

Dream Big Dreams!

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Believe in Your Child—If You Don't, Who Will?

Never deny the diagnosis, but always deny the negative prognosis. Norman Cousins

Ignore the negative predictions of others—no one can predict your child's future. What your child can achieve is determined by *your child* (with your unconditional support) and no one else! Let's dream with and for our children, so they learn to dream for themselves.

Go Back in Time

What were your dreams for your child with a disability before you knew about your child's diagnosis? (The same kind of dreams any parent has for any child, right?) It's time to get those dreams back—anything is possible when we open our minds to possibilities.

You most likely did *not* dream things like: my child will talk...my child will walk...my child will have appropriate behavior...my child will read at grade level...my child will master the pincer grasp...my child will write with a pencil...blah, blah, blah...

None of those (or similar things) are required to live a wonderful life. My son, Benjamin, cannot walk; he uses a power chair; he cannot write with a pencil; he uses a computer; and he's a successful college student! Go back to those big dreams: that your child will be successful in school, have friends, get a good education, go to college or vocational school, get a job, leave home, fall in love and get married, make you a grandparent, or whatever—we need to dream big!

It is difficult to say what is impossible, for the dream of yesterday is the hope of today and the reality of tomorrow. Robert H. Goddard

Think About Right Now

What does your child need to be successful *right now*? Let's live in the present—that's the only place any of us can be—while thinking about the future. A child who is successful is paving the path to success as an adult. But if a child is not successful in the early years, it's hard to "flip a switch" at age 18 and expect success. What needs to happen so your child is successful *today*, as a 2-year-old, or a 6-year-old, or a 14-year old? What assistive technology devices, supports, or accommodations does your child need to lead a wonderful, ordinary life, included in all areas of society?

If your child *did not* have a disability, consider: Where would your child be throughout the day? Who would your child be with? How would your child be spending his/her time? The answers reveal what should be happening in the life of your child with a disability.

Think about **privileges and responsibilities** (those normal, ordinary, and precious activities that are the building blocks for a successful life) that are chronologically age-appropriate, *not developmental age*. Do you allow your child to make his/her own decisions (and live with the consequences)? Does your child pick out his/her own clothes? Is your child expected to do chores around the house? Does your child receive an allowance? Does your child participate in ordinary and inclusive activities at school and in the community? Keep thinking about other "normal" things that children without disabilities routinely do...

What will it take to ensure your child is living a successful life right now? Success today paves the way for success tomorrow!

Reality can destroy the dream, why shouldn't the dream destroy reality? George Moore

Support Your Child's Dreams

The impossible talked of is less impossible from the moment words are laid to it. *Storm Jameson*

On a regular basis—around the dinner table, while driving in the car, etc.—talk to *all* your children this way: “When you grow up and [drive a car, leave home, go to college, or whatever]...”

We don't know that *any* of our children will achieve any of these things (they might run off and join the circus, instead), but let's lay a foundation of high expectations. When we speak this way to our children, we send the message that we believe in them, we trust them, and we know they're competent and able.

When you talk to a child this way, the child will “talk back” the same way: “Mom, when I grow up and [fill-in-the-blank]...” Yippee—the child believes in himself! Then, when your child says, “I want to be an actor [or the president, or a nurse, or whatever], support your child's dreams. Never pooh-pooh the dream as “not realistic.” We're “not realistic” with children who *do not* have disabilities—we don't crush their dreams. So let's not crush the dreams of our children who have disabilities. Again, no one knows what's possible!

Stories were full of hearts being broken by love, but what really broke a heart was taking away its dream—whatever the dream might be.

Pearl S. Buck

When my son, Benjamin, said he wanted to be an actor, I encouraged him to learn more about acting by taking drama classes. For three years, he was a successful actor in children's theater productions. His disability was irrelevant, and he demonstrated many strengths (great auditory memory, being a big ham, and more). When my daughter, Emily, said she wanted

to be a pediatrician, I suggested she become a junior volunteer at the hospital. After less than a week, she changed her mind—she couldn't bear to see the babies crying after being given shots and more. She did, however, continue volunteering in a different part of the hospital. Learning what you *don't like* is as important as learning what you *do like*! So when your child shares a dream, encourage that dream; suggest your child takes a class in it, research it on the internet or at the library, identify a mentor who's involved with the activity, and/or find another way for your child to explore that dream.

And if failure occurs, value that experience. Your child will learn that failure is not the end of the world (kind of like tipping over the bicycle; we learn to pick it up and get back on). For all of us, disappointments allow us to learn and enable us to become stronger!

Belief in a thing makes it happen. *Frank Lloyd Wright*

Believe it can happen and it will. The belief comes first; the how follows. If you don't believe it can happen, it won't. The barrier is never a child's diagnosis, but our attitudes and actions!

Notes



www.disabilityisnatural.com has more strategies to create positive change.