

Family Support for Deaf Teens

Encouraging Independence and Self-Determination



Overview

Deaf¹ teenagers with stronger family support are more successful after high school. To succeed, deaf people need to be able to make their own decisions, communicate about their preferences, and advocate for their needs. This is called *self-determination*. People who are more self-determined have better job and education outcomes.² Deaf adults with stronger self-determination skills make more money and have more opportunities for career advancement.³

Families play an important role in the development of independence, resilience, and strength in deaf children.⁴ Deaf teenagers whose parents had positive expectations about their future were more likely to go to college, complete college, and have a job later in life.⁵ This happens because parents with high expectations of their deaf child support their child doing things independently, like looking for jobs.³

For many parents, their deaf child is the first deaf person they have ever met! Parents who are not familiar with raising deaf children may face challenges with communication at home. These barriers may lead to issues in developing self-determination skills for teenagers. Communication barriers can also make it hard for families to connect with their deaf teenagers about their hopes, wishes, and dreams. Building a strong network of support can help families learn communication strategies and encourage a more positive view of their deaf child's future. This network of support should involve extended family, other parents, and deaf mentors and role models. Parents with strong support systems are better able to support the development of self-determination for their deaf child.

Families can use many different strategies to support self-determination in their deaf child!



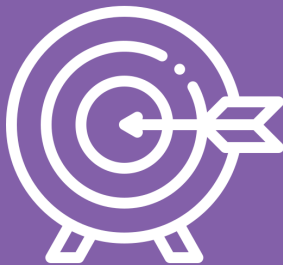
Develop Independence

Deaf teenagers with a strong sense of independence are more prepared for life after high school. Being independent is an important part of college, work, and beyond. There are many ways to encourage independence in teenagers, such as having your teen lead their IEP meetings, do household chores, and schedule appointments independently. Holding back a deaf child from doing activities or becoming independent can lead to challenges later in life.



Provide Choices

Whenever possible, provide choices for your teen and encourage them to take an active role in decisions. For example, instead of assigning chores, allow your child to choose chores. When choices cannot be offered, provide reasons why you are asking or expecting something from your child. For example, if you set expectations for your child to complete a list of chores before hanging out with friends, explain **why** they need to do the chores!



Encourage Initiative and Aim High

Set high expectations for your teen and explain why you have these expectations. Encourage your teen to set their own expectations. Goal setting is one way teenagers can show self-determination. Reinforce and encourage your teen's pursuit of their goals while allowing them to be independent. Teens can learn as they work toward specific goals, even through setbacks or other challenges.² Support goal setting by helping your teen brainstorm solutions or reflect on previous experiences. Teach your teen how to prioritize and set goals to overcome a problem or barrier.



Acknowledge Feelings and Perspectives of Teens

Encourage your teen to share their perspectives, even when you disagree. Show your teen that it's okay to share how they feel and acknowledge why they may feel that way. Validating negative feelings instead of dismissing them can help your teen better understand different points of view while supporting their motivation and self-determination. Making your teen feel understood and listened to is a vital developmental need and is often overlooked when discussing ways to promote self-determination.



Nurture Self-Regulation

When teenagers use self-regulation, they think carefully about themselves and their actions, figure out what goals and tasks are appropriate, and hold themselves accountable. To support self-regulation, encourage your teen to learn about time management and teach them how you organize your work and tasks. Have conversations about how to keep your teen accountable. Ask them questions and get their perspective on how they could better reach their goals.



Support Self-Empowerment

Support your teen's belief that they have what it takes to reach their goals. Your teen's skills, support, and resources can strengthen their self-empowerment. Support self-empowerment by having your teen talk to doctors themselves or make their own orders at restaurants. You can also help by using positive language and framing to support your teen's sense of self and positive identity. Teenagers with positive identities and feelings of self often have better job and education outcomes.



Be Less Strict: Teach Responsibility

Being a parent is not easy! Parents only want what's best for their child. Juggling life's many demands and parenting a teenager can be hard. Studies show that use of control or pressure in parenting can hurt the growth of independence and self-determination. Try being less strict in your parenting and instead be more encouraging. Be mindful of word choice and try to use words such as "suggest" and "encourage" instead of negative language. Teaching self-determination and independence will lead to your teenager being more responsible, making it easier to parent!



Strengthen Self-Awareness

Self-awareness is the knowledge of our strengths and weaknesses and how they affect specific goals and functioning in everyday life. Self-awareness helps your teen think about how to use their strengths and work on their weaknesses. Encourage awareness by having your teen talk to mentors about issues they are experiencing and helping them develop their own network of support with peers, adults, mentors, and more! Self-awareness also includes awareness of personal preferences and strategies, such as your teen's preferred way to communicate, learn, socialize, and so forth.



Notes and References

1. NDC uses the term *deaf* in an all-inclusive manner to include people who identify as deaf, deafblind, deafdisabled, hard of hearing, late-deafened, and hearing impaired.
2. Shogren, K., Wehmeyer, M., Palmer, S., Forber-Pratt, A., Little, T., & Lopez, A. (2015). Causal agency theory: Reconceptualizing a functional model of self-determination. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities, 50*(3), 251–263.
3. Garberoglio, C. L., Schoffstall, S., Cawthon, S., Bond, M., & Caemmerer, J. M. (2017). The antecedents and outcomes of autonomous behaviors: Modeling the role of autonomy in achieving sustainable employment for deaf young adults. *Journal of Developmental and Physical Disabilities, 29*(1), 107–129. doi:10.1007/s10882-016-9492-2
4. Cawthon, C., & Garberoglio, C. L. (2017). *Shifting the dialog, shifting the culture*. Washington, DC: Gallaudet University Press.
5. Cawthon, S., Garberoglio, C. L., Caemmerer, J., Bond, M., & Wendel, E. (2015). Effects of parent involvement and parent expectations on postsecondary outcomes for individuals who are d/Deaf or hard of hearing. *Exceptionality, 23*(2), 73–99. doi:10.1080/09362835.2013.865537



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