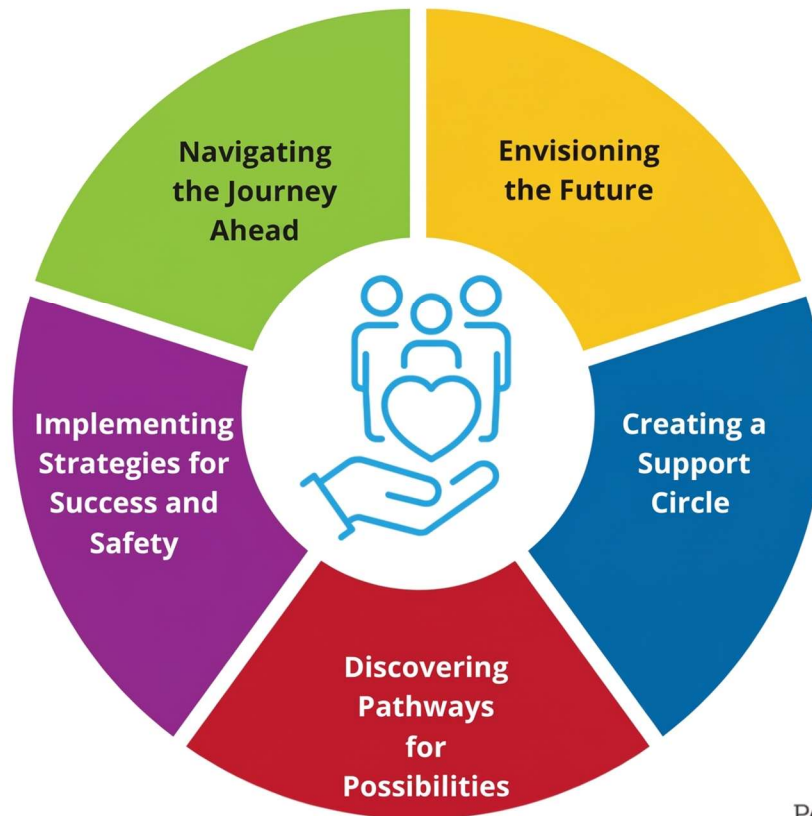


Pathways to Possibilities: Families Leading the Way

**A resource to support people with disabilities to explore
employment and life in the community**



Developed by families, for families

Creating a Support Circle



Using These Guides Together: A Note to Families and Family Members

“Creating a Support Circle” is the second of five guides in the series “Pathways to Possibilities.” This guide helps you and your family take meaningful steps toward employment and self-sufficiency as you plan for the future. This series includes:

1. **Envisioning the Future** - Set high expectations and explore possibilities.
2. **Creating a Support Circle** - Build a team of people who can provide support.
3. **Discovering Pathways for Possibilities** - Find strengths and skills at any age.
4. **Implementing Strategies for Success and Safety** - Identify and nurture daily living and vocational skills from early years through adulthood.
5. **Navigate the Journey Ahead** - Understand services and programs that can provide support.

For Parents and Caregivers: You help your family member with a disability grow and learn new skills every day. This guide suggests strategies to support them while they explore options.

For Family Members with a Disability: Your dreams and ideas are important! You can dream big and ask for help when you need it.

At the end of this guide, you'll find a worksheet called "[Moving Forward](#)." This worksheet has questions for both the individual with a disability and their family members. We suggest you:

- **Take turns filling out the answers.**
- **Share what you wrote with each other.**
- **Talk about where your ideas are the same or different.**
- **Use your answers to make a plan together.**

Let's plan for a great future together!

Why This Matters

Building a team around your family and family member with a disability can make a big difference in your lives. *Creating a Support Circle* is about bringing the right people together to support your dreams and goals for employment and independence.

No one reaches their goals alone. A strong support circle made up of family, friends, mentors, teachers, and service providers can encourage growth, celebrate progress, and help navigate challenges. Together, you can build a network that opens doors to opportunities – relationships, employment, community membership, and career development.

Key Ideas to Remember: Steps for Building a Support Circle

1. **Start with People You Trust:** Include people who believe in the potential of you and your family, who are invested in your collective future, and who take the time to listen to your ideas and offer theirs.
2. **Think Broadly:** Support comes from many places: family, friends, community connections, schools, faith communities, neighbors, mentors, and workplaces.
3. **Clarify Roles:** Different people can offer support in different ways, and each contribution matters. Some may share advice and guidance based on their own experiences, while others provide practical help, such as offering transportation or connecting your family member to training and job opportunities. Building a strong network means welcoming all types of support, knowing that even small actions can make a big difference to you and your family in reaching your respective goals.
4. **Keep Growing Together:** Remember, as your goals or your family member's goals change, your support circle can change too. You might meet new people who can assist you in different ways. It is important to welcome new friends, neighbors, professionals, family members, and other “helpers” who can guide you as you all learn new things. The people who supported you before are still important too. Growing and learning never stops. Having the right people around you and your family will make it easier, more fun, and more supportive for everyone. In support circles, everyone gives and receives support.

Try this at Home: Families Can Help

Families are the foundation of a strong support circle. Here's how you can build an effective team:

- **Identify Potential Supporters:** Think about who knows your family member well, believes in their potential, and could join the support circle. Who has helped before and who can help now? Who does your family member value and trust, including individuals who can help your family member explore learning opportunities, work experiences, and future career possibilities?
- Use **Supported Decision-Making:** Supported Decision-Making is a process that enables individuals, particularly those with disabilities, to make their own choices with the assistance of a support network or single supporter they choose. This network can include trusted friends, family members, or professionals who help the individual understand their options, opportunities, and the consequences of their decisions. See [Supported Decision-Making | National Resource Center](#) for more information.

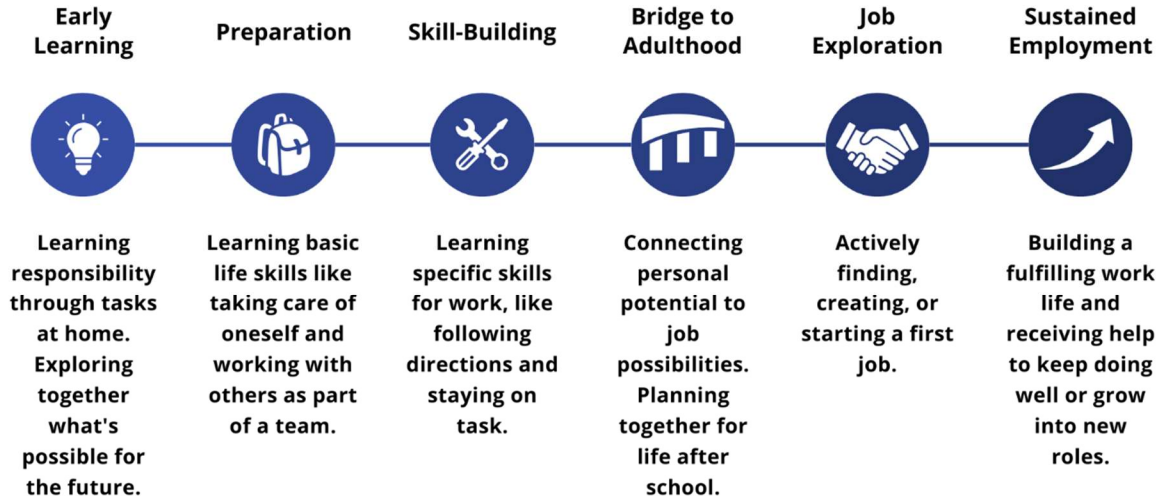
Key aspects of supported decision-making (SDM) include:

- **Empowerment:** Individuals are empowered to make decisions about their lives rather than having decisions made for them.
 - **Collaboration:** SDM involves collaboration between the individual and their support team to ensure informed choices.
 - **Flexibility:** The support can be tailored to the individual's needs, allowing for varying levels of assistance depending on the decision at hand.
 - **Legal Recognition:** Supported decision-making agreements can be formalized to ensure that the individual's rights are respected.
- **Ask for Support:** Practice asking for support; it is an important skill to have in life! People who care are happy to help, and they too benefit from the strengthening of your relationships. Asking questions and talking to a variety of people is key to understanding what your family member needs to be successful.

Resources and Connections

Note: Some of the resources for this guide were also shared in other Pathways to Possibilities guides because they apply to more than one area of exploration.

Creating a Support Circle



Early Learning

Your family member is learning responsibility through tasks at home, building habits that support independence, community participation, and readiness for work.

- **Basic Life Skills for Adults with Disabilities - UDS:** This resource provides suggestions for supporting adults with disabilities to build community living skills and abilities.
- **Parent to Parent:** Take the first steps in asking for support by connecting with other families who understand.



Preparation

Your family member is learning basic life skills like self-care, communication, and teamwork, which lay the foundation for successful participation in school, community, and future employment.

- [**Magic ToDo – Goblin Tools:**](#) Goblin Tools uses an artificial intelligence (AI) tool designed to support people with neurodivergence and enhance productivity.
- [**Getting Ready for Independent Living at the Age of Majority - Center for Parent Information and Resources:**](#) This website provides information and resources for people with disabilities to build autonomy skills.
- [**Home - Deafverse:**](#) This resource, developed by the National Deaf Center, promotes awareness of disability accommodations, rights, and self-autonomy.



Skill-Building

Your family member is developing essential skills for long-term success and meaningful employment—such as critical thinking, effective communication, adaptability, and problem-solving. These skills will help them thrive in the workplace and navigate their future with confidence.

- **Schools and Libraries:** Many schools partner with local businesses or community colleges to offer career exploration events, job shadowing, or project-based learning that builds real-world skills. Libraries often provide access to free digital learning platforms where individuals can build computer skills, explore career paths, or practice resume writing.
- **Local Community Centers:** Community Centers often offer free workshops and fun activities to build skills, network, and expand Support Circles.
- [**Kibu:**](#) Kibu offers bite-sized lessons to learn new life and job skills and build confidence.
- [**YouthBuild:**](#) This website provides information about this youth-based program that helps develop leadership, advocacy and workplace readiness with peers.
- **Apprenticeship or Pre-apprenticeship programs:** Apprenticeships and pre-apprenticeships offer hands-on learning that helps build real-world job skills while earning wages. These opportunities are often available through your state’s Office of Apprenticeship, vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency, or workforce development programs. Check with local offices to see what’s offered near you.



Bridge to Adulthood

Your family member is connecting personal potential and strengths to employment and self-sufficiency after high school, including career exploration, post-secondary learning, and entry into the workforce.

- [Explore Your Future](#): Use this workbook to explore post-school goals.
- [American Job Centers](#) (AJCs): AJCs are local career centers that help people explore jobs, engage in job training to learn new skills, and meet employers. AJCs can also help with work readiness after high school.
- [Got Transition](#)[®]: This national resource center assists youth in transitioning their health care from pediatric to adult.



Job Exploration

Your family member is actively searching for a job or has just started their first job.

- [AskEARN | Home - Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability](#): This website offers information and resources to help employers recruit, hire, retain, and advance people with disabilities in the workplace.
- [Four Stages of Adaptation](#): Parent to Parent TX created this short video section on Separating to assist families in shifting their focus from primary caregiver to cheerleader as their family member's independence grows.
- [Job Accommodation Network](#) (JAN): JAN is the leading source of free, expert, confidential guidance on job accommodations and disability employment issues. JAN provides people with disabilities and employers with one-on-one practical guidance and technical assistance on job accommodation solutions.



Sustained Employment

Your family member is building a fulfilling work life and receiving support to maintain employment, gain new skills, and pursue advancement.

- [The Value of Dignity of Risk](#): This resource promotes the importance of people with disabilities taking reasonable risks, which is essential for learning new skills and gaining independence.
- [ABLE National Resource Center](#): This website provides detailed information on tax-advantaged ABLE accounts and savings plan for individuals with disabilities.
- The [Secure Your Financial Future](#) toolkit from the U.S. Department of Labor offers practical, accessible guidance to help people with disabilities and their

families navigate employment, manage benefits, and plan for long-term financial stability at every stage of work life. It provides tools, resources, and tips to support informed decisions about work, income, and financial well-being for every stage of a person's employment life cycle.

Remember: *Reach out, stay connected, and believe in your strengths.*

Creating a Support Circle



Moving Forward

My Support Team:

For Parents/Caregivers: Who are the key people in your family member's life who could be part of their support circle?

For your family member with a disability: Three people I trust and would want in my support circle are:

Communication Preferences:

For Parents/Caregivers: From our observations, how does our family member like to communicate and learn?

For your family member with a disability: The ways I like to share my thoughts, preferences, and ideas are:

Support Team Roles:

For Parents/Caregivers: What specific support might each team member provide?

For your family member with a disability: What kind of support would I like from the people in my circle?

Team Building:

For Parents/Caregivers: What first step can we take to start building this support circle?

For your family member with a disability: One way I can reach out to a potential support team member is:

For both: How can we thank and celebrate those who support us?

Tips:

- *Talk about how your answers are the same or different. Use what you learn to plan your next steps together.*
- *Recognize the strengths each support team member brings to the circle and remember that a support circle can change over time.*