
Making choices and encouraging independence

Something all parents do is provide opportunities for their children to become independent. Making choices is part of this and needs practicing. Simple things like choosing what to eat or wear, what shampoo to use or toothbrush to buy are all ways of us feeling in control of our lives and what happens to us. Starting to make choices from an early stage can help encourage future independence in life.

Tips for encouraging independence

New experiences can provide concrete examples of things to make choices about. For example, deciding between cinema or bowling, swimming or trampolining, Chinese or Italian food are all simple choices that someone can make in their everyday experience.

Work experience, volunteering and other work opportunities are a great way of fostering independence. You can find out more about work on our WorkFit page.

People who have Down's syndrome can sometimes find it hard to understand what something is like which they haven't experienced. This can make it more difficult to start new experiences and activities. Films and videos are a way of allowing young people to see what is possible beyond their own world.

How you can support your son or daughter as they grow up

Start thinking and talking about the future as a family. The 14+ transition review is a good time to begin finding out about what is available (care and support, work, leisure, housing).

Keep a written record of what works and does not work for your son or daughter. This will provide valuable information to social work and health professionals about what works best for your son or daughter when there are decisions about health, care or accommodation to be made.

Begin developing a person-centred plan with your son or daughter and the people who care about them. A person-centred plan is a plan that revolves around the person, what they like and don't like, and what they want, both now and in the future; this will provide vital information about the wishes and needs of your son and daughter and the support they will need to achieve them. The plan will develop as they grow into adulthood.

Circles of support

Circles of support can be another way of adding an extra layer of support. A circle of support is a group of people who know a person well, such as family, friends and supporters, who meet regularly to help the person they support achieve what they want. This can include sharing ideas to tackle problems, providing a strong network of relationships, helping the person feel more independent and taking action to get things done. A circle of support usually includes

somewhere around 3 – 10 people. There is no formal process to setting up a circle of support and you can organise it yourself.

You can find more [formal support from Helen Sanderson's website](#).

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