

Exploring Careers: Information for Parents of Students With Disabilities

Beginning at age 14, or sooner if the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines that it is appropriate, transition planning becomes the foundation for the development of the IEP. Transition planning begins with exploring interests and preferences to identify the student's goals for postsecondary training, employment, and independent living. The IEP team needs to design transition services and activities that allow students to explore careers as part of their educational program. As a parent/guardian, you provide important input and support in helping your child to explore careers and to choose a career path.

Why should my child explore careers?

As part of the transition planning process, your child needs to explore and investigate many career options. Active participation in career exploration activities will help your child become aware of the many career opportunities available and the steps needed to reach his/her career goals. Career exploration includes:

- Understanding the work environments of interesting careers;
- Exposing your child to careers he/she may have never considered;
- Discovering the various types of post-high school education and training, as well as their costs; and,
- Understanding the accommodations that may be needed to accomplish his/her career goals.

When should career exploration start?

Career development is a life-long process and a young person's plans frequently change as he/she gathers more information. Career exploration begins in early elementary school and expands to become a continual process throughout the middle and high school years. Exploring careers helps your child to make decisions about his/her career direction and choices. Those decisions should be based on current and realistic information. Your child's preferences and interests will

be used to identify his/her goals for postsecondary education and training as well as employment.

What should career exploration look like?

The information associated with learning about and exploring careers looks different at various stages of development. Career exploration begins with the awareness that different occupations exist. At any stage, career exploration includes both investigation and first-hand experience. It continues with research and "trying out" several occupations. Below is an example of a "Career Development Ladder," which offers a progression of career exploration and development that corresponds with middle school, early high school, and later high school as the student approaches graduation. This list identifies skills that students obtain at each stage in their development and includes suggestions for parents to support their son/daughter at each stage.

Career Awareness

- During this phase, the student will be given support to:
 - Learn the importance of work.
 - Develop an awareness of parents' and other family members' jobs.
 - Describe what parents and others do at work.
 - Begin to identify areas of interest.
 - Identify at least three jobs to investigate.
 - Learn about how people get jobs.
 - Learn what happens if adults cannot get or do work.
 - Identify why people have to get along with one another at work.
- Student will use text and web resources to learn about careers.
- Student will visit various worksites to learn about careers.

How Parents Can Help

- Talk to your child about the importance of work.
- Ask your child about jobs that might interest him/her.
- Encourage your child to express his/her preferences related to career experiences.
- Discuss various occupations when traveling or watching television.
- Have your child visit your job site, or that of a family member, if appropriate.
- Encourage your child to be as independent as possible.
- Teach and model appropriate social and work-related behaviors.
- Participate actively in your child's IEP team meetings.

Career Exploration

- During this phase, the student will be given support to:
 - Identify (via assessment) his/her preferences and interests for employment, for example, indoor vs. outdoor work, solitary vs. working with others, working with hands or machines vs. working strictly with their minds.
 - Identify work habits that are needed for successful employment.
 - Formulate questions about occupations.
 - Identify different ways to find out about different occupations.
 - Learn where to get applications and how to complete them.
 - Learn about the interview process.
 - Practice interviewing skills.
 - Identify his/her strengths, abilities, skills, learning styles, and special needs regarding work or specific jobs.
- Student will continue to use text and web resources and visit worksites to learn about careers.
- Student may be given an opportunity to job shadow, and/or to volunteer at various sites.

How Parents Can Help

- Talk to your child about his/her interests and preferences.

- Find someone who works in your child's career interest area and arrange for your child to watch that worker for a day.
- Talk with your child about his/her experiences.
- Help your child to ask questions about the current career activity.
- Help your child to consider additional experiences for future explorations.
- Provide structure to assist your child with developing increased independence and responsibility for personal and school-related tasks.
- Teach and model appropriate social and work-related behaviors.
- Discuss with your child any barriers related to his/her disability that need to be considered or addressed.
- Participate actively in your child's IEP team meetings.

Career Preparation

- During this phase, the student will be given support to:
 - Identify specific strengths and abilities regarding careers of interest.
 - Identify his/her special needs regarding specific careers of interest.
 - Request appropriate accommodations needed to be successful.
 - Describe the educational and work requirements of specific careers and jobs.
 - Identify where education and training can be obtained.
 - Identify the steps in acquiring the skills necessary to enter a chosen field or job.
 - Identify the worker characteristics, work habits, and skills in working with others that are required in a chosen field or job.
 - Complete an application or resume, and interview.
 - Identify and make contact with agencies that can provide support.
- Student may be given opportunities to prepare for careers through career and technical education (CTE) programs, job shadowing, work experience and/or paid employment.

How Parents Can Help

- Help your child to understand how his/her disability can impact success in a particular career.
- Help your child to develop the self-determination and self-advocacy skills to appropriately request accommodations that will help him/her to be successful.
- Provide opportunities for your child to volunteer for organizations that hire people in his/her career interest area.
- Encourage your child to take part-time or summer jobs that relate to his or her career interest area.
- Help your child find a work-based learning experience related to his/her career interest area.
- Encourage your child to take responsibility for completing assignments, meeting deadlines, completing tasks at home, managing personal care, etc.
- Participate actively in your child's IEP team meetings.

What is a career portfolio and how can it help with transition?

A career portfolio is a collection of your child's academic and work experiences, career interest assessments and personal achievements. A career portfolio enables your child to keep a record of important academic and career information that can be used in the future. When your child keeps all of this career and educational information in one place, it will be easily accessible when he/she is ready to apply to college, apply for a job, or create a resume. Career portfolios can be paper and pencil, or electronic. Many schools require that each student create a career portfolio beginning in middle school and many IEP teams decide that a career portfolio is an important transition activity, and list this on the IEP. As a parent, you may want to discuss having a career portfolio as part of your child's transition process.

Where can our family find quality career information for exploration?

There are many resources for career exploration. The career center, guidance office, or school library may be the first place to start. Your child's school or local library may also have a computerized career information delivery

system (CIDS) to provide career information to your child. Every state has a local office of America's Career Resource Network (ACRN). ACRN is a nationwide network dedicated to helping young people and adults identify and provide the academic and career skills they need to become productive citizens, workers and community members. You can find the contact information for the ACRN office in your state by going to: www.acrnetwork.org and clicking on Network.

For more information:

Pennsylvania's Employment Site:
www.pacareerlink.state.pa.us

Federal Employment Site:
www.careervoyages.gov

Pennsylvania Career Zone (Online Career Interest Resources): www.pacareerzone.org

Pennsylvania Career Education and Work Standards Toolkit: www.pacareerstandards.org

O*NET Online Comprehensive source of occupation information: <http://online.onetcenter.org>

Holland Self Directed Search:
www.self-directed-search.com/Holland

Your Child's Career, A Website for Parents:
www.yourchildscareer.org/careerplanning/careerplan_no_plan.htm

PEPNET (for students who are deaf or hard of hearing): www.pepnet.org/itransition.asp

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD/Youth):
www.ncwd-youth.info/index.html

Occupational Outlook Handbook:
<http://stats.bls.gov/oco/>

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