



Professionalism

Activities

Employers want new workers to be responsible, ethical and team-oriented and to possess strong communication, interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Wrap these skills up together and you've got professionalism.

Professionalism

Throughout our working lives, most of us will hold many different jobs, each requiring a different level or set of skills. No matter the industry—from customer service to an office job to construction and the trades—all jobs have one thing in common: To succeed and move ahead, you need to demonstrate professionalism. Professionalism does not mean wearing a suit or carrying a briefcase; rather, it means conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability and excellence. It means communicating effectively and appropriately and always finding a way to be productive.

As the labor market becomes more and more competitive, job seekers will continually need to find ways to stand out from the crowd. There are few things an employer values more than employees who carry out their duties in a professional manner. Professionalism isn't one single thing; it's a combination of qualities. A professional employee arrives on time for work and manages time effectively. A professional worker takes responsibility for their own behavior and works effectively with others. High-quality work, honesty and integrity are also part of the package. Professional employees look clean and neat and dress appropriately for the job. Communicating effectively and appropriately for the workplace are also an essential part of professionalism.

Regardless of the job or industry, professionalism is easy to spot. On a construction site or in a trade, a professional worker will work hard and manage time effectively, including arriving and returning from breaks on time. A professional worker in a customer service setting will speak clearly and politely to customers and colleagues and have neat and clean appearance. In an office setting, an employee with professionalism will work productively with others and strive for a high standard and constant improvement. Professionalism may look slightly different in various settings, but the core elements are always the same. Appreciating and displaying professionalism will give young employees an edge as they begin their careers.

The activities in this section focus on each of the five individual soft skills we have presented throughout this publication (i.e., communication, enthusiasm/attitude, teamwork, networking and problem-solving/critical thinking) but in a broader framework. This is because professionalism, in and of itself, is not one skill but the blending and integration of a variety of skills. When professionalism is demonstrated, it tends to be thought of as the “entire package.”

Note to facilitators: *Professionalism is not an easy skill to develop, since it is made up of many different skills and tends to take years of experience to perfect. More than any of the other soft skills covered in this publication, professionalism is the one about which employers say, “I know it when I see it.” Recognizing that there is a population of young people who may struggle with one or more of the individual skills that make up professionalism, it is important to provide a safe environment for all youth who are determined to practice and reinforce these skills. Young people need an environment where they feel safe enough to make mistakes, learn from their mistakes and are provided the opportunity—and the encouragement—to try again. It is by offering a safe environment, along with encouragement, that all youth can succeed and develop their own personal style of professionalism.*

26. Diversity—and Stereotypes—in the Workplace

JUST THE FACTS: The face of the workplace is constantly evolving. For example, an office may have a mix of Gen Xers, Millennials and Gen Zs all working together. In addition to generational differences, differences in education, upbringing, social norms and values bring a variety of perspectives to the workplace that can benefit and strengthen an organization enormously. Yet, the same differences may create cultural gaps that can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or conflict. The purpose of this activity is for participants to discuss how to bridge generational, cultural and other diversity gaps to build a new standard for professionalism in the workplace.



Time

30 minutes



Materials

- Activity 26
- Flip chart, markers (optional)



Directions

The modern workforce is made up of people from many different cultures and generations. In fact, some workplaces include people ranging in age from 16 to 60 (or older), all working together. How can these different generations of workers get along when so often their values, ideas and experiences are so different?

Begin a discussion around these questions:

- What do you think the older generation thinks of the younger generation? Responses may include: lazy, lack of loyalty and respect, need for constant feedback, unrealistic goals (e.g., they expect to get to the top right away).
- What does your generation think of the older generations? Responses may include: inflexible, slow, set in their ways, technologically incompetent.
- Do you think these ideas are always true? Sometimes true? Never true? Why do you think each group may have these ideas about the other group?

Discuss the word *stereotype*. According to Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary, a stereotype is a standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude or uncritical judgment. When we stereotype groups of people, we depict all people within that group as having the same characteristics.

What causes these stereotypes? How can our society rid itself from grouping people by stereotype?

Divide the larger group into groups of no more than four. Each group will be using Activity 26 to discuss some of the situations that might create a “cultural divide” in the workplace. Discuss the small-group answers as a larger group.



Conclusion

Draw out a list of some of the strategies one can use on the job to ensure that everybody (not just different generations) works well together. Discuss some of the proactive steps one might take to avoid stereotyping on the job. Some examples might include:

- Look past stereotypes.
- Find common ground.
- Learn from each other.
- Listen to each other.
- Acknowledge and appreciate differences.
- Promote intergenerational discussions.



Journaling Activity

Think about a time when someone made a biased judgment about you or acted unfairly toward you because of your age, skin color, clothes you were wearing, gender, the way you speak, where you live, how much money your family has or some other reason. Why do you think those assumptions were made about you? How did that experience make you feel? How do you think you should have been treated in that situation?



Extension Activity

Connect with an employer who can talk about diversity in the workplace—its importance, its relevance and how most companies strive to eliminate stereotyping in the workplace and encourage diversity.

You may also wish to delve further into a discussion about groups that tend to face stereotyping and stigma frequently (such as women, people of color, people with disabilities, formerly incarcerated people, teen parents, certain cultures, etc.) and what a world without stigma and prejudice might look and feel like. Participants can work together to come up with a slogan or educational campaign for promoting a workforce that truly celebrates diversity and inclusion.

Activity 26.

Diversity—and Stereotypes—in the Workplace

The modern workforce is very diverse. People of different ages and backgrounds are working alongside one another more so today than ever before. The purpose of this activity is to consider how we perceive others, how others may perceive us and whether these perceptions paint an accurate picture of who we are. Consider the following situations:

- Terrence is 18 years old and just graduated high school with a 4.0 average. Terrence has an interview today for a summer internship. Terrence is a wheelchair user. Do you think the interviewer may avoid asking Terrence the same interview questions they would ask of someone who does not use a wheelchair? Why or why not?
- Marissa is in 10th grade. She comes from a family of mechanics. Her dad and three brothers are mechanics, and her grandfather owns a garage. Marissa has secretly wanted to work on cars but has been afraid to tell her family. She now wants to approach her grandfather for a summer job. Why do you think Marissa has kept her career dream a secret? How might she ask her grandfather for a summer job?
- Ruthie is 62 years old and looking for a job. She loves one of the local clothing stores and applied online for a job as a salesclerk. She has an interview today and is afraid the store manager will be much younger than her. Ruthie considers canceling the interview. Why do you think Ruthie is worried about her interview? What would you tell Ruthie?
- Sam is 20 years old, a sophomore in college and looking for an engineering internship. Sam has Asperger syndrome (a form of autism), and while he has an A average in his engineering courses, he recognizes the fact that he has trouble interacting socially and is worried about his interviews. Why do you think Sam is worried about his interviews? What advice would you give Sam?

27. Professional Work Attitudes

JUST THE FACTS: As an employee, your attitude at work contributes to your work environment and how you get along with your coworkers and supervisors. A positive attitude can improve morale and increase productivity for all. The purpose of this activity is to generate a discussion about workplace attitudes (of both supervisors and coworkers) and how these attitudes impact those around us.



Time

30 minutes



Materials

- Activity 27
- Flip chart, markers



Directions

Imagine it is your first day on a new job. Discuss what you would do to make a good impression on your coworkers and supervisors (make a list for all to see). Why might it be important to make a good impression on your first day?

Divide the larger group into smaller groups. Each group will work together to offer advice on an issue related to Justin, a stock clerk at the grocery store (see Activity 27). As the facilitator, read the story aloud, one section at a time. Pause after each section and ask each group to confer and share their collective answer/solution to the question at hand. Each group should be given the opportunity offer their advice first, followed by any additional advice from the other groups. You may choose to continue the discussion around the room.



Conclusion

Ask the group to describe Justin's work attitude. What do you think would be the most difficult part of being Justin's supervisor? How can a supervisor or boss affect your job performance? How can a coworker's attitude affect your job performance?



Journaling Activity

Imagine you are a supervisor on the job. What type of supervisor would you be? How would you deal with an employee who had a bad attitude? What are some of the skills you would like to develop so that one day you can be a great supervisor?



Extension Activity

Using the situation in Activity 27, have participants work in small groups to create a series of short skits or role-plays about both coworker and supervisor attitudes—and how those attitudes can affect the job performance of others.

Activity 27.

Professional Work Attitudes

Justin is a stock clerk at the local grocery store. Justin does only what he is told to do—no more and no less.

Question: *Does Justin have a good attitude toward work? Why or why not?*

One day, one of Justin's coworkers knocked over a product display. Boxes were scattered all over the floor. At the time, Justin was working close by. He ignored the scattered boxes and left his workstation to tell others what had happened.

Question: *If you were the coworker who knocked over the display, what would you have said to Justin?*

Later the same day, Justin was stocking shelves. The item he was stocking belonged in another part of the store. A coworker trying to help Justin told him he was making a mistake. Justin insisted he was right and started an argument.

Question: *Was it appropriate for Justin to argue with his coworker? What could Justin have done differently?*

Before Justin went home that night, he overheard a personal conversation between two coworkers and the supervisor. The next morning, Justin told everyone what he had heard. The entire grocery store was soon talking about what Justin told them.

Question: *Was Justin correct in discussing what he had overheard? Explain.*

When Justin's supervisor found out what had happened, she called Justin into her office for a conference.

Question: *What do you think was said to Justin?*

Question: *If you were one of Justin's coworkers, what advice would you give to him?*

Question: *If you were Justin's supervisor, what could you do to help him become a better employee?*

28. Professional Behavior

JUST THE FACTS: Part of understanding professionalism is figuring out how each of our individual actions impacts the actions and work of others. This activity is designed to give participants a quick way to rate themselves and their own professional actions. It also gives them the opportunity to reflect on the positive behaviors they demonstrate, and how these behaviors impact others.



Time

20 minutes



Materials

- One copy of Activity 28 for each participant



Directions

Using Activity 28, participants will rate themselves on workplace behaviors that are typically thought of as “professional” in the workplace. Participants should be encouraged to be honest, as this paper can be kept 100% confidential. The purpose of this activity is to generate discussion and thought related to the workplace soft skills often sought by employers.



Conclusion

Ask the group to share the skill they feel the proudest of. Without asking who wanted to improve, discuss some of the strategies people could use if they wanted to improve a few of these skills (select two or three). Ask the group if there are any additional skills missing from this list. What are they?



Journaling Activity

Do you think that the strengths and weaknesses you recognize in yourself are the same as those that others recognize in you? Why or why not? How do you think your behavior impacts those around you?



Extension Activity

Using additional copies of the activity sheet, have participants ask three people they know and trust to complete the form (about the participant). The forms can be completed anonymously if possible. Participants should take some time to determine whether the way they view themselves is similar or different from the way others view them. Discussion can then be generated as to why this may be. Participants should pay particular attention to the answers to the three questions asked at the bottom of the activity. How does this information impact the young person’s original answers to these questions?

Activity 28.

Professional Behavior

Here are some quick tips for being a good employee—and a good team player. Determine which of your skills are “on target” and which might need some improvement by choosing how consistently you exhibit them at work.

1. I get to work on time. If I am going to be late, I call and let my boss know.

Always Sometimes Never

2. I rarely miss work. If I am going to miss work, I let my boss know ahead of time (or call if I am sick).

Always Sometimes Never

3. I work as hard as I can.

Always Sometimes Never

4. I pay close attention to my work.

Always Sometimes Never

5. I do my work as I am told. If I am unable to do something or have questions, I ask my supervisor or coworkers.

Always Sometimes Never

6. I am friendly on the job.

Always Sometimes Never

7. I try to solve problems that come up.

Always Sometimes Never

8. I follow safety and company rules.

Always Sometimes Never

9. I use materials and equipment properly.

Always Sometimes Never

10. I behave professionally.

Always Sometimes Never

Now answer the questions below.

Based on the descriptions above, I am most proud of my ability to:

One skill I'd like to improve is:

Some strategies I might use to improve this skill are:

29. Is It “Professional” to Have Friends in the Workplace?

JUST THE FACTS: Working with friends can make work lots of fun. It may not always be the best situation, however. The purpose of this activity is to get participants to discuss the benefits and potential drawbacks to working on a job alongside friends.



Time

15 minutes



Materials

- One copy of Activity 29 for each person or each group
- White board or flip chart, markers (optional)



Directions

Ask the group to discuss (or list) some of the pros and cons of being on the job with friends. Divide the larger group into groups of three. Hand each group Activity 29. Discuss/define clique if necessary: a small group of people with shared interests or other features in common, who spend time together and do not readily allow others to join them.

Each group should read together and discuss Scenario #1. With the larger group, discuss what the lifeguards’ supervisor meant by “not letting close friendship get in the way of doing their jobs.” If you were the supervisor, what specific instructions would you give?

Next, the small groups should read together and discuss Scenario #2. Each group should come up with possible solutions for each of the four questions for consideration and be prepared to discuss with the larger group.



Conclusion

Come back together as a group to discuss the possible solutions. These may include, but need not be limited to:

- Too much socializing at work may result in poor production.
- Coworkers may feel alienated by the clique. They may be suspicious or jealous that they’re not included in the group.
- The three can maintain their friendship outside of work hours.
- It’s important to like people at work. It makes the job more enjoyable.

Use this opportunity to discuss cliques in general—and the problems that might arise (in different situations) because of them. Think about how cliques may be perceived by others. Ask if anyone has ever had the experience of being part of a clique or an outsider to a clique. If comfortable, ask each to share a story explaining what it felt like to be in either position.



Journaling Activity

What would be the benefits of working at a job with your best friend? What would be the drawbacks? Would you want to work at a job with your best friend? Why or why not?



Extension Activity

Participants can create a list of tips for:

- How to manage friends in the workplace
- How to develop friendships on the job
- What to do when your workplace friend turns into a “frenemy”

Activity 29.

Is It “Professional” to Have Friends in the Workplace?

SCENARIO #1:

LaToya, Rosa and Day were great friends. All three received their lifeguard certification together and were very excited to be working at the same community pool during the summer. The pool’s supervisor knew the three girls were all close friends and that this would be their first paid job. He wanted to be sure they recognized how fortunate they were to be able to work alongside their friends, but also needed to stress the importance of not letting their close friendship get in the way of doing their jobs.

If you were the supervisor, what specific instructions would you give to the girls?

SCENARIO #2:

Trent, Ben and Antonio all started working at a local home improvement store at the same time. They were in the same orientation group and liked each other immediately. Trent and Ben work in the customer service department and Antonio works in accounting. The three usually go out together after work on Friday nights, text each other during the day and try to eat lunch together several times a week if they can. Sometimes they even hang out on the weekends. While Trent, Ben and Antonio are lucky to have found such good friends at work, some of their coworkers are not as pleased about their close friendship.

Questions for Consideration

1. What is the danger of becoming too friendly with coworkers or socializing with them too much?
2. What objections might other coworkers have to this three-person clique? Why might some of these coworkers not be pleased?
3. How can the three maintain their friendship without damaging their relationships with their coworkers?
4. Why is it important to have friends at work?

30. Self-Reflection: Professional Problem-Solving at Its Best

JUST THE FACTS: Problem-solving is an important skill in work and life. Though there are many ways to solve problems, learning the skill of self-reflection as part of career decision-making can be extremely helpful. The purpose of this activity is to have participants see themselves in the future—and then reflect on how the decisions they made got them to where they are.



Time

30–40 minutes



Materials

- Paper (legal-size or chart paper may work best)
- Writing instrument of choice for each participant (pen, pencil, colored pencil, marker, etc.)



Directions

Ask the group what the term *self-reflection* means to them. [Solicit responses.] Self-reflection is a process of giving serious thought to our lives and our decisions by examining our character, our actions and our motives or motivations. Sometimes we make decisions and then reflect on our choices; other times we reflect before making choices.

Say something to the effect of: This exercise will get you thinking about your future. You will be asked to think about what you want to do with your future and define some life goals by working backward in time.

Ensure that each participant has a piece of paper and their writing instrument of choice.

Then say: I'm going to ask you a series of questions. You will need to think about these questions very carefully and then either draw or write your reactions on your paper. Your responses do not need to be in any particular order, but keep in mind that they will ultimately help you to tell or retell your own personal history.

Ok, here goes: Imagine you are in your final years of life. You are sitting in a rocking chair reflecting on the life you have lived. You are contemplating the answers to the following questions:

- Did you choose a career (or careers) that you enjoyed?
 - If so, how did that happen?
 - If not, why not?
- What accomplishments did you achieve?
- What accomplishments did you want to achieve but did not?
 - What held you back?
- Which activities did you do that you wanted to?
 - What encouraged you to do them?
- Which activities didn't you do that you would have liked to?
 - What held you back?

- If you had your life to do over again, what would you have done differently?
- What would you have kept the same?
- What things did you choose to do in your life that made you happy?
- Could you have done more of them?
 - Why didn't you?

Thinking through your answers while in this imaginary rocking chair can have tremendous power. By looking ahead to what you think your life will be, you open opportunities to take more control of your life right now.



Conclusion

Ask for volunteers to talk about their “rocking chair” life story. It may be helpful for you to have a previously completed picture or word collage you can use to share your personal rocking chair life story with the group first.

Discuss with the group how self-reflection activities have the power to help us make the personal decisions necessary to plan for our future.



Journaling Activity

Think about a time you needed to solve a personal problem and acted first, then reflected later. Now think about a time when you needed to solve a problem and you reflected first, then acted. Which way turned out the best for you? Why do you think this is so?



Extension Activity

Take self-reflection one step further and think about your future career from your current point of view. Read each of the following 10 questions (also see Activity 30) and take some time to think about your answers. Your responses today may not be the same as your responses tomorrow or next year, but the important thing is to keep asking yourself questions like these—and answering them.

Self-Reflection: 10 Questions to Move You Toward the Career of Your Dreams

1. How do you want your life to be?
2. What are the 10 most important work values to you?
3. What would you do if time, money nor experience were a concern?
4. What would you do or learn if you knew you couldn't fail?
5. What are you passionate about and energized by?
6. What are your current skills, abilities and talents?
7. What is preventing you from moving forward and achieving your goals, including any self-limiting beliefs about yourself?
8. What beliefs do you need now to achieve the life of your dreams?
9. What are the choices you have in front of you?
10. What will you commit to now to move forward?

Activity 30.

Self-Reflection: Professional Problem-Solving at Its Best

10 Questions to Move You Toward the Career of Your Dreams

QUESTION: *How do you want your life to be?*

CONSIDERATIONS: Think about what you would like to experience on a day-to-day basis. If you were 100% happy with your life, what would that look like? What do you want to be doing a year from now, or five years from now?

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What are the 10 most important work values to you?*

CONSIDERATIONS: Some examples are independence, helping others, challenge, advancement, risk-taking, change and variety, prestige, stability, making a difference, social status, leadership, making decisions, security, artistic creativity, self-expression, adventure/excitement, public contact, mental stimulation, travel, working alone, etc.

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What would you do if time, money nor experience were a concern?*

CONSIDERATIONS: After you've traveled, bought your family a house and car, etc., what would you do next if there were no limits?

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What would you do or learn if you knew you couldn't fail?*

CONSIDERATIONS: Put fear to one side and allow your imagination to work without restriction. Would you start a brand-new career or start your own business?

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What are you passionate about and energized by?*

CONSIDERATIONS: What do you love doing? What could you talk about for hours? What would other people you know say if I asked them this question about you?

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What are your current skills, abilities and talents?*

CONSIDERATIONS: If you struggle to answer this, as many people do, ask three significant people in your life what they think are your skills and talents. You may be surprised!

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What is preventing you from moving forward and achieving your goals, including any self-limiting beliefs about yourself?*

CONSIDERATIONS: You need to identify anything that is holding you back. It may be a real limitation (e.g., you don't have the necessary qualifications) or it may be a mental hurdle (e.g., you don't believe you can succeed). Whatever it is, identify it and deal with it (e.g., take a course to earn a qualification or credential, read a book about building self-esteem or ask a teacher or counselor to help you).

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What beliefs do you need now to achieve the life of your dreams?*

CONSIDERATIONS: In order for you to have your perfect career, what would you have to believe about yourself to make that a reality (e.g., “I have achieved many great things in my life, and I deserve to have the career of my dreams.”)

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What are the choices you have in front of you?*

CONSIDERATIONS: Brainstorm all your possible choices. Don’t start to evaluate them at this stage, just get them all onto paper.

ANSWER:

QUESTION: *What will you commit to now to move forward?*

CONSIDERATIONS: Now evaluate all your options and decide on a path to take. Create an action plan of all the steps you’ll need to go through to achieve your goal and, if necessary, get support from an adult you trust.

ANSWER:

Source: Louise A. Newson

A Word About Social Networking

The internet and social media have significantly changed the way our society communicates, connects and does business. Generations of young people have never known a world without the internet—something that older folks must put into context when they think about how to communicate with others, both at work and at home. According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project, more than 93% of teens (ages 12 to 17) and young adults (ages 18 to 29) in the United States use the internet regularly, and more than 70% use social media. Furthermore, among teens who use the internet, 62% use it to get news about current events and politics, 48% use it to make purchases and 31% use it to get health, nutrition and physical fitness information.

Social media presents both opportunities and risks. What follows is a cursory breakdown of both, followed by a series of lesson plans specifically targeting online safety.

ADVANTAGES OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

- **Social skills.** Social media allows people to keep up with current friends and make new ones. When used in a healthy way, social media can increase self-esteem and help someone feel less isolated.
- **Independence and self-expression.** Creating content allows people to express themselves and share their interests. They can become part of an online community of people with similar interests—or discover new ones.
- **Digital competence.** Technology is evolving faster than ever. Young people need to be able to adapt to and understand new technologies (or new applications of existing technologies) to ensure that they can use social media and consume other online content with sophistication, smarts and safety.
- **Educational development.** Young adults in secondary and postsecondary education will often use social media to discuss schoolwork, share discussions about assignments and schedule school-related events.
- **Research.** Young adults can gather information about topics that are hard to discuss with others, such as drug use and sexual health.
- **Additional advantages for youth with disabilities.** Social media can open up a new world of communication, integration and community participation. Young adults can express themselves, including their thoughts and feelings, more easily and without fear of the rejection or stigma they may experience in real life. Research also suggests that these young adults may be more willing to ask for help online than in face-to-face situations. Furthermore, young adults who experience difficulty with social skills can socialize anonymously online, experiment with different personas and practice initiating and maintaining online friendships. They can also take the time they need to respond to others, reviewing and editing communications before sending them. Ultimately, these skills may carry over into “real life” and give youth a new sense of courage to make and maintain friendships in everyday life.

RISKS OF SOCIAL MEDIA:

- **Sharing one’s personal information with the wrong crowd.** Young adults need to be aware that information shared online could also put them at risk of victimization. People looking to do harm could use their shared content to identify them or gain their trust. They can also be deceptive by pretending to know a young person. Encourage young people to privatize their online social media accounts (such as Instagram and TikTok).
- **Bullying.** Cyberbullying can be relentless and devastating and it may spill over to offline bullying if victims are located. Cyberbullying can cause significant emotional harm resulting in depression, anger, school avoidance, violence and suicide.
- **The permanence of online profiles.** Once information has been shared on the internet, it’s out there forever! Deleting information that others have already viewed and shared is nearly impossible. Inappropriate pictures, captions and comments could come back to haunt youth as they start applying to colleges or looking for jobs.
- **Disclosure.** People tend to be far bolder and less discretionary in their behavior online versus in person. This means there is a greater risk of giving out information—including the presence of a disability—that they might not have wanted to disclose otherwise.
- **Additional potential risks for youth with disabilities.** Social media can further isolate those who already feel isolated or excluded and may ultimately lead to loneliness or an increased risk of depression. In addition, for young adults with disabilities, who must make important life decisions regarding the disclosure of their disability (if, how, when, to whom), activity on social media can have unintended consequences. By posting pictures or becoming fans of disability support groups, for example, they may end up disclosing information unintentionally. While this may or may not be an issue, it makes the “disclosure” discussion even more important. For more information on disability disclosure, see “The 411 on disability disclosure: A workbook for youth with disabilities” (available online at thinkcollege.net/resource/transition-planning/411-disability-disclosure) and “Cyber Disclosure for Youth with Disabilities” (available online at fndusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Cyber-Disclosure-for-Youth-with-Disabilities.pdf).

The process of empowering youth to make safe and responsible decisions online is not unlike teaching them to cross the street safely. First, they hold hands with an adult in the crosswalk. Then, they gain a little more independence and can be watched from afar. Eventually, they become capable of making safe and responsible decisions on their own. Educating youth about social media use must be grounded in proper knowledge, skills and values, so that eventually they can be expected to exercise good judgment independently.

Cyber Resource: CyberSmart!

CyberSmart! is a free curriculum and part of Common Sense Media’s education programs. Common Sense will be updating the CyberSmart! lesson plans and adding video, interactive components, and a rich complement of parent resources to create an integrated K-12 Digital Literacy and Citizenship curriculum.

Who Are You Online?

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/lesson/who-are-you-online>

What does it actually mean to “be yourself” or to “be real”? Those are deep thoughts for any middle schooler. For kids today, these questions matter online, too. Help your students explore why some people create different or alternate personas for themselves online and on social media.

Chatting and Red Flags

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/lesson/chatting-and-red-flags>

Having conversations online, without the benefit of nonverbal cues or seeing people’s faces, can be awkward and sometimes even risky—with drawbacks from simple misunderstandings to manipulation or inappropriate messages. Help students navigate and avoid these situations before they go too far.

The Power of Digital Footprints

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/lesson/the-power-of-digital-footprints>

Our digital footprints can impact our future. What others find about us online shapes how they see us or feel about us. Help your students learn about their digital footprint and the steps they can take to shape what others find and see about them online.

Digital Drama Unplugged

<https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship/lesson/digital-drama-unplugged>

Miscommunication is a common occurrence online and on social media. Plus, being behind a screen makes it easier to say things they wouldn’t say in person. So how do we help students avoid the pitfalls of digital drama? Help them learn tips on avoiding online drama in the first place and de-escalating drama when it happens.

And From the Office of Disability Employment Policy:

Cyber Disclosure for Youth with Disabilities

[fndusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Cyber-Disclosure-for-Youth-with-Disabilities.pdf](https://www.fndusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Cyber-Disclosure-for-Youth-with-Disabilities.pdf)

A supplement to “The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities,” this publication focuses on the advances in technology that have changed what youth need to know about disability disclosure.

Additional Resources for Youth with Disabilities

Career Planning Begins with Assessment: A Guide for Professionals Serving Youth with Educational and Career Development Challenges

files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED533383.pdf

This guide serves as a resource for multiple audiences within the workforce development system. Youth service professionals will find information on selecting career-related assessments and determining when to refer youth for additional assessment, and additional information on accommodations, legal issues and ethical considerations. Administrators and policymakers will find information on the development of practical and effective policies, collaboration among programs, and interagency assessment systems.

The 411 on Disability Disclosure

thinkcollege.net/sites/default/files/files/resources/411_Disability_Disclosure_complete.pdf

This workbook is designed for youth and the adults who work with them. It helps young people make informed decisions about whether to disclose their disability—a deeply personal decision that differs from one person to another—and how disclosure may impact their education, employment and social life.

The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Families, Educators, Youth Service Professionals and Adult Allies Who Care About Youth with Disabilities

capeyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2021/05/Adult-The_411_On_Disability_Disclosure_for_Adults.pdf

This adult-focused workbook is a companion to “The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities” (see above). It is written for adults supporting youth with disabilities and introduces numerous examples of young people grappling with the question of disclosure.

JAN: The Job Accommodation Network

askjan.org

JAN is the leading source of free, expert and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. Working toward practical solutions that benefit both employer and employee, JAN helps people with disabilities enhance their employability, and shows employers how to capitalize on the value and talent that people with disabilities add to the workplace.

The Center for Advancing Policy on Employment for Youth (CAPE-Youth)

<https://capeyouth.org/>

The Center for Advancing Policy on Employment for Youth (CAPE-Youth) is a collaboration between the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy, The Council of State Governments, and the K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability at Cornell University. CAPE-Youth was created in 2019 by the Department of Labor. It seeks to improve employment outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities by helping states build capacity in their youth service delivery and workforce systems.

Making the Move to Manage Your Own Personal Assistance Services: A Toolkit for Youth with Disabilities Transitioning to Adulthood

pueblo.gpo.gov/CAARNG/ODEP/PDF/ODEP051.pdf

This guide assists youth in strengthening some of skills that are essential for successfully managing their own personal assistance services: effective communication, time-management, working with others and establishing professional relationships. Such skills are key not only to enhancing independence, but also to thriving in the workplace and growing professionally.

ODEP: Guideposts for Success

dol.gov/agencies/odep/program-areas/individuals/youth/guide

Developed by ODEP, in collaboration with NCWD/Youth, *Guideposts for Success* reflects the most robust research on the key educational and career development interventions that can make a positive difference in the lives of all youth, including youth with disabilities.

PACER Center

pacer.org

PACER Center is a training and information center for parents and families of people with disabilities, from birth through age 21. Located in Minneapolis, the center serves families in Minnesota and across the nation. Parents can find publications, workshops and other resources to help them make decisions about education, vocational training, employment and other services for their children with disabilities. PACER designs materials for parents and families, but also educators and other professionals who work with students with or without disabilities.

Universal Design for Learning

cast.org/impact/universal-design-for-learning-udl

Universal design for learning (UDL) is a set of principles for curriculum development that gives all individuals equal opportunities to learn. UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructional goals, methods, materials and assessments that work for everyone using flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs, rather than a single, one-size-fits-all solution. UDL implementation guidelines for educators can be found at udlguidelines.cast.org.

In Their Own Words

The final version of this publication was a collaborative effort by the Office of Disability Employment Policy; Concepts, Inc.; and the youth and facilitators of seven different youth programs across the country. Careful time and attention were taken to ensure that youth, ages 14 to 21, from all different backgrounds, had the opportunity to experience and contribute to the Soft Skills pilot activities over a five-week period. Changes were made to the original manuscript, based on both youth and facilitator feedback. Here is what our youth participants and program facilitators had to say:

Youth Participants

*Interview in 2 hours, I need to get ready
But I'm so nervous, my hands ain't steady
Body got shivers, what should I do
Grabbed my notebook and started to skim through
Remember eye contact, firm handshake
Take no calls, put phone on vibrate
Speak clear, big smiles, don't show no fear
Give the boss good reasons for working here
Don't forget collared shirt, black slacks and low heels
Turns out I got the job
THANKS SOFT SKILLS
—J'Laan H.*

Soft skills make a difference because they will help you deal with situations in everyday life, such as job interviews, getting along with others, and just communication with people. Soft skills also help you find yourself...and really make a difference because they help you to think critically.

—RaeMisha Sierra

When students are writing or talking in class or at an interview, they sound like they are on the streets talking to a friend. Who would want to hire someone like that? And that's where I feel soft skills should come in for young people. [We] never learn about these things. I feel [that] the younger people are when they learn these skills, as they get older it won't be a problem. —Jessica Alexis

Be open-minded because if you just go with [these activities], you can learn a lot about being successful in the workplace. —Giselle Padilla

I can't think of just one thing that we did because I enjoyed everything. —LaShondra Neely It was an experience going beyond my dreams. —Brandon Pursley

I was putting things in my text messages that I shouldn't have, and I learned about it during the ODEP project. It was fun because I didn't know that people text that way. —Shionte Davis

I liked the hands on. Building the spaghetti tower was the best. —Chavario McQuay

I liked the projects because I learned how to be team leader. —Jasmine Turner

I learned so many new things. —Rayalshia Daniels

The journals help you work on a better you. —Youth participant

I like Soft Skills because I got to do activities with my classmates and teacher. —Rachael Washington

I liked Soft Skills because it gave me an opportunity to interact and engage with my peers.

—Michael Francis

My favorite activity was the one that talked about failures. It was interesting to learn about how Mickey Mouse was created. —Justine Thomas

How I felt about Soft Skills is GREAT! It teaches people how to get along with each other. My favorite activity was when we had to build the tallest structures made out of marshmallows. —Troy Booker

I liked the Soft Skills program. My favorite activity was acting out the skits. —Tyrone Hunter

Soft Skills had different activities to help you talk more about how you feel. —Brittany Prue

Facilitators

These activities were great in getting students to think about how they would react or respond to various situations that could arise in the workplace. It also helped them to recognize that a job can entail a lot more than just showing up. They began to recognize that teamwork, attitude, communication, networking and problem-solving and critical thinking are all crucial components to success, both in the workplace and outside of the workplace. —Jamie Youngblood, Denver, Colo.

The ODEP pilot program was one of the best projects that we have participated in. The students learned so many skills while developing team building and leadership skills through fun-filled activities. The activities addressed areas that everyone could benefit from, while providing new, exciting ideas. —Mary Coody, Madison, Fla.

I was delighted to hear about the curriculum [and to] see how much the students were enjoying the program. It was evident by their conversations that they were learning a lot about how to apply the skills to their everyday lives. —Dr. Dierdre Williams, Washington, D.C.

I have not enjoyed teaching a program this much in my over 25 years of working with students that have an intellectual disability. The Soft Skills curriculum is a marvelous teaching tool that is able to reach all students wherever they may be in their learning process. —Lisa Haynes, Washington, D.C.

I think that the students really enjoyed the ODEP pilot program. The students responded well to the group activities, and I found [the program] to be very educational and informative. —Jean James, Madison, Fla.

I found the activities to be very energizing and adaptive for any age group. —Mike Radel, Madison, Fla.

We finished the workshop with a lighthearted activity called A Super Ball and a Raw Egg. Each student had the opportunity to throw a bouncy ball and a raw egg at a giant bull's-eye drawn on a vinyl table cover. After observing the effects on the objects being thrown and the wall covered by the tablecloth, we asked the students if they knew what this symbolized in relation to their outlook on life. "Are you a raw egg or a bouncy ball?" we asked them. When you hit a barrier in your plans, do you shatter? Or do you bounce back stronger and faster than ever? Our students were still debating the meaning of the activity as we cleaned up the eggshells and ended the workshop. An hour and half had never flown by so quickly! We knew it was one of the best workshops Gainesville Area HS/HT has had this year! —Stephanie Weeks, Gainesville, Fla.

At first the students were a little skeptical about the activities and the corresponding paperwork [associated with the pilot program], but once I explained that they had the opportunity to give their input for a publication that will be distributed across the nation, they were very excited and eager to tell me what they thought! They really impressed me with their feedback (about what they liked and did not like). We enjoyed the activities so much, that before we knew it, we had gone over our allotted workshop time. Gainesville HS/HT is excited to be involved in this special opportunity and we look forward to completing the rest of the activities with our students! —Mellissa Merrill, Gainesville, Fla.

The Soft Skills [activities] are fabulous. They cover the five areas that are desperately needed in today's workforce. Soft skills used to be taught at home; however, in today's world, it is our obligation to teach our young folk what is needed to succeed in life and in work, and Soft Skills fits the bill.
—Virginia Dever, Louisville, Ky.

The [Life Is Full of Hard Knocks] lesson provided our students with the opportunity to see firsthand that even those who are now viewed as highly successful people were once in a tough space as well.
—Facilitator, R.I.

The interview role-play [in Activity 9] allowed students to see what a good interview looked like versus one that needed some critiquing. This particular activity was interactive and held the students' attention the entire time. It also generated conversation that kept the group thinking while having a good time.
—Facilitator, R.I.

As the facilitator of the activities, they were definitely very useful and meaningful because they truly educated and informed students in a way that helped them take personal responsibility for their skills or lack thereof, instead of an adult telling them what they need to do or know. —Facilitator

From the exploring of their attitudes and how they respond to instruction and authority, to communication styles, teamwork and networking, these activities gave [participants] some real-life, practical experiences that they could learn from—but presented in a way that was fun and educational. I think the communication activities were really insightful because students had to explore their forms of communication and what messages they could be sending that are not always intentional. —Facilitator

I enjoyed the activities on listening and asking questions because this showed [participants] that it was okay to ask a question, which they seldom don't want to do because they are afraid of looking dumb. This activity showed them the necessity of using this skill in the workplace and how impactful it could be to their success on the job. —Facilitator

The [Life Is Full of Hard Knocks] activities were very helpful and insightful because students could see that the road to success is not an easy climb, that everyone starts at the bottom and that it takes time and plenty of failures before you make it, but that's okay, as long as you don't quit. —Facilitator

Overall, I think the students really learned a lot and were challenged by exploring and addressing skills and styles of communicating that could not be articulated or explained, but now have meaning and comprehension that will help them be more successful in the workplace—because keeping a job is just as successful as getting one. —Victoria West, Renton, Wash.

It was really great to see how the students began the class with one outlook, and at the end of the sessions, I could see how their perceptions had changed. Many of them believed that once they interviewed for a position and obtained the job that they no longer had to make themselves presentable. —Facilitator

A lot of [students] didn't realize that they have been networking or that networking was an important component when trying to get ahead. Many of the group activities were eye-openers for the students. They all loved the Super Ball and a Raw Egg activity. I think that particular session stood out to them. They learned that when things happen it's okay to fall apart, but it is more important to get back up and learn and live!!! —Kiana Davis, Renton, Wash.