

## Family Advocacy Training

# Module 1: Building a Positive Description Transcript

Welcome to the Promise Parent learning module series. This module is called Building a Positive Description.

In this module you will create a positive description of your child, based on what he or she can do, and not on his or her disability.

### ***Introducing Your Child***

When parents of children with disabilities describe their child, they often start with the child's disability. For example, a parent might introduce their child by saying "This is Curtis. He has Autism."

Have you found yourself doing this? If so, you are not alone. It is very common, especially when you have to tell people about your child's disability and what he or she can't do in order to get the services and supports your child needs. But over time, it's possible that a description of your child has been built around the disability. Let's start to change that.

### **More Than Disability**

The first step to developing a positive description is to understand and believe that your child is more than the disability. Building a positive description, and helping your child identify his or her strengths, becomes even more important for employment. Employers want to hire people who have positive character traits and the skills needed for their workplace. In order to get a job, people need to market themselves to employers based on what they can do, not what they can't. This will be true for your child as well.

## **Building Positive Descriptions**

Why is it important to build a positive description and how do we do this?

There are decisions to be made first. To begin with, I'd like to read you story to help us think about some of the decisions we would make. The first story is about Taylor and I'd like you listen. Just relax and listen.

Taylor is thirteen years old and in the sixth grade. He has a diagnosis of mental retardation and has a history of seizures. His disease has caused tumors to grow in various organs and tissues of his body, most significantly his brain and both kidneys. Taylor reads on a second-grade level. Handwriting is very difficult for him, due to his poor spatial awareness and weak fine motor skills. He needs assistance to follow instructions that require more than two steps. Math is his most difficult subject, due to a very limited understanding of abstract concepts as well as no sequencing ability. He has no concept of numbers. Taylor is receiving special education and related services including speech, physical, and occupational therapies. He exhibits some receptive and expressive language difficulties. Taylor is a pleasant young man who is eager to please. Now I would like you to know that this information comes from Taylor's record with permission from his family.

So I'd like you to think about where you might see Taylor. If you walk into a school, where would you expect to find him and what would you think his future look like? Take a minute and think about that.

I'll share with you what other families have said. They would expect to see Taylor in a self-contained special ed classroom. In the future they would expect to see him in and out of the hospital given his physical issues. For his future they would also expect that he would work in a sheltered workshop. That's where most people say they expect to find Taylor. And in various areas around the state and around the nation, that's what families say.

So now I'd like to talk about this more but first let's have a second story. This story is about Lee. Lee is a seventh grader. He is a hardworking and creative individual, who takes his work seriously. He is persistent and committed. He is especially fascinated by the social studies and sciences; his favorite television shows are the Discovery Channel and the Weather Channel. He enjoys working with his hands, particularly with small

engines. Lee has traveled the United States and Texas extensively, and has traveled outside of the United States on both borders as well. His hobby is model railroading; he operates a large O-gauge railroad at home. He volunteers his time to a local non-profit organization repairing their lawn mowers and mowing lawns. He rides horses weekly. Lee maintains an A-B average every year and has been elected by his teachers to receive the Citizenship Award twice in the last three years. He has received the Presidential Academic Excellence Award. Lee ran cross-country this fall, winning an 8th place medal in District. He plans to run on the track team this spring.

So now let's take a minute to think where we would expect to find Lee in the school. And what would we think his future might look like?

So other families have indicated that they think they would find Lee in a regular education classroom. They think he would have a good future. He would have competitive employment. That he probably is involved in gym classes. That he could look at higher education and perhaps find employment weather-related attached to a meteorologist. I'm wondering what you thought of Lee.

I think it is important to note that Taylor and Lee are the same person, they are the same individual. However we look at them very differently depending on how we've described them.

When, and you'll notice, when we describe someone in positive terms, based on their successes, the things they are passionate about, what they are trying to do in their lives, and what they love to do in their lives, we see more possibility for that person. We see a better future. And we see more of how we might build that future.

When we describe someone based on how they are labeled and what they cannot do, then we are very unlikely to see anything in the future other than a future intensively filled with support and limited options. So as you are getting ready to think about your advocacy for your child, think about this, how will you describe your child?

### **Positive Description Example**

Let's listen to couple of other examples that illustrate the power of positive descriptions. Click on the pictures to hear two parents in Wisconsin talking about their children. Both

parents will start by describing their child in terms of their disability and challenges. Then they'll focus on their child's strengths and interests. Notice how differently we may envision their futures when we focus on their assets rather than their difficulties.



**Joyce**

[Let me tell you a little bit about my son...](#)



**Delores**

[Let me tell you a little bit about my son...](#)

## **Write a Positive Description**

So now it's your turn to create a description of your child. Try to focus on your child's strengths and not just the disability. Take a minute to write your description.

Complete these sentences about your child:

My child is...

My child likes...

My child is good at...

If you are having a hard time coming up with positive ways to describe your child, don't worry! Ask your family and friends, your child's teachers, or your DVR Counselor to tell you some of the positive things they see about your child. When you are done, you can then share with others.

Now remember... the next time you talk about your child with others think about using the positive description you have created. Share these important ideas first.

## **Conclusion**

This concludes the parent training module on building positive descriptions. If you have questions, talk to your DVR counselor about your questions or concerns.