THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE ON
COMMUNITY INCLUSION
of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

A Practical Guide for People with Mental Health Conditions Who Want to Work

A guide from the Temple University Collaborative on Community Inclusion of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

The contents of this guide were developed under a grant from the Department of Education, NIDRR grant number H113B100037. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

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Acknowledgements

This Guide was based upon the earlier work "Matrix Research Institute's Brochure Series on Mental Illness and Work" compiled and produced by Karen Escovitz and edited by Karen Escovitz and Richard Baron with support from the National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research. The current 2013 edition was updated and edited by Arlene Solomon, Horizon House, Inc. The Temple University Collaborative gratefully acknowledges the thoughtful editorial contributions to this document made by Susan Rogers, Director of the National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse, based in Philadelphia. Formatting and editing were provided by Jared S. Pryor, Temple University Collaborative; and graphics design provided by Maria del Mar Cabiya, Philadelphia Department of Behavioral Health & Intellectual Disability Services.

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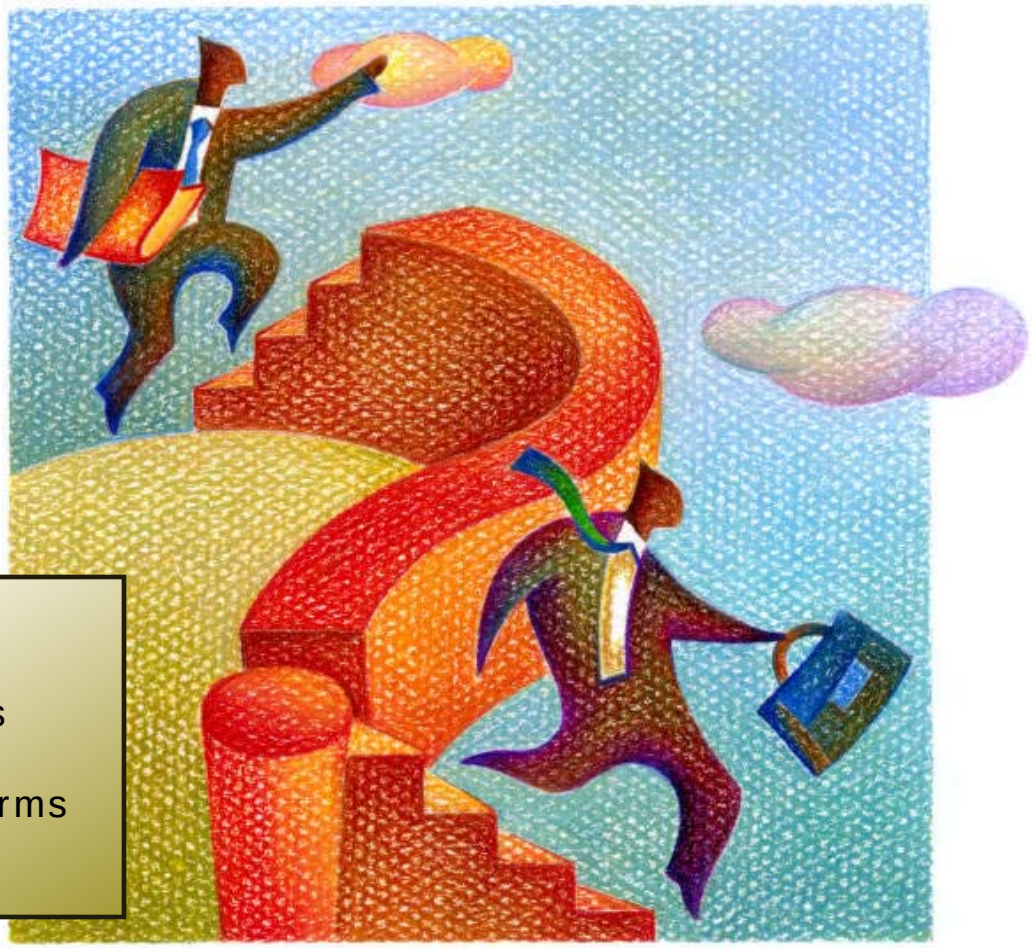
Section 1:

An Introduction to Mental Health Challenges and Work



In this Section:

- Introduction
- How to use this guide?
- Defining our terms
- The Guide

Introduction

Work is an important part of most people's lives. Yet most people with mental health conditions do not work, even though the great majority of them report that work is a very important goal. The truth is that many people with mental health conditions are able to work successfully if they receive the supports they need and want.

The authors believe that people in recovery should have the opportunity to live their lives as independently as possible in their communities. For many people, work can be an important part of recovery, of achieving self-sufficiency, and of maximizing their potential.

If you are a person in recovery without a job, you may be wondering whether working is a good idea for you. You might want to know whether you can find the help you need to prepare for work. You might be uncertain about how to get started or worried that you won't succeed. You might be wondering how to find a job you enjoy and begin to build a long-term career for yourself. This Guide is for you.

How to Use This Guide?

This Guide is designed to provide information you may need to figure out whether working is right for you, and to help you be successful if you do decide to work. It can serve as an important first step in your journey towards employment. You may want to read this Guide from start to finish, or you may want to pick and choose which sections you think will be most helpful. A list of the topics, with descriptions, can be found in this section.

While this Guide is primarily designed to be of use to individuals who are pursuing employment or are thinking about it, it can also be used in peer groups, job clubs, clubhouses, psychiatric rehabilitation programs, or community mental health settings by groups of people who are meeting regularly to explore the possibility of employment. A Facilitator's Manual is available to help participants, advocates or service providers use this Guide as a way of organizing a work-related discussion or support group. The Facilitator's Manual includes guidelines for group participants, discussion topics, and strategies for helping people make the best possible use of the information in each section.

Reading about and talking about employment sometimes makes people a little uneasy. It can bring up hopes and dreams, as well as fears and memories of past experiences. It can be very helpful to discuss your reactions with a supportive group of people who are exploring how to handle mental health challenges and work. This sort of group can provide opportunities to learn from each other's experiences, and to offer mutual advice and support. If you are not using this Guide with a group, we encourage you to discuss your

reactions with a friend, family member or counselor. Take your time, get all the information and support you need and want, and then you will be able to make up your own mind about the role of work in your life.

Defining Our Terms:

Work

For the purposes of this Guide, when we say "work" we mean paid employment. There are many different kinds of paid employment to consider when you are trying to figure out what might be the best match for your interests and abilities. You may want to work full time, part time, seasonally or only once in a while. You may want to work for a big company, a small business, or be self-employed. You may want to work with other people, or alone. You may stay at the same job for a long time or change jobs frequently. There are many possibilities, and all of them are reasonable ways to think about work.

A Word about Words

There are a lot of different ways to talk about people in recovery. Formerly, individuals in recovery were referred to as 'people having psychiatric disabilities' or 'people with mental illnesses.' Due to issues associated with stigma and discrimination, some individuals do not want to be identified in those ways. Some individuals are okay with being referred to as 'consumers' (of mental health services). Throughout this Guide, we have chosen to talk about 'people with mental health challenges' or 'a person with a mental health diagnosis'

or ‘a person in recovery.’ You will see the term “disability” used in this Guide when there are legal implications or funding regulations associated with it, as when asking for ‘reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act, or when seeking services from a state vocational rehabilitation agency. Most of the time, however, we will be talking about how people with mental health conditions who have difficulties related to moods, behaviors, or cognitive states may be helped to pursue, obtain and maintain employment.

Rehabilitation

In this document, we will refer to Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Vocational Rehabilitation. Psychiatric Rehabilitation refers to services that are designed to help people with mental health challenges to develop their social, occupational and living skills towards the goal of living as independently as possible in the community. Vocational Rehabilitation refers to the part of that process that is specifically about work and work-related skills.

The Guide

Getting a first job, getting a better job, or developing your career will require a significant amount of time and effort on your part. Ideally, this Guide can help you decide what you want to do, prepare yourself for each step, and proceed with a clear sense of direction. The Guide has fifteen sections, described below:

1. **An Introduction to Mental Health Challenges and Work:** This section, which you are reading right now, introduces the topic of work for people with mental health challenges, gives a detailed description of the sections that follow and how to use them, and provides some definitions of key terms.

2. **The Importance of Work:** This section describes some of the advantages of working, and the evidence that work is a realistic possibility for people with mental health challenges. It also includes some tips for helping you make your own decisions about work, and some strategies for getting started.

3. **Barriers to Employment and Resources for Overcoming Them:** In this section we review some barriers to employment, and some strategies and resources that may overcome these barriers. The section also contains descriptions of some of the most common types of programs that help people in recovery to work.

4. **Empowerment: You Are in Charge:** This section explains the idea of empowerment, and provides suggestions for how to take charge of your own rehabilitation. This includes tips for how to make sure that your support team helps you do what YOU want to do, and respects your right to make decisions for yourself.

5. **Self-Assessment and Planning:** The best way to set yourself up for a good job experience is to clarify for yourself what your interests, skills and desires are and then look for a job that matches them. This section is designed to help you systematically assess your vocational abilities and preferences. This section will also help you consider how you want work to fit into the rest of your life; and to consider how your financial situation, responsibilities, relationships, schedule, location, and health will affect, or be affected by, going to work.

6. **Applying for Jobs:** This section explains some things you might need to know about applying for jobs. It provides some suggestions for how to look for job openings, how to use the Internet in your search, how to keep good records of your job search, and how to keep a positive outlook in the process.

7. **Résumés, Cover Letters, and Job Application Forms:** This section provides detailed information about how to create effective résumés and cover letters to use when you apply for jobs, and how to fill out job application forms. Specific strategies for dealing with gaps in one's work history are provided.

8. **Job Interviews:** This section will help you practice and prepare for job interviews, and includes tips for handling tricky questions. Interview follow-up procedures are also discussed.

9. **SSI Work Incentives:** Sometimes individuals who receive SSI are afraid to work because they believe that they will lose their check or their medical benefits. The truth is that many people work and continue to receive all or part of their SSI benefits. This section explains exactly how the SSI Work Incentive programs operate, so that you can make informed decisions about what combination of work and SSI will be best for you. The section includes information about how PASS (Plans for Achieving Self- Support) and IRWE (Impairment Related Work Expenses) can be used, information about the Ticket-to-Work Program, how to keep track of different kinds of income, and tips for record keeping and budgeting.

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11. **Your Rights in the Workplace: Job Accommodations and the ADA:** The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) is an important law that protects the civil rights of people with disabilities, including those with mental health challenges. It is especially important in making it illegal for employers to discriminate (in hiring, firing, promotion or supervision) on the basis of disability. The ADA also requires that employers provide persons with disabilities "reasonable accommodations" in the workplace. Read this section to learn about your workplace rights under the ADA, and to learn about job accommodations that can be helpful to people with mental health challenges.

12. **Dealing with Disclosure, Discrimination and Harassment on the Job:** Even though your rights in the workplace are protected by the ADA, you may still experience unfair treatment. This section will help you figure out what to do if you are experiencing discrimination or harassment on the job. This section also includes a discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing your mental health challenges. This is a very delicate and personal issue, and it is important to think carefully about whether, when, and whom you should tell.

13. **Starting Work: What to Expect and How to Prepare:** This section will help you know what to expect when you start a new job. In addition to learning a lot of new information at once, you will also have to be prepared to interact with new people, get used to a new routine and handle other possible changes in your day-to-day life.

14. **Mobilizing Long-Term Employment Supports:**
    This section will help you anticipate the supports you might need to stay at your job on an ongoing basis, supports that any worker might need, and supports that might be related to your mental health challenges. Included is information about different sources of support, and how to access them.

15. **Prioritizing Work for Your Future:**
    All people who work have to figure out how to keep work a priority, balance responsibilities, and take good care of themselves so that they can continue to work and function. This section will help you think about how to maintain stability in your work life, and how a stable work life can have a positive impact on other areas of your life.

If you are unsure about working, reading through this Guide may help you to figure things out. If you have already decided to pursue employment, we hope this Guide will help you to be successful in finding a job that's right for you. We wish you the best of luck on your journey to employment!

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Section 2:

The Importance of Work

In this Section:

- Introduction
- Benefits
- Is it possible for me to work?
- How do I decide?
- How to get started?
- Additional Resources

Introduction

You may wonder whether working is a good idea for you. This Section will review some of the advantages of working. It will also address whether it is possible for people with mental health challenges to work. (Spoiler alert: it is!) And it will give you some pointers about how to make your own decisions about work.

Benefits

The benefits of working include:

- **Money:** Obviously, work provides income to help support ourselves and our families, and to plan for the future. Having your own money will help you live independently and make your own choices.

- **Health:** People who work are often physically healthier than people who do not work, with fewer aches and pains and more energy for enjoying life. Also, people who work are less likely to have emotional ills than those who do not. Work provides structure, helps people stay active and involved, and helps them exercise their bodies, minds, creativity, and skills. In addition, meeting the daily demands of a job means spending less time on the challenges of having a mental health diagnosis.

- **Connections to Other People:** Loneliness and isolation are common problems of people with mental health challenges. Work can provide an opportunity to interact with other people on a regular basis. Some people will become good sources of support for you at work; some may become close personal friends. Many people have met their

spouses at work. In other words, work can be a great place to form valuable relationships.

- **Meaning:** Work provides most of us with a way to contribute to our community and a chance to prove our own value. There are many other ways for people to carve out a positive role for themselves, but work is often a central part of who we are and how other people think of us. It can provide a sense of accomplishment and the feeling of being part of a larger group with a purpose.

- **A Sense of Future:** Work can give us a sense of where we are headed in life. Whether we want to earn a promotion or a raise or develop new skills, working can motivate us to move forward and improve our lives. Working is a way of investing in ourselves and our future.

Is it possible for me to work?

Yes! People in recovery can work, especially if they have the support they need.

- **Lots of people in recovery <u>do</u> work:** Those who are working hold a wide range of jobs, from entry-level positions to more demanding jobs and professional careers. In industry, business, social services, tourism, food services, journalism, health care, and nearly every occupational category, there are workers who have mental health challenges. People in recovery are increasingly showing their capacity to hold onto jobs; it's about learning to manage the challenges and get the right supports.

- **Jobs are available in a wide variety of patterns:** Some people work in traditional 9-to-5, 5-day-a-week jobs. Many others work in part-time positions, on short-term assignments,

on their own schedule, or are self-employed. This reflects changing patterns in the national workforce.

- **Job accommodations can be made available at most jobs:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which became enforceable in 1992, forbids discrimination in hiring and promotions because of disabilities, AND requires employers to make "reasonable accommodations" to the needs of working persons with disabilities, including psychiatric disabilities, as long as they can perform the "essential functions" of the job. Job accommodations might include changes in work schedules or environment, special assistance with communication, job coaching, reassignment of specific tasks, or other changes that you might need in order to do the job you were hired to do. Section 11 in this series has more information about job accommodations and the ADA.

- **Employment programs have helped people find and keep jobs:** A new generation of vocational rehabilitation programs helps people find "real jobs for real pay" quickly, without long-term placements in workshops and pre-vocational classes. These programs are proving very successful in preparing people for work, finding them jobs, and supporting them on the job. See Section 3 for more information about rehabilitation programs.

- **More employers report that they are willing to give people with mental health challenges a chance:** Although employer attitudes toward people with mental health challenges have been slow to change, the numbers of employers and personnel managers who say they are willing to consider a job application from someone with a mental health diagnosis is growing steadily.

- **You may be able to find the kind of job you want more easily than you think**. Or you may continue to have difficulty

working because of your challenges, or for other reasons. The right match between the individual and the job, and the right supports from employment programs, can make all the difference.

How do I decide?

Make your decision based on accurate information. Also, figure out what you really want for yourself; don't decide based on what someone else thinks you should do.

- **Consider the whole picture.** You may have mental health challenges, but you are a whole person with abilities, skills, interests, ideas, relationships, needs, feelings and dreams. Consider what working might mean for all of these aspects of your life.

- **Take the initiative.** It takes energy, commitment, and effort to pursue employment. While there are many people and programs that can help you, they will not (and should not) do it *for* you. If you know what you want to do, start doing it. If you know you need support, find it. No one is better qualified to act on your behalf than you are!

- **Get the best information you can.** It may take some time and effort, but it is worth spending the time to sort out the myths from the facts about work. You may need help to find out everything you want to know. Take your time. Don't be afraid to ask questions.

- **Remember that there are different perspectives.** Even if someone tells you what they think will be "best," you are still the best judge of what will be best for you.

  - Mental health professionals used to think that work would be too stressful or upsetting for people in recovery. Some may

still say that you should “stabilize your condition” before considering employment. You need to decide for yourself whether vocational rehabilitation or working would be too stressful, or whether it could help you.

- Vocational rehabilitation counselors or case managers may have told you that finding a job would be difficult. But times have changed! More and more counselors recognize the value of employment for individuals with mental health challenges. You may need to help counselors recognize your potential and motivation for work.

- Family members or friends may advise you not to work because they are worried about stress or problems that might occur on the job. They may worry that they will not be able to protect you, or that your challenges will get worse. You may need to help them find ways that they can show their caring by supporting your desire to work.

How to get started?

If you are reading this brochure, congratulate yourself: you have already started! You may want to use the rest of this guide as you continue. Here are some more things you can do:

- **Think about what you might like to do:** What kind of work would you prefer? What would you be good at? What kind of schedule would you be ready for now or in the future? What kind of salary would you want? And so on. Work is a serious obligation, and you will want to know as much as possible about yourself, your interests, and your potential before you get started.

- There is a great resource you can use to help you answer these questions: it is a government website called http://www.onetonline.org/ or O*net. O*net lists hundreds of jobs along with job descriptions, salaries, and job qualifications. It also has an interest survey that helps you identify what you like and don't like in a job, and makes suggestions based upon your responses. The website is www.onetonline.org.

- **Talk about your work ambitions with people who can help:** Spend time with family members and friends exploring your ideas and hopes; and seek out a counselor, case manager, peer specialist, or vocational rehabilitation worker to help you explore your options and think through your plans.

- **Work with local rehabilitation program personnel:** There are a variety of programs that work with individuals to attain their vocational goals. For example, each state in the country has an office that focuses on vocational rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities. Different states have different names for these rehabilitation services – some are Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), others are Divisions of Rehabilitation Services, etc. - but they are part of every state human services systems. Their mission is to help people who have disabilities identify a vocational goal and gain competitive employment. They may fund training or education when appropriate to help people gain the qualifications necessary to find a job in their chosen field. Individuals must have a documented disability and be willing to go through the process to establish the disability. This may include a psychiatric evaluation, tests to establish a learning disability if appropriate, or physical examinations when the individual has a physical disability. They also offer placement services that may include individual or group assistance. Not everyone with a disability will qualify for services. For more information, check out the website for your state government,

and look for an 'office of vocational rehabilitation' or similar name.

- **Assert yourself:** Even if someone tells you that you are 'too sick to ever work' or 'too sick to work yet,' keep looking for the encouragement and support you need to make it possible for you to work.

- **Find peer-run programs:** Many peer-run programs, sometimes called peer resource centers, run job clubs and other self-help activities and can provide a supportive group of people who can share concerns, strategies, and solutions. For more information check out the website for the National Association of Peer Specialists (NAPS) at www.naops.org or contact your local Mental Health Association.

- **Be willing to try!** You might have to try a few different jobs before you can tell what kind of work is the best for your skills and interests. Sometimes the best way to figure out what you can do is to try doing it. You'll never know until you try!

YOU CAN DO IT!

If you decide that you really want to work, don't let anybody tell you that you can't do it! Somewhere out there are jobs for you. Finding work will take some time and effort. If you can do a little bit at a time and are willing to keep working at it, you can do it!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Check out the following websites for information on issues facing individuals who have psychiatric disabilities:

- The Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation at Boston University has resources, curricula, and workbooks at http://cpr.bu.edu/;
- Virginia Commonwealth University has a Rehabilitation and Research Training Center on employment that has information and resources about work and disability issues at www.worksupport.com; and
- The Judge David L. Bazelon Center, which deals with legal and advocacy issues, has a website that includes information on community integration and employment at http://www.bazelon.org/Where-we-tand/community-integration/employment/employment-policy-documents.aspx

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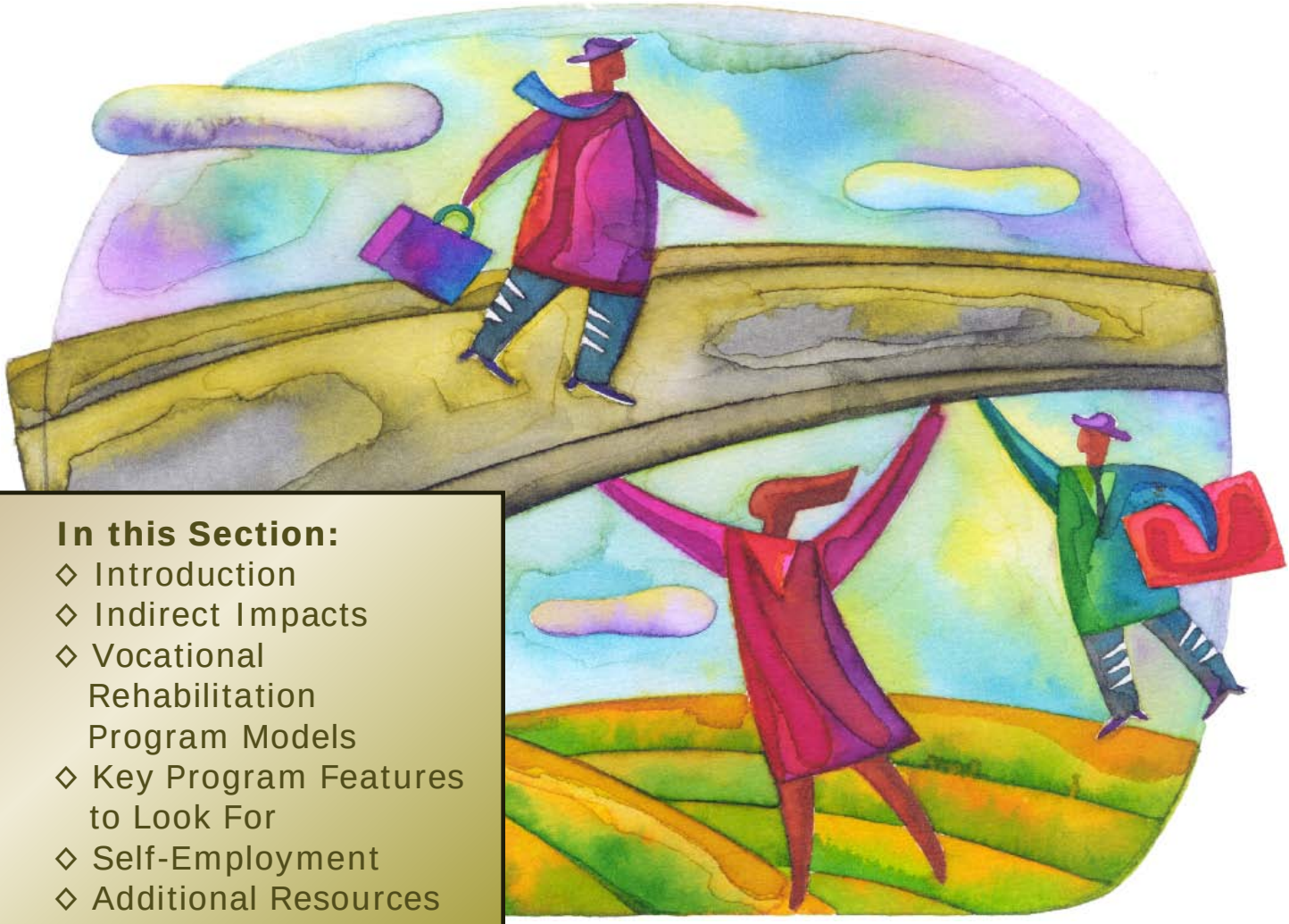
Section 3:

Overcoming Barriers to Employment



In this Section:

- Introduction
- Indirect Impacts
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program Models
- Key Program Features to Look For
- Self-Employment
- Additional Resources

Introduction

If you are a person in recovery who wants to enter or re-enter the workforce, you will need to be both realistic (acknowledging that you may face very real barriers to employment) and resourceful (learning how to overcome those barriers as you move toward your goal).

In this chapter, we will review some of the most common problems faced by people with mental health diagnoses who want to find (or keep) a job, and some of the programs and strategies that can help you solve these problems. You can carry out some of the strategies yourself; other strategies may require the help of a counselor, therapist, job coach or peer specialist.

Not every person with mental health challenges has all of these problems; this list is intended to encourage people to evaluate their own situation and to consider what strategies might help them. Remember: there are strategies and supports to help you address whatever problems you may encounter as you enter the workforce, and supports are available from several different types of vocational programs designed to help people in recovery find and keep jobs. In the second part of this Section, you can get some ideas about which ones might be helpful.

Symptoms of mental health conditions can cause difficulties on the job for some people. With proper planning, care, and support, you can manage most mental health challenges and they do not have to keep you from working. Talk to your psychiatrist or therapist about how to address any such problems so that your job won't be affected. Adjusting your medications or treatment plan may be an important part of your strategy for minimizing any difficulties.

Direct Impacts

Here are some of the barriers that are a direct result of mental health challenges, and some coping strategies that can help you manage them at work.

***Cognitive Barriers*:** Difficulty processing or filtering information, remembering things, or concentrating can interfere with your ability to work.	*Strategy:* You can learn organizational techniques to compensate for any cognitive barriers. For instance, taking notes and creating lists can help you keep track of work responsibilities. Your employer may also help by providing written instructions, minimizing distractions, or offering other accommodations.
***Perceptual Distortions*:** Sometimes individuals perceive ordinary situations, objects and people as threatening, unfriendly, strange or unusual.	*Strategy:* People you trust can help you test the reality of the situation and maintain a realistic view of the world around you.
***Problems with Moods or Anxiety*:** When a mood changes quickly, is too extreme, or doesn't match the current situation, people may behave in ways that are not appropriate to their work environment. Serious bouts of anxiety or depression can be distressing and make it hard to focus on your job.	*Strategy:* Learn to avoid situations that trigger extreme moods or anxiety, and acquire methods for preventing moods or anxiety from getting out of control. There are stress-reduction techniques such as breathing, meditation and relaxation exercises that can help you manage and minimize the disruptions that result from extreme or quick-changing moods. Also, it is important to get enough

	sleep and eat a healthy diet: people are better able to handle stress and anxiety if they are in good physical condition. See Resources for Wellness at the end of this Section.
***Affective Barriers*:** Some mental health conditions can affect the way people express their emotions: your facial expression or tone of voice may show either very little emotion or too much emotion. This can lead to misunderstandings with co-workers.	Learn more about what types of emotional expressions are expected by the people around you, and learn to concentrate on expressing your feelings so that others understand you better.
***Unpredictability of Challenges*:** Mental health challenges can appear, or reappear, unexpectedly even if they have been under control for some time. This may make you nervous about going to work.	Learn to recognize early warning signs so that you can get effective help early on, and avoid a crisis. In medical terms, these warning signs are called "prodromal symptoms." Ask your doctor to help you learn to identify your prodromal symptoms and what you can do when they occur .

Indirect Impacts

Some barriers are not directly due to mental health challenges but create problems nonetheless.

Indirect Barriers	Strategy
***Treatment Effects*:** These are negative effects caused by some mental health treatments. The most common example would be medication side effects, which can range from annoying (such as dry mouth) to significant (such as weight gain).	Learn to take greater control over your own treatment. Know the side effects of any medications the doctor prescribes and if there are alternatives that may not affect you the same way. Ask your doctor to work with you to find medications and dosages that manage your issues but will not interfere with your ability to work. It is important for you to make decisions about your care based upon your wishes and achieving the best outcomes with the least side effects. Tell your doctor how important it is to you to maintain or obtain employment.
***Low Tolerance for Stress*:** It can take a lot of concentration to manage the challenges of your condition and work at the same time. Because of this, you may have less energy or patience to deal with even the ordinary stresses of the workplace. Even if	Learn techniques for managing your issues in addition to relaxation and other approaches to help you handle stress.

you are adequately handling your work stress, you might still feel overwhelmed in some other areas of your life.	
***Interpersonal Barriers*:** Many people experience mental health challenges for the first time late in adolescence, when most people fine-tune their social skills and interpersonal style. If you experienced the onset of problems at that time, you may have missed the opportunity to learn the interpersonal skills you need on the job (e.g., negotiating, relationship building, persuasion, etc.). This can cause you to feel awkward or unsure of yourself around other people, and to become isolated both in the community and at work.	With practice, you can learn to interact more effectively with others through participation in groups, by imitating contact with others, and by observing how people interact with each other. You can role-play situations at work with someone you trust. There are also many self-help books available that can help you learn how to handle yourself and what to say in different situations.
***Interrupted Work Histories*:** If you have had extended periods of unemployment or have changed jobs a lot due to your mental health issues, it may be difficult to convince a potential employer that you are dependable and a hard worker.	Develop a skills-based résumé, emphasizing what you can do and have done. Use volunteer work to develop skills, and to add recent work experience and references to your résumé. (See Section 7 for more information about creating résumés.)
***Employer Discrimination and Stigma*:** Some employers will discriminate against you if they become aware of your psychiatric	Learn how to decide whether to let people know that you have a disability, and learn about the rights you have which protect you

history because they believe negative stereotypes about people with mental health challenges. No matter how far you have come in your recovery and how experienced you may be in your chosen field, this may still happen. Also, you may encounter co-workers who have similar negative attitudes.	against discrimination. (See Section 12 for a more detailed discussion of the pros and cons of disclosure, and Section 11 for information about your rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act.)

You can learn how to maximize your capacity for productive work by increasing your skills, by developing good coping strategies, and by using the supports available to you. There are many people who can help you figure out how to overcome the barriers to work, including family members, friends, and service providers. Sometimes the most helpful person may be someone who has overcome similar barriers, such as a peer specialist.

Some people may tell you that you can't or shouldn't work. These people may be trying to protect you. Decide for yourself whether you want to take on the risks and rewards of work. Ask the people who care about you to support you in making your own choices.

Vocational Rehabilitation Program Models

There are several different types of vocational rehabilitation programs that can help you address barriers such as the ones reviewed above. Each has advantages and

disadvantages. Learn about each approach, and find out what is available in your area. Talk with agencies that offer these programs and ask as many questions as you need to in order to find a program that you think will work best for you. Check out the Internet resources listed under each program and at the end of this Section.

- **Clubhouse Program and Transitional Employment (TE).** Clubhouses are programs for individuals with mental health diagnoses. Participants are called "members" and run most of the functions of the clubhouse with minimal staff intervention. At the core of the program is the vocational component, including work at the program as well as 'transitional employment.'

  Transitional employment (TE) gives individuals who are not ready for competitive employment an opportunity to try working at sites in the community on a short-term basis – for anywhere from three to six months. TE helps people develop basic work skills that they could apply to any job (e.g., sticking to a work schedule, adjusting to the pace of a work day). TE programs offer an opportunity to practice working in entry-level positions. After an initial placement, people are either offered a different transitional job, or may begin looking for a regular competitive job. In TE, anyone who wants to is usually given the opportunity to work, and the program staff provides necessary job training and coaching. Members are compensated for their work either directly by the employer or through the clubhouse. Clubhouses help with permanent competitive employment as well. For more information about clubhouses**,** visit Fountain House, the nation's first clubhouse, at http://www.fountainhouse.org/. In addition, the Fountain House website has a list of clubhouse coalitions throughout the U.S. at http://www.iccd.org.coalitions.html.

- **Supported Employment (SE).** Supported employment helps individuals obtain competitive employment at jobs that pay minimum wage and above, at worksites that include both individuals with and without mental health diagnoses. Generally, an employment specialist or job coach is assigned to work with you on an individual basis as well as in groups.

  Many SE programs have job clubs where people can gain peer support and share job leads and concerns. Support varies depending upon the type of funding the program receives. It generally includes individualized assistance from the employment specialist (or job coach) where the individual and the support person decide upon what services are needed. Services include help with résumé writing and job interviews, identifying job leads, using the Internet for job searches, and support once the individual starts the job. In this type of program, job placements that meet your specific interests and skills are sought; and the jobs are not time-limited, as they are in Transitional Employment.

  Many programs use the supported employment principles established by the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which research has shown to be the most successful approach to finding and keeping employment. It is known as an evidence-based practice because its effectiveness has been proven by numerous research studies. For more information on supported employment, check out SAMHSA's Supported Employment Toolkit at http://store.samhsa.gov/product/Supported-Employment-Evidence-Based-Practices-EBP-KIT/SMA08-4365. The toolkit can be downloaded free of charge.

- **Individual Placement with Supports (IPS).** IPS is a form of 'supported employment,' described above, but in this approach there is a team of professionals to serve the person in recovery. The team consists of a psychiatrist, case manager, employment

specialist, nurse, and other providers who work with the person in all aspects of life. The employment specialist helps the person find a regular job in the "competitive" job market, and provides follow-along support. The employment specialist also works with the rest of the team to share information, anticipate problems and develop effective solutions and strategies.

The IPS model is often used in Programs of Assertive Community Treatment (PACT) settings and Community Mental Health Centers, many of which are balancing their clinical services with more vocational programming. Many programs use peer support specialists to help individuals with various aspects of seeking and retaining employment. Some mental health agencies may operate programs using psychiatric rehabilitation principles, which heavily emphasize employment services. The U.S. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Association website, www.uspra.org, describes the services offered in psychiatric rehabilitation programs and resources for employment.

- **Peer-Operated Programs.** Some programs use TE, SE or IPS models within peer-operated (or consumer-operated) programs rather than programs that are run by service professionals. Peer-run programs, in addition to clubhouses (mentioned above), might also offer peer support groups, job clubs, and opportunities to develop skills or work with a mentor.

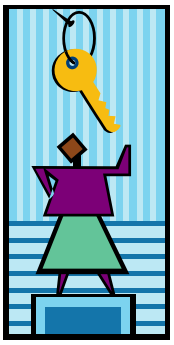
  Some peer-operated programs have started their own independent businesses. Often these are groups of people from peer-run organizations who decide to work together to create employment opportunities for themselves. Sometimes they have been able to get start-up money from agencies or other service programs; other times they have applied for grants or sought investors. Peer support as well as business skills are the key to

peer-operated businesses.

- **Group Placements.** Some agencies offer group placements as well as individual placements. Some people may not be ready for competitive employment and would like to try working with their peers first. Working with a group of other people may provide a sense of safety, security and companionship.

  There are several different types of group placements. Sometimes a rehabilitation program brings in work for a group to do. Many service agencies start an agency-sponsored business in order to offer individuals an onsite structured work experience. Other group placements involve sending groups out to do work in various locations as a mobile work crew. Some agencies partner with the federal government through the AbilityOne Program, where a community agency produces a product or delivers a service to a federal agency, including military bases and government offices. Check out the AbilityOne Program at http://www.abilityone.org or NISH, the federal oversight organization, at www.nish.org .

In group placements, groups of employees are usually supervised by agency staff. Group placements can help you get ready for an individual placement or competitive employment.



Key Program Features to Look For

Research has shown that there are some features of vocational rehabilitation programs that are especially effective in helping people in recovery obtain and maintain employment. Keep these in mind as you explore programs in your area:

- **Rapid Job Placement**. Some of the most effective programs minimize prevocational services and seek to place you in a 'real job for real pay' as quickly as possible. Sometimes the best way to learn a job is by doing a job.

- **On-the-Job and Off-the-Job Supports.** Effective programs tend to offer you supports either by joining you on the job (if that's what you would like) or providing assistance before and/or after your shift. Some people are more comfortable with just phone contact once a week. You should have a choice of how you want your support handled.

- **Ongoing Support**. People with mental health challenges may need support on an ongoing basis, from the time they start their job search through the time they start working. Peer support, in particular, is an effective strategy for ongoing supporters.

- **Individual Choice.** The most effective programs listen carefully to what you want and make sure that you set and pursue your own goals and proceed at your own pace.

- **Availability of Peer Support.** It is helpful to have the support of people who have been through similar programs and succeeded. Having someone to show you the ropes, tell you what enabled them to succeed, and provide personalized support and encouragement can make a world of difference. 'Peer specialists' – people who have experienced mental illnesses in their own lives but now work as counselors within the mental health system – are often specially trained to help others consider, find, and keep a job in the competitive labor market.

- **Clinical/Rehabilitation Linkages.** Research has shown better employment outcomes when your rehabilitation counselor or employment specialist and clinical service providers (e.g., therapist, psychiatrist) communicate with each other and work

together to support you.

- **Job Variety.** It's important that you have the opportunity to pursue a wide variety of jobs, depending on your vocational interests, skills and qualifications. Entry-level jobs are right for some, semi-skilled and skilled work is right for others, and a professional role is a good fit for still others. Programs that match your interest, skills and experience with job opportunities do best in helping people to stay employed.

- **Assistance with Career Development.** An effective program will help you develop and pursue your own career goals, and proceed at your own pace. You do not have to stay in one job forever. You may want to move on to more demanding or better-paid work, or pursue further training. A good program will help you explore your options and figure out what is best for you. If you are interested in furthering your education, whether it's obtaining a high school diploma or GED or enrolling in a college or certificate program, help should be available in connecting you to the right people. If you have any interest in post-secondary school, check out the Temple University Collaborative's *A Practical Guide for People with Disabilities who Want to Go to College* at http://www.tucollaborative.org/pdfs/education/College_Guide.pdf. It covers all the major issues you need to consider before enrolling in school, and has a lengthy list of resources at the end.

Self-Employment

For some individuals, self-employment offers a viable alternative to working at a job site. It offers flexibility of hours and eliminates the issue of having to conform to someone else's expectations. On the other hand, there is much less stability in terms

of income. If you have an interest in self-employment, check out these resources:

A manual prepared by Michigan State University on supported self-employment in 2007, at http://www.nchsd.org/libraryfiles/SelfEmployment/MI_SelfEmp101HandbookAug07.pdf.

David Hammis and Cary Griffin, who are well known for mentoring providers and peers on customized employment, including self-employment, have written a book called *Making Self-Employment Work for People with Disabilities* (2003). Check out their website at http://www.griffinhammis.com/

The Virginia Commonwealth University has a training department that deals with employment issues for people with a variety of challenges. Check out this website, which has an online seminar on self-employment: www.t-tap.org/training/onlineseminars/ellis/ellisseminar.htm.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For help locating programs in your area like the ones described in this Section, you can contact your local Office of Mental Health, your state's Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, or:

National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse
1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 1100
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Phone: (800) 553-4539
or (215) 751-1810
Fax: (215) 636-6312
E-mail: info@mhselfhelp.org

The Clearinghouse also has a Consumer-Driven Services Directory http://www.cdsdirectory.org/ . "The purpose of the Directory is to provide consumers, researchers, administrators, service providers, and others with a comprehensive central resource for information on national and local consumer-driven programs."

For information on social skills training, see *Social Skills Training for Schizophrenia, Second Edition: A Step-by-Step Guide,* by Alan S. Bellack, Kim T. Mueser, Susan Gingerich, and Julie Agresta. The title is unfortunate, but the book is useful for anyone having difficulty with communication. The authors are experts in the field and have conducted research on their methods. It contains lesson plans, breaks skills into small steps, and suggests role-play scenarios and homework assignments.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Other Employment Websites:

The SAMHSA website has a variety of articles on employment at

http://store.samhsa.gov/facet/Treatment-Prevention-Recovery/term/Employment-Services

The Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center: http://www.Worksupport.com

Information on the one-stop career centers available throughout the U.S. through the Department of Labor: www.careeronestop.org.

Two Department of Labor websites for general information about occupations:

www.onetonline.org and www.occupationalinfo.org. They have lots of information about what is required for certain occupations, etc.

For employment issues for youth: the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth at www.ncwd-youth.info/workforce-development.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Resources for Wellness:

Boston University's Center on Psychiatric Rehabilitation has resources, curricula, and workbooks at http://cpr.bu.edu.

Information on recovery and wellness, including the Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) through the Copeland Center for Wellness and Recovery, at http://www.mentalhealthrecovery.com.

SAMHSA's Wellness Initiative:
http://store.samhsa.gov/product/SAMHSA-s-Wellness-Initiative-Information-For-Consumers/SMA12-4567

THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE ON
COMMUNITY INCLUSION
of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Section 4:

Empowerment:

You are in Charge

In this Section:

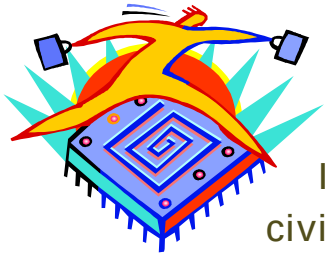
- Introduction
- The Philosophy of Empowerment, Choice and Control
- How this Applies to Vocational Rehabilitation
- Take Charge of Your Rehabilitation Process
- What to Expect from Your Supporters
- The Benefits of Empowerment
- Additional Resources

Introduction

One of the barriers to employment for people in recovery is the assumption that they cannot or should not make their own decisions about work. Mental health professionals may claim that they know best whether you are stable enough to work. Vocational rehabilitation counselors may claim that, because they know what employers are looking for, they know best whether you have what it takes to enter the workforce. Friends or family members may worry that work will be too stressful for you.

But no one knows you – and your likes, dislikes, motivations, and fears – as well as you do. You are the best person to decide what you want, what you can do, and when you should do it. It is good to talk with the people in your life who know you well, care about you, and can help you consider your choices. They can help you decide what is realistic and be honest about what they see as your capacities and limitations. It is important to share as much information as you can with them about your plans, as well as your thoughts and feelings about your plans, so that they can make good suggestions and help you address your goals. You can listen to what they have to say, but it is your right and responsibility to make your own decisions.

You can use the suggestions offered in this Guide to gain control over your progress toward a job, even while you continue to use the support offered by others.



The Philosophy of Empowerment, Choice, and Control

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, influenced by other civil rights movements, some people with mental health diagnoses started talking with each other about the trauma they had experienced in psychiatric institutions and the unfair treatment they were receiving in society, and began to organize. Initially, they organized to protest abusive psychiatric practices and to assert their basic civil rights. But the movement for social justice of individuals with psychiatric histories grew, and now includes the efforts of many people in recovery to have an impact on mental health-related laws and policies, to help design and monitor service systems and programs – including peer-run services – that affect their lives, and to combat negative stereotypes of, and discrimination against, people who have mental health diagnoses.

For a long time, psychologists, politicians and administrators decided how people with mental health challenges would be treated. Since the l970s, however, these individuals – sometimes called consumers, survivors, ex-patients, peers, individuals in recovery, or other terms – have taken on new roles, educating legislators and working on committees and task forces to make sure that they have a voice in determining how they will be treated. Further, policy makers and funders of mental health services have realized the power of peer support. People with lived experience of mental health issues can help their peers work toward recovery in a way that has a significant impact on helping people take risks and find and use supports to achieve their life goals, including employment.

On an individual level, peer empowerment means the same thing: you have a voice in the decisions that affect your life so that these decisions aren't made without your involvement and consent. One of the central philosophies of the consumer/survivor/ex-patient (c/s/x) movement has been "Nothing About Us Without Us." You can use this philosophy to help service providers and other supporters understand that you must be actively involved in any decisions that will affect your future.

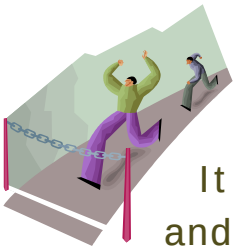
How This Applies to Vocational Rehabilitation

Current research shows that people in recovery can benefit from working, and have even better results from working if they are actively involved in the process that gets them there. In the past, many employment programs have been criticized for starting every individual at the same level regardless of their capabilities, and for forcing everyone to move at the same pace. It became clear that programs were more effective when their approach was individualized, with each person starting at a level and progressing at a pace that was right for them. Individuals in recovery, like anybody else, are more motivated and effective if they are working towards goals that they have set for themselves, and that reflect their own interests.

Most mental health rehabilitation programs today talk about giving the users of their services choices within the structure and limits of their programs. They say that the individual has control over the course and direction of the services that are developed for them. This guiding

principal, at the core of psychiatric rehabilitation services, is one reason why this approach has grown significantly over the past 10 years. Unfortunately, many programs know that this is what they're supposed to say, but don't always put these ideas into practice. Too often, the choices are narrowly defined, or service providers fall back on old habits of making decisions for the people they serve, or pressuring them to proceed in a certain direction. In addition, some people with mental health challenges have become accustomed to having decisions made for them, and may have trouble imagining any other way of doing things.

The first step towards empowerment must come from the person in recovery who decides to take charge of his or her own life and vocational path.



Take Charge of Your Rehabilitation Process

Vocational rehabilitation is about your life and your future. It is your job to figure out what you are capable of doing and what you would like to do, to explore your options and then to choose from among those options. But you don't have to do it all by yourself. Think of those who support you as coaches: a coach can offer training and support but the athlete must run the race. Your counselor and other supporters can help you develop skills but it is up to you to use those skills.

Here are some things that you can do:

- *Set goals for yourself*. What kind of job do you want? What kind of workplace do you prefer? Set some short-term goals and some long-term goals. For instance, if your long-term goal is to own a restaurant, your short-term goal might be to work in a restaurant and learn about the business. Even if you never achieve the long-term goal, it helps you define your short-term goals.

- *Decide what it will take to reach your goals.* Think realistically about your capabilities and qualifications, whether the kind of job you want is available in your area, and what steps you might take to get there. Create opportunities for success by setting attainable goals.

- *Make sure you have the information you need.* Ask questions. Use the resources you have access to, such as the library, the Internet, knowledgeable people, and this Employment Guide. If you are well-informed, you will become more aware of the available choices, and you will be better equipped to strategize and problem-solve as different situations come up. You may need to learn more about: your strengths and limitations, your mental health issues, your medications, the vocational resources and supports available in your area, your rights as an employee and as a person with a disability, and your benefits. Don't assume that everything you've been told is accurate: if something doesn't seem right, get a second opinion. If you are confused about something, keep asking for help until you have it sorted out.

- *Insist that your service providers and supporters help you move towards your goals, not their goals.* If necessary, gently remind them that, even though they may think they know what is best for you, it is for you to decide. In the case of service providers, you are the customer and it is their job to help you achieve your

goals. If a service provider is not willing to help you work towards your own vocational goals or seems more concerned with their own agenda, you may want to seek a different service provider.

- *Try to do things for yourself.* It might be scary to try new things. You might worry about making mistakes. But every time you try, it is an opportunity to learn something. Even if you do make a mistake, you still are making progress because you'll know more the next time around.

- *Keep asking questions.* Avoid doing things just because someone says so; find out why. Ask questions of yourself and of others. Even if you trust someone's judgment, it is still okay to ask them to explain their reasoning. Then you can decide for yourself if what they're suggesting is right for you.

What to Expect from Your Supporters

Think of the people who help you along your journey to employment as a team that is working together for your benefit. Your team might include a vocational rehabilitation counselor, case manager, therapist, psychiatrist, teacher, mentors, peers and/or family members. You are the team captain and you call the shots. When you encounter a problem, it is your job to think about which team members would be the best ones to help you.

Here are some guidelines about what to expect from your support team:

- *They should be asking you what you want, not telling you***.** The people who are helping you can help identify options for you to consider. They might help generate ideas, or ask questions that help you clarify your goals – but they should not be telling you what you want. Prepare yourself for this by giving a lot of thought to your goals and ambitions.

- *They should be encouraging you to make decisions, not making them for you.* You can ask your supporters to help you think things through. They might guide you through your decision-making process, help you weigh the pros and cons, and give you honest feedback. They can help you sort it out but the final decisions are yours.
- *They should be sharing information-gathering responsibilities with you*. Your support team should not do all the information-gathering but you should not have to do it all alone either. Your supporters can help you find and acquire the resources you need.

- *They should be helping you learn how to do things yourself.* When somebody does things for you all the time, it encourages you to be dependent upon them; but when somebody helps you learn to do things yourself, it helps you to become more independent and self-sufficient.

- *They should offer you honest feedback.* Everybody needs people in their lives to help them see things objectively. Your support people should be able to discuss their opinions with you, and tell you if they think you are being unrealistic about your capabilities or vocational goals. They should also be able to point out the things you have done well.

- *They should believe in you.* Surround yourself with people who think positively about you and your abilities. Your support team

should believe that you can succeed. Even if they have concerns, they should encourage you to keep trying.

- *They should discuss the possibility of advancing past entry-level jobs.* One size does not fit all. Some people in recovery think they can only handle an entry-level job because they have mental health challenges. Your support team should help you explore all options, including going back to school, whether it's to get your GED or enrolling in college, graduate school, or a certificate program.

The Benefits of Empowerment

Taking control of your vocational rehabilitation process has many benefits:

- Through vocational goal setting and assessment, you will gain a better understanding of yourself.
- As you try new things, you will learn skills that will serve you for the rest of your life.
- You have the opportunity to gain confidence in your own abilities.
- You gain the experience of being taken seriously and being respected by others.
- You will be more likely to succeed because you have been able to define your own goals, and have become invested in achieving them.
- You will move towards greater independence, self-sufficiency, and self-determination.
- You will be able to take greater pride in your own achievements.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

It can help to talk to peers who have also figured out how to stay in charge of their life decisions. There are people all over the country who are involved in the consumer movement for social justice and who can be good sources of support and information. There are consumer advocacy organizations, peer resource centers, clubhouses, and support groups that you can participate in and benefit from. You can find out more about what is available in your area and how to get involved by contacting the National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse, the National Empowerment Center, or the Peerlink National Technical Assistance Center. All three are peer-run national technical assistance centers funded in part by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration to serve the consumer movement. All three handle numerous inquiries from peers, family members, professionals and others requesting information about everything from locating local groups to how to get more involved in the self-help and advocacy movement. All provide onsite consultation for self-help project development, training events, newsletters, and technical assistance pamphlets and manuals on a variety of topics.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

National Mental Health Consumers' Self-Help Clearinghouse
1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 1100
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Toll-free: 800-553-4539
Local: 215-751-1810
Email: info@mhselfhelp.org
http://www.mhselfhelp.org

National Empowerment Center
599 Canal Street
Lawrence, MA 01840
Toll-free: 800-power2u (800-769-3728)
Local: 978-685-1494
Fax: 978-681-6426
Email: See form at Contact Us link on website
http://www.power2u.org

Peerlink National Technical Assistance Center
MHA of Oregon
10150 SE Ankeny St., Suite 201-A
Portland, OR 97216
Toll-Free: 888-820-0138
Local: 503-922-2377
Fax: 503-922-2360
TTY: Use 711 Relay
Email: peerlinktac@gmail.com
http://www.peerlinktac.org/

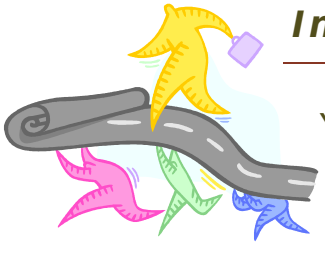
THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE ON
COMMUNITY INCLUSION
of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Section 5:

Self-Assessment and Planning

In this Section:

- Introduction
- Self-Assessment
- Vocational Exploration
- Career Development
- Planning



Introduction

You are most likely to have a rewarding and successful work experience if you can find a job that closely matches your skills, interests, needs and dreams. Finding the right job depends on two essential processes: self-assessment and vocational exploration.

Self-assessment means figuring out what your job-related skills, interests and needs are. You will learn more about your personality type and work preferences. Your answers are likely to guide your job search: doing a self-assessment will help you set goals, write your résumé, and know how to answer interview questions.

Vocational exploration means learning about what types of jobs are available, and learning more about different types of work so that you can determine a good job match. Many details of work life – such as schedule, benefits, work environment, the type of supervision you would prefer, pace, etc. – are important to consider.

It is normal to think about and try out different jobs. Don't feel bad if you don't have much work-related knowledge or experience: everyone has to start somewhere, and reading this Section is a step in the right direction.

As you think about a job, think ahead about potential changes in your life when you start to work. Different jobs will result in different kinds of changes. Thinking ahead may help you choose a job that will result in the changes you want, rather than any changes you don't want. It can also help you prepare to navigate these changes and adjust to working. Some of these changes are discussed later in this Section, and you can find more information about how to adjust to these changes in Section 13.

Self-Assessment

There are a number of helpful approaches to self-assessment: there are some in this Section, and you may encounter others if you are in a vocational rehabilitation program or getting job search help from some other source. These assessments should not be used to tell you whether you can or cannot work; they should help you identify your skills, your strengths, and the kinds of support you may need to succeed on the job.

1. **Conduct a Personal Inventory.**
   Get a notebook and take notes as you do this, since much of this information will be used in your résumé. Recall your past experience, your education, and the skills that you have mastered. Use the list below or look at the Interest Inventory on the O*Net at www.onetonline.org. See Section 2, *The Importance of Work*, under *Getting Started*.

- List all previous work experience (full and part time, volunteer work, internship, work study, etc.). For each experience, write down the dates of employment, and list all the things you did as part of that work.

- List all education and training (degree programs, certificate programs, special training, seminars and workshops, etc.). For each item, write down the dates completed and a brief summary of what you learned.

- List any memberships in civic, professional, and hobby/special interest organizations. Write down past as well as present memberships, including the dates. Include both official memberships – the kind that you send in applications and dues

for – and unofficial involvement in groups (for example, softball teams, neighborhood watch groups, church choirs).

- List as many of your skills as you can think of. Write down things you can do and things you are really good at. Include any tools, equipment, or computer programs you know how to use. In addition to specific skills, think about more general interpersonal and life skills, such as patience, budgeting, being on time, listening, being good at teaching others, etc. We use many skills in our daily lives that can also be used on the job. Ask people who know you to tell you what skills they notice that you have: they may identify different skills than you do

.

- List any time spent in the military. What did you learn and/or achieve there?

- List awards, special recognitions, accomplishments, programs completed, etc.

- List any hobbies/leisure activities and why you like them. For example, you coached a Little League team because you enjoy mentoring kids, or taught crocheting because you're good at teaching and it allowed you to be creative.

- List any equipment or tools that you own and that you could use for work (e.g., a car, paint brushes, computers, sewing machine, circular saw, computer, bicycle, etc.).

- List any personal characteristics that might be helpful in a job (e.g., physical strength, liking to be awake at night, being good in a crisis, being good with children, etc.).

Look over your inventory. These are all experiences, qualities and skills that you could bring to a job, and reasons someone might want

to hire you. Highlight the things you are especially good at or that you particularly enjoy.

2. **Identify your strengths and limitations.**
   For each of the following areas, write down a description of yourself. Use the questions to get started, and feel free to add questions and comments of your own. This should tell you more about what sorts of jobs or workplaces might be good matches for you.

   - **Physical**: Do you have areas of particular physical ability, or limitations such as not being able to stand for long periods? Do you have any illnesses, medical needs, conditions, or take any medications that might affect your work? Do you like being physically active or relatively inactive? What time of day are you most alert, and when are you most likely to be sleepy?

   - **Intellectual**: Think about your educational experiences. Are there certain kinds of thinking you particularly like or dislike? Are there certain kinds of thinking you are especially good or poor at? (For example, are you good at working with words? Do you like numbers? Computers?) Are you a quick or slow learner? Do you find it hard or easy to follow instructions? Do you learn better by reading instructions, or by having someone show you what you need to know? Take all of these things into account as you think about work.

   - **Psychological**: Most people have both psychological strengths and weaknesses. Think about your major emotional and psychological patterns. Is there anything that would make you particularly well-suited for certain kinds of work, or particularly poorly suited? What impact might your mental health condition have on your work? What accommodations might be helpful? Section 3 has more information about some specific limitations

that may be related to your mental health issues, and how to overcome them.

- **Social**: Do you tend to be shy or outgoing? Do you prefer doing things as part of a team or working alone? Do you prefer to be around people who are like you or people who are different from you? If you could create your ideal work situation, whom would you work with? Do you have a social support network (i.e., friends and family who help you)? Section 14 tells more about how to enlist the support of others.

- **Moral**: Do you have any strong beliefs or philosophies that might steer you towards or away from certain jobs or certain workplaces? Are there particular types of work that you believe are especially important, or that you are especially moved to do because of your beliefs? For example, if you are a vegetarian, you may not want to work in the butcher department of a supermarket.

- **Occupational:** If you have worked before, think about the kinds of work you have found rewarding and the kinds of work you haven't found rewarding. Do you prefer work that feels easy, or that is challenging? How much help do you generally require? Do you have a career plan, or do you prefer to take things one job at a time?

3. Identify your work preferences.

Write down your ideal answer to each of the following questions. It is unlikely that you'll find a job that meets all of these ideals, but having them in mind may help you to look for jobs that meet some of them. If you have clear preferences, think about what kinds of jobs match your preferences. If you aren't sure, that's okay.

- What hours would you prefer to work? (This might mean full time, part time, steady, seasonal, temporary, etc.)

- What schedule would you prefer (e.g., 9-5, shift work, overnights, weekends)?
- What kind of environment would be ideal (e.g., indoors, outdoors, office, factory, etc.)?
- How much pay/salary do you need? What is the minimum amount you could accept?
- What benefits would you like? Which are absolutely necessary?
- Would you prefer to be active on the job or would you rather sit at a desk?
- Would you prefer to work alone or with a team?
- How much support and/or supervision would you want?
- Would you like a casual or formal work environment?
- Do you have a preference about the location of the job? How you will get there?
- How do you feel about wearing a uniform or getting dressed up as opposed to wearing more casual attire?
- Would you rather work in a big workplace or a small one?

- Would you prefer to work with other people with mental health challenges, such as at a mental health or consumer resource center? Or would you rather work in some other field?

4. **Review your self-assessment.**
   Look over everything that you have written down about yourself. What have you learned? Does your self-assessment indicate that you would be a good candidate for any particular kind of work? Does it suggest any particular job situation or workplace that would be best for you? Has it brought to your attention any jobs or workplaces that you want to avoid?

Vocational Exploration

Readers of this Section will vary in their process of vocational exploration. You may know exactly what kind of work you want to do and just need help getting a job. Or, particularly if you haven't worked before, you may not have any idea of what kind of work you want to do. If the latter is true for you, here are some ways you could start your exploration:

- Ask people you know who work to describe their jobs for you.
- Go on www.careerbuilder.com, a large website listing hundreds of job openings, and start getting a sense of the jobs that are out there, how they are categorized, and what employers seem to be looking for.
- See if your self-assessment suggests any types of work.
- Explore vocational rehabilitation programs in your area. Some may provide you an opportunity to try out different kinds of work in a Transitional or Supported Employment placement, or a volunteer position.

- Look for volunteer opportunities to try out different kinds of work. (Be aware that volunteering isn't quite as simple as it used to be. Some organizations expect you to complete an application and may require a criminal background check.)
- Visit the human resources offices of major employers in your area to see what jobs are available and if there are any jobs you might like to do. Before your appointment, go on the organization's website to see if they post job listings; then you will be more knowledgeable during your meeting. You can get the website address by Googling the name of the organization.
- Walk around your neighborhood. Are there any work establishments that interest you?

If you have some idea about work you would like to do, list the jobs you think you would like. This may include jobs you have done in the past, jobs you have had some connection with, or jobs you know about but have never done.

For each job you have listed, look at the O*Net website and consider the following:

- What kind of training or experience is required? Am I qualified?
- What skills and abilities are required? Could I do this?
- What interests me about this job? Do I want to do this?
- What is the approximate range of starting salaries for someone with my background? Will it meet my financial needs?
- What kinds of agencies or businesses hire people to do this kind of work? How do I find them?

- Are there many opportunities for this kind of work where I live? How far am I willing to travel?

If you are already working but want to change your work situation, it will help if you can identify what you want to change and what you would like to stay the same. Ask yourself these questions:

- What is dissatisfying to me about my job? (Make a very specific list.)
- What would it take for me to be more satisfied?
- What do I really like about my job?
- Is leaving this job the best strategy for making the changes I want to make? What else might work?
- Are there changes that could be implemented so that I could be satisfied staying in my current job? What would it take to accomplish those changes?
- What are my vocational or career goals?
- How might I best work towards achieving my career goals?
- Can I continue working at one job while looking for another (yes!)?

Career Development

Think about what kind of career you want. Where are you in your career development? What are your career goals? Consider your skills, educational background, challenges, and capacity for growth.

For some people, careers in entry-level work may be best. For other people, entry-level jobs are a way to develop the skills and experience they need in order to move into other positions. Others, if they already have the education, skills and experience, may completely skip over entry-level jobs into more demanding and better-paying jobs. Some might pursue further education or training to prepare them for the work they want. Others may do better if they start working right away and learn on the job.

In the past, some rehabilitation programs have assumed that everyone needed to start at the same entry-level jobs and proceed at the same pace. Current research shows that people have more successful work experiences if they have the chance to start at the right place for them and proceed at their own pace. Think about your own career development and what would be best for you at this point in your work history.

Planning

When you begin to work, many areas of your life will be affected. Many people decide they want to work precisely because they want some things to change. If you think ahead and plan for the changes, it is less likely that you will be surprised and overwhelmed by them. For now, the main reason to think about these things is to help you compare and consider what different job possibilities will mean for your future, and how to seek jobs that will meet your needs.

Working will affect your financial life in several ways. You will gain income, and have access to more of the resources that require money. If you receive any Social Security benefits, make sure you understand exactly how receiving a paycheck will affect your benefits, and learn the rules for reporting income. (See Sections 9 and 10 for more information about Social Security Work Incentives.) Some jobs come with benefits such as health and life insurance, tuition reimbursement, pension plans and paid time off; and these will also make a difference in your financial situation. Remember that you might have additional work-related expenses (meals, transportation, and work clothes) to consider.

Work will affect your routine and how much discretionary time you have. You may have to cut back on some of your current activities to accommodate your work schedule. Many people find that the structure provided by a work schedule helps them to be better organized and accomplish more in other areas of their lives. The key is planning how

to use your time, including using a calendar to keep track of your schedule and appointments.

You also need to consider your other responsibilities. For instance, do you take care of any children or older family members? What chores do you normally do? How will you balance work with these responsibilities?

Congratulations!

If you have been following the self-assessment and planning suggestions in this Section, you have learned important information about yourself and your vocational goals. If you have been writing things down, you now have the information you need to compile your résumé and to begin applying for jobs. As you make applications and consider various job possibilities, use your notes to help you evaluate each one. As you prepare for interviews (See Section 8), refer back to your notes to help you answer interview questions.

The next Section will help you use the information you have compiled to start your job search.

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Section 6:

Applying for Jobs

In this Section:

- Introduction
- Job Hunting
- Summary of The Job Application Process
- Job Hunting Tips
- Thinking Positive: Dealing with Rejection
- Give Yourself a Pat on the Back

Introduction

Job hunting is challenging for everyone, whether or not they have mental health conditions. Most people are uncomfortable being evaluated by strangers, and worry about being rejected or disappointed by potential employers. In addition, job hunting can raise dilemmas about how to balance work against other important responsibilities and plans. Job hunting can also be exciting and can provide an opportunity to dream about and plan for the future.

It is important to approach job hunting with a positive and hopeful attitude, and a willingness to keep trying until you reach your goal. In this Section we will review some job-hunting strategies, as well as strategies for maintaining a positive outlook during your search.

Job Hunting

Effective job hunting takes concentrated and consistent effort. There is a lot of uncertainty involved, and it's often hard to know just what to do. Because there are factors in your job search that you cannot do anything about, it becomes especially important to work hard at the parts that you can do something about. Applying for employment requires giving it your best effort, seeking to improve your skills each time, and not taking it too personally if the results aren't what you hoped for right away.

Three factors will come into play as you look for a job:

1. The Job Market: No matter who you are, what your qualifications are, or what kind of job you're looking for, your search will be affected by the job market in your local area and in your field of work. If there are only a few jobs, and a lot of applicants are competing for those few jobs, it is likely to take longer to get hired. It is important to learn about whether there are a lot of jobs in your chosen field or only a few, and what qualifications employers are looking for.

2. Job-Hunting Skills: Getting a job is not just a matter of being qualified and able to do the job. It is also a matter of being able to get the job. This requires good job-hunting and job-application skills, which may be different from the skills you need to do the actual job. One of the essential skills is knowing how to use the Internet. Not only do job seekers use the Internet to locate jobs, but many employers use it to communicate with job applicants. Many employers ask you to apply for jobs online; this requires navigating the Internet as well using email. The Internet saves time and money for the employer. The better your job-hunting and job-application skills – such as résumé writing, interviewing and follow-up – the more likely you are to be given the chance to prove yourself on the job. Fortunately, you can develop your job-hunting skills with a little effort and guidance. This Section, Section 7 and Section 8 focus on job-search skills. Every job you apply for is an opportunity to practice these skills.

3. Finding a Job That Is Right for You: You need to apply for jobs that match your qualifications and interests. (Section 5 provides exercises and questions to help you figure out what your qualifications and interests are.) Finding a job that is right for you depends upon: a) whether appropriate jobs are available; b) the

strength of your job-hunting skills; and c) whether employers are looking for someone with your work experiences and abilities.

You usually won't know all you need to know about a job until after you've been through an interview and several conversations with a potential employer, so it is a good idea to "cast your net widely": apply for a range of jobs, including some that you might be overqualified for and some for which you might be under-qualified. Include jobs you're fairly certain you would like and some that you're unsure about. Apply for any job that interests you, even if you don't think you have much of a chance of getting the job. Even if you do not get interviews right away, many employers keep applicants' résumés on file for the next time they have a position available.

In the past, there were lots of job openings in the Help Wanted section of the local newspaper, but those days are over: the newspaper has largely been replaced by the Internet. In some areas, you still will find some job listings. But there are many ways to look for jobs, and the more ways you look, the better your chances of finding something you like.

Networking

It is impossible to overestimate the importance of networking – that is, getting people you know to look for job opportunities for you. Tell everyone you know that you are looking for work and, if you can, tell them what kind of work you are seeking. Ask them to think about other people who might be able to help you. Ask people you know if they have any jobs or know anyone who is

hiring or even if they have heard about any job openings. Some people might be willing to pass your résumé on to someone they know, so it's a good idea to have extra copies to give out. Sometimes people will ask you to email your résumé to them, or you can ask them if it is okay if you send it to them. It's a good idea to have a business card with your contact information: that way, if someone asks for your phone number or email address, you can hand them your card. Cards are available online from www.vistaprint.com free of charge for the first 250.

Even if you don't think you know many people, you should network with those you do know. You may be surprised at the connections you can make and the opportunities that may turn up. This is a good way to find out about job openings before they get listed online and before there are many other applicants trying to get the same job. In addition, networking may give you an "in" with the potential employer. Many employers prefer to hire someone who has been referred by someone they know. If nothing else, it can make you stand out from the pool of other unknown applicants. Make a list of everyone you know and who you think they may know. You may be surprised at how long the list is.

Classified Ads

Again, most employers now post their job openings on the Internet. There may be some listings in your local paper – check these out – but you will find many more opportunities online at websites like www.careerbuilder.com, www.craigslist.com,

or on a specific company's website. Whether the job listing is online or in the newspaper, send your résumé and cover letter by the deadline listed or within a week of the publication of the ad.

Job Boards

There are many places where you can find bulletin boards with jobs posted. For instance, many colleges and training programs have job boards. Sometimes large employers, such as hospitals, universities, agencies, and big businesses, as well as community centers, also have job boards.

Job Fairs

Keep an eye on your local newspaper or your local radio station for notices of job fairs. These are typically held in large public spaces where employers send representatives to recruit employees. Some are focused on a particular field of employment, may be in a particular neighborhood, or may include employers from specific fields. When you go to a job fair, dress as if you were going to a job interview and bring copies of your résumé to leave with potential employers.

School Job Placement and Career Development Offices

Most two-year and four-year colleges, technical schools and training programs have offices to help their graduates find jobs. The services are typically used by students as they are graduating, but many services will be available to alumni at any time in their career history. If you are a graduate of a program or school with a job placement or career development office, contact the office to find out what services are available to you. Also, contact former college instructors or the chairperson of the department you were in for job leads. In addition, many people who do not have substantial job experience often use their college teachers for references, especially if they worked with you in an internship program.

Human Resources Offices

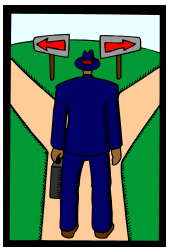
Many large employers have Human Resources offices that handle all job applicants. They will often make job listings available to people who come into the office asking about job availability. Ask if they have a website listing their openings. You will be able to look at them at your own pace. Remember that many large employers require standard support services such as clerical staff, custodial staff, security workers, food service workers, groundskeepers, etc., in addition to professional level and trade-specific staff.

Trade Publications

If you are looking for work in a particular field, find out if there are any publications such as newsletters, magazines or journals that carry job listings for that field. The best way to find this out may be to talk to people who already work in that particular field. Many trade publications are available online.

Job Clubs

Many clubhouses, mental health service agencies, consumer-operated programs, religious groups and other community organizations have job clubs in which people share listings with each other. Job clubs also offer peer support and guidance during your job search.



Help Wanted Signs

Many retail establishments post “help wanted” signs. If you think you might be interested in a position, go inside and ask about the openings and how to apply. You may be able to complete an application on the spot, or you may be referred to the company’s website to apply online.

The Internet

Since many employers post job listings on the Internet, you need access to a computer. If you don't have your own, public libraries, clubhouse programs, consumer-operated programs, and rehabilitation agencies may have computer resource rooms that you can use. Also, your local state one-stop career center – every part of the country has a career center designed to help people find work - may have computers for you to use. You may need to establish an email account. You can open a Gmail account at www.gmail.com/ at no cost, and there are other similar services that allow you to do the same thing. Employers may want to contact you this way. **Don't be afraid to ask for help on the computer:** not everyone knows how to use one. If you log on to some job websites, you may be able to receive notifications of any available positions without searching the whole website or even a whole category.

For example, the website www.indeed.com will send you emails when a job that fits your personal profile comes up. Also, www.indeed.com searches several other job sites for you and sends you notifications when it finds any possible jobs. When you go to the website, it will ask you for a profile that includes the category or categories you are interested in, what part of the country you are looking in, etc. Save yourself time by completing a profile. You have the choice of only looking at the jobs sent to you by the website or searching the whole listing. You can change your preferences on the website if you want to explore other options.

Temporary Agencies

Don't forget about temporary employment agencies. You may be able to find a part-time job for a limited amount of time while you decide what you want to do on a more permanent basis.

Summary of The Job Application Process

Once you've identified some jobs you'd like to apply for, you can send a cover letter and résumé to the specified address – which may be a post office box or website address. You may not know the name of the organization offering the job opening; these are called "blind ads." Follow the directions carefully: the first step may be filling out an application form (see Section 7). Some online job postings do not allow you to include a cover letter. Keep track of the date on which you applied for the job.

Sometimes employers will notify you by phone or mail if the position has been filled. However, sometimes you will receive no response from a potential employer. If you don't hear back from the employer within a reasonable amount of time (two weeks is generally a good amount of time to wait), follow up with a phone call. This is common practice during job searches, so don't worry about being too "pushy." Employers will generally appreciate your persistence. Tell the contact person that you are calling to confirm that they received your application and to find out when you might expect a reply. However, many employers will not contact you unless they want you to come in

for a job interview, so don't be discouraged. Often employers receive a large number of applications, particularly for entry-level jobs.

If the employer is interested in finding out more about you, they will generally invite you to a job interview (see Section 8). Sometimes, there may be more than one interview and it may be with a group of people from a particular department.

At the end of an interview, ask when you can expect them to make their decision. Send a follow-up letter or a hand-written "thank you" note after your interview; hand-written notes make more of an impact than emails. If you haven't received any information by the time they said they would respond, follow up with another phone call. This tells the employer that you are good at keeping track of details, that you are persistent, and that you are truly interested in the job.

Remember that the average person must send out many résumés in order to get just one interview, and it may take many interviews before you are offered a job. So it is a good strategy to continue sending your résumé, even if you are waiting to hear back from an employer. Continue to follow up on job leads and check job postings.

Job-Hunting Tips

Respond to job listings and advertisements promptly. If there is a due date, make sure you send your résumé or application by that date. If there is no date specified, try to send in your application within a week of the date the job was advertised, or even earlier.

Be prepared to send many résumés and make many applications. The more you send, the more likely it is that one of them will result in an interview. And the more interviews you go on, the more likely it is that one of them will result in a job offer.

You must be prepared to actively seek jobs. Jobs will rarely fall into your lap. Job hunting is a job itself, so treat it as such. Spend some time every day doing work that is related to your job search, such as making phone calls, writing cover letters, working on your résumé, or searching the want ads online.

Keep good records. Create a notebook or system of index cards for keeping track of your efforts. For each job you look into, write down the name and address of the company, the name and phone number of the contact person, as much of the job description as is available, when the job was listed, when you responded to the listing, etc. Make a note of all contacts you have with potential employers. Keep track of all follow-up letters and phone calls.

Put a lot of time and effort into your résumé and cover letters. The first impression a potential employer has of you will often come from looking at your résumé and cover letter, so it is worth spending the time to make sure that your résumé is carefully constructed to present you in the most positive way possible. Section 7, as well as many self-help books, provides detailed information about how to construct a good résumé and cover letter.

Prepare and practice for job interviews. Most hiring decisions are made during job interviews, yet most people have very little interviewing experience. Job interviews make most people a little nervous, but practicing asking and answering questions can really help. See Section 8 for detailed information about how to prepare for job interviews.

Make sure you have some support. It can be very helpful to have a counselor, friend, family member, or peer group to talk to as you consider different jobs, apply for them, receive responses, and think through your choices. Identify a person or persons who can help you by providing feedback on your application materials, by giving you a pep talk once in a while, or by listening to you reflect on your job-hunting activities.

Job hunting can be exhausting and discouraging, so take good care of your physical and mental health. Eat well, get enough rest, and take breaks from job hunting once in a while. Pay attention to your anxiety, depression or other issues as you look for a job. Come up with some strategies to keep from getting overwhelmed. Look at the resources on Wellness at the end of Section 3.

Thinking Positive: Dealing with Rejection

Nearly everyone who applies for jobs gets turned down at some time or another. Dealing with rejection is part of the package when you apply for jobs. This may be especially difficult for people who tend to get depressed easily or for people who already have low self-esteem or little self-confidence.

Here are some things you can do to handle disappointment and rejection:

- *Seek support from people who believe in you*. You don't have to deal with this alone. Make sure you have someone to talk to. If you would find it helpful, ask your allies to tell you all about your positive qualities and listen to what they are saying.

- *Identify something you did well.* Take the time to notice what parts of the job application process you handled well. Pat yourself on the back.

- *Identify something you can learn.* Notice what you might improve on the next application, and try to enjoy the learning process. This is an opportunity for you to grow.

- *Don't spend too much time trying to explain it.* There are many possible reasons why you didn't get a particular job. Maybe someone else was a better match, or was better qualified. Most

likely, the reason isn't personal. And chances are that the employer won't give you a specific reason. Try not to dwell on it; move on to the next application.

- *Do something you know you're good at, or that makes you feel good.* Whatever it is that you can do to remind yourself of your worth…do it!

- *Find someone else who is looking for work, or find a job club.* Group support can really give you a boost. At the very least, you will see that you are not alone and that others are experiencing similar situations.

Give yourself a pat on the back!!

Until you get a job, job hunting IS your job. Take some satisfaction from the things you do every day that move you towards your goal. Notice all the things you are learning. Remember that every application you make and every person you talk to during your job hunt, whether or not you get that job, help you build the skills and connections that will help you get a job in the long run. All the time you spend job hunting, especially when you apply yourself to learning from your efforts, is time well spent. Consider keeping a journal of your experiences to help show you how you've grown throughout your job search process.

What do employers want? Someone who is PRIDEFUL, who shows that they are:

Persevering

Reliable

Initiating

Dependable

Efficient

Friendly

Useful

Loyal

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Section 7:

Résumés, Cover Letters and Job Application Forms

In this Section:

- Introduction
- Resumes
- Resume Do's and Don'ts
- Different Resume Formats
- How to Handle Gaps in Your Work History
- Cover Letters
- Completing Job Application Forms
- Tricky Questions and Illegal Questions

Introduction

Resumes, cover letters and job application forms are the tools you will use when you apply for jobs you want. This Section will review how to create effective resumes and cover letters and to fill out job application forms.

This is not the only source of information available to you. There are many books about job hunting at your local library or bookstore that could provide additional information. You may find additional resources through a job club or vocational rehabilitation program. If you have access to the Internet, you will also find many resources to assist you. It can also be very helpful to look at resumes and cover letters of people who have successfully applied for jobs.

You don't have to do this alone. Also keep in mind that, like any other skill, the more you practice, the better you will get. Try not to get discouraged if your first few applications are not successful. Use these attempts as opportunities to learn how to improve your application skills.

Resumes

Many employers require that you send in a resume as the first step in applying for a job. Not all employers require this. Some start with job application forms which will be discussed later in this Section. Nevertheless, it is a good idea to have a resume prepared

to send in case you need it. The process of writing your resume can be as important as the finished product itself. The process of putting together your experiences and skills into words can help you feel confident about yourself and prepare you to answer questions in an interview or on job application forms. Sometimes writing things down can help you remember skills you didn't even realize you had.

Resumes are used by most employers as a way to screen applicants. On the first pass, they will take a quick look at each resume they receive and decide 'yes', 'no', or 'maybe'. Your resume, along with the cover letter, will probably be the first impression a potential employer has of you. You will want these documents to grab the reader's attention and represent you in the best possible light.

In order to compose your resume, you will need to do an assessment of your skills and experiences. See Section 5. Resumes typically include information about your educational and work history, as well as any additional information about yourself that pertains to the jobs you are applying for. You will want to write down the information from your assessment, and edit it carefully until it is a clear and concise summary of whatever experiences and skills you have that make you a good candidate for the job.

Remember that an effective resume gets you an interview, not a job. A good resume makes a potential employer want to know more about you and your capabilities. It is the first step in the process of convincing an employer to hire you. You will need to be prepared to answer questions about the information on your resume, and about

your ability to do the job you have applied for. (See Section 8 for information regarding interviewing)

Resume Do's and Don'ts

Do:

Make your resume one or two pages in length and no longer.

Check for spelling or grammatical errors on your resume and cover letter. Have someone check specifically for these type of errors. If you use the Spell Check function on your computer, it will not always identify these errors. You want to show the employer that you pay attention to detail and take pride in your work. Your resume represents you and is the way you introduce yourself.

Describe your previous experiences accurately and in enough detail that the reader can get a clear sense of your activities and capabilities.

Give yourself full credit for all aspects of the work or jobs you have done. Use action verbs to describe your experience. For example, say "ordered supplies" instead of responsible for ordering supplies or "supervised staff," or "conducted research."

Include information about relevant volunteer work, classes and trainings, extracurricular activities, hobbies and life experiences. Only do this if the information enhances your appeal as an applicant (e.g. demonstrates knowledge, skills, commitment, reliability, membership in a related organization, etc.)

Send or email your resume in a timely fashion. If there is an application deadline make sure your resume arrives by that date. If you are responding to an advertisement without a deadline date, send in your resume and cover letter within a week or as quickly as possible.

Create more than one resume. Create a different resume for each type of job. Also, cover letters should be customized for each job for which you apply.

Don't:

Overcrowd the pages with type. If there's too much to read, a potential employer may skip your resume in favor of one that is easy to skim for information.

Lie or put inaccurate information in your resume. Don't report experience that isn't really true; don't list skills you don't really have. Instead, figure out a way to present what IS true in as positive a form as possible.

Include information in your resume that will diminish your chances of being hired. You do not need to include information that is irrelevant to the job, or that might be used against you.

Include contact information for references in the body of your resume. If references are specifically requested, include them on a separate sheet of paper. Otherwise, you should include a line at the end of your resume saying that your “references are available upon request”.

Different resume formats

There are different ways to format the information in your resume, depending on what you want to highlight. Remember, however, that the information closest to the top of each type of resume is most likely to be read.

You should think about which of these formats you could use strategically to portray yourself as an appealing job candidate. Think about your history, and what the employer may be looking for. If you have significant gaps in your work history you might choose to use a functional resume format to draw attention to your skills and away from the gaps. If you have worked in a series of jobs with increasing responsibility, you might want to use a chronological resume format to draw attention to the fact that you have been making progress and developing as a worker.

You may also choose to combine elements of these two formats, starting with a functional approach that highlights your skills, and then include a chronological listing of those jobs that pertain to the skills that you've listed.

If you are not certain which format to use, you might try creating a few different versions. That way, you can pick which resume you think would be most effective for each particular application. If you have ready access to a computer, you may also consider customizing your resume for each job you apply for. Then you can tailor it as closely as possible to what the employer seems to be looking for.

If you use Microsoft Word to type your resume, you can use an outline called a template. In other words, the format is laid out for you. You just type in your information where it is requested. Microsoft Word offers a selection of these templates. Go to New in the drop down menu in the upper left hand corner. Click on New, click on installed templates, and you will find several listed. Or, after you click on New in the drop down menu, you can click on Microsoft office online, click on resumes, and you will get a whole variety of them.

Functional Resumes: A functional resume is organized according to the functions of the job you wish to obtain. It lists qualifications, skills and related accomplishments while de-emphasizing dates and positions. This type of resume emphasizes capabilities and is especially useful for individuals lacking work experience or for those trying to enter a new occupation. Listing an Objective at the top of the resume is optional. People are listing 'objectives' less and less.

A Functional Resume Sample

JOE SMITH
123 North Broad Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144
(215) 555-8272
Email: jsmith59@gmail.com

QUALIFICATIONS:

- **Organization**: Planned, edited, typed, distributed daily periodical. Supervised staff members.
- **Microsoft Office Suite**: Processed all instructions, awards, and related instructions. Proficient in Microsoft Word, Publisher, and PowerPoint.
- **Clerical/Accounting**: Currently studying accounting and Excel.

EDUCAT ION:

Rosemont College, El Cajon, CA. AA in Business Management 1991

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY:

Foreman, *Commercial Fence, Philadelphia, PA.*
Estimate jobs and install fences, order parts and supplies, maintain inventory, supervise labor apprentice. .....*October 1994 to present*
Waiter, *El Torito Restaurant, Philadelphia, PA..*
Provided quick and friendly service to customers. Assigned various tasks normally involved in restaurant business, assisted in training new waiters. .....*January 1991 to February 1993*

HONORS:

Employee of the Month, El Torito Restaurant.....*August 1992*

References available upon request.

Chronological Resumes: A chronological resumé is a record of work experiences including a job description list, in reverse order, from your most recent job back to your first job. This resume style emphasizes career growth and is most effective when your occupational objectives are closely related to your work history. It is best used by people with few gaps in their employment history.

A Chronological Resume Sample

ROBERTA RAMIREZ
1234 West First Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19004
Cell phone(215) 555-8247 / Home (215) 393-5783
Email robram@yahoo.net

WORK EXPERIENCE

3/89—Present Employed as a Secretary with Temporary Employment Agencies.

7/88—1/89 *Healthcare Medical Center of Englewood,* Englewood Business Office, Englewood , NJ

Secretary / Healthline Coordinator
Reviewed, processed, and recorded patient credit applications, adjusted A/R patient accounts using Microsoft Excel.

6/85—11/86 *ABC Insurance Services,* Philadelphia, PA.

Administrative Assistant to Vice President
Established new office, composed/typed correspondence using Microsoft Word, maintained files, scheduled appointments for the Vice President.

EDUCATION

1990 *AA/Liberal Arts,* Community College of Philadelphia, Philadelphia, PA.

References are available upon request.

How to handle gaps in your work history

Many people with mental health challenges worry about how to account for the times in their lives when they were unable to work because of their disability. If you have a gap in your work history, you may be worried that this will make you unappealing to an employer. This is a legitimate concern, since employers are often interested in continuous and recent work, and consistency of employment. Here are a few ideas for how to design your resume to de-emphasize any gaps in your work history.

- Use a functional resume format, as discussed above. Note that the functional format doesn't eliminate the need to put dates on your resume. It just draws attention away from the date.

- Use summary dates. If there was a period of time during which you were working on and off, you could create a summary for this period of time rather than listing each short-term job separately. This is especially useful if the jobs were similar. For instance, if you have done a variety of fix-it jobs for people you know, you might list it on your resume as follows: Self-employed. Freelance home repair work, light construction and plumbing, 9/92—7/95

- Fill in the gaps. Think if there were any activities that you did during that time, whether it was for pay or not, that could be considered work related or skills related. Many household and family responsibilities may be relevant. For instance, if you have been providing care for an elderly or sick relative, you have experience that would be applicable to work as a personal care

attendant. Is there anything that could be considered volunteer work, freelance work, consulting work, self- employed, seasonal or as-needed work, or temp work?

Remember that you will probably be asked questions about your work history in your interview, so it is not a good idea to make up work experiences that aren't real or true. However, your resume will be strongest if you can learn to portray the truth in ways that are as appealing as possible to potential employers.

If you have periods of time when you were incarcerated, be honest with an employer. Generally there is a question on the application asking if you have ever been arrested. Sometimes, they are only interested in felony arrests or convictions. Be sure to read the application carefully so as not to give out information that is not required. Many employers conduct criminal background checks so the information will surface. However, some criminal checks only go back 7 or 10 years so your history may not come up. If you get the job and lie about your history, it is grounds for immediate termination. Job applications are considered to be legal documents. When you sign the application you are generally attesting to the fact the information contained in the application is true to the best of your knowledge.

See Section 8 for more information on how to handle interview questions about gaps in your work history.

Cover Letters

When you send a resume to a potential employer, it should be accompanied by a cover letter. Many times an employer will offer an interview on the basis of an outstanding cover letter. The cover letter should have three parts:

The Identification-This paragraph should explain how you identified this particular employer, what positions you are applying for and your source of information.

The Body-This section should relate your particular skills and abilities to do the job. Do not summarize your resumé here. Only highlight those items of your background which may make you the best candidate for this particular position.

The Request- Make a request. If you want an interview, ask for it. Clearly state when you will be available to talk to the employer. Give a telephone number(s) or email address where you can be reached.

Other cover letter tips:

- Address the cover letter to a specific person whenever possible. (If you have to, call the potential employer's office to get this information.) Make sure you get the correct title and spelling of the person's name. If you cannot get this information, address the letter to 'Dear Sir or Madam".

- Keep the letter short and clear.

- The letter can reflect your individuality, but be polite and professional. Do not try to make your letter humorous or overly familiar, and try to avoid appearing aggressive or overbearing.

The cover letter should highlight anything special that makes you stand out. In the example below, Joe is currently taking classes in packaging design and technology that will increase his skills. This shows he has an interest in the area and wants to advance his skills. You can also highlight some personal connection to a job, without disclosing information you may not want the employer to know. For example, if you are applying for a job to work with individuals who have intellectual disabilities, and you have been a volunteer with the Special Olympics, you should mention this. Since you are volunteering on your own time, it shows a real desire to work with the population beyond the bounds of paid employment. An employer may be seeking someone with real dedication as demonstrated by your volunteer work. Be sure to highlight this in your cover letter.

- Always say “thank you” at the end of your letter and remember to sign it.

SAMPLE COVER LETTER:

April 1, 2012

Ms. Susan Johnson
Personnel Manager, ACME Widgets, Inc.
9876 Ridge Road
Anothertown, PA 19777

Dear Ms. Johnson:

I am writing in response to your advertisement for a Packaging Supervisor listed on Careerbuilder on April 19. I have enclosed my resume for your consideration.

As you can see, I have several years of packaging experience, including two years as a supervisor. During my second year, I received an award for Package Design of the year from the International Packaging Council. This award has spurred me on to enroll in more advanced training. I hope to receive my advanced degree in Packaging Design and Technology, with a specialization in widgets and gadgets in May of 2013. With my experience and training, I believe I could be a valuable addition to your staff.

I would appreciate the opportunity to learn more about the available position, and to discuss my qualifications further. To arrange an interview, please contact me on my cell phone (215)555-9283, by email at jsmith59@gmail.com, or at the above address. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Joe Smith

Encl. (Use the word "Attachment" if sending by email)

Completing Job Application Forms

When you go to a potential employer's office to apply for a job, you will usually be required to fill out a job application form(s). Sometimes these are requested instead of a resume, and sometimes they are requested in addition to a resume at the time of your interview. Job application forms typically ask questions about work and salary history, educational background, skills, references, and any criminal history.

In addition, at the time of the application, you may be required to complete an I-9 form. This form is required by the federal government and asks for identification showing your citizenship status. You may need to have 2 forms of identification, depending on what you are using, including one with your picture, such as a driver's license, a non-driver's license ID or passport. Other forms of ID that are accepted include a birth or baptismal certificate, a Social Security card, or voter registration. You must bring original documents that the employer may copy and verify that they saw the originals. You must sign the form. The I-9 may be completed **after** you have been offered a position. In addition, the employer may do a criminal background check and a motor vehicle check if the job requires you to drive. In that case, you must show your driver's license. If you are unsure what information will be required, ask ahead of time so that you can be prepared when you go to fill out the application forms.

Be prepared to give a record of any jobs you've had, including full- and part-time as well as volunteer placements.

You will need to know:

- the names and addresses of schools you attended and dates of attendance
- the names and addresses of previous employers
- the names of persons able to provide information about your performance, generally past supervisors
- the exact nature of the work you performed
- your starting and ending salary at each job
- the reason for leaving each of your most recent jobs
- dates of any military service
- your Social Security number

When you go to any interview or job site to complete an application, you should bring all of this information with you, preferably in writing, so that you don't have to worry about forgetting important details. Bring names and contact information of the people who have agreed to provide references for you.

Tricky questions and illegal questions

When filling out job application forms, you might be asked to give reasons for leaving previous employment. Like the information you put on your resume, it is important to be truthful. But you can learn to protect your privacy, to omit detrimental information, and to write strategically about these things in order to improve your chances of getting hired. You do not have to write down that you left a job due to psychiatric symptoms or hospitalization. You might write instead that you left for “personal reasons”, or that you left due to illness that required treatment. If asked about it, all you need to say is that the situation is better now, and that you’re ready to go back to work.

You should know that there are laws about what potential employers are permitted to ask on job application forms and during interviews. They are, for instance, not permitted to ask about your medical or psychiatric history, use of prescription drugs, treatment history, diagnosis or prognosis. They are also not permitted to ask any questions about your personal or family life. They are only allowed to ask about your ability to perform the job, to meet the requirements of the job, and past work experiences. See Section 11 for more information about your rights under the ADA.

Unfortunately, potential employers may occasionally ask questions that they are not supposed to ask. If you find illegal questions on an application form, you should leave them blank. If asked later why you didn’t answer the question, frame your response in terms of your ability to do the job. For example, you may say, “1 didn’t believe it was relevant to my ability to do this job.” Only if the person is

defensive, or persists in asking illegal questions should you point out that the questions are illegal. The next Section (8) will provide more information about how to handle tricky questions in an interview situation.

No matter how good your resume looks, or how skilled you are at answering questions, these things will only help you get a job if you submit the application. Apply for as many jobs as you can. The more applications you make, the better your chances are of getting to the next step, the job interview, which will be covered in the next Section.

THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE ON
COMMUNITY INCLUSION
of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Section 8:

Job Interviews

In this Section:

◇ Introduction
◇Interviews
◇What will the Interview be Like?
◇Telephone Interviews and the Internet
◇ Preparing for Interviews
◇Practice Questions
◇ General Interviewing Tips
◇Tricky Interview Questions and Answers
◇After the Interview
◇Self-Assessment
◇What to do if you are offered a job?
◇What to do if you are not offered a job?
◇Informational Interviews

Introduction

Job interviews can be intimidating to anyone, whether or not they have a diagnosis of mental illness. First, remember that no one is born knowing how to make a good impression in a job interview. It is uncomfortable to be evaluated by a stranger, and most people are nervous or afraid of being rejected or disappointed when they go to a job interview. The good news is that you can learn how to master the *art* of job interviewing. Through preparation and practice, you can become more comfortable and confident when you respond to employer questions in your job interviews: the purpose of this chapter is to assist you in preparing to present yourself as the best job candidate you can be.

Interviews

If a potential employer is impressed by your job application, or your resume and cover letter, you may be asked to come in for a job interview. The interviewer will ask questions about your background and your ability to do the job. They will want to get to know you, and to figure out what you might be like as an employee. The job interview is very important, since it is usually the step in the process when a hiring decision is made. This is your opportunity to show how valuable you can be as an employee.

With all the emphasis on presenting yourself well, it is easy to forget that the interview is also your opportunity to find out what your future employer might be like. Remember, you are trying to find a job that is

a good match for *your* skills, interests and needs. So make sure that you are prepared to ask any questions you have about what it might be like to work for this particular employer.

What will the interview be like?

Each interview will be a little different, but there will probably be some common components. Employment interviews can last anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour in length. Sometimes employers will conduct two rounds of interviews, the first round for screening applicants and then a second round to select from among the top few candidates.

The first few minutes of the interview are usually devoted to opening lines of communication. This phase usually sets the tone of the interview, and this is when important first impressions are formed. At this stage of the game, the small details matter. Make sure that you are on time for the interview, and that you have brought whatever materials were requested. Make sure that you are dressed appropriately, make good eye contact, and greet the interviewer in a friendly manner with a firm handshake.

The next part of the interview is an exchange of information. The interviewer may offer you information about the company or the job that is available, and explain what the company's needs are. The interviewer will probably ask you for more information about yourself. Sometimes you are asked to respond to open-ended questions, such

as “Tell me about yourself.” This part of the interview gives you a chance to answer some of the “what,” “where,” “when,” “how,” and “why” questions about yourself. This is also your chance to elaborate upon your strong points and maximize whatever you have to offer.

Your answers should be presented as positively as possible. Refrain, whenever possible, from making negative statements – like why you didn’t like your last job. Also practice answers that are reasonable, short, and to the point. Avoid talking about things that aren’t directly relevant to the job. Remember, you don’t have to tell everything. And you certainly do not have to disclose any information about your mental health status, unless ***you*** want to.

Once the interviewer is finished asking questions, he or she will probably provide an opportunity for you to ask questions. Your questions should be specific and job-related and should indicate your interest in the position. If you don’t have any questions, you may simply say, “I believe you have covered all of my questions.” You should always thank the interviewer for their time, and find out what the next step will be. In particular, you should find out whether and when you can expect them to contact you, or whether it is alright for you to contact them about their decision. You can also ask whether or not you will hear from them even if they hire someone else. Not every employer will do that.

Telephone interviews and the Internet

More and more employers are using telephone interviews. An employer may use this interview as a way to screen applicants and limit the number of people who receive face-to-face interviews. Employers may do this initial screening and then determine on the spot whether or not to schedule you on the phone for a face-to-face interview. Treat a telephone interview the same way you would a face-to-face interview. You want to be professional and not too casual, even though you may be at home. You may be asked similar questions as you would during a face-to-face interview.

Be prepared to talk to an employer anytime the phone rings if you are in an active job search: any time the phone rings it may be an employer calling to schedule an interview or to conduct a brief interview over the phone. If you are not in a place where you can talk comfortably, without distractions from family members or other people, don't take the call. Let it go to your voicemail. An employer may be turned off if they hear people screaming in the background or if a young child answers the phone. Any contact with an employer is considered part of the interview process. If you must answer your phone and you cannot talk without distractions, let the employer know you really cannot speak with them at that time and when would be a good time for you to call back. Also, check the message on your voicemail to be sure that there is nothing offensive or something that might give an employer the wrong idea about who you are. Your message should be short and state what number the person has reached and for the caller to please leave a message.

Just like your voicemail message, you want to be sure that your email address also is not offensive or unprofessional. For example, “sexymama24@yahoo.com” does not set the right tone for an employer. Also regarding the Internet, be careful what you put on your Facebook page if you have one. Some employers do check. You don’t want anything on your Facebook page that you wouldn’t want an employer to know. If you do have a Facebook page, you can set the page to ‘private,’ which will only allow people on your friends list to view your Facebook page.

Preparing for interviews

It can be very helpful to practice doing job interviews. No matter how much you think about what you want to say, it always helps to practice saying it. Also, job interviewers might bring up unexpected questions, and the best way to keep from getting flustered is to practice in a pressure-free situation how you want to respond. Role-playing job interviews with a friend or job coach, and then getting feedback on your performance, can be extremely enlightening.

Some people even film themselves as they practice interviewing so that they can see how they look to other people. This is especially useful in identifying and getting rid of any nervous habits, such as fidgeting, that you might not be aware of but which can be very distracting to interviewers.

Some employers have begun to use a strategy for interviewing call behavioral interviewing. This means that the employer may ask you

to describe what you did in a certain situation. A typical question might be, “Tell me what you did in a crisis situation.” Or “Tell me how you handled a problem with a co-worker,” because past behaviors are seen as predictors of how you will act in the future on the job in similar situations. A way to prepare for these types of questions is to try to anticipate what an employer might ask and how you would answer. They may ask a practical question to see if you can “think on your feet” in a crisis situation.

Practice Questions

Here are the twenty most frequently asked interview questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What type of job are you looking for?
3. Are you looking for a temporary or permanent position?
4. Why do you think you would like this job?
5. What are your career goals?
6. What jobs have you held? How were they obtained?
7. What do you know about our company?
8. What interests you about our product or service?
9. Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
10. What are your ideas on salary?
11. Do you like routine work?
12. What jobs have you liked?
13. What kind of boss do you prefer?
14. Are you willing to go where the company sends you?
15. What are your special abilities?
16. Why should we hire you for this job?
17. What are your major strengths? Weaknesses?
18. How would you describe yourself?

19. Why are you looking for a change in employment?
20. Can you get recommendations from previous jobs?

Before you go to the interview, make sure you know exactly where you are supposed to go, how to get there, and how long it will take you to get there. If necessary, practice the trip beforehand. Make sure you know the name and position of the person you will be meeting, and what you are expected to bring with you. Bring a pad and pen with you and take notes during the interview in case you need to write something down. Bring a copy of your resume and your references just in case. If possible, do some research about your employer, and find out whatever you can BEFORE you go for the job interview. You can do this by asking around, talking with current employees if you can, obtaining a job description from the company's human resources office (if they have one), or doing a Google Search on the Internet. A company's website usually has a good deal of information especially if it's a large company. Preparing in this way helps you to present yourself as well informed, and may also help you target your presentation of yourself to the interests of the employer.

Another aspect of preparing for interviews is figuring out what YOU want to know about the job. Make a list of the different aspects of the job that you will want to know before you make a decision. In general, it is good to respond first to the interviewer's questions and needs. After you've made a good impression and promoted yourself as a worthy employee, then you can further impress the interviewer by asking thoughtful questions about the job, like:

- Can you describe a typical day? What are the responsibilities and

results expected of the position?

- What is it like to work here? Can you tell me something about the culture of this workplace?
- Who would be my direct supervisor? What is that person's supervisory style like?
- How does this position fit into the workings of the organization as a whole?
- What type of training would I receive? Are there opportunities for continuing education?
- What would be a normal career path from this position?

Depending upon what other information has been made available to you, you may also need information about work schedule, work environment, transportation options, dress code, etc. It is usually best to wait until after the employer has decided that you would be a good candidate to ask about salary, benefits and specific company policies.

General Interviewing Tips:

DO

- Show enthusiasm for the job.
- Find out about the employer/organization in advance if at all possible.
- Let the interviewer conduct the interview, don't try to "take over."
- Become familiar with your assets and liabilities in order to respond quickly to problem questions without having to stop and think about what to say or how to say it.
- Practice interviewing! Practice with a friend, family member or counselor.
- Be on time or a little early for your interview.
- Dress appropriately. Find out what normal work attire is, and then dress up a little more than that. For some job interviews,

suits or a dressy outfit with a jacket is appropriate. For some interviews where the usual dress is much more casual, dress up a little more than the usual (e.g. a shirt and tie, or nice slacks or a skirt outfit). Make sure your clothes are clean, neat, ironed, and comfortable. If you are uncomfortable in your clothes, you won't feel comfortable in the interview.

- Be friendly, speak clearly, establish eye contact, and use proper English.
- Listen and understand the tone and direction that the interviewer sets. Listen for what they need in an employee and try to match your response.
- Emphasize your qualifications for the job.

DON'T

- Lie. Even if the interviewer doesn't catch you lying, you'll worry about it.
- Apologize for lack of experience or gaps in your resume; instead, continue to emphasize your strengths.
- Smoke, chew gum, fidget or look at your watch. Nervous habits are distracting.
- Argue. Even if the interviewer asks you a question that they are not supposed to ask, remain calm and diplomatic.
- Interrupt or talk over the interviewer. Wait until they are done to respond or make a comment.
- Wear strong perfumes or colognes, or heavy makeup.
- Tell the interviewer about negative past experiences with employers. Never bad-mouth a former employer.
- Answer your cell phone. Either turn it off or put it on vibrate before you go into the interview.
- Discuss personal problems or issues not related to the job.
- Tell the interviewer how many resumes you've sent out, or how badly you need the job.
- Assume there's nothing you can do but wait. Active follow-up,

including a letter and phone calls, can be very effective.

- Take a bad interview too personally.

Tricky Interview Questions – and Answers

Can you explain some of the gaps in your work history?

If you have a gap in your work history due to mental health challenges or hospitalization, you need to be prepared to respond to this sort of question. The truth is that, unless you are applying for a job that is specifically designated for a peer specialist, disclosing your mental health issues at this point could interfere with your chances at being offered the job. Some individuals decide that it's worth taking that chance because they feel more comfortable being completely open and honest about their situation, even in the job interview. Others decide to keep information about their mental health issues to themselves until after they have been hired, which is perfectly legal. It is up to you to decide how you want to handle this situation. (See Section 12 for more help deciding whether and when to tell employers or co-workers about your mental health issues.)

If you decide to withhold information about your mental health issues, you may still have to respond to the question about gaps in your work history. A good strategy is to tell about whatever work you were able to do during that time, even if it was unpaid or inconsistent. If, for instance, you were doing volunteer work or on-and-off again work, you can use that as an honest response. Remember to consider household

responsibilities and activities as possible fillers. You can also say, if it is true, that you were helping to care for your children or relatives. If you were doing any consulting or freelance work, that might also provide the response you need.

Another strategy is to tell about your hospitalization in a way that is non-specific. You might say, for instance, that you required treatment for a medical condition that has since been resolved, and that you are now fully ready to go back to work. Remember that the interviewer is legally not permitted to pry into personal matters that are unrelated to your ability to do the job, or to discriminate on that basis. Still, some interviewers will persist in asking personal questions. If this happens, do whatever you can to bring the conversation back around to your ability to do the job. You might anticipate the interviewer's concern and say something like "If you are worried that I might not stay at this job, I want to assure you that I am a loyal and committed worker, and quite capable of doing an excellent job for you."

If a gap in your resume is due to your being incarcerated, and you have to disclose this information on the job application, don't lie about it. If the employer does a background check and discovers your history, you can be fired or not be hired. You can explain that you spent time in prison but you have changed your life around and are committed to working hard and succeeding on this job. Depending upon the type of offense, just because you served time in prison doesn't mean the employer will not hire you. It's a good idea to work with an agency that helps people formerly incarcerated to identify employers who do hire individuals with a criminal background. Your local state one-stop career center can help with this. To find the

location of the nearest one-stop center, check the white pages under State Government or check out the website: www.careeronestop.org.

Is there anything that would prevent you from performing the duties of the job?

This is a standard interview question that is typically asked of job applicants, regardless of whether or not they have mental health or physical health issues. However, you might be more sensitive to this question if you do have a mental health diagnosis. To this question, you might answer "No, not as I understand the responsibilities of the job." Or "Based on what you have told me, I am capable of performing the duties of the job." Even if you expect to require job accommodations later, and expect to perform some tasks differently, as long as you can perform the essential duties of the job, say so. If you honestly don't believe you can perform the essential duties of the job, this is probably not the right job for you. (See Section 11 for a more detailed discussion of the employer's responsibility for providing reasonable job accommodations, and how to decide whether and when to ask for them.)

Could you tell me about your weaknesses?

This is also a common interview question. It's a good idea to think about this ahead of time and make a strategic decision about how you want to answer this question. One effective way to answer this question is by identifying a "strength in disguise". Here's an example: "Because I'm a perfectionist, I sometimes get frustrated if people I

work with don't meet my high standards." Or "Because I am a very hard worker, I sometimes forget that I need to do things to take care of myself, like taking breaks or time off."

Thinking about this question may get you wondering whether to disclose anything about your mental health diagnosis. Again, it is entirely up to you to decide how much you want to disclose about yourself at this point in the process. Some working people with mental health conditions suggest that is it better to wait until after you're hired to disclose anything about your mental health diagnosis. Your interviewer might have misconceptions about psychiatric issues or disabilities, and it might affect your chances of getting the job. On the other hand, some people in recovery say that they feel more comfortable if they can be completely honest about their mental health challenges from the very beginning. Section 12 has more information about how to decide whether and when to disclose your situation.

After the Interview

After the interview, write a brief follow-up letter. This letter should thank the interviewer for his/her time and courtesy, and let the interviewer know that you are still interested in the position. It is also a chance to remind the interviewer of your special qualifications and to return the application form or provide any additional information that the interviewer requested.

On the next page is an example of a good follow-up letter.

April 22, 2012

Mr. Robert Jones
Director of Human Resources
So and So Publishing
982 Elm Road
Anothertown, PA 19555

Dear Mr. Jones:

Thank you for the time and consideration you extended me today. I want you to know that I am very interested in the position we discussed. Based on our conversation, I am certain that I have the necessary experience and skills to be an asset to your organization. In particular, I believe that my editing skills will be especially useful as you begin the new projects you described.

I have enclosed the writing sample you requested. Please let me know if I may provide any additional materials to support my application. I will call in one week to see how the search is progressing. In any event, I enjoyed meeting you and look forward to hearing from you shortly.

Sincerely,

Jamal Brown

You will probably have to wait a while before you hear about the employer's decision. Be sure to stick to whatever the interviewer said would be an acceptable time for follow-up calls. If the interviewer told you that they would be calling you, wait until they do or at least two weeks before you call them. If the interviewer told you to call at a certain time, make sure you call when they expect you to. Do follow-up in a reasonable time but do not keep calling. You many appear to be overly anxious and repeated calls may turn off an employer.

Self-Assessment

Take the time to reflect on your interview experience, and learn from what happened. You may want to discuss your job interview with someone who can help you reflect both on what went well and what needs improvement. You can use the following checklist to help you.

Check those items to which you would answer "Yes."

- Did you stress your qualifications for the job and your interest in it?
- Did you discuss only matters related to this job?
- Were you brief in your answers, and businesslike?
- Did you give all of the information that was requested?
- Did you let the interviewer take the lead in conversation?

- Were you able to pick up cues given by the employer's questions or statements and use them to convince the employer that you fit his/her requirements?

- Do you have a definite understanding as to what would be required of you if you were hired? This will avoid possible disappointment for you and/or the employer later.

- Were you realistic in discussing wages?

- Do you feel comfortable with how much information you shared about your mental health issues?

- Were you able to manage whatever nervousness or anxiety you experienced during the interview?

- Did you feel encouraged at the end of the interview

For those items to which you cannot answer "yes," think about how you might handle things differently the next time.

You may have to go through the interviewing process several times before you get a job. It is important for you to maintain your self-esteem. Each interview is an opportunity to practice, learn, and improve your interviewing skills.

What to do if you are offered a job?

Accepting a job is a serious commitment. Before you accept the job, make sure you know what you need to know and have had the chance to consider your decision carefully. Do not be afraid to ask for more information, or for a little bit of time to think about the offer. You might want to take the time to talk to another employee about what it's like to work at that place. You are more likely to be successful at a job that matches your skills and interests, so take the time you need to figure out if the job you've been offered is a good match for you.

Also remember that once a job is offered to you, the employer has some investment in you. This gives you a little bit of room to maneuver. Now is a good time to negotiate anything that you would like to be a little different, whether it is salary, benefits, schedule, etc. It is harder to make those sorts of changes after you have accepted the job. If you think you might need any accommodations in order to do the job, think about whether you want to bring up the subject now or later. See Section 11 for a detailed discussion of job accommodations.

Remember that it is ok to say "no" to a job offer, if you think it really isn't the right job for you. Remember that it is also ok to say "yes" if you think it is right, or if you want to give it a try. If it doesn't work out, you can always start looking for something better.

What to do if you are not offered a job?

Almost everybody who has applied for jobs has been turned down. Rejection is simply part of this process, and that is a risk for every person who applies. Try not to get too discouraged. Keep on looking and applying for jobs.

Remember that if you don't get a job offer, it doesn't necessarily mean you did something wrong. It may mean that there was a candidate with better qualifications. It may mean that they hired somebody who was already with that company or organization. It may be that the employer was looking for some quality or characteristic that they didn't tell you about. The truth is that you probably will not know why you weren't offered the job. Not all employers contact you if you don't get the job, even if you have been interviewed for it, or they may take a long time to get back to you. Don't take it too personally, and try not to let it shake your confidence too much.

On the other hand, it is a good idea to reflect on what happened and try to learn as much as you can from each experience. Make every effort to improve your presentation and application skills, and to locate job openings for which you are well suited. The more applications you make, the better you will get at applying, and the more likely it is that one of the jobs you apply for will work out.

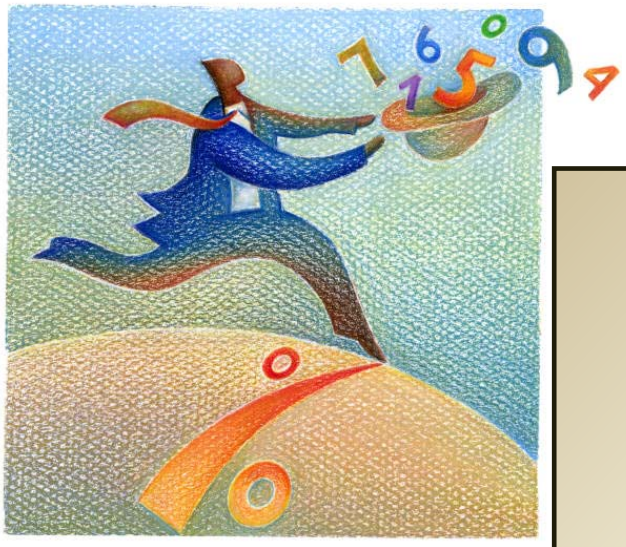
Informational Interviews

Sometimes, an employer may be willing to spend time with you just to give you information about the field and jobs in general. It's a good way to get more information about a field you are interested in but don't have a lot of first hand information about. These interviews tend to be short, and you are more likely to get an employer to see you if you have a contact who knows the employer. These interviews are helpful not only in giving give you information, but also in providing an opportunity for the employer to meet you in case an opening that is just right for you comes up in the future. Also, the employer may have other contacts for you. This is another good way to network.

THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE ON
COMMUNITY INCLUSION
of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Section 9:

SSI Work Incentives and the Ticket to Work



In this Section:

- Introduction
- Common Myths about Supplemental Security Income
- Record Keeping
- What about my Medical Benefits
- Medicaid Buy-In for Working Persons with Disabilities
- Plan for Achieving Self Support
- Impairment Related Work Expenses
- Hospitalization
- If you are found to no longer have a disability
- Reinstatement
- Appeals
- Ticket to Work Program
- The Advance Self-Advocacy Plan
- Additional Resources

Introduction

The Social Security Administration (SSA) has made many changes over the years in its 'work incentives programs' – that is, in programs that are designed to encourage people with disabilities to return to work. These next two sections highlight what people need to know about the SSI programs (Section 9) and SSDI programs (Section 10), and the best ways to make sure that going to work 'works for you.' However, this information is not comprehensive, so you are strongly encouraged to contact the Social Security Administration or a rehabilitation agency or service that works with SSI and/or SSDI applicants or recipients for more up-to-date and detailed information.

Many people with mental health conditions rely upon the SSA's Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. There are many myths about SSI. It can be hard to get accurate information about Social Security programs, so it is no wonder that lots of people are confused about it.

Many people with mental health conditions say that they want to work but are afraid they will lose their SSI automatically as soon as they start. This isn't true.

During times that a person is totally unable to work, SSI provides important basic financial and medical benefits. The work incentives built into the SSI system are intended to help people transition gradually from dependence upon SSI to working for their own independent income. If you receive SSI and are thinking about

working, this Section will help you understand how to use the work incentives, and how employment will affect your SSI check and benefits.

NOTE: If you receive both SSI and SSDI (Social Security Disability Insurance), you are entitled to both the work incentives discussed in this Section and the SSDI work incentives, described in Section 10.)

Common Myths about Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Below are the most common SSI myths. Each is followed by the truth, with greater detail later in this Section.

Myths and Truths:

Myth: As soon as I start working I will stop getting my SSI check.

Truth: Because your SSI check will only decrease gradually as you report increased earned income, you can earn over $1,000 a month before you get no SSI check at all, although in some states the amount you are able to earn before you get no SSI check is even more. (See pages 128-129 for more detail.)

Myth: I can make more money collecting my SSI check than I can if I go to work.

Truth: The first $65 you earn in a month may not affect your check at all, and after that the amount of your check only goes down by $1 for every $2 you make. So from the time you earn your first dollar, you are always ahead. (See page 129 for more detail.)

Myth: If I go to work I'll lose my Medicaid, and I can't afford that.

Truth: If you continue to have a disability, even if you earn too much to continue getting an SSI check, you may be eligible to continue your full Medicaid coverage. (See pages 130-131 for more detail.)

Myth: If I go to work, get off SSI benefits, and then get sick again I'll have a hard time getting back on benefits.

Truth: If you go off benefits and then need, and are eligible for, benefits again at any time, you can be reinstated without reapplying. (See page 139-140 for more details)

Myth: I can't get ahead. I can't get a good-paying job, and I can't afford to get training to help me get a good job.

Truth: With PASS (Plan for Achieving Self Support), you may be able to put away as much of your money as you need for school or training and have that money not count as income or resources affecting your check. (See pages 133-134 for more detail.)

About Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program is a federally funded and federally administered program that provides a minimum income for individuals who are “aged,” “blind,” or “disabled,” and who have limited financial resources and little or no income. This money is to help you pay for your basic needs: food, clothing, and shelter. It is not intended to be enough to pay for your transportation, recreation, or luxury items and other activities.

The maximum amount of your SSI check differs from state to state. In addition to the difference in the total dollar amount, checks may also be administered differently, as follows:

1. In some states, you receive only the federal payment or the federal payment plus a state supplement in one check.

2. In other states, people get two separate checks, one equal to the federal amount and a second check in the amount of the state supplement.

To remain eligible for SSI, besides having a continuing disability, your personal resources (such as bank accounts) must remain under $2,000 for an individual and under $3,000 for a couple. If your resources are over this amount, you are not eligible to receive a check.

You are required to notify Social Security at the end of any month in which you have either *unearned income* or *earned income* (gross wages) that Social Security doesn't already know about. Look for the details of what counts as *earned* and *unearned income* below.

NOTE: The maximum federal SSI rate for 2012 is $698 for an individual and $1,048 for a couple. This is called the *Federal Benefit Rate*; throughout this Section it will be used in all examples. This rate changes each year to account for cost-of-living changes. If you receive a different amount, although the amount of your check may be more, the formulas used to figure the deductions and reductions will remain the same for everyone (except where noted).

Record Keeping

When you are receiving SSI, and particularly when you begin to work while continuing to receive an SSI check, it is very important that you keep good records. The Social Security Administration office keeps a file containing information about your benefits, but it is important that you keep your own records as well. This will help you avoid problems if there are ever questions about your earnings.

IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU KEEP RECORDS ABOUT:

1. Your disability benefits.
2. The company name and the address of your employer(s).
3. The dates you worked.

4. The wages you have received. Keeping a copy of your pay stubs would be very helpful.

In addition, keep copies of all letters and notices that you receive from Social Security, and keep copies of everything that you send to Social Security.

Also keep a written record of all telephone calls to or from Social Security. Before you call Social Security, write down all your questions so that you don't forget any of them. During or right after the phone call, write down:

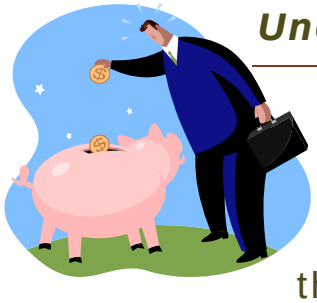
- The date and time of your call.
- The name and title of the person with whom you spoke.
- Exactly what you asked.
- Exactly what answers you were given.

Keep a record of all calls whether they are to your local Social Security office or the toll-free number (800-722-1213).

You must notify Social Security of any changes in your work activity, including starting or stopping work; changes in duties, hours, or pay; or if you start paying for expenses that you need in order to work. Report a change within 10 days after the end of the month in which the change occurs. Changes can be reported by phone (800-722-1213) to SSA's national office, or by fax, mail, or in person at your

local SSA office. To find the numbers you need for your local office, go to the Social Security website www.socialsecurity.gov or call the toll-free number: 800-722-1213.

Unfortunately, the Social Security Administration has begun to cut back their services that help people navigate their system, so you may experience long waits when calling.



Unearned Income

Unearned income is any money that you received other than earnings from your job or the money you received in your SSI check. This would include such things as:

- Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).
- Veterans Administration (VA) benefits.
- Unemployment benefits.
- Workers' compensation.
- Pension or retirement payments.
- Lottery winnings.
- Private (or state) disability benefits.

For most *unearned income*, the first $20 you receive in a month will not reduce your SSI check at all. This is your *general income exclusion*. *Unearned income* over $20 in a single month will reduce

your check by $1 for every $1 of *unearned income* you receive. You must report this to Social Security at the end of the month in which you receive the money. You l need to report the source and amount of the income, and the date you received it.

EXAMPLE 1: In January, Tom received a check for $250 for correctly picking the Daily Number in the state lottery. This is *unearned income*. Tom's SSI will be affected like this:

Unearned income (lottery winnings)	$250
Minus the *general income exclusion*	- 20
Equals the *countable income*	$230

Tom's SSI Payment (*Federal Benefit Rate*)	$698
Minus the *countable income* from above	-230
Equals the SSI check	$468

The *unearned income* that is received in one month does not affect the SSI check until two months later. In the example above, Tom received the *unearned income* in January, so his March SSI check will be $468 rather than $698. This means that he must plan for the month when his check will be less than usual. This can be very confusing, so it makes it all the more important to keep your own records.

Earned Income

Earned income is money that you receive as a salary or from self-employment, including money earned in a sheltered workshop. Here are two important points about your *earned income*:

1. Social Security counts your *gross earned income*, which is the total amount of your pay before taxes and other deductions are taken out.

2. Your earnings are counted in the month you receive them (the date of the check), even if some or all of the money was earned in the previous month.

With *earned income*, the first $65 of gross earnings in a month will not affect your check at all. This is called the *earned income exclusion*. And, if you do not have any *unearned income*, the $20 *general income exclusion* can also be used, resulting in an $85 total for *income exclusion*. Once you expect to earn more than the deduction amount in any month, you should call the Social Security Administration, tell them you are working, and give them an estimate of what you will earn each month. Keep your pay stubs for each month of paid work. Generally, you will be asked to submit pay stubs every month. If your pay will vary from month to month, ask the Social Security (SS) Claims Representative to calculate your benefits based on your actual pay stubs and not based on an estimate.

Earned income over your deduction amount ($65 or $85) will reduce your SSI check by $1 for every $2 you earn. You report it by bringing or mailing in a copy of your pay stubs (be sure to keep the originals for yourself) to a SS Claims Representative after the last payday of each month. They must have the information on your wages by the 10th day of the following month. The SSI check affected by your income will be the check received the second month following the month you received the earnings. Keeping the Claims Representative informed of all income will help you avoid an overpayment which you may have to pay back later.

EXAMPLE 2: In June, Mary made $301 working part time at a pizzeria. She has no other income. Her SSI check will be affected like this:

Earned income (wages)	$301
Less the general ($20) and the earned ($65) exclusions	-85
Less $108 - $216 divided by 2 ($1 reduction for $2 earned)	$216

Equals the countable income by which her check is reduced	$108
Mary's SSI payment (Federal Benefit Rate)	$698
Minus the countable income from above	-108
Equals the SSI check	$509

Again, the income that Mary received in June will affect her August check, which will be $590. In this example, the individual had only *earned income*. This will help you plan because you will know exactly how much to expect in your check.

Both earned and unearned income

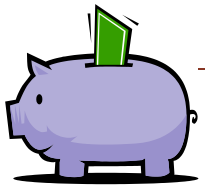
If you receive both *earned* and *unearned income* in the same month, follow these steps:

1. Take the *unearned income* and subtract the $20 *general exclusion*, which gives you the *countable income*.

2. Take the *earned income* and subtract the $65 *earned income exclusion* and then divide by two. This will give you the *countable earned income*.

3. Add together the *countable unearned income* and the *countable earned income*, which will give you the total *countable income*.

4. Subtract the total *countable income* from your SSI benefit rate, and that will be the amount of your SSI payment.



In-Kind Income

Since the SSI benefit is intended to help you pay for your food, clothing, and shelter, if you have someone regularly paying for any of these things your SSI benefit may be reduced. Examples follow:

- You may have a job where you get lunch and dinner for free every day that you work. Those meals can be valued at a certain cash amount and your SSI payment may be reduced.

- If you live in a rooming house where you pay rent and your meals are provided as part of your rent, your benefit should not be affected.

- If you have regular access to free clothing, a monthly cash value can be placed on this clothing and your benefit may be reduced.

- Housing is often affected by the *in-kind* income provision. Social Security asks you to show how much you pay for rent. They also ask you to show the overall costs of running your home (rent, utilities, insurance, taxes, etc.). That number is divided by the number of adults living in the household, to calculate your fair (pro-rated) share of housing costs. If someone else is paying a significant amount of your share of housing costs, your SSI payment may be reduced. If reduced, it can only be reduced up to approximately one-third of the *Federal Benefit Rate* (at the present time) or a maximum of $232.66.

Breakeven Point

The amount of your SSI check gradually goes down as your income goes up, until you reach the *breakeven point,* that is, the amount of *earned income* that finally reduces the SSI check to $0. To figure out your *breakeven point*, use the same process used to figure that reduction of the check, but in reverse.

EXAMPLE 3: Jamal gets a monthly SSI check of $698. He wants to figure out how much *earned income* he can receive before he stops getting his SSI check. He can figure it out like this:

Jamal's SSI payment (*Federal Benefit Rate*)	$698
$2 of earning for every $1 of reduction	X 2
	$1,396
Add the $65 and $20 deductions	+ 85
Equals the *breakeven point*	$1,481

Jamal's SSI check was $698. This means when Jamal makes $1,481 in a month, his SSI check will be $0.

If your SSI check, prior to any deduction or reduction, is different from $698, use the same math to figure it out but put your check amount in the place of the first figure.

If you receive both unearned and earned income …

Your breakeven point will be lower because your SSI check is smaller. For example, if you receive SSDI and SSI, you would calculate your breakeven point as follows:

(SSI amount x 2) + $65 = *breakeven point*

What about my medical benefits?

Medicaid is the medical coverage you received while on SSI. (Each state may have a different name for it.) The Medicaid program is administered by the state. In most cases, as long as you continue to receive at least $1 of SSI, you will remain eligible for Medicaid (although this is not the case in every state).

Extended Medicaid [1619(b)]

Once your monthly income goes over the *breakeven point* and you no longer receive an SSI check, you do not necessarily lose your medical coverage. You may be eligible for continued Medicaid under Section 1619(b) of the Social Security Act.

To be eligible for coverage under Section 1619(b), you must have stopped getting your SSI check due to the amount of your earnings. That is, you did not stop getting checks due to having resources over $2,000 or because you have been found to no longer have a disability.

In most cases, if you have Medicaid before you started working you can keep the coverage even after your earnings go over the *breakeven point* as long as all of the following is true:

- You were eligible for an SSI cash payment for at least one month.

- You would be eligible for a cash payment except for earnings.
- You continue to have a disability.
- You still meet all the other eligibility rules, including passing the resources test.
- You need Medicaid in order to work.
- You have gross earned income that is insufficient to replace SSI, Medicaid, and any publicly funded attendant care (for people with a physical disability).

You are eligible for continued Medicaid under Section 1619(b) as long as you meet the above criteria and your income is not more than your state's 1619(b) *threshold amount*. To find out your state's maximum allowable annual income under 1619(b), call the Social Security Administration (SSA) office and ask for the "1619(b) threshold amount." If necessary, the SSA office can perform an individualized threshold calculation.

As long as you continue to receive Medicaid coverage you are maintaining your SSI eligibility. This means that, at any point when your monthly income drops below the *breakeven point* and your resources remain less than $2,000, you will begin to receive your SSI checks again without having to re-apply. This is called *reinstatement*. For *reinstatement* to occur, you must continue to notify a Claims Representative of your earnings at the end of each month.

Medicaid Buy-In for Working Persons with Disabilities

Your state may allow you to inexpensively purchase Medicaid for yourself if you have a disability according to the Social Security definition and are no longer eligible for free Medicaid because you returned to work but would be eligible for SSI if you were not working. For more information, contact your state Medicaid office. You can obtain the phone number by calling 800-MEDICARE. Ask about the Medicaid Buy-In Program.

Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS)

You can use a PASS to set aside money to pay for education, vocational training, business start-up costs, tools, transportation, job coaching services, child care, etc. if they are related to your making it possible to work. The purpose of a PASS is to help you reach your work goal. The money that you set aside using a PASS won't be counted by the Social Security Administration as resources or income or part of your continuing eligibility for SSI. A PASS can enable you to receive more SSI than you otherwise would, as long as you use what you keep to pursue a specific vocational goal. For more information on PASS plans, go to:(http://ww.socialsecruity.gov/disabilityresarch/wi/pass.html).

When you use a PASS, keep all deposit slips and receipts to show that the money was spent for those things approved in the PASS.

A PASS must:

- Be designed especially for you.

- Be submitted in writing to Social Security and be approved. You can use Social Security's form SSA-545-BK. It can be downloaded at www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ssa-545.html or obtained at the local Social Security office.

- Have a specific work goal that you can probably meet.

- Say how long it will take you to reach the goal and list all the steps you will take to reach the goal.

- Say what income or resources (naming the sources of the income) will be set aside and how they will be used to reach the goal.

- Say what goods and services you will need to reach the goal and explain how those items will help you reach that goal.

- Explain how you will keep the income or resources separate from your other money (for instance, in a separate bank account). When kept in a separate account, the funds will not be counted as a resource for SSI eligibility.

- Be reviewed periodically by Social Security to see if it is helping you to achieve your goal.

Vocational Rehabilitation programs may also have the forms available. You can fill out the forms yourself or ask for help from a vocational counselor or other helpful person or service provider. Social Security evaluates each proposal's feasibility (whether the expectations to work

are reasonable) and viability (whether the proposed steps for meeting the goal are likely to work). Keep this in mind as you write your proposal. It can take as long as a year or more to find out whether Social Security has approved your plan. If your plan is not approved, you may be eligible to make changes to it and then re-submit the plan.

Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE)

Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) are expenses that can be deducted from your *earned income*, thereby causing your SSI check to be reduced by a lesser amount. These expenses must be related to your disability, necessary in order for you to be able to work, and unavailable from any other source (such as Medicaid or your state office of vocational rehabilitation.) You can use IRWE to pay for things such as medication, supports for a physical disability, transportation (in some cases), counseling/therapy (in some cases), a service dog, and similar expenses.

Impairment Related Work Expenses must be:

- Approved by the Social Security Administration. (Therefore, you might ask a Claims Representative before spending the money.)
- Reasonable expenses that have been paid for by you with cash, check or money order; receipts must be submitted at the end of each month.

- Only work-related expenses that are not reimbursable through other sources (as mentioned above).

There is no time limit to when you can use IRWE, as long as it is needed in order for you to be able to work. This means that you can use IRWE as long as you are receiving SSI and you are working. The end result of using IRWE is that you can receive reimbursement for up to 50% of the funds you have paid out.

Hospitalization

If you go into the hospital and you are expected to be there throughout a full calendar month through the last day of the month (not four weeks or 30 days) or more, you or someone you designate should contact a Claims Representative.

Generally, if you enter a hospital or other medical facility where Medicaid pays for more than half of the cost of your care, your federal SSI payment is limited to $30 per month. If Medicaid is not paying for more than half the cost of your care, you may not be eligible for any SSI payment. If no one tells the Social Security Administration that you are in the hospital and you stay more than one full calendar month, you may have to pay back the money you received.

A special rule applies if you will be in the hospital for 90 days or less. If you give the Social Security Administration the information they require, you may continue to receive your regular SSI check for up to

the first three full months that you are in the hospital. Your doctor must state in writing that you will be in the hospital for 90 days or less. SSA also needs a statement from you or someone familiar with your circumstances that you need your regular SSI checks to maintain your residence while you are in the hospital.

In all instances, the most important issue is communication with the Social Security Administration office (SSA). If you go into the hospital, notifying SSA is not likely to be the first thing on your mind; it would help if the people close to you know about the importance of telling SSA what is going on. For a helpful resource, in case you need to go into a hospital, see the *Advance Self-Advocacy Plan* at the end of this Section.

If you are found to no longer have a disability

Periodically, Social Security will do a disability review, which is very similar to what was done when you originally applied for benefits. Social Security will verify that you do, in fact, meet their definition of “disabled” and therefore are entitled to continue to receive benefits.

- When you begin to earn $500 in gross earnings per month, Social Security will schedule a disability review within 12 months.
- If you do not work, or if you earn under $500 a month, Social Security may do a disability review every three to four years.

Frequency of reviews is based on the severity of the disability and the expectation of improvement.

If you are still receiving treatment and /or rehabilitation services and Social Security says that you are no longer “disabled,” you have the right to appeal the decision.

Section 301 of the Social Security Act provides a way for people to keep receiving benefits while they complete a vocational rehabilitation program or vocational training. This is to help you succeed in your efforts to return to work and become self-sufficient (that is, to no longer need SSI). What Section 301 says is that if you are found to be no longer “disabled” AND are in a vocational training program, you can continue to receive SSI payments until you have completed the program. The program must be approved by your state Vocational Rehabilitation Office and designed for you to become financially independent – in other words, not dependent on Social Security.

Reinstatement

If you are unable to work after losing your SSI check and Medicaid due to your earnings, your benefits can be reinstated without reapplication at any time.

Earning Credits Towards SSDI

Whenever you earn more than $700 per quarter (three months), you earn a "credit" towards SSDI and Retirement Benefits. If you receive SSI and have been working, this means that you may eventually have enough "credits" to become eligible for SSDI instead of SSI benefits. If this happens, make sure you learn about SSDI rules and work incentives, which are different from SSI rules. (See section 10 for more information about SSDI.)

Appeals

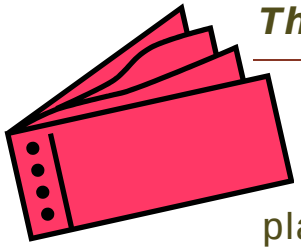
You have the right to appeal any decision that Social Security makes that affects your individual benefits. This includes an initial denial of benefits, termination of benefits, charge of overpayment, or any other action affecting your benefits. You have 60 days to file an appeal, beginning from the time you receive a notice from Social Security saying that your benefits are going to be changed.

- If you file an appeal within the first 10 days of receiving the notice, your checks will not be reduced or discontinued until a decision on the appeal is made. If a decision is made against you, you may be charged with an overpayment (see below).

- If you file your appeal after 10 days but before the 60-day deadline, your check will be reduced or stopped but will return to its original amount if the appeal is decided in your favor.

- If you file your appeal after 60 days, your check will be reduced or stopped, and your appeal may not be considered.

If you have been charged with an overpayment (that is, you have been given SSI monies to which you were not entitled), you may be justified in requesting a *Waiver of Overpayment,* which means you will not have to pay the money back if overpayment was not your fault and it would be a financial hardship for you to pay it back. There is no time limit on filing for a Waiver of Overpayment. If money is already being taken out of your check, you can still file for a waiver. If the waiver is granted, money will stop being taken out of your check, but you will not get back what has already been taken out. Generally, the most that can be taken out of your check without your permission is 10% of the total check. For instance, if your check is $698, the most that can be taken out would be $69.80.



The Ticket to Work Program

The Ticket to Work Program is for persons with disabilities who want to work and participate in planning their employment. A Ticket increases your choices in employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, and other support services you may need to get or keep a job. It is a free and voluntary service. All SSI recipients receive a Ticket to Work. You can use the Ticket if you choose, but there is no penalty for not using it. The advantage of using your Ticket is that you are not subject to continuing disability reviews; in other words, the Social Security Administration will not review whether you continue to have a

disability and are eligible for SSI while you use the Ticket. This program is also available for SSDI Beneficiaries.

The Ticket makes available to you a selection of private and government vocational rehabilitation agencies and other providers who can help you obtain and retain employment. These providers are called Employment Networks. The Ticket program pays these providers for helping you, so there is an incentive for them to help you succeed. The services they offer are varied.

You can obtain information about the program by calling the Ticket Call Center at 866-968-7842; for TTY/TDD call 866-833-2967. Information is also available online at www.chooseworkttw.net. For a list of Employment Networks, you can obtain a full list by visiting https://yourtickettowork.com/web/ttw/en-directory.

For more information about SSI Work Incentives, contact the Social Security Administration directly about any recent changes in their policies and to request updated brochures on their benefits and work incentive programs. Visit www.socialsecurity.gov for a list of brochures, including the *Red Book*, which is updated annually, or call 800-772-1213 to ask questions about SSA policies and procedures.

For questions concerning your specific situation, benefits, or check, contact a Claims Representative at either your local Social Security Office or at 800-772-1213.

The Advance Self-Advocacy Plan (ASAP)

Consider putting a plan in place in case you need to go into the hospital. The Advance Self-Advocacy Plan (ASAP) is a simple tool to tell others how you want to be treated in case your mental health takes a turn for the worse. It helps you figure out, and communicate about, what you need to handle during a mental health crisis and provides a way to address those needs, both in and out of the hospital. It includes a list of people to contact and tasks that need to be handled if you are unable to do so, including contacts with the Social Security Administration. An ASAP Guidebook was developed as a companion to the ASAP to help in planning. Both documents were created for the Temple University Collaborative and are available online at http://tucollaborative.org/resources/resources.html#selfDetermination . Click on *Advance Self Advocacy Plan – A Planning Document* and *Advance Self Advocacy Plan – A Guidebook*.

What if I Am Homeless?

The Social Security office will make special arrangements to have a homeless person's check sent to a third party. The third party can be a relative, a friend, or an organization. If you are living in a public shelter, you may receive a full SSI check for up to six months within any nine month period. This rule is to enable you to save money for permanent housing.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you need more information about SSDI or SSI Work Incentives, contact Social Security at the following numbers/addresses:

By phone: 800-772-1213; if you have a hearing impairment, call TTY/DD 800-325-0778. Hours are from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern Standard Time, Monday through Friday.

Internet Access: *Social Security Online* at www.socialsecurity.gov. For persons with disabilities, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/disability. For information on the Ticket to Work Program, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work. To locate a local Social Security office online, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/locator. Enter your zip code to get the address, telephone number, and directions to your local office.

By mail: If you have been unable to resolve a problem after calling the toll-free number or after contacting your local Social Security office, you can write to the Office of Public Inquiries at:

Social Security Administration
Office of Public Inquiries
6401 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21235-6401

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To request copies of the *Red Book* or other Social Security publications, you can fax your request to 410-965-2037 or mail your request to:

Office of Supply & Warehouse Management
Social Security Administration
239 Supply Building
6301 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21235-6301

(They will not ship to Post Office boxes.)

Virginia Commonwealth University has a website that offers information designed to help people understand how to best use the work incentives through federal and state disability benefit programs. The website address is http://www.vcu-ntc.org/.

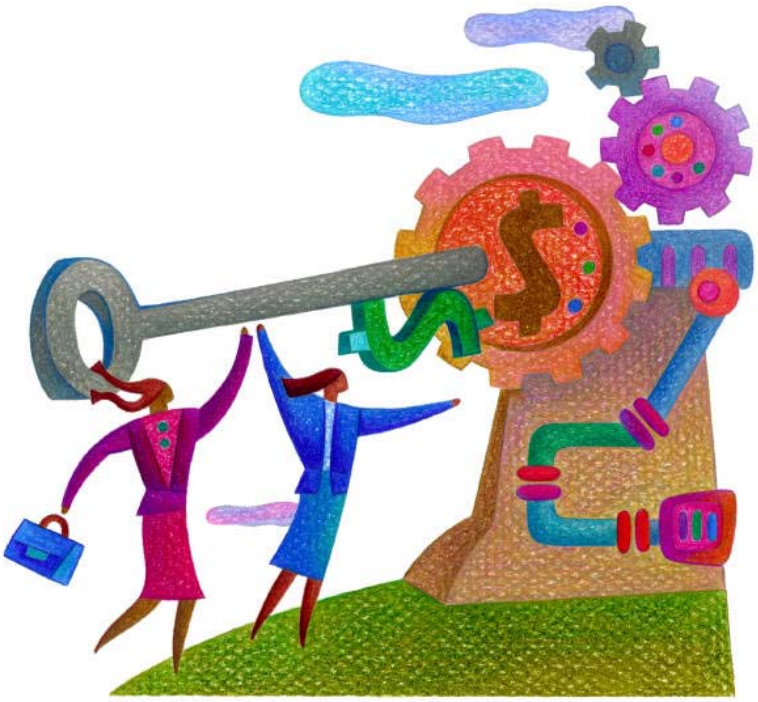
THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE ON
COMMUNITY INCLUSION
of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Section 10:

SSDI Work Incentives

In this Section:

- Introduction
- Common Myths about Social Security Disability Insurance
- About Social Security Disability Insurance
- If you receive both SSI and SSDI
- Record Keeping
- What Is the Trial Work Period in SSDI
- What about My Medicare Coverage?
- What Are Impairment Related Work Expenses?
- How Can You Use Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)
- Do I Have Any Right to Appeal a Decision Made by SSA?



Introduction

If you were working, and then developed a disability due to mental health issues that qualified you as 'disabled' under the Social Security Administration's definition of "disabled," you may be receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). You qualified for Social Security benefits by earning Social Security credits when you worked and paid Social Security taxes.

There are many myths about SSDI and what happens when you want to go back to work. It can be hard to get accurate information about Social Security programs, so it is no wonder that lots of people are confused about it.

Many people with mental health conditions say they want to work but fear that they will lose their SSDI automatically as soon as they start. This isn't true.

This Section will help you understand SSDI *work incentives*. As you plan to go back to work, you will need to know exactly how your check will be affected so that you can budget properly.

NOTE: If you receive both SSI (Supplemental Security Income) and SSDI, you are eligible for both the work incentives discussed in this Section and SSI work incentives, which are described in Section 9 of this *Guide*.

At this writing, in 2012, the Social Security Administration is making changes in both their work incentives program as well as the way people contact the Social Security Office and update their profiles. This Section, like Section 9, highlight what people need to know. However, this information is not comprehensive, so you are strongly encouraged to contact the Social Security Administration or a rehabilitation agency that works with Social Security recipients or those thinking about applying for benefits.

Common Myths about Social Security Disability Insurance

Below are most common SSDI myths. Each is followed by the truth, with greater detail later in this Section.

Myths and Truths:

Myth: As soon as I start working I will stop getting my SSDI check.

Truth: If you earn under $720 a month or work less than 80 hours a month if you are self-employed, your benefits are not affected at all. If you earn over $720 in a month, you use up a trial work month but continue to get your full benefit checks. (See page 152-153 for more detail.)

Myth: I can make more money just collecting my SSDI check than I can if I go to work while I am on SSDI.

Truth: You will keep both your income and your SSDI check until you have used up your nine trial work months. After that, as long as you earn under $1,010 a month, you will continue to get your SSDI check until after the 36-month Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE). (See pages 154 for more detail.)

Myth: I can't go to work because I can't afford to lose my Medicare.

Truth: When you work, you will be on Medicare throughout the trial work period (a minimum of nine months) and through the Extended Period of Eligibility (a minimum of 36 months). (See page 154-155 for more detail.)

Myth: I can't get ahead because I can't get a good-paying job, and I can't afford to get training to help me get a good job.

Truth: Even though you are on SSDI, you may be eligible for the Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS), an SSI Work Incentive, if you are eligible for SSI as well. (See page 159-160 for more detail.)

About Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) differs significantly from Supplemental Security Income (SSI). With SSDI, there is no gradual reduction of your check; you will either receive your entire check or no check at all. The monthly SSDI benefit amount you will receive is based on the amount *you* have paid - or what your parents paid if you developed a disability that qualifies you for SSDI prior to age 22 – into the system when you (or they) were working. With SSDI, there is no resource limit; you may have any amount of money in the bank.

To be eligible for SSDI, a person must:

- Have worked and paid Social Security taxes (FICA), earning sufficient credits – credits are earned quarterly – over the last five to 10 years. Generally, a person needs 20 credits earned in the last 10 years ending with the year he or she became "disabled" according to the Social Security Administration's definition.
- Earn under $1,010/month or have no earned income.
- Be considered "medically disabled" OR have become "disabled" prior to age 22 and have a parent who is eligible for Social Security who is retired, has a disability, or is deceased.
- Be a citizen of the United States or a legal alien, and be a current resident of the United States.

- File an application for Social Security benefits.

The amount of the SSDI check is based on the amount of your income before you became "disabled." The amount of the monthly check will therefore be different for each individual. Social Security usually provides an annual cost of living increase of approximately 2.5% each year. If the amount of your SSDI check is less than the SSI maximum amount for your state, you will be entitled to the SSDI check plus an SSI check in an amount that will bring the total amount of the combined benefits up to $20 more than the SSI maximum rate. You must also meet the resource/income requirements set by SSI. The fact that you are then also receiving SSI will make you also eligible for Medicaid's medical coverage.

There is no "cap" – or upper limit – on the amount of money an individual can receive on SSDI since the benefit amount is based on past earnings. However, the payment may be reduced if you are receiving Workers' Compensation payments and/or public disability payments. There is also no limit to the personal resources, such as bank accounts, that you can have while receiving SSDI.

If you receive both SSI and SSDI you can take advantage of both the work incentives discussed here and the SSI work incentives described in Section 9 of this *Guide*.

If you receive both SSI and SSDI:

1. You will need to report your income regarding both your SSI and your SSDI to a Claims Representative.

2. You will need to figure the reduction of your SSI check on a monthly basis so that you can apply to keep your Medicaid benefits under 1619(b) (extended Medicaid) when you come close to losing your SSI check. (See Section 9.)

3. You are also subject to SSI work incentives policies.

Record Keeping

When you are receiving SSDI and particularly when you begin to work while on SSDI, it is very important that you keep good records. Social Security keeps a computer file containing information about your benefits, but keeping your own records will help you avoid problems if there are ever questions about your earnings. It is important that you keep records about:

- Your disability benefits.
- The company name and the address of your employer(s).
- The wages you have received.
- The dates of your employment.

In addition, keep copies of all the letters and notices that you receive from Social Security, and keep copies of everything you send to Social Security.

Also keep a written record of all telephone calls that you make to or receive from Social Security. Before making a call to Social Security, write down all of your questions so that you remember to ask them all.

<u>During or right after the phone call, write down:</u>

- The date and time of your call.
- The name and title of the person with whom you spoke.
- Exactly what you asked.
- Exactly what answers you were given.

Keep a record of all calls whether they are to the local Social Security office or the toll-free number (800-722-1213). You can use the toll-free number to report changes in your employment status or to report income or appeals, or you can contact your local office and speak directly to a claims representative.

What Is the Trial Work Period in SSDI?

If you go back to work while you are still receiving SSDI, Social Security allows you nine months of trial work within

a rolling five-year period before your SSDI benefits may be affected. This means that the computer looks at the last 60 months [five years] to determine in how many months you have earned over $720 (previous years have lower monthly *trial work period* thresholds. For example, in 2008 the monthly trial work amount was $670.) It will do that every month by adding the current month and dropping the oldest month. *Trial work* months do not have to be used consecutively; each month in which you work and earn wages of $720 or more counts as a *trial work* month. Once you have used the nine *trial work* months, your *trial work* period is over.

This is Social Security's way of supporting you while you begin to return to work and establish yourself in a new job. The trial work period allows you to earn wages and still collect your full SSDI check.

EXAMPLE 1: James worked in January, February, March and April of 1990, earning $900 in each of those four months. He has not worked since. On January 1, 1995, the Social Security computer looks back 60 months (to January 1, 1990) and sees that James has used four trial work months and has five left. On February 1, 1995, the computer looks back 60 months (to February 1, 1990) and sees that he has used three trial work months, meaning that he now has six trial work months left. January 1990 no longer counts because it would have been 61 months ago.

BUT…

EXAMPLE 2: Susan worked from January through August 1991 (eight months) and earned $950 in each of those months. In January 1995 she got a job and earned $850 for the month; this was the end of her trial work period. Even though she has not worked for over three years (from August 1991 through December 1994), she has used up her allotted trial work period because the nine months she did work are all within a five-year period.

What Happens after I Use Up My Trial Work Period?

Once you have used up the nine months of your trial work period within the rolling five-year period, you have 36 months during which you can work and still receive benefits for any month your earnings are not "substantial." In 2012, earnings over $1,010 ($1,690 if you are blind) are considered to be substantial. No new application or disability decision is needed for you to receive a Social Security disability benefit during this period. This is called the *extended period of eligibility.*

What is the Extended Period of Eligibility for SSDI?

The Extended Period of Eligibility (EPE) for SSDI is a benefits period which begins immediately after the end of the ninth

month of your trial work period. The EPE lasts for 36 consecutive months, whether or not you are working during that time. Medicare benefits will be extended for 39 months after the trial work period. If your Social Security disability benefits stop because of your earnings, but you are still "disabled," your free Medicare Part A coverage will continue for at least 93 months after the nine month *trial work period.* Medicare Part B can continue for at least 93 months as well as long as one is paying the monthly premium.

When you are in the EPE, you will still receive your full SSDI check for any month during which you earn under $1,010 a month. For every month in which you earn $1,010 or more, you will not receive your check.

NOTE: The check affected by your income is the check following the month after the month in which the income was earned. So if you are in your Extended Period of Eligibility and you earn $1,010 in January, you should not receive an SSDI check in February.

EXAMPLE 3: Sarah is an SSDI beneficiary and receives $800 a month in benefits. She is in her Extended Period of Eligibility and has a job with varying hours. Her income for January through May is below. You can see how her check is affected by looking at the SSDI amounts she receives. Notice that in May and June she receives no check because of her income levels in April and May.

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul
Income	$900	$900	$730	$1,010	$1,010	----	----
SSDI	$800	$800	$800	$800	$0	$0	$800

Remember: Social Security counts your gross income (before taxes or any other deductions are taken out), and they count income in the month in which you earn it, so it is important to keep track of your actual daily hours and wages per hour.

Budget your money!

Since the earnings received in one month affect the check of the month following, you could be in a difficult position if your income is not steady, as in Example 3, above. You may choose to pay a month's rent early because you have the money on hand, knowing that in the month you will have no SSDI check and may not be working.

What Happens after the 36-Month Extended Period of Eligibility Ends?

Once you have passed the 36th month of your *extended period of eligibility*, your benefits will stop two months after that in which you earn $1,010 or more. It may be the first month after the *extended period* or it may be the 100th month. If your monthly income remains below $1,010, you will continue to receive your full benefits check. However, after 36 months, the first time your monthly income

reaches (or exceeds) $1,010, Social Security will close your case and you will no longer receive a check even if you go back to earning under $1,010.

What about My Medicare Coverage?

If your Social Security disability benefits stop because of your earnings, but you are still "disabled," your free Medicare Part A coverage will continue for at least 93 months after the nine month *trial work period.* Medicare Part B can continue for at least 93 months as well as long as one is paying the monthly premium.

If you still meet certain disability requirements, you will be given the option of purchasing continued Medicare coverage at a reasonable price, even if your SSDI check has ceased. If you become unable to work again after this point, you will have to re-apply for Social Security benefits.

If You Receive SSDI and Medicaid

Some individuals who receive only SSDI may also receive Medicaid if their state Department of Public Assistance deems them eligible due to low income (not disability). Many states use the Federal Poverty Income guidelines to determine eligibility. If your monthly income exceeds this level you will lose your Medicaid, which generally provides pharmaceutical benefits. If this is your

situation, explore your options by contacting your Department of Public Welfare office and ask if they have a “spend-down” program. Also, you can call Medicare at 800-633-4227 or TTY: 877-486-2048. For more detailed help, you can contact your state’s State Health Insurance Assistance Program (SHIP). Call 800-633-4227 for the number for your state office, or visit www.medicare.gov/contacts. Those who are eligible for Medicare Part B can apply for this coverage. If you are working, you may be eligible for the state Medicaid Buy-In Program. See this heading in Section 9: SSI Work Incentives.

What Are Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE)?

Impairment Related Work Expenses (IRWE) are deductions that Social Security allows against your gross income for expenses that relate to your disability and which you need to pay for in order to continue working. (They may also be expenses for items you need both on and off the job, such as a wheelchair.) You may use this program during an Extended Period of Eligibility to keep your Countable Income under $1,010. You may NOT use IRWE during your Trial Work Period.

IRWE must be paid for by you, and must not be reimbursable from other sources such as Medicaid, Medicare, the state offices of vocational rehabilitation, the Department of Veterans Affairs, or other sources. Allowable Impairment Related Work Expenses include but are not limited to specialized transportation services, modifications to a vehicle needed because of your disability, computers you would need because of your disability, durable medical equipment you would need

to pay for if you lack medical coverage, modifications to a home environment because of a disability if you are starting a business there, medications not covered by your insurance that you need in order to work, job coaches, and possibly therapy. If you think of other impairment-related expenses that might apply to you, submit them to Social Security for their consideration.

If you have Impairment Related Work Expenses with SSDI, no money is reimbursed to you, but you can use it to deduct from your *countable gross earned income*. Generally, you must be working in the month you are claiming an IRWE. You must keep all receipts for IRWE and submit them to Social Security at the end of each month. You must submit the proper application and gain approval for IRWE from Social Security in order to use it.

EXAMPLE 4: Tamika is on SSDI and in the Extended Period of Eligibility. This month she had an earned gross income of $1,010 but paid $100 for a job coach, which Social Security approved as a legitimate IRWE. Therefore, her *countable income* for this month is only $910. Since it is less than $1,010, she gets her full SSDI check.

How Can You Use Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS)

PASS is a work incentive designed by Social Security to help people who have work-related goals but who need help saving the money they need to achieve those goals. PASS allows you to receive a partial or full SSI check while you put away income (including your SSDI check) to use toward your vocational goal for

such expenses as job-related education or training, necessary equipment, etc.

PASS is technically designed for people who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI). However, the PASS rules say that a person can write a PASS to make themselves eligible for SSI. Someone who receives SSDI may be able to take advantage of this rule. There is more information about PASS plans in Section 9 of this *Guide*.

Are There Other Ways to Reduce Countable Income?

If you are receiving job supports provided by or paid for by your employer, the value of those job supports may be subtracted from your gross earnings (even though you do not pay for them). This work incentive is called a *subsidy*. The *subsidy*, or job support, has a cost: Social Security recognizes that since these supports are necessary for your continued employment, these costs must be taken into consideration. The value of that support must be figured as an expense that is necessary to employment, and without that support employment would not continue.

EXAMPLE 5: Maryann has a job as a medical file clerk making $1,010 a month. All the other clerks earning similar pay perform additional jobs such as answering phones and making appointments when the receptionist is out.

Maryann's employer continues to pay her the same rate although she is unable to perform those additional duties, which make up about 25% of the job. So Maryann is being paid 100% of the salary but is only able to perform 75% of the work performed by her coworkers.

So Maryann's gross wages of $1,010 a month are reduced by the *subsidy* of $252.50 (25% of $1,010), making her countable income $757.50. This puts her below substantial gainful activity of $1,010 and she continues to receive her full SSDI check.

What Happens if I Am "No Longer "Disabled"?

Periodically, the Social Security Administration will do a 'disability review,' which is similar to what they did when you originally applied for benefits. SSA will try to verify that you continue to be "disabled" enough to have your benefits continued. Disability reviews will be performed:

- If you also receive SSI and you begin to earn $1,010 in gross earnings per month; in this case, Social Security will schedule a disability review within 12 months.
- Whether you work or not, every three to four years OR if the disability is deemed to be permanent, every seven years.

If you are still receiving treatment and/or rehabilitation services and SSA says you are no longer "disabled," you have a right to appeal that ruling.

If you are in an approved vocational training program (if it is being funded by your state's vocational rehabilitation program) and you are found to no longer be "disabled," you can continue to receive your SSDI until you complete that program. This provision, in Section 301 of the Social Security Act, helps you prepare yourself to succeed in returning to work and becoming self-sufficient.

Do I Have Any Right to Appeal a Decision Made by SSA?

You have the right to appeal any decision that SSA makes that affects your benefits. This includes an initial denial of benefits, termination of benefits, charges for overpayments, or any other action affecting your benefits. You have 60 days to file an appeal, dating from the time you receive a notice from the Social Security Administration saying that your benefits are going to be changed.

- If you file an appeal within the first 10 days of receiving the notice, your checks will not be reduced or discontinued until after the appeal is heard.
- If you file your appeal after 10 days but before the 60-day deadline, your check will be reduced or stopped but your appeal will be heard. If you win, your check will be returned to its original amount.
- If you file your appeal after 60 days, your check will be reduced or stopped and your appeal will not be heard.

- If you have been charged with overpayment (meaning you have been given checks for which you were not entitled), you may be justified in requesting a “Waiver of Overpayment,” which means you will not have to pay the money back. This can be done if the overpayment was not your fault and it would be a financial hardship for you to pay it back. There is no time limit on filing for a Waiver of Overpayment.

- If you apply for a waiver within 10 days, no money will be taken out of your check until the waiver is ruled upon.

- If the money is already being taken out of your check, you can still file for a waiver.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you need more information about SSDI or SSI Work Incentives you may contact Social Security at the following numbers/addresses:

By phone: 800-772-1213 from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday. If you are hearing impaired, call the TTY/DD number: 800-325-0778.

Internet Access: Social Security Online at www.socialsecurity.gov. For persons with a disability, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/disability. For information on the Ticket-to-Work Program, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/work. To locate a local office online, visit www.socialsecurity.gov/locator. Enter your zip code to get the address, telephone number, and directions to your local office.

By mail: If you have been unable to resolve a problem after calling the toll-free number or after contacting your local office, you can write to the Office of Public Inquiries at:

Social Security Administration
Office of Public Inquiries
6401 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21235-6401

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To request copies of the *Red Book* or other Social Security publications: fax your request to 410-965-2037 or mail your request to:

Office of Supply & Warehouse Management
Social Security Administration
239 Supply Building
6301 Security Blvd.
Baltimore, MD 21235-6301

Social Security will not ship to Post Office boxes.

Virginia Commonwealth University ***has a website that offers information designed to help people understand how to best use the work incentives through federal and state disability benefit programs. The website address is http://www.vcu-ntc.org/.***

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Section 11:

Your Rights in the Workplace Job Accommodations and the ADA

In this Section:

- Introduction
- The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Your Rights Under the ADA
- Equal Treatment and Opportunity
- Privacy/Confidentiality
- Job Accommodations
- Use of a Job Coach Using Customized Employment
- How will my employer respond?
- Using the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Additional Resources

Introduction

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed by the United States Congress in 1990 to protect the civil rights of all people with disabilities, including people with psychiatric disabilities. Although the ADA also protects people with disabilities in many other aspects of their lives, it is especially important in making it illegal for employers to discriminate in hiring, firing, supervising or promoting on the basis of a disability. In this section, you will find important information about the ADA and your rights as a worker.

One of the most important parts of the ADA is the requirement that employers provide “reasonable accommodations” for persons with disabilities; that is, if a person with a disability is able to perform the essential functions of the job but needs some accommodations that don’t create an “undue burden” for the employer, the employer is required to make such accommodations.

This Section contains information about some accommodations that are frequently requested and useful to people with mental health challenges. It also contains tips for how to figure out whether you need accommodations, what sort of accommodations you need, and how to ask for them.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is considered a landmark effort to protect workers with disabilities from

discrimination based on their disability. Although employers are not always familiar with or willing to comply with the provisions of the ADA, in fact it is now ILLEGAL for employers to:

- ask job applicants about psychiatric treatment - past or present
- deny a job to someone with the necessary experience and skills because of the person's past or current psychiatric treatment or possible future treatment
- deny a job or promotion because of a prejudicial (unfounded) belief that a person with a mental disability won't be able to "handle" the job
- refuse to make 'reasonable' modifications in workplace rules, schedules, policies or procedures that would help a person with a psychiatric disability perform the job
- force an employee with psychiatric disabilities to accept a workplace modification if that employee is able to do the essential functions of his/her job
- contract with other organizations and individuals that discriminate against people with psychiatric disabilities; or
- retaliate against people with disabilities for asserting their rights.

Adapted from: "Mental Health Consumers in the Workplace". An ADA Handbook by the Mental Health Law Project, The Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Washington ,D.C., July, 1992.

Check out this website at Bazelon for more information: www.bazelon.org/Where-we-stand/community-integration/employment/employment-policy-documents.aspx

Also, the Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center has a website on work and disability issues. The web address is: www.worksupport.com.

Your Rights Under the ADA

The Americans with Disabilities Act provides certain protections for people with disabilities that are specifically related to employment. This law says that employers with 15 or more employees (including part-time employees) may not discriminate against someone on the basis of their having a disability, whether it is a physical, mental or psychiatric disability. The ADA contains detailed information about what employers must do to comply with the law. Most employers are aware of the ADA and try to follow its guidelines. However, it is good to make sure you know what your rights are in case you encounter employers who are unaware of or unwilling to follow the rules. This brochure provides good general information about the ADA as it applies to psychiatric disabilities and work. At the end of this Section, there are resources listed that you can contact for more detailed information, or for help applying the ADA to your particular situation.

Equal Treatment and Opportunity

A person who is qualified and able to perform a job must be given an equal chance at being hired: the ADA doesn't guarantee that the individual with a disability will be hired, only that he or she has an 'equal chance' to be hired. If hired, the person must receive the same treatment as any other employee regarding advancement (e.g. promotions and raises), pay, training opportunities, and "other terms or privileges of employment" (e.g. benefits).

This means, for example, that an employer cannot require you to have a medical examination or drug test upon entering employment unless the same requirement is made of all entering employees. It is also illegal for an employer to make you work under different conditions (e.g. alone, or in a different room), to withhold pay, to delay raises or promotions, or to discipline or reprimand you solely on the basis of your disability. Employers may ONLY judge you on the basis of your ability to perform your job.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Information about your psychiatric history, symptoms and disability status is personal, private information. An employer is not entitled to ask you for this information, and you are not required to tell an employer about your mental health history or disability. There are situations in which you might choose to tell your employer, such as when you are asking for a job

accommodation. More information about *disclosure* (telling others about your disability) can be found later in this Section, and in Section 12.

If you choose to provide information about your mental health history or disability to an employer, they are required to treat that information as confidential. As with medical records, this information must be stored in a separate place from your general personnel file. Only supervisors/managers who are directly involved in negotiating job accommodations, first aid and safety personnel, and government officials (when investigating ADA claims) are allowed to have access to this information unless you choose to share this information more widely.

An employer may not share information about your psychiatric history or disability with your coworkers without your permission. Even if you have a job accommodation and a coworker asks the employer why you are receiving "special treatment," the employer may not tell the coworker about your disability.

Job Accommodations

A job accommodation is any adjustment at work, arranged with your employer that helps you succeed by compensating for difficulties related to a disability. While you and your employer may arrange for other work adjustments for other reasons, the ADA only requires employers to provide job accommodations that are related to your disability. These adjustments can be changes in your work environment, schedule, duties, or the

way you go about doing your job. The ADA also states that employers are only required to make “reasonable” accommodations that do not create an “undue burden” on the employer. You and your employer may have different opinions about whether a particular job accommodation is “reasonable”. It may be necessary to negotiate with your employer to find accommodations that are both helpful to you and “reasonable”.

It is important to remember that each person’s needs are different. And what is understood to be “reasonable” will be different in different work situations. You will have to consider your work situation, your disability, and your work related needs in order to determine whether you need any job accommodations, and what they might be.

Deciding whether you need job accommodations:

- When you are interviewing for a job, ask for a detailed job description. You must understand the full nature of the job so that you can anticipate whether you might need any job accommodations.

- Think about your job. What are the skills and capabilities that you use in your job? Do you require any specific supports or accommodations in order to be able to use those skills and capabilities or do your job? Are these related to your disability?

- Think about your work environment. Are there features of your workplace that add stress, distraction or difficulty to your job? Are there features of your workplace that are already available that could ease stress, help you focus, or assist you in doing your job? What changes in your work environment would help you do your job? Are the accommodations you think would be most useful related to your disability?

- Finally, think about yourself as a worker, and about your mental health diagnosis. What sorts of job difficulties, if any, does your mental health diagnosis create? What would be the best way to address those difficulties? What strategies could you use? What job accommodations might be part of your strategy?

Sometimes it is easy to see what kinds of accommodations you will need either before you start the job or in the very first weeks - and you can begin talking with the employer very early about the changes that might be made. Sometimes, you may not realize, or need, specific job accommodations until you have been at work for weeks or months. You should be aware that it is perfectly alright to ask for job accommodations whenever you recognize that you need them, even if you have not previously informed the employer of your disability. At the end of this Section you will find a resource for helping you make these decisions. See Job Accommodation Network (JAN).

Requesting Job Accommodations

If you find that you do need job accommodations, it is important to think about your workplace and decide for yourself how you would like to go about

making your request. Think about the culture of your workplace. Do you work in a place where coworkers are supportive of one another, where supervisors are flexible and try to help employees? Or do you work in a place where workers are expected to meet strict standards with little support? You are legally entitled to reasonable job accommodations no matter what the culture of your workplace is like. However, if you work in a place that is already very supportive, you may be able to get the adjustments or help you need without making a formal request for job accommodations.

Some people are successful in getting informal adjustments at work. This means that they are able to ask for arrangements with their employer or coworkers that help them to do their job, arrangements that any employee might ask for without telling about their disability or asserting their rights under the ADA. While these kinds of arrangements are helpful for some people, you need to know that you are not legally entitled to them.

You are legally entitled to reasonable job accommodations only when you make a formal request for them. When you make a formal request for job accommodations, you must tell your employer that you have a disability, and that you need accommodations related to that disability. When you approach your employer to request accommodations, remember that you must:

Be able to perform the essential tasks of the job. You may need accommodations in order to be able to do the job, but you must be qualified for the job and have whatever skills, experience, or credentials that are required.

Be able to provide documentation of your disability. Your employer is allowed to ask for written documentation from a doctor, psychologist, rehabilitation counselor, or other service provider with knowledge of your disability. The employer is only entitled to information that relates directly to your ability to do your job. Remember that your employer is required by law to keep this information confidential.

Be prepared to discuss with your employer what you need and why. Your employer may not know what you need, and may not understand your issues. Your employer may be unaware of what types of job accommodations can be helpful. You may need to educate your employer about these issues.

Who should I talk to about job accommodations?

Each work situation will be a little different. First, you should find out whether there is any policy at your workplace about this. If you work for a large employer, there may be an employee manual or staff in a Human Resources Department that can tell you who to go to. If these are not available to you, you should start by talking with your immediate supervisor. Hopefully, you and you supervisor can work together to figure out how to proceed within the structure of your workplace. There may be circumstances under which you might tell someone else, such as medical or safety personnel. Depending on your situation and the type of

accommodation needed, you will have to make a judgment about who the best person is to talk to.

Talking about Job Accommodations with your employer

When you decide to request a job accommodation, you must let your employer know that the need for an adjustment at work is related to a medical condition or disability. You may use plain language to do so, and you do not need to use special terms like “ADA” or “reasonable accommodation.” For instance, you might say “I have a medical condition and I may need time off for medical appointments,” or “I have a disability that affects my ability to focus my attention, and need a partition around my desk so that I can work more effectively.” You do not have to provide a detailed history or diagnosis in order to bring up the topic. What your employer needs to know at this point is how your disability affects your functioning on the job, and what can be done about it. You are not required to put your request in writing, although you may choose to do so. Your employer is allowed to ask you to provide documentation of your disability, and is required to treat that information as confidential. Their inquiries must be kept specific to your ability, with or without accommodations, to do the essential parts of your job.

Remember that you are allowed to request job accommodations at any time during your employment. You do not have to bring up the topic when you interview, or when you first start working. Indeed, you may

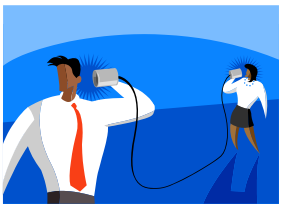
not know until later whether you even need accommodations. Your employer may complain that you should have told them sooner, but they are not allowed to penalize you for having waited to ask for accommodations.

You will have to decide for yourself how much you want to tell your employer and when. The issue of disclosure, or telling about your condition, is discussed in more detail in Section 12 of this document. There are many good reasons for sharing information, and many good reasons for keeping information about your disability as private as possible. Ultimately, the best answer for you will depend on the detail of your situation, and your own comfort level.

Different Types of Job Accommodations

There are several types of job accommodations that are commonly helpful for people with mental health challenges. Remember that these are examples*, and that there may be a different type of accommodation that you and/or your employer will design for your specific circumstances.

**list of accommodations adapted from: "A national study of job accommodations for people with psychiatric disabilities: Final report". Granger, B., Baron, R.C., and Robinson, M.C.J. (1996) Matrix Research Institute, Philadelphia, PA.*



Facilitated Communications

Facilitated communications involve arrangements to help you make requests, express concerns, or do problem solving with your supervisor (or with other people on the job) that your disability makes it difficult for you to achieve otherwise. These accommodations might include:

- Using a job coach on-site to help you with problem solving on the job. The job coach might participate in supervisory sessions or help out when you feel particularly anxious or confused at work.
- Allowing you to have phone contact with an off-site job coach as needed.
- Arranging for more frequent feedback, or more positive feedback from your supervisor.
- Providing more detailed or written instructions or job descriptions to make sure that you and your supervisor have a clear understanding of what is expected.
- Setting up daily task planning to clarify priorities and expectations for that day.

Flexible Scheduling

Flexible scheduling would permit you to follow a time schedule that more closely meets your specific needs, as

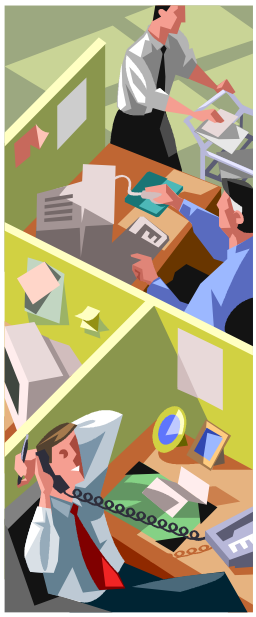
long as you are able to fulfill the basic job requirements. For example:

- Allowing you to work part-time.
- Allowing time off for clinic or medical appointments.
- Permitting you to take time off without pay (without losing your job) if you need it, or allowing you to use vacation or personal time for medical needs.
- Scheduling more frequent breaks.
- Re-arranging work hours.

Changes in Work Assignments

This might involve changes in your job description, as long as these changes still require you to fulfill the primary functions of the position you hold. For example:

- Gradual introduction of tasks, allowing you time to master one task at a time.
- You may be able to exchange some non-essential tasks with other workers.
- Some people might find that minimizing changes to their job description over time is an effective accommodation.



Work Space Accommodations

These accommodations are usually associated with people with physical disabilities such as the need for a wheelchair access ramp or other special equipment. However, occasionally a person in recovery may need a work space accommodation. For example:

- Access to drinking water in the work space.
- Access to a rest area.
- Access to a quiet or private space.
- Access to a refrigerator for medications.
- Change in work location.
- Change in noise level or lighting.

Remember that you do not have to figure out job accommodations on your own. These are complicated issues to deal with. You may want to make sure you have someone who you trust to help you consider your options. This might be a friend or family member, supervisor, co-worker, counselor, job coach, or other service provider. There are also several sources of information and support that are listed at the end of this Section.

Use of a Job Coach Using Customized Employment

Customized employment is a strategy being used by many employment rehabilitation agencies to help individuals who have mental health challenges to locate and customize a job to meet their specific issues. A Job Coach works with the job seeker and potential employers to create a situation that takes into account any special needs. For example, a Job Coach may use a technique called 'job carving' where a job that currently is full time is divided between 2 individuals into 2 part time positions. The Job Coach not only is familiar with the needs of the individual but also is knowledgeable about the employer's needs. If you decide to use the services of a rehabilitation agency, ask about customized employment. If a Job Coach is able to negotiate a position that meets your needs, you will not have to ask for an accommodation since the employer and the Job Coach have designed a position specifically for you.

How will my employer respond?

Different employers will respond differently to your request for accommodations. Some employers are especially sensitive to the needs of people with disabilities and go out of their way to make the work site accommodating. And some employers already know about the ADA and are eager to comply. In these cases, you may not need to approach your employer with the law in hand; the employer is a willing partner in your commitment to do your job.

You may have an employer who wants to comply with the ADA, but who believes that your particular request is unreasonable, or creates “undue burden”. With this sort of employer, it is a good idea to present several different ideas for accommodations that might be helpful. Be willing to negotiate for an arrangement that is acceptable to both you and your employer. You may want to get help from a mediator or advocate who can help you negotiate, and who knows about what sorts of arrangements have been found to be “reasonable” in other ADA cases.

On the other hand, there are certainly employers out there who have little awareness or understanding of disabilities or of the ADA. With these employers, you should be prepared to answer their questions or send them to someone else who can. They may be worried that the job accommodations you need will be expensive or burdensome. Reassure them that most of the job accommodations for people with mental health challenges are both inexpensive and easy to arrange, and are excellent investments in your productivity as a worker.

Whatever type of employer you have, remember that you are valuable as an employee. If there is a job to be done and you can do it, that is, you have the skill and the interest and the reliability to do your job, then you are entitled to reasonable accommodations by law. People sometimes worry that their employer might think less of them if they need an accommodation. Usually, employers just want the work to get done. Remember, that reasonable job accommodations are not special favors: they are your civil rights.

Using the Americans with Disabilities Act

The fact that the ADA protects the rights of people with a disability means that if an employer fails to comply with these rules, the person with the disability can bring a lawsuit against the employer. So you must know enough about your rights under this law to know when your rights are being violated. You may want to refer to the ADA if:

- You find that your employer is unwilling to make what you consider to be “reasonable accommodations”, and you want to assert your rights.
- You believe that they have discriminated against you unfairly on the basis of your disability.
- Your employer has not followed the ADA rules about fair treatment and confidentiality.

You can do this by reminding your employer of their responsibility under the ADA. If your employer does not respond to this, you might have a job coach, advocate or lawyer contact the employer on your behalf to clarify the law and the employer’s responsibility. You may choose to seek out a mediator who is trained to handle ADA issues. You can also check to see if there might be some alternative accommodation strategies that the employer would be more willing to provide by consulting with the Job Accommodation Network or Regional DBTAC (both listed at the end of the Section).

If your employer is unwilling to be responsive, and you are considering filing a formal complaint or bringing a lawsuit against your employer, you must call the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), which has the responsibility under the ADA to investigate a complaint on your behalf. You must file your charge of discrimination on the basis of disability with the EEOC within 180 days (roughly 6 months) of the alleged discriminatory act. If you wait longer than 180 days to file your complaint with the EEOC, you will surpass the “statute of limitations”, and lose your ability to sue the employer.

You should be aware that there is often a sizable backlog of cases at the EEOC. It may take months for your case to be handled. The EEOC will conduct an investigation. Depending on what they find, the EEOC may attempt to resolve the problem without a lawsuit, initiate a lawsuit in federal district court, or may issue a “right-to-sue” letter which gives you permission to initiate a private civil suit. Make sure you have advice and support should you choose to proceed in this way. Sometimes people decide that it isn’t worth the fight, and would rather simply look for another job. Other people decide that it is important to stick up for their rights, and have successfully sued employers who violated their rights under the ADA.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

To help you think about whether or not you could use an accommodation, check out the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) website. It lists suggested accommodations for specific problems/diagnosis for people with mental health challenges. It's called the Accommodation and Compliance Series for employers, at: http://ASKJAN.org/media/Psychiatric.html. For employees that need help, JAN has SOAR (Searchable Online Accommodation Resource): http://askjan.org/soar/psych.html#limit. You can actually speak to a JAN Consultant, at no charge to discuss your individual issues. The number is 1-800-526-7234 (Voice), or 1-877-781-9403 (TTY).

The ADA & IT Technical Assistance Centers (DBTACs) are your comprehensive resource for information on the Americans with Disabilities Act and accessible information technology. Call toll free at 1-800-949-4232 (V/TTY) The website address is:

http://www.icdri.org/legal/DBTAC.htm

The Mediation Training and Information Center for the ADA/Key Bridge Foundation maintains a national listing of mediators who are trained to handle ADA issues, and provides training and technical assistance on the ADA. Their website address is: http://www.keybridge.org/DOJ.htm or you can contact them by phone at: PHONE (202) 274-1822, TDD (800) 630-1415.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) can be contacted to file a complaint. The website address with complete instructions is: www.eeoc.gov. You can call to file a complaint at: 1-800-669-4000, 1-800-669-6820 (TTY) or use online website at: info@eeoc.gov.

You can find a complete copy of the EEOC Enforcement Guidance on the ADA and Psychiatric Disabilities at the following web address: http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/psych.html.

THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE ON
COMMUNITY INCLUSION
of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Section 12:

Dealing with Disclosure, Discrimination and Harassment on the Job

In this Section:

- Introduction
- Disclosure at Work
- Discrimination
- Harrassment
- Using the Americans with Disabilities Act
- Additional Resources

Introduction

Many people know very little about mental health issues, and some wrongly believe that people with mental health diagnoses are incapable, unintelligent, strange, or dangerous. Some individuals in recovery find that one of their most difficult challenges in obtaining and keeping a job is combating the negative cultural messages that people with mental health conditions cannot or should not work.

While your employer and supervisor, and most of your coworkers may not care about your mental health status, you may encounter some who hold these destructive beliefs. A few people may tease or harass you, and you may also experience more subtle forms of discrimination.

It is important to carefully consider how you want to respond. Because people may be uninformed about mental health issues or fear individuals with mental health diagnoses, there is some risk in letting your boss, your supervisor, or your coworkers know about your situation.

This Section will help you recognize discrimination and harassment, and figure out what to do about it. It can also help you decide whether, when, and how to tell colleagues about your mental health issues.

Disclosure at Work

There are many good reasons to "disclose" at your workplace and many good reasons not to. On the one hand, disclosing that you have a mental health condition exposes you to other people's misconceptions and prejudices. On the other hand, if people know your situation it may help them understand you better. Unfortunately, there is no way to predict what will happen if you do or do not disclose, so think about this carefully and talk it over with family and friends. You might also seek advice from counselors, job coaches, or other individuals in recovery who are also working.

Reasons you might choose NOT TO disclose:

- People may judge you based on misinformation and prejudice instead of seeing you as an individual.
- You may be discriminated against, even though it is against the law to do so. You may fear losing your job, being passed over for raises and promotions, or not being hired in the first place.
- You may worry that people will avoid you, gossip about you, or be afraid of you rather than being supportive.
- Your belief that mental health history is private and personal and you do not believe it is necessary to share it with others.
- You may feel that your mental health diagnosis is irrelevant to your work life if it doesn't affect your work or work relationships.
- You think people might attribute your successes to your treatment and your difficulties to your mental health condition, rather than thinking of you as a whole person who has good and bad days, and areas of skill and vulnerability like anyone else.

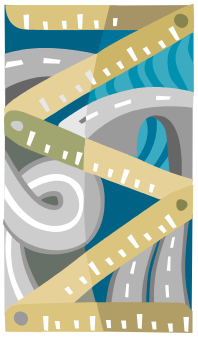
Reasons you might choose TO disclose:

- You might disclose in order to get the job accommodations you need. If you don't need an accommodation you don't need to disclose, but you can only make this decision once you know enough about the work setting, culture and tasks to determine that you need something other than what is already part of the workplace.
- The job is designated for someone with a mental health diagnosis, as is the case in positions such as peer support specialists. In these instances, disclosing will make you eligible for the job.
- You want someone at work to understand you better so that you can work more comfortably together.
- You want people to know that someone with a mental health diagnosis can do a good job and that you are an example of this. In this situation, you are not just making a personal statement but playing a public education role.
- It is uncomfortable for you to keep your mental health challenges to yourself. It can take a lot of energy and attention to make sure that nobody knows about your situation. Some people are more comfortable if they don't have to worry about keeping secrets.
- You feel that some aspects of your mental health diagnosis are central to who you are and you want to be authentically yourself at work.
- At your workplace, people share aspects of their personal lives with each other, and support each other in ways that go beyond the job. Where coworkers care about each other, disclosing can open the door to a new source of support. It can also be reassuring to know that your coworkers are aware of your needs and are looking out for you.

When to disclose

Some people choose to disclose their mental health status during their job interview so that everything is up front from the beginning. Others wait until after they've been hired before they even consider disclosing. Some people prefer to wait until after they've been on the job for a while and have a chance to show their ability to do the work. Others might decide to tell their supervisor about their mental health issues when they start their job. Some people prefer to wait until their coworkers have had a chance to get to know them before they disclose their mental health issues. Others prefer to let their coworkers know right away, and use it as an opportunity to teach their coworkers about mental health issues. And some people choose never to disclose at work at all.

The only reason you must disclose is when you are formally requesting a job accommodation on the basis of a disability. Even though some employers say that they would rather know about an employee's disability sooner rather than later, you do not have to tell them until you request accommodations. (See Section11 for more information on job accommodations.) Disclosing for any other reason depends on what is comfortable for you.



What to tell people

First, think about why you are disclosing. Consider your audience: who are they and what do they already know about you? How much do they need to know? How much do you feel safe sharing with them? People may fear what they don't understand, and it can help if you are prepared to educate them. Encourage people to ask you questions if they are curious or unsure about anything. Many people have been given little or only inaccurate information about mental health issues, and may make assumptions that you should be prepared to address. If you are not comfortable answering questions, it can help to have educational materials about mental health handy.

You have choices about what to tell people. You might decide to tell someone only the little bit of information you think they need to know. You don't have to tell them your whole life story; that may be TMI (Too Much Information)!

Here are some examples of different ways you might disclose at work:

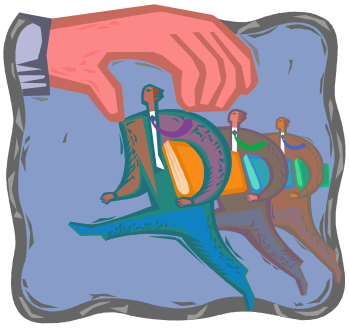
- Say you have a problem you need help with. Describe the immediate problem, and what you need.
- "I take medicine for a medical problem. The medicine makes me very thirsty. Would it be okay with you if I keep a water bottle with me?" (This would be addressed to your supervisor.)
- Tell them you have a mental health condition and describe the challenges and what you want them to understand.

- "I have problems with depression. Sometimes that means I might be sad or grouchy or not feel like talking. If that happens, please don't take it personally."

- You might choose to tell someone your diagnosis, define it for them, and describe the impact it has on your life at work. However, think carefully before you tell someone your diagnosis (unless your employer needs to know in order to grant you an accommodation); this may be an unnecessary level of detail.

- "I have an anxiety disorder. When I am anxious about completing a new task, I may have trouble focusing. I can manage this problem best if I can work in a quiet place and can get assignments and instructions in writing."

- "I want you to know that I have bipolar disorder, which, when untreated, can cause mood swings; but I have it under control and I don't expect to have any problems with my moods at work. It's fine if you want to ask me questions; I've been dealing with this for a long time and can probably tell you whatever you need to know."



Whom to tell

Whom you choose to tell depends on why you are disclosing and whom you trust. If you are disclosing to get job accommodations, you only have to tell the person responsible for arranging your accommodations. Whether it is someone from the Human Resources office or your supervisor, the person is required to keep what you tell them completely confidential. Section 11 provides more information about this.

Other than that, whom you tell is up to you. In a supportive work situation, disclosing can help your coworkers know what sort of support you need. In a less supportive environment, it may make more sense to keep your personal business to yourself, do your job and seek support elsewhere. Sometimes, in an unsupportive situation, you might find one person you trust who can be an ally, but remember that when you tell someone they just might tell someone else.)

What to expect once you have disclosed

Your employer or coworkers may respond with support and assistance. More and more people understand mental health conditions because of their own experiences or those of family members, and most research finds that the longer people work together, the more understanding and supportive they become.

However, employers or co-workers may react negatively. There is still prejudice and suspicion out there; and you may want to make sure you have someone at work, at home, or in a counseling relationship who can help you grapple with some of the fears and resentments that may be expressed toward you at work.

Discrimination

Whether or not you choose to disclose on the job, you may experience discrimination related to your mental health issues. Discrimination on the job is when you are being treated differently than other employees for reasons that aren't directly related to the work you do.

There are many different kinds of discrimination. Obvious examples include being passed over for a promotion or raise that you are qualified for, being denied training or benefits that other employees get, being required to follow different rules than other employees, or being fired for reasons unrelated to your performance. Discrimination can also include being over-protected, being given different tasks, being "talked down to," being given "special treatment" when you haven't requested any, or being supported more than you need to be.

Remember, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) mandates that any discrimination in the workplace is illegal. You might have to remind people at work that you have the right to be judged on your abilities. As long as you are doing your job, there is no reason for you to be treated differently from other employees, unless you ask for a job accommodation.

- If you believe that you are experiencing discrimination from

Your supervisor at work, it can help to confront the situation directly. Express your concerns to your supervisor calmly and directly: you could say *"I'm concerned that your awareness of my mental health history has had an impact on your evaluation of my work."*

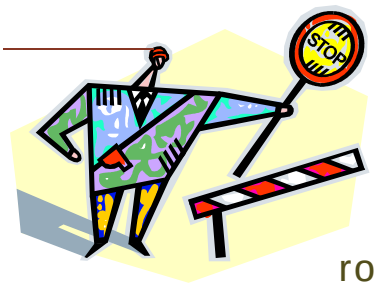
- If you are worried about being passed over for a raise or promotion due to your mental health challenges, you might raise the issue yourself: you could say *"You may have concerns based on my mental health history, but I believe my performance shows clearly that I am able to do the job well."*

- If you are receiving unwanted "special treatment" or favors because of your mental health issues, even if you think your employer is just trying to help, you can let your supervisor know: you could say *"I appreciate your willingness to let me flex my schedule, but I don't need that right now. I'd prefer to work a regular schedule. If I find that I need that sort of accommodation in the future I'll let you know."*

- When people are uninformed or misinformed, they might discriminate against you without even realizing it. In this situation, try to educate that person and clear up the misunderstandings: you could say *"I know you are trying to be helpful, but I think you may be underestimating what I can do. If you aren't sure how much I can handle, please ask me."*

Some people knowingly engage in discriminatory behavior. In these instances, find out your employer's policies for dealing with grievances and what advocacy organizations are available in your area to help you assert your rights.

Harassment



You may have coworkers who harass you for being different. If you find yourself being ridiculed, teased, or used as a scapegoat, or if someone is routinely doing something deliberately to make you feel uncomfortable, then you are being harassed. Find out your employer's policies for dealing with harassment on the job. Talk with your supervisor about what is happening and ask for help to solve the problem. If your supervisor is harassing you, talk with that person's supervisor or boss. Harassment is extremely upsetting and disruptive to one's ability to work. No one should have to tolerate harassment at work for any reason.

It can be hard to know how to respond to harassment. Many people are afraid to confront those who are insulting or harassing them. It is especially hard to do it in the heat of the moment. Role-playing with a friend can help you practice how to respond to harassment.

Here are some examples of situations and responses:

- If someone is making jokes that you find insensitive or insulting, you can tell that person how you feel: you could say *"I don't think that's funny. Everyone has emotional problems sometimes, and it's very difficult to deal with. It's nothing to make fun of. It hurts and offends me when you say that."*

- If you are being teased or ridiculed by coworkers, you can tell them to stop: you could say *"I don't appreciate the way you're talking to me. Please leave me alone and let me get my work done. That hurts me. Cut it out."*

- If they won't stop, seek help from a supervisor: you could say *"My co-workers are teasing me and calling me names. When they do that I get upset and it's a lot harder for me to do my work. I need your help in getting them to stop."*

- Sometimes, people might ask questions that are insulting or intended to provoke you. You don't have to answer them: you could say *"I'd really rather not talk about it. "I think you just asked me that to upset me. I'm not going to answer that question."*

There are many ways to deal with harassment and discrimination. Think about whether you've encountered harassment and discrimination before and how you handled it. What worked? What did not? Draw from your experience to come up with a strategy that you think will work. Discuss it with some other people who can help you figure things out, and who can support you if you're feeling frustrated, angry, scared, or sad.

Using the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination at your workplace, discuss it with your employer. If your employer is not supportive, you may need to remind them that your rights as an employee are protected by the ADA, and that it is their responsibility to uphold that law. If your employer doesn't respond to this, you might have a job coach, advocate or lawyer

contact your employer on your behalf to clarify the law and their responsibility. If your employer continues to be unwilling to address your concerns and you are considering filing a formal complaint or initiating a lawsuit, you must call the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which is responsible for investigating a complaint on your behalf. You must file your charge of discrimination on the basis of disability with the EEOC within 180 days (about six months) of the alleged discriminatory act. If you wait longer than that, you will surpass the "statute of limitations" and lose your ability to sue the employer. The 180-calendar-day filing deadline is extended to 300 calendar days if a state or local agency enforces a law that prohibits employment discrimination on the same basis.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
800-669-4000
800-800-3302 (TDD)
http://www.eeoc.gov

A complete copy of the *EEOC Enforcement Guidance on the ADA and Psychiatric Disabilities* is posted at http://www.eeoc.gov/policy/docs/psych.html.

THE TEMPLE UNIVERSITY COLLABORATIVE ON
COMMUNITY INCLUSION
of Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities

Section 13:

Starting to Work – What to Expect & How to Prepare

In this Section:

- Introduction
- Getting Ready for your first day
- What will it be like?
- Relationships with your Employer and Co-Workers
- What your employer will expect of you
- What you may expect of your employer
- Having a job will impact many areas of your life
- What to do if you're having trouble
- Additional Resources

Introduction

Starting a new job can be very exciting. Your new role of "employee" allows you to develop a new part of your identity. Usually, starting a new job also means meeting a lot of new people and taking in a lot of new information all at once. For anybody, whether or not they have mental health conditions, starting a new job can be a little overwhelming. It takes some time to get to know new people, and to get used to a work schedule and job responsibilities. This Section is designed to help you know what to expect at a new job, and to prepare yourself for life with your new job.

Getting ready for your first day

Make sure you know all the details you need to know for your first day.

Ask yourself the following questions. If you don't know the answer, make sure you find out. For many of these questions, you should be able to ask the person who hired you.

- What day and time does my job start?
- Where I am supposed to go? To what address and what room?
- Who is the person I am supposed to report to on that day?
- How shall I get there? Do I know the bus or train route and how

much will it cost? Do I need exact change? Do I need to buy a bus or transpass? If you drive, do you know where to park? (See Resources at end of Section on Transportation resources.)

- What should I wear to work?

- If you're not sure how to dress, ask someone else who does a similar job at your new workplace, or ask the person who will be supervising you.

- What do I need to bring with me on the first day?

- How and where will I get my meals?

- If your work shift spans a meal time, make sure you plan accordingly. Find out what other employees do for meals. Is there a cafeteria, or do most people bring their own meal? Where is food stored?

At most new jobs, you will have to fill out forms when you start. You may need to bring identification, proof of citizenship, names and phone numbers to give as emergency contacts, or other information with you in order to complete the necessary paperwork. Also, some new jobs may require you to bring your own tools or equipment. Make sure you know what is expected.

It is also important to prepare in other ways for the beginning of your job.

- Make sure you get enough rest beforehand, and that you leave yourself enough time to get ready before you leave your home.
- Make sure you know how to get to your job and how long it will take. Practice traveling to your job if necessary. Make sure you have bus or train fare if necessary. If you are getting a ride, make sure the driver knows it's important for you to be on time.

- If you have other responsibilities to take care of, make sure you have planned accordingly. For instance, if you take care of children, ill or elderly relatives, or pets, make sure that they are being taken care of properly so that you will not be distracted or interrupted at work.

- If you take medications for any reason, it is important that your medication is under control as best as possible. Talk with your psychiatrist or family doctor about any concerns you have about your issues and medicine. The week you start your new job is not the best time to try out a new medicine or dosage, or any other treatment that might require a period of adjustment and stabilization. You will be quite busy adjusting to your new environment, and it will be helpful if other aspects of your life and health are as calm and predictable as possible.

It is also a good idea to have someone to talk to about your first days or week at work. Make sure the people who support you know that you're starting a new job. Ask them to call you and check in with you during the first few weeks. You may need someone who can help you sort out new information, and the feelings that can arise during this transition.

What will it be like?

The first thing to keep in mind is that most people have some difficulty or discomfort when they first start a new job. Whether or not they have a mental health diagnosis, most people feel nervous on their first day. Most people experience confusion and make mistakes, at first, and go home feeling exhausted. These are perfectly normal feelings to have when you start your job, and may be especially true for people who haven't worked in a long time or who haven't ever worked before. The good news is that these feelings will probably go away fairly quickly as you get used to your new job and workplace.

Typically, when people start new jobs, they need to spend some time getting set up and oriented. This may include:

- Completion of forms for tax and payroll purposes. Don't be afraid to ask questions about completing these forms. They may contain terms you are not familiar with. You may also have to fill out forms for any benefits (e.g. medical, retirement, life insurance) that you receive.

- Make sure you keep copies of important paperwork.

- You will probably be given information in writing about any of your employer's policies that apply to you, such as paid holidays and sick days, overtime pay, lateness, and codes of conduct. Take the time to read these policies, and make sure you understand both what is expected of you and the benefits to which you are entitled.

- If there's anything you don't understand or which troubles you, ask your supervisor or the human resources representative at your job to explain them and discuss them with you. If these policies are not offered to you in writing, you should ask for a copy

You may be presented with a lot of new information all at once in addition to meeting a lot of new people. You will be learning about the tasks and responsibilities that are part of your job. Here are some tips:

- If you feel overwhelmed or confused, don't be afraid to ask for help and support. Your supervisor, trainer or co-workers may be able to help you.
- Try to pay attention to how you're feeling, and what you need. You may need to ask the person training you to slow down, or to put instructions in writing for you.
- Ask questions when you need to.
- Ask for breaks when you need them.
- Carry a pad and pen with you to take notes and to write down people's names.

Remember that it takes some time to adjust to the demands of a new job. Once you have had time to adjust, things will probably feel less overwhelming. Don't be too hard on yourself. Everyone makes mistakes on a new job until they get adjusted. This does not mean that you are stupid or incompetent. You should also expect to feel tired. Learning new things is hard work! Make sure you leave yourself

plenty of time to get the rest you need during the first days and weeks at your new job. Hopefully, you will also feel excited by the new opportunities and activities provided by your new job.

Relationships with your Employer and Co-Workers

When you begin working, you enter into a new set of relationships with people at work. They may be a little different than other types of relationships you already have.

Employer - The person or organization that has hired you is primarily interested in your ability to do the job you were hired to do.

Supervisor - Your direct supervisor is probably responsible for making sure the work gets done properly, and for providing whatever guidance, support, problem-solving, and discipline is necessary.

Co-workers - Your co-workers are generally people who, like you, have certain tasks to accomplish each day.

Each of these people or groups of people have a particular role to play in the workplace, as do you, and are there to do their jobs. Relationships at work are generally built around work roles and responsibilities. When each worker does his or her part, and workers feel they can count on each other, then work relationships can go

smoothly regardless of whether or not the individuals know each other well or like each other.

Sometimes people who work together also form personal relationships and share more with each other than just workplace experiences. However, you should assume that the people at work are there to get their work done, and that social and support relationships are secondary. It is important for you to remember that it is not your co-workers' responsibility to provide support for you. You may eventually form supportive personal relationships with a few of your co-workers. Until you have figured out who you can trust, and who is interested in a more personal relationship, it is a good idea to keep personal issues out of work relationships.

What your employer will expect of you

Formal expectations:

- Doing the work that is in your job description, and following all the rules and policies of the workplace.
- It is extremely important that you read the employee policies at your job carefully so that you are sure you fully understand what rules you are expected to follow.

- Among other things, your employer will expect regular attendance, consistency, reliability, and competence.

Informal expectations:

- There might be things that aren't written down, but which most employees come to know through experience. For instance, some

employers like it when employees take initiative or are creative in generating ideas. Other employers just want employees to follow instructions and nothing more.

- Some employers want their employees to work closely with their supervisors, and other employers want their employees to work more independently.

- It can take some times to learn about these informal expectations. The best sources of this information may be other employees who work in positions similar to your own, or who work for the same supervisor.

- Each work setting has its own culture. For example, in some work places, employees' birthdays are celebrated or a whole department may eat lunch together at the staff lunchroom.

- Try to look for cues from other employees and don't be afraid to ask questions. Oftentimes, a co-worker will take on the responsibility of showing the "new guy" the ropes.

What you may expect of your employer

- You may expect your employer to provide you with clear information, in writing, about workplace policies, regulations, pay and benefits, as well as a clear job description.

- You may expect your employer to be willing to answer any work-related questions you might have.

- You can expect help getting started at your new job.

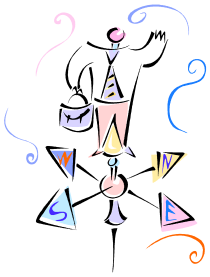
- You should expect to be treated fairly and with dignity and respect.

- You can also expect your employer to comply with all relevant safety, financial and non-discriminatory laws. (See Sections 11 and 12 for information about your rights as an employee under the ADA.)

- You may expect to be paid on time every pay period.

- If you are entitled to take paid days off when you are ill, you may expect to be permitted to do so.

- If your job comes with health insurance, it is the employer's job to pay their part of the premiums and ensure continuity of coverage. It is extremely important to understand how your benefits work, and what your rights are, so that you know what your employer is obliged to provide for you. These benefits can become an important part of your strategy for coping with the stresses of the workplace.



Having a job will impact many areas of your life

You will probably find that having a job will affect your life in many ways. By thinking of these things in advance and planning ahead, you will be better prepared to handle the changes that may happen.

Working will affect your social life. You will probably meet new people at work, and have the opportunity to form new relationships. Some people prefer to keep work relationships at work, and other people enjoy developing friendships with coworkers. Some people welcome new relationships and other people find it hard to figure out

how to fit new friends in with their other relationships or how to act with people outside of the job.

Working will affect how much free time you have available and how you use it. In addition to the time you spend doing your job, you will spend time traveling to and from work, resting so that you can do your work, and preparing for work (e.g. packing a lunch, getting showered and dressed, etc.) You will need to plan other activities and responsibilities - such as medical or therapy appointments, errands, and exercise - around your work schedule. Remember that you will also need to plan for time for relaxation, time for spending with friends and family, and time for self-care.

Working will affect how much money you have and how you spend it. It is a good idea to plan ahead, and make a budget to account for how much money you will have coming in. If you are receiving SSI or SSDI, make sure you figure out how working will affect your benefits check. (See Sections 9 and 10 for detailed information about SSI and SSDI respectively.) You should also figure out what your expenses are. Don't forget to include the cost of traveling to and from your job, parking, work-related tools or equipment, and/or meals.

What to do if you're having trouble

If you find that you are having difficulties adjusting to your new job, or managing your job in the context of the other demands of your life, it doesn't automatically mean that you should quit your job. The reality is that

jobs can be hard. Most people have trouble at their job at some time or another. It is important to consider ways of handling the problem. Quitting should be the last resort.

Take the time to try to figure out what the problem is and how to solve it. You don't have to do this by yourself. Depending on the problem, you may find that you can get good support or assistance from co-workers, a supervisor, your therapist or counselor, a job coach, family members or friends. Sometimes all you might need is to talk through the problem or talk to someone about how you're feeling. Other times, you might need more concrete assistance, such as help making a budget, or additional training. It might be that you need a job accommodation, an adjustment in your responsibilities or environment, or additional support, in order to meet the expectations of your job. (See Section 11 for more information about job accommodations and the ADA.) There are many strategies to try, and many people who might be able to help you work through difficulties on the job.

If you are having trouble at your job, you might feel the impulse to quit. That is one option, but you should think of it as a last resort. There are many options to try; options which might yield results that are better for you in the long run than quitting.

Some companies offer assistance and/or a few counseling sessions at no cost through a third party called an employee assistance program (EAP). EAP's are staffed by people that are not employed by your company. They are on contract with your employer to help employees deal with a number of issues including family and personal problems at

no cost to the employee. They generally also offer a list of resources around specific issues. For example, if you are caring for an aged relative who becomes ill, they could offer you alternatives to getting them assistance. This is a common problem facing many employees that often affects their attendance and concentration at work.

Take good care of yourself!

One of the most important things you can do as you start is to remember to take good care of yourself. Pay attention to your physical health; eat well, get enough rest and exercise, and tend to any medical problems that you have. Pay attention to your mental health; monitor your issues closely, and if you need medications, make sure you take them regularly and stay in close contact with your psychiatrist about whether the medications are working for you. Pay attention to your stress level, and remember that you need time for relaxation and recreation. And pay attention to your social and relational needs: identify the people in your life who you can talk to, who can provide support and/or companionship for you.

Pat yourself on the back. You have a job!

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

If you are having difficulties with transportation, check out the TU Collaborative's document called "Getting In, Out and Around: Overcoming Transportation Barriers to Community Integration." This publication is a brief guide to public transportation and private mobility policies, programs, and practices that impact the lives of individuals with mental health conditions, and is at:

http://tucollaborative.org/pdfs/Transportation_Mongraph.pdf.

For developing a plan of action, a Wellness Recovery Action Plan (WRAP) can be written that focuses specifically on issues to keep you at work. Check out the website: mentalhealthrecovery.com, or other resources for planning such as Pathways to Recovery at: http://www.socwel.ku.edu/mentalhealth/projects/value/pathways/workbook.shtml., or Boston University's Psychiatric Rehabilitation website at: http://.cpr.bu.ed.

Section 14:

Long-Term Employment Supports

In this Section:

- Introduction
- What challenges will I face?
- What kinds of supports are available?

Introduction

Any job comes with both rewards and challenges. The rewards of work- such as pay, health care benefits, positive self-image, a working identity, structure, and social contacts can increase with time. You may earn a raise or promotion, develop better skills, increase and improve relationships, and feel an increased sense of accomplishment. In order to reap the benefits that develop over time, you must be prepared to meet the ongoing challenges of working. Fortunately, you don't have to do this alone, but can use many different types of support to help you meet those challenges.

Everybody needs support at work. All people who work need encouragement, guidance, help, and advice. For many people that support can come from family members or friends. For others, the best support comes from co-workers. For still others, support comes from social activities outside of the workplace. It is always helpful to have someone to talk to about the situations that develop at work, to help solve problems, and to provide encouragement.

For working people who also have mental health challenges, additional and specialized supports may be needed. This may be especially true for people who are very isolated or have only a few supportive relationships in their lives. People in recovery may receive a lot of support from peer specialists, case managers, vocational counselors or job coaches while they are looking for a job, and when they start a new job. However, working while managing mental health challenges, especially if there's a pattern of up-and-down cycles, means that it is

important for many people to develop ongoing supports as part of their overall vocational plan.

This Section discusses the ongoing supports that people find useful in sustaining a long-term career, and is designed to help you plan your own ongoing employment supports.

What challenges will I face?

There are some challenges of working that can come up for any person. Unlike one-time problems that go away when you solve them, these are the kind of challenges that can come up day after day, or that can come and go, and require support and coping strategies that can work over a period of time.

- **Handling pressure**: Most jobs have some amount of pressure to get things done quickly and without errors. Some jobs have quite a lot of pressure, and dealing with it on a daily basis can be very stressful.

- **Boredom**: Jobs that are repetitive and tedious can make it very difficult to sustain the motivation and concentration you need to make it through the day. Some jobs are boring because there is not enough to do or do not present a challenge.

- **Adjusting to change**: Any time there is a change in a job - changes in duties, staffing, schedule or number of hours,

location, supervisory structure or level of responsibility - it takes some time to adjust. Some people have a hard time adjusting to a lot of changes.

- **Getting along with co-workers**: You usually don't have much choice about who you will be working with, so you have to figure out how to work together regardless of whether you like each other or not. Supervisors can be critical. Co-workers can be annoying. Sometimes getting along with other people at work is the most difficult part of a job.

There are other kinds of challenges that are more specific to people in recovery, and that can come up from time to time. If they do, it will be important for you to have a plan for coping with them.

- **Dealing with mental health issues**: When mental health issues become more intense or you experience a particularly upsetting episode, you will need strategies to help you cope without losing or leaving your job. If you need some time off from work in order to gain stability, or if you are in the hospital, you might need some help negotiating with your employer about sick leave or other arrangements in order to keep your job.

- **Responding to medication changes**: Any medication (even for colds or allergies) can affect a person's ability to concentrate and work at their best level, and changes in mental health medication can be particularly disruptive. You may need help monitoring the effects of your medication, and adjusting them to enhance rather than interfere with your ability to work.

- **Negotiating for "reasonable accommodations"**: As you work, you may become aware that, because of your mental health

challenges, you need some sort of accommodation in order to do your job. While most employers recognize that the Americans Disabilities Act (ADA) require employers to make reasonable accommodations (see Section 11), you may need some help figuring out what accommodations would help, and negotiating with your employer.

- **Discrimination on the job**: Unfortunately, many people still don't understand mental health issues and feel uncomfortable around people who have them. You may experience prejudice or harassment from such people (see Section 12 for more information). If this happens to you, you may want to seek guidance, emotional support, advocacy or legal help.

- **Managing your finances and benefits**: If you are on SSI or SSDI, you may need help making strategic decisions about how best to make use of Social Security Work Incentives. You may also need help making a budget or figuring out new medical and mental health systems as a result of changing insurance providers.

What kinds of supports are available?

There are a number of different supports that you can use to help you stay on the job. Different people will have different support needs. Sometimes, you might need help solving a problem, other times you might need to "vent" your frustrations, other times you might need a specific kind of professional assistance. Pay attention to your experience at the job, your reactions to people

and situations at work, and try to figure out which sort of support might be most helpful.

- **Clinical supports**: Just as a person with a physical disability may need to see a physical therapist for treatment in order to keep working, a person with a mental health diagnosis may need to talk to a mental health professional on an ongoing basis to discuss issues and problems that arise in the workplace. Ask your therapist or counselor to figure out strategies for managing issues, talk through concerns you might have, help you anticipate and adjust to changes, and help you handle interpersonal difficulties. Tell your psychiatrist about any problems with side effects or dosage of medication, and ask him or her to adjust your medication so that they don't interfere with your ability to work.

- **Vocational counseling**: If you have received the help of a vocational program in preparing for finding a job, stay in touch with that program. Seek help from a job coach to help you with the specific job skills, facilitate communication with your supervisor or co-workers, negotiate job accommodations, and other on-the-job problems. If you want to figure out your vocational goals and plan how to pursue them, work with a vocational counselor. Some agencies offer a support group for individuals who have used their services and are successfully working. You might want to stay at your job or look for a different job, to pursue additional training or education in preparation for a future move. (See Section 15 for more information about planning your long-term career.)

- **Consumer support groups and peer specialists**: Consumer-run peer support groups and individuals who work as 'peer specialists' are other excellent sources of support, and you can

look for consumer run programs or peer specialist services in your area. It is good for people to get together and share suggestions, problems, successes, and strategies for coping with work. In a peer group, participants can benefit from the experiences of people who have grappled with the same issues. These programs are often available evenings and weekends, when other traditional supports are not available. If you can't find a group like this in your area, you might want to start one yourself.

- **Support from your employer**: If you work for a large employer that has an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), find out what sorts of services and supports the have to offer. In addition, you may have a supervisor who can provide support. You will have to decide whether or not to tell your employer about your disability (see Section12). But if your employer does know about your issues, you may be able to talk with him or her about difficulties that arise that are related to them and get help problem solving at work.

- **Supports from co-workers**: Many people who work use the "natural support" that is available from co-workers who share the same work environment, same tasks, or same supervisor. Co-workers often talk together about work, "let off steam" together, and offer each other a listening ear or concrete assistance. Take your time figuring out which co-workers can be supports for you. It is important to consider who you trust, and who can help you. Some of your co-workers may face similar issues not necessarily due to a mental health diagnosis. Most people, sometime in their life, face personal challenges such as a sick relative or a child who is having problems in school. Working while worrying about one's personal problems can cause similar reactions as people dealing with a mental health diagnosis. Feeling stressed about a personal issue, while trying to be effective at work, can cause anxiety or

depression, inability to concentrate, and withdrawal, for example. So, don't be surprised if you find support from your co-workers.

- **Employment support plans**: It can be valuable to develop formal support plans to address crisis issues that may arise in the workplace. Some people work with their job coaches, co-workers and supervisors as a team to develop a list of situations that might arise, and instructions about how you want your supervisor, job coach or co-workers to respond (e.g., call a friend to pick me up, etc.) Putting a support plan in place in advance may help you to be less anxious about what might happen if you get sick at work. You will have to use your own judgment about whether or not this is a good strategy for you at your workplace. Spend some time getting to know the situations, and your employer's degree of willingness to be supportive, before you decide whether or not to set up a support plan like this. Check out the Resource section at the end of Section13.

- **Support from friends and/or family members**: Most people who work do bring at least some of the stress from their jobs home. It can help to discuss work-related stress with a spouse, friend, roommate or family member. Sometimes, because they are primarily concerned about you and not the job, they can help you figure out what you need. It is good to have people who care about you, who are on your side, to help you sort things out. And sometimes they can also help you get your mind off of work and work-related problems.

- **Community involvement and recreation**: While it is important to prioritize work in your life, it is also important to remember that your job isn't ALL of who you are. It is good to have other activities in your life that you enjoy, and that sustain you. You might join a club, participate in spiritual or religious activities, play on a sports team or exercise alone, participate in political

organizations, do volunteer work, take a class, join the YMCA, or spend time with friends. Having interests and activities outside of work can provide an outlet for stress, opportunities to make and build friendships, and a chance to spend time simply enjoying yourself.

YOU CAN DO IT!!!

Remember everyone experiences frustration and difficulties at work in order to reap the rewards. You may have short-term setbacks. But if you have a long-term plan, and support strategies to help you achieve your plan, you'll soon get past them. You don't have to do it all by yourself. Learning what supports are available to you, and using them well, can be the key to your success!

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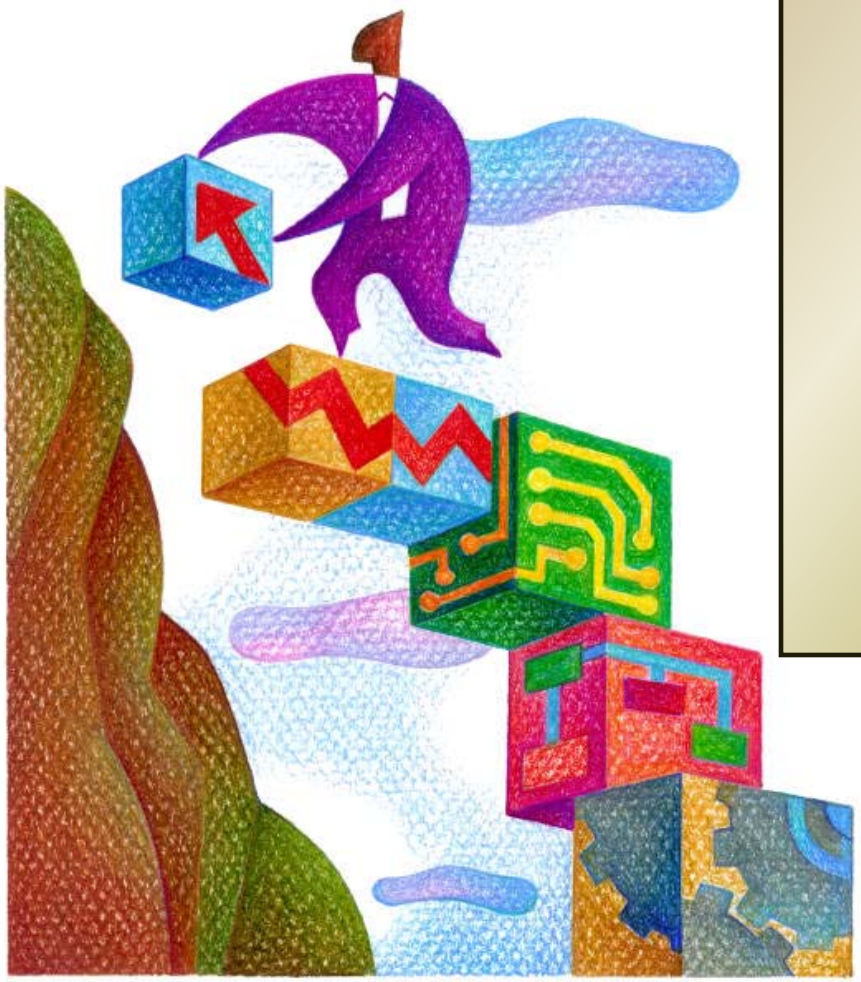
Section 15:

Prioritizing work for Your Future



In this Section:

- Introduction
- Making Work a Priority
- Thinking about Work as a Career
- Keeping Your Career on Track
- Holding On to Your Job
- Changing the Job
- Returning To Work After Being Fired or Laid Off
- Start Looking for a New Job

Introduction

This Section provides an opportunity for you to do some thinking about the role work will play in your future. If you've gotten this far in this guide, you may already be enthusiastic about working or you may already be working. You may have already changed your image of yourself from someone with a mental health condition who might manage to work to someone who works and manages their challenges. This can be an important shift in how you think about yourself and your life.

You may be thinking about how to make sure you hold onto the job you have for a long period of time, or how to move on to new jobs that provide more income and interesting opportunities year after year. You may also want to consider how to balance work with other major life responsibilities and activities. This Section is designed to help you think about and plan for your future as a working person.

Making Work a Priority

People who work, and want to stay working, learn to make work a top priority. This means planning around the requirements of the job, and what it takes for you to be successful at work, as much as possible. You will need to manage your time well and to learn what other activities and responsibilities you can manage without sacrificing your ability to work, or the quality of your work. You will need to take good care of yourself so that you are able to do a good job at work. There are many aspects of life that

can impact on your ability to work. When you make work a priority, you have to consider these aspects of life too, and make decisions whenever possible that make it easier, not harder, for you to work.

- **Housing**- An unstable living situation can make it very hard to work. Everybody needs a place to live where they are safe, and where they can rest. People need a home that renews and nurtures them so they can do what they need to do out in the world. Where you live, how close you are to work or to transportation, can make a big difference in your ability to get work done every day.

- **Financial Stability**- It is important to budget carefully so that you have enough money to cover basic living and work-related expenses such as rent, food, clothing, and transportation. If you develop good habits like budgeting, paying bills on time, and saving money, you will be less likely to face financial crises, and will be better equipped to handle them if they do arise.

- **Physical and Mental Health**- Any health problems, whether they are medical or psychiatric in nature, can pose challenges to your ability to stay at work. It is important to take good care of yourself, exercise and eat well, and pay attention to any issues that may pose a problem to you. Communicate regularly with your health care providers and make sure they know how you're doing. If you need to take medicine, be sure to take it regularly as prescribed, or talk with your doctor if your medicine is causing you any problems.

  It is also important to learn how to function <u>with</u> whatever physical or mental health issues you may have. Take the time to learn all about your abilities and limitations. If you have any ongoing or chronic conditions, make sure you know the "early warning signs" and what to do if things get worse. It's really important that you have good health care providers with whom

you feel comfortable asking questions and are readily available to you. If you need to contact a health care professional, you should be able to get an appointment in a reasonable amount of time or at the very least, be able to speak to someone who can deal with your immediate problem.

- **Family Responsibilities**- Most people who work have to plan carefully for the care of their dependents. If you have children, you will need to plan for childcare while you are at work and for what to do if your child gets sick or needs you in the middle of your workday. The same is true for any other family members who rely upon you for care. If you have a partner who works, you may have to divide up responsibilities around each other's job responsibilities.

- **Relationships and Social Life**- People need recreation and social relationships. It is important to remember to leave time for these and not have them take significant time and attention away from work. For instance, it may not be possible to be in touch with friends or family members while you're at work except for emergencies. You may need to plan visits with friends in advance, or make sure not to stay out too late. If you're the kind of person who becomes immersed in their work, you may need to remind yourself to go out and have fun once in a while. It's important to prioritize work, but it also important to have a life outside of work.

  Taking care of each of these areas of your life can help you prioritize work, and maintain long-term employment. It is also true that when your work life is stable, you will be better able to take care of these areas of your life. Maintaining employment can mean that you have better financial resources to afford housing, childcare and other necessities. It can mean access to better health insurance and care, opportunities for more social contacts, and more structure to your time. It can also help you feel better

about yourself, and more able to handle whatever adversity comes your way.

Thinking about Work as a Career

When you commit yourself to work as a lifelong endeavor, something you will want to have as a part of the rest of your life, then it is more than work, it is your career. It used to be that most people stayed with their first employer for many years, gradually working their way into higher level positions and salaries. Nowadays, there are many different types of career patterns. As you think about career development, you will be in a position to make some choices about what will work best for you. At some point, you may decide to get additional training or a certification or degree to help you qualify for a better job. You may need to move to another job and/or employer to advance in your career.

Full-time vs. part-time employment: Many people with a mental health diagnosis find that full-time work gives them the structure and income and opportunities they most need, and others find that part-time work offers the flexibility and freedom they need to manage both a career and their mental health challenges.

Ongoing vs. intermittent employment: Some people work from the time they leave school to the day they retire. But there are also many people who take time away from working for a variety of reasons, including raising children or pursuing educational goals. Some people

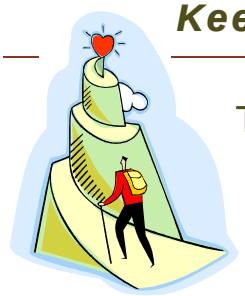
find they work best if they can work for a while and then take a break before they re-enter the labor market.

A few jobs vs. many different jobs: Years ago, most people expected to have only one or two jobs in a lifetime, but today the average working person will have eight or nine jobs before they retire, sometimes in three or four different fields of employment.

Working for an employer vs. self-employment: Most people work for an employer who determines the work schedule and job description, and who assumes responsibility for making sure the employees get paid. But an increasing number of people work independently, as consultants or freelance workers, picking up jobs whenever they are best able to work. Self-employment can be financially risky, but allows for greater flexibility and independence for the worker.

Whatever the pattern you choose or whatever the pattern that develops, you will face a number of challenges and need to respond to those challenges with a strong commitment to the value of work in your life.

Keeping Your Career on Track



There are three broad strategies for keeping your career on track, and you'll need to decide which of these to use in different circumstances. Sometimes it's most

appropriate to make the changes and accommodations necessary to save the job you're in; sometimes you may want to move on to a new job that is more financially or personally rewarding; and sometimes, if you've been fired, it's important to figure out what went wrong and how to make sure you're not in the same situation in your next job.

Holding On to Your Job

Most of the time, you will want to do your best to hold on to the job you have. You may want to work with an employment counselor or job coach to discuss any of the challenges you are facing at work. You may want to discuss things with family members or friends, ask a therapist to help you with coping skills, or you may want to sit down with your supervisor or co-workers to discuss the problems and brainstorm some solutions. Think about:

- What can you do to improve your performance on the job or increase your tolerance for its demands? You might consider different ways to manage your stress or develop new strategies for meeting demands on the job. In fact, it is a good idea to regularly assess how you are doing so that you can have your own 'early warning system' for emerging problems. You may need to think about whether you getting to work on time, solving problems with coworkers effectively, turning projects in on time, using sick leave only when you really need it, etc. Then, take steps you need to take to solve problems before they become crises.

- What can your employer do to make “reasonable accommodations” for your mental health challenges? If you are willing to disclose your disability to your employer, you may want to ask for job accommodations, some changes in work assignments or environment that enable you to manage the “essential functions” of the job, and which compensate for a disability-related problem. Remember, you can ask for an accommodation at any time, and if the right change at the right time makes you a more productive worker, then both you and your employer will benefit. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires most employers to make “reasonable accommodations” for people with disabilities. See Section 11 for a detailed discussion of job accommodations and the ADA.

Changing the Job

Sometimes you may decide that you want to change jobs. It is important, however, to avoid simply walking out one day and not coming back, quitting suddenly or in anger, or believing that because you have been ill on the job that you can’t go back. Most times you can return to your old job after a mental health crisis. But if you have decided that you need a job that is more interesting, or offers more pay and/or benefits, or that is closer to home, whatever your reason, it is usually a good idea to stay at the job you have until you have found another one. Also, whenever possible, make sure to give your employer adequate notice that you will be leaving.

To move your career forward, think about:

- **Promotions**: One way to move onward from a job you don't particularly like or which does not particularly meet your needs is to seek a promotion while working for the same employer. In most circumstances, employers only promote people who have already been doing an excellent job. You will need to demonstrate how efficient and effective you are at the job you have before you'll be considered for the next position up the ladder. Or, if you are not yet working on a full-time schedule, you might ask for more hours or responsibilities.

- **Changing Jobs or Fields**: If no changes or promotions are possible or interesting to you, then think about finding a new job in a new field. Hold on to the job you have while you look around on the Internet, in newspapers, or by talking with friends or counselors about new opportunities that might open up for you. (See Section 6 on Applying for Jobs.) You'll want to leave your current job on good terms, even if you haven't been happy there or gotten along with your supervisor. So, do your best to discuss your plans to move on (once you've been offered and accepted another position) in the most positive terms possible. You never know when you may need a reference or run into someone from your previous employment on another job. The old expression that is fitting here is: "Don't burn your bridges."

- **Improving Your Education**: One of the most effective ways to build a career is to increase your education. You may want to finish your high school education or complete college courses or get an advanced degree, or you might want to take a computer course or enroll in a trade school or program. Often, you can complete your education at night or on weekends while you work, or you may want to leave work for a short while to return to school. But be sure that you have talked this over with family or friends, counselors and educators to be sure that you are moving in the right direction. Also, if you do leave work to pursue your education, make sure you have planned for whatever financial

changes might result, such as having less income and paying tuition. Take a look at "A Practical Guide for People with Disabilities Who Want to go to College" at the TU Collaborative website at:

http://www.tucollaborative.org/pdfs/education/College_Guide.pdf . This guide covers all the essential topics to be considered before going to a post secondary school program.

Returning To Work After Being Fired or Laid Off

There are two important things to do if you are either fired or laid off. First, try to figure out what happened so that you can learn from the experience. Second, start looking for a new job as soon as you can.

Remember, that is not all that uncommon for people to be fired from a job if their work productivity or quality doesn't meet the boss's expectations. One of the big mistakes that people with mental health conditions often make is to assume that if they are laid off or fired that this is proof that they shouldn't have tried to work in the first place. It's never good to be laid off or fired, but remember that many people, with and without mental health challenges, have been fired at some time in their career, and most have gone on to find better and more satisfying jobs.

It is important for you to figure out 'what happened.' If you were laid off, it probably had very little to do with you. It is very common these days for companies to "downsize" and lay off employees. You may want to be careful in looking for a new job with a company that is in good financial standing and is not expected to downsize. In fact, this is a good question to ask when you go on a job interview, "What is the prospect for the funding for the position that I am interviewing for?"

If you were fired, then it really is important to figure out why. Sometimes you may decide the boss's expectations were unrealistic or that your supervisor just didn't understand the value of your work. But sometimes it will be because for one reason or another you really didn't have the skills, experience or capacity your employer needed. The more you can understand what it was that led to your being fired, the more you can do to make sure that in your next job you either avoid similar circumstances or work on your own skills. It's often hard to be objective when you've been fired so it can be very helpful to have someone around to help you think through these issues, someone to check your thinking with, and to bring in different perspectives.

Think of this as an opportunity to learn something important about your strengths and limitations. The better you understand yourself, the better able you will be to find a new job that is a better match for you.

Start looking for a new job

Once you understand why you lost your last job, it is important to begin looking for work as quickly as possible. Figure out what kind of job you now think you need. Get the help you need to identify the kinds of jobs that will offer a better chance of success for you. Start going out for interviews and filling out job applications, and getting yourself back into the labor market. Remember that most people change jobs a few times before finding one where they can be successful and satisfied.

You may be eligible to collect unemployment insurance while you are looking for another job. Regulations vary by state and are based upon the length of time you were on your last job. Check out your local Unemployment Office for regulations and how to apply.

This concludes this Employment Guide. Good luck with your employment endeavors and remember to “pat yourself on the back” from time to time.