

# Disability-Inclusive Apprenticeship Practices Guide

This guide offers practical strategies for mentors, instructors, supervisors, and workforce partners who support apprentices. It focuses on building confidence, communication, and a sense of belonging — because people learn best when they feel seen, supported, and valued.

## 1. What Helps Apprentices Succeed

Youth and young adults learn most effectively when:

- Expectations are clear
- Someone is available to ask questions
- Feedback is steady, specific, and encouraging
- Progress is noticed and named
- Challenges are approached with curiosity rather than judgment

These practices help every apprentice, and they are especially supportive for youth and young adults with disabilities who may be navigating new environments or expectations.

## 2. Creating a Supportive Start

A strong first week sets the tone for success. Apprentices benefit when the workplace feels understandable and predictable.

### What to Do

- Walk the apprentice through the workspace (not just a quick tour)
- Introduce key people and explain their roles
- Show where to find tools, supplies, and help
- Explain the routine: start times, breaks, equipment, check-in points
- Share expectations in plain, concrete language

### Coaching Language to Use

“Let’s do the first few tasks together so you can see how this works.”

“I’ll check in with you at lunch — if anything feels unclear, that’s when we’ll talk about it.”

“It’s normal to have questions in the first few weeks. Asking is part of learning.”

No one benefits from being told to “just jump in and figure it out.”  
Apprentices benefit when learning is guided, paced, and reinforced.

### **3. Mentorship That Builds Confidence**

Mentorship is not about having all the answers.

It’s about being consistent, approachable, and willing to teach.

#### **What Good Mentorship Looks Like**

- Checking in regularly (even 3–5 minutes helps)
- Noticing effort and progress
- Demonstrating tasks more than once without frustration
- Asking open-ended questions like:
  - “What part of this felt comfortable?”
  - “What part felt tricky?”
  - “Where should we slow down and try again together?”

#### **If the apprentice becomes unsure or frustrated**

Avoid correcting too quickly.

Slow the moment down:

“Let’s pause and take this one step at a time.”

“Tell me where it started to feel confusing.”

“We can try a different approach — learning looks different for everyone.”

The goal is not speed — it is mastery over time.

### **4. Supporting Problem-Solving**

Challenges are normal, not a sign that something is wrong.

#### **When an apprentice is struggling:**

- Describe what you observed without judgment
- Ask what part felt unclear or difficult
- Work together to break the task into smaller steps
- Repeat steps until the apprentice shows comfort and confidence

#### **Coaching Language**

“Let’s try that step again together.”

“Show me how you would start this — I’ll help with the next part.”

“You’re getting the hang of this. We’ll build the rest as we go.”

This communicates: You’re capable. We do this together.

## 5. When Additional Support Is Needed

If an apprentice needs more support, you are not alone.

Partners exist to help keep apprentices learning and moving forward.

This may include:

- VR support for accommodations or tools
- Workforce staff coordinating transportation or schedules
- Training providers adjusting instruction
- Supervisors checking in more frequently

Support is not remediation or special handling —  
It is good apprenticeship practice.

Young people learn who they are through work.

When they feel welcomed, guided, and encouraged, they grow — not only in skill,  
but in identity and confidence.

Your presence and consistency matter.

Small supports, steady mentoring, and believing in a young person's potential  
can shape a career — and a future.

