



LAUNCHING Into Their First Jobs

A guide for parents of teens with autism spectrum disorders



diverseability
TEEN

ANN MCCREEDY

In this web-book, you will learn



Why helping your teen obtain and maintain a summer job is critical to their long-term financial and social success



Five steps to prepare your family for the job search



Three steps to obtain the job



Three steps to ensure your teen maintains his/her job and keeps taking those checks to the bank



Extra resources to help you succeed in this process

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The Status Quo is Unacceptable

In the United States



60% of adults work for pay



20% of adults with ASD work for pay

Immediate College Enrollment



66% of neurotypical teens enroll in college within 3 months after high school graduation



35% of teens with ASD enroll in college within 3 months after high school graduation

**The term “neurotypical” describes individuals who do not have an autism spectrum disorder (ASD)*

If not college, then working



74% of neurotypical teens who don't enroll in post-secondary education start working within three months



55% of neurotypical teens who don't enroll in post-secondary education start working within three months

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The power of employment in high school

Research has found that students with disabilities who work for pay during high school are more likely to work after graduation.

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center reported that teens with disabilities who had two or more jobs during the last two years of high school were more likely to be engaged in post-secondary employment. Additionally, teens who had worked for pay for a full year were more likely to be living independently.



A separate study published in the Journal of Disability Policy Studies found that paid community employment during high school was a significant predictor of post-secondary employment.

STEP 1 - Preparation

Schedule time

Life is busy. You may be balancing work, a spouse, other children, and other responsibilities. Job searching with your teen won't happen unless



it is scheduled and on your calendar. What time of day is your teen most engaged? Early mornings? Mid-afternoon? Late nights? Whatever time of day is best for your teen, schedule 3-5 hours during that time every week for the next eight weeks to spend together working on his or her workforce plan.

Express your desire

You want your teen to work for pay this summer. If you didn't, you wouldn't be reading this guide. Let your teen know that you believe it is important for him or her to work and you believe he or she can do it.

Explain the purpose

Prior to your first scheduled time with your teen, explain that you want to spend the next few weeks focusing on helping him/her find a summer job. Be clear and very specific. **By the end of these eight weeks together, you will have a summer job secured.** By the end of the eight weeks, you will not have determined what career your teen wants in his/her adulthood.

Set realistic expectations

What was your first summer job? For most people, a first job involves a uniform of some kind and a hot shower at the end of the day. First jobs aren't usually glamorous. The purpose of a first job is to learn how to be a good employee. If it offers other things such as career exploration, networking opportunities, or resume building, that's an extra bonus.

Set geographic scope for your search

Determine how your teen will get to and from work. Will your teen walk from home to work? Can they drive themselves? Is there public transportation in your area? Can your teen look for work near where a family member works and commute with that person? Your teen is going to be going to work 3-5 times a week. Thinking about how to make the commute work within the time and resource constraints of the family is important to consider before beginning to look for a position.

Foster independence whenever possible. **Jobs your teen can walk, drive or take public transportation to are preferable to jobs that will depend on you being the chauffeur.** You may be thinking, “My teen can’t walk or take a bus alone.” Take some time to consider letting go of that fear and anxiety. Most high school students with ASD are ready to take this step of independence.



Communicate with your teen what you believe is a reasonable radius for your job search. You might say:

- We’re going to look for jobs that are less than 1.5 miles from our house.
- We’re going to look for jobs that you can get to on one bus in 25 minutes or less.
- We’re going to look for jobs within 1 mile of my office.

STEP 2 - Action

Use your network

Together with your teen, make a list of all the adults you know who would be excited that your teen is going to work this summer. Consider contacting relatives, teachers, former teachers, coaches, neighbors, members of your religious organization, co-workers, and friends. Brainstorm at least 10 adults to put on this list.



Create a script for you and/or your teen to use when reaching out to the adults on your list. If possible, encourage your teen to call the people on the list personally. Practice the script a few times with them before they make the calls. You could also do the first call on a speaker phone, with you taking the lead to model how it is done. If your teen has minimal verbal communication, they could send an email or you could call on their behalf. You can use the script below as starting point and modify it to make it work for your teen.

Telephone Script for if they mention they have a job lead

Jake: Hi Uncle Ian. This is Jake. How are you?

Uncle Ian: Oh, hey Jake. I'm good. What's up?

Jake: I'm looking for a summer job and I'm wondering if you know of anyone looking for help.

Uncle Ian: Hmm... well what kind of job are you looking for?

Jake: I'm looking for a job that I can get to on my own, on the bus or walking. I have basic computer skills and I'm very organized. I'm going to have extra support learning the new job so I will be able to learn whatever they need me to do. I have a strong reaction to

strong perfume smells so it would be better for me not to work at an inside customer service job where I'm interacting with strangers a lot. Do you know anyone who might need help this summer?

Uncle Ian: Actually, Aunt Carol just told me the YWCA is looking for teen counselors for the grade school day camp. Would you want to do something like that?

Jake: Hey, maybe. Could my mom and I talk to Aunt Carol about the position?

Uncle Ian: Yeah, of course! I'll have her call you tonight.

Jake: Thanks, Uncle Ian! Talk to you later. Bye.

(Ideas for how to manage the call with Aunt Carol in the next section titled "Exploring Job Opportunities.")

Telephone Script for if they say they don't have a job lead

Jake: Hi Uncle Ian. This is Jake. How are you?

Uncle Ian: Oh, hey Jake. I'm good. What's up?

Jake: I'm looking for a summer job and I'm wondering if you know of anyone looking for help.

Uncle Ian: Hmm... well what kind of job are you looking for?

Jake: I'm looking for a job that I can get to on my own, on the bus or walking. I have basic computer skills and I'm very organized. I'm going to have extra support learning the new job so I will be able to learn whatever they need me to do. I have a strong reaction to strong perfume smells so it would be better for me not to work inside at a customer service job where I'm interacting with strangers a lot. Do you know anyone who might need help this summer?



Uncle Ian: To be honest, I can't think of anyone right now, but I'll think about it some more and ask around. Ok?

Jake: Thanks, I appreciate that. Would it be OK if I called you back next week to see if you thought of any ideas?

Uncle Ian: Yeah, of course! Talk to you then.

Keep several irons in the fire. Just because Uncle Ian has a great lead at the YWCA, don't stop calling the other people on your list. As you learn more about the opportunity, you may find that it isn't of interest to your teen or doesn't fit for some other reason.

At this stage, you may eliminate opportunities that don't work with your transportation plan determined in the prior section.

Exploring Job Opportunities



Unless a family member is directly able to employ your teen, you're going to be connecting with employers in the community. You may have a warm introduction from a friend or family member or it may be a cold call.

Warm Introductions

If you're introduced to an employer by a friend or family member, use the shared connection to build rapport. Whenever possible, it is better to stop by a place of business rather than connect with the employer over the phone. Below is a script that your teen can use to follow up on a warm introduction. Again, you can modify this if they're corresponding over email or you're communicating on their behalf.

In person script for initial employer conversation (warm introduction)

Jake: Hello, Ms. Winters? My name is Jake Smith. My Aunt Carol Smith told me that you're looking for teen counselors for the grade school summer camp. I'm interested in learning more about that opportunity. Would you have a few minutes to talk with me?

Ms. Winters: Of course, your aunt mentioned that you would be stopping by. Please come in and have a seat.

Jake: Ms. Winters, do you mind if I record our conversation on my cell phone? It would help me to listen to the details of what you're looking for again later to make sure I can be a fit for this job.

Ms. Winters: Oh, um, no, I don't mind. Thanks for asking. Well, the counselor position is (description of the position). Does that sound like something you could do?

Jake: Yes, I think so. Do the counselors need to think up the activities or does someone else do that?

Ms. Winters: Most of the activities are recycled from past years but we welcome new ideas. And, of course, free time requires some creativity from counselors to gather kids together to play a game or join in an activity.

Jake: Thank you, I understand. Could you tell me how to apply for this position?

Ms. Winters: You can fill out this application now or take it and return it to the front desk. I encourage you to fill it out soon as we're already interviewing candidates.

Jake: Thank you. I will take it with me and return it as soon as possible. Thank you again for your time.

Ms. Winters: Not a problem. Have a good day.

Asking to record an initial conversation with an employer can foster independence for your teen, but it is generally only advisable in a situation where a friend or family member has made the connection to the employer.

Cold Calling

In addition to connections made by your network, you can initiate contact with employers within your geographic area. There are two approaches to cold calling: targeting based on your purchasing history and teen-guided searching. Consider what stores you regularly patronize and start where people will recognize your face. Think about how much money you spend at the grocery store, the coffee shop or the dry cleaner nearest your house. You're known there and more likely to have a decent conversation with an employee at these establishments.

Another approach is to take a walk through your geographic area with your teen. Pay attention to where your teen lingers or pays more attention. Whatever store catches his/her attention, go in and talk to whomever is behind the counter. This is an activity



best done during non-rush hours. Trying to get information from a grocery cashier when her line is five-people deep is going to be a waste of time. Expect some hits and some misses.

Whether you target businesses you patronize or let your teen's interests guide your search, do not start the conversation with, "Do you have any jobs available?" It is difficult to anticipate the script for these conversations but the script below offers suggestions about how to begin and end these conversations. If possible, it would be helpful for you to be within earshot and taking notes.

In person script for initial employer conversation (cold call)

Jake: Excuse me Miss. I'm interested in learning about your work. Would you have a few moments for me to ask you about your job?

Random Cashier: Umm...Maybe you should speak to the manager...

Jake: OK, if you would feel more comfortable I can, but I know that I won't start out as a manager so I would be really grateful to learn from you about what it's like to work as a cashier. Are you busy with customers all day? What is most challenging about your job? Did you start out as a cashier?

Random Cashier: No, I didn't start out as a cashier. I was hired as a stocker. I worked that for ...(goes on to talk about his job, possibly with follow questions from your teen)... So that is basically it. It's hard work standing on your feet all day but talking with the friendly customers makes it a good job.

Jake: Thank you. Your description was really helpful. I'm not sure I would be good at talking with customers. Can you just be a stocker without becoming a cashier?

Random Cashier: Of course!

Jake: Oh OK. One last question, could you tell me how to apply for a position at this store?

Random Cashier: Go online and fill out the application. Then, if they have an opening, they'll give you a call.

Jake: OK, great. Thank you. I'll look that up. I really appreciate your time today. I hope you have a good rest of the day.

Random Cashier: My pleasure. You too.

Secure the job

By building rapport with the employers, we hope to avoid a traditional interview setting. Below are some strategies that can help your teen avoid needing to perform in a traditional interview.

1. Have your teen send a personal note and/or stop by to thank your contact again for their time and to let them know that he/she submitted an application.
2. Be assertive on behalf of your teen. Talk directly with the employer offering to answer any questions they may have about your teen's abilities and highlight your teen's strengths. Ask if they would be willing to offer a trial period of paid employment.
3. Offer to work a shift to learn what the job entails. Following the grocery store example above, ask if you could work as a stocker or bagger for a day to understand what the job entails. Yes, this is a big personal commitment! You may need to take time off from your job; you may get questions from acquaintances that run into you as you restock the milk; it may be more be more physical labor than you're used to, etc. However, the information you learn and the relationships you build during the sample shift will be invaluable later as you help with on-boarding your teen. At the end of the shift or the next day, follow up with the manager, and let them



know based on your experience that you believe your teen could be successful in this job. Ask them if they would be willing to extend a job offer based on the conversations so far and the knowledge that you will assist with on-boarding.

4. When all else fails, you can ask for an accommodation if an interview is required. Your teen / you can say, “Thank you for your invitation to interview with you. I find it difficult to gather my thoughts quickly in an interview. (Or, when I’m in an unfamiliar situation, I have some ticks that can be distracting to those around me.) Would it be possible to get a list of interview questions from you ahead of time to prepare thoughtful answers to your questions? (Or, would it be possible for me to come in and write/type my responses to your questions rather than respond verbally?)



Taking these steps may bring you out of your comfort zone and that’s OK. Remember to schedule time for this activity and hold yourself accountable to working on it 3-5 hours a week (perhaps longer if you’re working a sample shift). It is easy to avoid tasks that make us uncomfortable, but these activities are critical to your teen securing a job.

STEP 3 - Launch

Congratulations! Your teen has secured a summer job. Take a moment to enjoy this success. Hopefully, you and your teen can share a feeling of pride and accomplishment for reaching this stage in the process. It's time now to look ahead to ensure they maintain their new job.

Getting to work

If your teen is driving, walking or taking the bus, you'll want to practice the route at least four times at the time he or she is going to work and four times at the time he or she will be coming back from work. The environment can look and feel different at different times of day. The first two times you should walk in front of your teen or drive. Narrate what you are doing and point out queues along the way. The next two times time your teen should walk in front of you or drive. You shouldn't say anything (unless your teen is in imminent danger). If your teen turns the wrong way, see if he or she can course correct on his or her own.



Use technology to support the process. Does your teen have a smartphone? Use the smartphone (with or without headphones) to provide walking or driving directions. Does the noise of the street distract your teen? Perhaps, use sound canceling headphones.

Make a plan for what they'll do if your teen gets lost or overwhelmed. What soothing techniques will they use? Will they call or text you? Will they give the driver a card with a preprinted request for help on it? Assume that the first few days of the commute are not going to go perfectly. Plan your schedule so you can be available for questions and to offer support during these times.

On the job training

Begin with the end in mind. How much time can you spend on the job with your teen helping them get trained and acclimated? Perhaps you can take full days off work or flex your schedule to be on the job site with your teen half days for the first week or two. Your time with your teen on the job site is probably limited by the other responsibilities in your life. As you begin to help your teen get trained at his or her new job, you should be thinking, how can I help my teen do this without my prompting?



What has helped your teen be successful at school and home? Do they benefit from pictorial or visual cues? Do they appreciate having an expected schedule and doing things in the same order every day? Is your teen aware of his or her body signals and comfortable asking to take a

bathroom break or should time be scheduled to ensure he or she takes breaks to take care of personal needs? Does your teen use a watch or a phone to remind him or her it's time to move on to another activity?

This non-exhaustive list is meant to help you start thinking about how to apply in the workplace the tools you know work for your teen. Work with the employer to incorporate as many supports as your teen needs in order to be successful.

Be aware of your physical presence. If you touch, gesture or verbally cue your teen to start or end a task, how will they know when to start or end that task when you're not there? Stand behind your teen as they work and use as few prompts as possible for them to complete the task correctly. You can model how to do something but try not to touch your teen.

Case Study

Jake is hired to stock merchandise at the grocery store. The task involves going to the storage area at the back of the store, taking the bin off of the top of a pile of bins, taking it out to the store floor, putting the merchandise on the shelf and bringing the empty bin back to the storage area. Jake's employer agrees to let Jake's mom, Sandy, work as a stocker for a few hours before Jake's first shift so that she could make a list of the steps Jake will need to complete his responsibilities. After working for a few hours, Sandy creates the following list of steps:

Steps to putting out merchandise

- 1. Put on blue smock.*
- 2. Go to where the blue bins are stacked up. The bins are about 1.5 x 2 feet long.*
- 3. Pick up a bin that is on top of one of the piles.*
- 4. Open the bin*
- 5. Decide what type of things are inside and give the bin a title like "Soap" or "Pasta"*
- 6. Put the bin on your cart.*
- 7. Push your cart into the store and look up at the signs at the end of each aisle to find the one that has products like the ones in your bin.*
- 8. When you get to the place where other items like the ones in your bin are located, put the new items behind the same items on the shelf.*
- 9. Repeat steps 7 & 8 until your bin is empty.*
- 10. Return to the storage area and start again with step 2.*

During Jake's first shift, Sandy realizes that there are a few problems with her list. There were a few practical steps she forgot to list and she also realized that when Jake looked up to read the signs at the end of the aisle, the bright lights hanging from the ceiling distracted him and made him frustrated. Sandy suspected that if he looked at a map of the store instead of up at the signs at the end of the aisle, he would be able

to stay focused. The store already had maps of the layout of the store and were happy to provide one to Sandy. Sandy revised her list and asked Jake to try using these steps during his second shift.

Revised Steps to putting out merchandise

- 1. Put on blue smock.*
- 2. Get a grocery cart from the front of the store and bring it next to where the blue bins are stacked up. The bins are about 1.5 x 2 feet long.*
- 3. Take the roll of tape, map of the store, and this list out of your pocket.*
- 4. Unfold the map and this list and tape them to the child seat at the front of the cart.*
- 5. Put the tape back in your pocket.*
- 6. Pick up a bin that is on top of one of the piles and set it in your cart.*
- 7. Open the bin*
- 8. Decide what type of things are inside and give the bin a title like "Soap" or "Pasta"*
- 9. Look at the map of the store and determine where one item in your bin is located.*
- 10. Push your cart into the store and go to that aisle*
- 11. Find on the shelf the brand and type of item you have in your bin.*
- 12. Take the items already on the shelf off and stack them in the front of your cart or neatly on the floor.*
- 13. Put the items in your bin on the shelf leaving room to put the items now on the floor or in the front of your cart back on the shelf in front of them.*
- 14. Put the items now on the floor or in the front of your cart back on the shelf.*
- 15. Repeat steps 8 through 14 until your bin is empty.*
- 16. Return to the storage area and start again with step 6.*



Jake's second shift was smoother, but Sandy found two more ways to help Jake do his job even better. Sandy found it frustrating to follow Jake up and down aisles without pointing out to him that it would be more efficient for him to put similar products away at the same time. For example, his bin had both pasta sauce and pasta in it but Jake put the pasta sauce on the shelf, then went to another aisle to stock soap and then came back to put the pasta on the shelf.

She remembered that she was supposed to prompt him only if very necessary so she remained quiet while he went about his work. Later

that night, Sandy had the map of the store laminated and got Jake a dry erase marker. She added a step for Jake to mark on the map before he left the store room which aisles contained the items in his bin. She also added a step for him to take a handkerchief out of his pocket and wipe off the map each time he returned an empty bin. Jake could then work more efficiently by understanding sometimes multiple products in the bin were stocked in the same aisle.

Jake also asked his supervisor if he could wear noise-cancelling headphones. He found the music that played over the loudspeaker in the store gave him a headache and made him feel frustrated. His supervisor agreed to this modification. Sandy thought this modification might also reduce the number of patrons who tried to ask Jake questions. Jake seemed to get flustered whenever this happened.

By the end of his first week, Jake was working independently and efficiently.

This case study highlights a few important points around supporting your teen with on the job training.

1. Work a full or partial shift of the job alone before your teen starts to anticipate what supports he or she may need in order to be successful.
2. Make a list of steps for your teen to follow – even if you think your teen won't need it, make one because it will help them feel confident.
3. Hold your tongue and let your teen struggle. You would love to jump in and help them but it is better for them if you let them struggle it out.
4. Use written or video cues rather than have you physically or verbally prompt them. In the case example, a written list and map helped Jake navigate his responsibilities. If the task is more complex, like using a photocopier, you might create a video on your teen's smartphone of you or your teen completing different tasks on the photocopier (double sided, collated, staples, etc.) The teen can replay the video(s) on his smartphone when completing that task for the employer.



Ongoing relationship with employer

The first week or two your teen is on the job will be time intensive for you. You'll work with your teen and the employer to create the patterns and supports your teen will need to be successful throughout the summer.

You should plan to talk to your teen's employer at least once a week to see how your teen is doing. It is best when these check-ins can be done in person. You're providing the employer an opportunity to let you know



about any challenges that have come up since you were present for on-site training.

Always give the people working closely with your teen your cell phone number. Let them know you're available for questions or to hear any concerns they may have.

As the end of the summer is approaching, talk with your teen and the employer about the employer's need for part-time help during the school year. If they need help and would like your teen to continue during the school year, is your teen interested in continuing? Many times teens feel a sense of pride in their work and want to continue working during the year. Work can provide positive additional structure to the teen's school year schedule.

If the job is ending at the end of the summer, start talking with your teen about how to end the job well. If the employer has offered to continue employment during the school year but your teen is not interested, help your teen write a letter of resignation giving two weeks' notice. Coach your teen on how to thank the people who worked closely with him or her. Your teen can also forecast his or her interest to work with the company again next summer.



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You're not alone!

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The most important thing is to take a first step today. Whether it is scheduling time on your calendar to talk to your teen about summer employment or emailing DiverseAbility Teen to ask a question, complete one task today that starts you on your journey.

Talk to other parents



@ASD1stJob



DiverseAbility Teen

Ask questions

Email any questions you have about this process or your specific situation to contact@diverseabilityteen.com. We look forward to helping your teen launch into his or her first job.

Hire a coach

You understand the long-term value of summer employment to your teen, but are unable to commit the time necessary to directly support him or her through this process. You may want to hire a Certified Employment Support Professional to work through this process with your teen. For more information email contact@diverseabilityteen.com

DiverseAbility Teen can work with families in many locations across the country. Our certified coaches:

1. Develop the job leads
2. Secure the employment
3. Provide on-the-job training
4. Maintain on-going relationship with the employer



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