



YOUTH TRANSITION CURRICULUM

Building a Sustainable Future

Empowering Youth with Disabilities Beyond Just a Job



Program Overview

Purpose:

This statewide, standardized, and sharable curriculum is designed specifically for youth with disabilities to support a successful transition from school to adulthood. It focuses not just on employment but on equipping youth to live independently, fulfilling lives. The curriculum is built on the principles of self-determination, strength-based planning, and inclusion.

Why this Curriculum?

Too often, youth transition programs stop at “get a job.” But meaningful adulthood includes more than employment. This curriculum empowers youth with disabilities to build confidence, understand their options, develop practical skills, and plan long-term futures aligned with their unique strengths and goals.

Curriculum Format:

- 8 Comprehensive & Interactive Modules
- Designed for use in school settings, community programs, or CILs
- Adaptable for 1:1, small group, or classroom instruction
- Each Module includes: Hands-on activities, real-life scenarios & examples, pre- & post-surveys, self-assessment tools, and connections to real services and agencies.

Pre-Survey

Section 1: How Confident Do You Feel?

Click the answer that fits best for you.

Statement	Not At All	A Little	Kind Of	Pretty Confident	Very Confident
I can talk about what I want to do after high school					
I understand what transition planning means					
I know what choices I have after graduation					
I know how to speak up for myself					
I feel comfortable talking about my disability and what I need					
I know what kind of job or career I want					
I understand how money works and how to make a budget					
I know what skills I'll need to live on my own					

Statement	Not At All	A Little	Kind Of	Pretty Confident	Very Confident
I know how to handle stress and hard emotions					
I know who I can ask for help with my future plans					

Section 2: Let's Talk About You

1. What are some things you want in your adult life? (*student types in answers*)
2. What is one thing you feel nervous or unsure about when you think about the future? (*student types in answers*)
3. What is one thing you're excited about for the future? (*student types in answers*)

Section 3: What Do You Know About These Topics?

Click the box that fits best for each topic below.

Topic	I've never heard of this	I've heard of it but don't know much	I know a little about it	I feel confident about it
Transition Planning				
IEP or 504 Plan				
Job Interviews				
College or Trade School				

Topic	I've never heard of this	I've heard of it but don't know much	I know a little about it	I feel confident about it
Budgeting and Paychecks				
Living on my Own				
Self-Advocacy				
Healthy Relationships				
Setting Goals				
Local Support Programs (like Voc Rehab or Independence Inc.				

Your answers help us understand how to support you best. You don't have to answer anything you're not comfortable with.

Module 1: Introduction to Transition Planning

Transition planning is the intentional, student-centered process of preparing youth with disabilities for life after high school, including further education, employment, independent living, and community participation.

Goals:

- Understand the purpose of transition planning
- Learn how IEP's and transition services support future goals
- Identify what adulthood means to them

Topics Covered:

- What is transition?
- Legal foundation (IDEA, ADA, Section 504)
- Postsecondary paths: college, technical school, employment, independent living
- Beginning future planning early

Activity:

Reflection writing: "Name 3 things you want for your adult life."

Prompts youth to start thinking about what matters most to them.

By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Define what “transition planning” means in the context of disability services and education
- Recognize how transition planning helps prepare for life after high school
- Identify at least 2 post-secondary options that interest them (e.g. work, college, living independently)
- Begin visualizing a future life that reflects their personal values and goals.

Key Concepts & Definitions

Term	Definition
Transition Planning	A process that helps youth with disabilities prepare for life after high school, including education, employment, and independent living
IEP Transition Plan	A section of a student’s individualized Education Program (IEP) that includes post-school goals and the services needed to achieve them
Post-Secondary Options	Education, employment, or training opportunities that occur after high school
Self-Determination	The ability to make choices and decisions about one’s own life

Today, we're going to talk about your future. It might feel far away, but the decisions you make now can help you build the kind of adult life you want to have. Transition planning is a way to help you figure out what you want, and how to get there. Whether you want to go to college, get a job, live on your own, or build relationships, your transition plan is your roadmap.

Transition planning is the process of helping students with disabilities prepare for life after high school. It is a formal part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and is required by law (IDEA). Transition planning focuses on three main areas of adult life:

- Education or Training
- Employment
- Independent Living

It helps students figure out what they want their adult life to look like and creates a plan to get there, step by step.

Why it matters: Transition planning isn't just paperwork. It's a roadmap that helps you move from being a high school student to a young adult with goals, options, and support. Without transition planning, students may leave high school feeling confused, unprepared, or unsure of their next steps. With it, they are more likely to:

- Get jobs they enjoy and are good at
- Succeed in college or training programs
- Learn how to live on their own or with the support they choose
- Be more confident in making life decisions

• Key Parts of Transition Planning:

Component	What It Means
Student Voice	Your thoughts, dreams, and goals matter most. The plan should reflect what you want.
Postsecondary Goals	These are goals for after high school. They should include education/training, employment, and independent living (if needed).
Transition Services	These are supports and activities written into your IEP that help you reach your goals.
Annual IEP Goals	Every year, the IEP should have at least one goal that supports your transition.
Age-Appropriate Assessments	These are tools that help you figure out your strengths, needs, and interests. They guide the plan.

Real-Life Examples of Transition Planning:

If you want to become a veterinary assistant, your IEP might include:

- Job shadowing at an animal shelter
- A class about animal care
- Help with filling out FASFA for college

If you want to live independently someday, your plan might include:

- Learning to cook or grocery shop
- Practicing budgeting and using public transportation
- Touring supported living options

Who is Involved in Transition Planning?

Transition planning is a team effort. You don't have to do it alone!

The team usually includes:

- You (the student) – the most important person in the room.
- Your family or caregivers – they can help support your goals.

- Special Education Teachers
- General Education Teachers
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors
- School Counselors or Social Workers
- Other Adults you trust (like a case manager, job coach, transition specialist).

When does Transition Planning Start?

Under IDEA, it must begin by age 16 (but in Kansas, it starts as early as age 14). The earlier it starts, the better. Your transition goals are updated every year at your IEP meeting.

Student Voice is KEY!

Transition planning should not be something adults do for you, it should be done with you. You get to:

- Share your dreams
- Explore what excites you
- Ask questions about college, work, and housing
- Practice making decisions
- Learn how to speak up for yourself

Activity: Design Your Future Roadmap

Draw a simple road or path. At the end, write a dream or goal (like “working as a graphic designer” or “living on my own”). Along the path, write or draw 3 to 5 steps it might take to get you there (like “graduate high school,” “take a graphic design class,” “practice cooking”). This helps show how transition planning works like a GPS for your life.

Legal Context (Accessible Overview)

Transition planning is required by law for students with IEPs by the age of 16 (14 in Kansas). It ensures that students with disabilities are supported in preparing for life after high school.

Key Laws That Protect and Support Youth with Disabilities

1. IDEA – Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

What it is: A federal law that guarantees special education services to students with disabilities in public schools.

What it does?

- Requires schools to create an Individualized Education Program (IEP)
- Says that transition planning must begin by age 16 (or earlier in some states like Kansas where the age is 14)
- Ensures youth have a say in their goals for life after high school

Why it matters for transition: IDEA is the law that gives you the right to a transition plan, a section in your IEP that helps you prepare for jobs, further education, independent living, and life after high school.

2. ADA – Americans with Disabilities Act

What it is: A civil rights law that protects people with disabilities from discrimination in public life.

What it does?

- Makes sure you have equal access to school, jobs, public transportation, housing, and more
- Requires reasonable accommodations in work, college, and public places
- Applies to all ages, not just students

What it matters for transition: Once you leave high school, ADA protects your rights in the adult world. It helps you get what you need to work, go to school, or live independently (like ramps, extended test time, or job coaching).

3. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

What it is: A law that prevents discrimination against people with disabilities in programs that get federal money (like public schools and colleges).

What it does?

- Allows students with disabilities who don't qualify for an IEP to still get support through a 504 plan
- Requires schools and colleges to make reasonable accommodations
- Protects your rights in education, work, and public services

Why it matters for transition: If you don't have an IEP but still need

help at school, Section 504 ensures you still get support. It also protects you in college, job training, and workplaces as you transition into adulthood.

Summary Table:

Law	Who It Helps	What It Covers	Why It Matters
ADA	People of all ages with disabilities	Equal access to jobs, housing, schools, transportation	Protects your rights as an adult in the community
IDEA	Students with IEPs	Special Education services and transition planning	Requires a transition plan in your IEP by age 16 (14 in Kansas)
Section 504	Students and Adults with disabilities	Accommodations in school, work, and public programs	Ensures access even if you don't qualify for an IEP

Activity: Know Your Rights Match-Up

Title- Match the Law to the Right

Purpose: Help youth understand the difference between IDEA, ADA, and Section 504 and connect each law to real-life situations they might encounter during transition.

Example:

Scenario	Which Law Applies?
You are in high school with an IEP, and your team helps you plan your goals for after graduation.	IDEA

Scenario	Which Law Applies?
You need extra time to take a test in college because of your disability.	Section 504
You use a wheelchair and need a ramp to access your workplace	ADA
You don't have an IEP, but you still need accommodations in high school.	Section 504
You ask for job coaching support at your first job after graduation.	ADA
Your IEP includes career planning and learning how to apply for jobs.	IDEA

- Have you ever used accommodations in school? Which law gave you that right?
- Why is it important to know these laws before graduation?
- How can you speak up if you feel like your rights aren't being met?

These laws are here to protect and support you, not just in school, but in the real world too. Knowing your rights is one of the most powerful tools you have.

Why is Transition Planning So Important?

Transition planning puts YOU in the driver's seat of your future. Instead of just "graduating and figuring it out," transition planning gives you time, tools, and support to create a life that fits your goals, needs, and dreams. Whether you want to go to college, get a job, move into your own place, or explore something new. Planning helps you get there step by step, and with support.

Top 5 Reasons Transition Planning Matters

- Gives you a Voice
 - You know yourself better than anyone else. Transition planning gives you the space to speak up about what you want your adult life to look like.
 - Example: Instead of someone choosing a job for you, you help decide what kind of job fits your interests and strengths.
- It helps you build real-life skills
 - Life after high school can be challenging, but planning ahead helps you learn the skills you'll need, like how to manage money, ride the bus, ask for help, or apply for a job.
 - Example: Your transition plan might include learning to do laundry or practicing how to answer interview questions.
- It gives you a foundation for the Future
 - Without a plan, it's easy to feel overwhelmed. With a plan, you can take small steps toward big goals. Each step builds confidence.
 - Example: If your dream is to become a chef, transition planning can include a cooking class, a visit to a culinary school, and a job at a restaurant.

- It connects you to people and programs who can help
 - You're not in this alone. Your plan can help connect you to programs like Vocational Rehabilitation, Centers for Independent Living, or job coaching services that help with training, funding, or housing.
 - Example: Your plan might include setting up a meeting with a Voc Rehab counselor to talk about getting help with college tuition or transportation.
- It helps you prepare for adult life - before it starts
 - Once high school ends, our supports can change. Planning ahead helps make sure you're ready, so nothing gets missed.
 - Example: If you know you'll need help managing medications or budgeting when you turn 18, transition planning helps you set that up now.

Transition Planning = Better Outcomes

Studies show that when youth with disabilities actively participate in their transition planning, they are:

- More likely to graduate
- More likely to get a job or go to college
- More independent as adults
- More confident and prepared
- Less likely to fall through the cracks after high school

Real Talk: Without Transition Planning.....

Without Planning	With Planning
"I don't know what to do after graduation"	"I know what I want to do and who can help me"

Without Planning	With Planning
"No one ever asked what I want"	"I'm part of the conversation about my future"
"I didn't know I could get support in college"	"My plan includes help applying for accommodations"
"I'm stressed and confused about adult life"	"I've practiced life skills and have a plan"

- What's one reason you think planning ahead is helpful?
- What's something you'd like to feel more confident about before you finish high school?
- Who do you trust to help you plan for your future?

Options After High School:

There's more than one path, and your future should fit YOU

Many people think there's only one path after high school (life going straight to college), but that's not true. Especially for youth with disabilities. You have choices, and the best path is the one that fits you're strengths, interests, and support needs.

There are 4 Main Pathways After High School

- **College or Postsecondary Education**

What it is? Programs where you continue learning after high school. This could be a 2-year community college, or a 4-year university, or a short-term training program.

Examples:

- Community College (e.g., getting an associate degree)
- 4-Year University (e.g., bachelor's degree)
- Certificate Programs (e.g., graphic design, welding, early childhood education)
- Specialized Training Centers (e.g., job corps or tech schools)

Supports Available:

- Disability services offices (like college IEP/504 support)
- Extra time on tests, note-taking help, assistive technology
- Tutoring and academic coaching

Who it might be good for:

- You enjoy learning and want to pursue a career that requires a degree or license
- You want to build your knowledge or credentials in a specific field

Questions to ask yourself:

- Do I need more training for the job I want?
- Can I use accommodations in college?
- Am I ready to manage a more independent schedule?

• Employment (Getting a Job)

What it is? Working for a pay in a part-time or full-time job. This might be your first job or a career you've trained for.

Examples:

- Entry-level jobs (grocery stores, restaurants, retail)
- Supported employment through Voc Rehab or a job coach
- Internships or apprenticeships that lead to full-time work
- Self-employment or gig work (like selling art or walking dogs)

Supports Available:

- Job coaching
- On-the-job accommodations (like visual schedules, quiet workspaces)
- Transportation support (e.g., reduced bus fare, travel training)
- Help from Vocational Rehabilitation or local employment programs

Who it might be good for:

- You're ready to work right away
- You want to earn money and gain experience
- You'd rather learn through doing than sitting in a classroom

Questions to ask yourself?

- What kind of work sounds exciting or doable?
- Do I want full-time or part-time?
- Do I need help applying or preparing for interviews?

• Independent or Supported Living

What it is: Living on your own, with roommates, or with support. This can mean managing your own space or learning the skills to do so over time.

Examples:

- Living at home with increased independence
- Renting an apartment with roommates
- Group homes or shared housing with support staff
- Semi-independent living with help from a CIL or agency
- Living alone with regular check ins from staff

Why it's a good option:

You get to make your own choice, practice daily life skills, and feel confident managing your time, money, and space.

Things to consider:

- You may need to budget, cook, clean, and/or do laundry
- Transportation and access to work or school is important
- You can receive support through Medicaid Waivers, CILs, or housing agencies

- **Community Involvement & Personal Growth**

What it is:

Sometimes, the next step isn't just about work or school, it might be about building confidence, gaining experience, or connecting with others.

Examples:

- Volunteering (libraries, shelters, community centers)
- Peer leadership or self-advocacy groups (like SACKS)
- Therapeutic services or confidence-building workshops
- Supported recreation or travel programs

Why it's a good option:

It helps you grow personally, meet people, and stay connected to your community. It can also prepare you for work or education later.

Things to consider:

- These programs may help you explore interests in a low-pressure environment
- Transportation and daily routine planning might be needed
- Some programs have age limits or waiting lists, plan early!

Can I Do More Than One?

Yes! You can mix and match these options. For example:

- Go to college part-time and work part-time
- Work during the day and take online classes
- Live at home while learning life skills, then move out later
- Start in a day program, then transition to supported employment

Reflection Questions:

- Which of these options do I feel most interested in right now?
- What strengths or skills would help me succeed in that option?
- What support might I need to make it happen?
- What's something I'd like to try before I leave high school?

Building Your Vision for Adulthood

What do YOU want your adult life to look like?

Adulthood doesn't just "happen," you get to create it. Your vision for adulthood is a picture of what kind of life you want to live. This includes your job, where you live, who you spend time with, how you take care of yourself, and what makes you happy. When you know what you want, you can start planning how to get there.

What is a Vision for Adulthood?

It's a personal dream or goal about your future life. Your vision might include:

- What kind of work you do
- Where you live (apartment, house, with roommates)
- Who you spend time with
- What you do for fun
- How you manage your time, money, and responsibilities

- What support you might need to be successful
- Your vision doesn't have to be perfect or final. It can change and grow as you explore, learn, and try new things.

Why It's Important to Have a Vision

- It helps you set goals for school, work, and life
- It gives your IEP and transition plan a direction
- It helps adults support you better when they know what you want
- It keeps you motivated, even when things are hard
- It gives YOU control over your own future

What Can a Vision Include?

Here's a breakdown of areas to think about when building your vision:

Life Area	Examples of Vision Goals
Work/Career	"I want to work with animals." "I want to be a mechanic." "I want to run my own business."
Education/Training	"I want to go to culinary school." "I want to take art classes"
Living Situation	"I want to live in my own apartment." "I want roommates and a pet."
Social Life	"I want to make new friends." "I want to date and have a relationship."
Transportation	"I want to learn to ride the city bus." "I want to get my driver's license."
Health & Wellness	"I want to cook healthy foods." "I want to learn how to manage my medications."
Hobbies & Interests	"I want to play video games with friends." "I want to join a book club."

How to Start Building Your Vision

You don't need to figure it out today. Start with what you know and what makes you feel excited or curious.

Ask yourself:

- What kind of life would make me feel happy and proud?
- What are some things I don't want in my future?
- What am I good at or interested in?
- Where do I want to be in 5 or 10 years?

Activity: Design Your Dream Life

Create a Vision Board or Draw a picture or collage of your dream adult life. Label things like: job, home, hobbies, support people, pets, etc.

Things to Think About:

- What's one thing you definitely want in your adult life?
- What scares you about becoming an adult?
- What kind of support do you think you'll need to reach your vision?
- How can adults (teachers, family, etc.) help you reach your vision?

Your adulthood can be whatever you want it to be. It may take time, help, and planning but the most important thing is that it's yours. You are the author of your story.

Module 1 Check-In & Wrap-Up

Let's reflect on what you've learned and how you feel about your future.

Purpose of this Check-In:

This is not a test, just a way to:

- Reinforce key concepts
- Encourage self-reflection
- Give students a voice
- Provide facilitators with quick, useful feedback
- Support transition planning and IEP documentation

Reflection:

- What is one thing you learned about planning for your future?
(*Student types in their answer*)
- What is one thing you want in your adult life? (*Student types in their answer*)
- How do you feel about planning for your future now? (*use emojis, stars, or a 1-5 scale*)
 - 😬 = Still nervous and unsure
 - 🤔 = Okay, but I need help
 - 😎 = Starting to feel confident
 - 😁 = I'm excited and ready!

Great work today! You've taken your first step toward your future, and that's a big deal. Remember, this isn't about having everything figured out right now, it's about discovering what's important to you and learning how to ask for the support you need. Every module will give you more tools to build your adult life, your way.

Module 2: Self-Discovery & Self-Advocacy

Self-discovery is the process of getting to know who you are, your strengths, interests, challenges, values, goals, and needs. For youth with disabilities, self-discovery is especially powerful. It helps you:

- Understand how your disability affects your daily life
- Build self-awareness and confidence
- Make decisions that reflect your true interests, not what others expect
- Advocate for the accommodations and support that help you succeed

In short, self-discovery gives you the language and insight to take ownership of your lives.

What is Self-Advocacy?

- Knowing what you need
- Speaking up for yourself
- Asking for help or support when you need it
- Making decisions about your life
- Understanding your rights and using your voice

It doesn't mean being loud or confrontational, it means being clear and confident about what works for you.

When students practice self-advocacy, they gain: Independence, stronger communication skills, better outcomes in education, work, and relationships, the ability to set and protect their boundaries.

Goals:

- Understand yourself better
- Build confidence in expressing needs
- Learn tools for communication and boundary setting
- Identify accommodations that help you succeed in school, work, and life

Topics Covered:

- What is self-discovery
 - Strengths, challenges, interests, values
 - Disability identity and how it affects daily life
- What is self-advocacy and why does it matter
 - Real-life examples of advocating for yourself
- How to speak up and ask for what you need
 - “I” statements, sentence starters, role-playing
- Knowing what works for me and how to ask for it
 - Accommodations, preferences, communication styles

By the end of this module, students will be able to:

- Identify at least one strength, one interest, and one support need
- Define what self-advocacy means
- Practice using an “I” statement to ask for help or express a need
- Name at least one accommodation or support that helps them
- Recognize real-life situations where speaking up is important (e.g., IEP meetings, interviews, work)

Key Concepts & Definitions

Term	Definition
Self-Discovery	Learning about your own strengths, needs, interests, and values so you can make choices that fit who you are
Self-Advocacy	Speaking up for yourself, asking for what you need, and making decisions about your own life
Accommodation	A change or support that helps you succeed in school, work, daily life. (Example: extra time on a test, using a visual schedule)
Strength-Based Thinking	Focusing on what you can do and what makes you unique, not just on what's hard
"I" Statement	A way to express your feelings or needs by starting with "I" (Example: "I learn best when things are written down.")

Topic 1: Understanding Self-Discovery

Before you can tell the world who you are, you have to know who you are.

Self-discovery is the process of learning about who you are, what you like, what you're good at, what you need help with, and what kind of life you want.

It's more than just knowing your favorite color or what food you like.

Self-discovery helps you understand:

- What you're good at
- What challenges you face
- What you care about
- What you need to succeed
- What kind of future you want to build

For youth with disabilities, self-discovery is especially important because it lays the foundation for:

- Self-confidence
- Decision-making
- Self-advocacy
- Goal-setting
- Independence

When you know yourself, you can ask for what you need, choose the right supports, and build a future that fits you, not just what other people expect.

Why Self-Discovery Matters in Transition Planning

Transition planning is about preparing for life after high school. But how can you plan your future if you don't know:

- What you're passionate about?
- What environments help you succeed?
- What supports make things easier?
- What kind of life you want?

Self-discovery gives you the answers and the power to make informed choices for college, jobs, living situations, relationships, and more. Your IEP team is planning for your future, but your voice should lead it. Self-discovery helps you know what to say and what to ask for.

The Four Main Parts of Self-Discovery

Self-discovery is not a one-time thing, it's a lifelong journey. But for transition planning we focus on four key areas:

- **Strengths**

What this means:

The skills, traits, or talents that come naturally to you or that you've worked hard to develop.

Why they matter:

Knowing your strengths builds confidence and helps you find jobs, environments, and activities that play to your abilities.

Examples:

- I'm a good listener
- I solve problems calmly
- I remember routines well
- I'm creative
- I like working with hands
- I'm very organized
- I'm friendly and make others feel welcome

Ask Yourself:

- What are you proud of?
- What do people say you're good at?
- What's something that feels easy for you?

• **Challenges or Supports Needed**

What this means:

The things that are harder for you or areas where you need extra time, tools, or help.

Why they matter:

Understanding your challenges helps you learn how to work with them, not against them, and get the support you need without shame.

Examples:

- I get distracted in loud environments
- I have trouble reading large blocks of text
- I get overwhelmed with too many instructions at once
- I need more breaks than others
- I need help organizing my day
- I use a communication device

Ask Yourself:

- What's hard for you, even when you try your best?
- What support helps you do better?
- What do you wish people understood about you?

• **Interests & Passions**

What this means:

The things that make you curious, excited, or happy. Hobbies, topics, activities, or dreams you love thinking about or doing.

Why they matter:

Your interests help guide your goals. People who follow their passions often feel more motivated and satisfied in school, work, and life.

Examples:

- Art, drawing, music, or dance
- Animals or nature
- Building or fixing things
- Fashion or makeup
- Helping others
- Video games, tech, or coding
- Cooking, baking, or organizing

Ask Yourself:

- What do you love doing on a good day?
- What could you talk about for hours?
- What activities make you lose track of time?

• Values & Priorities

What this means:

The beliefs, principles, or qualities that matter most to you, what guides how you make choices and live your life.

Why they matter:

Your values help you make decisions that match your personal goals, not someone else's.

Examples:

- I want to be independent
- I care about honesty and fairness
- I believe in helping others
- I need to feel safe and calm
- I want to be respected
- I value family and connection

Ask Yourself:

- What's really important to you?
- What kind of person do you want to be?
- What makes you feel proud or fulfilled?

How These All Work Together:

Strengths show you what to build on. Challenges show you where support is needed. Interests show you what excites and motivates you. Values show you what matters most.

Self-Discovery = Personal Power

When students know all four parts, strengths, challenges, interests, and values they're better equipped to:

- Set meaningful goals
- Choose classes or job paths
- Ask for supports that really help
- Build relationships that honor their boundaries
- Plan a future that reflects who they really are

The more you know yourself, the more power you have to build the life you want. You don't have to fit someone else's mold. Your path is yours.

Topic 2: What is Self-Advocacy?

You are the best person to speak up for what you need.

Self-advocacy means understanding your needs and speaking up for them in a respectful, clear, and confident way. It's about knowing your rights, expressing your preferences, and taking control of your life decisions at school, work, in relationships, or in your community.

For youth with disabilities, self-advocacy is a life skill. It's a tool that empowers students to:

- Be heard in IEP meetings
- Ask for accommodations that make learning or working easier
- Say "no" to things that don't feel right
- Explain your disability and what supports you need
- Take charge of your goals and dreams

Have you ever told someone you needed help, or asked for something to make things better? That's self-advocacy, even if you didn't realize it.

Why Self-Advocacy Matters in Transition Planning

Knowing how to speak up for yourself leads to:

- Better outcomes in school, jobs, and independent living
- More confident decision-making
- Healthier relationships and boundaries
- Greater Independence
- Less frustration and more problem-solving

It also prepares students for adulthood, when they'll need to advocate in new places like college, jobs, doctor's offices, or apartment rental meetings.

The Four Main Parts of Self-Advocacy

To teach self-advocacy we need to break it down into four main keys skills.

• Self-Awareness

What this means:

Self-awareness is understanding who you are, your strengths, challenges, preferences, and needs. It's also knowing how your disability affects you and what helps you do your best. Self-awareness is the foundation for all self-advocacy. You can't speak up for yourself if you don't know what you need.

Why it matters:

When you're aware of what works for you, you can:

- Make informed choices
- Ask for the right supports
- Avoid unnecessary frustration or confusion
- Feel more confident and in control.

Your disability is not a flaw, but is one part of your identity that gives you valuable insight into how you learn, work, and grow.

Examples:

- I do better when I have written instructions
- Loud sounds distract me, so I use noise-canceling headphones
- I need reminders to stay focused in class
- I like working with my hands more than reading long text

Ask Yourself:

- What am I good at?

- What is hard for me
- What support helps me do my best
- How does my disability affect my daily life or learning

- **Communication**

What this means:

Communication in self-advocacy means being able to express your needs, feelings, or preferences in a way that others can understand. This might include speaking, writing, using gestures, AAC devices, or visuals. Good communication is clear, respectful, and confident. Even if you feel nervous.

Why it matters:

When you can explain what you need:

- People are more likely to help
- You avoid misunderstanding
- You're seen as capable and independent
- You build strong relationships and trust

Communication does not have to be perfect. It just has to be honest and direct.

Examples:

- Can I get extra time on this assignment
- I'm not comfortable with loud noises. Can I sit somewhere quieter
- I prefer when people show me instead of just telling me
- Using a card, app, or AAC to request a break or ask a question

Ask Yourself:

- What's one thing I want people to know about me?

- How do I communicate best, speaking, writing, pointing, or showing
- What's one way I can clearly ask for help this week?

- **Knowing Your Rights**

What this means:

This means understanding that, as a person with a disability, you have legal rights to support, access, and respect under laws like: IDEA (in school), Section 504 (accommodations in school and college), and ADA (in public spaces, jobs, housing, etc.). You don't need to be a lawyer but you do need to know that you're protected and allowed to ask for what helps you succeed.

Why it matters:

Knowing your rights helps you:

- Feel empowered, not helpless
- Speak up if your needs are being ignored
- Make sure you get fair treatment in school, work, and life
- Participate actively in your IEP or transition plan

You have the right to learn, work, and live in a way that supports you needs and you can ask for those supports without getting in trouble.

Examples:

- I have an IEP and accommodations for extended test time
- The ADA says I can ask for an accessible work environment
- I have a right to attend my IEP meetings and share my goals

Ask Yourself:

- Do I know what my rights are at school or work?

- What accommodations or services am I allowed to ask for?
- Who can help me understand my rights better?

• **Problem Solving and Persistence**

What this means:

Even when you speak up, things might not always go perfectly. This part of self-advocacy means learning how to handle challenges calmly, try new solutions, ask again if your needs weren't met, and keep going even when it's hard. Persistence means not giving up on your needs.

Why it matters:

Advocating once is good, but being able to keep trying, ask in different ways, or seek help from someone else builds long-term independence and resilience. It also shows people you're serious about your needs, and that you believe in yourself. Advocating is a process and getting that support often takes follow-up.

Examples:

- I asked my teacher, but they forgot so I reminded them the next day
- My first job didn't work out, but I used what I learned to do better in my next one
- I wrote my request instead of saying it aloud because I felt nervous

Ask Yourself:

- What can I do if someone doesn't listen the first time?
- Who else can help me if I'm stuck?
- How can I stay calm and keep going when I feel frustrated?

Self-advocacy is more than just asking for help. It’s knowing yourself, expressing yourself, and standing up for your right to be supported, respected, and successful on your terms.

Real Life Examples of Self-Advocacy

Situation	Self-Advocacy Example
You don’t understand directions in class	“Can you explain that a different way?”
You need more time to finish a test	“I have accommodations for extended time.”
A job is too fast-paced	“I’d do better with a task list.”
Someone talks down to you	“Please talk to me directly, not my caregiver.”
You’re overwhelmed at work	“Can I take a short break to reset?”

Have you ever been in one of these situations? What did you do or what could you say next time?

Activity: My Self Advocacy Statement

Students will practice typing simple self-advocacy statement based on something real in their lives.

Instructions: Use sentence starters to help guide you.

- I learn best when:
- I need help with:
- I feel uncomfortable when:
- It helps me when:
- One support that works well for me is:

You are the best person to speak up for your own needs. Your voice matters. It's okay to ask for help. It's okay to say what works best for you. Self-advocacy helps you build the future you want YOUR way.

Topic 3: How To Speak Up

Your voice matters. Let's practice using it.

Self-advocacy starts with knowing yourself, but it comes to life when you actually use your voice. In this topic, students learn how to speak up in a way that feels confident, respectful, and true to who they are. "Speaking Up" doesn't always mean talking loudly or being in charge. It means clearly sharing what you need, what matters to you, or what you're feeling even when it's uncomfortable. It's about healthy communication, not conflict. It's about collaboration, not confrontation.

What this means:

Speaking up means:

- Saying what you need
- Asking questions when you're confused
- Letting others know what works best for you
- Sharing your opinion, even if it's different
- Saying "no" when something doesn't feel right
- Asking for help without shame

And remember, you don't have to speak to speak up. You can:

- Write it down
- Use gestures or visuals
- Use AAC devices or apps
- Point to communication cards
- Ask someone to help advocate with you

All forms of advocacy are valid, including quiet, nonverbal, or written

Why this matters:

Knowing how to speak up builds confidence, independence, and stronger relationships. It also:

- Helps prevent misunderstandings
- Makes people more likely to take you seriously
- Keeps you safe by setting boundaries
- Gives you more control in school, jobs, and daily life
- Builds trust between you and the adults around you

When students can speak up effectively, they feel seen, heard, and respected.

Key Strategies for Speaking Up

• Use “I” Statements

“I” statements help express what you feel or need without blaming others. They’re clear and respectful.

Examples:

- “I need more time to finish my work”
- “I feel anxious when I’m called on without warning”
- “I understand better when I can see it written down”
- “I like to work in a quiet space”

Avoid “You always....” or “You never....” statements, which can feel aggressive. Practice rewriting these into “I” statements.

• Ask for What You Need

Sometimes people don’t know you need help unless you ask. It’s okay to speak up, even more than once.

Ways to ask:

- “Can you help me understand this better?”
- “Can I take a break?”
- “Can I use my calculator?”

- “Can you explain that differently?”
- “I need help finishing this task”

• **Be Honest and Direct**

You don’t need fancy words. Just be real. Direct communication helps others help you.

Instead of saying, “Ugh I hate this.” Try saying, “This is hard for me. Can I get help staying on track.”

It’s okay to have “messy” communication. It’s okay if you don’t say it perfectly. Honesty over polished.

• **Know When to Speak Up**

You don’t have to speak up all the time, but you should when:

- You’re struggling and need help
- You need an accommodation or reminder
- You’re being treated unfairly
- You want to share an idea or opinion
- You feel unsafe or uncomfortable
- Someone is making decisions about your life without your input

When is it important to speak up? (Students will type out response)

Real-Life Situations & Sample Responses

Situation	How to Speak Up
You need a break	“Can I take 5 minutes to calm down?”
Your group isn’t including you	“I’d like to help with this part too.”
The teacher is talking too fast	“Can you slow down or repeat that for me?”

Situation	How to Speak Up
A friend crosses a boundary	“That made me uncomfortable. Please don’t do that again.”
A boss changes your schedule without notice	“I need a consistent schedule to do my best. Can we talk about that?”

Activity: Speaking Up Sentence Builder

Objective: Students will practice creating simple advocacy statements using structured sentence starters.

Starters:

- “I feel.....”
- “I need.....”
- “I understand better when....”
- “I would like.....”
- “Can you please.....”

Reflection Questions

- What’s one thing you feel comfortable asking right now?
- What’s something you wish people understood about how you learn or work?
- What’s one situation where you might try speaking up this week?

Speaking up doesn’t mean you’re being difficult. It means you care about yourself enough to ask for what you need, and that’s a strength, not a weakness.

Topic 4: Know What Supports Work For Me

The right support can turn a challenge into a strength.

This topic teaches students how to recognize and name the tools, strategies, accommodations, and people that help them do their best. These are often called supports and they can make a huge difference in school, work, and daily life.

Some students already use supports (like having a para, using a visual schedule, or getting extra time on tests). Others may not realize that the things helping them succeed are supports, or that they have a right to ask for them. This is where self-discovery meets self-advocacy. Support is not a weakness, it's smart, strategic, and empowering.

What this means:

Knowing what supports work for you means:

- Understanding what tools or accommodations help you succeed
- Being able to ask for those supports when you need them
- Being aware of what doesn't help or even makes things harder
- Recognizing the difference between helpful support and unhealthy dependency

This skill is about matching your needs to the right supports, so you can advocate for them during IEP meetings, job interviews, or real-life situations.

Why this matters:

When you can name the supports they need:

- You feel more confident and in control
- Teachers, employers, and family members know how to help

- You avoid unnecessary stress or failure
- You build long-term independence
- You're more likely to succeed in school, jobs, and independent living

Supports don't erase a challenge, it gives access to success.

Examples of Supports

Supports can be tools, strategies, people, or environmental changes that help you thrive.

Here are examples organized by setting:

In School:

- Extra time on tests
- Breaking assignments into smaller chunks
- Using noise-canceling headphones
- Having instructions written down
- A para or aide for help staying on task
- Using a calculator or text-to-speech software

In the Workplace:

- Visual task checklists
- Modified work hours or schedule reminders
- Job coach or mentor
- Frequent breaks or quiet workspace
- Assistive technology (speech-to-text, timers, organizers)

In Daily Life:

- Routines and reminders
- Grocery shopping with a list or app
- Maps or visual bus schedules
- Support person to help with medical appointments
- Coping strategies like taking walks or listening to music

Helpful vs. Unhelpful Supports

It's also important for students to reflect on what support doesn't work for them or even holds them back.

Helpful support empowers you to do more independently.

Unhelpful supports may make you feel stuck, ignored, or overly dependent.

Helpful Support Example: A teacher gives you extra time on your test

– You complete it confidently

Unhelpful Support Example: A peer always answers for you – You stop speaking up for yourself.

Has anyone every helped you in a way that made things harder, not easier? How could it have been more helpful.

Ask Yourself:

- What helps me focus or stay calm when I'm overwhelmed?
- What do I need to understand directions better?
- What tools or people help me feel confident and successful?
- What support have I used before that worked really well?
- If there a support I used that didn't feel helpful?

You are not "too much" for needing support. You are worth every tool, every strategy, and every accommodation that helps you succeed.

Knowing what works for you is a superpower and learning how to ask for it is how you make your voice heard.

Module 2 Wrap-Up Check-In: Self-Discovery & Self-Advocacy

Let's pause and see what we've learned about ourselves and how we can speak up.

Purpose of this Check-In:

This is a short reflection tool that helps

- Students connect with what they've learned
- Facilitators gather quick insights about growth
- IEP/transition teams document participation and self-awareness
- Build confidence before moving into career, life, or goal-setting topics

Reflection Questions:

- What is one thing you learned about yourself during this module?
- What's one way you can speak up for yourself in school, at home, or at work?
- Name one support that works well for you and how it helps?
- How do you feel about advocating for yourself?
 - 😞 Not confident
 - 😐 A little confident
 - 😊 Getting better
 - 😄 Very confident

You've done amazing work learning about who you are and how to speak up for yourself. Remember, self-advocacy isn't about being perfect. It's about knowing what works for you, being brave enough to say it, and knowing it's okay to ask for help. That's how you build a future that fits YOU.

Module 3: Career Exploration & Employment Skills

This module helps students explore the world of work and think about the kind of jobs or careers they might enjoy. It introduces students to different career paths, the importance of soft skills, how to apply for a job, and what it means to build a career. Not just get hired. It also supports students in identifying their employment goals based on their strengths, interests, and support needs, using what they've already learned in Modules 1 and 2.

Have you ever thought about what kind of job you'd like to have? What about what kind of life you want to build through work?

Goals:

- Understand the difference between a job and a career
- Begin identifying careers that match their interests and strengths
- Learn essential job, seeking and workplace skills
- Practice introducing themselves in a professional setting
- Know how to prepare for interviews and create a basic resume
- Explore different career pathways (college, trades, apprenticeships, supported employment)

Topics Covers:

- What is job vs. what is a career?
- Exploring career options based on interests, strengths, and values
- Types of pathways (college, trade schools, apprenticeships, job coaching)

- Basic Employment skills: resumes, applications, and interviews
- The importance of soft skills (communication, reliability, attitude, etc.)
- How to introduce yourself to an employer (30 second self-pitch)

Key Concepts & Definitions:

Term	Definition
Job	A short-term position you do to earn money. May not be related to long-term goals.
Career	A long-term path that reflects your interests and goals. Careers often grow over time.
Career Pathway	A step-by-step plan to get into a job field (example: training, education, work experience).
Soft Skills	Personal skills that help you succeed at work like being on time, getting along with others, and staying organized.
Resume	A short document that lists your work experience, skills, and education to show employers.
Interview	A conversation with an employer where you talk about your strengths and why you want the job.

Topic 1: Job vs. Career

A job is what you do. A career is what you build.

Before diving into career goals and job applications, it’s important for youth to understand the difference between a job and a career. Many students with disabilities have only been told to “get a job” but they haven’t been encouraged to dream bigger or see themselves as career builders. This topic helps students reflect on their long-term goals and the type of life they want to build through employment. Both jobs and careers have value. The point of this module is to

explore purpose, fulfillment, and sustainability, not just paychecks.

By the end of this topic, you will be able to:

- Explain the difference between a job and a career in your own words
- Identify examples of short-term jobs and long-term careers
- Reflect on your personal goals for work and adult life
- Recognize that building a career is a journey with many starting points
- Begin thinking about your own future pathway with confidence

What this means:

A job: A job is something you do to earn money. It might be short-term, part-time, or not connected to your long-term interests. It gives you experience, builds skills, and helps pay for things you need.

A career: A career is a series of jobs or roles that connect to your interests, strengths, or long-term goals. You might have different jobs along the way, but they build toward a larger vision of the kind of work, and life you want.

Why it matters:

Understanding the difference helps students:

- Set realistic and meaningful goals
- Avoid feeling stuck or discouraged
- Connect current experiences to future opportunities
- Make intentional choices in school, training, or part-time work
- See employment as part of independence not just a requirement

Jobs can be steppingstones. But you deserve to think beyond survival, to fulfillment, independence, and pride in what you do.

Job	Career
Working at a grocery store to earn money in high school	Becoming a nutritionist who helps others eat well
Babysitting your neighbor's kids	Becoming a certified child care provider or teacher
Dog walking	Working as a vet tech or animal trainer
Mowing lawns for summer cash	Starting a landscaping business
Washing dishes at a restaurant	Training to become a chef or restaurant manager
Delivering pizza	Becoming a logistics coordinator or delivery company supervisor

What is a Job?

A job is a specific task, role, or set of duties you do in exchange for money. Jobs can be:

- Full-time or part-time
- Temporary or long-term
- Related or unrelated to your interests or goals
- A starting point or side step on your path

Jobs teach you valuable skills like:

- Showing up on time
- Following directions
- Working on a team
- Dealing with customers
- Managing stress or solving problems

Jobs are important because they give you:

- Experience
- Money
- Responsibility
- Confidence
- Independence

Example: Working as a dishwasher at a restaurant helps you learn time management, teamwork, and hygiene. Even if you don't want to wash dishes forever, that job teaches skills you can use anywhere.

What is a Career?

A career is a path made up of many jobs, experiences, and learning opportunities that build on your:

- Interests (what you like)
- Strengths (what you're good at)
- Values (what matters to you)
- Needs (what supports help you succeed)

A Career:

- Grows over time
- Evolves as you change and learn
- Includes education, training, volunteering, internships, and paid work
- Can take many paths, including disability-specific support systems (like supported employment or customized employment)

Careers are about creating a life, not just getting a paycheck. For example, you start by walking dogs in your neighborhood (a job). You realize you love animals. You volunteer at a shelter, take a vet assistant training course, and one day get hired at a veterinary clinic (a career). Over time, you become a certified vet tech.

Let’s Get Visual: The Ladder vs. The Bridge

Job = Ladder Rung

Each job is like a single rung on a ladder. You step up one at a time and can move sideways, up, or down.

Career = Bridge or Journey

A career is like a bridge you build. Every job, class, training, and volunteer opportunity adds another board to get you closer to the life you want.

Deeper Comparison Chart

Category	Job	Career
Goal	Make Money	Build a Future
Timeframe	Short-Term	Long-Term
Connection to Interest	Might not be related	Usually tied to your passions and strengths
Stability	May change often	Often includes growth and advancement
Support Needed	May rely on others heavily	Includes growing independence and self-advocacy
Example	Working at a grocery store	Becoming a nutritionist, store manager, or supply chain planner

Job or Career? Both Can Be Right!

Jobs are great when you need experience, want to try something new, are exploring what you like, or need flexibility or support.

Careers are great when you want to work toward a bigger goal, have a passion or long-term vision, are ready to grow and challenge yourself, want more stability and benefits.

Disability-Inclusive Career Pathways:

For youth with disabilities, career pathways might include:

- Supported employment
- Customized employment
- Internships with job coaching
- Project SEARCH or Vocational Rehabilitation Support
- Micro-enterprise (starting their own business)
- Volunteering that transitions into paid roles
- Apprenticeships or trades with accommodations

Having a disability doesn't limit your dreams. It just means you might take a different path, and that path is still powerful.

Real Talk: What Do You Want?

- How do you want your job to make you feel?
- Do you want to work with people or alone?
- What kind of lifestyle do you want?
- Do you want to grow in your role, or stay steady and secure?

Think about your sensory needs, communication preferences, learning styles, daily routines, and environments where they feel safe and confident.

A job gives you money. A career gives you meaning. You deserve a chance to think long-term, dream big, and explore what makes you feel excited, proud, and empowered.

Topic 2: Exploring Career Options

The best careers often happen where what you love, what you're good at, and what matters most to you all come together.

What This Topic Is About

This section is about helping you start the process of discovering the kinds of work that might be a good fit for you. Instead of just picking something because it's available or because someone told you to.

You will be exploring three core areas:

- What you like to do (interests)
- What you are good at (strengths)
- What is important to you in life (values)

By combining these, we start to form a clearer picture of careers that can provide not just income, but also purpose, enjoyment, and personal fulfillment. For youth with disabilities, this process is especially important. It can help them see past limitations others may have placed on them, and instead focus on their own vision of success. This also gives them a framework for making choices that will keep them motivated, supported, and engaged in the workplace.

Why This Matters

When people choose careers that align with their interests, strengths, and values, they are more likely to:

- Stay motivated at work
- Feel proud of what they do
- Continue learning and growing
- Build stability over time

On the other hand, when there's no match, work can feel like a daily struggle, leading to burnout or frequent job changes. This is why identifying these areas now, before committing to a career path can save time, stress, and frustration later.

Interests - What You Enjoy Doing

Interests are things that capture your attention, curiosity, and energy. They can be hobbies, topics you like to learn about, or activities that make you lose track of time. For example:

- Enjoying being outdoors might lead to careers in landscaping, environmental science, or park services.
- Loving to solve puzzles could point toward work in IT, engineering, or quality control.
- Passion for helping people might lead to healthcare, teaching, or social services.

Interests don't have to be tied to a current skill level. For example, liking art doesn't mean you need to be a professional artist right away, it could also connect to jobs in graphic design, animation, or even set decoration.

Strengths - What You're Good At

Strengths are the skills and abilities you already have, either naturally or from experience. Some strengths are obvious, like being good at drawing, while others are softer skills, like being dependable or a great listener. For youth with disabilities, it's important to look at both abilities and adaptive strengths, the unique problem-solving skills, perspectives, and resilience they've developed. Examples include:

- Technical skills like fixing electronics, using specialized software, or cooking.
- Physical skills like building, lifting or fine motor tasks.
- Personal skills like staying calm under pressure, organizing tasks, or motivating others.

Strengths can grow over time. Remember that even if you're "not good" at something now, practice, training, and support can change that.

Values - What Matters Most to You

Values are the beliefs and priorities that guide decisions. They help determine what makes work feel satisfying. For some people, values center on helping others or making a difference. For others, it's about financial stability, creativity, or independence. Examples of workplace values:

- Having a flexible schedule
- Feeling respected and included
- Opportunities to learn and grow
- Doing meaningful work that helps people
- Working in a safe, accessible environment

Identify values early ensures you're not just chasing a paycheck, you're also looking for workplaces and careers that support your overall well-being.

Supports - What Helps You Succeed

Exploring career options also means being realistic about the supports that help you do your best work. This could include assistive technology, job coaching, flexible hours, a sensory-friendly environment, or extra time for training. Recognizing needed supports is a strength, not a weakness. It allows you to plan for workplaces that will meet those needs and to advocate for accommodations if necessary.

Putting It All Together - Matching Careers to You

Once you know your interests, strengths, values, and supports, you can begin looking for overlap. The careers that check all (or most) of those boxes are the ones worth exploring further. For example:

- Interest: Working with animals
- Strength: Good at following step by step instructions
- Values: Helping others and feeling useful

- Support: Needs clear written instructions and flexible scheduling

Possible Career Match: Veterinary assistant, animal shelter worker, pet groomer.

Activity - The Career Fit Map

Students will create a “Career Fit Map” where they have three circles (Venn diagram) labeled **interests, strengths, and values**. In each circle, they list their own answers. Where the circles overlap is called the **Career Fit Zone**. Youth then brainstorm jobs or careers that could fit in that zone.

You deserve work that feels good for you. The best career choices happen when you do something you enjoy, you’re good at or willing to learn and it matches what’s important to you in life. This doesn’t mean you have to find the perfect career today. It means you now have the tools to explore, ask questions, and make choices that lead you toward a future where you feel valued and capable.

Topic 3: How to Research and Explore Career Pathways

You can’t choose the right path if you don’t know where the path leads.

What This Topic Is About

This topic teaches youth how to gather real, useful information about careers so they can make informed choices about their future. We’re not just talking about “Googling Jobs” we’re giving you structured ways to find out what a job is really like, what it takes to get there, and whether it’s a good fit for their interests, strengths, values, and support needs. For youth with disabilities, career research is about more than matching skills to jobs. It’s also learning which workplaces will provide needed accommodations, offer inclusive environments, and value their contributions.

Why This Matters

Choosing a career without research is like picking a vacation spot without checking the weather, cost, or things to do. You could end up somewhere that doesn't fit your needs. Research:

- Helps youth understand real requirements (education, training, skills)
- Shows you what day to day work actually looks like
- Reveals salary ranges and growth opportunities
- Identifies companies, industries, or organizations that are disability-friendly
- Reduces the risk of wasting time or money on a path that won't work for them

What Career Pathways Are

A career pathway is a series of connected jobs, training programs, and educational steps that lead to a long-term career goal. Pathways are flexible, people may move between them, change direction, or combine different elements over time. For example:

- **Healthcare Pathways:** Start as a dietary aide in a hospital → Complete nursing assistant training → work as a CNA → continue to nursing school → become a registered nurse
- **Skilled Trades Pathway:** Start with a summer job in construction → join an apprenticeship → become a certified electrician → eventually own your own business
- **Creative Pathway:** Start as a volunteer at a local theater → take classes in set design → work as a stage crew member → become a full-time production designer

Ways to Research Career Pathways

- **Online Research:** Students can use websites like:
 - **O*Net Online:** Find detailed information about job tasks, skills needed, and typical work environments
 - **CareerOneStop:** Explore career clusters, training programs, and salary information
 - **My Next Move:** A simpler, youth-friendly tool for exploring careers based on interests
 - **JAN (Job Accommodation Network):** Learn about workplace accommodations for different disabilities

What you should research: Job descriptions, average pay and benefits, education/training requirements, typical schedule and work environment, and opportunities for advancement.

- **Informational Interviews:** An informational interview is when you talk to someone who works in a career you're interested in. This can be done in person, over the phone, or virtually. Questions you should ask:
 - What does a typical day look like in your job?
 - What do you like most about your work?
 - What challenges do you face?
 - How did you get started?
 - What advice would you give to someone starting out in this field?
 - What supports or accommodations have been helpful to you or coworkers?
- **Job Shadowing:** Job shadowing lets youth spend a few hours or a day observing someone at work. Benefits:
 - See real tasks in action
 - Ask questions directly
 - Get a feel for the environment
 - Decide if it's something you could see yourself doing

This can be especially valuable for youth with disabilities who may need to evaluate the accessibility of the workplace firsthand.

- **Volunteering and Internships:** Hands on experience is one of the best forms of research. Even unpaid volunteer roles give students valuable insight into:
 - Work culture
 - Team dynamics
 - Specific skills needed
 - Whether the work feels energizing or draining
- **Career Fairs and Networking Events:** Attending events in the community or online allows youth to:
 - Meet potential employers
 - Learn about multiple industries in one place
 - Practice introducing themselves and asking questions

For youth who may find large events overwhelming, try smaller, targeted networking groups or virtual career fairs.

Accessibility in Career Exploration

When researching or exploring pathways, youth should also be encouraged to:

- Ask about workplace accommodations
- Observe whether employees with disabilities are visible in the organization
- Look for employers who have inclusive hiring initiatives or partnered with disability employment programs

Activity: Career Pathway Map

Youth will pick a career they're curious about. Research the required education/training, entry-level positions, mid-level roles, and advanced roles. Create a "Map" (Flow chart) showing each step, estimated time to move between steps, and any supports they might need at each stage

The more you learn about your career options, the more confident you'll be in your choices. Exploring isn't about locking yourself into one path today, it's about gathering tools, information, and experiences, so you can make smart decisions and adjust as you go. Every step you take to explore is a step closer to finding the path that fits *you* best.

Topic 4: Skills for Getting and Keeping a Job

Getting the job is step one. Keeping it and growing in it is step two, and both take skills you can learn.

What This Topic Is About

This section focuses on the essential skills needed not just to get a job, but also to keep it and succeed long term. We'll cover how to create a strong resume, prepare for interviews, understand workplace expectations, and develop habits that make employers want to keep you on their team. For youth with disabilities, this also means knowing how to communicate about accommodations, understanding their rights at work, and building confidence in their ability to perform and contribute.

Why This Matters

A career exploration plan is only as strong as the skills you have to actually make it happen. Employers look for people who are reliable, skilled, and adaptable. Without preparation, youth might struggle to get hired or could lose a job because they didn't know how to meet expectations. These skills:

- Open doors to opportunities
- Build confidence and independence
- Help create positive relationships at work
- Lead to career advancement instead of job-hopping

Resume Writing - Telling Your Story on Paper

A resume is your personal advertisement to employers. It shows what you can do, what you've done, and why you'd be a great hire.

Key Parts of a Resume:

- **Contact Information:** Name, phone number, email (professional), city/state (optional)
- **Summary Statement:** A short sentence or two about who you are and what you're looking for. Example: "Motivated high school student seeking a part-time position in retail to build customer service skills."
- **Skills Section:** List both technical skills (like Microsoft Word, cash handling) and soft skills (like communication, teamwork).
- **Experience:** Include jobs, volunteer work, school projects, internships, or community activities. Use action words like organized, created, assisted, led.
- **Education:** School name, expected graduation date, and any special programs or certifications.

Tips for youth with limited experience:

- Include school achievements (Perfect attendance, honor roll)
- Mention community service, youth programs, or sports participation
- Add transferable skills from non-work experiences (example: babysitting → responsibility, time management.)

Preparing for Interviews - Showing Your Best Self

An interview is your chance to tell your story in person and show that you're a good fit. Types of interviews youth may encounter:

- **In-Person:** Face to face meeting at the workplace
- **Phone Interview:** Focuses on verbal communication
- **Video Interview:** Tests both skills and presentation

Preparation Steps:

- Research the company, know what they do, their values, and the role you're applying for.
- Practice common questions:
 - "Tell me about yourself."
 - "Why do you want to work here?"
 - "What are your strengths?"
 - "Tell me about a time you solved a problem."
- Use the STAR method for behavioral questions:
 - Situation → Describe the context
 - Task → Explain the challenge or goal
 - Action → Share what you did
 - Result → Highlight the outcome
- Prepare your own questions for the interviewer:
 - "What does a typical day look like?"
 - "What opportunities for learning or training are available?"

Workplace Expectations - Understanding the Basics

Employers expect certain behaviors and attitudes. Meeting these expectations helps you keep your job and grow in it. Key employer expectations:

- **Reliability:** Arrive on time, complete shifts, call ahead if you can't make it.
- **Following Directions:** Listen carefully and ask questions if you're unsure.
- **Communication:** Speak clearly and respectfully to coworkers and supervisors.
- **Teamwork:** Work cooperatively and help others when needed.
- **Problem Solving:** Try to find solutions before asking for help.

Why This Matters: Employers hire people who make their business run smoothly. Being dependable and respectful shows you're a valuable team member.

Soft Skills - The Invisible Tools for Success

Soft skills are personality traits and habits that make you easy to work with. Examples:

- **Positive Attitude:** Approaching challenges with “I’ll try” instead of “I can’t.”
- **Adaptability:** Adjusting when plans change.
- **Listening:** Paying attention to instructions and feedback.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Handling disagreements calmly and professionally.

Understanding Workplace Culture

Each workplace has its own “personality” and rules. Knowing how to fit in helps you feel comfortable and succeed. Examples of Culture Differences:

- In a restaurant: fast paced, constant movement, teamwork with servers and kitchen staff
- In an office: structured schedules, more computer work, quieter environment
- In construction: outdoor settings, physical labor, safety gear required

Observing Workplace Culture:

- Watch how coworkers dress
- Notice how people greet each other
- See how and when breaks are taken

Why It Matters: Understanding culture helps you adapt and reduces misunderstanding.

Self-Advocacy at Work - Speaking Up for Your Needs

Knowing how to communicate about your needs ensures you can do your best work. Examples of self-advocacy at work:

- Asking for written instructions if verbal ones are hard to remember
- Requesting a quiet workspace if noise is distracting
- Letting your supervisor know if a schedule change affects transportation

Remember you have rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and can request reasonable accommodations without fear of losing their job.

Activity - The Job Skills Bootcamp

Warm-up poll: Which part of getting a job do you think is the hardest? (answer options: resume, interview, knowing what to wear, talking about your needs).

- **First activity:** Resume Builder. Students will have a resume template, they can add at least three skills, two experiences, and their education.
- **Second activity:** Soft Skills Scenario Challenge. Youth choose the best response for common workplace challenges. (format: Questions are presented one at a time, youth choose between A, B, C, or D. The program will reveal the best choice and explain why.
- **Third activity:** Sample Scenarios and questions. Same format as the second activity.