Stop, Look, and Listen: Planning for Independence and Adult Decision-Making Support

As families and IEP teams plan for the highest degree of independence possible, this tool is designed to assess what learning opportunities an individual has been provided to prepare for adult decision-making responsibilities. Ensuring access to learning opportunities is critical. It is important not to assume a deficit in a given area is a result of a disability. Often it is the result of a lack of opportunities to build skills related to independence.

Part 1 of "Stop, Look, and Listen" is all about gathering input from an individual decision maker and at least one adult supporter on the opportunities provided to learn and practice adult skills in critical decision-making areas. Part 2 provides guidance on putting into action the input gathered in Part 1.

This tool can be used by and with students of any age and any type of disability. Input from the individual decision maker is essential. Accommodations for participation may involve one-on-one assistance to explain concepts, record information, read prompts, etc. For many, a printed copy of nothing but the 2nd and 3rd pages of this tool may help it to feel more approachable.

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Stop, Look, and Listen
Part 1: Assessing Opportunities to Learn and Practice in Areas of Adult Decision Making

Who is Completing This Assessment? ☐ Decision Maker ☐ Parent ☐ Teacher ☐ Other: _____

Step 1: For each skill in Part 1, decide how often you have had the opportunity to practice or learn this skill (not at all, some, a lot). **Check the *one* box that fits best**. **Step 2:** Compare the results of the decision maker with the results of a supporting adult. Highlight the areas of agreement or disagreement about available opportunities to learn or practice important, adult skills. **Step 3:** Go on to Part 2 and begin the discussion as a family or as an IEP team on increasing opportunity for skill-building in the areas most important to the independence of that person.	 **I have had the opportunity to learn and practice this skill a lot.**	 **I have had some opportunities to learn and practice this skill.**	 **I have not had opportunities to learn and practice this skill.**
Finances			
Making small purchases (e.g. lunch, snacks, clothing, etc.)	☐	☐	☐
Keeping track of purchases and bills (i.e. budgeting)	☐	☐	☐
Managing a bank account (e.g. online banking)	☐	☐	☐
Understanding when someone is trying to take advantage of me financially	☐	☐	☐
Making big decisions about money (e.g. opening an account, signing a lease, or obtaining a credit card)	☐	☐	☐
Paying bills	☐	☐	☐
Relationships			
Understanding the personal space of myself and others	☐	☐	☐
Speaking up if something doesn't feel right	☐	☐	☐
Recognizing abuse	☐	☐	☐
Making choices about romantic relationships	☐	☐	☐
Making choices about sex	☐	☐	☐
Education			
Providing input in my IEP meeting	☐	☐	☐
Understanding my accommodations and requesting them	☐	☐	☐
Asking for support when I need it	☐	☐	☐
Choosing how I want people to help me	☐	☐	☐

The "Stop, Look, and Listen" tool was inspired by the resource, "Identifying Alternatives to Guardianship," developed by the University of Missouri Kansas City's Institute of Human Development.

	I have had the opportunity to learn and practice this skill a lot.	**I have had some opportunities to learn and practice this skill.**	**I have not had opportunities to learn and practice this skill.**
Employment			
Communicating about what I want to do for work	☐	☐	☐
Working on the job independently and asking for help appropriately	☐	☐	☐
Behaving professionally with bosses and co-workers	☐	☐	☐
Applying and interviewing for a job	☐	☐	☐
Health			
Taking the right prescription medicine at the right time	☐	☐	☐
Communicating with healthcare professionals about how I am feeling	☐	☐	☐
Explaining in my own words how my disability or health conditions affect me	☐	☐	☐
Setting and keeping appointments and knowing when to go to the doctor	☐	☐	☐
Making choices about how I want people to support me in taking care of my health	☐	☐	☐
Home and Community			
Choosing and doing things that I enjoy when I have free time	☐	☐	☐
Using transportation available to me to travel as independently as possible	☐	☐	☐
Knowing what to do in the event of an emergency	☐	☐	☐
Completing chores and maintaining a clean living space	☐	☐	☐
Cooking meals and preparing snacks	☐	☐	☐
Understanding nutrition and planning meals	☐	☐	☐
Purchasing items needed for daily living (groceries, cleaning supplies, soap, toothpaste, etc.)	☐	☐	☐

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Part 2: Planning for Independence

Now that we have taken a look at the opportunity to learn and practice specific skills, two things should happen:

1. We should have open conversations about how to increase opportunities to learn and practice critical, adult skills that promote independence. Part 2 of this tool was designed to help you do just that. Please keep in mind that some of these suggested activities may seem overwhelming at first but may be easily accomplished with the support of the IEP team or service provider agencies. The IEP team can use information gathered from this tool to inform annual transition goals in the IEP.
2. Most of us were not fully ready adulthood when we reached the age of 18. As home and school work together to promote independence, it is also important to consider what options may be available for supporting adult decision making. In other words, upon reaching 18, how will an individual be supported in making adult decisions where skills are currently lacking? This can be done formally through planning and a Supported Decision Making Agreement or more informally. Like surgery for a medical condition, a process like guardianship should be the last option considered. For more on Supported Decision Making, visit www.scsupporteddecisionmaking.org

Discussion Questions:

1. What are our biggest decision making and adult skill concerns? What are the strongest areas of adult skill and decision making?
2. Are there areas where our IEP team or our family's practices can and should add opportunities to learn and practice adult skills and decision making? Are we all aiming for independence and challenging our assumptions about possible areas of dependence?
3. As a family or an IEP team, do we understand the many available ways to support an adult decision maker that do not include the removal of rights through guardianship? If not, do we know how to find resources that may help in that conversation?

Activities to Promote Independence

Finances	Relationships	Education	Employment	Health	Home and Community
○ Mock budgeting exercises ○ Provide practice in the community with purchases ○ Talk about the thought process of making financial decisions ○ Use a phone app to break down and discuss spending and	○ Roleplay relationship scenarios ○ Identify examples and of appropriate and inappropriate relationship behavior ○ Discuss personal interactions seen in public or on TV ○ Teach youth explicitly about sex,	○ Support youth in understanding their role in the IEP meeting and providing input verbally, in writing, or through a prepared presentation ○ Create a plan with youth for how they want support in an	○ Provide a variety of employment experiences. ○ Discuss job duties, possible accommodations, and role play conversations with an employer to request accommodations to perform a job	○ Use a phone-based app, planner, and/or pill boxes to encourage taking responsibility for medications ○ Support youth in talking to healthcare professionals ○ Plan for the role of youth in	○ Provide training in travel like using public transportation or ride sharing ○ Create an emergency plan together ○ Teach independent living skills explicitly ○ Offer youth roles in household chores and help create a plan for

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bills ○ Roleplay basic financial scenarios ○ Role play complex financial scenarios like credit card offers, incorrect change given in cash purchases, etc. ○ Begin using a bank account with a limited amount put into it each month, with a budgeting activity to guide spending ○ Allow exposure to natural financial consequences	boundaries, and consent ○ Allow youth access to relationship topics as taught in general education classes (e.g. Health Education) ○ Support youth in choosing person or persons they feel most comfortable discussing personal topics with and encourage those discussions ○ Support youth in finding trustworthy, online sources of information about relationships, sex, and reproductive health	IEP meeting and in the classroom ○ Plan with youth for one-on-one discussions with teachers about accommodations and what they need to be successful in the classroom ○ Support youth in taking steps toward leading their own IEP meeting ○ Find ways youth can self-monitor behavior in school, increasing self-awareness and self-advocacy	○ Help supervisors provide feedback and help youth understand employment-related consequences on the job ○ Teach skills to get a job and to navigate on-boarding process ○ Discuss with youth appropriate work relationship behavior and encourage honest self-assessment of performance and interactions with colleagues	appointments ○ Begin setting appointments *with youth* instead of *for youth* ○ Discuss experience with youth after appointments. Asking permission to capture an audio recording of appointments for this purpose may be helpful ○ Discuss diagnoses, health conditions, and treatments openly	completing them ○ Encourage household responsibility early ○ Ask youth to track supply of toiletries and to request when they are needed ○ Provide opportunities to learn about internet safety, including safe use of social media as a social outlet ○ Role play a variety of emergency situations

Guidelines for Promoting Independence

- ○ Independence is rarely "all or nothing." We increase our independence with a skill as we are exposed to it and the natural consequences for doing it or not doing it. If an individual is not currently performing a skill, it does not mean they cannot grow in that area. Needing support in areas is a natural part of growing up for all people.
- ○ Connect with sources of support. Youth with disabilities may be used to others providing support in their daily lives without them asking for it. For this reason, youth may need help in defining the possible roles of adult supporters, problem solving, and requesting that support.
- ○ Avoid assumptions about capacity to understand or grow in an area. Try not to avoid learning opportunities because of failures in other areas or the difficulty of a task. Independence from increased responsibility can be a great incentive for learning new skills.
- ○ Nationally, the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) mandates that transition planning begin in the IEP no later than age 16. In South Carolina, transition planning must begin by age 13. The purpose of this window of time is to purposefully plan for the transition to adult life, and the IEP can and should set a path forward for learning critical skills. With a strong IEP and a home life that supports independence, incredible things are possible.

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