

Five Tips to Help Students with IDD Land a Job

By Erin Luchterhand, Instructor

We've all been there: searching for a job, interviewing and waiting on the call. Did we get the job or not? For individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities, the process can seem even more daunting. Here are five tips to teach your child, student, or friend with a disability to help them land the job they want.

1. Write a winning resume. A resume is YOU on paper. This is your first opportunity for the employer to “see” and learn about you. You want to impress the employer and those interviewing you. Your resume should include solid work experience, references and strengths all aligned with the job for which you are applying. That means, if you are applying for a job at a grocery store, reference your hard work, ability to organize, and friendly demeanor; all things a grocery store employer would look for in an employee. If you are applying for a job at a restaurant, highlight your ability to manage time, listen to customers, and maintain a positive attitude. Your resume should reflect who you are but should also show the potential employer that you would be a good fit for their business.

2. Get a professional outfit. A lot of research has been done on the effects different types of clothing and accessories have on the outcome of an interview. Research suggests that the more the outfit follows these guidelines, the better you will look to an interviewer. Your outfit should be: black and white or solid colors (no neon!). Men should wear a solid color tie or a striped tie with no more than 3 colors and women should avoid accessories. The overall look of the outfit should be clean and conservative in appearance. Need an example? For a man, it is suggested to wear black dress pants with a white or muted color button up shirt and a matching tie (solid or striped with no more than three colors). For a woman, it is suggested that black dress pants or skirt and a white or muted colored dress shirt would be appropriate. A black suit jacket would also be an appropriate addition to either outfit. NOTE: Teaching specific interview outfit guidelines to an individual with a disability is important because it offers concrete recommendations geared towards helping them have the best opportunity for employment.

3. Know your skills. An employer will hire you to do a specific job. What kind of skills do you bring to the team that will allow you to do the job well? Know what you are capable of and decide ahead of time what you want the employer to know about you. Telling the interviewer what you are able to do, and how you can help their company, is vital to them seeing you as part of their team. For example, if you are applying for a job at a greenhouse, make sure the employer knows that you know the difference between an annual and a perennial flower.

4. Prepare your answers to interview questions ahead of time. Most interviewers often ask similar questions. Know what your answers to these questions will be ahead of time. Some questions are difficult to understand and it can be challenging to know what to say. This is why it is so important to prepare and know your answers ahead of time. If you know how you will answer basic questions, and you practice that answer, then answering your interview questions will go smoothly. Not sure what questions to practice answering? Google it! There are many lists of top interview questions, even for specific job related interviews. Do a little research and determine which questions you will likely be asked, and then practice answering them. Find a friend, parent, or sibling to practice with and ask for feedback! Knowing your answers will help the employer see you as part of their business.

5. Practice, practice, practice! There can never be too much practice. The more comfortable we are with something, the better we will be. Regular and continued practice is so important to a comfortable and smooth interview. As you practice, always seek feedback and ways to improve your answer, your interview outfit, your skillset, and your resume. Practice.

Knowing what you will tell an employer in an interview, and looking professional at the same time, will help to land you that job! If you have done all of these five steps, feel confident in yourself as you tackle an interview and get a job!