

Enhancing the lives of children with disabilities

This handout offers tips on helping children with disabilities prepare to make the transition to adulthood.

While some tips can be used from birth, others are more appropriate for the older child.

HOW TO GET THERE

See the adult in the child – When providing services and support to a young child with a disability, keep in mind a picture of the kind of adult you would like to see them become. As they get older, they can modify this goal as they choose.

Focus on the child, not the condition – View the child as the person they are, not as a diagnosis.

Assume success – From the beginning, assume that your goals and wishes will come true. While you should be open to changing your goals when necessary, try to avoid a “can’t do it”/ “won’t be able to” attitude.

Start at birth - Focus on the child’s special gifts and abilities from the start. Family members and care providers will then take their cues from you.

Seek out guidance wherever it can be found – Try to continually search for support and knowledge wherever you can find it. Take advantage of credible information and learn from the life experiences of others.

Be a squeaky wheel - Make your desires and feelings known to others. If it feels that “the system” is not meeting your child’s needs then shout louder, work harder, and join others who feel the same way you do. Eventually, change will come.

STAYING HAPPY

Work through the grief – Both parents need time to come to terms with an unexpected disability so that they can see their child in a positive light.

Appreciate the little things in life – Be thankful for a smile, a sunrise, the warmth of a hug. These things, not possessions, are what life is really about.

What can your child DO? Focus on the child’s abilities, not on their limitations.

Seek out resources – to help with respite care, extracurricular activities, etc.

Promote friendships – for the child with the disability by involving them in community events

Support parents and siblings - Don’t forget that they need special care, too. Look into retreats and sibling workshop opportunities

Be in the moment – While you can’t help rethinking the past or worrying about the future, try to focus on what’s happening here and now.

(continued)

STAYING HEALTHY

Know/ learn about the condition – Use textbooks, support groups, and the internet to become knowledgeable about the condition and challenges associated with your child’s disability.

Reinforce good health habits – Start healthy tooth brushing, eating, and exercise habits early on

Don’t forget the simple things – While some medical problems happen more often to children with disabilities, keep in mind that ear infections, sore throats, and colds happen more often than more rare illnesses.

Well woman care – Young women with disabilities need gynecological care and guidance just as much (if not more) than their non-disabled peers.

S, D, and R&R – Don’t forget to talk to a teenager with a disability about common adolescent challenges like Sex, Drugs (and Rock & Roll!)

LEARNING TO BE INDEPENDENT

Chores, Discipline, Expectations – Assign developmentally and physically appropriate chores to the child with a disability and expect them to follow the house rules or be punished just like their siblings.

Ask the Child with a disability what they want to be when they grow up - Future goals, whether attainable or not, enable the child to start seeing themselves as productive contributors in the future.

Interpersonal skills- Help the child work on their handshakes, eye contact, and speaking in public so that they’ll give a good first impression to new people they meet.

Get organized (priorities, time) Help the child learn to prioritize what’s important to them and work on time management skills

Vocational Rehab/ College - Get the school’s vocational rehab counselors involved once the child turns 14 years old so they have enough time to help the child make and attain future educational and employment choices.

If these tips seem overwhelming to a parent who is dealing with the day to day challenges of surviving with their child, consider choosing a limited number of goals to work on at any one time and refer back to this sheet when ready.

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