

Top 10 Life Management Skills Young Adults Need for Independence



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If you've been an adult for a long time, it can be hard to remember what it was like before the basic skills of adulthood felt like second nature. For parents or others helping a young person make that challenging transition to adulthood, here are ten key areas to focus on in order to guide them on the path to independence.

1. Managing Time

Possibly the most important skill for young adults to master as they become increasingly independent is time management. When parenting children and teens, it's natural to fall into the habit of creating a calendar for them and enforcing appropriate times for school, sleep, appointments, and recreation. But this also means that time management is a set of skills that needs to be consciously taught to most young adults in order to become truly independent.

2. Managing Money

Money can be a difficult topic for many people to talk about, but it's critical that young adults develop the ability to handle money independently. A basic understanding of savings and checking accounts, how to read a pay stub and a balance sheet, and how to create a simple budget are essential.

Knowledge of credit and interest is important to avoid getting pulled into scams, payday loans, and high-interest credit card debt. Whether using an envelope method or fancy computer-based systems, all adults need to be able to make appropriate purchases within their financial means.

3. Getting From Here to There

Transportation has a huge impact on how all of us live our lives. For those young adults who have both the desire and the ability to drive, basic car maintenance is a must-have. The knowledge of how to change a tire, how to use jumper cables, and when to schedule professional maintenance are often-neglected lessons that take some young adults by surprise.

For those who don't drive (or who can drive but don't have access to a vehicle), working knowledge of public transportation systems is indispensable. Luckily, GPS systems have made navigation as simple as typing in a destination, and some (such as Google Maps) include bus, train, bicycle, and walking directions as well as those intended for drivers. Regardless of the method used, all adults need to know how to get where they want to go and arrive on time.

4. Communicating With Others

While everyone has their own communication style, not every kind of communication comes naturally. Solid phone skills, for example, are necessary in order to make a doctor's appointment, call a plumber, or even make a reservation at a restaurant.

The ability to explain one's work and skill set is the foundation of a successful job interview. The popularity of *Toastmasters clubs* around the world just goes to show that many adults—perhaps even most—feel that their communication skills could use an extra boost.

5. Maintaining Their Environment

Keeping a living space livable is a surprisingly complex process. From laundry (How much detergent do I use? What counts as “delicate”?) to waste (When should I take out the trash? What can I put in a garbage disposal?) to dealing with incoming mail, the work of maintaining a home environment is never done.

And even for young people with strong habits in this area, adulthood still produces new situations to be addressed. Where should I keep a spare house key? What's an appropriate refrigerator temperature? What do I do if I discover weather damage, mold, or pests? It can be overwhelming at times, but solid coaching can ease the transition to independent adult.

6. Healthcare and Self-Care

While young adults might sometimes *think* they're invincible, taking care of your physical well-being is a major part of independent adulthood. This means making and keeping key medical and dental appointments, but also skills like planning and preparing healthy meals, tracking and taking necessary medications, and finding a type of exercise that is engaging enough to want to do it regularly. Self-care also means knowing how to seek out assistance when their health seems to be slipping, whether physical, mental, or social.

7. Stress Management

Americans are *more stressed than ever*, and learning to navigate that reality is an important skill for all young adults moving towards independence. While money, work, relationships, and prospects for the future can all cause anxiety, learning one's own triggers and how to cope with them is a highly individualized process.

Some people may respond well to breathing exercises or meditation, while others take refuge in journaling. Exercise, music, and spending time in nature can all be helpful, as can therapy or medication. Regardless of the particular solution, learning to address and cope with stress in a healthy way is a critical skill for both new and experienced adults.

8. Building Personal Relationships

Strong social bonds have been found to be *closely linked to longevity*, but newly independent adults can find it challenging to make and maintain friendships once they are no longer in school with their peers. Learning to seek out like-minded people—such as by joining a book club, volunteer organization, faith community, or other special interest group—isn't something that teens need to think about consciously, and can come as a surprise to many people as they enter adulthood.

In an age of digital communication, developing real-world friendships can be extra challenging, which is all the more reason to think about making friends as a skill to be developed, rather than a “natural” side effect of just being in the world.

9. Setting Healthy Boundaries

Closely related to relationship building is the skill of setting appropriate boundaries. Knowing how and when to say “no” in an appropriate but firm way to people ranging from a boss to a friend to a romantic partner can be challenging to newly-minted adults who are used to seeing anyone older as

an authority figure, but it's important in establishing both good relationships and a healthy balance between needs, desires, and obligations.

10. Citizenship

Adulthood comes with a lot of new freedoms. It also comes with a lot of new responsibilities. Adults need to know how to educate themselves about local, state, and national issues, how to register and vote, what jury duty is and how to respond to the call to serve. Adults also need to know how to advocate for themselves, their communities, and for issues they care about.

They need to know the basics of the laws that apply to them and the potential consequences should they choose to ignore them. While a lot of this may be covered in high school, the details often remain fuzzy. No parent, teacher, or friend, no matter how well-meaning, can take on the responsibilities of citizenship for another person, but it's one that we can all work together to help young adults to rise to the occasion for themselves.

Have a question about accompanying young adults on their journey towards independence?

New Directions for Young Adults is here to help. [*Get in touch*](#) and let's talk.