

Supporting Students to Make Their Own Decisions

How to Answer Questions Without Telling Students What to Do

Types of Questions

When you talk with students about jobs, careers, and college, they may ask different kinds of questions.

There are 4 types of questions:

1. Information questions – “What is...?” or “Where can I...?”
2. “How do I...?” questions
3. “What do you think?” questions – asking for your advice or opinion
4. Personal questions – asking about your own life or experiences

The following pages give examples of each type of question and ways you can respond.

For all types of questions, remember these three steps.

Step 1: Give a Positive Message

No matter what kind of question a student asks, let them know it is okay to ask questions.

You can say, “Good question,” or show encouragement by smiling and nodding.

Your response should send the message:

- You can work.
- You can plan a career.
- You can keep learning after high school.
- You deserve information about your future.
- It is okay to ask questions.

Three Steps for Every Question

Step 2: Give Correct Information AND Get Them Involved

You could just answer the question, but that can sometimes end the conversation.

Instead, give the student information and help them think for themselves. Ask questions to find out what they already know, what they want, and what they want to learn more about.

There are two ways to do this:

- One way: Give some information. SAY something helpful, and then ASK a question.
- Another way: Start by ASKING a question about what they want to know.

The goal is not to make decisions for the student. The goal is to give them information and help them make their own decisions.

Step 3: Find Out if They Have Other Questions

ASK: “Do you have any other questions?”

1. Information Questions

For information questions, keep your answer simple. Give correct information that answers the question and is useful to the student. And then ASK a question to keep the conversation going.

Who can I talk to about getting a job?

SAY: “You can talk to me, another Peer Trainer, your teacher or case manager, your family, or a HireAbility counselor. There may be other people who can help too.”

ASK: “Who do you feel comfortable talking with?”

Where can I get help finding a job?

SAY: “HireAbility can help you look for jobs, apply for jobs, and get ready for interviews. Your school transition team can help too. Some people also get help from a job coach.”

ASK: “Who do you think could help you find a job?”

What is a job coach?

SAY: “A job coach is someone who helps you learn your job and get comfortable at work. They might help a lot at first and then step back as you learn.”

ASK: “What do you think a job coach could help you with?”

What is a work experience or internship?

SAY: “It is a chance to try out a job or type of work. You can learn new skills and find out what you like and don't like.”

ASK: “What kind of work would you like to try?”

What is a resume?

SAY: “A resume is a short document that tells an employer about you. It can list your skills, education, and jobs or volunteer work you have done.”

ASK: “Does that make sense? What would you want to put on your resume?”

1. Information Questions (continued)

What happens at a job interview?

SAY: “The employer asks questions to get to know you and see if you are a good fit for the job. You can ask questions too. It helps to practice before you go.”

ASK: “What questions do you think an employer might ask you?”

What is an accommodation?

SAY: “An accommodation is a change or support that helps you do your job or schoolwork. It could be written directions, extra time, or a quiet place to work. You can ask for accommodations at work and in college.”

ASK: “What helps you do your best now?”

Will I lose my SSI if I get a job?

SAY: “Working can change your SSI or Medicaid, but many people work and still keep some or all of the help they need. Everyone's situation is different. A benefits counselor can look at your situation and explain what could happen.”

ASK: “Do you have other questions about benefits or who you could talk to about them?”

Can people with intellectual disabilities go to college?

SAY: “Yes. People with intellectual disabilities can go to college. There are also college programs designed for students with intellectual disabilities, including programs in Vermont. Students may take classes, learn job skills, take part in campus life, and sometimes live on campus.”

ASK: “What have you heard about college? What would you like to know?”

How is college different from high school?

SAY: “In college, you have more choices and more responsibility. Your IEP ends when you leave high school. In college, you usually need to contact the disability services office and ask for the accommodations you need.”

ASK: “Does that make sense? What would you like to know more about?”

2. “How Do I...?” Questions

Questions that start with “How do I...?” are often asking for information. You can give information, but it is also important to get the student involved in figuring out the answer.

How do I know what job is right for me?

SAY: “Some people think about what they enjoy doing, what they are good at, and what other people say they are good at. Trying different jobs and work experiences can help too.”

ASK: “What do you enjoy doing? What do people say you are good at?”

How do I get a job?

SAY: “One place to start is figuring out what kinds of jobs you might want to try.”

ASK: “Is there a job you are interested in?”

OR

ASK: “What have you tried so far?”

How do I tell my boss I need help or an accommodation?

SAY: “Some people ask to talk with their boss in private. They explain what is difficult and what would help. Some people write down what they want to say first.”

ASK: “What do you think you would want to say?”

How do I talk about my disability with an employer?

SAY: “It is your choice whether you tell an employer about your disability and how much you share. Some people share information about their disability because they need an accommodation. You do not have to tell everyone everything about your disability.”

ASK: “What would you want your employer to know about you and what helps you do your best?”

How do I get along with my coworkers?

SAY: “Every workplace and every coworker is different. Think about what has helped you get along with people before.”

ASK: “What works for you when you are trying to get along with people at school or at work?”

2. “How Do I...?” Questions (continued)

How do I keep my job?

SAY: “There are different things that can help people do well at work, like showing up on time, doing your work, asking questions, and letting someone know when you need help.”

ASK: “What do you think would help you do well at work? What might be hard?”

How do I quit my job?

SAY: “People leave jobs for many different reasons. Usually, you tell your employer that you are leaving and give them some notice. Many people give about two weeks' notice.”

ASK: “What do you think you would like to do?”

If you are not sure why the student wants to leave, you could also ASK:

“What is making you want to leave your job?”

How do I make my IEP meeting about my goals?

SAY: “You can talk about what you want your life to look like after high school. Some students write down their goals, make slides, or lead part of their IEP meeting.”

ASK: “What would you want everyone at your IEP meeting to know about your goals?”

How do I get ready for college?

SAY: “Some people visit colleges, talk with students who go there, and learn about different programs. Practicing how to speak up for yourself and ask for help now can also prepare you for college.”

ASK: “What would you like to learn or do in college?”

How do I know if I am ready for a job or college?

SAY: “That is something many people wonder about. People get ready in different ways. Some people try a work experience first. Some visit a college. Some decide they are ready to jump in and learn as they go.”

ASK: “What is important to you? What would help you feel ready?”

3. “What Do You Think?” Questions

These questions are asking for your advice or opinion.

Examples:

1. Do you think I should go to college or get a job?
2. Do you think I'm smart enough for college?
3. What job do you think I should get?
4. Do you think my dream job is too big?
5. My parents want me to work at one place, but I want to work somewhere else. What do you think I should do?
6. Do you think I should tell my boss about my disability?

It can be tempting to tell the student what you think they should do. But your job as a support person is to help them figure out what they think.

You can give information without giving your opinion.

SAY: “Some people...”

Then **ASK:** “What do you think?”

OR

“What is important to you?”

Example

Student asks:

“Do you think I should go to college or get a job?”

SAY: “Some people go to college right after high school. Some people work first. Some people work and go to college at the same time.”

ASK: “What sounds good to you? What is important to you?”

The goal is to give information, not make the decision for them.

4. Personal Questions

Students may ask you personal questions.

Sometimes they are trying to get to know you. But often they are really trying to find out what is “normal” or what they should do.

When you are working as a support person, you do not have to answer personal questions. Also, It doesn't matter what you did or what you would do. It is about helping them, not telling your stories.

Remember: The conversation is about helping the student figure out what is right for them.

How much money do you make?

SAY: “Pay is different for every job. It depends on the kind of work, how many hours you work, and sometimes how much experience you have.”

ASK: “What would you like to know about getting paid at a job?”

Did you go to college?

SAY: “There are lots of different paths people take after high school. What matters is figuring out what path is right for you.”

ASK: “What do you think you might want to do after high school?”

Have you ever been fired?

SAY: “Sometimes a job doesn't work out. People can learn from what happened and try again.”

ASK: “What worries you about working?”

Keep the Focus on the Student

If They Keep Asking a Personal Question

You can politely set a boundary.

SAY:

“That's a personal question that I'd like to keep private.”

Then bring the conversation back to the student.

You could ASK:

- “What do you think you need to be ready for a job?”
- “What do you want your life to look like after high school?”
- “What is important to you?”
- “What would you like to know about jobs or college?”

Remember

Your job is not to tell students what choices to make.

Your job is to:

- Give correct information.
- Encourage them to ask questions.
- Help them think about their choices.
- Ask what is important to them.
- Help them make their own decisions.

Acknowledgment

This handout was adapted by Green Mountain Self-Advocates (GMSA) using an approach developed by Elevatus Training for responding to questions about sexuality. GMSA adapted the approach for conversations with teens about jobs, careers, and postsecondary education.

Learn more at www.elevatustraining.com.