

Pre-Vocational

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Pre-vocational planning is designed to prepare students for a successful transition to meaningful, paid employment within the community. It commonly involves training in the basic work skills required for a typical job setting. Wherever your child's post high school path may lead, obtaining a strong vocational foundation will help contribute to his or her success. In a sense, "pre-vocational" intervention during the middle school years (ages 11-14) can act as the early intervention of job skills during the critical years of adolescence.

Build That Skill Base!

There are many opportunities, both at school and at home, for vocational tasks to be introduced, discussed, and practiced. The keys to solid growth are opportunity, consistency and repetition. Consider what your child is currently working on, and then ask yourself if you can add additional experiences to solidify a stronger vocational foundation.

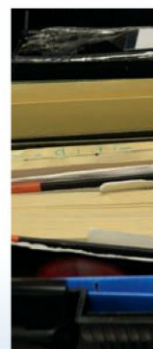
Opportunity

- Create a small 'work skills center' in your home. Have a place for your child to 'sign in/out' each day for 'work'. This builds a sense of responsibility and work readiness. A variety of tasks can be introduced and completed within this space. For example, if your child is working on setting the table, have them sort utensils here first, to prepare for the job. Other tasks that can be practiced in this location are filing by letter or word, collating and stapling papers, and even buttoning shirts. The 'work space' is to be utilized as a routine space for learning vocational tasks that are purposeful and rewarding, while promoting as much independence as possible.

- Have your child track the 'jobs' completed, as well as reflect on how they felt about the job. Reflecting allows for discussions and connections to things they like to do, thus enhancing self-discovery. Tracking can be hand written, typed or in the form of a happy/sad face or even a thumbs up/down! Experiment with each to determine which way your child responds best in order to keep him or her engaged and invested in the tasks at hand.

- Create a way to make chores meaningful and connected to future goals. Knowing how to set a table is related to working in a restaurant. Folding towels is part of the hotel industry. Buttoning and folding shirts is a skill found in retail. There are countless ways to tie hands-on activities practiced in the home to the world of work.

Example of setting table with tools



Example clerical job training

Paving the Path

- Check with your child's teacher for in-house job opportunities such as recycling, mail delivery and cafeteria set up and break down.

- Inquire about off-campus job opportunities in a variety of settings such as grocery stores, offices and hospitals. Beginning these experiences in middle school can provide students the extra time they need to become proficient in employability skills. Speak with your child's teacher for more information.

Consistency

- Use the 'work skills center' when completing tasks or 'jobs' (refer to examples above). Having your child 'sign in/out' reminds them of the task at hand and its importance. Continue to have them track the jobs completed and reflect on how they felt about doing it.

- Build on work related vocabulary. Some examples include: supervisor, co-worker, timecard and uniform. When working with specific materials, label each appropriately. If working with clerical supplies, name the items by their official names (envelope, mailing labels and envelope sealer). In addition, list the variety of jobs connected to the task, such as mail deliverer, bagger and cashier. Lastly, help your child 'see' the jobs in their mind. When working with clothing items, list the stores in the area that your child has been to before. Having the personal association, as well as the visual, strengthens the connection to the newly introduced concept.

- Work next to your child, especially at first, and incorporate instruction on ways to ask for help, how to greet co-workers and what different uniforms are like across work settings.

- When out in the community, discuss the jobs you see. Encourage your child to identify jobs and what items the employee requires to successfully complete their task. This instills a real life connection and helps to build vocational vocabulary, which in turn better prepares them for future employment opportunities.

Training: to Employment

- Continue to inquire about vocational experiences your child has had in the school setting. Look for variety. It's important that your child experience jobs that they enjoy, but also those that challenge them. These experiences become teachable moments and help build the foundation for workplace success.

Repetition

- Use the bank of vocational words you've integrated frequently. It may feel silly at first, but having that prior knowledge as a young adult in a new work environment can ease anxiety and increase success.

- Even after a 'job' or task has been mastered, revisit it for review and practice to keep the skill sustained. This should be done within the school setting as well.

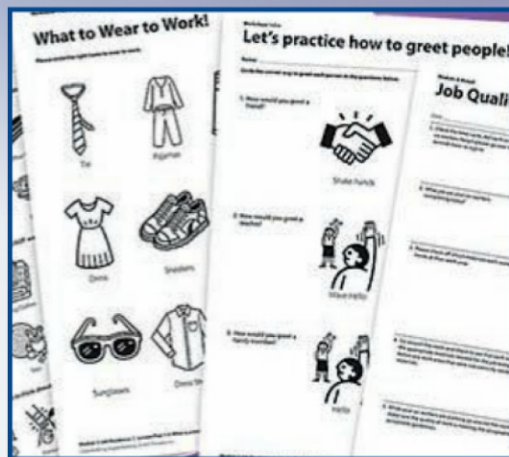
- Every little bits counts! Take those real life moments to spark a conversation about the future and continue the planning process.

- Continue to encourage your child's investment and participation in his or her future planning and preparation.

Everyone deserves to be a contributing member of society, and with a strong vocational foundation set at the right time, everyone can.

Angela Felice Mahoney, MEd is the author of I Can Work! A Work Skills Curriculum for Special Needs Programs.

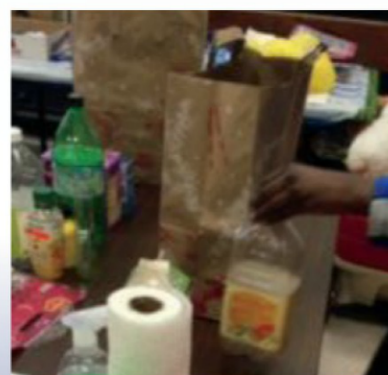
Who Am I? What job do I have at the supermarket? What other jobs are at the supermarket? →



Example of training tools for a Supermarket job



Introduction to grocery words



Practicing packaging and grocery merchandising