



Supported Employment Tip Sheet

Your child has decided he/she would like to enter the world of work. Although certainly an exciting time, you as caregiver are likely to have questions and concerns about what this means for your son or daughter: *What is supported employment? What is the role of a job coach?*

Your friends at **New York State APSE**--the New York Chapter of a growing national non-profit membership organization, and the *only* national organization with an *exclusive focus* on integrated employment and career advancement opportunities for individuals with disabilities--and **Parent to Parent of New York State**--a statewide not-for-profit organization with a mission to support and connect families of individuals with special needs--have designed this tip sheet to help you through what can be a complex process. We appreciate all that you do and view you as an essential partner in your child's pathway to employment.

For caregivers, the process of *letting go* can be a difficult one. Primary caregivers have been crucial in helping a person with disabilities reach this important move to employment. It is important for caregivers to realize that there are no special education laws and regulations to stand behind in the world of employment. Different skills are needed, including open and proactive communication. By opening up to the dignity of risk, we offer the opportunity to foster success, despite some bumps in the road along the way.

We strive for that balance between fostering dependence by offering too much support, and fostering independence by offering needed supports, but no more than is needed: *This* is the essence of supported employment, and the support team includes parents, caregivers and family members, support providers and employers. While taking into consideration input from the entire support team, the eventual responsibility of the supported employment professional is to foster collaboration among the agency, the employer, and the supported employee.

APSE holds certain standards for professionals working in the field of supported employment (*Ethical Guidelines for Professionals in Supported Employment*). Quality programs and providers will follow these guidelines. If you feel that your provider is *not* adhering to these standards, you have a right to ask questions!

What is Supported Employment?

Supported Employment is paid competitive employment in an integrated setting with ongoing support for individuals with the most severe disabilities (i.e., mental health, intellectual disabilities, significant learning disabilities, traumatic brain injury, deafness and blindness, and extreme mobility impairments for whom competitive employment has not traditionally occurred, and who, because of the nature and severity of their disability, need ongoing support services in order to obtain, perform, and retain their job. Supported Employment provides assistance such as job placement and job coaching, assistance in interacting with employers, on-site assistive technology training, and individualized job training.

What is a Job Coach?

A job coach is a person who is hired by a job placement agency to provide specialized on- and off-site training to assist the employee with a disability in learning and performing the job and adjusting to the work environment. Different agencies use different titles for this position (e.g., Employment Consultant, Employment Specialist).

Job Coaches facilitate the job seeking process of people with disabilities to find paid employment in the open market. They provide knowledge, networking contacts, encouragement and resilience when seeking a job, accepting a job and keeping a job. When necessary, job coaches also can “carve out” or “customize” a job in a workplace; they find tasks at the site that can be successfully accomplished by the employee, and create a new job out of these elements. This often results in a “win, win” situation for both the employer and employee.

Four Key Stages:

Assessment and Needs Analysis

The Job Coach will carry out a Needs Assessment with the job seeker to identify skills, interests and ambitions, with a view to identifying the type of work one would like to do. This phase may also include updating resumes and writing cover letters. It may also include work experience for job sampling/testing purposes.

Job Development & Job Search

The Job Coach offers supports in identifying suitable job options where one's skills, interests and talents match the requirements of the job. This involves but is not limited to arranging mock interviews; searching for jobs in newspapers, on the internet, and at recruitment agencies; and by visiting possible employers (job shadowing). Depending upon the disability and individual preferences surrounding one's diagnosis, the job coach and job seeker may engage in conversation about the merits of disclosing one's disability to potential employers.

Employment with Job Coach Support

The Job Coach supports the new employee in becoming and remaining a competent worker. The various tasks involved in the job are examined and accommodations requested, if required. Help is given to develop technical and social skills, again, only if required. Supports may take place both on- and off-site.

Ongoing Support (*Extended Services/Follow Along*)

The amount of support often will decrease over time as the employee adapts to the job and the workplace. Job retention and integration are essential features of Supported Employment. Help is offered to the participant to facilitate communication on the job; for example, ask questions, ask for time off, inquire about task enlargement, training, or promotion.

Other Considerations

As individual agencies may maintain differing philosophies regarding the provision of supported employment supports and services, we encourage parents to take the time to interview more than one agency to determine whether their philosophy is a “fit” for you and your family.

Individuals with the most significant disabilities often will need ongoing 1:1 support to succeed at work. This does not mean they cannot benefit from paid employment and add value to the workplace. Yet often it is not feasible for traditional supported employment agencies to provide this level of support.

An option for individuals needing continuing 1:1 support is to pursue a self-directed plan, in which a program can be designed around the person’s needs.

When exploring job possibilities (*job development*), a good Job Coach will:

- Meet with the job seeker on a regular basis.
- Ask about their goals, dreams, and aspirations.
- Spend time with and get to know the job seeker (*assessment*).
- Include family and other partners in the process, while still prioritizing job seeker preferences.
- Contact employers.
- Offer help with resume preparation.
- Conduct mock interviews.
- Stress and discuss with sensitivity the importance of proper work attire and good hygiene (*first impressions*).
- Offer support before, during, or after a job interview; this may include sitting in on a job interview.
- Allow the job seeker to speak for themselves.
- Offer honest, objective input on which jobs may or may not be available in the current job market and/or geographic area.

While supporting the supported employee on the job, a good Job Coach will:

- *Supplement* any training already provided by the employer.
- As much as possible, allow coworkers to provide training and support (*natural supports*).
- Facilitate direct communication between the employee and his/her coworker.
- Observe supported employee interactions with coworkers, for later discussion if needed.
- Help the employee learn the culture of the work environment.
- Adjust job coaching to the individual’s learning style. For example, some may learn best with verbal prompting, others with a written task list.
- Try fading from the employee’s immediate work area, and off-site as appropriate. The goal of supported employment is to foster independence on the job.

For more information on Supported Employment, please visit the NYS APSE website: www.nysapse.org, where you can find useful information, links to the National APSE website, and regional contact information.

For more information on Parent to Parent of NYS go to www.parenttoparentnys.org.