South Dakota DHS
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

November 2026

# Transition Newsletter

# BUILDING YOUR REPUTATION: REFERENCES FOR FUTURE JOBS

## Resource to Consider

## Pathful

**Pathful** is an online career exploration and work-based learning platform that helps students discover careers, explore job opportunities, and develop skills for life after high school. Students can explore different career paths, learn about workplace expectations, and build important employment skills. Pathful can also help students prepare for the world of work by developing résumés and cover letters to highlight their strengths, skills, experiences, and career goals as they prepare for future employment opportunities.

Talk to me about getting an account today!

*This information is provided for informational purposes only. Please review the resource and determine for yourself whether you wish to use it.*

## Your future starts with the choices you make today!

Whether you are preparing for your first job, exploring a career, or planning for life after high school, building a positive reputation is an important step toward success. The way you treat others, complete tasks, and follow through on responsibilities can help you develop strong relationships with people who may support you in your future career.

## Why Does Your Reputation Matter?

Your reputation is how other people remember you based on your actions, attitude, and work habits.

A positive reputation can help you:

- Get a job or internship.
- Receive a recommendation for a job, scholarship, or training program.
- Build trust with teachers, supervisors, coworkers, and community members.
- Show others that you are dependable and ready to learn.

**Remember:** Small actions make a big difference! Arriving on time, being respectful, asking questions, and completing tasks all help build a strong reputation.

## What Is a Work Reference?

A work reference is someone who can tell a potential employer about your strengths, skills, character, and work habits.

People who may serve as references include:

- Teachers or special education staff.
- Coaches or club advisors.
- Employers or job coaches.
- Volunteer supervisors.
- Mentors or community program leaders.




A strong reference is someone who knows you well enough to describe your abilities and give examples of your positive qualities.

**Important tip:** Always ask permission before listing someone as a reference. Never assume someone will automatically agree.

## contact me

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## Volunteer Today, Build Skills for Tomorrow!

Volunteering is a great way to explore careers, practice job skills, meet new people, and develop references—even if you have never had a paid job. Consider exploring these opportunities:

**Animal shelters or pet organizations:** Practice following directions, organizing supplies, and caring for animals.
**Libraries**: Develop organization, communication, and customer service skills.
**Food pantries or community meal programs:** Practice teamwork, sorting, stocking, and helping others.
**Community events:** Build communication, problem-solving, and time-management skills.
**Parks and recreation programs:** Practice teamwork, following schedules, and completing assigned tasks.
**School clubs and activities:** Develop leadership, responsibility, and collaboration skills.
**Senior centers or community organizations:** Practice respectful communication and helping others.



Look for opportunities that match your interests, strengths, and support needs. Ask a trusted adult, transition teacher, school counselor, or vocational rehabilitation counselor to help you explore options. Some volunteer roles may require an application, orientation, or adult supervision.

**Did you know?** Volunteer experience can help you demonstrate work skills to a future employer, even when you have limited paid work experience.

## How Do I Ask Someone to Be a Reference?

Asking for a reference can feel uncomfortable at first, but practicing what to say can make it easier.

**You could say:**

"Hi, [Name], I am applying for a job and was wondering if you would be willing to be a reference for me. I enjoyed working with you and learned a lot. I can share information about the job and the skills I have been practicing. Thank you for considering it"

**When asking:**

- ☑ Ask politely and give the person time to respond.
- ☑ Explain what job or program you are applying for.
- ☑ Thank the person, whether they say yes or no.
- ☑ If they say yes, ask for their phone number and email address.
- ☑ Let them know when you get an interview and the job!

## Protect Your Reputation Online

Your online activity can affect how others view you and may influence future job opportunities.

**Before posting, ask yourself:**

Is it respectful?
Would I be comfortable with a teacher or employer seeing it?
Does it show the kind of person I want others to know?

**Remember:**

Think before you post, communicate professionally, and protect your privacy. Your digital footprint is part of your reputation!

## Your Action Plan: Take One Small Step This Month!

- □ Ask a teacher, coach, or mentor about becoming a future reference.
- □ Explore one volunteer opportunity in my community.
- □ Practice asking someone to be a reference.
- □ Update my résumé to include school, volunteer, or community experiences.
- □ Practice a work skill, such as arriving on time, following directions, or communicating professionally.
- □ Thank someone who has helped me learn or grow.

Be reliable. Be respectful. Keep learning. Build connections. Your next opportunity could start with one small step!