Caregiver Tip: Promote Dignity for Adults with IDD

A key part of family and caregiver support for a youth with IDD as they grow into a young adult is promoting growth and dignity. This may mean a change in how you think about the person's abilities.

When parents raise their young children, they protect, teach and help them stay safe and in control. They "bubble wrap" their young children for safety, particularly when raising a child with disabilities. As a youth with IDD becomes a young adult, the family/caregivers can test removing some bubble wrap. This is a way to teach a person with IDD how to be more self-directed and grow while staying safe.

One idea to try is called: **Never say never.** This expression reminds family/caregivers to listen to a young adult's wishes and goals and avoid saying no too quickly.

Some goals are not reachable right away. Some are unlikely to be reached at all. But it is a type of **Dignity** to help the person try.

Families and caregivers can help by breaking down a goal into small steps. They can help think, plan and do steps to make progress. It can be a success if the person grows a little without reaching their final goal. Here are two examples:

- Some youth want to learn to drive. Driving is a complicated and hard skill.
  - The first step might be to learn and practice the rules of the road, watch videos or use text to voice for the driver's manual or do practice questions.
  - Another small step could be to try a golf cart, go-kart or lawnmower.
  - Another small step could be to take a lesson on a dual control driving school car with an instructor. The instructor can advise the youth if they are ready to drive. This allows someone other than a parent to give that advice.
- Some youth want to get married. This is also complicated.
  - There are many steps to learn to date and find a person who is a good match.
  - Thery are many steps to build a relationship through life's ups and downs.
  - The first step might be to say hello to someone you like.
  - The next step is to talk about shared interests.
  - As youth learn the steps, family support can help them practice one at a time.

Some youth will learn on their own that driving or getting married is not for them. This is their **Own Choice**. The parent did not need to say no.

Others may choose to continue to work on small steps toward their dream. The parent can continue to support the work on those steps.

Think about a way to try "Never say Never" with a youth or young adult with IDD.

IUSM Center for Youth and Adults with Conditions of Childhood, 2025.
Accompanying "Never say Never" video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S04ZYon4j5s