



Positive Parenting your Horizons Student for Independence

Vol. 1, Issue 3, 2016

The theme for the third issue of this parenting newsletter is guiding your student to assume adult responsibilities. In our society, moving away from the family home is a recognizable step toward adulthood. This is only the beginning! Consider the many challenges to living independently.

As young adults transition to independence, they must make decisions about career training and paid jobs, effectively managing time and schedules, and solving problems apart from parents. In addition, your student must learn to manage disability and illness, intimate relationships, pay bills and save money, and decide whether to become a parent. What may parents and guardians do to promote success? What is meant by "Helicopter Parenting?" How will you develop a new relationship with your young adult establishing healthy boundaries?

Establishing Boundaries As You Encourage Independence

There are many rites of passage that we experience as we grow and mature. Some of them are biological, such as losing our baby teeth and anxiously awaiting our permanent teeth, or the hormonal challenges brought on by puberty. Some are cultural like a bar or bat mitzvah, quinceanera and sweet 16. Rites of passage may be age-related, such as voting, first job, college, marriage and retirement to name just a few.

For those parents who have children with developmental disabilities, milestones often come later and after a lot of coaching and hard work. A typical child may leave home for college at age 18 or 19, secure a first job and their own apartment, begin dating and driving independently. Sometimes, it seems that our children lag behind.

Parents may feel exhausted, having spent the last 18-20 years micromanaging every aspect of your child's life (therapy and doctor appointments, IEP meetings, nightly homework, medications, social and recreational events). Do you feel like it has been a struggle to obtain opportunities and advancement for your child? It's no wonder parents have such a hard time moving young adults with learning disabilities into independent lives! Even though you want and need your sons and daughters to move on, it is hard to relax control and withdraw some of that management, permitting your son or daughter to assume more responsibility.

At Horizons School, we work with students to practice the life skills that come more naturally to others. We allow them some leeway to safely make mistakes (remember the first load of laundry

you did when everything turned pink or blue? Or maybe you had lots of nights with burned suppers?). We believe that first-hand experience is invaluable to healthy development!

Now, while your student attends Horizons School, is a good time for you to figure out how you are going to help them assume the role of the *adult son or daughter*. If you have other adult children it might not be too difficult to develop that adult relationship. If you are new at this, then it might be more difficult to put into practice a different set of expectations.

When your son or daughter comes home for break it is easy to fall back into established roles and patterns of doing too much for them. It's comfortable; it's what has worked for many years, and it's how you managed your busy lives. But you have made the hard decision and investment to send your student to Horizons School believing that they will learn to be independent.

Your student is acquiring and practicing many life skills. When they come home you must insist that they continue to demonstrate what they have learned. They may complain, ignore you or seem rebellious. Remember, everyone will be better for it.

Eventually your daughter or son will stop complaining, and at some point may even get a little angry when you try to do something for them that they are capable of doing on their own. Horizons students work hard to gain their independence. Help them transfer those new skills while in your home!

We have all heard the term "helicopter parent." Such a parent anticipates challenges and swoops in before their children can make mistakes, making all their decisions for them. We often see this habit among parents whose son or daughter has special needs. Parents have worked hard to help them get to this point, so it can be difficult to pull back and stop hovering.

Begin now by not scheduling every moment of their free time. Typical adults do not go out or have activities with friends every night of the week, or every moment of the weekend. Permit them to hang out and watch TV with friends, quietly read a book or play music. Perhaps they like to draw, write short stories, produce videos, or develop another passion. But don't let them fall back into the habit of hiding away in their bedroom playing video games, texting, tweeting, snapchatting or posting on Instagram for many hours.

Every family works differently, so customize these tips to establish some ground rules and expectations for those times when your student comes home on break. Our students work from weekly and daily schedules, learning to balance class, work, self-management and socialization. Ask your student to create a schedule for their time at home to include time for fun activities as well as chores.

Practical Strategies to Consider

1. Have your student set an alarm to get up at the same time, Monday through Friday. They can sleep in on the weekends. This will help them to keep a consistent routine while they are home. It will be an easier transition for them when they return to school.
2. What household chores will they be responsible for? Be sure to make a list of those chores and when those chores need to be completed. Be specific, instead of saying clean your room, list the tasks that need to be done to achieve that goal. For instance, pick up your clothes and place in hamper, and then bring to the laundry room. Or, make your bed, straightening sheet and bedspread. Dust surfaces before you vacuum the floor.
3. Ask students to help you plan and cook family meals. Some of our students are really good cooks. They demonstrated this during the annual Thanksgiving potluck meal! Enjoy having someone else prepare your meal. Be available to provide guidance to follow favorite family recipes or if they begin to struggle with sequential steps.
4. Plan family social and recreational outings with your student. They are learning what it takes to plan an activity, so give them a chance to figure out travel time, the cost of the activity and who will be a part of it.
5. Help yourself and your student by treating them as the adult they are. Our first year students have gotten a small taste of the adult world and are rising to the challenge. While they all have struggles in different areas, it is really inspiring to see them work hard to achieve their goals.

Enjoy your time with them and praise their achievements both large and small.

Evaluation Corner

You know that The Horizons School teaches young adults with learning and other disabilities how to live and work independently. Did you know that data from the **2016 Alumni Survey** indicates three-fourths of graduates hold paid jobs? Of these, 20% work full-time!

Horizons School Career Team members compiled a database of student internships and paid employment positions. Graduates work in a variety of positions across multiple career clusters (Architecture and Construction; Food Service; Personal Care and Services; Educational and Social Services; Plants, Animals and Natural Resources; Retail Services; and Transportation Services). Most have been employed for 7 months or longer. Fourteen of 20 parents and three alumni reported employment has lasted more than one year. Congratulations on these achievements, graduates!

Helpful Resources

ReachOut.com offers Teen Forums and Fact Sheets about becoming independent. Content is written by youth with help from a mental health professional.

The Kids. How to Be Independent from Parents,
<https://mom.me/kids/5846-how-be-independent-parents/>

What's Normal for Teen Development. Becoming Independent,
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/family/families-with-teens/resources-parents/whats-normal-for-teen-development/becoming-independent/>

Talk Back

What topics do you recommend for future newsletters? What exceptional effort would you like to recognize for your student or her mentors? We want to hear from you!

- *These are excellent newsletters! Thank you so much for sharing them - Horizons parent.*
- *The workshop on Supportive Decision Making and Trusts featured during 2016 Fall Parent and Family Weekend was wonderful. I would have paid to hear these speakers! - Horizons parent*
- *This is the BEST school and my son is living proof of it! - Horizons parent*
- *We are so proud of our son and couldn't be more happy with everything he is learning at Horizons. The other day we had conversation with him and put into perspective all of the things that he has done in the past two months, that he has never done on his own before. They included living in his own apartment (and keeping it relatively clean), food shopping, making his own meals (even if they are frozen dinners), paying bills – actually writing his own checks, laundry (ok not perfect, but he is doing it!), getting around a new city and using public transportation. I'm sure there are many other things he is doing and learning. We couldn't be more thrilled. We told him, the sky's the limit if he keeps on learning every day! - Horizons parents*

The Horizons School - Preparing young Adults with learning difficulties for an Independent Life.

State Licensed***NCASES Accredited

2018 15th Avenue South Birmingham, AL 35205

www.horizonsschool.org

205-322-6606 · 800-822-6242 · FAX: 205-322-6605