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# Building Self-Determination

## For Parents of Young Adults with Learning Differences

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### Part I: What is Self-Determination?

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### Building Self-Determination in My Teen

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Ms. Panter and Dr. Mitchell are a mother/daughter team who work with students, teachers, and parents in the field of special education. Beth was in special education since second grade and while, Dr. Mitchell was a special education teacher, she was also the mother of a daughter in special education. Beth and Vickie use not only what is backed by education research and practices to train others, but they also teach what they learned as a mother and daughter walking down the road of special education services. As Beth tells students, “your disability does not fall off of you because you are an adult. You must learn early in life that your disability is not who you are. So, learn who you are, what works for you, and learn how to help yourself.”

Your young adult and his/her special education teacher will be working on self-determination skills. The self-determination strategies are designed to teach young adults how to help themselves. But there is another very important team member and that is YOU, the parent. The information in Part I, II, III, IV, and V are designed to provide ideas to parents on how to help their young adult learn self-help/self-determination skills at home.

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### **What is Self-determination?**

As parents, we work hard to raise our children to be the adults of tomorrow. What we know is that “building the adults of tomorrow” is a step-by-step, day-by-day building process that begins when your teen is born. We also know that we cannot wait until our teen turns 16 or is a senior in high school to begin to develop responsible adult skills, whether they have a disability or not. Developing “self-reliant” children begins even before elementary school. It really begins as toddlers or some researcher say it begins earlier than that.

Two key skills in self-determination is the ability to solve problems and set goals. Educational research about successful young adults indicates that the earlier a teen learns self-determination skills the more likely they are to use these skills when they are teenagers and later as adults.

So, what is self-determination? Well, it is composed of two words, “self” and “determined.” Self-determination is the ability to begin to take control of one’s life, to make decisions, set goals, and basically to learn to help yourself. A self-determined person learns to use plans to meet goals for life, home, and/or school. Successful adults have self-determination skills. It is what gives us the attitude and skills to become self-reliant. As parents, if we do not help teenagers learn self-determination as soon as possible.

Teens without self-determination skills often find it difficult to make choices and make decisions. It is important for success in adult life to possess these skills. We are lucky today because we do not lead the difficult life our grandparents and parents had. Most teenagers will probably did not work on the farms or industry. Our children have every conceivable piece of equipment to clean the house and get any other job done. No many of our sons are outside fixing cars in their spare time

any more because the technology is so complex, nothing is simple to fix. The advantages we have today are also our disadvantage. When teens of previous generations had the type of adult experiences described above, they learned decision-making, the good and bad of adult consequences, etc. In today's world, our teens will not learn this unless we specifically take the time to teach it. Today's teenager is smarter and better equipped to be more successful than their ancestors, but the world in which they live does not provide them opportunities to learn adult skills the way life did for previous generations. Hopefully, we have made the case and convinced you to become a team member in helping teach self-determination skills to your teen.

Start now. Remember they are still teenagers so they won't learn the skill immediately or quickly. But you will see a difference, as your young adult gets older.

By starting now and helping them build self-determination skills over time, you will help to develop some very important survival skills in your young adult. We all learn differently and at a different pace. For teens with more significant disabilities, the teen may not be independent, as an adult, but it does not mean they must be totally reliant upon other people to all of their decisions or choices.

Start now. Even if a young adult does not understand special education or their disability, rest assured they know there is a problem. A struggling teen knows they struggle when other teens do not. However, without information to understand the disability (not the definition, just how the disability affects them) teenagers come up with an explanation in their head and simply think, "Something is wrong with me." The absence of information can result in some very interesting and sometimes troublesome personal beliefs. What every parent CAN DO is talk to their teen about the STRUGGLE. Be positive not negative or gloomy. There are many successful adults with disabilities but they will all tell you that attitude and the "I can" philosophy goes a long way toward success. If you don't believe that, then you are in for a big surprise when you go to the 20-year reunion for your high school graduation class!!

Help your teen to understand that their struggle or disability is not who they are. It is simply something we must work with, work around, or sometimes get some help to get the job done. It is no different than the mother who wears glasses, the grandfather with high blood pressure, or the aunt who has diabetes. The health condition is not who they are and as long as they know how it affects them and what to do so they can go on and live their life. Knowledge about oneself provides greater possibilities for the future.

That is what we are talking about with self-determination:

- Building decision-makers,
- Goal-setters, and
- Leaders from elementary school through high school.

## **How can I help my teen have more self-determination?**

1. Encourage your teen to make choices in their every day life
2. Help them to identify their strengths
3. Help your teen understand choice and consequences
4. Help your teen make goals
5. Promote disability awareness (*They don't have to know the technical stuff or all the logistics ... just help them to understand they have a weakness but they also have strengths. Just like different medicines, there are lots of side affects to a disability but we don't always have all of them ... just because your teen has a certain disability does not mean he or she has all of the characteristics of that disability that you read about in a book or on the internet. Don't look for problems, look for strengths and create opportunities.*)
6. Help your teen with problem solving

**Did you know that, ONE YEAR AFTER GRADUATING FROM HIGH SCHOOL, children with disabilities who have self-determination skills are more likely to have a job and/or be attending postsecondary education than students without self-determination skills?**

*Wehmeyer & Palmer (2002). Self-Determination and the education of students with disabilities. ERIC Digest #E-632.*

## **Below is a list of Internet sites to learn more about self-determination:**

1. **I'm Determined** <https://www.imdetermined.org/>
2. **The Self-Determination Handbook**  
<http://www.authorstream.com:80/Presentation/Garrick-35463-self-determination-handbook-Continued-People-Want-Skills-Use-Life-Choose-Or-Ar-as-Entertainment-ppt-powerpoint/>
3. **National Center on Secondary Education and Transition**  
<http://www.ncset.org/>
4. **Self-determination.org** <http://www.self-determination.org/>
5. <http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/eric/e632.html>

## Part I Self-Determination Activity for Parents

The next time your teen has a problem at home, take the opportunity to teach real-life problem solving. Use a small problem that is easily solved to teach the problem-solving skill. CAUTION: When learning a new strategy or technique, DO NOT use it on a “big” problem or the learning will be lost by the stress of the BIG problem. Start with small problems. Follow these steps:

A Problem-Solving Strategy	
Steps for Problem-Solving	Actions
1. Identify the problem	<i>Ask questions to help your teen identify the problem. Write the problem below:</i>
2. Determine the cause	<i>Help your teen determine the cause. If there is more than one cause, identify the main cause:</i>
3. Brainstorm Solutions	<i>Solution #1:</i> <i>Solution#2:</i>
4. Predict possible outcomes	<i>Solution #1:</i> <i>Outcomes</i>
	<i>Solution #2:</i> <i>Outcomes</i>
5. Select the desired outcome (Goal)	<i>Of the possible outcomes you and your teen identified, which one did your teen select as the one he/she liked best. (his/her goal)</i>
6. Develop a plan	<i>Have your teen describe what he/she will do to meet the goal and set a deadline date to accomplish the goal:</i>
7. Implement the plan	<i>Have your teen report to you on a regular basis the progress he/she has in implementing the plan. Give encouraging words. Take notes on what is working and not working. This will help you know what other skills your teen needs to learn for problem-solving at home.</i>
8. Meeting the Goal	<i>- If your teen has trouble meeting the goal, talk about why and revise the plan with a new deadline. - If your teen meets the goal, CELEBRATE. Developing a plan, following the plan and reaching a goal is an ADULT skill, which can be learned by young adults. Parents, you celebrate too!! Your teen could not have learned this skill without you.</i>

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## Part II: What Can Parents Do At Home?

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## **WHAT YOU CAN DO AT HOME:**

**Note:** *One of the challenges we have parenting teenagers is the same challenge we have teaching self-determination skills to teens. It is the tendency of teens to be emotional, whether it is the male teen that becomes angry or the female teen that throws a teen tantrum. And then there is the “complacent teen” that pretends not to care. But remember what is important to teens: being heard by someone who listens, being encouraged by someone who cares, being respected by someone they respect, and being motivated by something they care about. Use these characteristics of teenagers to get their attention and teach self-determination skills.*

### **Middle School/Junior High School**

1. Allow choice making: *(This will allow your teen to feel free to make choices but with you still in control)*
  - a. “This weekend we need to visit your grandparents Saturday morning and we have church on Sunday morning. What are your plans for the rest of the weekend?” (Here you are letting the teen know the family responsibilities while at the same time reminding them they do have control over the remainder of the weekend schedule.)
2. “What method do you want to use to get yourself up for school? I can wake you up or you can use your alarm clock or alarm on your cell phone.” *(Make sure your teen knows you have a plan to solve the problem but you want them to come up with the plan.)*
3. Ask questions. Try this one when the teen has made a good decision: “I am curious, what did you think about that caused you to make that decision?” Then compliment your teen on his or her decision-making process.
  - a. When you first use this strategy, use it to ask about decisions that were correct with good results. This way it starts as a positive conversation. You are also teaching that decisions we make in life can have good or bad results, so learning how to “think about problems and come up with an effective plan to solve the problem” is a very important adult skill.
  - b. Soon your teen will be used to an adult exchange that did not find fault when what they did. When you see a problem on the horizon or a problem that already occurred, have the same conversation but be sure to stay away from fault-finding! Help your young adult analyze where the thinking went wrong that resulted in the outcome they did not want. Backtrack with your teen to help them think about what to do differently the next time the problem arises.
4. Provide feedback: *(provide feedback for everything)*
  - a. We get so busy as parents that it is the things that go wrong that we notice the most and try to correct with our children. Sometimes we forget to “catch them being good” or making good decisions.
  - b. “You made a good decision about how to solve the schedule conflict you had with your school responsibilities and your social life. You were very

smart to think about both consequences-what would happen if you did not get your work turned in on time and what would happen if you did not go out with your friends. I know that was a hard decision to make. I am proud of you.” *(In other words, you are reinforcing the mental process they used to make a decision. Sometimes teenagers do things right but then they make the mistake the next time the same problem arises because they do not know what they did right the first time. By giving your teen feedback, describing the thinking and decision-making process they used successfully, you increase the chance of good decisions occurring more than one time. Be patient, it will take many times of giving feedback for it to stick in the “long-term memory compartment” of the brain! Remember, you will have this teenager for a few more years, so you have some time.)*

5. Planning:

- a. “We are going to the beach for the whole day. What do we need to bring with us?” *(Here you are teaching teenagers how to plan ahead and to think about what they need? Why is it that as parents we have to keep doing things for our teenager that they are capable of doing for themselves? Sometimes it is because we have taught them since they were two and three years old, that we parents will do the thinking for them.)*

## **High School**

1. Strategies to discover “what works” and to make choices:

- a. “When you ask for my help, how would you like me to help: just listen, listen and ask questions to help you think it through, or listen and give you ideas to pick from?”
- b. “Do you prefer to do your homework when you first get home or you would prefer some down time and then do your homework?”
- c. STORY: I once was frustrated with my son because he always waited until the last minute to do his school assignments. He did them the night before and sometimes he even did them the morning they were due before he went to school. It seems I was constantly fussing and even punishing him. After years of frustration both on his part and mine, I finally stopped to think about the problem. WOW, was that an eye-opener!! I was demanding he do things differently so he could get the results I wanted-for him to pass and graduate. As I thought about his grades, he was passing and was on track for graduation. The problem was truly ALL MINE. My son was getting the results I wanted. The problem was he was not doing it MY WAY. I finally re-grouped and told him this: “John, I don’t particularly like the way you get things done for school, but I must admit you are making good grades (or passing), which is what I expect for school. I will make a contract with you. As long as you get the results I expect for your school performance, you can do it your way (as long as it is legal, ethical, and moral). However, if your way stops working for you and you do not get the results I expect for school, then you will have to do it my way.” Life was much more pleasant after that. I stopped fretting over “the way he got things done” and focused on results. Most teenagers are

not organized and responsible. That is the nature of teens. Teach good skills that when the teen is an adult he might adopt and use, but for now... focus on results!

2. Problem and Solutions:

- a. "This morning you forgot your lunch money, how did that affect you at lunch?" *(If the teen says, "I got to eat anyway," ask them questions to make sure they realize the extra steps they had to make in order to eat lunch. For example, they had to talk to the teacher, get money from the office, call you, or whatever they had to do. Then ask them what they could have been doing if they had not had to take that extra step to get the money for lunch. If you do not, the teen will not recognize the negative aspect since they were able to eat lunch anyway. For example, would the teen have had more time at the lunch table talking to friends, etc.? You may have to look long and hard to make sure your teen understands the negative side of forgetting money. Try to make sure that you and the school staff, do not "rescue" the teen any more than necessary. No one learns to do things differently if there are no negative consequences.)*

3. Giving "calm" feedback on decisions your teen made:

- a. "You did very good on this paper (or math on the report card). Good job! What did you do differently that worked better this time compared to last time?" *(You may need to help your teen remember if they have forgotten. Maybe your teen attended tutorials. Maybe he met with their teacher. Maybe she spent an extra 30 minutes on her homework. Maybe he simply TURNED IN his homework, which he had not turned in the first semester. If need be, make a list of what is working and post it in a location you both agree on. The list of strategies that worked at home and at school will become a "Toolbox for Success" that can be reviewed when your teen is needing to solve a problem at home or at school.)* Help your teen to begin to recognize the work habits and learning strategies that work for them. This will not only help your teen in school but this self-awareness knowledge will help him or her as adults.

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### Part III: Planning for the ARD Meeting with My Teenage

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## **How can my young teen participate in his or her ARD/IEP Meeting?**

***If your child is involved with presenting at his/her ARD Meeting, consider the following activity:***

1. Find out if your campus is working with students to participate in what is called “student-led ARD/IEP meetings.” It does not mean the student leads the whole meeting, but it does mean that the student is an important part of the meeting and not just attending the meeting. After all, who is the meeting about and who is it for? The ARD meetings are about the student with a disability, and it is for them to plan their education program. In the United States, we have gone for decades meeting and planning for a person who was not really involved in the solution, the student. The student-led ARD/IEP meeting process helps students become part of the solution by helping them to understand what is working for them, not working for them at school, and identifying needs. It is also an opportunity for students to identify and tell the ARD/IEP committee their goals for after high school regarding getting a job and/or going to college, university or trade/technical school. Having a goal is motivational. Making sure the high school program and IEP is designed to help the student meet their goals for life after high school is essential. In education, we call this “transition.” Transition is part of the ARD discussion and is in the IEP paperwork we receive as parents.
  - a. If your teenager has been working with his/her special education teacher or case manager to plan a presentation for his/her ARD meeting, then you do not need to do the following activity because it will already be done by your teen.
  - b. What you can do is to ask your teenager to tell you about their plans and show you their presentation so you know what will be discussed in the ARD meeting.
  - c. If you would like more information about the discussion in the ARD meeting, contact your child’s case manager or diagnostician at your child’s school and ask what all will be discussed in the meeting. Tell them you want to have time to think about it and come prepared to help make decisions.

***If your child is not involved in student-led ARD/IEP meetings, consider doing the following activity with your teenage as you both plan for the ARD Meeting.***

1. We have developed a “Parent and Student Discussion Worksheet.” Use the Parent and Student Discussion worksheet. The questions will start a conversation with your teen to help him/her to recognize their strengths and barriers to learning, but more importantly to help them think about how to help themselves in the future.

2. Locate a comfortable place to have the discussion. Don't be distracted by other things, like the cell phone, TV, or the computer. Your body language of "being busy with other things" and the "lack of eye contact" speaks volumes to your teen about the importance or lack of importance of their opinion or of the topic you are talking about. Don't let your child be distracted by the cell phone either. Conduct the meeting like any important meeting between adult; turn off all cell phones.
3. Make it a conversation and not a lesson. Sit back. Relax. Make it fun and not a chore. Break it up into small pieces, if needed, and talk about one question per day or at a time. Help your teen to recognize what is working in school; what is discouraging to them in school, and to identify solutions. **BEST OF ALL, help your teenage discover that "THEY ARE THE SOLUTION and not the problem."** This discovery will be a gift for a lifetime!
4. Go over the completed worksheet with your teen before the ARD/IEP meeting. This will help you go into the meeting prepared and better able represent your teen if he or she does not attend the meeting.
5. **CAUTION:** Do not conduct this activity or have this conversation the day of or the day before the ARD/IEP meeting!! Rushed conversations are stressful. Have the conversations weeks before the meeting. In fact, have it now, why wait? Then after you talk with your teen, tell them if they think of anything else that they can add to the list the two of you have made, about how to help themselves.
6. **ANOTHER CAUTION:** Do not ever identify a problem without identifying a solution. Think of ways for the solution to be implemented by the teen. Have the teen report the results to you. Remember, not every solution works and not every solution works the first time it is implemented. That is life. Talk with your teen.

Next, Vickie and Beth tell a mother/daughter story they experienced as Beth learned to solve problems when she was in elementary school.

**The Vickie (*Mother*) and Beth (*Daughter*) Story (*True Story*):**

Elementary Story:

Once upon a time there was a third grader named Beth. She was very unhappy with her teacher and believed she had been "wronged." She wanted her mother (Vickie) to call and talk to her teacher about the problem. Vickie told Beth that the problem belonged to Beth and so Beth would need to solve the problem. Together the mother and daughter brainstormed solutions for Beth and role-played the activity. The next day, Beth came home from school exasperated and told her mother that the idea did not work and now it was time for mom to call the teacher.

Since Vickie was a teacher, she knew there were two sides to every story, so she asked Beth to describe the event in detail. As Beth described how she implemented the solution, the problem became evident that it was not the Beth's solution that did not work; it was Beth's timing!! As adults, we have learned that timing is everything. Beth was trying to tell the teacher the problem when the teacher was trying to round up the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students into a line to leave the classroom. The teacher did what any teacher or parent does when they are in a rush and a teen is asking for something, they just say "No."

Vickie told Beth about the concept of "timing." She suggested Beth try again, but this time ask the teacher in the morning one simple question, "Mrs. Warren, I need to talk to you today when is a good time?" Well, you can guess what happened. Yes, this time the strategy worked. Mrs. Warren told Beth to talk to her during recess. When Mrs. Warren had time to listen and Beth had time to plead her case, Beth got the results she was looking for. Not only did Beth solve her problem, but two more things happened. (1) Beth was more likely to attempt to solve problems for herself in the future instead of asking mom to do it. Beth learned a very valuable adult skill. (2) Beth learned that solutions do not always work the first time. Problem-solvers must analyze why the solution did not work and make the necessary changes to reach the goal.

#### Secondary Story:

Beth was in a high school English class with a teacher similar to the English teacher many of us had at some point in our high school experience. The difference is Beth was in special education. Beth worked very hard on her papers but she kept getting low grades. Beth asked her mother to talk to the teacher because she was sure she was getting low grades because she was in special education. However, Vickie did the same thing she did when Beth was in elementary school, she told Beth she needed to solve the problem. After a series of attempts Beth decided things were not going to change in that class. In a discussion with her mother, they brainstormed solutions, one of which was to ask to be changed to a different English teacher. Again, Vickie told Beth that she needed to go to the diagnostician to make the request and to be prepared to state her case with evidence. The request could not be just an "I want to" or an emotional outburst. When Beth talked with her diagnostician, she found that changing her schedule would change other classes she liked and did well in. Vickie explained to Beth that she had a decision to make. Vickie talking to the teacher was always an option but just like in the world of work, there are sometimes people that we don't really like to work with but we just put our head down, get the job done, and know we will be out of there. Or Beth could change classes, but now she risked having six classes she did not like instead of one. Beth decided to take less of a risk with her schedule and keep the English teacher. Vickie reminded Beth that her responsibility was to do her part, do the best she could and leave the

problem where it belonged, with the teacher. Beth learned important adult skills:

- To solve problems for herself
- To advocate for herself
- To ask questions and investigate both the good and bad consequences of each choice before making a decision, and
- That once a decision was made, let go of the problem, make it work for you and remember it is actually a small part of life so don't make it bigger than it is.

**Did you know that 3 YEARS AFTER GRADUATION from high school, children with disabilities who have self-determination skills, are more likely to have a job that provides benefits, vacation time, and are more likely to live somewhere other than the family home?**

*Wehmeyer & Palmer (2002). Self-Determination and the education of students with disabilities. ERIC Digest #E-632.*

# Answer Sheet

Use this page to write your teen's answers. Bring this to the ARD. This information can be used when the ARD Committee talks about (1) the Present Levels of Academic and Functional Performance/PLAAFP, (2) accommodations, and (3) transition.

## Strengths:

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## Weakness:

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**Student's Role as a Learner:** *(What will I do to help myself, like attend tutorials, meet with the teacher, etc.?)*

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**Teachers Role:** *(Use what your teen said that helps them learn best when their teacher.....)*

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**Parents Role:** *(What have you learned from your teen and how can you as the parent help your teen be successful in school?)*

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## Postsecondary Goals for After Graduation:

Employment \_\_\_\_\_

Postsecondary Education \_\_\_\_\_

Independent Living \_\_\_\_\_

## What will I do this year to help myself reach my goals?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Set a specific study time                             | <input type="checkbox"/> Monitor my progress and report to my parents     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Join a study group                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Attend College and Career Night for the district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attend tutorials                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Visit the Texas Workforce Commission about jobs  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Talk to DARS about college and jobs after high school |   |

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### Part IV: Self-Determination Ideas for Parents of Children Ages 2 through 18

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**SELF-DETERMINATION IDEAS FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN  
AGES 2 THROUGH 18**

**Definition for Self-Determination:** The attitudes and abilities needed for people of all ages to understand choices and consequences, problem solve, make decisions, set personal and professional goals, and take actions necessary to meet the goals.

### **Activities to Promote Self-Determination**

#### **Ages 2 to 5**

- Provide opportunities to make decisions. For example, “Do you want to wear the blue shirt or the red shirt?” Look for other opportunities, such as making decisions about food, play activities, etc.
- Look for opportunities to talk about the facts used to make decisions. For example, when one shirt might be long sleeve while the other is short sleeve. Talk about how hot they got when playing yesterday so what will it be like if they chose the long sleeve over the short sleeve shirt. Teach children how to consider different choices and how the choices make life better or worse.
- Provide feedback. For example, describe for me what you were doing when your crayon broke (they pushed too hard). What caused it to break? What can you do next time to help yourself and take care of your belongings (not push so hard).
- Provide opportunities for planning. We are going to grandma’s house this weekend. What will you need to bring since there will be time to play and we will all go to church the next day?

#### **Ages 6 to 8**

- Provide opportunities to choose from different strategies to get the job done. For example, “Do you remember your spelling words best when you write them down, have someone test you out loud, or take practice tests?” The strategy the child identifies as the best one for them is the one they use to do their homework to study for a spelling test.
- If your child does not know what strategy works best for them, ask the teacher to give you ideas on what he or she has observed in the classroom. You may even want to try different study methods, then you and your child record the grades and make a decision together about which study strategies worked the best and why.
- Learning about consequences. Teach children to reconsider choices. “This morning you forgot your lunch money, how did that affect you at lunch.” If the child says, “I got to eat anyway,” make sure they realize the extra steps they had to make in order to eat. For example, they had to talk to the teacher, get money from the office, call you, or whatever they had to do. Then ask them what they could have been doing if they had not had to take that extra step, for example, more time at the lunch table talking to friends, more time for recess, etc. You may have to look long and hard to make sure they understand the negative side of forgetting money and try to make sure that you and the school do not “rescue” them. No one learns to do things differently if there are no negative consequences.

- Show them examples. Sometimes children do not know what a good example of a clean room or homework paper looks like. Take a picture of their room when it looks the way you want it to look. Now you have a standard for the child to follow and they know what it should look like when the job is “done.”

### Ages 9 to 11

- Making decisions. Teach children a method for making decisions. Write the decision at the top of the page. Write the possible decision choices. Then write the possible advantages and disadvantages of each choice. Help the child to look at which choice will help them to get the outcome they want.
- Reviewing past decisions. “You were angry at Jo for teasing you and so you hit her. Now you have to sit out at recess for a week. What are some other things you could have done instead? What might have happened if you had used some of the other ways of solving the problem?”
- Analyzing life. Take the opportunity for children to analyze why things happen to other people and how to use that information to keep from making the same mistakes. “Did you notice that Mary did not get to play in the game today? Why do you think she did not get to play? Help your child to see that Mary is always late to the game or practices and having to sit out the game is her consequence. Explain that Mary’s coach is trying to teach her an “adult life skill”. Mary cannot be late for the game, students cannot be late for class, and I cannot be late for work. We all have a job to do and our role as a member of the team, class, or business is to be on time so we can all work together and get the job done. How can I (the child) use this information to keep from making mistakes that are easy to prevent?”
- Preventing problems. “You got a low grade on your research paper. What did you do to make it a strong paper? What extra steps did you take? Do you have a grading sheet (grading rubric) that said what the teacher would grade on and did you use it to review your completed paper? What steps did you leave out? What can you do next time to be more successful?”

### Ages 12 to 18

- Create opportunities for teens to learn about the choices that are available after adult life. It is hard to plan for the future when there is very little you know about your choices.
  - District College and Career Night: Students do not have to be a senior to go to College and Career Night. Middle/junior high school is not too early to attend. In fact, this is a good time to attend because there is not pressure to make a decision, you can merely attend to get information. Walk with your child around to the booths. Collect college pens and whatever else they are giving away. The hidden message you are giving your child is that learning is life-long. You are also letting them know you want them to continue their education

after high school. Yes, I know they may not want to do...but don't make that decision at age 12 or 16. Always keep your options open. At the very least, get information so if the child decides not to go, it is an "informed decision."

- Do you see anyone from the district that is with the special education department? Ask the special education staff member or the high school counselor if any of the colleges or trade schools brought someone from their office of disability services. If so, go and visit that table.
  - Know that postsecondary colleges, universities, and trade schools have an office of disability services but the young adult student must qualify. Also, they must go to the office to request to be considered for help, no one will go find them like in public school. If they are not doing well, they will have to go to the Office of Disability Services to ask for help, no one will be monitoring their grades or going to find the young adult to see if they need help. In other words, that high school graduate will need self-determination skills.
  - Parents once your child graduates from high school and goes to postsecondary education, the staff at colleges, universities and trade/technical schools will not talk to you even if you are paying the bills. By law, you're your adult is now legally an adult once they are over 18. The postsecondary institution communicates ONLY with your adult child, so your child will need to have self-determination skills.
  - Ask if the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitation Services (DARS) is at the College and Career Night. Go by that table and find out how DARS is a state agency that will help with books and tuition costs for adult students with disabilities who qualify.
- The City or County Job Fair:
    - Find out when the next job fair is in your community.
    - Go with your children. Walk around and talk about the different booths, companies and job choices. If no one is at the table trying to get a job, go with your child to the table and tell the person you are trying to help your child learn about different jobs and would they mind telling you and your child about the jobs in their company. What are the names of the jobs, how do you get the job, what is the training/education needed, and what is the typical pay for that job?

- Collect pens, pencils and other things that are being given away. You are giving your child the hidden message that when they grow up they are expected to work.
  - Talk about jobs you think are a good job match for your child. “Juan, I think you would be good at a job like that because you like computers. You also like being outside so do you think you would like a desk job?” “Margarita, honey, you don’t like to get hot or sweat now, do you think you would like that job since it is out in the heat?”
  - Find out if any of the businesses offer summer employment for youth. Do they have internships for graduating seniors who have time in the senior year schedule to work?
- Visit or call the local community college, university or trade school. Ask if they have summer programs for youth. Many do. Some are free and some have a small fee. Some programs are designed for fun, while others are designed with future employment goals in mind or focus on academics.
  - For High School Age Students: Parents take your child to the Texas Workforce Commission. Sit in front of the computer and teach them how to look for a job. Ask to talk to the TWC representative who works with adults with disabilities. Ask how they help adults with disabilities find work. Ask the TWC representative about summer work programs for high school students with disabilities.
  - JOBS: students with or without disabilities who have jobs in high school are more likely to be employed after high school. Encourage your high school student to have a job during long holidays, like Christmas, and the summer.
  - Bad Economy: if your child is having trouble finding a job due to the economy, teach them to use the opportunity to add to their resume. Attend free training at Home Depot, the community college or community organizations that also give certificates for the training. Do volunteer work; especially volunteer work related to what you want to do for a career.

## **ONLINE RESOURCES**

### **The PACER Center for Parents**

<http://www.pacer.org/>

### **The Association for Individuals with Severe Handicaps (TASH)**

<https://tash.org/>

### **The BEACH Center for Parents: University of Kansas**

<http://beachcenter.org/families>

**Education.com**

<http://www.education.com/reference/article/self-determination-students-disabilities/>

**Eric Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education**

<http://www.hoagiesgifted.org/eric/e632.html>

**Resource Guide on Higher Education for Individuals with Disabilities (Texas)**

<http://www.txddc.state.tx.us/resources/publications/collegehtml.asp>

**Department of Labor: Pathways to Success**

<http://www.careeronestop.org/>

**Directory of Community Resources in Texas: Texas A&M Site for Parents**

<http://disabilityresources.tamu.edu/>