



Helping Your Teen Find a Summer Job

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Summer is coming. It's time to think about a job for your teenager with disabilities. During the Transition years, from ages 15–22, a summer job can be an important way for your child to make community connections, find out what kinds of work she likes to do, learn and practice work habits, and discover the skills she will need in the future. This is also a good opportunity to help foster your child's growing independence by helping her learn to advocate for herself. As

an adult, she will need to understand her own strengths and weaknesses and be able to explain the supports she needs to be successful. Working together to find a summer job for your child helps advance these goals.

Find out if the school has conducted any work-related Transition assessments (such as an Interest Inventory or Functional Vocational Evaluation). Use the results to help you and your child compile a list of her strengths and weaknesses. Encourage your child to ask her teachers and other trusted adults, "What do you think I do well?" Explore the Internet together to find online Career Interest Inventories and websites that describe the abilities required for specific jobs. The U.S. Department of Labor produces the *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, which describes thousands of jobs, and the skills needed to perform them. Find it at your local library or browse it online at www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm.

Encourage her to identify activities she does well and enjoys, as well as tasks she dislikes doing and should avoid. What does she like to do in her free time? What are her favorite school subjects, and why? Does she like to work with her hands or use a computer? Is she artistic? Does she like to be alone or in a group? Would she be best suited for outdoor or indoor work? Does she need structure and predictability? Is she a good listener, speaker, reader, or writer? What household chores does she do well? Can she handle money, find her way around town, drive a car, or travel on a bus? What does she need help to do, and what can she do independently?

The answers to these questions can help you and your child find a satisfying job. For example:

- *If your child likes pets - make friends with neighbors who have dogs and find out if they would like to hire a dog walker. If your child gets lost easily, have her pair up with a friend who is good at using maps and they can go into business together. By the end of the summer, your child may pick up some navigation skills and become more familiar with her town. Alternately, your child could volunteer at an animal shelter or veterinary office.*

- *If your child is organized - she may enjoy stocking supermarket or food pantry shelves, doing office filing, organizing books at the library, or doing summer maintenance at her school.*
- *If your child is friendly and helpful - some large stores employ greeters. Your child could also usher at a theater or stadium, be a guide at a park, a summer camp counselor in training, or a nursing home volunteer.*
- *If your child enjoys doing Internet research or entering information into a database - your local newspaper or nonprofit might need her talents.*

Another way to identify summer job possibilities is to walk down the main street of your town with your teen. Are there businesses that might be potential summer work sites? Have your child introduce herself to the people who work at your local library, grocery or clothing store, pharmacy, farm stand, medical office, YMCA, or bakery. Ask if they need help, and help them to think creatively about ways your child could fit in. Even if these businesses can't accommodate your child this summer, you will have made a connection for the future. And, don't forget about volunteer opportunities! Your child does not have to make money to gain valuable work experience. In fact, her willingness to work in exchange for an opportunity to learn and gain experience might encourage an employer to make a place for your child.

What supports need to be in place so your teen can succeed? Providing needed supports may be key to your child's success at a summer job. If possible, obtain help from other employees or friends. Consider assistive technology such as electronic calendars, tape recorders, and talking word processors, especially if your child uses them at school. If your child's IEP Team determines that her summer job is a needed part of her vocational education, the school may provide a job coach. Finally, consider supplying your child with a safety net: a cell phone so that she can call you if she gets stuck. This will give both of you peace of mind.

In autumn, your child will return to class with new skills, new community connections, better self-knowledge, and an important addition to her resume!

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