job shadowing someone you know who works in a field of interest.
- Arrange for informational interviews with friends or family members to gain firsthand information about their jobs. Help your youth think of questions to ask. Help him or her write a follow-up thank you note to the person he or she interviewed.
- Use web-based resources to research labor market trends and occupations that align with your son or daughter's skills and areas of interest. A place to start is careerinfonet.org.
- You may also want to contact a local vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor. Each state has a VR program to help eligible individuals prepare for, find, and keep a job. VR services can help determine the types of jobs that are a good match to your son or daughter's abilities and interests.
- Participate with the IEP team in developing career exploration goals and services to be written in the IEP.

Having a job or work experience during high school is another important step toward post-school employment success. Parents can help:

- Plan for work-based learning opportunities in high school. These experiences and the supports needed for success can be included as a transition service in the IEP.
- Encourage internship opportunities. These experiences are helpful because they allow students to learn by doing and can be stepping stones to future employment.
- Consider self-employment in the community as an option, such as babysitting or doing lawn care.
- Explore volunteer opportunities that allow your youth to experience a job, develop a routine, and learn about responsibility. Volunteer work can sometimes lead to part-time or full-time employment.
- Important note: if your son or daughter receives benefits through Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid, or plans to apply for these benefits at age 18, you may want to determine how a job might impact those benefits. To learn more about this part of the process, refer to additional PACER handouts available at pacer.org/transition/learning-center/benefits

Another step, as you explore employment options, is to take note of your child's "soft skills."

"Soft skills are the skills, traits, work habits, and attitudes that all workers across all occupations must have in order to obtain, maintain, and progress in employment. These include being dependable, responsible, punctual, adaptable, honest, honorable, well-mannered, positive toward work, and appropriately dressed and groomed. Soft skills also refer to such attributes as the ability to get along with others, work in teams, attend to tasks, work independently, and provide excellent customer service, both within the company and externally." –National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth

Parents can do much to help their youth develop these important skills. Having good "soft skills" will increase your son or daughter's chances of finding and maintaining employment. Consider the following ideas:

- To improve communication and active listening skills, encourage youth to join a social skills group outside of school through Centers for Independent Living (CILs), self-advocacy organizations, or other disability organizations. The IEP may include a related communication goal.

- Encourage good personal hygiene and stress that most workplaces require their employees to be well-groomed and to dress appropriately.
- Help youth develop a sense of responsibility by assigning household chores.
- Look for opportunities for your son or daughter to work cooperatively with others by participating in a team sport, volunteering in the community, or engaging in teamwork at home when doing daily chores.
- Create opportunities to practice independence, learn a new skill, or encourage youth to join extracurricular activities of interest.
- Practice following directions, how to handle conflict, and how to use good manners.
- Be clear when tasks need to be done in a timely manner and practice if necessary.
- Enforce expectations of personal responsibility by creating an organizational system to keep track of appointments, schoolwork, and social events.
- Request a copy of PACER's "Top Secret Job Skills: Declassified," an animated, interactive CD for transition-age teens, with and without disabilities, to learn the interpersonal skills needed to be successful in the interview and on the job. Visit PACER.org/publications/transition.asp to order.
- Participate with the IEP team in developing "soft skills" goals and services that will be written in the IEP.

For ideas on taking these steps with your child, read the handout "Talk to Your Child about Employment" at pacer.org/transition/learning-center/planning/preparing-employment.asp