

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability: Youth Employment Skills Parent Checklist

The Youth Employment Skills Parent Checklist was developed, with permission, from the NCWD (2012) publication, "Helping Youth Build Work Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families," (<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/publications/helping-youth-build-work-skills-for-job-success-tips-for-parents-and-families/>).

Parents and families can use the publication and checklist as a guide to help their youth develop skills that will help them get and keep a job. The checklist is organized according to five sections. Sections one through four are categories of work readiness skills that are important for all entry level jobs: communication, interpersonal, decision-making and lifelong learning. Section five addresses inclusion of work skills in the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) and Summary of Performance (SOP). After each category, there are guiding questions and strategies provided that families can use to help their youth develop employment skills.

Section 1: Communication Skills

Communication skills involve the ability to read with understanding, convey ideas in writing, speak so others can understand, listen actively and observe critically.

1. Is your youth able to gather, process, and use information by observing his environment?

How can you help?

- Help your youth identify his learning style.
- Plan family activities that help youth develop their powers of observation.
- During a long car or bus trip, ask your youth to find and write down a few road signs and billboards.
- If your youth has a visual impairment, help him become familiar with common accessibility strategies, such as large print or screen reader programs.

2. Does your youth convey ideas using written language or through other technologies?

How can you help?

- Keep an eye on your youth's writing style and make sure that he understands that it is important to use correct punctuation, complete sentences and accurate spelling in other forms of written communication.
- Have your youth practice sending thank you notes for appropriate occasions.
- Have your youth practice clear handwriting and proficient keyboarding skills.
- Bring a job application home or find one online and have your youth fill it out.
- Help your youth create an e-resume using PowerPoint, pictures, and video.

3. Does your youth understand what he reads?

How can you help?

- Discuss the importance of reading with your youth, and encourage him to find materials to read for pleasure.
- Ask your family member to read a passage from a book or newspaper article, and have him answer questions you ask about what is read.
- If applicable, advocate that your youth's IEP address skill building in functional reading.
- Investigate job accommodations that might address reading difficulty in the workplace.

Section 2: Interpersonal Skills

Interpersonal skills involve the ability to guide others, resolve conflict and negotiate, advocate and influence, and cooperate with others.

1. Is your youth able to show others how to do a task?

How can you help?

- Speak to your youth about the importance of being able to teach others how to do a task.
- Explain that your youth must know how to do a task before he can teach others how to do it.
- Help your family member understand that the easiest way to guide somebody through a task is to break that task into manageable segments.
- Ask your youth to identify a task with multiple steps and guide you through it.
- Discuss the concept of positive reinforcement with your family member.

2. Is your youth effective in advocating for what he thinks should be done and influencing others towards their point of view?

How can you help?

- Encourage your youth to participate in school or community-based activities that promote leadership.
- Ask your youth to identify something their school or community needs, such as a new playground, public swimming pool, or teen center.
- Have your youth present the case for this need to an impartial person, such as a relative or teacher.
- Give your youth constructive feedback on the proposal, and ask him to modify the proposal based on the feedback you give.

3. Does your youth use his creativity?

How can you help?

- Plan a family garage sale and ask your youth to be in charge of promotion.
- Encourage your family member to enjoy age appropriate brain teasers and other puzzles that promote creative problem solving.
- Create a made-up situation, such as “the Nature Club needs money for a field trip to the National Forest,” and have your youth brainstorm possible solutions.
- Encourage your youth to enter a piece of art, creative writing, or homemade film into a local contest or to take a class in an area of interest.
- Explain to your youth about when they can use creativity in the workplace.

Section 3: Decision-making Skills

Decision-making skills involve the ability to use math to solve problems and communicate, solve problems and make decisions, and plan.

1. When given a task, is your youth able to plan a course of action?

How can you help?

- Consider purchasing a digital voice recorder so your youth can record directions or job tasks given by an employer.
- Give your youth a vague task, such as “make dinner,” that requires steps to plan; have him write out and describe steps to you; and help your youth complete the task.

- Encourage your youth to ask questions about details of the tasks when vague directions are given and the next steps are unclear.

2. Does your youth need assistance in solving problems and making decisions?

How can you help?

- Watch a local news broadcast and ask your youth to summarize the problem or conflict detailed in each story.
- Have your youth offer a possible solution to the issues on the news.
- Schedule an informational interview with a worker from a job your youth is interested in.
- Role-play a situation with your youth where an issue arises at work that he will need to report on. Have him practice describing what the situation was, who was involved and what steps he took to remedy the situation.

3. Does your youth use math to solve problems and communicate?

How can you help?

- Help your youth become familiar with mathematic symbols, numbers, and phrases.
- Use home improvement tasks as an avenue to work on math-related problem solving.
- Encourage your youth to re-check the calculations using a calculator or computer.
- Keep your weekly grocery receipts and ask your family member to create a chart that shows what your grocery spending is for a two-month period.

Section 4: Lifelong Learning Skills

Lifelong learning skills involve the ability to take responsibility for learning, reflect and evaluate, learn through research as well as use information and communications technology.

1. Does your youth use technology, such as computers, with proficiency?

How can you help?

- Create a checklist of technologies and programs that are commonly used on the job; use school resources, libraries, volunteer experiences, and technology you might have in the home to ensure your youth is familiar with each. List on his resume.
- Encourage your youth to take computer classes in school, at the library or through other community agencies.
- Make sure your youth is aware of how to use computers and technology appropriately in the workplace.
- Consider exploring what is available in the area of assistive technology (e.g., Florida Alliance for Assistive Technology [FAAST], www.faast.org).

2. Does your family member seek information from other sources when faced with a problem or task?

How can you help?

- Discuss the importance of employees being able to gather information to solve problems.
- Ask your youth to find a new dessert that your family can bring to a holiday gathering, using three different sources of information (e.g., Internet, cookbook, television)
- Have your youth use an Internet search engine to research a topic of interest.
- Role-play with your youth a situation where he has to ask a co-worker or supervisor for help or advice.

3. Is your youth able to recognize and count money and to make change if necessary?

How can you help?

- Use actual money or purchase an imitation money set that includes coins and have your youth practice identifying the currency and coins.
- Carry cash when shopping for small items and have your youth interact with the cashier and pay for the items.
- Help your youth find opportunities to practice working with money (e.g., yard sale, concession stand, selling raffle tickets).

Section 5: Including Work Skills in the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) and Summary of Performance (SOP)

Families of students receiving special education services can advocate for incorporating goals that relate to building work skills into their youth's IEP. In addition to requiring an IEP for youth with disabilities, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) also requires public schools to provide students receiving special education services a "Summary of Performance" (SOP). This summary of a student's academic achievement and functional performance should also include recommendations on how to assist the youth in meeting his postsecondary goals. The SOP is provided to students with disabilities who are due to graduate with a standard diploma, or exceed the age eligibility for a free and appropriate public education. The SOP is most useful when linked with the IEP process and the student has the opportunity to actively participate in its development.

1. Does your youth's IEP address work skills?

How can you help?

- Advocate for IEP goals that teach reading for understanding.
- Advocate for goals that teach technology skills.
- Advocate for goals that provide community- and school-based work experiences.

2. Does your youth's SOP include work skills?

How can you help?

- Make sure that your youth's SOP lists work skills that he has mastered.
- Make sure that your youth's SOP includes work-related academic and interpersonal or soft skills that he has mastered (e.g., counting money, reading and following instructions, following directions from supervisors).
- Consider including an updated resume with the SOP.

Summary

Youth with and without disabilities can increase their chances of successful employment by acquiring the work skills that employers seek. Families need to be aware that youth develop these skills from a variety of sources, including through the influence of family life and activities. Families are partners in the effort to build work skills. By providing opportunities for youth to build and practice key work skills, families can set the stage for a lifetime of employment success and community participation.



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