



## Develop a support network. Look to family, friends, and teachers.

*Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.*

— Jane Howard —

Successful adults with disabilities report that they benefited in their youth from opportunities for inclusion, high expectations from adults, disability-related accommodations that de-emphasized their differences, promotion of autonomy, encouragement of friendships, and support from caring adults. On the other hand, their progress was inhibited by segregation, atypical treatment that highlighted their differences, restricted opportunities for independence, social isolation, and social rejection (Powers, Singer, & Todis, 1996).

Environmental factors have a major impact on the development of self-determination skills in young people with disabilities. Relationships with people and activities in which they are engaged can serve to support or obstruct their movement toward self-determination. For example, a parent who provides a son with opportunities to make choices, no matter how limited, is supporting the development of self-determination skills in that child. In contrast, a parent who overprotects her daughter is obstructing her development of self-determination skills. Of all the environmental supports in a young person's life, *relationships with others* can present the greatest barrier to self-determination (Field & Hoffman, 1994a, b). As reported by an accomplished scientist who is blind:

Some adults helped me a lot, but more of them caused barriers to my development. Some of that is so terrible it won't make it into anyone's book. Everyone steered me away from science.

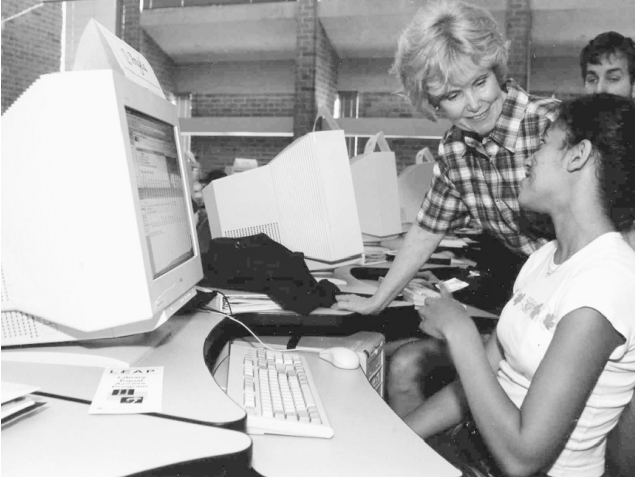


Without supportive relationships, some people with disabilities, like the person quoted above, still manage to achieve self-determined, successful lives. However, too many simply learn to let others make decisions for them. “Learned helplessness” is passive behavior that can result from overprotection, from an environment where a child has few opportunities to make choices, and from a child's repeated failed attempts to control her life. Eventually, she avoids new challenges and accepts a life controlled by others.



## E-Mentoring

Adults can help young people lead self-determined lives by being sensitive to the language they use, promoting positive relationships with adults, encouraging friendships, promoting participation in healthy activities, and giving young people choices.



Participating in clubs, organizations, and sports can contribute to a successful life. Adults can help young people with disabilities get involved. These efforts will pay off in helping them find happiness for themselves and contribute in a positive way to the lives of others. People who are content with their lives are usually involved in volunteer activities; enjoy helping others; have a tendency to protect siblings, friends, or pets; and care about the plight of other people (Katz, 1997).

Positive relationships and participation in activities contribute to a successful, happy life. After young people have completed the online activities in this chapter, they will know the value of

- opportunities to contribute.
- opportunities to make choices.
- negotiation, compromise, and win-win decisions.
- opportunities to verbalize plans and practice self-determination steps.

The e-mentoring administrator can select appropriate messages from the following examples and send the *Mentor Tip* messages to the mentors only and the *E-Community Activity* messages to the entire mentoring community. Use these examples to stimulate other ideas for online discussions. It is desirable that, ultimately, most discussion topics come from the mentors and protégés.

- positive relationships with adults.
- engagement in social activities.
- positive peer relationships.
- participation in clubs, organizations, sports, and other activities.



## Mentor Tip: Teen Support

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on teen support

Adults can help young people lead self-determined lives by being sensitive to the language they use, by promoting positive relationships with adults and friends, by encouraging participation in activities, and by giving young people choices. The following story demonstrates the significant effect supportive adults can have on young people with disabilities.

- Those adults who have contributed to my success tended to either create opportunities for further development for me or help me to pursue a certain activity by coming up with creative adaptations, by implementing my suggestions for adaptations, or simply by encouraging me. For example, throughout my childhood, two relatives of mine who functioned as grandmothers made an effort to let me touch everything interesting around their house, in their yard, and on walks and visits to other places. These experiences supplemented my exposure to plants, animals, sculptures, and many other things. On the academic side, my first- and second-grade teacher gave me extra work that furthered my education. She was great at responding to the individual needs of students. In contrast, my fifth grade math teacher asked me to just listen instead of participating in class when we went over a test on which I had received a high grade. This made me want to fail the next test, so that I would be allowed to participate in the class discussion. (I did not fail the next test, thanks in part to my parents' intervention). In graduate school, a professor teaching a class on reading and drawing weather maps suggested that I come to his office once a week so that he could discuss the material with me. He made it possible for me to succeed in this required class. (Ph.D. candidate who is blind)



## Mentor Tip: Supportive Environment

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on supportive environment

As we create a supportive environment for young people, consider the advice offered by successful individuals with disabilities.

- Many small steps equal a mile. Don't just recognize people's miles; celebrate each "step of success." (adult who is blind)
- Have patience. This will not be easy. You will have to learn a new language to communicate with teenagers. (high school student with Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder)
- It is important for them to have someone to talk to about what is going on in their lives and to receive encouragement when they lose confidence in themselves. (college student who is blind)
- Don't create a relationship of excessive dependence. Teach all of your children to be independent from an early age. This will benefit them in their adult lives. (college student who is deaf)
- Don't be so adult that children can't connect with you. Be available to talk about any topic, and be willing to both be serious and have fun. (college graduate who is blind)
- Encourage children with disabilities to lead the most normal life possible. (retired counselor with mobility impairment)
- Teach them the skills required to participate in a career. (college student who is blind)
- Remind them of what they're capable of. Sometimes it's hard to see outside of yourself to know all of the possibilities. This is when feedback from respected people in one's life is critical.... especially from mentors. (employee with a mobility impairment)
- Support their dreams. (young person with a mobility impairment)
- Help them get involved in their school. It can lead to new friendships and experiences. (college student who is blind)



## Mentor Tip: Self-Determination Support

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on self-determination support

Adults can further or hinder self-determination in young people. They can help create environments for a child—in the home, in the classroom, and in the community—that nurture the development of self-determination skills. Adults can model self-determined behavior and interact with children in ways that promote self-determination. Reflecting upon the following questions may help guide you as you support young people with disabilities.

- How can you apply self-determination steps in your life? How can you best share your experiences with the young people with whom you interact?
- What current factors in the classroom, home, church, and community encourage or discourage young people from being self-determined? How can these environmental factors be adjusted to support the development of self-determination skills?
- How can you assure that young people with disabilities can fully participate in school, church, and community activities? How can you encourage them to do so?
- How can you provide opportunities for young people to contribute to their family, school, or religious community?
- How can you encourage young people to express their feelings? How can you be a better listener to assure a teenager that you understand what they are saying to you?
- How can you encourage young people to understand their own strengths and challenges?
- How can you encourage young people to set their own goals?
- How can you encourage young people to take action and accept the consequences of their actions?
- How can you help young people learn from the outcomes of their actions?
- How can you model communication patterns that support self-determination in the young people with whom you interact?
- How can you help a young person be actively involved in planning decisions as they transition to adulthood?
- What special programs could be put in place in your school, church, or community center to help young people, including those with disabilities, develop and apply self-determination skills?



## Mentor Tip: Teen Relationships with Adults

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on teen relationships with adults

Successful people often report that while they were growing up, they had positive, supportive relationships with a few adults—relatives, neighbors, teachers, church members, and other mentors. Successful young people and adults with disabilities made the following comments about the value—personal, social, spiritual, academic, and professional—of their positive relationships with adults. You'll hear more in my next message to the whole community. Think of what you can contribute to this conversation that would be beneficial to our younger participants.

- My mother has always encouraged me to do better in all aspects of my life. It doesn't matter whether it's academic, physical, or art. I am visually impaired, and I am also a great artist. I am thinking about starting an art magazine in my senior year of high school, and my mother backs me up one hundred percent. She sees that I have a vision problem, and she understands the difficulties I have. But she encourages me to do things even when it is hard. (high school student who has a visual impairment)
- Besides my parents, there have been two adults who influenced me personally, socially, and academically. They helped me overcome my disability and become who I am today. They transformed a reclusive person who didn't believe in himself into a driving, determined individual who is confident and who can handle adversity. The first of these adults I met in the beginning of eighth grade when I first lost my sight. He was a paraprofessional. A "para" is someone the Board of Education gives to students who need someone to help them with mobility and/or note taking. I needed someone to help me with both. When I first met him, I was nervous, apprehensive. I was just getting used to the fact that I had lost my sight. I was shy and reticent. Between class assignments he and I would talk about life and his experiences. He taught me a lot about people and how they can act. He became the brother I never had, someone I could trust. He left me a better person than I was when we first met. (high school student who has a visual impairment)

*continued on next page*



## Mentor Tip: Teen Relationships with Adults (continued)

- My parents have always been encouraging. They never let me take the easy way out. Developing a positive relationship with an adult is important because as a kid, your knowledge and experience is limited. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- A couple of years ago I met a woman who has a little vision and is very interested in genetics. We first met because of these reasons. However, our relationship has since grown amazingly. We can talk about many things, commiserate, laugh, and just enjoy being with each other. She pushes me, too, but she also listens to me. She is no longer just a mentor but a good friend, and while I don't always agree with the things she says, I always think about them. (college graduate who is blind)
- When I was in third grade, I was just beginning to understand what my learning disability was and how it would impact my life. I was extremely frustrated academically because everything was so hard. I just did not get it. Sometimes I would think that I was just stupid. Having a special tutor was the best thing to happen to me then. She knew that I was intelligent and she showed me that. She not only helped me make a quantum leap academically, but she also discovered who the real me was. When I first came to her, I was sad, angry, and frustrated. From her I learned not only a sense of self and an academic confidence but also an MO (modus operandi) for life. Hard work does pay off. And yes, I will succeed. (high school student with Dyslexia and Attention Deficit Disorder)



## E-Community Activity: Developing Relationships with Adults

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Developing relationships with adults

Successful people often report that while they were growing up, they had positive, supportive relationships with a few adults. These could be relatives, neighbors, teachers, church members, and other mentors. Successful people with disabilities made the following comments about the value—personal, social, spiritual, academic, and professional—of their positive relationships with adults.

- My aide in high school would not let me quit, and she pushed me into doing things that I thought I could not do, such as going on overnight trips, working on the computer, and being friendly to the other students in school. (college student with mobility and speech impairments)
- I remember an international business teacher who helped me “grow” in high school. He never ever quit believing in me. He said, “If you want it—make it happen.” He believed in me, even when my parents doubted and other teachers were sort of distant. He never once downplayed my ability. With his “What do you want to do next?” questions he challenged me to push the envelope further. Believing in someone is the first step in helping them achieve their dreams. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- I grew up in a family of four kids, and my parents never gave me any slack just because I had a disability. I was doing all the same chores everyone else was doing (even if it was dragging the vacuum all around the house!). They always pushed the idea of self-pity out the door and never once felt sorry for me for anything! They treated me like everyone else, not like their “child with a disability.” Because they treated me like everyone else, I strove to be like everyone else and to live up to the norms of what people my age were doing, whether it was singing in the choir, learning to drive, or swimming. (college student with a mobility impairment)
- I have had a very positive relationship with my orientation and mobility teacher for a very long period of my life. She taught me to work hard in school and to strive for the goals I set for myself. My grandmother has also been a positive influence in my life, as she has given me encouragement and has helped me adopt a religious faith at a young age. (college student who is blind)

How have relatives, neighbors, teachers, church members, mentors, or other caring adults helped (or NOT helped) you achieve success personally, socially, academically, or spiritually?





## E-Community Activity: Working with Adults

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Working with adults

Adults can help young people achieve success. However, it is a two-way street. The actions of young people can either help or hinder the ability of adults to help them. Statements of advice to teens from successful people with disabilities are listed below. Think about whether you agree or disagree with each statement.

- In dealing with your parents, try to look at both your point of view and your parents' point of view. I know that this is hard to do.
- Always stay calm in a disagreement. Impossible, right? Yes, but it's worth a try.
- If you and your parents get in a fight, wait until they cool off and then tell them that you still love them. Trust me, this works.
- Allow time to really see what the adults are like, and then, if you feel okay with them, go ahead and open up to them. The results may be better than you may think!
- Positive relationships with adults can provide you with encouragement and help you build confidence and self-esteem.

What advice would you give other teens about what THEY can do to develop positive relationships with adults?



## E-Community Activity: Participating in Activities

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Participating in activities

Many adults who are successful participated in clubs, organizations, sports, or other activities in their schools and/or communities when they were teens. Below are examples of how young people stay involved in their communities.

- The primary activities I have been involved in have had to do with promotion of bike helmets. (high school student with brain injury)
- I am in my school's band and on our Youth Leadership Team. In the past, I was part of the speech team and the Student Council. Being a part of clubs has given me confidence and boosted my self-esteem. I enjoy music, and think it is an awesome feeling to be able to go out and be a part of my school's band to cheer on the sports teams and to contribute to a music concert. (college student who is blind)
- I have participated in flag corps/marching band, winterguard, High School/High Tech, and Beta Club. They have given me a chance to see what it is like to work with different kinds of people. (college student with a learning disability)
- I have been riding in the Little Bit Special Riders, a horseback riding program for disabled people, since I was four years old. In grade school I would always have something to share at show and tell that I was proud of. It was something I could do that not all of my friends could do, and they all thought it was so cool. I made a lot of friends, both disabled and not, that I have now known for a long time. (high school student with mobility and speech impairments)
- I am involved in the drama club at my school. (high school student with a mobility impairment)
- I have been involved in internships. They give me experiences that are needed for jobs. I've also been part of a city hall committee. This helps me know how professional life is. (college student with mobility and health impairments)
- I was involved in sports in high school—as a manager of the football team for four years and even lettering in the sport—and also I was on the wrestling team and lettered in that three years. I loved being a part of a team and supporting and being supported in working hard toward team and personal goals. I loved the camaraderie that the teams offered. (college student who has seizures)

Describe an activity you have been involved in and why it has been important in your life.



## **E-Community Activity: Being a Good Friend**

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Being a good friend

Friends can contribute to fun times and provide a boost when you're down. Positive relationships can enhance our health and well-being. What does being a friend mean to you? How can you be a better friend to others and to yourself?



## Mentor Tip: Friendships

Send this message to the mentors only.

Subject: Mentoring tips on friendships

Successful individuals with disabilities have a lot to say about the importance of having a positive social life. However, they sometimes face challenges in developing friendships. For example, here is a comment from a student who is blind:

- Blind people face the particular challenge of not being able to walk up to someone with whom they would like to talk unless they hear their voice or the person introduces himself or herself. In the dining hall, for example, I always asked someone to help me find a seat, but that person would not necessarily know the people I liked to sit with, so it was a game of chance. Sometimes I met new people, sometimes I happened to sit next to good friends, and sometimes I was unable to join in the conversations around me. However, by making friends in certain interest groups and arranging to meet friends for a meal, I was able to keep in touch with the people I cared about.

Sometimes people with disabilities face attitudinal barriers, as pointed out by this student with a disability:

- My disability gets in the way of getting friendly with some students, but they weren't worth knowing anyway. The others, who accepted me as an equal, were the ones I stuck with.

However, most people with disabilities find the same enjoyment with an active social life as others. As another student wrote:

- Social life is imperative for your own sanity and for learning how to interact with people.

Reflect on these issues as we help teens in our e-community develop friendships.



## E-Community Activity: Developing Friendships

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Developing friendships

Successful individuals with disabilities have a lot to say about the importance of having a positive social life. They value relationships with other people. Below, young people with a wide variety of disabilities share their opinions about the value of a positive social life in college. Think about your level of agreement or the relevance to your life.

- I can't stress enough the importance of at least trying to get out and be involved. It really doesn't matter in what—clubs, teams, friends, whatever. It won't be easy, but it's worth it.
- I found people to be a lot more open in college than in high school. I made most of my friends in classes, in the dining hall, in clubs, and at the Lutheran Ministry at my university. I am still in touch with several people I met during my college years.
- School consists of both social and academic learning. As I look back on my undergraduate days, I remember a lot more social times with other people than I do lectures or exams. And I'm not really a people person, either. I know I learned a lot from the social end of things. Some of that learning was painful, because when you make friends, people sometimes give feedback that you need but wouldn't otherwise get about behavior and attitude. This is part of people relating to one another and causes necessary growth. Mostly, though, socializing is fun, and being by yourself is lonely.
- The key is to balance your social life and school.
- For me, the debate team and the foreign language house provided communities where I felt accepted and had a good time.
- Living in a dorm helped immensely by immersing me in the college social life.
- My social life revolves mostly around people on my college dorm floor. I'm in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, too.

*continued on next page*



## E-Community Activity: Developing Friendships (continued)

- A lot of my social life resulted from my career goals. I wanted to be a programmer and hung around the computer lab—not exactly beer and pizza, but it was very social. There was great interaction and sharing of ideas and concepts. I think I learned more from the other students than from my professors.
- There are many strategies to a fulfilling social life in college. You can join a fraternity or a sorority on campus or live in a dorm. Another way is to join a club that matches your interests. I made a lot of friends by joining a club.
- I made one good friend in a class we were taking together. Every week, we got together and worked on the homework.
- I understand that for some people making friends is not as easy as it is for others. But if you treat people in a friendly manner, they are going to treat you the same, whereas if you feel yourself so different from others that you don't talk to them, you find yourself totally out of place. Everyone is the same and different too. This is what is so good about the world.

Why is it important (or unimportant) for you to have a satisfying social life in high school and/or college? What special challenges do you face and what strategies do you use regarding the development of a successful social life?



## E-Community Activity: Locating a Career OneStop

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Locating a Career OneStop

Many states have Career OneStops that give information on a wide range of programs for jobs and training. These centers are sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor and state and local organizations. More information can be found at

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

Explore the resources. Locate a Career OneStop near you by using the "State Gateway."

How might a Career OneStop help you prepare for or obtain employment?



## E-Community Activity: Finding Resources and Support

Send this message to the e-community of protégés and mentors.

Subject: Finding resources and support

No one achieves success alone. The comments below provide examples of how successful individuals have found, accessed, and used resources to help them achieve success personally, socially, academically, and professionally.

- Most of the resources I use I found through word of mouth (from parents, friends, and others I know), from newsletters, or from the Internet. Sometimes I find out about something useful by accident, and at other times I ask around or look on the Internet for a specific resource. I often ask others whose opinion I respect for advice, especially when I am making a major decision. I subscribe to a few newsletters and magazines that provide information on topics that interest me and keep lists of useful websites on my home page. (Ph.D. candidate who is blind)
- I ask questions. (high school student with a brain injury)
- Resources I use are people (parents, friends, teachers, mentors, etc.), agencies, financial resources....I have found so many different resources from so many people. As for my technical resources, I have gotten assistance from the local Educational Services District, counselors at the University of Washington, and the adaptive technology instructors at the Commission for the Blind and a community college. As for my social and financial resources, my mother and father have referred me to some of those as well as my counselor at the Commission for the Blind. Online communication has also really helped me find resources. When I use online resources, I can download information to my hard drive and translate it into Braille if I need to. (college student who is blind)
- One way in which I find resources is by being active and involved. Organizations for the blind and campus disability services offices are both good resources and good places to learn about other resources. (college student who is blind)
- One of my resources is my best friend. When I take her along with me, I can tell that people who don't know me feel more comfortable being around me. My friend and I think that there isn't a way that I can't be a part of what she is doing. Being with her is one of the ways I use a natural resource. (high school student with mobility and speech impairments)

Describe one way you have gained (or could gain) access to resources and support to help you in high school or college.