

Promoting Community Independence for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Inclusion and participation in the community are not always easy for individuals with ASD. At times, members of the community may not be accepting or supportive. However, community participation can lead to a better quality of life for everyone and make all the difference in an individual's life.

What do Teachers Need to Know?

One of the best ways to engage students and promote independence is to give opportunities for choice making and problem solving. This helps increase motivation and attention to task. The practice of giving students choices of rewards or free time activities that they earn by doing what we want them to do is of limited long-term benefit. As teachers, we need to build choices into our instruction and give students significant input into the activities we ask them to do.

Tips for Teachers

Some students struggle with being independent due to a lack of direct instruction and emotional development. Here are some strategies teachers might use to help students overcome challenges and become as independent as possible.

Problem Solving

Practice solving problems using the **STAND** strategy.

Making Choices

- Choices should be under voluntary control, easy to perform, easy to recognize, and can be prompted if needed.
- Select options based on learner likes. In other words, the student likes either item he or she chooses. Error-free learning helps to get buy-in from the student.

STAND Strategy:



STOP
and calm down



TELL
your problem



ASSESS
alternatives



NARROW
choices to win-win



DECIDE
on the best one and DO it!

- Select times in the daily routine to present the pair of choices. Some examples:
 - Choose between activities and materials.
 - Choose to **refuse**. The student can refuse to make a choice and that is ok. Respect the student's choice.
 - Choose **who** to work with or hang out with, **where** to work or relax, **when** to participate, and when to **quit**.
 - Students can indicate a choice by reaching, touching, eye gaze, facial gestures, vocalization, body movement, sign language, or assistive devices.

Change in Routine

- Build in a “change in plans” throughout the day and practice how to manage the strong emotions that go along with the “change.”
- Teach coping strategies such as deep breathing, counting, and imagery.

Tips for Individuals with ASD When Interacting with First Responders

- Remain calm.
- Disclosure of disability is an individual's decision. Using a handout card with information pertinent to one's disability might be helpful.
- Do not attempt to run away.
- Do not make sudden movements.
- Ask for help! Say things like “I don't understand.” or “Please say that again.”

Tips for Families

Families can be “bridge builders” between their young adults and the community by doing the following:

- Help others see the individual's potential.
- Praise and reinforce community members when they are helpful.
- Find and encourage natural supports.
- Look for the right activities for the individual to participate in by building on strengths & interests.
- Work on the skills that the individual that needs to be successful in the community.