

FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS FOR AUTISM

BY HOLLY BORTFELD

PRESENTER

Holly Bortfeld is a single mother of 2 adults with ASD. A long time homeschooler living in PA, Holly has been doing biomedical treatments since 1998 and now owns a homestead farm for men with autism.

Located in York County, PA, Felton Homestead is a biomed-friendly intentional residence where the residents require a strict dietary program and have similar medical and safety needs. The resident farmers grow as much of their own food as possible, learn skills to care for animals, garden, preserve, cook and much more. The farm will also host a Functional Life Skills day program in a few years.

Follow us at <https://www.facebook.com/FeltonHomestead/> or @feltonhomestead on Instagram



DISCLAIMER

For more than 10 years, I worked at TACA as their lead author, Parent Support Manager, recipe creator and lots of other things. I resigned from TACA to focus on setting up the farmstead for my son and his future roommates.

You will see a lot of links to my articles on the TACA website in this talk as there is no point in recreating the wheel.

Please note: I will refer to our kids as “kids” or “children” throughout this talk. It doesn’t matter if they are 2, 22 or 52, they are still our children, so please insert “adult with autism”, “person with autism” or whatever verbiage you prefer when you hear me say “our kids”.



WHAT WE’LL COVER

- Functional life skills: What are they and why are they important?
- Chores by Developmental Age
- Personal Care, Food Preparation, Safety, College, Independence, Job and Volunteering Skills
- Transition IEPs
- How to teach functional life skills
- Volunteering
- Resources



FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS: WHAT ARE THEY?

Functional life skills are laundry, cooking, cleaning, getting dressed, shaving, personal hygiene, shopping, ordering at a restaurant, paying bills, working, taking vitamins or pills, making healthy choices, exercise, advocating for themselves, navigating their community, and making and keeping friends. Some life skills overlap with social skills, of course, and both are necessary to live a safe, fulfilling life.

Some functional life skills are needed by everyone, like doing laundry, while some are job dependent, like taking orders and making change if they work as a cashier, as example. Few skills can be learned overnight, they need a lot of practice. There are also developmental steps to learning each skill, so starting early is key.

How can you know what your child needs to learn? Assessments like the **ABLLS-R**, **AFLS** and **VB-MAPP** can be used to find out where your child's strengths and weaknesses lie and show you what skills need to be taught to fill in the gaps. During your transition IEP meetings which start at age 16 (14 in some states), the evaluation should include a Present Level of Performance (PLOP) as well as vocational aptitude tests and if possible, the student's input about likes, dislikes and ambitions for their future.

Parents can get help from Vocational Rehabilitation and the Transition IEP team who can provide vocational aptitude tests and job shadowing, job counseling and supported job coaching, if needed.



WHY ARE FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS SO IMPORTANT?

Safety – People who cannot care for themselves are more open to abuse and neglect by caretakers.
Self-esteem – Self-esteem comes from achievement and ability. If your child can do things to help themselves, they are empowered and happier. Self-reliance makes people the “master of their destiny’ because they don’t always have to wait around for others to do for them and they can choose to do things their way.

Health – Kids who can feed, clean, clothe themselves and take care of their own basic needs will live a healthier life.

Independence – Not having to depend on someone for everything will open the child's world up to more independence and they will have more living and work options to choose from, rather than being locked up in a maximum care facility. The more skills they have, the more options they have for housing and work. For example, if your child isn't toilet trained and can't do basic self-care, there will only be one type of housing he can go into. There is no guarantee that placement would be good, but you'd be left with no other options.



WHY ARE FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS SO IMPORTANT?

Self-advocacy – when children can care for themselves and perform decision making tasks, they can have a larger say in their own lives and making informed choices to be successful in creating and accomplishing their own dreams. Being empowered to set your course for the future is something all people strive for, regardless of disability.

Self-Regulation – Learning to manage stress, anxiety and feelings is a very important life skill and will help your child be able to cope with the rigors of daily life.



FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS AND YOU

If you ask parents of older teens and adults what advice they have for parents of tweens, you will consistently hear one resounding concern – “academics are nice but if your kid can’t function in the real world, he’s in trouble, so teach them life skills.”

Here is the critical piece though – **YOU** must teach life skills to your child. Yes, the school or a therapist can help, but unless you are consistent with your child 24/7 about learning and using these skills everywhere you go, then they won’t stick. Always remember that life skills must be functional and stick to be useful.



ARE YOU BABYING YOUR SPECIAL NEEDS CHILD?

It is not uncommon for parents to “just do it for him” when it comes to our children, with or without autism. While our kids with autism do have delays, some profound, it doesn't mean they cannot do things. Lots of things.

Teaching our kids these important skills does take a lot of time, effort and repetition, and yes, it would be MUCH faster for you to just do it for them, but then they never learn how to do it for themselves. So while it's faster for you to tie their shoes when they are 7, are you still going to be willing/able to do it when he's 57? If not, take the time, teach the skills. Our kids ARE competent, they just need more repetition and help.

Meeting your child where they are is paramount. Even the most profoundly affected can learn life skills. Putting their clothes in the hamper, getting their own glass of water, putting their dish in the dishwasher. Sure, they may not do it perfectly, but they will get better with time.



WHY CHORES?

Chores serve many purposes:

- Teaches skills and competency
- Keep kids with ASD engaged
- Teaches independence
- Teaches charting and calendaring
- Teaches about money or reward
- Teaches value of work
- A non-disabled peer/sibling would be expected to do it
- The chores that need doing, get done



CHORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL AGE

The following slides are some of the chores a child may do, based on developmental age.

Since autism is a developmental disability, your child will not likely do them by chronological age, but rather developmental age.

People with autism often have splinter skills, which means they can do some things in a age-group and maybe not some others. The items they cannot do in the age-group should be on the list of skills to work on.



CHORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL AGE: 2-3

- Put their toys in toy box
- Stack books on shelf
- Put dirty clothes in hamper
- Throw trash away
- Fold washcloths
- Fetch diapers and wipes
- Dust baseboards
- Put napkins on table
- Brush teeth with help
- Get dressed



CHORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL AGE: 4-5

- Feed pets
- Set the table
- Wipe up spills
- Put away toys
- Straighten bedroom
- Water houseplants
- Sort clean silverware
- Prepare simple snacks
- Use Dustbuster
- Clear kitchen table
- Dry and put away dishes
- Brush teeth alone



CHORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL AGE: 6-7

- Gather trash/recycling
- Fold towels
- Dust mop floor
- Empty dishwasher
- Match clean socks
- Weed or water garden
- Rake leaves
- Peel potatoes
- Make salad
- Replace toilet rolls
- Make their bed
- Carry in groceries
- Typing



CHORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL AGE: 8-9

- Shovel snow
- Load dishwasher
- Change light bulbs
- Wash laundry
- Hang/fold clean clothes
- Dust furniture
- Sweep and hose off patio/
walkways
- Put groceries away
- Scramble eggs
- Bake cookies
- Walk dog
- Wipe off table
- Windex mirrors/windows



CHORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL AGE: 10-11

- Clean bathrooms
- Vacuum
- Clean countertops
- Prepare simple meals
- Mow lawn
- Bring in mail
- Do simple sewing (buttons, hems, etc)
- Use a camera
- Take garbage/recycling to curb
- Use a cell phone to call and text



CHORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL AGE: 12-13

- Mop floors
- Wash/vacuum car
- Trim hedges
- Paint walls
- Shop for groceries with a list
- Cook complete dinner
- Bake bread or cake
- Do simple home repairs
- Wash windows
- Iron clothes
- Balance Checking Account



CHORES BY DEVELOPMENTAL AGE: 14+

- Use ATM
- Plan meals with a budget
- Create shopping list
- Learn meat handling rules
- Keep personal calendar
- Comparison shop online
- Understand basic internet safety rules
- Clean out fridge/freezer
- Clean tub/shower
- Make an appointment
- Find a circuit breaker/use it
- Pump gas
- Read a map
- Read signs to navigate airports, stores, restaurants
- Use GPS
- Know local landmarks
- Know how to find schedules, routes, pick-up points for public transit
- Use public transportation alone



FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS

- Personal Care Skills
- Food Preparation Skills
- Safety Skills
- College Skills
- Independence Skills
- Job & Volunteering Skills



PERSONAL CARE SKILLS

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| • Shaving | • Washing face |
| • Bathing/showering | • Dressing (picking out clothes that are seasonally accurate, putting them on independently) |
| • Deodorant | • Nail care |
| • Brushing hair | • Genital care |
| • Brushing teeth | |



FOOD PREPARATION SKILLS

- Bake
- Blend
- Boil
- Broil
- Chiffonade
- Chop
- Cut
- Flip
- Fry
- Grate
- Julienne
- Macerate
- Make a slurry
- Measure
- Peel
- Proof
- Read a recipe
- Sauté
- Shred
- Squeeze
- Steam
- Stir
- Wash dishes
- Whisk
- Zest

<http://www.tacanow.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/ASD-Teens-Cooking-Class.pdf>

SAFETY SKILLS

There are many types of safety skills that our kids need: swimming, internet safety, eloping/wandering, bullying, sexual, personal safety, among others.

Making sure your child is in a safe environment, even at work/volunteering, is paramount. Unlike schools, employers may not do background screening checks on other employees so if your child will be left alone with any staff, make sure they are properly screened and trained to work with your child.

More information on safety issues, skills and background checks is at <http://www.tacanow.org/family-resources/keeping-your-kids-with-asd-safe/>

COLLEGE LIFE SKILLS

Some basic functional life skills are needed to live on campus, your child will need these skills first. Work them into IEPs, starting with your Transition IEP.

- Setting priorities
- Time management
- Handling stress
- Food preparation (even in a dorm, you can cook a little)
- Managing money
- Caring for clothes (remember, dorms are TINY and they will be bringing a fraction of what they own)
- Being responsible for their own health
- Navigating the campus and surrounding area
- Conflict resolution



INDEPENDENCE SKILLS

- Navigate community (public transportation or driving, read a map/GPS, know local landmarks)
- Use ATM/credit/debit card
- Ask for help
- Learn skills needed to gain and keep employment
- Explore options for post secondary education
- Explore hobbies and build friendships
- Maintain self-care, health and hygiene
- Use technology safely
- Cooking skills
- Restaurant ordering and shopping
- Make and keep appointments



JOB AND VOLUNTEERING SKILLS

Every job will require its own unique skillset so the skills your child will need for potential jobs should be addressed in the transition IEP and pre-taught in school and home to ensure an easier transition to the workplace.

But most jobs have a few things in common. Some great examples of skills to work on are:

- Typing
- Counting money
- Alphabetizing
- Cleaning
- Filing
- Asking for help
- Greeting strangers
- Answering questions
- Sorting
- Reading signs to navigate store/office



TRANSITION IEP

A transition IEP is a regular IEP but includes expected outcomes and the goals for those outcomes for the child after high school ends. It will include information about your child's interests and skills and what needs to be done to get him/her ready for the post-school world or work or college, whichever is appropriate. It will also include which route to graduation, diploma or certificate of completion, your child will take.

One big difference is the shift from teacher-developed goals and activities to student-driven plans for the future. Transition IEPs are to include and emphasize the child's self-advocacy and self-directed vision for his/her future.

Preparing for the transition IEP starts with the parent, and child if able, to create a vision of the child's future. What would your child like to do? What would he be able to do? What skills would he need to develop between now and the end of school to attain those skills?

When: IDEA says "Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team" but in many states it's done when the child turns 14. Some districts hold a transition IEP meeting separate from a regular IEP meeting, and some do not.



WHAT SHOULD BE INCLUDED IN A TRANSITION IEP?

The IEP should include a student profile with a statement of current functioning covering all areas of performance including current academic achievement, current functional performance and recommendations for achieving post-secondary goals. Goals should be in these areas:

- Employment
- Vocational/Technical Training
- Higher Education
- Residential
- Transportation/mobility
- Financial/income
- Self-determination
- Social competence
- Health/safety

HOW TO TEACH FUNCTIONAL LIFE SKILLS

There are many books and a few websites available but there are also curriculum and therapists or teachers who already teach these skills. You can use teachers or therapists to teach the skill but if you do, you need to also learn what they are teaching and how they are teaching it, so you can follow through at home.

How do you teach a child to do basic life skills tasks? Repetition. Repetition. Repetition.

Every task has steps to it, and just like any ABA or Discrete Trial drill, you just need to break down the task into tiny bits and teach each bit separate and then together. Some kids do better with photos of each step, some with written word. We used both – photos with the written description under the picture.

TASK ANALYSIS

Task analysis is the breaking down and sequencing of goals into teachable steps. It is an efficient way of teaching a variety of skills, as it provides the instructor(s) with a consistent approach and measurable goals. It can serve as a useful diagnostic function for teachers, by helping them focus on their students' specific functioning levels on targeted skills. Task analysis also provides the teacher with a sequential instructional program, that will allow the student to move towards the highest level of independence, that he/she is able to achieve, at a pace that is appropriate for that person.

If you'd like to learn more about Task Analysis and Breakdown many more tasks, go to <https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules> for free learning modules.



BREAKING DOWN A TASK – FOLDING A TOWEL

How many steps are there in folding a towel anyway? A lot.

1. Pick up towel
2. Lay on table
3. Smooth towel flat
4. Grab two corners on top
5. Pick up corners
6. Fold corners to bottom edge
7. Smooth out towel
8. Grab two corners on top
9. Pick up corners
10. Fold corners to bottom edge
11. Smooth out towel
12. Move towel to basket/side/closet



BREAKING DOWN A TASK – WASHING YOUR HANDS

1. Turn on faucet
2. Place hands under water
3. Pump liquid soap into one hand
4. Rub hands together
5. Rub backs of hands
6. Rinse hands under water until soap is gone
7. Turn water off
8. Dry hands on towel



BREAKING DOWN A TASK – BRUSHING YOUR TEETH

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Get Toothbrush | 11. Brush teeth, starting in the back on bottom left |
| 2. Get toothpaste | 12. Turn water on |
| 3. Open toothpaste cap | 13. Fill cup with water |
| 4. Squeeze toothpaste onto toothbrush | 14. Swish mouth with water |
| 5. Turn on water | 15. Spit water out |
| 6. Run toothbrush under water to get it wet | 16. Rinse toothbrush with water |
| 7. Turn water off | 17. Turn water off |
| 8. Brush teeth, starting in the back on top right | 18. Put toothbrush away |
| 9. Brush teeth, starting in the back on top left | 19. Put toothpaste away |
| 10. Brush teeth, starting in the back on bottom right | 20. Dry hands and mouth |



VISUAL GUIDES


To add visual guides for your child, you will need to take a photo of every step and put them in a document like Word and under each picture, type whatever words your child will understand to explain the picture.






Whether you use visual guides or not, depending on your child's functioning level you will need to do all of these steps hand-over-hand, again and again, with your child until he or she gets it and then keep practicing so they don't lose the skill. Remember, the goal is NOT perfection, but function. If he or she gets all the steps done, that's your first goal. Neatness, hopefully, comes later. Eventually you can fade the prompts, the child may even memorize the schedule and be able to do the task without it, but if they don't that's OK too – you're still increasing their independence.

Using Video Modeling to Teach

[YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) offers many free video modeling clips, but you can also make your own. Others ideas at <http://www.tacanow.org/family-resources/what-are-social-skills/#Video>

BREAKING DOWN A TASK – VISUALS

 **Brushing Teeth**

1	2	3	4	5
				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 1 • Grab toothbrush
- 2 • Grab toothpaste
- 3 • Open toothpaste
- 4 • Put toothpaste on toothbrush
- 5 • Brush teeth
- 6 • Spit
- 7 • Rinse
- 8 • Put items away

BE PATIENT

In order for my son to be successful at such a low interest task as laundry, I had to make sure there was laundry to be folded every single day. Eventually I just left the same batch – one of each of a towel, washcloth, pants, shorts, long sleeve shirt, short sleeve shirt, tank top (that one messed with him!) and 3 pairs of different colored socks. It took a few months for my son to really master this task and it's by no means a favorite for him but he can do it. I routinely gave him a basket of laundry to fold just to keep the skill fresh for. Yes, this approach takes a lot of YOUR time, every day for awhile, but if you want your child to be able to do things for him or herself, this is the only way.



WHY VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering not only teaches skills and keeps the volunteer engaged, but also benefits the larger community, spreads autism awareness and we can make new friends. The following are just some examples of volunteering opportunities that may be of interest to young adults with ASD.



VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteermatch.org has a great search engine for in-person and virtual volunteering opportunities based on zip code and area of interest. <http://www.volunteermatch.org>

Humane Society – The Human Society has lesson plans to pre-teach skills, and job descriptions for each type of volunteering opportunity from office work to working with the animals.

http://www.humanesociety.org/animal_community/resources/tips/reasons_volunteer_shelter.html

Food Pantries - <http://www.feedingamerica.org/find-your-local-foodbank/> or <http://www.foodpantries.org/>

Some pantries have kitchens that serve food and some just compile bags for families. All have indoor office work available as well.

Community Gardens - <https://communitygarden.org/find-a-garden/>

You can also do a web search for “Cooperative Extension” and your state to find a garden.



VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

Any nonprofit (501c3) organization in your community may need help but organizations that serve individuals with autism such as horseback riding therapy, swimming classes, Special Olympics, summer and school break camps, Challenger baseball/soccer/basketball leagues just to name a few. These orgs are ideal since they already have autism awareness to some degree. For sporting teams, volunteers may take statistics, set up/clean up, help with snack sales or buddy up with younger kids.

Senior citizen residential or activity centers love to have volunteers. **There is a potential worry many parents of ASD children have of viral shedding from frequent vaccination of the elderly that can last 3 weeks, which our immunocompromised kids may not be able to medically tolerate. Ask the center or agency about their vaccination policies before agreeing to volunteering opportunities with the elderly.*

Organizations may also need data entry or graphic design help, help with mailings or office work, or on-site event help for fundraiser walks, conferences or seminars, meetings, such as working at the event registration table, booth help, clean up and more.



VOLUNTEERING OPPORTUNITIES

There may be opportunities in school or you can create programs in your school for Peer Mentoring like Lunch Buddies, where kids with ASD are matched up with peers to sit with at lunch, talk, play games and make friends. Talk to the school guidance counselor for in-school opportunities.

Meals on Wheels, community clean-up projects, the public library, sibling programs, Ronald McDonald House, are also good options to investigate. <http://www.mowaa.org>
<http://www.siblingsupport.org> <http://www.rmhc.org>

Churches always need volunteers. If standard opportunities are full, think about turning some of their lawn into community garden. If the church will lend out its kitchen to teach skills like canning, cooking, and basic nutrition, etc. to then your teen could help the families. Maybe even set up a cooking class for teens with ASD, which you can read about here: <http://www.tacanow.org/family-resources/asd-teens-cooking-class/>

Please note that for-profit companies cannot let minors volunteer without paying them, as that would be illegal.



CHORE CHARTS

Chore charts can be simple photographs with or without labels



CHORE CHARTS

Charts can also be more complex to fit your needs.

WEEKLY CHORE CHART								
		SUN	MON	TUES	WEDS	THURS	FRIDAY	SAT
WEEK 1	NAME	ENJOY WEEKEND	LAUNDRY	SWEEPING - kitchen + living room	BATHROOM - toilet + sink	VACUUM		ENJOY WEEKEND
	NAME	ENJOY WEEKEND	DUSTING		BATHROOM - tub + floor + mirror		SWEEPING - kitchen + bedrooms	ENJOY WEEKEND
WEEK 2	NAME	ENJOY WEEKEND	DUSTING				SWEEPING - kitchen + bedrooms	ENJOY WEEKEND
	NAME	ENJOY WEEKEND	LAUNDRY LAUNDRY + SHEETS	SWEEPING - kitchen + living room	BATHROOM - toilet	VACUUM		ENJOY WEEKEND
WEEK 3	NAME	ENJOY WEEKEND	LAUNDRY	SWEEPING - kitchen + living room	BATHROOM - tub + mirror + floor	VACUUM		ENJOY WEEKEND
	NAME	ENJOY WEEKEND	DUSTING	MOP	BATHROOM - toilet + sink		SWEEPING - kitchen + bedrooms	ENJOY WEEKEND
WEEK 4	NAME	ENJOY WEEKEND	LAUNDRY LAUNDRY + SHEETS		BATHROOM - toilet		SWEEPING - kitchen + bedrooms	ENJOY WEEKEND
	NAME	ENJOY WEEKEND	DUSTING	SWEEPING - kitchen + living room	BATHROOM - tub + floor + mirror	VACUUM		ENJOY WEEKEND

CHORE CHARTS

Charlie's Chore Chart							
	Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
Brush Teeth							
Get Dressed							
Be Nice							
Put Toys Away							

CHORE CHARTS

Today I will..	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Make my Bed							
Brush my Teeth							
Get Dressed							
Pick up my room							
Do Homework							
Wash Dishes							



RECOMMENDED READING

The Assessment of Functional Living Skills (AFLS) <https://functionallivingskills.com/>

Assessment of Basic Language and Learning Skills - Revised (The ABLLS-R®)
<https://partingtonbehavioranalysts.com/>

The Verbal Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program: The VB-MAPP
<http://www.marksundberg.com/vb-mapp.htm>

<http://www.tacanow.org/family-resources/volunteering-opportunities-for-people-with-asd/>

<http://www.tacanow.org/family-resources/developing-life-skills-chores/>

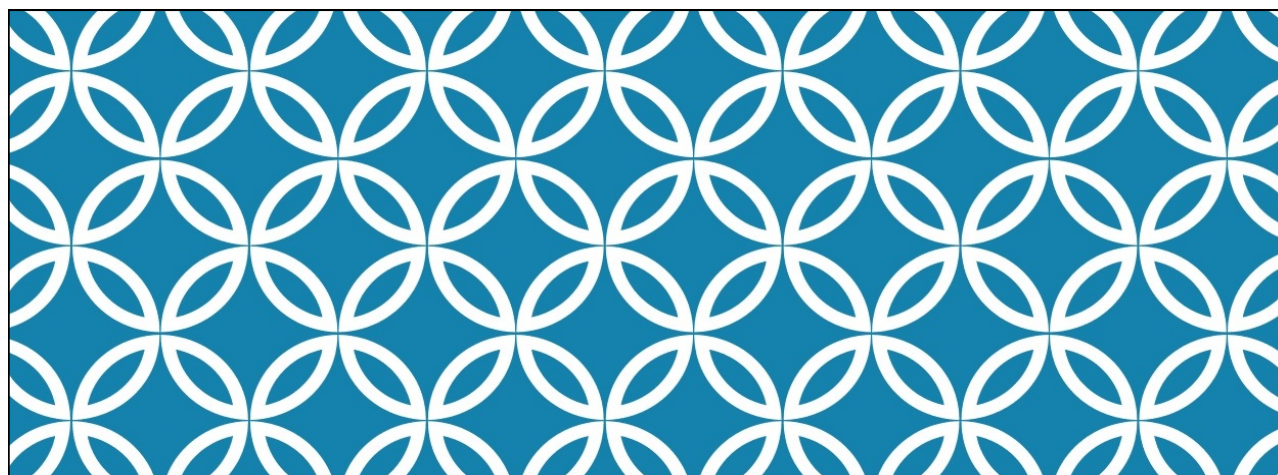
RECOMMENDED READING

<http://www.tacanow.org/family-resources/teens-with-asd-life-skills/>

<http://www.tacanow.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/Skills-Checklist.pdf>

<http://www.tacanow.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/How-to-get-your-ASD-kid-into-college-WEBINAR.pdf>

<http://www.tacanow.org/family-resources/teens-with-asd-transition-ieps/>



QUESTIONS?