



INDEPENDENT LIVING

LIVING ON YOUR OWN



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Every day comes with choices. You may decide what to have for lunch, the people you want to hang out with after school, or what XBOX game to play next. As you get older, those choices get bigger, like where you want to live, what job you want, and who you want to be. Up to this point many choices about the direction of your life have been made by your parent or guardian. As you get closer to becoming an adult, it is important to set goals for yourself so that you can live an independent life. You might feel anxious or scared about taking more control over your life and that's okay. If you have a disability or special health care need, there are resources out there that can help you live a fulfilling life and be successful. By learning more about who you are and what you want, you can create the life you imagine for yourself because Talent Knows No Limits!

INTRODUCTION TO INDEPENDENT LIVING



As a person with a disability you have more opportunities than you might think. People with disabilities are living in their own homes, graduating from college, working at good jobs, getting married, and having children. This is due in large part to laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act which prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities. But this did not happen overnight. There was a time when people with disabilities did not have the opportunities that exist now. It took a movement of mostly young people (like you!) with disabilities to change society's perception of people with disabilities and to pass laws that make your independence possible.

One example of a young person with a disability who changed the world is Ed Roberts. When Ed was a child he contracted polio, which was a very common disease in the 1950s. Ed used a wheelchair and also spent a large part of his life in an iron lung, which was a machine that helped him breathe. Despite his physical challenges, Ed excelled in school and dreamed of attending UC Berkeley for college. However, when Ed applied to the university he was told that because of the severity of his disability the university did not want him there. Ed fought this and won. When Ed saw how inaccessible the university was to students with disabilities he decided to change things. He and a few other students in wheelchairs formed a group called The Rolling Quads and started the very first Disabled Student Services Program (DSSP) on a college campus. Today almost every college and university in the country has a disabled student services program and they help with things like personal care attendant referral, getting in-class accommodations, and finding accessible housing on or around campus. To locate the DSSP office of a college or university you are interested in, click the Student Services link on their homepage.



After Ed and the other Rolling Quads created the Disabled Student Services Program, they realized that the community surrounding the Berkeley campus was not very welcoming and accessible to people with disabilities either. There were no curb cuts and the buses were not equipped with lifts. Also, many residents with disabilities struggled to live in their own homes because they could not find an attendant to help them with their basic living needs like bathing and dressing. In response, Ed and his friends founded the Berkeley Center for Independent Living in 1973. The purpose of the center was to be a resource for people with disabilities in the community. Today there are 29 centers for independent living (CILs) in the state of California. CILs provide six core services: information and referral, peer support, advocacy, independent living skills training, personal attendant referral, and housing assistance (to find the CIL near you, visit www.cfilc.org).

Ed's story is not unlike your story. Most of you have had to face barriers and challenges to get where you are today. For example, you may have had difficulty getting the accommodations you needed in school, or maybe someone told you that you would not be able to achieve your goals because you have a disability. But you got through those times with the help of others, such as your parents or supportive teachers. You will no doubt face difficult times on your way to becoming an adult, but you do not have to go through that alone. Independence does not mean you know all the answers or do everything yourself; it means seeking out resources to reach your goals and being in control of how you use them.

LIVING WITH A DISABILITY



Now that you are on your way to becoming an adult, you have a lot on your plate. Between school, relationships, and after school activities, you sometimes wonder how to juggle everything. As your life changes, so does the way you feel about and manage your disability. Some of you may be uncomfortable talking about your disability to others because you just want to fit in and be “normal”. Some of you may wish that you did not have a disability and could do some of the things your friends can do. You have a right to the way you feel, but sometimes not communicating your feelings and needs about your disability can get in the way of becoming independent.

The way you think about your disability may have a lot to do with the society in which you grew up. Lets talk about two of the most common ways disability is viewed in society and the differences between them. The first way of looking at disability is called the medical model. According to the medical model, a disability is a medical condition that must be cured. If a person has a disability they must be “fixed” in order to be a whole person. The second way of looking at disability is called the social model. Those who follow the social model of disability believe that the problem is not with the disability itself but with the way society views people with disabilities. They see having a disability as a natural part of the human experience and something which to be proud.



DISABILITY WORKSHEET

How do I feel about being a person with a disability?

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Do I feel comfortable talking about my disability with others?

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Do I think having a disability is something of which to be proud?

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Who in my life can I trust when I need to talk about my disability?

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What are some aspects of living with a disability where I struggle? What resources are out there to help me through those struggles?

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What are some activities that I want to do that I think I cannot do? Is there another way of doing the activity that would work for me?

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What are some things I can do that my friends cannot do?

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Suggestions For Further Reading About Disability:

Shapiro, Joseph No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement, Times Books, ©1994

Fleischer, Doris & Zames, Frieda The Disability Rights Movement: From Charity to Confrontation, Temple Univ, ©2001

Charlton, James Nothing About Us, Without Us, University of California Press, Berkeley, ©1998

PARENT'S SECTION

----- TIPS FOR PARENTS

You have been there for your child since the day they were born. You have no doubt been their biggest advocate, securing their IEP accommodations, fighting for needed services, equipment, or benefits. Now that your child is heading toward adulthood you are no doubt experiencing a mix of relief, joy, and apprehension. It can be hard to let go.

- What are some of the things you do for your child that they could be doing on their own?
- What are some of the ways that you can help your child feel empowered to manage their own life?





SETTING GOALS

1. What would I like to be doing right after I graduate from high school?

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2. Where do I see myself in five years?

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3. List the names of people and organizations that can help you set and reach those goals. (i.e. parents, teachers, employment specialists).

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Now that you have set some goals and identified people who can help you achieve them, it may help to create a timeline of things you need to do to get where you want to go. This can be in any format you wish- you may want to draw it, make a list, or just write it out.



KNOWLEDGE IS KEY

HOUSING

You don't need to have all the answers right now. What's most important is knowing where to get the information you need to live as independently as possible. Below are some key resources on topics which can help you reach your independent living goals.

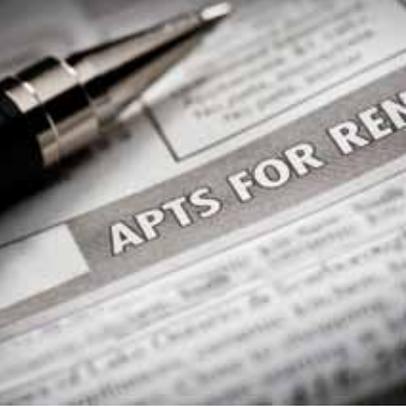
Housing

As you finish high school, you may start to think about living on your own. Housing is a basic need and one of the first things you will want to think about. There are many different living situations, and it is up to you to choose what is right for you.

This guide can provide answers to your questions:

- What kind of home do you want to live in?
 - Rent your own apartment
 - Rent an apartment with one or more people
 - Buy a house or condominium (condo)
 - Live in a group home
 - Live with your parents, other relatives or guardian
- What kind of access or accommodations do you need?
 - No steps
 - Accessible bathroom with roll-in shower
 - Visual doorbell and fire alarm
 - Assistive technology, such as telephone or alarm clock
- How will you pay for it?
 - A job
 - Income from SSI or other benefits
 - Help from your parents or others
 - Subsidized housing
 - Who can you go to for help?
 - Your local independent living center
(see section on Independent Living Centers)
 - Your local Regional Center (see section on Regional Centers)





Finding Affordable Housing To Rent

Every community has some apartments and houses that are called “affordable” housing. That means that it costs less to live there than it costs in an average apartment or house in that area. You can get a listing of affordable housing in your community (see below). You can also ask apartment managers if they have affordable housing; it never hurts to ask!

California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) - A state agency that can provide you with a list of affordable rental housing developments, organized by county: <http://www.hcd.ca.gov/fa/affordable-housing.html>

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) - A federal (national) agency that supports access to affordable housing organized by city, county, or zip code, type of apartment, and number of bedrooms: <http://www.hud.gov/apps/section8/step2.cfm?state=CA.California>

Centers for Independent Living These centers can provide you with phone numbers and addresses for affordable apartment complexes in your area, they can help you fill out rental applications, and they can help you identify places that are accessible to you. See section below on “Independent Living Centers” for more information, and how to find a center near you.

Housing Choice / Section 8 Vouchers - Often called Section 8 vouchers, these coupons can help you pay for an apartment. This is a program of the federal government designed to assist people with very low incomes to get housing. A participant is free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program. With the voucher, you usually pay about 30% of the rent, and the government will pay the rest of your rent directly to the landlord.

Unfortunately, there are not nearly as many Housing Choice vouchers as there are people who need them, so it is hard to get a voucher. If you are interested, you should contact your local Public Housing Agency as soon as possible to apply. You will probably need to get on the waiting list. If the waiting list is closed, check in regularly to find out when the waiting list opens up. You may also check Public Housing Agencies in other cities and counties near where you would like to live, to see if you can get on their waiting list sooner.

Housing Choice vouchers are run by your local Public Housing Agency (Housing Authority). To find yours, go to: <http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/pha/contacts/>





Basics to Remember About Renting a House or Apartment

- Read your lease before you sign it and before you give anyone rent money or a deposit!
- Be sure to pay your rent on time every month.
- Keep your apartment clean and report any problems to your landlord immediately.
- Get a copy of your lease and any other documents.
- Pay by check or get a copy of your receipts.
- If you have any problems, put them in writing and keep a copy for yourself.
- For more tips on renting a house or apartment, visit:
<http://www.nolo.com/article.cfm/pg/1/objectId/CAF4533E-3997-4D94-ABC6A2AD3AA63300/catId/346AF4A6-12EE-431F-AB312758B5211CD5/104/138/139/ART/>

Finding Roommates

A great way to save money on rent is to find roommates that you might feel comfortable living with. You may rent a room from someone, or share a large place with many roommates. Whatever you decide, it is important to have a written agreement in place, showing how much each person will pay for rent and what the expectations are for sharing utilities (i.e. electricity, cable, internet, etc.).

Good places to look for roommates:

- Look at shared housing for available rooms, or post your own ad for a roommate at <http://www.craigslist.org>:
- Your local college or community colleges have bulletin boards or databases of roommates or rooms
- Your local newspaper: check for room listings.



Buying a Home

Rather than spending your money on rent every month, buying a home is a great chance for you to invest your money in something that will likely gain value and will allow you to have something of your own. However, keep in mind that owning a home is a big responsibility. Not only will you have to pay a monthly mortgage, you will also be responsible for all repairs to the house. There are many different programs to help you get a home, such as down payment assistance programs and first-time homebuyer programs. You can ask your local independent living center how to find them. One good example is the HomeChoice Program, which is a program for people with disabilities that makes it more affordable to buy a home, by providing a low interest rate loan. In California, check out the HomeChoice Program at: <http://guildca.com/HomeChoice.html>

In addition to providing assistance with your rent, you can also pay for your home with a Section 8 voucher. Go to your local Public Housing Agency (see information above) to get a voucher, and talk to them about using it to buy a home.

Housing Rights

The Fair Housing Act makes it illegal to discriminate in any type of housing related transaction on the basis of race, sex, religion, national origin, color, if you have children under the age of 18, or if you are disabled. In the state of California it is also illegal to discriminate against anyone because of marital status, ancestry, sexual orientation, source of income and arbitrary reasons. Check your state and local laws.

That means that a landlord cannot refuse to rent to you because of your disability, your race or ethnicity, your sexual orientation, or other factors.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

----- ABOUT RENTER/TENANT RIGHTS:

Is my landlord required to make my place accessible?

No. Your landlord is not required to put in a ramp, a visual doorbell, or any other modifications. BUT your landlord does have to allow YOU to make changes, as long as you agree to change things back when you move out.

How much can a landlord legally raise the rent?

In California, there is no maximum amount for rent increases. But if you sign a lease for more than 30 days (such as a 1-year lease), your rent cannot be increased during the term of the lease.

What happens if I can't pay the rent?

Before you move in to a place, make sure that you will be able to pay the rent on time every month. If something happens, like you lose your job and can't pay the rent, call your local independent living center or local fair housing agency to see if you can get one-time assistance, and make a plan to get the rent paid the next month. If you don't pay your rent, your landlord can evict you – kick you out. You don't want an eviction on your record, because it can make it harder for you to rent another apartment.

What if my landlord won't make repairs?

Your landlord is required to keep the basics working: hot and cold running water, heat, electricity, and adequate trash. If you request a repair and nothing happens, write a letter to your landlord, and keep a copy for yourself. If still nothing happens, go to your local fair housing agency or independent living center. They can show you what actions to take to get your apartment fixed.

If you believe you have been discriminated against, contact your local fair housing or legal services agency. Check this website to find an agency close to you: <http://www.housingrights.org/yourrights/nationalcontacts.htm>

For a comprehensive guide on California renters'/tenants' rights and responsibilities, go to:

<http://www.housingrights.org/pdfs/catenantwithcompanion.pdf> or call the California Department of Consumer Affairs at 800-952-5210.

Additional Housing Resources

Tips on getting assistance to pay for energy bills

If you have special heating or cooling needs related to your medical condition, energy companies often may provide a discount on your bill. Check with your energy provider to see if they offer a medical discount.

LIHEAP (Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program): <http://liheap.ncat.org/profiles/California.htm>



PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANCE

A Personal Assistant (PA, sometimes called a personal care attendant or PCA) supports people with disabilities to live more independent lives. A PA works directly for and is employed by the individual with a disability. The role of a personal assistant is to fill in the gaps so that the person with a disability can do what everyone else does. They can provide you assistance with the dressing, transferring, preparing meals, bathing, running errands, etc.

You can also use your personal assistance in the workplace:

Personal care-related assistance, such as help in the restroom or at lunch breaks.

Job-related assistance includes tasks such as help with reading, interpreting, lifting or reaching work materials, and travel assistance between work sites.

Paying for Personal Assistance

The In-Home Supportive Services (IHSS) Program provides funding for personal assistance services to help people with disabilities live safely in their own home. To qualify for IHSS, you must also be eligible for Medi-Cal. To apply for In-Home Supportive Services, you can request an application from your local county welfare office. To find the office nearest you, please go to the following website and click on county offices: www.dss.cahwnet.gov/cdssweb/pg139

Finding PAs –

Some people with disabilities rely on their family or friends for the personal care assistance. Some people with disabilities decide to hire individuals who are not their family or friends. You can find good PAs a number of different ways, including Centers for Independent Living, IHSS registries, placing an advertisement in your local paper, or posting an advertisement on an online bulletin board (such as www.craigslist.org). Since you will likely be the main person hiring, training, and managing your PA, it is important to have good communication with your PA.





Personal Assistance Services (PAS) can be crucial to your ability to live independently. Whether you are new to PAS or have been using them for years, you may have questions or need more information. For more information on how to have good communication, tips on how to hire a personal assistant, and much more, take a look at the following resources

The Personal Assistance Informational Manual is a useful guide for both users of personal assistance and for those providing personal assistance. You can download the manual by going to the following website: http://www.southernct.edu/drc/uploads/textWidget/wysiwyg/documents/PA_Informational_Manual.doc

For more information on personal assistance services including personal assistance in the workplace, assistive technology, independent living, disability rights and much more; Please visit the following website: http://www.pascenter.org/pas_users/index.php

You can find a list of IHSS providers in your area by visiting the IHSS public authority website at: <http://www.capaihss.org/contactcounty.htm>



TRANSPORTATION

If you do not have the ability to drive, you have many options! If you are seeking to be more independent, you can use public transportation (buses, light rail etc.). There are agencies such as Department of Rehabilitation, and the Regional Centers that can provide you with a public transportation pass and training on how to use the public transportation system. Also, most counties have companies which provide door-to-door transportation services for people with disabilities. Sometimes called Paratransit, these services can be found by contacting your local Department of Transportation. Once you begin to use these services you will find that getting around on your own is a huge step in becoming more independent!

Transportation Resources:

Federal Transit Administration: www.fta.dot.gov/ada

United States Department of Justice (useful when filing a transportation complaint): www.ada.gov

Disability Rights and Education Defense Fund: www.dredf.org

Paratransit Eligibility: http://www.dredf.org/transportation/paratransit_eligibility.html

DBTAC: Pacific ADA Center: www.adapacific.org





Find a Mentor

Remember, being independent does not mean you have to go it alone. Successful adults living with disabilities similar to your own have found ways to work around obstacles to reach their goals. Many adults with disabilities are eager to share their time and ideas about navigating life with a younger person who has a disability. Talking to an adult living with your disability or a similar one can help you learn tips and resources available to help you succeed in whatever you decide to do in life. To get connected with a mentor, go to www.disabledproud.org.

Resources Checklist

- After high school I plan to live: In an apartment with roommates dorm group home house with parents
- I will need a Personal Attendant to live independently. Yes No
- What will I need my PA to assist me with? Dressing Bathing Grooming Cooking
- I can drive. Yes No
- If I cannot drive, I plan to get around using Paratransit Bus Parents Bicycle Walk
- I know how to find accessible, affordable housing in my area. Yes No
- I know how to obtain a disabled transportation pass or sign up for Paratransit. Yes No
- I know how to find, hire, and manage a Personal Attendant. Yes No
- I know where my local ILC is and plan to stop by. Yes No
- I know someone with a similar disability who I can come to for advice. Yes No

Use Your Independent Living Center!

Remember the story at the beginning of this chapter about Ed Roberts and the Rolling Quads? Ed made a difference in his community by creating the very first independent living center (ILC) in Berkeley, CA. Now every county in California has an independent living center. Your local independent living center has information about housing, transportation, and personal attendant services specific to your area. Many of them also have programs specific to youth with disabilities such as peer groups, volunteer, and internship opportunities.



You can also work with an independent living specialist one on one to help you reach your goal of becoming independent. To find your local ILC, go to “<http://www.cfilc.org>” www.cfilc.org and click “Find an ILC”.

Planning for Success

In this section you learned a lot about independent living and were given some tools to help you achieve it. Everybody has a different idea about what independence means to them. Maybe independence for you is moving out of your parent’s house and going off to college. Or maybe your goal is to get a job right after high school and move into your own apartment. Whatever your goals are after high school, seeking out the resources suggested in this section will put you in a better position to achieve what you want for yourself. And remember, no one can create this vision for you. Only you can decide where you want life to take you. By setting goals and knowing the steps and support necessary to achieve them you can do anything because Talent Knows No Limits!



The logo features the text "talent knows no limits" in a white, sans-serif font. To the left of the text is a graphic of four overlapping white-outlined squares of varying sizes and orientations. The text and graphic are set against a red background with a dashed white line below them.

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