



Planning for **A FULL** AND **MEANINGFUL LIFE**

Planning the best possible life for your child with a disability means challenging yourself to be proactive and to 'think differently' at every age and stage. The purpose of this booklet is to encourage conversations and questions that assist in forming a strong foundation for planning.



0-5 yrs

CASTING THE VISION.

Visions are based on values.

- What values are important to you when thinking about your child's future? (i.e. independence, self-sufficiency, caring relationships, giving back)
- Craft a vision statement for your child. What are the key words? What do they really mean? (i.e. Joseph will be independent, have caring, meaningful friendships, enjoy a typical education, find meaningful employment and give back to his community)
- Think big picture. How do those words apply to home, work, school, and community with regards to meaningful roles in your community? (i.e. My child will be a friend, renter or home owner, student, employee, volunteer) Take action. How can you start to build your vision? (i.e. attend a play group, invite other families with young children over, strengthen family relationships)
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- Share your vision with family and friends, as well as the support services involved in your child's life.

ASSET BASED THINKING.

Parents are often forced to identify all of the deficits that their child may or may not have in order to access supports and services. Asset based thinking is about meeting challenges from a position of possibility and hope.

- Focus on your child's abilities.
- Everyone can learn.
- Everyone has something to offer.
- Don't believe everything the experts tell you. Your child will surprise you.

MIX AND MINGLE.

Where do families meet and connect in your neighbourhood and community?

- Explore community programs.
- Attend information and education sessions.
- Volunteer as a family in the community.
- Invite people that you meet through your involvement in your community to get to know your child and your family, outside of your immediate family.



5-10yrs

ADVOCATE.

It is important that your child is welcome to learn, play and grow in typical environments at home, school and in the community. There may be times when you will need to speak up for your child to help others see how full participation and inclusion benefits everyone involved.

- People who are not comfortable or have not had any personal connection with a person who has a disability will take the lead from you and your family.
- Inclusive Education Canada is a great resource for parents to explore their role in ensuring their child receives a quality education. www.inclusiveeducation.ca

THE STRENGTH OF THE PACK.

Natural, personal networks of support are made up of individuals who have a connection and a vested interest in your child and your family.

- Network members can be family, friends, neighbours, members of a spiritual or religious community, and members of clubs or associations.
- Network members are committed to change and willing to stick it out for the long haul.
- Who is part of your network already? Who is missing?

Some personal networks meet formally while others are more fluid.

- It is helpful to have a lead person who organizes and sets the agenda for a meeting of the minds.
- Meeting with your family's personal network helps clarify your vision for your child's future, prioritize issues, identify goals and obstacles and brainstorm action steps needed to resolve obstacles and reach goals.
- As your child gets older, it is important that their voice and dreams are given priority within your support network.

Find a Family Network in Your Community!

- Connecting with other families with similar experiences provides fresh perspectives and practical information, lessens isolation, and can help innovate new solutions.
- Offering and receiving support builds resilience for you and in turn your family.
- A family network can be a pathway to discovering and building upon resources already present within 'your own backyard'.
- Check with your local Community Living Organization or Partners for Planning for a family network in your area.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.

Authentic relationships are the keys to the better things in life. Being involved in community invites new experiences and activities into your child's life that encourages personal growth, increases self confidence and promotes social learning.

- Continue to explore opportunities in your community for programs and activities that are age appropriate and inclusive. What are some activities your child's peers enjoy participating in? Where are the places in your neighbourhood that children like to visit or play?
- Volunteer! What is a cause your family is passionate about or an activity that you love to do together?
- Get to know your neighbours.
- It's difficult to make friends if your child is not around others. While you may not be able to make friends for your child, you can create the conditions in which new friendships are possible.

PLAY!

Play is a natural way to build friendships and learn social skills.

- Set up some play dates and invite some of your child's classmates over for some fun.
- Take time to celebrate the good things in life together as a family. Engaging in structured play with your child teaches appropriate behaviour, sharing and taking turns. (i.e. board games)
- Consider enrolling your child in some structured activities (sports teams, music lessons, theatre groups, dance classes, etc.) Exposing children to a wide variety of play activities will help them discover what they do and don't like and develop friendships along the way.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT.

Teach and provide opportunities for your child to develop independence and life skills at home that are age appropriate.

- Setting the table.
- Unloading the dishwasher.
- Helping with meal preparation.
- Self care. (i.e. brushing their teeth, combing their own hair, help pick out their own clothes)
- Helping organize the family calendar.
- Helping with outdoor tasks.
- Organizing the shoe closet.
- Sorting and matching socks.



10-15yrs

DUST OFF THE VISION.

Helping your child prepare for adolescence and high school can be a daunting task... and not for the faint of heart.

- It might be time to review/rewrite the vision with your child.
- What are their interests?
- What are their hopes and dreams for the future?
- Is there extra support needed to achieve those goals?
- Continue to develop and meet with your network of support.
- Encourage curiosity and look for learning opportunities that build on your child's interests.
- Be prepared to talk to your child about puberty and sexual health.

FOCUS ON FRIENDS.

This is typically a time when friendships become very important to young people. The best friendships tend to happen around shared interests. Teaching your child to take an interest in others is a key component in building reciprocal relationships.

- Are there clubs, community programs, community spaces or leisure activities that your child might enjoy being part of? (i.e. Scouts, Girl Guides, Meet-Ups etc.)
- Continue to encourage age appropriate independence at home, in leisure activities and in the community (i.e. learning to take public transit.)
- Teach your child to take an interest in others by looking for natural ways to ask questions during the day. (i.e. at the dinner table, in the car, etc.)
- Self care. Good hygiene practices are an important factor when it comes to making friends. Teach your child how to pick out clothes suitable to their body type and are similar to that of their peers.
- Time for "The Talk"...



15-21yrs

WHAT'S THE DREAM?

Start planning for life after high school with your child by thinking about their interests and passions.

- Co-ops are an important part of figuring out interests and employment opportunities post graduation.
- Summer jobs are about making money, getting work experience and encouraging independence. Youth who have some work experience during their high school years have a greater chance of securing employment post high school.
- Volunteering in an area of interest is a great way for your child to meet like-minded people and give back to the community.
- Student Links is a program offered by Community Living Ontario that encourages high school students to explore their interests by facilitating connections with community members based on shared interests.
- Post secondary education is a real possibility for many students living with disabilities. Take time to look in to potential opportunities at colleges and other schools.

MOBILIZE THE NETWORK.

Your child and your family may need to meet with your support network more frequently to talk about what he/she wants to do after high school. Some opportunities to explore include:

- Post secondary education.
- Community courses/programs.
- Internship/Apprenticeship.
- Employment.
- Volunteering.
- Housing options.

The P4P Planning Network offers **FREE resources** designed to empower people with a disability and their families to create meaningful lives and secure futures, firmly rooted in community.

Check out our **online webcasts with expert Q&A.**

Visit **planningnetwork.ca** to take charge of the future, today.

Partners for Planning is a family-formed and led nonprofit organization.



smart strategies | creative tools | sustainable solutions

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