

Person-Centered Practices

Today's classrooms are ever-changing, bringing new demands for students, their families, and the professionals who support them. One thing that has not changed, however, is keeping students at the center of everything we do!

Person-Centered Practices emphasize a person's strengths and interests, not just their needs or perceived challenges, and provide teams with a clear, ongoing roadmap for support across the lifespan. By making decisions based on what matters most to the student, teams can proactively design a personalized, meaningful support plan that promotes self-determination skills, increases prosocial/positive behaviors, and improves quality of life.

Effective implementation of these practices relies on a team approach designed to support the person in setting goals and making decisions that affect them, both in and out of school. School professionals, families, and caregivers play a key role in creating a safe environment where students can explore their hopes and dreams, learn essential skills, express preferences, identify strengths, and understand their rights and post-secondary options. The resulting information can become a Person-Centered Plan that naturally supports the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) and ensures it truly reflects the student's voice, preferences, and goals.

● Foundations of Person-Centered Planning

A person-centered plan supports self-determination by helping students envision the life they want and plan actionable steps toward it. Grounded in the core values of Positive Behavior Support (PBS), person-centered planning teams should:

- **Involve the student:** Everyone can direct their planning process. Ensure the student participates in person-centered planning by expressing their own perspectives rather than having others speak on their behalf. This includes active participation in their IEPs by sharing their likes, dislikes, needs, and choices.
- **Focus on strengths:** Maintaining a strengths-based approach that emphasizes what students can do rather than what they can't do, presumes competence, and encourages them to strive for their goals. High expectations recognize that every student, regardless of the impact of their disability, can participate in directing their own planning, express preferences, and make meaningful choices.
- **Honor all forms of communication:** Create an environment that respects a person's preferences, including the way they choose to interact with others. People have the right to communicate in their preferred modality. This begins with recognizing that behavior is



communication. A person who does not communicate by speaking may share their thoughts and feelings by smiling, gesturing, typing, using pictures, or even expressing frustration. Teams should create opportunities for students to further develop communication, listening, and self-advocacy skills that will support their goals.

- **Encourage community membership:** Every person deserves to live a meaningful life within their community. Community includes any place where a student can participate in activities alongside non-disabled peers, such as home, school, workplace, and everyday spaces. At its core, community is about belonging, connection, and active participation in the places that matter most to the individual.

● **Empowering Students, Families, and Communities**

- **Teach Self-Determination Skills** -- The earlier you can teach students decision-making, problem-solving, and self-advocacy skills, the better. Incorporate these skills across the day in various subject areas. Use real-world examples to illustrate the connection between the skills and knowledge students are learning, helping them discover their talents and strengths and how to transfer them to academic settings, career interests, and leisure activities.
- **Equip Families to be Advocates** -- Families and caregivers are essential partners in supporting student success and long-term outcomes. Because they remain involved throughout the student's life, it is critical to provide them with meaningful resources that empower them to advocate for their child's goals and the goals they have for their child. In addition to ACE Family Resources, many statewide and local organizations offer free training and support for families, including the Partnership for People with Disabilities, the Center on Transition Innovations, and the I'm Determined Center.
- **Connect with Community Members** -- Building relationships within the community is essential in advancing person-centered practices. Educating partners on the value of including people with disabilities as contributing members can enhance personal satisfaction by expanding meaningful opportunities for social relationships, employment, recreation and leisure, and independent living.

- **Resources:**
 - Autism Center for Education: For Families: <https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/parents.cfm>
 - Center on Transition Innovations: <https://centerontransition.org/projects/discoveringme.cfm>
 - I'm Determined Center: <https://imdetermined.org>
 - Partnership for People with Disabilities: <https://personcenteredpractices.partnership.vcu.edu/>

Connect with ACE:

- Visit [ACE Website](#) & [Early Childhood Website](#)
- Sign up for the [ACE Mailing List](#)
- Follow ACE on: [Facebook](#) & [Instagram](#)



For additional information, visit the ACE website:

vcuautismcenter.org

