

Career readiness goes beyond academics; it also requires strong independent living skills. When students can manage daily responsibilities and make informed life decisions, they are better prepared to handle the demands of employment. Recognizing independent living skills as a core part of career readiness allows educators to build comprehensive support systems that promote students' long-term success. Ultimately, true readiness is measured not just by what students know, but by how well they can navigate life beyond high school.

What are Independent Living Skills?

Independent living skills, also known as adaptive or daily living skills, refer to skills needed within home and community settings. These skills include, but are not limited to, personal care, food preparation, housekeeping, money management, using transportation, managing health, purchasing, leisure, and safety (Bambara et al. 2020). Independent living skills are increasingly recognized as an essential component of transition planning that helps students prepare for postsecondary education and employment. In fact, independent living skills are explicitly included within the college and career readiness framework for students with disabilities (Morningstar et al., 2024).

What the Research Says

Independent living skills are a critical predictor of postschool employment for students with disabilities (Mazzotti et al, 2021). In other words, students with greater independent living skills are more likely to achieve paid employment after high school. Additionally, adults with disabilities who have higher levels of independent living skills are more likely to *maintain* employment over time. Chan et al (2018) examined factors associated with adults maintaining paid employment and found that being able to manage personal care and hygiene is a robust predictor of an individual's ability to sustain community employment. Other skills identified as strongly associated with maintaining employment

included housekeeping and meal preparation (Chan et al., 2018). These tasks involve executive functioning components, such as following directions and planning, that are highly valued in the workplace.

Providing youth with targeted instruction in independent living skills may further increase the likelihood that students not only obtain paid employment post-graduation but also remain employed over time. Targeted instruction is necessary because students with disabilities often exhibit fewer independent living skills compared to their peers; for instance, students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) rated themselves lower than their peers without IEPs on all independent living skills (Taconet et al, 2025). Although all students with disabilities benefit from instruction on independent living skills, students with autism and intellectual disability may require the most focused interventions because they are reported to have the lowest level of daily living skills (Taconet et al, 2026).

Guidelines for Practice

Preparing students for successful adult outcomes requires intentional instruction in independent living skills. The following strategies provide practical ways to integrate these essential skills into daily instruction and real-world learning opportunities.

- Prioritize instruction on independent living skills that directly support workplace success, including personal care, hygiene, time management, money skills, meal preparation, housekeeping, and health management. These skills are strongly associated with long-term employment outcomes and adult independence.
- Increase opportunities for community-based instruction that allow students to practice independent living skills in authentic environments such as grocery stores, banks,

public transportation systems, medical offices, and workplaces. Repeated practice across settings helps students generalize skills and build confidence.

- Provide systematic instruction and repeated practice in transportation skills, including reading schedules, using navigation apps, understanding public transit systems, ride-share safety, and planning travel routes independently. Transportation competence is critical for maintaining employment and community participation.

Additional Resources

Pathways to the Future - Independent Living Skills

This website provides resources related to career planning, education planning, and independent living.
<https://www.pathwayswv.org/independent-living.php>

Independent Living, Here We Come Toolkit

This toolkit assists students with creating a plan to build independent living skills.
<https://fhfofgno.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Independent-Living-Here-We-Come-Toolkit-8.3.2023.pdf>

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