

INSPIRING POSSIBILITIES

High Expectations: A Most Valuable Tool*

Every parent has hopes and dreams for their child, even if those dreams aren't always openly expressed. When parents have a child with a disability, goals might need to be modified. **This doesn't mean expecting less of your child, but it may mean expecting something different than what you had envisioned.** It's important to understand the critical influence of having "high expectations" for your child. You need to instill those expectations in your youth and advocate for those expectations throughout the public school elementary and secondary transition process.

Takeaways from this handout:

- High expectations lead to positive transition outcomes or results
- Youth with disabilities who have little expected of them run the risk of living isolated lives where they are not able to strive for their own hopes and dreams.
- Families may have to advocate for increased expectations and more challenging academic programs and post-school education, employment, and independent living goals.

Why is having high expectations so important? It is important because **high expectations lead to positive transition outcomes.**

- Research has shown that families of youth with disabilities who maintain higher expectations will see their child achieve greater academic success.
- Families that consistently set high expectations have a better chance of creating that same vision in the people who educate, and employ with their child.
- Higher academic achievement is tied to better outcomes in postsecondary education, employment, and financial self-sufficiency.
- Youth with disabilities who have more expected of them

are more likely to live fully integrated lives and have a greater opportunity to strive toward their own hopes and dreams.

- Youth with high expectations may have more educational options and better-paying jobs that match their abilities and interests.

"When my daughter was first diagnosed with autism, the focus was on all the things she couldn't do and may not be able to do in the future. Instead of dwelling on the negative, I soon realized the importance of focusing on the things she could do. Celebrating small victories soon led to greater victories, and she was able to accomplish more than what was predicted early on. By having high expectations, a lot of patience, and finding needed support, I quickly learned to never underestimate my child."

Parent

- Parents of youth with disabilities are encouraged to explore what is possible for their son or daughter.
- There are many government and community programs that offer the supports necessary for a person with a disability to earn postsecondary degrees, be successful in the job of their choosing, and live independently.
- Exploring these options, and speaking to other parents who have been in the same situation, can help families create a vision for their youth of a life filled with possibilities and achievements.

Cultivating and maintaining high expectations is just part of the opportunities and challenges for parents.

- Parents may need to help others (including medical, special education and other supporting professionals) to understand that the whole team needs to help the child

to achieve his or her dreams.

- Families often advocate for increased expectations and more challenging academic programs.

The following are some **ideas that can help parents work with schools** to ensure that the family's goals are met:

- Expect your child to be valued as an individual whose rights are respected.
- Appreciate those who provide excellent services for your child, and actively participate in planning those services.
- Know your child has a legal right to an appropriate public education where he or she can make meaningful educational progress.
- Discuss with school personnel what the child can do at home or in the community. Schedule a home visit, videotape your child displaying a particular skill, or explain how you have modified an activity so your child can succeed.
- Describe why and how your vision for your child makes sense.
- Share your ideas with the school and be open to their ideas.
- Educate yourself about the special education process, and learn how to turn your child's needs into measurable goals for the Individualized Education Program(IEP).
- Be willing to try something for a given amount of time and measure its effectiveness.

**Adapted from PACER's "A Guide to Preparing Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School"*