

Fostering Independence in Your Child

Prepare your child at home for the new challenges he or she will face in adult living. Above all, foster as much independence as your child is capable of achieving. Here are some suggestions for helping your child to become as independent as possible.

- Devise realistic household chores and insist upon completion. A small child can dust chair legs, baseboards, and wash windowsills.
- Teach basic cooking skills. Microwaves and easily prepared foods make simple cooking possible for practically everyone.
- Expect children to accept consequences. Children need practice in accepting responsibility for their behavior.
- Allow children to take risks. They will learn by trial and error. Give them the joy of accomplishment, of living with the results of their own decision-making. Help them to cope with the results of an error in judgment and don't penalize them by saying "I told you so."
- Don't set a double standard for children in the family. Expect all of your children to follow certain basic rules for courtesy.
- Don't allow the child with disabilities to think he or she deserves special treatment. Try to make his or her routine as much like that of the rest of the family as possible.
- Teach social skills to your child with a disability. They will make more friends if they have appropriate social skills.
- Encourage the child to work at a community job or a job in the home or neighborhood (volunteer work is helpful as well as paid employment).
- Stress good work habits like being on time and completing tasks.
- Be sure that your child socializes with nondisabled individuals as well as individuals with disabilities. Have your family interact with families who do not have children with disabilities.
- Allow your child to develop as many practical skills as possible, including such things as driving (even if it takes extra lessons), music appreciation, or sports.
- Help your child to set realistic goals.
- Let your child make as many decisions for himself or herself as possible. This will give the child personal management skills necessary for adulthood.
- Don't allow your child to manipulate you. Manipulative behavior interferes with achieving maturity as an adult.
- Involve your child in ordinary activities of running a home like mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, learning to fix a lamp, hanging pictures, doing the laundry. The child may not be physically able to do all of these tasks, but knowing how they are done is important.
- Encourage money management, budgeting, and saving.



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- Encourage your child's sense of humor. Make laughter part of every day.
- Help your child to develop leisure time skills like participation in sports, daily exercise, hobbies, computer or table games.
- Teach your child to think of others, remembering birthdays, saying thank you, volunteering to help and listening to others.
- Develop your child's conversational skills.
- Provide sex education.
- Concentrate on the child first and the disability second.
- Model and monitor good grooming habits.
- Teach as many personal care skills as your child can learn and teach them when your child is young. If your child is going to require personal care services for a lifetime, consider allowing another person outside the family to help care for his or her personal needs as the child becomes a teenager.
- Make a determination about guardianship.
- Plan financially, including making a will, getting a Social Security number for the child, and applying for Supplemental Social Security and Medicaid when the child reaches 18.