

FADING SUPPORT IN COLLEGE: THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE

by Judi Bean and Maria Paiewonsky

Issue No. 2

INTRODUCTION

There are many benefits to increasing student independence at college. For starters, promoting independence sets the tone that students with intellectual disability are just like all the others on campus. They are young adults making their way to classes, hanging in the student lounge, working out at the fitness center, and studying.

Promoting independence also gives students opportunities to speak for themselves and make their own choices. When their college peers, staff, and faculty see them navigating college on their own, they see a person who is self-sufficient and self-directed. Students with disabilities are in good company, since their college peers are learning the same skills.

Below, we offer suggestions on promoting independence and gradually fading prompts to maximize a student's potential for independence. These suggestions are provided in a naturally occurring order, but not all steps are necessary, and the student's abilities and needs should guide the process.

CHECK IN WITH THE STUDENT'S TRANSITION TEAM

Student transition teams, usually made up of school and college program personnel, have policies regarding student supervision that vary greatly. These policies often reflect the team's adherence to safety and student protection on a college campus, as well as monitoring student behavior, if indicated on an IEP.

Regardless of these policies, it is important to consider each student's individual needs and how a team can incorporate fading support into the student supervision plan.

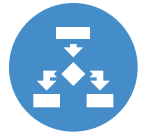


Inclusive Dual Enrollment Student Support for College Success

These fact sheets summarize best practices for coaches and mentors who support dually enrolled students with intellectual disabilities and autism on college campuses. A list of related items for an educational coach professional portfolio is included.

USE A HIERARCHY OF PROMPTS

To increase student independence on a college campus, a plan should take into account reduced levels and intensity of support. These include prompts that model a behavior, coach a person through an activity, or provide pointing or verbal cueing to direct someone through a task.



"WATCH ME"

From using transportation to following schedules and attending classes, a modeling or "watch me" prompt can be used. "Watch me" cues might be the first approach coaches use to demonstrate to students how the task should be completed. This allows the student to see the order of the steps, and lets them ask questions for clarification.



"Watch me" cues can teach students how to schedule rides to and from the campus, navigate around campus, organize school work, use technology and apps, complete tasks on time, and participate in activities appropriately. The possibilities are endless.

It is important to take advantage of teachable moments (naturally occurring times that allow students to learn in the moment). For example, when a student has an opportunity to buy a lunch at the campus dining center, a coach can use the opportunity to go first. This is a natural opportunity to model how to order food, find condiments or cutlery, pay for lunch with cash or a college dining card, and find a place to sit down.

"NEED A QUICK REMINDER?"

Verbal reminders are useful when a student initially benefits from being coached through a task. Saying "Show me how you do it" can often serve as a reminder to the student that she can do it on her own, with just a little assistance, and will soon be ready to do it on her own with no cues.



These "reminder" cues might be especially helpful for students during the beginning of a semester, when class times, locations, and instructors change. Meeting with a coach or peer mentor for a few minutes at the beginning of the

day can be beneficial for students who just need a brief reminder about their schedule, routine, or assignment for the day.

“Reminder” cues may also be helpful for a student who likes referring to a script when making arrangements for transportation.

LINE OF SIGHT

Once the student can complete most tasks independently, the educational coach and student may agree that it's time for the coach to fade back by first keeping the student in their line of sight, several feet away. That way, if the student is in need of support, the educational coach can step in and provide any cues necessary.

As the student becomes more independent, these observations can happen from a greater distance. For example, the educational coach may observe from across the campus or via text check-ins as the student goes to class or participates in activities.



SHIFTING TO NATURAL SUPPORTS

Once the student is initiating more tasks, it's a good opportunity for the educational coach to help identify natural supports on campus. This might mean encouraging the student to check in with a classmate about homework and assignments, or assisting him to invite someone to lunch as a way to build social support.

Finally, assisting a student to develop a mental map of the campus and to use digital scheduling apps can help with following a college routine. Meanwhile, the coach fades into the background, working in the general vicinity if the student needs support or cues.



CHECK-INS

Once the student has adapted to using natural cues, and knows what to do in an emergency, she should be able to navigate campus and follow a schedule independently. At this point, coaches and students should arrange for check-in meetings to ensure that the student is maintaining independence in a safe way, and is accessing support as necessary.

Check-ins may differ greatly depending on the student, so it is important that coaches and students agree on the format that makes the most sense, including face-to-face meetings, cell phone calls, or text messages. These check-in meetings should also be faded as appropriate.



INDEPENDENCE!

Total independence is achieved when the student no longer requires the support of an educational coach to be a successful college scholar.



When these steps have been taken, coaches or mentors have an opportunity to give students the skills they need to engage in college as freely as possible, without obvious supervision or oversight. The college setting provides a small community where skills can be practiced and mastered before becoming generalized into the larger community.

Sample products for an education coach portfolio related to life skills development on the campus

- Sample checklist with target dates for decreasing cues
- Simple data sheet with evidence of decreased student support
- List of apps and technology shared with students to increase campus independence
- Student schedule that highlights limited coach support
- List of sample natural supports coach has directed student to

Checking in: Are you supporting dually enrolled students to:

- Increase time on campus without direct support from you?
- Respond to emergencies safely?
- Arrange for transportation needs?
- Use natural supports and identify new ones?
- Is the student able to:
- Navigate campus activities and routines?
- Participate in class and complete work for their classes (using accommodations as needed)?
- Follow a schedule and take part in all activities?

 **ThinkCollege**
TRANSITION PROJECT



The Think College Transition Project is funded by an Investing in Innovation Development Grant # U411C130149 from the Office of Innovation and Improvement with matching funds provided by the Peter and Elizabeth C. Tower Foundation. Think College is a project of the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

RECOMMENDED CITATION: Bean, J. & Paiewonsky, M. (2017). Fading support in college: The path to independence, Think College Transition Grab and Go Practices, number 2. Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston.

Special thanks to members of the Think College Transition ‘Student Support for College Success’ and ‘Self Determination’ workgroups at Holyoke Community College, Westfield State University, and Bridgewater State University: Sherry Elander, Erin Lylis, Lyndsey Nunes, Sheila Chamberlin, Tracie DeGrandpre-Abodeeb, Kristin Cerasa, Joyce Butler, Alice Boyle, Ashley Rodriguez, Stuart Slawsby, Amy Galaska and Penny Redfern.