
Teaching Soft Skills

Employers have identified ten soft skills that are needed for getting and keeping a job. Although employers value the following skills for all employees, recognize that individuals with ASD will have varying degrees of needs and knowledge/skill levels. It is important to acknowledge that accommodations in the workplace and employment practices centered on the individual's strengths should be part of the conversation for individuals with ASD.

You can support your son or daughter in learning these skills and begin by understanding their current abilities in these areas to expand on them. These include:


A Strong Work Ethic - Having a strong work ethic means understanding the importance of work and of being diligent or working hard. A person who does not care about work won't have the strong work ethic that employers value. One of the best ways to teach the value of work is through chores at home. Make a daily chore list of what you expect youth to do. Explain that every member of a household has a responsibility to pitch in and help.

Any time a child or young adult practices setting a goal and completing it, they are learning about having a strong work ethic.

Dependability - Employers want dependability. They want to be able to rely on their workers to do what they say they will do, be on the job regularly and on time. There are many opportunities to teach dependability at home and school. Teach your child or youth the skills to manage their own time as is age-appropriate so that they can do things like get up on time, and be where they need to be on time and as independently as possible.

A Positive Attitude - Employers say that an employee who shows up to work with a positive attitude can often be taught a skill he or she does not already have. A positive attitude is evident when the employee smiles, is friendly and is willing to learn or to do what is asked.





The most powerful thing parents can do is to model having a positive attitude. Lead by example, and show your child or youth you are willing to learn new things even when it is challenging. Talk to them about your own work experiences, and how a good attitude at work has helped you.


Self-Motivation - Self-motivation is the ability to do what needs to be done without influence from other people or situations. People with self-motivation find the reasons and strength to complete even challenging tasks without giving up or needing another person to encourage them. Self-motivation skills are essential when working on a job.

It is important to note that we all are often more motivated to do things we find enjoyable or to do things we care about in some way. Parents can help build self-motivation skills by finding things that interest their child or young adult and then helping them experience the success that comes from the efforts they make when they are motivated.

Being a Team Player - Employers like a person who works well with others. At almost every job site, employees are expected to work with co-workers and to be team players. There are many opportunities to practice being a team player at school and at home and it can be especially fun and rewarding to do so.

All children and youth should have access to extracurricular activities that can provide opportunities to be team players. Help your child or youth learn to be a team player by helping them understand the differences people have. Introduce them to people who are different from them by taking part in activities like community festivals that feature different cultures, various places of worship, or through books, magazines, film, television, or the internet. Give them many opportunities to work on group projects.

Being Organized - The ability to be organized is a key to job success. School is a great place for your child or youth to learn to keep information organized. Using some type of calendar or daily organizer can help them understand how being organized helps them to be prepared.



Working Under Pressure - The ability to work under pressure is important since sometimes work will be stressful, and there will likely be multiple demands placed upon a person at the same time. Both school and home environments present many opportunities to develop skills for being resilient and coping under pressure.


One important skill for working under pressure is knowing how to ask for help. Children and young adults can also learn skills for managing their stress. We want to prepare children and young adults so that work is not so stressful that it is harmful to their physical and mental health.

Communication - Employers want people who can communicate well, whether it is being able to ask and answer questions clearly, or the ability to actively listen and participate in conversations. Employees also need to be able to judge when they should speak with supervisors about issues that come up.

An important part of developing soft skills at school and home should be determining what communication skills your child or youth needs to work on, and the communication method that works best for them.

Flexibility - Flexibility will go a long way toward success on a job. Consider how well your child or youth adjusts to change. Workers on the job often need to adjust to changes in assignments or schedules.

Flexibility is often a deficit in those with ASD. Yet those who can think about a problem in a new way and engage in flexible thinking will be more successful. Teach them cognitive flexibility, to let go of an old way of doing something to try a new way. Having a variety of experiences and activities will help your child develop more flexibility, confidence, and the ability to cope with change. You can create opportunities for practicing and gradually building cognitive flexibility by introducing unexpected changes in routine and supporting your child as they learn to process and cope with the unexpected. You can slowly increase the frequency of those unexpected changes until those transitions feel more natural.



Confidence - Confidence or self-esteem is a feeling of appreciation for one's abilities. Children and youth need to build up their self-confidence. Developing healthy self-esteem and confidence is essential for obtaining and keeping a job and for overall life success and happiness.

Parents have a critical role in helping their child or youth to develop a healthy sense of self-confidence. All children benefit from appropriate honest praise and recognition of their efforts and hard work and a positive uplifting environment at home. All also benefit from learning social skills. Knowing when they are acting appropriately builds confidence. The very basic social skills are things like how to make eye contact, how close to stand to another person, and how to shake hands. Another tool you can use to build confidence and self-esteem may be positive affirmations. These are phrases or statements that are repeated out loud or internally that highlight the positive traits in your child.

Building on what the individual has already learned or acquired can only benefit them in the long run. Small steps and changes toward that growth will add up, and the individual will be on their way toward their own degree of independence and success.

References:

- Utah Parent Center:
<https://utahparentcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Soft-Skills-High-Functioning-.pdf>
<https://utahparentcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Soft-Skills-Moderate.pdf>
<https://utahparentcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/Soft-Skills-Significant.pdf>