

Set an Independent Living Destination and Map a Course to Get There

People usually plan journeys with a specific destination in mind and map the way accordingly. When you are planning for your child's "journey" to independent living, you will also need to decide on a specific "destination" or goal, and then map a clear course of action to reach that goal.

Takeaways

- Parents can help their son or daughter explore independent living goals using self-determination
- Your child can practice independent living skills early and often
- The school and other agencies may be able to help

Set an independent living destination through self-determination

When helping your youth set independent living goals, give careful thought to the skills they will need to live as independently as possible and meet their individual goals. Self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities that lead people to set personal goals and take the initiative to reach them. It is about being in charge, but is not necessarily the same thing as self-sufficiency or independence. It means making choices, learning to solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for one's life.

Families can provide support in developing self-determination skills. Parents can help prepare their young adults by giving them increasing opportunities to make their own decisions. Families should also provide their teenager with opportunities to explore employment, housing options, and community recreation programs. Utilize your own network of relatives and friends, as well as formal service systems to make connections. Most importantly, families should prepare themselves to accept their child in his or her new adult role and allow their adult children to actively make decisions that will determine their future - even if it means allowing them to take risks and make mistakes.

Then map a course

Your child can practice independent living skills while living at home. Including your child in the many activities required to run a household, go to work, and live independently in the community will give your child valuable experiences. Consider the following ideas:

- Include them when cooking, cleaning, and shopping. Give them a list of groceries to buy or household chores to complete
- Discuss the importance of personal hygiene, and help them establish a morning and evening routine
- Make sure they know which medications they take, what they are for, and when to take them
- Help them schedule a doctor's appointment and write down any medical or health questions to ask the doctor

- Have them order their own prescription refills from the pharmacy
- Take them to the bank and open a checking account. Teach them how to write a check, deposit money, and withdraw cash
- Obtain a copy of an apartment application and show them how to fill out the form
- Show them how to read a bus schedule and take a trip to the store
- Practice what to do in emergency situations and who to call for help
- Encourage community participation by involvement in youth organizations, special interest clubs, community theater or arts centers, places of worship, community education programs, libraries, athletic centers, or volunteer opportunities
- Call a supervisor, coach, or manager to talk about your child’s disability and help these people access reasonable accommodations for your child. Some community education and park and recreation programs also offer recreation and leisure opportunities for adults with disabilities
- Look for ways to turn interests into real skills and social experiences. If attending movies is one of their favorite activities, make the most of it. Help them make plans to invite a friend and decide on a plan for transportation to and from the movie
- If the IEP team has identified needs in this area, participate with the IEP team to develop independent living goals and services that will be included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

For some children, there may be other public agencies to help “map the course.”

Your child may need ongoing support to live in the community. Programs offered through the county should be explored while they are still in school. A number of these services have eligibility requirements or waiting lists, and some may also charge fees for services even if your child meets eligibility criteria.

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) requires that states provide services and supports to people with developmental disabilities and their families. These services can include:

- Case management through the county
- Assistance when applying for benefits, including Social Security
- Medical Assistance
- Semi-independent living services
- Assistance with housing, social, and recreational needs.

County services may also be available for children with significant mental health needs. Eligibility is determined by medical diagnosis, living arrangements, needs, and other criteria. For more information on how to apply, contact the county where you live or your state’s Department of Human Services.

Contact other adult service providers that do not require eligibility, such as Centers for Independent Living (CILs) or disability-specific groups. They may help with teaching self-advocacy, providing written materials and other resources, offering peer support or support groups, giving ideas for assistive technology, and providing disability-related assessment resources.