



**Utah
Parent
Center**

**Special needs,
extraordinary potential**

Tips For Teaching Soft Skills to Youth With Mild to Moderate Disabilities

1. 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 employer's value.

One of the best ways is to teach 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, the youth is learning about having a strong work ethic.

- Create a chore chart where your youth can check off each chore as it is completed. It may take some children and youth more time to master doing a chore, so be patient and be prepared to assist them in doing the task as many times as needed to master a task.
- When you give your young adult directions for doing a chore such as laundry, mowing the lawn, or straightening a room, have her repeat the instructions in her own words to check for understanding.
- Do not do the task for your son or daughter because it seems quicker and easier. Remember that the goal here is for your child or young adult to do it.
- Use rewards to help keep youth motivated to stay on task. Rewards could be money or time to do a desired activity like video game time.
- Post a visual reminder of the steps for completing the chores.

2. Dependability

Employers want dependability. They want to be able to rely on their workers to do what they say they will do and be on the job regularly and on time.

There are many opportunities to teach dependability at home and at school. Teach youth the skills to manage their own time so that they can do things like getting up and ready for school on time, getting to classes on time and being where they need to be on time and as independently as possible.

- Help youth learn to manage their time. Explore the wide array of assistive technology that is available to organize and track time. If one method does not work, there are many other options to try. For free assistance with time management assistive technology apps and programs, contact the Utah Center for Assistive Technology.
- Try having youth wear a watch with a digital display and learn to set alarms.
- Help your youth keep a binder with a printed and laminated copy of his or her daily schedule and other helps.
- Use a family calendar where you can all plan together.

3. 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 shows 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 youth you are willing to learn new things even when it is challenging. Talk to them about your own work experiences, and how having a good attitude at work has helped you.

- Be specific in your praise. Rather than saying, “Thanks for having a great attitude”, say “I really liked your positive attitude while working on your homework today even though it was a little bit challenging. You smiled and did it cheerfully.”
- Remember to model having a good attitude and lead by example.
- Use role-playing. Give your young adult an example like, “How could you show a good attitude if your boss at work asked you to clean the toilets?” Let your young adult come up with ideas. You might also act out the situation using two or more family members.

4. 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.

- Help youth explore their interests and passions at a deeper level.
- Consider their learning styles when considering how to do further exploration. Do they do better with a certain learning modality such as visual learning or auditory learning? If so, incorporate activities that use their strengths into their deeper exploration. For example, if a youth is a hands-on learner, she may need to go out into the community more and experience things for herself rather than just reading about things or watching videos. See the resources on learning styles.
- Consider what accommodations a youth may need. If she reads at a lower level, for example, audio books may be a better option than traditional books.
- If making choices seems overwhelming to your young adult limit the choices to 2 or 3 options at time.

5. 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 a team player. There are many opportunities to practice being a team player at school and at home. Working on this skill can be especially fun and rewarding.

All youth should have access to extracurricular school activities that can provide opportunities to be a team player.

Help a young adult learn to be a team player by helping him understand differences people have. Introduce him to people who are different from him 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 youth many opportunities to enjoy working on group projects.

- Look for classes offered through parks and recreation and community education that are willing to offer basic accommodations for youth with special needs. For example, youth may be able to attend classes with a

friend or family member for support.

- Look for adaptive recreation classes offered by parks and recreation departments, especially for those with disabilities.
- Play games as a family and encourage teamwork. Board games help youth build many skills that apply to work such as cooperating with others, taking turns, following rules, controlling emotions, and learning new knowledge and skills. Scheduling a weekly game night is a fun way to teach teamwork while bonding as a family.
- Have youth participate in a social skills group. They could practice taking turns at games, working on assignments together, etc.
- **6. Organization**

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

- Create a chart to track assignments and turn in dates. A graphic organizer might be helpful.
- Create an appropriate reward system for work turned in on time and marked on the chart. Let youth help decide what types of rewards would be meaningful. Remember that rewards don't always have to be a tangible item. They could include verbal praise, lunch with a friend, or getting to sit in a preferred seat.
- Teach youth how organization skills could help her find success when working on a job.
- Find out if there is a class website through Canvas or another platform. A class website often lists assignments, due dates and other important information and is a great way to help youth stay organized.

7. 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 to know how to ask for help. Children and young adults can also learn skills for managing their stress. We certainly want to prepare our children and young adults so that work is not

stressful to the point that it is harmful to their physical and mental health.

- Practice coping skills for stress reduction. Remember that you may need to practice skills multiple times before your child or young adult masters them. Consider activities to build into her schedule as a routine to help reduce stress such as a yoga class, going on walks, regular exercise classes, or other stress reducing activities. Be sure she understands why you are doing these activities and help her be aware of how they help her feel better.
- Help your youth identify techniques that help when she is feeling stressed, like slowing down breathing, counting, or using calming self talk. Coach her to use the technique when you notice she is stressed.
- Have the youth practice job skills and help him pay attention to how long different tasks take.
- Help youth go identify when accommodations are needed or when assistance is needed and how to ask appropriately for what is needed.

8. Communication Skills

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. Youth also need to be able to judge when they should speak with supervisors about issues that come up.

An important part of developing IEP transition plans should be determining what communication skills your youth needs to work on.

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9. Flexibility

Flexibility will go a long way toward helping youth have success on a job. Consider how well your young adult adjusts to change. Workers on the job often need to adjust to changes in assignments or schedule changes.

Cognitive flexibility includes two skills: flexible thinking and set shifting. Young adults who are able to think about a problem in a new way engage in flexible thinking, while young adults who get stuck in their ways tend to engage in rigid thinking. Set shifting refers to the individual's ability to let go of an old way of doing something to try a new way.

Having a variety of experiences and activities will help all youth develop more flexibility, confidence, and ability to cope with change.

- Sometimes tweak the routines so that youth understand that things are not always going to be the same and learn to handle change. Instead of doing everything exactly the same way each day, make small changes here and there. Even small changes, like taking a shower at a different time of the day, show young adults that it's okay to do things in a different way.
- Telling jokes or making silly puns is also another great way to build flexible thinking skills.

10. Confidence

Confidence or self-esteem is a feeling of appreciation for one's own abilities. The teen years are a particularly important time for youth 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 youth to develop a healthy sense of self-confidence.

All youth benefit from appropriate honest praise and recognition of their efforts and hard work and from a positive uplifting environment at home.

All youth 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.

- Talk with youth about friendships. Youth build self-confidence during their young adult years through developing friendships. Sometimes youth with disabilities do not understand whether someone is truly a friend or not or they may engage in harmful friendships that can hurt their self-esteem. Teach youth that true friendships are those where there is respect that goes both ways. Friends don't ask you to engage in harmful behaviors and they respect your right to say no to things that make you uncomfortable.
- If your young adult feels anxious in social situations, provide guidance on social skills. Talk about body posture, smiling, connecting with others,

showing interest in others' activities and joining in conversations. You can teach simple strategies that can help youth feel more comfortable and confident. If your young adult has trouble with eye contact, teach her to look at someone's nose instead so it looks like she is looking towards someone's eyes.

- Include social skills in the IEP. There are many wonderful social skills programs that you can draw ideas from. Ask your youth's teacher for recommendations or contact the Utah Parent Center for ideas.
- Look for social skills classes at home and in the community to further help with these skills.

Resources Listed by Skill. Most resources are applicable to all ability levels.

1. A Strong Work Ethic

Fact sheet with examples of how to break down larger tasks into simple steps using either pictures or words. Created for teachers, and also helpful for parents: <http://www.ttacnews.vcu.edu/2012/08/task-analysis-teaching-multistep-skills-made-easy/>

Article about why chores are important and how to get teenagers to do household chores: http://www.naspcenter.org/adol_chores2.html

Article on how to create and use checklists for chores and other tasks. Includes links to apps and other helpful resources: <http://lifeafterieps.com/unleash-the-power-of-checklists/>

Article for parents about visual schedules: https://ed-psych.utah.edu/school-psych/_documents/grants/autism-training-grant/Visual-Schedules-Practical-Guide-for-Families.pdf

2. Dependability

Video for youth about being dependable and professional on the job: <http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=91>

A video about how parents can teach their children dependability: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=teaching+depenability&&view=detail&mid=9FB46DD4CBA2ED9F54A89FB46DD4CBA2ED9F54A8&&FORM=VDRVRV>

Utah Center for Assistive Technology (UCAT) web page: <https://jobs.utah.gov/usor/vr/services/ucat.html>

3. A Positive Attitude

Short video about having a good attitude at work: <http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=250>

Video for youth about having a positive attitude: <http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=93>

Article providing information about a growth mindset and free growth mindset printables for various ages: <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/building-on-strengths/download-growth-mindset-activities-for-kids>

Article on The Power of Praise: <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/celebrating-successes/ways-praise-can-empower-kids-learning-issues>

Resources for parents and educators for teaching a Growth Mindset:

<https://biglifejournal.com/blogs/blog/growth-mindset-resources>

<https://www.mindsetkit.org/>

<https://s3-us-west-1.amazonaws.com/mindset-net-site/FileCenter/3JIQAYABR8M8GHQCQ05Q.pdf>

Article: Using Video Modeling for teaching students with disabilities: <https://www.iidc.indiana.edu/pages/video-self-modeling>

Information on using Social Stories: <https://vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/assets/files/tipsheets/socialstoriestips.pdf> <http://www.pbisworld.com/tier-2/social-stories/>

4. Self Motivation

Video about a young adult who overcame personal challenges to pursue her passion: <http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=238>

Article about different learning styles: <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/building-on-strengths/studying-options-for-your-childs-strengths>

Video: How to Motivate your Teen: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=teach+your+child+self+motivation&&view=detail&mid=746E5E3F85FA2A9414A6746E5E3F85FA2A9414A6&&FORM=VRD GAR>

5. Being a Team Player

Video for youth about being a team player: <http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=92>

Family fun ideas that encourage teamwork: <https://www.verywellfamily.com/family-fun-night-ideas-with-teens-2609697>

Reviews of various board games that require cooperation and teamwork to play: <http://www.theboardgamefamily.com/all-game-reviews/cooperative-games/>

Centers for independent living around the state offer a variety of classes for youth and young adults. Offerings vary by location. Directory for Utah: <http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory-results/UT>

6. Organization

Video for students on how to organize homework: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=learning+how+to+self+advocate+and+ask+for+help&qvvt=learning+how+to+self+advocate+and+ask+for+help&view=detail&mid=FFAF372CDAC8E9E5351FFFAF372CDAC8E9E5351F&rvsmid=6B5B7D626FD9B99605876B5B7D626FD9B9960587&FORM=VDQVAP>

Video about using assistive technology at work to help yourself stay organized: <http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=254>

A simple homework checklist that can be used to track and reinforce responsible school behaviors: https://cdn.empoweringparents.com/simple_homework_chart.pdf

9 Simple Steps to Breaking Down a Homework Assignment: <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/learning-at-home/homework-study-skills/9-simple-steps-for-breaking-down-assignments>

A sample homework contract for both parents and youth. This helps everyone know how to be accountable: <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/learning-at-home/homework-study-skills/download-sample-homework-contract>

7. Working Under Pressure

Article: The Importance of Resilience for Kids With Learning and Attention Issues <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/building-on-strengths/the-importance-of-resilience-for-kids-with-learning-and-attention-issues>

Ideas to help high school students deal with stress: <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/managing-feelings/stress-anxiety/10-ways-to-help-your-middle-or-high-schooler-manage-stress>

Short video for youth about asking for help: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=learning+how+to+self+advocate+and+ask+for+help&qpv=learning+how+to+self+advocate+and+ask+for+help&view=detail&mid=107DE4E865F23DED9956107DE4E865F23DED9956&rvsmid=6B5B7D626FD9B99605876B5B7D626FD9B9960587&FORM=VDRVRV>

8. Communication Skills

Video for youth on the value of good communication skills on the job: <http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=82>

Suggestions on teaching your child about pitch and tone during communication: <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/common-challenges/picking-up-on-social-cues/at-a-glance-helping-your-child-notice-voice-pitch-and-tone>

10 ways to help your teen improve communication skills: <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/child-learning-disabilities/communication-disorders/10-ways-to-improve-your-high-schoolers-communication-skills>

9. Flexibility

Video for youth demonstrating flexible thinking and problem solving on a job site: <http://www.pacer.org/transition/video/player.asp?video=84>

Video about how to teach problem solving skills to children and young adults: <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=teaching+teens+with+disabilities+to+problem+solve&&view=detail&mid=E578946AB3C40FAE0E78E578946AB3C40FAE0E78&&FORM=VRDGAR>

10. Confidence

Article on 7 Ways to Help Your Child Build Positive Self-Esteem: <https://www.understood.org/en/friends-feelings/empowering-your-child/self-esteem/7-ways-to-boost-your-childs-self-esteem>

Your son or daughter needs self-determination skills such as making choices, setting goals, and self-advocacy. This Self-Determination video will provide you with a foundation of how to teach these skills to your son or daughter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-C4RXGSeeU&feature=youtu.be>