



**Utah
Parent
Center**

**Special needs,
extraordinary potential**

Tips For Teaching Soft Skills to Youth With Significant 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.

- Use a visual schedule or use pictures to show a chore and then mark it when completed.
- Break the chore down into very simple steps and support your child or young adult as necessary for him to master the process.
- Give a reward when the task is completed. Explain that the reward is like getting a paycheck for a job completed.
- A chore could be any task that is appropriate including completing personal hygiene tasks.

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.

- Use visual schedules to keep track of time or activities. If youth have support staff, those individuals should be talking with them about the schedules, where they are going and why.
- The IEP team could consider setting a goal for learning to tell time.
- Talk at home about being on time, why it is important that we be on time and how it will help on a job.

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.

- Use materials such as picture cards that show youth smiling and being appropriate with friends and co-workers.
- Consider using video modeling. In video modeling, you make a video of people or even your son or daughter displaying a positive attitude. Play the video for your young adult to show what a positive attitude looks like. Show the video multiple times over a period of time. See the resources on video modeling.
- Use simple social stories showing what a positive attitude looks like. See the resources on social stories.

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.

- Youth with significant disabilities should be able to pursue things they enjoy doing.
- Allow them to make choices using whatever method of communication works for them.
- Encourage them to stick with a particular task for just a little bit longer to help build their ability.

- Allow youth to have new experiences and explore a variety of things to help them determine what types of things they might be motivated to have an interest in.

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.

- Assist youth to participate in extracurricular activities. Check with the UPC for more information on working with the school to achieve this.
- Find adaptive parks and recreation programs appropriate for your young adult.
- Look for private providers within the community that offer recreational classes for individuals with more significant disabilities. Contact the Utah Parent Center to explore with staff what might be available for your youth's specific needs.
- Youth could participate in a social skills group and practice turn taking or working on assignments together. This could be an IEP goal.

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.

- Use a visual schedule or use pictures to show a task or a step in the task and then mark it when completed. You may need to break the task down into very simple steps and support your youth along the way in order for

him to master the process.

- Use a reward when the task is completed. Explain that the reward is like getting a paycheck for a job completed

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.

- Help your child or young adult ask for help. However she communicates, make sure she has a way to ask for help. Work with all her providers so that they are aware or how she asks for help.
- Set up regular ways for your youth to reduce stress. There are many therapeutic options available to help reduce stress. Some ideas include massage, music therapy, hydrotherapy, animal therapy, recreational therapy and art therapy.
- Find ways to help your youth learn to breathe more slowly, imagine she is in a peaceful setting, practice calming self talk or other techniques she enjoys. Find what works and help her practice when she is not stressed so she becomes comfortable using the technique when she is stressed.
- Make sure other caregivers or educators who work with your youth know what works for her so they can coach her to use the stress reducing technique when needed.
- Help the youth to use a visual schedule with pictures of the job and what needs to be done.

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.

- Practice communication skills using your youth's preferred communication method. For example, he might use his visual schedule to identify a need or concern.
- Program job-related phrases into your young adult's augmentative communication device, if he or she uses one. Phrases might include "How may I help you?" and "Please wait while I find the answer to your question." Communication phrases like these can help prepare youth for employment.
- If your young adult is verbal, use a five-point scale to teach appropriate speaking volume or standing distance. For example, if your son tends to use a loud voice, teach him to equate his voice with a number. If the loudest voice is a five and a one is a soft voice teach him that using a two or three level voice is appropriate at work.

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.

- Maintain a variety of activities in different environments. Go different places at different times on different days.
- At home, offer different activities at different times.
- Provide a variety of experiences to keep rigid behavior patterns from forming and help your young adult to be flexible and to understand that the world is always changing around us.

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.

- Provide specific praise for tasks well done. Praise youth for working hard and sticking with a task even if it is for a short amount of time.
- Part of being a confident person is being able to be healthy emotionally and physically. Think about what you and your young adult can do together to improve his health such as cutting out an unhealthy food or introducing a new exercise plan. Working on these goals can provide a sense of purpose and accomplishment too.
- Involve support staff in coaching and helping your youth accomplish goals. Set small goals and celebrate the success along the way.

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=VRDGAR>

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&qv=learning+how+to+self+advocate+and+ask+for+help&view=detail&mid=FFAF372CDAC8E9E5351FFAF372CDAC8E9E5351F&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&qvvt=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>