

How to Help Someone with Disabilities Live Independently

People often ask me how to help a loved one with disabilities live independently. The reasons behind the desire to facilitate this change are as varied as the individuals themselves. Their unique qualities will guide you to the path that's best suited for their needs and desires.

1. **Supplemental Security Income:** Many individuals with a disability qualify for [Supplemental Security Income](#) benefits at age 18. A visit to your nearest Social Security office is a great place to get the ball rolling. Let's face it, nothing happens without financial resources. I'm a firm believer in utilizing all resources available to help those in need.
2. **What's available in your area:** If your child is in school, meet with administration and teachers to discuss available options in your area. Most special education programs design "Essential Life Plans," also known as ELP's. These plans identify the individual's wants, needs, and desires. Once that is made clear, it becomes easier to match up with available programs.
3. **Service support:** There are different tiers of service help available to those who seek independent living, and the level of support is determined based on what the individual's needs are. If your family member qualifies for service support, a case manager will be assigned to organize those needs. For example, our son's agency offers 3 levels of support, and he receives 24-hour supported living. Most agencies do allow for private pay but it can get expensive, so it's important to understand how your state provides funds for assisted services. I encourage you to apply for funding as soon as possible. A good case manager can provide you with resources during this discovery period.
4. **Family support:** Once planning becomes reality, certain things become simpler. Our son moved into a home with six other individuals. His room was big, but since this was his only private area we wanted to make sure it felt like home. We helped him shop for things and he was excited about this new adventure. We assembled a few family photo collages and incorporated his favorite colors and sports teams, too! As a family, it was a great way to ease

the tension and pour some love into his new home.

5. **Private counseling:** It's important to acknowledge that this is a major adjustment. We did our best to keep open communication. Siblings may need extra help articulating their thoughts and fears. A disabled family member can be highly protected by siblings. For some, private family counseling is an option. We all need a safe place to share our thoughts, work through our fears, and relieve our anxiety. Counseling can be valuable during this time. More importantly, prioritize what works best for you and your loved ones.

Our son was ready to live independently. It has been amazing to witness his personal growth; he is a well-rounded and happy man. He still visits on the weekend, and we visit him frequently, too, as he now has his own "apartment" within a lower density living situation. Oftentimes I'll stop by to stock his fridge, assess his clothing, or just chat. You know how moms are...

We firmly believe that he would not be who he is today without the opportunity to live as independently as possible. This is our story, but everyone has their own unique circumstance. The beauty is, you can write your own and it will be your story to tell.

– Shelly Little, *Springible Contributor*

Springible is a solutions based, consumer-driven, lifestyle platform for caregivers, and people living with disability, special needs, and chronic illness.

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