



LAUNCHING YOUNG ADULTS

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Launching Young Adults



- Launching young persons who have disabilities begins in infancy.
- From the very beginning of life, the context of the person determines how that person approaches life.
- For persons who have chronic problems, they are often "protected," "kept dependent," or in some way shielded from having responsibilities, making decisions, learning how to negotiate, or taking responsibility for their life.

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- How does a person learn to be an adult? It starts with having chores to do in the home.
- At first, the adult demonstrates, models, supports, and urges the child to "pick up your toys." This starts by the adult picking up the toys and talking to the child about how this is done. Sometimes it is hand-over-hand guidance of pick it up, put it in the box, that is very good.
- Behavior that is rewarded will be repeated.



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- The PURPOSES OF A FAMILY are to teach a child as sense of:
- BELONGING (This is who we are, this is what we do, this is what we believe and value).
- SEPARATENESS (It is all right to be unique, it is fine to have your own life, it is expected that you are in charge, and you are encouraged to go forth and make your own decisions)

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- How will your young adult develop sense of belonging in the community?
- You will want to develop "Circle of Friends" who accept your family member with disabilities as a person, not a label.
- You will want to help your young adult with developmental delays learn to 1) initiate a conversation, 2) choose people he/she wants as a friend, 3) be able to identify those things your family member likes to do and share with others

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- Long before your family member reaches adulthood, you must teach that person to 1) make decisions, 2) initiate conversations to tell what they want, what they need, and what they like, and 3) learn to negotiate for these interests.
- We tend to over teach persons with developmental delays to 1) wait their time, 2) expect things to just be presented to them, 3) or not initiate.
- These traits are not helpful to an adult. Your family member needs to be recognized for who they are as a person.

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- Very early in life, your family member needs to be developing concepts of work.
- Having an idea of work comes very early in development. Most 4 or 5 year olds play at “working.” They like to play at being policeman, a doctor, a carpenter, or a variety of other make believe jobs.
- The same applies to your family member who has developmental delays.



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- Very early on, your family member is aware if people leaving for work, talking about work, and actually working in the home.
- Build on these. Prepare your family member with developmental delays to experience occupying their time in a productive manner.
- Have you noticed your family member parallel what adults are doing...sweeping, cleaning, preparing food, washing, or occupying their time the same way the adults occupy themselves?

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- At home ask “what is your job?” We do that with all our children and family members, but too often we don’t have that conversation with our family member who has delays.
- Most of us, especially men, define ourselves by our jobs, have you ever thought of that for your young adult with disabilities?
- How is your family member going to define what they do?



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- A second task you need to involve your young adult in doing is sequential thinking
- Thinking in a sequence is very critical and powerful way for all of us to learn.
- It is sometimes called “start, do, stop” or “first, next, next” or even “beginning, middle, end.”
- **LEARNING TO SEQUENCE IS IMPORTANT FOR ANY JOB AND ANY ADULT TO BE ABLE TO DO.**

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- Help your young adult organize materials, items, or objects.
- Loading and unloading a dishwasher is one place where things that are “alike” go together. Placing cups in the dishwasher in a certain way, putting utensils in and taking them out, or even just loading the dishwasher so that the items come out clean is a sequential task.
- So is washing clothes, sorting clothes, folding clothes (by owner) provides ways to think in sequence

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- These routines help your family member learn to follow a work task.
- These sequences helps your family member learn to organize along specified lines of sameness or differences.
- Learning to sequence, to follow directions, or to complete a task are very important in all our jobs. Teach them to your young adult as early in life as possible.

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The purpose of education for your family member who has developmental delays MUST be to:

1. Prepare the person to live in the community
2. Prepare the person to occupy their time in a productive manner. This may include employment, but if the person is not employed (and individuals with disabilities are the most unemployed group in our country), then you still want to teach your family member to occupy their time in a productive manner.

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- My experience has been generally that families who find ways for their family member who is disabled to occupy their time in a productive manner are far superior to any other option that is available to an individual who has development delays.
- Meaningful occupation is central to all persons including your young adult.
- Doing meaningful tasks increase our self estimate of who we are and our value as a person.

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- Wherever your family member who has developmental delays lives, they must occupy their time in a productive manner.
- At a minimum, this would be self-help, self-management, and taking care of themselves.
- Along a continuum to the maximum, it is doing tasks that contribute to others and who create appreciation of the individual from those around the person.

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- Another critical work skill is that of increasing learning over the lifespan.
- Time was when we thought (or were taught) that learning had its limits. That no longer is held as true.
- We continue to learn all our lives, and the opportunity to learn does not need to be denied at age 22 years.
- What does your young adult want to know more about?

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- Learning may be formal or informal, but your young adult needs to have opportunities to learn.
- Such learning may be a hobby or it may be a skill that the person wants to acquire.
- Every person, now days, knows that they must learn new things just to keep up in their work or in their life in general.
- The same applies to your young adult.



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- Austin Community College in Austin, Texas has a program called VoCAT. VoCAT means vocational training for adults with disabilities. Vo, of course, means vocation. I choose to use occupation. The "C" means communication.
- The "A" means academics. And the "T" means training.
- VoCAT is a "revolving door" concept that the person who is disabled may use across their lifespan. The young adult comes in to learn what they want and repeats this throughout their life as needed or desired.

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- For young adults, such supports, accommodations, and modifications allow them to keep changing and learning.
- It may well be that in the 20s and 30s of the lives of your young adults with developmental delays are the most productive times when they learn what they want to learn and achieve what they want to become.
- How may this happen?



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- First of all, we must change our expectations and attitudes about the person with developmental disabilities.
- We must move from focusing on “what the person cannot do” which is a deficit model
- To focusing on “what the person can do...” which is an abilities model
- Build on what your young adult likes to do, wants to do, and needs to do.

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- Most importantly, use the latest insights, research, and advancement in knowledge to apply to your young adult.
- For example, technology now allows a person to have a “reminder” system that keeps the individual on schedule and on task. Use these types of technology to support your young adult.
- We have devices that speak for a person, they will listen for a person and translate information, they will store facts and knowledge for those needing storage of memory.

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- We have not even begun to know the power that technology provides young adults with disabilities.
- And the future of technology in disability services is even brighter than we can imagine.
- Look to technology to support your young adult with assistance in every day life.



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- The University of Texas at Austin now has a FREE demonstration center in Amarillo that allows any family to come and see what technology is available to persons with developmental disability.
- They do not sell, repair, or refurbish technology, they are a demonstration center that shows all of the new technology that has been put on the market.
- They can demonstrate technology so that you know what you may find to help your young adult.

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- The Technology Access Center is located in Amarillo at Specialized Therapy Services (STS) on Lakeview just behind the Red Lobster Restaurant. The phone number to find out more is 806-468-9400. IT IS A FREE SERVICE
- There is also a cooperative project between Texas A&M University in College Station and the University of Texas at Austin called Person-Centered Planning where they focus on person-centered thinking to help young adults plan for their future. Information about this service may be obtained at 512-232-0740



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- And of course, I am available to work with you and your young adult. You may contact me either through PEN project or at:



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