

Independent Living Skills Needed

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Here are some helpful hints for parents who wish to help their children with disabilities develop independent living skills.

Set realistic tasks and insist upon completion. A small child can dust chair legs, baseboards, and wash window sills.

Teach basic skills. Most children will not have maids and cooks when they grow up. Children with disabilities need to know how the process works and the requirements needed to get a job done - they may have to tell their attendants what to do.

Allow children to accept the consequences of behaviors. Excuses are not going to help when they reach a point in adulthood when there is no one to blame or no one to rescue them.

Let children take a risk. They will learn, by trial and error, their own style of compensation. Give them the joy of accomplishment, of living with the results of their own decision-making. Help them to cope with the result.

Don't set a double standard for other children in the family. Making an exception either way is detrimental to the family unit.

Don't let the child who is disabled think he is the only person in the family. Keep a balance so that the medical treatment, routine and diet isn't so special that it makes your youngster so different from the rest.

Cultivate your child's mind and talents. Make their studies, school responsibilities - homework, projects - theirs, not yours. Give them the joy of their own success.

Remember that it is hard to be a friend of someone who doesn't have good social skills. Teach appropriate behavior.

Stress good habits for the workplace be on time, complete tasks and work neatly. To live independently, an employee or volunteer will need all of these.

Your child needs to be around children who are not disabled. Have your family interact with families who don't have disabled children. Families often are accepting of inappropriate behavior and then find out that other people aren't. Not all peer pressure is negative.

Give children as many skills as they can develop, such as driving, music appreciation, instrument lessons, sports, etc.

Give children ownership of their lives. This will give them the personal management skills necessary for adulthood. Remember, people make allowances for children but not for grown-ups.

Don't allow your child to manipulate you. It will be no gift as he/she matures into adulthood.

Involve your child in the ordinary activities of running a home, such as mowing the lawn, taking out the trash, fixing the car, learning to fix a lamp, hanging pictures, doing the laundry. The child may not physically be able to do it, but needs to know how to tell someone else to do it.

Teach your child a sense of humor. To keep a balance, a perspective on the glitches of life is important.

Teach your child how to use leisure time. Build in more skills than sunbathing and TV watching!

Teach children "otherness" - to look beyond themselves and their own physical needs. Gifts of thoughtfulness, remembering other people's birthdays without being reminded and gifts of time are appreciated.

Develop conversational skills. People are boring who can only talk about their own disability or keep bringing things back to themselves. Make the disability secondary to helping your child develop into a full, interesting, successful, independent person.

If your child needs personal care services, allow another person to care for him, especially as he gets to be a teenager. This will help him as he reaches adulthood. Teach as many personal care skills as you can, as young as you can