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## PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT

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### **Abstract**

Most deaf high school graduates in this study were actively learning about careers and making future plans. Most of their parents encouraged these activities through a variety of ways. These results were derived from interviews with 189 deaf seniors in 16 high schools and from a mail survey of their parents. Findings indicated that a majority of seniors had discussed their future plans with family members and most parents supported these plans. A majority of parents had also engaged in six types of activities to stimulate the career development of their deaf sons and daughters. Parents also reported numerous other ways they had assisted their deaf teenagers to prepare for more education and a future job. However, almost 75 percent of parents reported the need for four kinds of career planning information. Implications for enhancing communication between parents and professionals as well as training parents were discussed.

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It is generally recognized that parents are a major influence upon the career development of their sons and daughters. This influence includes certain kinds of behaviors by mothers and fathers as well as conditions within the family which foster growth in values, attitudes, and self-concepts in children. Youth leave home to test the realities of

their self-perceptions through formal education, school activities, and peer groups. The teenager also learns to make the transition from home and the adolescent subculture to adult society. The young adult's educational and occupational plans emerge from this crucible of change from dependence to independence.

Although parents have important roles in this process, exactly what parents do to encourage their adolescents to learn about careers is unknown. Many, if not most, parents feel uninformed about occupations and current labor market trends (Luckey, 1974; Ott, 1983). Upper class parents emphasize career planning and encourage their children to defer immediate gratifications and think about the future more than lower class parents (Ott, 1983). In a broad sense, parental endeavors in developing their adolescent's career aspirations are part of general child-raising activities. Parents motivate younger children through rewards and punishments and persuade older children by reasoning and exemplifying (Ott, 1983). Perhaps more important than the differences in how parents raise their children are the achievement values which they impart to them (Sandis, 1970). Equally important are the set of expectations or standards parents give their offspring as guidelines for developing their self-concepts (Ott, 1983). The adolescent's vocational aspiration, in turn, reflects these values and self-concepts.

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There is a special need for understanding parental roles in developing their deaf adolescent's career goals. Parents have problems in this area due to factors such as residential schooling which separates the child from home in addition to inefficient parent-child communication (Lerman & Guilfoyle, 1970). Parental expectations are also problematic. Parents feel deafness limits job opportunities for their children and deaf people cannot do as well as hearing people in employment (Meadow, 1967; Munson & Miller, 1979). Other parents encourage hearing youth more than deaf youth to train for occupations (DeCaro, Dowaliby, & Maruggi, 1983; DeCaro, Evans, & Dowaliby, 1982). Steffan (1982) found that parents vocationally encouraged their deaf sons more than they encouraged their deaf daughters. Concerns are justifiable if these parental expectations restrict the range of occupations young deaf adults seek to enter.

Recent research has focused on identifying dynamics within the family fostering either educational attainment or career development of the deaf adolescent so that effective interventions could be developed. Bodner-Johnson (1985, 1986) ascertained four types of parental roles which influenced academic achievement among deaf youth: (a) involvement and interaction with the child, (b) guidance and knowledge of their child's schooling, (c) press for educational achievement, and (d) adaptation to deafness. Mode of communication used by parents is another important element. Mothers more frequently than fathers selected this mode, be it sign language or speech, and the severity of the child's hearing loss along with the mother's level of education were additional factors bearing upon this decision (Kluwin & Gonter-Gaustad, 1991). Two other attributes of parent-child communication influenced the caliber of the home environment. These included the perceived quality of communication content, ranging from simple to complex, as well as the amount of time spent communicating.

Increases in both of these variables positively affected the career maturity, or readiness of the deaf adolescent to make career decisions (King, 1990).

In addition, characteristics of the deaf teenager, such as academic achievement, significantly influenced the career expectations of parents and teachers (Walker, 1982; Whitson, 1986). Interestingly, deaf students with high academic abilities were less ready to make career decisions than deaf students with low academic abilities (King, 1990). Towards explaining this behavior, Schroedel (1991) hypothesized that college-bound deaf students were more likely to defer career decisions than were deaf high school graduates planning to immediately seek employment or job-specific vocational training.

In forming career aspirations, deaf students consider, among other attributes, their academic abilities and plans after high school. Central to this self-appraisal are the adolescent's own self-concepts, which, are influenced by the expectations of parents. These expectations are shaped by conditions such as attributes of parent-child communication and family social class. Considering the parents' influential roles in the career development of their deaf adolescents, knowledge is needed to enhance their effectiveness with this responsibility.

### Objectives

The purposes of this study were:

- (1) To determine the extent to which deaf adolescents discussed their future plans with and obtained encouragement from significant other persons, especially within the family.
- (2) To ascertain which characteristics of the adolescent or his or her home life may be associated with parental involvement in planning for the future.

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- (3) To learn the specific techniques parents used to help their deaf sons or daughters prepare for more education or a future job.

### Method

#### Procedures

The data originated from two sources: (a) interviews with 75 percent of all eligible seniors (189 of 253) at their high schools during the spring of 1988 and (b) survey forms completed by 132 of 189 (70 percent) of the parents from mailings during the summer and fall of 1988. The 7 residential and 9 day high schools were located in Arkansas, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Missouri, Tennessee, and Texas.<sup>1</sup> Seniors were eligible for the study if they expected to graduate with either an academic or vocational diploma. Ineligible seniors were those graduating with certificates of attendance or enrolled in post-high school transition or remedial programs. Those who were too profoundly disabled to understand a signed interview were also excluded.

#### Adequacy of the Sample

The sample of responding parents was generally representative of its base population. There were no significant differences between respondents and nonrespondents regarding region of residence, parents' city population size, or type of seniors' high school. Fifty-one percent of responding parents lived in the north, 52 percent lived in cities with more than 250,000 people, and 68 percent had deaf sons or daughters graduating from residential high schools. However, on two measured characteristics parents participating in the survey were different from those who did not participate. Regarding parents' race, 68 percent of respondents were White compared to 42 percent of nonrespondents. There were also differences in senior's plans after high school among participating and nonparticipating parents. Responding parents

had deaf sons or daughters who were significantly more likely to attend college than were offspring of nonresponding parents. Seniors' post-graduation plans were also associated with such variables as parents' education and race. Larger percentages of seniors, whose parents had more education and were white, were more likely to enroll in college.

#### Other Respondent Characteristics

A wide diversity of parents participated in the survey. Parents' education, for example, ranged between completion of second grade to possessing a doctorate. More typically, 27 percent of mothers had not finished high school, 37 percent were high school graduates, and 36 percent had attended college. Forty percent of employed mothers worked in clerical or sales occupations. The remainder were equally distributed in (a) professional, technical, and managerial jobs, (b) machine operative and related jobs, and (c) service occupations. Eighty-eight percent of fathers and 93 percent of mothers were hearing. Ten percent of parents reported their deaf sons or daughters to have an additional handicapping condition. Fifty-three percent reported their graduating senior to be male. Fifty-one percent of fathers used speech with their deaf adolescents whereas 49 percent used sign language. Seventy-four percent of mothers used sign language and 26 percent used speech.

### Results

#### Plans After Graduation

Parents reported that 16 percent of the seniors expected to enter a rehabilitation facility or trade school for vocational training, 34 percent planned to attend a community college, 33 percent a four-year college, and 24 percent intended to seek a job. Most seniors had explicit plans: 89 percent of those aspiring to vocational training or college named a specific program they wanted to attend. Adolescents involved in developing future plans

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are displaying an important aspect of good career decision making compared to youth who are apathetic or passive in this area (Crites, 1978).

Interviews with the seniors revealed that a majority had discussed their plans after graduation with influential peers and adults in and out of school (Table 1). Mothers and high school friends were sought out most often by seniors to discuss their plans. Both the availability and the suitability of other referent persons influenced the frequency in which seniors discussed their plans with them. Such conversations were held less often with fathers, siblings, and other family members. This may be due, in part, because fathers in divorced families were not at home or brothers or sisters were younger. Most seniors approached school staff to discuss their future plans. "Other persons" mentioned by the seniors as sources of feedback included peers and deaf adults out of school. Furthermore, according to the seniors, a majority of significant persons listed in Table 1 encouraged their future plans when contacted. The overall results in this table suggest a reciprocity in feedback requested and received: most seniors

sought out significant other persons to discuss their future plans and most of these persons provided encouragement for these plans.

Two other variables significantly influenced the frequency with which seniors discussed their post-graduation plans at home. One of these was type of high school: 94 percent of day school seniors compared to 80 percent of residential seniors discussed their plans with their mothers. It would be expected that seniors from the day schools would have more time with their mothers than seniors from the residential schools; only 16 percent of the latter went home daily. Mode of communication used at home was also related to the frequency in which seniors reported discussing their future plans with their mothers. Ninety-three percent of signing mothers had deaf adolescents who discussed their plans with them in contrast to 81 percent of mothers who did not sign. Furthermore, seniors with mothers who used sign language were more likely to have a prelingual onset of deafness and attend a residential high school compared to seniors with mothers who did not use sign language.

**TABLE 1**  
**PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF SENIORS DISCUSSING**  
**OR RECEIVING ENCOURAGEMENT ABOUT FUTURE PLANS**  
**FROM SIGNIFICANT OTHER PERSONS**

Significant Other Persons	Percent of Seniors	
	Discussed	Encouraged
Mother	85	79
Father	62	73
Siblings	53	65
Other Family	54	77
VR Counselor	72	71
Teacher	76	83
HS Counselor	68	78
HS Friend	85	73
Others	38	91

N = 189 Seniors

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The finding that most seniors had discussed their future plans with their parents apparently was related to other fruitful results. One of these may be the high rate of agreement between parents and their offspring on these plans, despite the fact seniors and parents were contacted up to six months apart. Among the college-bound seniors, 91 percent of their parents agreed with their plans. Seventy-one percent of seniors expecting to seek jobs had parents who consented to these goals. In contrast, only one-third of seniors which anticipated entering vocational training had parents who thought similarly: forty-eight percent of the parents who disagreed expected their son/daughter to enter the work place; another 19 percent thought their offspring would attend college (where vocational training could be obtained). Most of the seniors planning postsecondary vocational training anticipated attending rehabilitation facilities and a few expected to enter trade or business schools. Perhaps a major reason for the discrepancy between these seniors and their parents about

post-graduation plans was that many of these parents may have been uncertain about the nature of the training available at the rehabilitation facilities.

What specific steps do parents take to help their deaf sons and daughters learn about work and jobs? More than 80 percent of parents discussed what was a "good job", their own jobs, or jobs other people do (Table 2). Furthermore, most parents encouraged their deaf adolescents to take vocational training or other courses to learn about jobs. They also encouraged them to get a part-time or summer job to learn about work. Only 60 percent encouraged their deaf offspring to visit work sites to learn about the jobs performed there. This response may have been relatively low because this task was the most specific activity listed in Table 2.

Either by talking or encouraging, a majority of parents fostered the involvement of their deaf teenagers in career-learning experiences. Both parental roles are important to the career development of adolescents (Jacobson, 1971). Even

**TABLE 2**  
**PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF PARENTS INVOLVED IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**  
**WITH THEIR DEAF SONS OR DAUGHTERS**

Career Development Activity*	Percent of Parents
Talked about a "good job"	95
Talked about parent's jobs	81
Talked about jobs other people do	82
Encouraged him or her to visit work places	60
Encouraged him or her to take courses or training to learn about a job	84
Encouraged him or her to get a job to learn more about work	86

\*Adapted from Jacobsen (1971)

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though discussing jobs is an abstract and verbal learning experience for an adolescent, parents are communicating important values when talking about jobs. Parents also encouraged their teenagers to directly learn about jobs and work through realistic experiences such as observation and hands on assimilation. For 5 of 6 items in Table 2, almost equal percentages of parents used both verbal discussion of jobs and encouragement to participate in concrete career-learning experiences with their deaf adolescents.

**Parental Needs for Job Information**

Almost three-quarters of the parents expressed a need for information on the vocational interests and aptitudes of their deaf sons and daughters. In addition, similar proportions wanted to know where job training may be obtained and where funding for such training may be secured. Other analyses determined that parental need for

this career planning information varied depending on the post-graduation plans of their deaf sons and daughters. Eighty percent of the parents of seniors bound for rehabilitation facilities wanted all types of career planning information listed on the questionnaire. In contrast, less than 60 percent of parents of the seniors who applied to four-year colleges needed this information. Most of the students destined for the rehabilitation facilities expected to enter prevocational training courses, such as job sampling. Their needs for career planning information were greater than students expecting to attend four-year colleges and who could defer career decisions.

**Specific Techniques Used by Parents**

Parents were asked to describe the ways in which they had been most helpful in preparing their deaf sons or daughters for a future job or

**TABLE 3**  
**PERCENT DISTRIBUTION OF MOST HELPFUL WAYS IN WHICH PARENTS PREPARE THEIR ADOLESCENTS FOR A FUTURE JOB OR EDUCATION**

Category	% of Parents With Comments
Promote Education	51
Adapting to Deafness	23
Psychosocial/Independence Development	21
Work Orientation	20
Goal Encouragement	18
General Encouragement	16
Contacted Professionals	8
Problem Cases	6
Parent As Advocate	6
Encouraged Career Decision	4

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more education. As summarized in Table 3, 114 parents made 198 comments which were grouped into ten categories. Promoting education was mentioned by more than half of the parents. Between one-sixth and one-fourth of respondents reported endeavors such as adapting to deafness, fostering psychosocial development and independence, work orientation, and goal encouragement. Smaller proportions mentioned four other types of activities. This mix of responses reflects the broad scope of important factors in developing the adolescents' educational and career aspirations. Each category is briefly discussed in Table 3.

### **Promoting Education**

Parents mentioned the importance of placing their children into the most appropriate schools and seeing that they had good teachers. More directly, they encouraged their children to attend school, complete assignments, prepare for tests, and take courses interesting to them. Seeing their deaf adolescents graduate from high school was a key focal point. Parents of graduates bound for postsecondary training emphasized the importance of acquiring more education and how this training would benefit future independence, life style, and quality of a future job. These parents were actively involved with their deaf teenagers in discussing future options, specific programs, and courses of study. Several visited prospective postsecondary programs.

### **Adapting to Deafness**

Parents followed several strategies in coming to terms with their child's hearing impairment. Foremost among these was communication. Either the parents and other family members learned sign language or assisted the deaf child in enhancing his or her own communication skills. Another aspect of this category was fostering an attitude of "deaf

people can do it". Several elements comprised this category: (a) considering the child as a person first, and then as a deaf individual, and (b) emphasizing that deaf people can be successful in life. In this latter respect, several deaf parents exemplified themselves as role models for their deaf adolescents. In another case, a parent took his deaf teenager to various companies where deaf people worked. A third component of adapting to deafness was expressed by parents who selected residential schools where their children could meet other deaf persons. A central theme found in these elements was that various attributes of deafness – sign language, deaf people, special schools, and the deaf community – were positively accepted within the home.

### **Psychosocial/Independence Development**

Among the two themes in this group, the first involved parents teaching their children values, such as accepting responsibility, being patient, and "anything done should be done well". The second theme focused upon fostering self-reliance and independence. Specifically, parents taught their teenagers how to use checking or savings accounts and spend money wisely. Other parents encouraged their adolescents to make their own decisions and life choices. Parents accomplished these goals by either serving as role models or exposing their children to as many life experiences as possible.

### **Work Orientation**

Parents used a variety of approaches to familiarize their deaf teenagers with the world of work. Several mentioned the importance of working. Specific work values such as punctuality, getting along with others on the job, the quality of work, and working to one's full potential were also noted. Other parents actively assisted their teenagers in obtaining summer or part-time jobs.



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### Goal Encouragement

In helping their teenagers make life decisions, parents took an almost deliberative approach. They first assisted the child in discovering his or her talents and interests relevant to possible future careers. Next, the advantages and disadvantages of various career options were discussed. As needed, the importance of additional training was pointed out. Unrealistic goals were sometimes discouraged, whereas attainable goals were encouraged. Most of these actions were geared towards aiding the adolescent's understanding of what he or she wanted to do.

### General Encouragement

Other parents used more indirect approaches in supporting their adolescents' future plans. As a group, these parents made themselves available to listen, communicate, and provide guidance or advice to their teenagers. They encouraged their children to grow at their own pace through both positive and negative life experiences. This type of parent also assisted by providing examples and emotional support.

### Encouraged Career Decision

It is notable that few parents mentioned specific careers they felt their deaf sons or daughters should enter. Most of these parents stated that their teenagers had talents for a specific line of work and that training would lead to better jobs.

### Problem Cases

Among the two categories of parents in this group were those who were not involved in preparing their deaf sons or daughters for a future job or more education. Most felt "the school knows best". Another group of parents were frustrated with a number of problems facing their deaf adolescents, including lack of services and appropriate facilities after high school. Many of

these parents had deaf youngsters with additional handicapping conditions.

### The Parent as Advocate

A contrasting parenting style was exemplified by parents who sought help from many sources, including other parents and professionals, in dealing with the needs of their deaf child. Such parents sought counseling for themselves, and regularly attended parent-child conferences and meetings at the school. They were also involved in workshops to learn various parenting skills. These parents worked closely with professionals in education and rehabilitation to see that their children's needs were met.

### Contact with Professionals

Most of these parents mentioned meetings with either school or rehabilitation counselors to plan their adolescent's future transition. Several of these parents stated they had to take the initiative with or confront professionals they felt were either not providing adequate information or taking decisive actions. However, on the whole, a climate of cooperation between professionals and parents pervaded. Obviously the 8 percent of parents in Table 3 reporting contacts with professionals understates the probable actual frequency of such contacts. Apparently, few parents considered these contacts relevant to answering the question on the survey form.

Several of the factors discussed above have been identified in other research studies of parents of deaf adolescents. "Promoting education" and "adapting to deafness" were two factors in the family environment significantly correlated to reading achievement (Bodner-Johnson, 1985, 1986). "The school knows best" was an attitude expressed by parents interviewed by Steffan (1980). However, the high school in Steffan's study had a strong program of involving parents with the school. This was not always the case at several high schools in the current survey where

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geography and other barriers hindered relations between the school and the parents. Thus, depending on the quality of parent-school relations, the "school knows best" attitude can be interpreted either negatively or positively.

### Conclusions

This study yielded insights into understanding parental roles in the career development of their deaf teenagers. These activities take place within a process of adolescents seeking advice and learning about jobs with parents providing information and support through a variety of behaviors. There were major differences in the strategies parents used to prepare their deaf offspring for more education or a future job. Furthermore, most parents needed additional career planning information. These and other results from the study have implications for the ways in which education and rehabilitation professionals communicate with parents. The findings are also relevant to developing techniques for training parents to become "career educators". These and related issues are discussed below.

Almost three-fourths of parents needed career planning information when many of their deaf offspring were already enrolled in postsecondary training. Two interpretations can be made from this finding. The first is that these requests were made at a peak time in the transition between high school and future options. Furthermore, it appears that many of these parents were taking the long-term point of view. Many will have deaf sons and daughters in postsecondary education for an extensive time. It is also possible that many teenagers had not yet started specific career preparation studies: about 60 percent of deaf college freshmen change their major fields of training (Kersting, 1978; McKee, Whitehead, & Bondi-Wolcott, 1984). There is an evident need for education and rehabilitation professionals to share career planning information with parents. The

second interpretation notes, with perplexity, that most parents reported they had not yet received this information. What are the patterns in communication between parents and professionals involved in various aspects of the high school graduate's career planning? This subject needs further research. Better policies and practices will enhance more effective roles for parents and professionals as deaf adolescents make important decisions about their education and employment.

Accounts of the ways parents felt they have assisted their deaf adolescents to prepare for a future job or more education yielded a wide range of responses. These include not only education and career decision making, but also psychosocial development, independent living skills, parental adaptation to deafness, and communication aptitudes. At least four contrasting parenting styles were evident in their comments: (a) some parents directly helped their teenager to crystalize goals and develop means to achieve them, (b) other parents more indirectly encouraged their offspring in forming their goals by listening and providing feedback, (c) sometimes parents felt the need to be advocates for their deaf sons or daughters to get better services from professionals, and (d) other parents, overwhelmed by problems associated with their deaf adolescent, deferred to others, such as the school, about decisions needed. Although factors as "promoting education" and "adapting to deafness" do not have direct implications for vocational development, they do have important ramifications for career learning by deaf adolescents. For example, promoting a "deaf people can do it" attitude can help overcome paternalistic stereotypes parents may have about the occupational potential of deaf people.

Few parents advocated a specific career field for their deaf sons and daughters. Most recognized that the career choice was the adolescent's decision. This situation marks a key turning point: the transition of the adolescent into a young adult who is on the threshold of making

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life choices after years of supportive preparation by parents, teachers, and others. Ideally, this parental support has been transformed over time from doing things for the teenager to doing things with the teenager. Many written comments by parents in the survey reflected this change in their role.

The overall picture emerging from this study is generally high levels of reported involvement by seniors and their parents in the adolescent's career development and planning for the future. However, concern is expressed about the parents who did not participate in this study. These were more likely to comprise those from minority backgrounds and presumably lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Thus, there are reasons to believe that these nonresponding parents need assistance to enhance their effectiveness in preparing their deaf sons and daughters for adult roles. Another important group of parents not fully represented in this study are those having deaf youth with additional handicapping conditions. Due to the eligibility criteria for participating in this study, only 10 percent of the seniors had an additional disability compared to 29 percent of the school-aged, hearing-impaired population (Schildroth & Hotto, 1991). Thus, the possibility exists that one of the reasons for the high rates of involvement in career development activities reported in this study is that households with "problem kids" were under-represented.

This study revealed the diverse ways in which parents are involved in preparing their teenagers for the future. These results suggest that multiple approaches are needed to effectively communicate career planning information to parents. Both parents and high school educators agree that parents need to: (a) act as worker role models, (b) identify and overcome barriers to career development, (c) provide career counseling, and (d) use career planning strategies (Egelston-Dodd, O'Brien, & Lenard, 1984). The results of the present study (see Table 3) suggest that specific parent skills in enhancing their adolescent's career

development may be related to generic skills in strengthening the educational aspirations, psychosocial development, and independent living skills of their deaf sons and daughters. Furthermore, several activities are required to meet parents' needs for more career planning information. Outreach activities, such as workshops and information dissemination by schools, can enhance the career planning roles of parents. The success of these strategies will hinge on the availability of skilled parent trainers equipped with suitable career education materials and curricula.

Unfortunately, almost 90 percent of the nation's special high schools for deaf students lack career educators (Twyman & Ouellette, 1978) and almost 90 percent of the deaf seniors in the present study did not experience a career education course (Schroedel, 1991). These conditions suggest a nationwide paucity of career education efforts in the instruction of deaf youth. There is an apparent need to develop a national resource center to provide instructional materials and conduct inservice training of school staff. A similar endeavor, the National Project on Career Education supported by Gallaudet and the National Technical Institute for the Deaf existed between 1978 and 1983. The reemergence of such a national effort will require networking, lobbying, and innovative and cost-effective ideas. One such idea is that of parents training parents. The parents who participated in this study provided many tips on how to prepare their deaf youth for more education or a future job. "Telling it like it is" is one of the most effective types of training parents need and can provide. Although this study found that parents use a wide variety of strategies to assist their deaf teenagers make future plans and career decisions, no information is available to assess the quality of these activities. The premise remains that training can enhance the effectiveness of parents in the career development of their deaf adolescents.

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### Notes

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