

Fostering Self-Determination and Independence


Parents can provide support for their children by giving them a growing number of opportunities to make their own choices and decisions as is age-appropriate. Help them to solve problems, set goals, and take responsibility for themselves. Parents should not wait until their children are teenagers to provide opportunities to explore employment, housing options, and community recreation programs.


Below are some basic skills parents can intentionally model, teach, and practice with their children.

1. **Choice-making** - the ability to show a preference between two or more options. Choice-making decreases challenging behaviors and increases engagement in tasks and activities.
 - a. Provide opportunities for choices
 - b. Model choice-making decisions
 - c. Expect the child to make choices as age-appropriate

2. **Decision making** - the ability to consider possible solutions and select the best one suited to individual needs while considering how the decision affects oneself and others.
 - a. Talk through the process with your child
 - b. Let your child hear you process out loud how you weigh the pros and cons of a decision before you make one
 - c. Guide your child to make the best decision possible
 - d. Ask questions that lead your child to consider what he hopes to gain from a particular decision
 - e. Allow children to make decisions at home and about their lives



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3. **Problem-solving** - the ability to effectively respond to and generate solutions for challenging situations that arise. Problem-solving leads to increased competence and independence and can help children safely navigate different environments.
 - a. Teach problem-solving by:
 - i. Identifying the problem
 - ii. Brainstorming solutions
 - iii. Weighing the pros and cons
 - b. Model problem-solving strategies
 - c. Allow the child to solve problems independently before offering assistance. Resist the temptation to step in too soon.
 4. **Goal-setting and planning** - working towards a desired outcome gives a sense of direction and purpose.
 - a. Allow the child to help set goals
 - b. Discuss future plans with your child
 - c. Encourage your child to plan for their future
 5. **Taking responsibility for oneself** - be accountable for things within one's control. Teaching your child to take responsibility for themselves gives them self-confidence and helps them gain independence. It also lessens their need for support for all aspects of life.
 - a. Gradually give your child responsibilities at home
 - b. Foster Independence - by doing all of the above (skills 1-5)
 6. **Self-awareness and self-knowledge skills** - accurately identify own strengths and limitations, preferences, interests, abilities.
 - a. Talk openly about the disability, its limitations, and ways to overcome challenges
 - b. Focus on the child's abilities
 - c. Teach that everyone is different and has different interests and abilities

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7. **Self-advocacy skills** - standing up for yourself and your rights, communicating effectively, and being a good team member. It allows control over one's life and choices and supports.
- a. Allow your child's choice to be heard and respected
 - b. Encourage the child to advocate for themselves and express their wants, needs, and feeling.
 - c. Allow your child opportunities to be a leader - maybe find volunteer opportunities with younger children to develop your child's leadership skills
 - d. Encourage communication skills - use eye contact, speak clearly, or use email to communicate
 - e. Provide opportunities to participate in inclusive activities to practice interacting and advocating with peers
8. **Have high expectations**
- a. Demonstrate self-determination skills of choice-making, decision-making, and problem-solving
 - b. Model daily living skills
 - c. Give positive reinforcement for appropriate behavior
 - d. Be available for support but allow your child to act independently
 - e. Collaborate with school staff and other professionals
 - f. Be a role model

Reference:

- Video on Utah Parent Center Website:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-C4RXGSeeU&feature=youtu.be>