

## 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?

It is important to have a plan with an end in mind! As students begin high school, it is important to develop a transition plan, with their input, for what they want to do after high school. Helping students think through a plan for what they want to do for work, ongoing education, where they want to live, and how they want to participate in the community after high school is very important. We know these experiences are a critical piece in being able to make good, informed decisions for these students. Research shows that work experiences in high school are a good predictor of successful employment outcomes after students leave school. We should focus on giving these students the opportunity to try 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 do by themselves, so it is important to develop partnerships with agencies, such as state vocational rehabilitation offices, supported employment providers, local community service boards, and local businesses. These agencies and businesses will ultimately be hiring these young adults once they are ready for work.

#### **Q** 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?

Technology we use every day, including our smartphones are great tools for teaching independence. Some of the things recommended to teachers with younger high school students with ASD is having them bring in their smart-phones (if allowed), and teach 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 from a break. Individuals with ASD need to do these things independently in the workplace. A student in a class setting may be learning how to answer the phone as some businesses require employees to do this with a particular greeting. This can be taught and practiced by using a script and having the students practice answering the phone to learn the professional language used. This could also include something as simple as teaching them how to put on and take off gloves, because it is a skill in work settings that require individuals to do any kind of cleaning tasks.

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

It is important to teach students with ASD work-related social skills and work expectations. Make contacts with local businesses and ask them to come in and talk to your class. Have companies share the work their organization does and what their expectations are to give 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/feedback, will 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 to have. Role-playing and problem-solving scenarios are great strategies to teach

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

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 can be a stumbling block and giving students with ASD the supports they need to be independent, we are really getting them prepared.

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-RRTC-ACE website: <https://vcuautismcenter.org/resources/asktheexpert/>