

Employment and Other Options

For many of us, our job represents a big piece of who we are. As outlined in IDEA, one of the most important objectives of transition planning is to develop and implement a plan to secure employment. In order to do this, you and your young adult may want to consider activities that utilize his or her strengths, as well as activities that he or she likes to do. Information gathering, volunteer opportunities, internships, job sampling and job matching all play important roles in preparing a young adult for employment.

Preparation

While your child is still in high school, you may want to begin the process of learning and educating him or her about possible future careers. Go over the various types of jobs available with your child and start to make a list of those that might match his or her interests and strengths. Try to expose him or her to those specific career areas as much as possible, and continue to build upon the skills that will allow him or her to succeed in the workplace.

Work experience while your child is still in school is an important way to help you understand his or her strengths and challenges within different types of work. Examples of ways to explore careers while still in school include volunteer opportunities, internships and job sampling. There may even be opportunities at school to practice work – such as general office tasks, working in the school store or helping out at after school programs for younger children.



Experiences such as internships can often help with skill building, job training and eventually the job application process. Your child may be able to connect to a peer or mentor at the internship or volunteer site who can lend a hand if needed. For young adults with autism who have more significant challenges, job coaches can help them reach their full potential. A job coach will assist your child in obtaining a job and provide onsite support and assistance. Your school district may be able to help you find an agency that can supply a job coach.

It is also important to keep in mind when exploring career opportunities that your child may need to build up the endurance and stamina needed to complete his or her workday. It may be helpful to start with one hour per week and slowly build up to more hours on multiple days per week. You will know best what your child is able to do at work, but don't be afraid to gradually build his or her endurance until an adequate level is reached for him or her to accomplish career goals.

Types of Employment

There are many different employment options for individuals with autism. It is important to note that a young adult on the spectrum can go from one type of employment option to another over time.

Below is a list of several possible types of employment:

Competitive Employment: a full-time or part-time job with market wages and responsibilities; generally no long-term support is provided

Supported Employment: a competitive job where the individual receives ongoing support services while on the job; can be funded through state developmental disabilities or vocational rehabilitation agencies

Customized Employment: a job in which the individual's strengths and abilities are used to develop a specific role uniquely created for the individual

Self-Employment: a job situation in which the individual's interests and strengths are matched to a product or resource that can allow him or her to make money, i.e. a bakery for those who love to cook; can increase the opportunity to tailor the work environment to the individual's needs

Sheltered Employment: a job setting where individuals with disabilities are not integrated with workers without disabilities; generally supported by a combination of federal and/or state funds; some argue that this system more often hinders the independence of people with autism in the community



Job Matching and Searching

Finding the best possible match is the most important component of securing successful employment. Sometimes even your child's passions or intense interests can be converted to a career. If your son is very interested in trains, maybe there is a job available at the local station. If your daughter loves to rearrange her closet in perfect order, bring her down to the local department store to see if they need help with restocking. Many individuals with autism have found great success pursuing their unique passions. For example, when Dr. Temple Grandin was a young girl, she became obsessed with cattle handling equipment at her aunt's ranch. Though that did seem different at the time, she was encouraged to pursue these interests and today she is the world's leading expert on the design of cattle handling facilities.



The information below regarding job matching is excerpted from *Life Journey through Autism: A Guide for Transition to Adulthood*, by the Organization for Autism Research:

Components of the Physical Job Match

- Hours of employment
- Acceptable noise levels at the job site
- Pay, leave and other benefits
- Acceptable activity levels
- Physical requirements of the job (e.g. lifting)
- Acceptable margin of error
- Production requirements

Components of the Social Job Match

- Acceptable level of interaction with coworkers
- Clear job expectations
- Grooming and hygiene requirements
- Demands on communication skills
- Personal space available
- Phone/vending machine/cafeteria
- Coworker training and support
- Community status

Workplace Skills

It is essential for young adults with autism to learn proper skills in the workplace, not just related to the job itself, but also social skills and rules of a work environment. Example of these skills include:

Initiating interactions with coworkers, as well as ending them

Understanding and respecting boundaries

Asking questions when help or clarification is needed

Being patient in situations that may be frustrating

Learning the best ways to respond when agitated, i.e. taking breaks in a quiet room or walking outside for fresh air

Maintaining proper hygiene

Knowing what topics are appropriate in the workplace and what should be kept private

Practice these skills at home and out in the community so your child is prepared for the workplace. Make sure he or she feels comfortable telling you in the best way possible if there are situations at work that might be improved with better understanding of these “soft” skills.

Remember that learning these skills will be an ongoing process and may take time. With practice and dedication, your child can and will succeed when the right fit is found!



Below is an excerpt from *Autism and the Transition to Adulthood* by Paul Wehman, Marcia Datlow Smith and Carol Schall.

Social Skills in the Community and the Workplace

Using Social Amenities: Phrases such as please, thank you and you’re welcome are simple, short and easily taught.

Using Appropriate Greetings: Some students fail to greet or acknowledge others; others greet people over and over again. Teaching the appropriate use of greetings can be helpful.

Terminating Conversations: A common complaint of peers, supervisors and coworkers is that the worker or participant with autism walks away while being spoken to.

Accepting Correction: Many people do not like to receive correction or criticism, which can be especially upsetting to an individual with autism. Social skills training may need to focus on teaching the student exactly what to say and do when given correction.

Responding Assertively: People with autism can sometimes be taken advantage of. Social skills training may be required to teach them how to stop this from happening, for example, how to say, “Leave me alone” if someone is bothering them.

Accepting Suggestions: If a teacher or parent provides a suggestion, this can sometimes result in a refusal to take the suggestion, and can even serve as a trigger to acting out behavior. Providing the student with general instructions on the need to accept suggestions followed by the opportunity to practice this skill can be effective.

Asking for Help and Revealing a Problem: One of the most important social skills is to ask for help when it is needed. In either the work or school setting, social skills training can be used to teach individuals how to ask for help and how to talk to others about a problem.

Other Options

Some individuals with autism, especially at a young age, may not be ready for employment. You may feel that there aren't any options that seem to be the right fit for your child. That in no way means he or she has to be home all day. Other options to consider include:

Day Habilitation Programs

Day habilitation programs are person-centered programs that provide structured activities and specialized supports that will allow your child to participate in non-employment related activities in the community. These services can be provided almost anywhere in the community based on the desired skill being taught. Day programs are available for adults with disabilities who have exited the school system and may not be ready or able to participate in the workforce in an effective way. These structured programs focus on independent living skills and integration into the community.

Day Treatment Programs

These programs combine therapeutic treatment with daily life skills. This type of program is administered at a program site rather than in the community. Many day programs for individuals with autism and other disabilities are administered through your state's Department of Developmental Disabilities. Contact your local office for more information on the programs available in your area. It is important to note that many programs may have waiting lists, so start the process of getting on a list as soon as possible.



Brian Merring has never considered himself much of a cook. But there he was, dressed in kitchen whites at the helm of a professional-grade stove and armed with a spoon and a palette of tasty ingredients. Brian, who was diagnosed with autism at age six, has never held a job. He wasn't sure if he would be able to complete the task at hand – turn the raw flavors before him into retail-worthy soups – but he was willing to try. It was the experience that he craved, and that's exactly what the Southwest Autism Research & Resource Center (SARRC) served up with CulinaryWorks®, a program the organization launched through a partnership with notable Arizona chefs that offers adults with autism spectrum disorders hands on job training through the preparation, packaging, distribution and sale of classic soups. CulinaryWorks provides those with autism vital trade skills that can be translated into employment opportunities in the future that will allow them to live and work independently.

"It's about creating a quality of life and a sense of independence for our adults with autism," says Jeri Kendle, Vocational & Life Skills Academy director. "Our participants are trained in a variety of skills, with opportunities in bookkeeping, sales and cooking. We want to give these individuals valuable skills so they can find jobs, have meaningful experiences and build self-esteem."

Developing skills and working toward employment and independence is crucial for many in this program. Brian's parents, Mildred and Dr. Leroy Merring, want their son to have every advantage possible in the job market. Both worry about what will happen to their son when they are no longer around to take care of him. "He has never had a job, and we're not going to be here forever," Leroy Merring says. "This is the first program out there that does something for the future of people like Brian. And It's a relief that this program is now available." **For more information about SARRC, visit autismcenter.org.**

Additional Resources

Vocational Rehabilitation

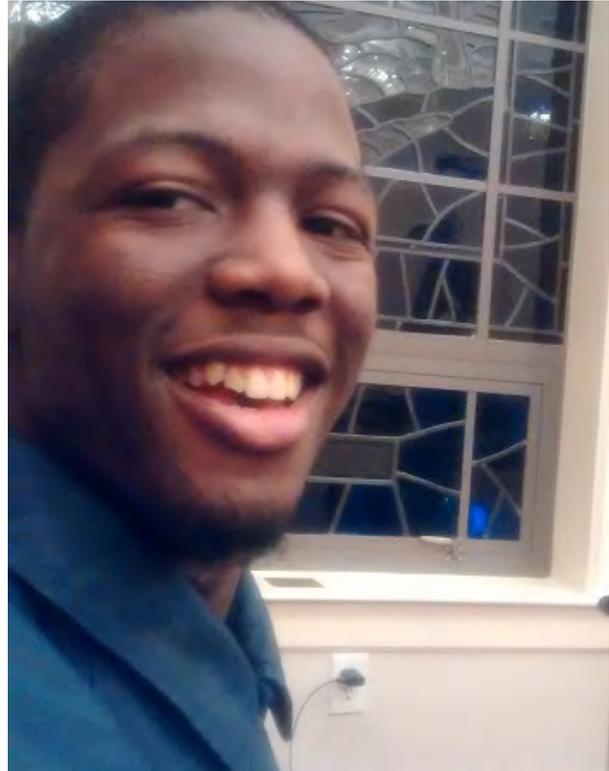
Each state has a Vocational Rehabilitation (Voc Rehab or VR) agency that provides employment service supports to people with disabilities, including autism. VR agencies can give your child vocational assessments that lead up to the development of an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE). A variety of employment-related services can be provided under an IPE, including training, counseling, job placement and supported employment.

State Developmental Disability Agencies/Home and Community-Based Waivers

State and local Developmental Disabilities services operate under a variety of names across the country. Frequently the funding for these services comes through the Home and Community-Based Services Waivers (HCBS), which are made available through Medicaid. The requirements for gaining access to these services vary from state to state. Several employment services can be accessed through this funding source, including supported employment, case management services and counseling and treatment services. Reach out to your local agency or the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) to see if your child is eligible for these waivers and if so, when you can get him or her on the wait list. You can find more information in the Legal Matters section of this kit.

Autism Speaks Employment Tool Kit

Autism Speaks has developed an Employment Tool Kit for young adults and adults with autism to help them find and maintain employment. This helpful guide covers a wide array of topics, including benefits and funding, various employment options, building a resume and cover letter, interviewing, accommodations and personal stories. Download the kit at [AutismSpeaks.org/Family-Services/Tool-Kits/Employment](https://www.autismspeaks.org/Family-Services/Tool-Kits/Employment).



Conclusion

As you know from your own life and those of your family members and friends, employment can play a vital role in the well-being of all people. It is important to keep in mind and let the world know that adults with autism can be positive contributors to the workplace when given the opportunity to display their strengths and abilities. Encourage employers to look past the communication and other such challenges your child might face, and see the skills that will allow him or her to succeed in a specific job. Start helping your child identify his or her greatest strengths and interests from an early age so you can start a list of some employment ideas for his or her future. Job sampling, internships, volunteer opportunities and more can help you see what type of work your child can do and enjoys. With a little research, assessment and advocacy, you and your child can help find a job, training opportunity or day program that works!