



## Positive Parenting Your Horizons Student for Independence

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The first issue of *Positive Parenting Your Horizons Student* presented strategies to promote healthy autonomy and self-regulation for your son or daughter. The focus of this issue is **personal empowerment**. An empowered young adult enhances strengths for self-reliance and minimizes deficits. Empowerment is a primary focus of the curriculum to build capacity for independence at The Horizons School.

*...empowerment requires practical knowledge, solid information, real competencies, concrete skills, material resources, genuine opportunities, and tangible results. (Staples, 1990)*

Family caretakers want their children to participate in family life, while also confidently engaging in the community. This can be difficult for all. Parents may feel upset when a previously cooperative child challenges their authority, refusing to comply with family plans.

Some young adults hesitate to act, waiting for the parent to take charge and minimize risk of error. It is necessary to yield power to the maturing child within limits set by adults. For instance, extending weekend curfew as the teen demonstrates personal responsibility.

Consider your own development. Was it difficult to make your own decisions as an adolescent? Were you able to express opinions and ideas different from those of family members? How did your parents and siblings respond? Did you feel rejected or supported by relatives?

Family caregivers may foster or hinder personal empowerment through word and deed. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do I allow my daughter to make independent decisions about friendships?
- Am I afraid of what will happen when I do not rescue my son when he is struggling?
- Do I respect my young adult's choices even if different from my own?
- Will I honor my daughter's choice of employment when I think she can do better?

Self-efficacy or feeling confident to accomplish a specific task in a situation results from planned opportunities to learn and practice independent living skills. Effective family caretakers seek strategies to augment empowerment. Consider three areas of independence, Personal, Social and Career. Each presents opportunities and challenges.

Managing **Personal Health** requires initiative to schedule a clinical exam, note illness symptoms, plan transportation and copayment. It may seem easier for the parent to “just take care of it,” since it requires time and patience to explain what is unfamiliar to a young adult. Help your daughter to practice what she has learned in classes at Horizons School. Guide her to add a Smartphone calendar reminder; plan a travel route by bus, taxi or car; budget travel fare and required copayment; write unusual symptoms and a list of questions to ask the provider. She will gain new confidence and skills as a result!



**Social Independence** includes forming reciprocal relationships with peers. Does your son or daughter primarily connect with others through social media? Perhaps he lacks confidence to make and sustain friendships? She may have felt rejected or bullied by peers when younger.

Together, search social opportunities planned by local parks and recreation programs, faith communities and nonprofit agencies. Community activities are frequently posted online on websites hosted by agencies, broadcast and social media. For instance, Create Birmingham is a cultural alliance that hosts an interactive web calendar of arts, sports, culture and entertainment events [<http://www.birmingham365.org/>]. Many events are free or low-cost and accessible by public transit!

Be patient. Your son may reject an activity you have selected, since he feels intimidated in large groups. Perhaps he will feel more comfortable learning a new hobby or sharing a favorite activity in a smaller setting, such as a gathering of Marvel hero enthusiasts at a local comic shop.

Help him to explore program location, cost, types of participants and event length. Consider an advance visit to tour the setting, meet staff and participants.

**Career Independence** includes developing pre vocational knowledge and skills to transfer to paid employment. Although difficult, it is necessary to teach and model how hard work yields desired outcomes. For parents, this may mean withholding a reward until your child has completed a task. Older students must learn to cooperate and work with others, sustaining effort over time as directed by a supervisor. Parents help by linking outcomes to individual ability and hard work, not fortune or good will of others.

At Horizons School, students learn to consistently practice good hygiene, career dress, and time management before shadowing employees in community businesses. The next step is to work part-time as a student intern, receiving feedback from a worksite supervisor and School Career Team. He is ready for paid employment after consistently demonstrating on-time arrival, daily stamina, appropriate workplace communication and thorough task performance. Do not feel discouraged if your student requires extra time to master these skills. Our Career Team works closely with worksite supervisors, providing needed training and encouragement.

### **Financial Aid Application Deadline - April 1**



Deadline for The Horizons Foundation Scholarship and The Marie McElheny Scholarship Fund is **April 1**. Annual Scholarship Funds are awarded based on availability. Families must apply through TADS (Tuition Aid Distribution Services) via the Horizons School website. All awards are needs based.

**Talk Back** - What topics do you recommend for future newsletters? Do you have informational resources to share with other families? What exceptional effort would you like to recognize for your student or their mentors? We want to hear from you!

*Preparing young Adults with learning difficulties for an Independent Life.*

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