



# Focus on **SCHOOL AGE**

Quick Guide in the *Life Experience Series*

**School age is the years from kindergarten through middle school.**

For Now that your child is school age, he or she will likely spend a lot of time with people other than their parents or family. During this life stage, your child is growing and changing rapidly, and they need many opportunities to have life experiences that will help them learn and excel at home, at school, and in the community, as they move toward becoming young adults.

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### DAILY LIFE & EMPLOYMENT

**What a person does as part of everyday life— school, employment, volunteering, communication, routines, life skills**

It's important to think about who your child is spending time with and having life experiences that will prepare him/her for life in the future as an adult. Do you have the expectation that your child will be employed as an adult, and what is he/she doing at school, at home and in the community to learn skills to prepare for adult daily life and employment?

- Am I in the least restrictive environment or neighborhood school?
- How am I learning social skills as well as daily living and academic skills in my school experience?
- What is your vision for my future as I learn and grow and are you asking me what I want to be?
- What kind of chores or responsibilities do I have at home, like cleaning my room or picking up my toys?
- How can you organize things differently to better accommodate me, and what routines/strategies might help both of us throughout the day?



### COMMUNITY LIVING

**Where and how someone lives— housing and living options, community access, transportation, home adaptations and modifications**

Community living is not just about where we live, but about how we are accessing and involved in our communities. Seeing and learning about different kinds of living options will help your child have a better idea of what their options will be when they are an adult. Going places that same age peers go and being involved in neighborhood and community activities will help your child learn continue to learn and grow.

- Is our home in a school district that promotes inclusive education, so I can learn and grow with my siblings and other neighborhood children?
- How are you helping me learn about different types of living arrangements (eg. apartments, house, roommate, dorm)?
- What community places, activities, and events do you take me to?
- What adaptations to our home have you explored that would better meet my needs?
- What options for getting to and from school, other than special transportation, have you explored (e.g. regular school bus, carpool, walking to school with other neighborhood children)?



### SAFETY & SECURITY

**Staying safe and secure— emergencies, well-being, guardianship options, legal rights and issues**

Now that your child is in school and getting more active in the community, you can't be with them all the time to keep them safe. Helping them learn skills to stay safe is important now and for their future safety as adults. You can help them learn to appropriately interact with "helpers" such as police, firefighters and emergency responders, and it's never too early to begin learning about money.

- Who do I tell if I don't feel safe or if I am being bullied or victimized?
- How are you helping me learn about stranger danger, and who I can trust?
- How are you keeping local emergency responders up-to-date as my needs change?
- How are you helping me know what to do in an emergency? Do we practice safety drills and have a disaster plan that takes my needs into account?
- How are you learning about and helping me understand my and our family's rights regarding education?
- How are you giving me chances to decide how to spend money?





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### SOCIAL & SPIRITUALITY

**Building friendships and relationships, leisure activities, personal networks, and faith community**

The school years are when children learn how to get along with others, and more importantly, how to make friends and be a good friend to others. They need lots of time and chances to practice these important social skills in a variety of settings and discover what they like to do for fun and recreation. This is also a time to explore if they desire to engage in a faith community.

- How am I learning about making friends and maintaining relationships?
- How are you encouraging me to try different activities so I can figure out what I like to do in my free time?
- How can I get involved and be included in extracurricular activities at school, parks and recreation or other community activities where I can meet and make new friends?
- How are you helping me explore spirituality and find a welcoming faith community?
- Am I learning the spiritual values and cultures of our family and participating in the rites and rituals of our faith?



### HEALTHY LIVING

**Managing and accessing health care and staying well – medical, mental health, behavioral health, developmental, wellness and nutrition**

Your child won't always be around healthy choices, so it's important to help them learn the skills to know the right foods to eat, how to stay physically active and fit, and say no to things that may harm them. School age children can start to take a more active role in their healthcare and understand their own health and specific information about their diagnosis or disability.

- How are you helping me learn to ask for help or tell someone when I am sick or just don't feel well?
- What are you doing to teach me to how to greet and interact with doctors and other medical professionals?
- How are you helping me understand my disability or healthcare needs and how it affects me as I grow and change?
- How are you helping me know what is good (healthy foods, sleep, exercise) and bad (drugs, smoking) for my body?
- How am I learning about healthy foods and nutrition and making healthy snacks?



### ADVOCACY & ENGAGEMENT

**Building valued roles, making choices, setting goals, assuming responsibility and driving how one's own life is lived**

You are your child's best advocate and teacher. This is a time when you can help them learn and begin advocating for themselves in planning meetings, at school, in the community. Making choices, speaking up for what they want and giving back to their community help children prepare to be a good citizen and advocate when they are an adult.

- Are you interested in helping other parents or engaging in policy or systems change?
- How am I being supported to learn leadership skills and take on leadership roles at home, school, or in the community?
- How are you helping me learn to be part of and start to lead school or person-centered planning meetings?
- Do you present yourself as an expert regarding me and my needs, and how are you helping me learn to be the expert on myself and my needs?
- How am I learning the importance of following rules at home, school, and other places?
- How are you helping me find valued roles and chances to help others or give back to the community?





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### SERVICES & SUPPORTS

**Resources and strategies to promote the development, education, interests, and personal well-being of a person and that enhances individual and family functioning**

We all use a variety of supports to help us get through our daily lives, including using our own assets and capabilities. Most of us have people in our lives who do things for us (and vice versa). We tap into technology, as well as businesses, organizations and resources in the community. Even though you may need paid services, remember to consider other types of support as well.

- What strengths and assets does our family bring to the table?
- Who else can we count on to be there when we need a helping hand?
- Are you looking for community resources that might benefit me or our family?
- Is there technology you have access to that would be helpful in taking care of me?
- Do you have a basic understanding of public benefits I or our family might qualify for, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), Medicaid, Food Stamps, or other state and local eligibility-based sources?



### FAMILY UNIT

**What the family unit needs to support and be a successful part of their family member's life. Supports that are directed to the family will ultimately benefit the individual**


Taking care of a young child can be one of the most rewarding and fulfilling experiences of our lives, but can also be exhausting and challenging. It is important to find time to take care of yourself, spend valued time with other family members, and do things as a family unit.

- Where can you connect with other parents/families one-on-one or in groups, online or in person?
- What are you doing to take a respite or short break from life's stresses?
- What do you do for yourself and my siblings to find balance with my needs?
- How are you teaching me about the cultures, traditions and values of our family?
- What are you doing to financially plan for my and our family's future (e.g. saving for college, opening an ABL Account, setting up a Special Needs Trust)?
- Who is a supportive friend or another parent you can take with you to my IEP meetings?

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:




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