



GUIDANCE FOR CONVERSATIONS

Identifying and designing pathways
towards rewarding employment



THE ROLE OF THE
CASE MANAGER



STARTING THE
CONVERSATION



FOCUSING ON THE
DESTINATION



CAREER
SUCCESS

THE EMPLOYMENT PATHWAY

State Employment Leadership Network

SELN Vision

Like most of us, people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) want an opportunity to do paid work at a living wage. They want and need to contribute to the economy and to their communities. They're hungry for their skills and talents to be recognized and valued. They want a chance to give back, without being restricted to publicly funded services.

At its core, employment for us simply means a person working at an individual job in a local business, as part of the general workforce, earning the prevailing wage. All employees are on the business's payroll, and everyone gets paid the same way. Finally, everyone gets the supports and accommodations they need to thrive in their roles.



This publication would not have been possible without the work of many individuals and states that have contributed over the years to Guidance for Conversations tools. We would like to thank the states of Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Utah, and the District of Columbia for your dedication to infusing guided conversations into your employment processes and sharing lessons learned with staff and members of the State Employment Leadership Network.

Introduction

As a case manager, your role is to help people you support discover the benefits of a job, and to help them identify a path to fulfilling work in the community. It's your responsibility to ensure that people with IDD have the same opportunities for satisfying employment as anyone else. You can ask questions and facilitate discussions that clarify a person's skills and interests, and fuel creative thinking about fulfilling careers.

Successful case managers facilitate conversations with a variety of people who know the job seeker, and have an important role to play in helping the person to identify and realize their potential. As need arises, ask the family to reach out to personal networks who have ties to the business community or can share perspectives about the person's unique skills. Team members may come and go, but as a case manager you are a constant in the person's life, and can help encourage progress and maintain focus.

Guided conversations help people process information, draw their own conclusions, and make their own decisions. These conversations are critical in assisting individuals with disabilities and their families to discover what possibilities and support options exist.

The ultimate goal of guided conversations is to identify and design a person's pathway towards rewarding employment.

This publication describes a series of pathways that we feel reflect most people's current circumstances and understanding. Each pathway is defined and questions for exploration and discovery are provided. Worksheets are available at the end of this document.

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First Steps

Goal: Set up the fundamentals of employment success.

Every day, we all make choices, which may be well-informed, made on a whim, or based on faulty information. “Informed choice” means making decisions voluntarily after careful consideration of our options, based on reliable and accessible information and real life experiences.

You have a valued role in promoting informed choice by providing information about the benefits of working in community integrated employment settings, and by linking the person to employment supports including career planning and vocational and situational assessments. You can arrange for opportunities for those not working to talk with peers who are, arranging peer-to-peer mentoring, and facilitating visits. A critical support may be connecting people to experts in benefits counseling, who can explain the impact of competitive work on an individual's public benefits.

Supporting these real-life experiences through an informed decision-making process is critical to movement on a person's employment pathway.

For the decision-making process to result in a free and informed choice by the person, review the additional considerations on the next page to to keep in mind.

Communicate an interest in working.

People use a wide array of methods to communicate: verbal language, facial expressions, body language, and behavior. Use your listening and observation skills to gauge interest, anxiety, excitement, and confusion, and respond accordingly. Many people will never say “I want to work” or “I don’t like working here,” but they may communicate their desires in other ways. Take affirmative steps to ensure that people with disabilities can make an informed choice to work in integrated settings.

Sometimes a person’s ultimate goal may not be to get a job, and employment may just be a means to an end. Perhaps someone wants to go on vacation, adopt a pet, or buy a new computer. Using personal goals to begin exploring the benefits of work is one strategy to consider.

Feel the urgency.

The concept of “job readiness,” where people spent months or years getting “ready” for employment, is outdated and ineffective. Show that you feel the person’s urgency to work, contribute, and lead a more multi-faceted life by promoting self-determination, modeling high expectations, and providing access to early work experiences.

Address challenges and barriers.

Most people face barriers to making a change in their lives, but with persistence, good planning, and appropriate supports and services, many of these barriers can be overcome. Multiple solutions must often be tried before success occurs. Maintaining clear communication about the role each person plays in finding and trying a solution, documenting what did and did not work, and using each prior experience to develop a new action plan will help people stay on board and on track. The first job might not work out, but the second one, third one, or another one down the road might. Don’t lose faith, and recognize that it may take some trial and error.

Consider your personal values.

As you support people with a variety of needs and strengths, your belief that they can succeed in the workplace can make the difference in whether they achieve their employment goal. Recognize and acknowledge the value of employment for all. Support each person to understand what is possible and focus on their specific needs and interests. A person’s ability to make an informed choice about employment increases when conversations and work experiences go hand in hand. Be positive and believe success can happen.

Ask the right questions.

Choose the questions you ask carefully. Closed-ended questions such as “Do you want to work” don’t expand the conversation, and you typically receive a single word (yes or no) or very short, factual answer.

Asking open-ended questions that elicit more complex answers allows you to discover a person’s knowledge, opinions, and feelings. These questions usually begin with what, why, or how. “Tell me about...” and “Describe...” can also work well.

The discussions you facilitate will be as varied as the interests, concerns, and belief systems of the individuals, family members, and other supporters involved. While this guide is a great tool to start and keep the conversations moving, other tools may help deepen your understanding of the individual.



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CHOOSING ROUTES: STARTING THE CONVERSATION

The person expresses concerns about moving toward employment.

Goal: Shifting the Focus to Employment.

There are many reasons why someone may not be interested in employment. As a case manager, your role is to talk with the individual to find out why they do not want a job. Once you discover the reasons, tailor your conversations to address their concerns and gauge their interests. Your goal is to help the individual understand that employment is attainable and beneficial. Once you reach consensus on this, you can begin to develop an action plan.

Begin by getting to know the individual. Use person-centered planning or discovery to identify interests, passions, likes, and dislikes, and build a base for a positive discussion about what it will take to build a more meaningful life. Take the time to learn more about them so you can discover what experiences and beliefs are guiding their decisions regarding work. Respond by addressing their fears and challenges. Provide clear information about employment and the benefits a job will have on their life. Always give information in a way that is accessible to the person.

It takes time to help someone overcome their misgivings. Your goal is to help the person move beyond doubt and be willing to take risks. Be patient but persistent, and always remain optimistic.

PROBING QUESTIONS & CONVERSATION STARTERS

Also see the worksheets starting on page 12.

- Tell me about past work you have done.
- What's your biggest question about work?
- Imagine yourself working.
What would you be doing?
- What worries you about getting a job?
- What's the best thing that can happen if you get a job?
- What's the worst that can happen?
- How do your family and friends feel about you getting a job?
- How would earning more money change your everyday life?
- Let's talk about people who can help you find and learn a job.



NEXT STEPS

Develop an action plan based on what you have discovered.



If the person expresses the desire to work, go to the “Focusing on the Destination” section of this guide on the next page.

If the person continues to express doubt about working, try the following:

- Identify concerns or challenges, and propose and explore potential solutions.
- Share stories about working, and connect them to peers with jobs.
- Help the individual discover their talents through volunteering.
- Help the individual build community and personal networks, particularly with others who work in the community.
- Provide opportunities for the person to build self-determination skills and self-confidence.
- Support the person to experience a range of activities and types of employment environments based on interests..
- Work across environments to encourage building additional skills and self confidence.
- Make a connection between the person's desires, dreams and work.
- Further engage the family and personal networks



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FOCUSING ON THE DESTINATION

Person is not working but says they want to work

Goal: Identify an individual's core interests and develop a plan that informs future actions towards employment.

By identifying the person's skills and support needs, case managers can engage and share with key partners, including vocational rehabilitation, employment service providers, families, and schools, to support a seamless job search process.

PROBING QUESTIONS & CONVERSATION STARTERS

Also see the worksheet starting on page 14

About Daily Life.

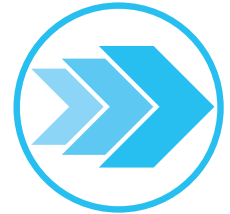
- What are your favorite things to do?
- How do you spend your day?
- What do you like best about your day?
- What don't you like about your day?
- If you could change something about your daily life, what would it be?
- Tell me about things that you do not like to do.

About Work Interests.

- What would you like to do for work?
- What new activity would you like to try at your new job?
- What types of things did you learn when you volunteered?
- How do you feel about meeting new people?
- What makes you feel important or proud?
- What are you good at?



NEXT STEPS



Some individuals may be ready to pursue work immediately. Others may have a vision of working, but may be more tentative in moving forward.

If the person expresses a desire to start a job search immediately or in the near future, ensure their plan reflects the individual's desire to work, past work experiences, negotiables and non-negotiables, interests, and talents.

- Connect the person to employment supports including as appropriate vocational rehabilitation and initiate the job search process.
- Share information discovered to help jump start cross agency collaboration.
- Provide information about benefits planning and connect to experts who can help with work incentive options.
- Identify concerns or barriers and propose and explore potential solutions.
- Assess if personal networks of the individual, their family, and their agency staff can be used to connect to possible work opportunities.
- Consider access to transportation and explore safety concerns in your planning.

Some people would rather look at employment as a long-term goal. People may not know what they want to do or may fear failure.

- Link to activities that focus on discovery and skill building, like taking a class.
- Help the person see the possibilities through experiences like job shadowing and career exploration.
- Review assessments conducted by other agencies to see that the person has learned from these experiences and help the person make a connection to jobs in the community.
- Review assessments conducted by other agencies to see that the person has learned.
- Connect the individual to people who have overcome similar challenges.
- Work in collaboration with the individual's support network to provide a positive message about work.



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CAREER SUCCESS

Identify job satisfaction and focus on career growth.

Goal: Identify the person's satisfaction with their job and maintain a focus on career growth.

As our levels of skills and experiences increase, it's natural to want to spread our wings. Sometimes people grow bored with the same old routine and just want a change. Moving from one path to another and back is natural. Here are some questions that can help determine if the person is ready for a change.

PROBING QUESTIONS & CONVERSATION STARTERS

Also see the worksheets starting on page 16.



About Work.

- What is the best part of your job?
- What do you do at work that makes you feel proud?
- What do you do at work that makes you feel valued?
- How do you get along with your co-workers?
- Tell me about your relationship with your supervisor.
- Tell me about new tasks you would like to try at your job.
- Tell me about fun social activities or events at work you have enjoyed.
- What kind of help do you need to develop new or different work skills?
- What other jobs might you be interested in?

About Financial Need.

- How do you feel about the amount of money you have?
- What would you do if you had more money?
- What would concern you about working more hours?
- What would be good about working more hours?

NEXT STEPS



Even if a person is working, you have a role in making sure the person is satisfied with their current situation.

If the person indicates overall satisfaction with their current job and earnings:

- ❑ Monitor and make sure the person is receiving the necessary supports to maintain their situation.
- ❑ Consider how to help the individual be prepared to respond to opportunities for career advancement (promotion, increased hours or pay).
- ❑ Continue these discussions during each plan review and any ongoing interactions.
- ❑ Provide opportunities for the person to share their employment success story with others.
- ❑ Continue to offer a wide range of experiences outside of work to encourage continued growth and opportunity.

If the person expresses dissatisfaction with their current job or earnings and clearly wants to change their position or place of employment:

- ❑ Determine if there is a need to plan for additional discovery of other interests, skills, resources, and opportunities.
- ❑ Link to other agencies like job centers or vocational rehabilitation regarding additional job training, certifications, or classes for career advancement.
- ❑ Support people to advocate for raises and new job opportunities. Help the person prepare for these discussions through role playing.
- ❑ Discuss personal networks with the person and their supporters to identify possible allies who might help.
- ❑ Identify what the person likes and does not like about their current job. Use this information to focus new job search efforts.

Probing Questions and Conversation Starters Worksheets

Complete the worksheets with the individual, and use them to inform the person's plan and future actions. Share them with the family and others on the job seeker's planning team. The worksheets are available for download at www.selnhub.org/guidanceforconversations.

Other Tools and Resources

Having many planning tools to draw upon can be helpful, especially when challenges and unique circumstances arise. The following are meant to enhance the work you are currently doing.

APSE Employment First Statement, adapted by Green Mountain Self-Advocates and Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered

This clear-language document can be shared with individuals with disabilities and self-advocacy groups to inform and promote employment.

Overcoming Challenges: The 4-Plus-1 Person-Centered Planning Tool

This tool can help job seekers think about a particular challenge or situation that may impact them in the workplace. Bring together a group of people who care about the individual. Collaboratively, support the person to answer the questions, and help develop a plan for change.

Relationship Circle

Use the relationship circle tool to inform and make decisions about who should be invited to planning meetings and what relationships in the job seeker's life need to be nurtured and strengthened.

Communication Chart

You may support people who communicate primarily through behavior and not words. A communication chart can be used to understand a person's likes, dislikes, and preferences.

The Decision-Making Profile

This tool helps to create a clear picture about how a person makes life decisions, and the best way to provide support in decision-making. It can help individuals to have choice and control in their lives and foster self-determination.

Charting the LifeCourse Framework Tools

The LifeCourse tools include a Daily Life and Employment Guide and an Employment Portfolio. You can find these and many more on the Charting the LifeCourse website.

More resources and tools are available at www.selnhub.org.



Name: _____

STARTING THE CONVERSATION

Shifting the Focus to Employment

Tell me about past work you have done.

What's your biggest question about work?

Imagine yourself working. What would you be doing?

What worries you about getting a job?

What's the best that can happen if you get a job?



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Shifting the Focus to Employment

What's the worst that can happen if you get a job?

How do your family and friends feel about you getting a job?

How would earning more money change your everyday life?

Let's talk about people who can help you find and learn a job.



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FOCUSING ON THE DESTINATION

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About Daily Life.

What are your favorite things to do?

How do you spend your day?

What do you like best about your day?

What don't you like about your day?

If you could change something about your daily life, what would it be?

Tell me about things that you do not like to do.



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About Work Interests.

What would you like to do for work?

What new activity would you like to try at your new job?

What types of things did you learn when you volunteered?

How do you feel about meeting new people?

What makes you feel important or proud?

What are you good at?



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About Financial Need.

- How do you feel about the amount of money you have?

- What would you do if you had more money?

- What would concern you about working more hours?

- What would be good about working more hours?



State Employment Leadership Network

The SELN is a place for states to connect, collaborate, and create cross-community support regarding pressing employment-related issues at state and federal levels for individuals with developmental disabilities.

The SELN was launched in 2006 as a joint program of the National Association of State Directors of Developmental Disabilities Services and the Institute for Community Inclusion at the University of Massachusetts Boston.



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