

School to Work: Key Differences and What to Expect

Transition from School-to-Work

As your child with a disability becomes a young adult, you will begin thinking about their post school life. Getting a job in the community is an important part of adult life. Becoming employed will allow your child to pursue their interests, contribute to the success of a business or organization, promote financial independence, provide an outlet for meeting new friends, encourage them to step outside their comfort zone and try new job tasks, promote self-worth, and help them gain a clearer picture of their future. However, a job in the community will be different than your child's experiences at school. These differences will not only affect your child, but affect families and caregivers as well. Not to worry! Knowing what to expect will help ease the transition. Here are a few things family members and caregivers should know about the differences between school and work.

Employment Specialist vs. Teacher

Rather than having a teacher, your child is likely to have an Employment Specialist who will work with your child during different steps of the employment process. An Employment Specialist will help your child figure out their vocational skills and interests, assist them with finding a job, help train them on-the-job, and maintain communication with you, your child, and the employer to ensure long-term job retention. Rather than communicating directly with your child's supervisor at work, you will communicate your questions and concerns to the Employment Specialist who will help your child interact with their supervisor.

Differences Between School and Work

Here are some of the biggest differences between school and work:

- **Disability Disclosure:** Your child may have had access to an Individualized Education Program or 504 plan that guaranteed they received certain services. At work, this is not automatically provided. Your child may need to disclose their disability to their employer in order to obtain accommodations and modifications. You and your child can discuss what, when, how, and to whom they should disclose their disability.
- **Support On-the-Job:** You may be used to regular meetings with your child's teacher to discuss their progress and any concerns you have over their performance at school. You may be used to emailing or calling the teacher whenever you have a reason to contact them about your child. This will be different with an employer. Employees without disabilities do not have family members call on their behalf or interrupt their supervisor during the day. The same will be true of your child. Instead, you will work with employment support staff who will act as a liaison or you can encourage your child to begin handling work matters on their own.

- **Planning for Leave:** At school, you were able to call your child out if they were sick or had another obligation. At work, your child will need to know the business's protocol, use sick or leave time, or may need to follow other procedures specific to the business such as pre-arranging shift coverage prior to absences from their job. You will want to make sure you are mindful of the proper ways to take needed time away and encourage your child to do so in a way that is acceptable to the business.
- **Performance Evaluations:** Most businesses have some sort of formal process for evaluating employee performance standards. While you probably received progress reports from your child's school or sat in on meetings about their performance, it would be strange for you to attend their annual performance review meetings with an employer. Other employees' families do not attend their feedback meeting with a supervisor. Instead, an employment support provider can attend these meetings or discuss with the supervisor on your child's behalf and let you know key information. What you can do is look for clues that everything is going well or not well. For instance, if your child's hours are suddenly getting cut at work or they are asked to work highly unpreferable hours then there may be cause for concern and you should contact their employment specialist. On the other hand, if your child is getting timely raises then take this as a good sign.
- **Handling Mistakes or Miscommunications:** Mistakes happen! At school, the consequences are typically pretty small. At work, a mistake could cost your child their job. While an employment specialist will work with the employer to make sure they understand by problem-solving issues that arise, you can help by discussing how to handle on-the-job mishaps with your child; make sure they understand ways to avoid mishaps in the first place by help know how to articulate their needs on-the-job.

How Can You Prepare Your Child For Work?

Here are some ways you can help your child get ready for work as they transition to adulthood:

- Encourage your child to advocate for themselves rather than relying on others to get what they want or need.
- Make sure your child has a way to ask others for help and knows when to recognize if they need help.
- Pay attention to your child's skills and interests as this information can help an employment specialist develop a good job match.
- Push your child to think through appropriate dress attire for different occasions and practice good hygiene skills they will need to maintain on-the-job.
- Create opportunities for your child to be accountable for completing chores, tasks, and other responsibilities without reminders.
- Help your child learn to take feedback or correction as this is a necessary skill for a work environment.

Summary:

Work is a big adjustment for most young adults. Employment comes with a lot more freedom and a lot more demands than school. The good news is that your child has support options to help them be successful and there is plenty that families and caregivers can do to prepare their child for work!