

January 2022

ace Autism Center for Excellence

Ask the Expert Q&A #3

Early High School Transition

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Q What are the important things to think about in early high school for supporting our students with autism?

One of the most important things to start is to have a plan with an end in mind! So, as students begin high school, it is about developing a transition plan, with their input, for what they want to do after high school. The most important people in the transition process, along with the students with ASD, are their families. Helping students think through a plan for what they want to do in terms of work, ongoing education, where they want to live, and how they want to participate in the community life after they leave high schools very important. One of the things we know is that these experiences are a critical piece in being able to make good, informed decisions for students with ASD. Research shows that work experiences in high school are a good predictor of successful employment outcomes after students leave school. One of the things that we should focus on is giving students with ASD the opportunity to try out different work experiences that are good matches for their skills, strengths, needs, and interests. We have learned this is something that schools and teachers can't typically do by themselves, so it is important to develop partnerships with adult agencies, such as state vocational rehabilitation offices, supported employment providers, local community service boards, and most importantly, local businesses. These agencies and businesses will ultimately be hiring these young adults once they are ready for work.

Q Why is it important to think about transition from high school during the freshman and sophomore years in high school?

Some of the skills that we need, that *everyone* needs, to be successful in employment, are skills that take time to teach! So, by focusing in early high school on teaching work-related skills that so often can be a stumbling block and giving students with ASD the supports that they need to be independent, we are really getting them prepared.

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What are some tips for high school teachers that are getting started with thinking about or implementing some of these ideas in the early high school years?

The technology we use every day, including our smartphones and iPads, are great tools for teaching independence. Some of the things recommended to teachers even with younger high school students with ASD is having them bring in their smartphones or iPads, (if allowed by the school or division), and teaching them how to set timers on their phones, rather than waiting for adult prompting to move on to the next task or to know when it's time to come back to work from a break. Individuals with ASD need to be able to do these things independently in the workplace. Also, a student who might be in a resource class setting may be learning how to appropriately answer the phone and these skills translate to the real world, as a lot of businesses require their employees to answer phones with a particular greeting. This can be taught and practiced by a script by the phone and having students take turns answering the phone and using that script in order to learn the professional language to use for those situations. This could also include something as simple as teaching them how to put on and take off gloves, because it is a necessary skill in work settings that require individuals to do any kind of cleaning tasks.

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What are some important tips to teaching work-related social skills and work expectations?

It is very important to teach students with ASD work-related social skills and work expectations. Make contacts with local businesses and asking them to come in and talk to your class. Have companies share about the work their organization does and what their expectations are in order to give the students some information as to what they can expect when they transition from high school to getting a job. Also, teaching specific skills such as how to accept correction or feedback, will definitely be helpful in the workplace and in their community. Knowing what you can or can't say and what you should or should not do when you are given constructive criticism from your manager/supervisor is an important skill for them to have. Role-playing and problem-solving scenarios are great strategies to teach our ASD learners the skills needed in the workplace.

This Q&A has been taken from "Ask the Expert Series" which are short videos that discuss important topics for parents, educators, community member, and individuals with ASD and can be found on the VCU-ACE website:

<https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/asktheexpert/>