

# Peace in the Midst Of...



Guidance for Christian Parents  
Wanting to Launch Special Needs Children  
Into Adulthood

By Eric & Amy Osborn



## “In the Midst Of...”

There are times in our married life when we definitely felt we were outnumbered and outgunned – that it was just us against the world. We felt locked into a seemingly never ending cycle of crisis that was truly wearying to the soul. It is our hope that we can pass on what we have learned and in so doing, encourage others to persevere. We especially have a burden for Christian parents of special needs children. Four of our five children were adopted (they have the same birth mother) and came with unique special needs. In the midst of parenting them, no simple or easy task, we also experienced the tragic death of a child. Quite frankly, as we groped about trying to cope with what seemed like an excessive amount of trauma and loss in our lives, we often found ourselves feeling very much alone. We found that the depth of our trauma made others very uncomfortable and it was extremely difficult to find others who could relate or give counsel to us and our unique situation. We wished for a resource just like the one we are creating and sharing with you now.

Our surname comes with a family motto, “Pax in Bello.” Translated it essentially means, “Peace in the midst of Strife.” It is our desire to not only be at peace in the midst of the various trials life has for us, **but to thrive** in the midst of them. In our efforts to do this we have encountered what seems like a unique set of problems that required us to grow and learn. It is our hope that, in passing on what we have learned, others will have an easier time. This is not meant to be a scholarly book but a sharing of information that we have picked up on the path of our journey that we were very thankful to learn and wish we had learned sooner! We don’t pretend to be experts in any field. Some of the information we have learned we have quite forgotten the source but we both remember the information. We have included a bibliography so that, if you wish, you can look things up for yourself. Please do!

We affectionately refer to our family as “The Thundering Horde.” Sometimes it really feels like they fit their name well! However, God has shown us in each situation, how to thrive and find peace “in the midst of” each situation. The way was certainly not easy. In fact, some of what we have learned was extremely difficult and painful to go through. But we found, in the end, that God’s grace was sufficient for our every need.

## In the Midst of Preparing Young Adults to Launch

After finally figuring out how to help our children thrive in childhood, we find ourselves facing another mountain that has to be climbed. Now that two of our sons are in their late teens and are technically adults, they are finding it very difficult to really launch into adulthood.

Our eldest is “twenty going on fourteen” (“dysmaturity” is common in children with FASD) and struggles with depression, profound anxiety issues and a lack of interest in anything other than socializing with friends. He claims he has been looking for work for over two years now but we are fairly sure he has not tried as hard as he professes (he has not always lived with us since finishing high school). I have taken time off of work many times to help him turn in applications, sign up for temp agencies, and explore programs like Job Corps (a federal program for at-risk youth that provides training and job placement assistance). Nothing so far.

Our second oldest is eager to work and loves to have resources to do simple things for himself and do simple things to bless others. He is mildly autistic and struggles with reading and communication in general (though most people don’t see it at first). He is a slow learner and actually likes doing things the same way every time. He is strong and self-disciplined. He too has been trying to find part-time work for almost two years. We suspect he is running into some prejudice about his issues. He does not tell potential employers of course, but we imagine it’s pretty easy to see something in the interview that keeps making them choose someone else. We are looking into some assistance from our state’s Department of Rehabilitation to help overcome his handicaps and find meaningful employment.

But our sons are not the only young men we know who are having problems finding and keeping work. Most of the late teens to twenty somethings we know still live at home and are largely unemployed. These are not all foster or adoptive children. But like us, their parents are at wits end trying to figure out what to do. Being a problem solver by temperament, I thought long and hard about this issue. I took a look at the big picture as a whole, not necessarily focusing on foster or adoptive children’s issues though we have some things to share about some resources and solutions we have uncovered for them.

## So what is the problem? Why can't kids find work?

We really live in a different country and a vastly different economy than what our parents and grandparents grew up in and what our schools and assistance agencies are used to. As a result, many young people (ages 18-25 or so) seem to be falling into a chasm of indecision, apathy, poverty and worst of all dependence on others (parents, financial aid and subsistence level govt. assistance). They are told to reach out for help by society only to find that the “helping agencies and services” really DON'T provide much help at all. Jobs are VERY hard to obtain when you are young and yet housing, food and transportation costs continue to rise beyond the reach of the typical job a young person CAN land (if they can land anything at all) . In addition to this, our society has created a set of expectations and a love of ease that young people have become used to and that costs a lot of money to come even close to maintaining.

On top of all this add in the dysfunction and dysmaturity that many foster and adoptive children deal with and you can see how the problem becomes even harder.

**The result:** many young people cannot or will not leave home at 18, 19, and 20 or even through their mid-20s. If they are forced to do so by any circumstances (even their own doing) they quickly end up impoverished, seemingly unable to work, unable to get around to find work or resources and without a permanent place to stay. Not a pretty picture.

## A closer look at how we got here.

In addition to some of the personal issues we have talked about, there are also problems with:

1. **Unrealistic expectations** set up by our society, parents, educators, friends & the media as a whole. These influences can falsely portray that life is **supposed** to be full of lots of fun and ease. Young people today expect MUCH more creature comforts when they first leave home than any previous generation **ever** has, and if they can't have them they just don't try to leave – preferring comfort, fun and ease over the self-supporting independence that has typically driven teens to leave home in past generations.
2. **Poor planning or a lack of realistic planning.** Schools push students into college as if

that will solve all their needs (it does not). So there is very little career training options given such as ROP programs that **really** work and connect students with employers willing to hire them at some point in the program if it works out.

3. **An economy that has changed drastically for the worse *but society continues to try to cling to the illusions of the old economic realities – high wages with lots of free benefits, job stability, smaller work week, and early retirements.*** Those days may be gone forever. For the most part, young people today are not being told this or being prepared to make their way in such a climate. In fact, they expect things to be even better for them than it was for their parents. Reality often crushes their expectations so harshly that some young people become extremely bitter, fatalistic and cling to their dependencies even harder, *delaying that necessary transition into adulthood.* Again, foster and adoptive children add to this their own unique issues that slow them down.

Some hard truths young people today must come to embrace.

1. **THE END GOAL FOR CHILDHOOD IS THAT YOU BECOME AN INDEPENDENT, SELF-SUPPORTING RESONSIBLE ADULT CITIZEN.** There is great virtue in being self-reliant! *“He who works skillfully with his hands can stand proud before kings”* as the proverb says. Believing the opposite (that dependence upon the charity and provision of others is a virtue) shows a profound lack of wisdom and leads to enslavement to those you are dependent upon (whether friends, family or govt.).
2. **No one owes you anything!** You will have to WORK for your pay. ***It will be YOUR job to convince someone to hire you and to work hard to keep your job.*** Even then, layoffs can happen so be prepared (learn to live well within your means and save for bad times). Be prepared to dress well, and conform as much as it takes ...whatever it takes to get the job (within reason and the bounds of the law). ***No job = no successful transition into adult life!***
3. **EVERYTHING IN ADULT LIFE TAKES MONEY!** A place to live, food to eat, transportation, a social life, entertainment – all cost .... A LOT (and more every year). You may NOT get to live it up when you first move out – but if you manage your resources carefully you

**will** get to do something. With careful stewardship you may get to do more and more as time goes on.

4. **Expect to start out pretty Spartan in your first apartment or dwelling.** You won't get to have all the creature comforts your parents took 20+ years to amass. You may have little or crappy furniture, you may have to drive a beater car or motorcycle, you may have a small TV and stereo with mismatched dishes and bare walls. BUT IT IS ALL YOURS! **Take pride in being independent** (a true grown-up) and you can postpone the emotional desire to have a well-decorated home and tricked out car.
5. **You need to start prepping your future before it "happens to you."** Have a realistic plan set up before you turn eighteen. Have a plan B and plan C just in case *that is realistic & that you can live with*. **Changing your plan isn't a problem...becoming eighteen or older without one is a PROBLEM.**

### So how do you get started?

**TASK #1:** Adjust your expectations to the new realities (see above).

**TASK #2: *FIND ANY JOB THAT PAYS!***

- IF you are under 18, at least a part time job of some kind...any kind!
- If you are over 18, ANY full time job or 2 or 3 part time jobs.
- YOU NEED TO START WORKING NOW...REMEMBER .... EVERYTHING TAKES MONEY!
- This is NOT the time to be so proud, picky or prissy that you can't find work. **Land any job you can – it's an important start. *Without a way to earn resources (money etc.) you will NEVER be able to become self-reliant and move out on your own.***

**TASK #3: *Do some career exploration NOW*** and keep it up even while you have your first jobs so you have something to work towards that will provide you with adequate resources to live the adult life and even live it up from time to time or afford a few luxuries. ***Look for opportunities and take them!***

**TASK #4:** Do some RELIABLE research (ask questions, search newspapers, internet etc.) about how much it costs to move out and live on your own. Don't forget that you will need money for:

1. Rent or a mortgage
2. Power, water, phone, and possibly garbage utilities
3. Health insurance and health care
4. Transportation expenses: car payment (?), insurance, gas, maintenance for engine & tires
5. Furniture: bed, dresser, table to eat on, chairs or couch to sit on etc.
6. Food and household expenses (laundry soap, dishwashing soap, bar soap, shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant, cleaning supplies, etc. + your groceries)
7. Home furnishings: pots and pans, light fixtures, alarm clock, bedding, etc.
8. Clothing (you may have to cut it pretty meager for a while but you have to have some clothes!)
9. Entertainment or social outings (may have to keep it pretty cheap for a while)
10. Life insurance
11. Retirement savings
12. Charitable expenses

You might also want to decide what community you want to live and work in. Check it out and compare costs of living (though this can come later if you like).

**TASK #5: Find a like-minded friend or two that you can trust AND WHO ALSO WORKS!!**

Consider having a room-mate for a few years until you can afford to live independently on your own – it's a great way to share living expenses & furniture/furnishings.

Don't get overwhelmed – start with the tasks in their numerical order and keep working on it until you have it done – then move on to the next one. No one can “make you grow up” or become an adult for you. **It is something each person has to do for themselves. Looking like an adult doesn't make you one – acting and living like an adult does.**

**REMEMBER: being an independent, self-supporting adult is the goal! Being adult in age but living dependent on parents or others is not really being a grown up at all.**

How can parents, churches and communities help?

**FIRST: teach children and young people the right way of looking at life and adulthood (see the Hard Truths above).** Impress upon them the true goal of childhood so that they automatically start working towards it too. By all means, do so in an age appropriate manner.

**SECOND: As they grow up, don't satisfy their every whim and buy them whatever fun they desire.** Have them work in an age appropriate manner to EARN greater privileges or resources. By the time a child is a teenager, they should understand that they are expected to find some kind of job (mowing lawns for neighbors, babysitting, delivering papers, raking leaves, cleaning out garages, sweeping up at a family owned business, raising 4H animals, whatever they can come up with). Teach them how to delay gratification and save these hard earned resources for some of the fun things they crave (game systems, computers, cell phones, special clothing, eating out with friends, movies).

**THIRD: Get to know people who employ other people and solicit their cooperation to allow your young person to job shadow them or even volunteer to work for free so they can observe what that kind of work their job entails or who could eventually hire them. Such people are an invaluable network later for getting your child their first jobs.** In addition, help your child make efforts to identify their strengths and how they can be applied to different kinds of work (there are several good inventories and “tests” to help with this).

**FOURTH: Many parents have a difficult time doing #3.** Not everyone has a relative that is a business owner or has friends in high places. **This is where churches and communities can be a huge help.** *Churches should identify members of their congregation who are either employers or are one of those uniquely connected people in the community.* Such people are invaluable help to our young people because truthfully, jobs are almost always obtained through the help of another person not the internet or mass mailings. Have your child get to know one of these network hub people so that they can better recommend a young person to specific people they may know. Churches really ought to deliberately create a ministry to assist this transition process (because our youth groups just don't do this).



## Some Resources We Have Uncovered

### Job Skills and Interest Inventories

[www.careercc.com/career\\_assessment.shtml](http://www.careercc.com/career_assessment.shtml)

[www.yourfreecareertest.com/](http://www.yourfreecareertest.com/)

[www.futurepaths.ca/youth/self-assessment.php](http://www.futurepaths.ca/youth/self-assessment.php)

<http://www.thecallonline.com/> a Focus on the Family produced online assessment.

### Programs to help Teens develop Job Skills and Work

- **California Conservation Corps** – job and personal skills training while actually employed doing outdoor work projects (other states may have something similar. A residential program.)
- **Job Corps** – provides high school completion, job skills training, help with placement and assistance for uniforms & tools needed upon graduation (Federal program. A residential program.)
- **ILP Independent Living Skills Program** - Serves foster youth, ages 15 ½ to 21 yrs. Living skills for emancipation. (county program)
- **Lilliput Post Adoption Services** <http://www.lilliput.org/> - serves adoptive families in Yolo County in a variety of support capacities. Check with your county for your local post adoption worker.

### Government Agencies

- **Social Security Administration** – see your state and county for contact information. If your child exhibits handicaps that would prevent gainful employment you should consider looking into Disability.
- **State Dept. of Rehabilitation** – see your state and county for contact information. If your child exhibits significant handicaps but would be able to work with accommodations or they need help getting work because of their handicaps this agency can really make a big difference.
- **Employment Agencies** – see your community or county directory for general employment assistance.

## **Being a Grown-Up = Being Self Supporting (Having your own resources)**

**Thus being a Grown-Up REQUIRES a Job. Period.**

**And Getting a Job = Convincing an Employer You can help THEM**

**To do this, you must be convincing, respectful and diligent.**

### **CONVINCING**

- **You must dress neatly, be clean and well groomed** (hair & facial hair)
- You must know the job needs and how you can meet those needs
- You need to **be prepared** to honestly answer questions and provide any information a potential employer wants or needs. *Have it in a folder at your side and always have a pen handy!*

### **RESPECTFUL**

- Always be careful to be respectful when talking to an employer.
- **Use “sir” and “ma'am” and do NOT interrupt.**
- **Fill out ALL paperwork neatly and completely.**
- Be prepared to answer questions honestly and completely.
- **Do NOT haggle or negotiate salary or hours – take whatever is given, PT or FT – ANY SHIFT.** Get your foot in the door and then when you have proven yourself on the job for a while, that is the time to negotiate.
- **Ask personal references before you put them on an application!!** Pick people who know you well, can highlight your positives and maybe have some pull in the community if possible.

### **DILIGENT**

- Fill out applications online as directed **BUT after 2 days try to follow up in person or on the phone to inquire if they received the application and if there is any additional information they might need. DO IT BEFORE 10 or 11 A.M. SO YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE A SLACKER!**
- **Go to establishments and ask for an application** (not if they are hiring). **Be ready to fill it out on the spot or to take it back w/in the hour completely filled out.**
- **Register with a temp agency and GO WHENEVER THEY CALL!!!!** They call those that say yes.
- **Call former employers** or talk to friends who work and see if their employer is hiring or if they can recommend you to their employer in some way.

**MAKE IT YOUR MONDAY – FRIDAY 9 TO 5 JOB TO LOOK FOR WORK  
AND YOU WILL FIND IT.**

**Live the life of a working person so that when you have a job you don't have to make that personal adjustment ON TOP of learning a new job.**