
Parent Guide

Helping Your Student Prepare for Life and Work

The transition from high school to the world of work or higher education can be a challenging experience for young adults with visual impairments, and their families. Parenting a teenager is never easy, but when a young person is visually impaired, families often have additional concerns about the future, and what their children will be when they “grow up.”

Employment options are many and should not be limited by misconceptions, misinformation and low expectations. With some pro-active planning, you can help your young person begin moving toward the next stage of a productive life.

To help your student prepare for life as an independent adult, it’s important that you expect him or her to be that person. Have the same expectations as you would for any other teen: that they will enter adulthood prepared, self-sufficient and ready to work. The potential for children with visual impairments to succeed depends a great deal on family expectations, education and training, and community support. Begin preparing early, no matter what your child plans to do after high school.

Here are some practical tips that you can share with your student to help them take charge of their future:
Parent Tips

No matter what the plan for the future, your student with a visual impairment will need to:

- **Take care of their personal living needs, including hygiene, grooming, meal preparation, shopping, time and money management, planning for accommodation needs and other independent living skills.** Chores and responsibilities at home provide valuable practice for independent living. Consult with your student’s teacher of the visually impaired (TVI) and educators for ideas about age appropriate responsibilities and accommodations to support good independent living skills.

- **Feel like he/she fits in.** Your child’s openness and comfort level about his or her visual impairment will go a long way in helping others feel comfortable as well. Help your child accept and understand his or her visual impairment without overemphasizing it.

- **Develop and practice social skills.** Expect your student to shake hands, make eye contact, ask questions and participate in a wide array of conversations, to prepare for social interactions in the workplace.

- **Have strong orientation and mobility (O&M) skills to be comfortable to travel to the places they need and want to go.** You won’t always be available to provide transportation, so encouraging your child to gain independence, and the confidence to travel in the community, is important. If your child has an O&M instructor, partner with them to create strategies to reinforce mobility skills at home and in the community.

- **Learn as much as possible about available technology.** The use of
assistive technology can be so important for success in employment or post-secondary education. Help your student to develop skills to monitor their own needs and to match them with appropriate technology tools. Partner with your school to provide opportunities for your student to experiment with a variety of assistive technology devices and office technology such as Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook, and PowerPoint.

**Resources:**
- The Carroll Center for the Blind ([http://www.carroll.org](http://www.carroll.org))
- The Hadley School for the Blind ([http://www.hadley.edu/](http://www.hadley.edu/))
- TechACCESS of RI ([http://www.techaccess-ri.org/](http://www.techaccess-ri.org/))

- **Develop strong self-determination skills.** To be successful in the workplace, young people must develop skills including goal setting, decision making, problem solving, self-knowledge and self-advocacy. Research supports the idea that youth who leave high school with well-developed self-determination skills have a greater chance of becoming employed and living independently. Help your student to develop strong self-determination skills by creating a supportive environment which allows them to take risks, test their abilities and limitations, develop problem solving skills, and practice positive work habits and behaviors. An understanding of oneself, including limitations, is essential to becoming an effective self-advocate.

**Resources:**
- The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities ([http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure))
- Fostering Self-Determination Among Children and Youth with Disabilities—Ideas from Parents for Parents ([http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/naturalsupports/pdfs/FosteringSelfDetermination.pdf](http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/naturalsupports/pdfs/FosteringSelfDetermination.pdf))