



Learn and Earn: Supporting Teens

Supporting high school students in preparing for careers

As adolescents go through high school, they learn to take on more initiative, responsibility, and independence. Parents and adults know that, in spite of their evolving maturity, many teenagers need support and encouragement as they begin take the initiative, act responsibly, and grow in their independence.

Parents and mentors of youth with disabilities have unique opportunities to promote their successful transition to postsecondary education, employment, and full participation in adult activities. Families and mentors assist in the transition process by providing adolescents direction in their exploration of interests, guidance in career and college planning, and encouragement and support.

Employment Issues

The number of students with disabilities entering and completing postsecondary education has increased dramatically in the last decade, yet people with disabilities are still underrepresented in the employment arena. Barriers to employment include lack of adequate support systems; little access to successful role models; lack of access to technology that can increase independence

and productivity; and, most significantly, low expectations on the part of people with whom they interact.

High school students may think they have plenty of time to decide on their career paths and acquire the skills they will need to market themselves successfully. They may also believe that completing a college or job training program will guarantee them a job. This is not true in every situation.

As future employees, students with disabilities face unique challenges. Like other students, they need to find a way to meet the specific qualifications of the desired job. They also need to demonstrate transferable skills—in other words, skills acquired through education and previous work experiences that can transfer to a new employment situation. Transferable skills include communication, trouble-shooting, decision-making, leadership, and problem-solving. These are some of the skills that cross jobs, career, and industries. It is never too early to get off to a running start.

Career planning and preparation should begin upon entering high school and occur throughout postsecondary studies. Remind students that they do not need to settle on one area to pursue right away, and can change directions. But, they do need to prepare for the long run—for their lifelong career or multiple careers. In today's competitive job market it is essential that students possess skills and relevant job experience that will set them apart from other applicants for a job. One way students can start narrowing career interests and developing job skills is through work-based learning experiences.





Why Should Students with Disabilities Participate in Work-based Learning?

Through the interaction of study and work experience, students can enhance their academic knowledge, personal development, and professional preparation. Specifically, work-based learning opportunities can help a student

- apply practical theories from classroom work,
- clarify academic and career interests,
- develop human relations skills through interaction with co-workers,
- develop job-search skills,
- develop resumes and cover letters,
- earn academic credit,
- gain contacts for employment after graduation,
- gain exposure to specialized facilities not available on campus,
- identify career assistance programs, and
- pay for her or his education.

For students with disabilities, work-based learning offers additional benefits. Participating in work experience can give them chances to determine if they can perform the essential functions of particular jobs with or without accommodations. In a job setting, students can also practice disclosing their disabilities and requesting accommodations from employers. In addition, they can test which accommodations work best for them. These experiences help students with disabilities develop the confidence and self-advocacy skills needed for success in challenging careers.

Below are descriptions of typical activities and services offered at many high schools:

Cooperative Education

Cooperative education programs work with students, school staff, and employers to help students clarify career and academic goals,

and expand classroom study by participating in paid work experiences. Students work in trainee positions in fields of interest and may also earn academic credit.

Independent Study

Some academic programs allow independent studies as an optional program component. Students work one-on-one with individual teachers to develop projects for credit. Projects can range from research papers to work experience within their field of interest.

Informational Interview

Informational interviews help students gain personal insight into specific careers from people in the field. They meet with people working in their areas of interest to ask questions about occupations, job duties, education requirements, qualifications, and companies.

Internship

An internship is an intensive learning experience outside the traditional classroom over a short period of time. Students work in a supervised learning situation, paid or non-paid, with an employer doing planned learning activities. Interns learn about occupational fields and specific job tasks, while developing work-readiness.

Job Shadowing

Job shadowing provides students with a realistic view of one or more occupations. Students visit a business to observe the everyday functions of their occupational area of interest. Experiences may vary in time from one hour to a full day.

Service Learning

In service learning experiences, students provide community service in non-paid, volunteer positions. These programs increase the relevancy of academic learning by giving students opportunities to apply knowledge and



skills while making meaningful contributions. Students with service learning requirements should pursue opportunities related to their career interests.

Providing Support

Parents, family members, and mentors can help young people become self-determined and access career preparation resources. They can empower them and reinforce their plans for success. Here are some ways to provide support:

- Help students identify their vocational strengths and interests—look at hobbies, pastimes, etc.
- Educate yourself about assistive technology, accommodations, and employment issues.
- Talk to students about self-advocacy, determining appropriate accommodations, and disclosing their disabilities.
- Encourage students to develop personal networks of family members, friends, and community contacts to open up opportunities for work-based learning.
- Parents and guardians should involve themselves in the Individual Education Plans (IEP) of their children and make sure employment preparation activities are included.
- Learn about available adult services and start preparing students for the transition to independent adulthood.
- Assist students in accessing local support networks and disability services organizations, such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, which may be able to provide career preparation, job placement, and referrals to community programs.
- Encourage students to visit the counseling, advising, or career center at their high schools. They may provide a variety of career preparation and job search services. Students can develop career plans and job search skills through individual counseling and workshops.

- Investigate School-to-Work programs, such as Tech Prep and High School/High Tech. Tech Prep education is a planned sequence of study in a technical field beginning early in high school. Some Tech Prep courses may be articulated with coursework at local community colleges.
- Contact your State Governor’s Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities for information about High School/High Tech, a partnership that combines site tours, job shadowing, internships, and mentoring to encourage students with disabilities to pursue careers in the technology industry.

Helping Students Get Started?

The CAREERS acronym developed by DO-IT can be used as a road map to help guide students through the process of preparing for a career.

C is for Careers. Have students think about their interests. Encourage them to be imaginative, then narrow it down.

A is for Academics. Assist students in determining which academic programs best suit their career goals.

R is for Research. Support research of careers that spark their interests, maximize strengths, and minimize weaknesses.

EE is for Experiential Education. Support the practice of job search skills. Assist in seeking and participating in opportunities.

RS is for Relevant Skills. Encourage students to learn practical “real world” skills through on-the-job experience. Help them apply what they’ve learned in school to the workplace.



- Assist students in developing mentoring relationships through family and employment contacts or through disability agencies.
- If necessary, provide transportation support to allow students to participate in work-based learning experiences.

Resources

The World Wide Web houses a wide variety of information, including information about jobs, career preparation, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). A good place to start is DO-IT's *AccessCAREERS* website at www.uw.edu/doit/Careers/.

Video

To accompany this publication, DO-IT has created a short video by the same title. It can be freely viewed or purchased at www.uw.edu/doit/Video/.

About DO-IT

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology) serves to increase the successful participation of individuals with disabilities in challenging academic programs and careers such as those in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology. Primary funding for DO-IT is provided by the National Science Foundation, the State of Washington, and the U.S. Department of Education.

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