



VOCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Finding and maintaining a job requires a variety of key life skills – communication, social, presentation, technology – to name a few. Right now, a career is down the line for your young adult, but they are already preparing for success on the job, including practicing these skills at home (often the first workplace!).

The Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) discussed in Chapter 2 may include goals for employment, preparing now for a potential job, and for a future one. IDEA requires that schools support students with disabilities to make the transition from school to work. To that end, goals, clear steps, and attainable outcomes can be built into the transition plan. The transition period will help autistic learners develop skills for entering the workforce, and will be guided by their interests, goals, and desires for the future. Building skills and preparing for first jobs and experiences are the first steps to long-term employment.

TRANSITION PLANNING

Your Young Adult's Role

Like any good student-centered transition plan, this process involves your child leading the way, to the best of their ability, regarding their interests, preferences, and goals for employment.

They will:

- ▶ Identify interests and skills needed for employment
- ▶ Develop and enhance life skills to reach employment goals
- ▶ Participate in the transition planning process
- ▶ Take the lead in searching for and finding employment

Your Role as a Parent

- ▶ Advocate for your student to gain employment skills in the transition planning process
- ▶ Monitor transition planning for employment-related skills
- ▶ Promote and encourage your young adult's self-determination and independence
- ▶ Find opportunities for your child to practice employment-related skills at home, such as time management, technology skills, teamwork

PLANNING SEQUENCE – STARTING EARLY

Starting in middle school or early in high school, you and your child should:

- ▶ Start having conversations about work and jobs. These conversations will tie in well with your discussions from Chapter 2 about interests, goals, future ideas.
- ▶ Explore job sampling, job shadowing, informational interviews, and experience through volunteering. Through such experiences, your child can learn about the wide variety of jobs and careers that exist, and perhaps gain skills through similar tasks at home, at school, or in the community. Completing chores or other activities around the home can build responsibility and work-related skills.
- ▶ Participate in vocational assessment activities at school or in the community, such as DVR or a related agency.
- ▶ Seek opportunities for your child to develop competency in independence, self-monitoring, and life skills outside the classroom.
- ▶ Identify training and skills that will support their needs.

In high school, you, your autistic child, and the transition team should:

- ▶ Reaffirm and reassess life and work goals related to interests and capabilities.
- ▶ Break down employment goals into realistic pieces and identify the steps and skills needed.
- ▶ Identify strengths and weaknesses relative to work interests and focus on skill development for work tasks.
- ▶ Identify and find tools and resources to support self-regulation, stress management, and time management. These skills are important in the workplace and can be enhanced in high school, with the help of occupational therapists and other service providers.

- ▶ Take advantage of programs that offer opportunities for training and employment through job sampling, school-to-work, apprenticeships, cooperative education, tech-prep, mentorships, independent study, and internships.
- ▶ Assess transportation needs and capacity to get to work.
- ▶ Discuss effective disclosure strategies for work environments.
- ▶ Contact DVR, ADD agency, and/or SSA before your child turns 16 to determine eligibility for services or benefits post-graduation.

THE EVOLVING NATURE OF WORK

The career and employment opportunities available to an autistic individual reflect the breadth of the entire job market. In addition, the flexibility of some workplaces and the evolving nature of work can provide additional options that are especially suitable for an autistic young adult. Where and how people work is ever changing, which opens up different types of opportunities for autistic individuals, depending on their needs, interests, and job match.

Traditional

A traditional work environment includes jobs that may be part-time or full-time, based on a 40-hour work week. Some jobs are temporary or seasonal, where the length of employment is based on a specific time period.

Vocational

Vocational work refers to more hands-on or technical jobs, which may include car repair, culinary arts, graphic design, and many others. Vocational training – a type of organized program that prepares individuals for paid or unpaid employment – may be a part of transition services. Check out your state’s VR website to gain more information about core services offered and services like trial work experience/apprenticeship, assistive technology, benefits analyses, and other job search costs covered by VR.

Self-Employment

Through self-employment, an individual owns their own business and earns income for themselves; income may come through contracts and/or freelance work as part of this business.

Remote – Telework

Remote work (telework, telecommuting, working from home, flexible workplace, etc.), where employees can work from anywhere and don't have to commute or travel to a central place, office, store, or building, has become much more common in recent years. Different types of employers and jobs offer unique schedules or opportunities for remote work certain days of the work week or full-time.

CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYMENT

Competitive

A full-time or part-time job with market wages and responsibilities is considered competitive employment. Most jobs are considered competitive employment, such as waiting tables, cutting grass, fixing cars, teaching, computer programming, and even writing guidebooks on transitions!

Supported

In supported employment, autistic individuals work in competitive jobs alongside neurotypical individuals and receive support services while on the job. Supported employment may also include career assessments, job training, job development skills, and job coaching. Support services vary by state and may be short-term in nature. Supported employment is often found at universities, hotels, restaurants, office buildings, or small businesses.

Supported employment may be funded through state developmental disabilities or vocational rehabilitation agencies, but families need to ensure that: (a) supported employment, by definition and statute, is intended for people with severe disabilities; and (b) autistic individuals can, in fact, work if given the proper support, training, and attention to job-match characteristics. If ineligible for state-funded services, some supported employment may be paid for privately.

Secured or Segregated

In secured or segregated employment, individuals with disabilities (not necessarily autism-specific) work in a self-contained unit and are not integrated with non-disabled workers. This type of employment is generally supported by a combination of federal and/or state funds. While competitive and supported employment are ideal vocational options for many autistic individuals, secured or segregated employment may be the only viable option for those with higher support needs, and is preferable to no employment.

Competitive	Supported	Secured/Segregated
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fully integrated into general workforce ▪ Requires special skills ▪ Natural supports and consequences ▪ Employment supports offered as needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community integration ▪ Ongoing job support ▪ Wages and benefits ▪ Place first, then train ▪ Personalized, flexible supports in place ▪ Built-in safety net 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group learning ▪ Basic skills building ▪ Minimal compensation or unpaid ▪ Behavioral supports

Preparing to Work

Like many young people, some autistic individuals are excited to get a job. Perhaps they want to earn some extra money to buy items they want, or to learn more about a particular area that they really like. Others may feel more comfortable just staying home and not want to become part of the workforce. Getting to the “why,” or the intention behind working, can be an important part of the process for your young adult and also a helpful personal motivator. Do they:

- ▶ Want to learn more about a particular topic?
- ▶ Enjoy working on a particular job or task?
- ▶ Want opportunities to contribute to a group effort?
- ▶ Want to enhance social opportunities?
- ▶ Want to begin a component of adult life?

You may find that your young adult’s intention may be a combination of these factors or none of these (they may not want to work!). Working together on future goals and wishes, and discussing how work may fit in could be a starting point. Chapter 2 offers some activities to brainstorm and work on together.

Beyond intention are the necessary skills – life, social, communication, and job skills – that will help your young adult thrive in the workforce. The section “Ensuring Success on the Job” below dives into more detail on specific skills that autistic individuals may build as they prepare for employment.

Finding a Job

The first job may not be “the job” for life. First jobs are great for gaining experience and learning new skills. This is the place to start – finding a first or even a second job – with your autistic young adult, where they can practice skills, get experience, and keep growing in the workforce.

When starting to look for a job, it is helpful to facilitate a conversation with your loved one and their support team on questions such as the following.

- ▶ How many hours can your child work at any given time?
- ▶ When are they available? Evenings, weekends, weekdays?
- ▶ What type of work environments should they try to avoid?
- ▶ What type of support is needed for your child to succeed in the workplace? (Job coach, written instructions, etc.)*
- ▶ What types of work or industry appeal to your learner?
- ▶ How will they get to and from the work site?

As your autistic young adult searches for jobs, they need to consider the match between themselves and a particular job. The “job match” refers to the extent a particular job meets an individual’s needs in terms of challenge, skills, interest, comfort, camaraderie, status, hours, pay, and benefits. Generally, as people move through the job market over time, they develop more skills and get closer and closer to their ideal job match.

Autistic individuals are motivated to work with a correlation to the extent they enjoy the work and are treated with the same respect as neurotypical coworkers. While money may not be a motivation, they do still appreciate receiving a paycheck for their efforts. A good job match is of critical importance in these cases. When considering things that contribute to job match, they can be classified into physical and social components.

PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL JOB MATCH COMPONENTS	
Physical Job Match Components	Social Job Match Components
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hours of employment ▪ Acceptable noise levels at job ▪ Pay, leave, other benefits ▪ Acceptable activity levels ▪ Physical requirements of the job ▪ Acceptable margin of error (quality control) ▪ Production requirements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Acceptable level of interaction with coworkers and supervisors ▪ Clear job expectations ▪ Grooming and hygiene requirements ▪ Demands on communication skills ▪ Personal space available ▪ Opportunities for food/snacks ▪ Coworker training and support ▪ Community status

Another possibility when looking for work is to explore neurodiversity initiatives. Some employers have specific autism at work programs, although these tend to fit individuals with high skills in technology or specific college degrees. While jobs, availability, and companies may change over time and availability differs throughout the country, for some autistic young adults, exploring neurodiversity recruitment programs may be an option.

* Work and school accommodations may be different. Parents may consider conversations with the school team and/or DVR representative to elaborate on accommodations that may be successful in the workplace.

JOB SEARCH

The job search can seem like a job itself! Remember, there are a wealth of resources to support the job search, many aimed at helping autistic individuals. Inquiring among agencies that address supported employment, agencies that support people with special needs, friends, family, colleagues, and acquaintances may be the best first job search strategy.

Online job search strategies may include job boards advertising job openings, virtual job fairs, company websites, and social media (like LinkedIn). Other methods include in-person visits to stores/locations, in-person career fairs, or employment/staffing agencies. Allow your young adult to explore and practice different ways of searching for a job.

The job search and application process includes many parts, which can be practiced and prepared for before and during the process. These parts include:

- ▶ Finding appropriate jobs
- ▶ Applying to jobs
- ▶ Crafting resumes and cover letters
- ▶ Preparing for interviews and interviewing (developing scripts for practice can help)
- ▶ Following up with companies after submitting applications and interviews

The job search takes effort, persistence, and patience. Most likely, there will be rejections and setbacks. There are a lot of skills involved, and building these skills can be worked into a transition plan for greater success. **Handout 4-1: *Job Possibilities*** (on page 65) includes some job ideas.

ENSURING SUCCESS ON THE JOB

Personal Disclosure

When considering a possible job or employment in general, it is important to consider when and if your autistic young adult will disclose their diagnosis. If they have had assistance securing the job and are receiving job coaching, the primary question is not whether or not to disclose, but rather what information is relevant for disclosure and to whom. Remember, in all cases, disclosure is a personal choice, and there is no law obligating anyone to disclose that they have a disability. However, to be eligible for accommodations under ADA, some level of disclosure is necessary. **Handout 4-2: *When (and If!) to Disclose*** (on page 67) provides information on timing options for disclosure, helping you and your young adult to think through the positives and negatives about disclosing at various stages in the job search process. There is no *one* correct answer for when to disclose; however, once disclosed, that information legally must be kept confidential by the employer.

Some questions for your young adult to consider when thinking about disclosure include:

- ▶ What is the intention behind disclosing? For informational purposes, to create awareness, or to ask for accommodations?
- ▶ What supports and accommodations would you benefit from in the workplace?
- ▶ Do you feel comfortable telling your boss or coworkers?
- ▶ For which aspects of the job might you benefit from your supervisor's help in developing strategies? Do you need to disclose in order to ask for this?

Accommodations on the Job

According to ADA, a qualified employee or applicant with a disability is someone who can perform, with or without reasonable accommodation, the essential functions of the job in question. Reasonable accommodation may include, but is not limited to:

- ▶ Making existing facilities used by employees readily accessible to and usable by persons with disabilities
- ▶ Restructuring or modifying work schedules
- ▶ Acquiring or modifying equipment or devices; adjusting/modifying examinations, training materials, or policies; and providing qualified readers or interpreters

An employer is required to make an accommodation to the known disability of a qualified applicant or employee if it would not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the employer's business. "Undue hardship" is defined in ADA as "an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of factors such as an employer's size, financial resources, and the nature and structure of its operation."

Reasonable accommodations under ADA can include longer training periods, written lists of tasks to complete and the time of day they are to be completed, and making sure there are no seriously distracting sights and sounds in the work area. For a more complete list of reasonable accommodations specific to autism, see **Handout 4-3: Reasonable and Common Job Accommodations** (on page 70).

Educating Employers and Coworkers

If your autistic adult decides to disclose their autism, they should be prepared to help the employer, supervisors, and possibly coworkers better understand autism and how it affects them relative to the workplace (i.e., training, performance, and assimilation/social interaction). It may be helpful for employers and coworkers to receive formal training about autism so that they can better understand and offer support when necessary. Ideally, the autistic employee

and the employer should cooperatively brainstorm and develop such training. The autistic employee could participate in a staff-wide discussion, for example, to help dispel myths about autism and share the strengths, experiences, and areas of support that are specific to them.

Workplace-Specific Social Skills

Although social skills may not be necessary for your young adult to perform the actual job, they may be needed to help them *keep* the job or be more socially included at work. The social skills demanded vary from place to place, but there are basic skills that every employee should know. The following sections provide an overview of the areas where your autistic young adult may need assistance or training to perform the job.

■ Personal Presentation

As an employee, your young adult will represent the company they work for. People make judgments about an individual based on appearance. Therefore, it is important to present oneself appropriately and professionally. Aspects of personal presentation include:

- ▶ Age- and job-appropriate clothing and footwear
- ▶ General cleanliness and good hygiene
- ▶ Grooming of hair, teeth, and nails
- ▶ Interpersonal greetings ranging from someone saying “hello” to high fives, fist or elbow bumps, and initiating an introduction

■ Communication Skills

Some autistic individuals have trouble effectively communicating their wants, needs, likes, or dislikes to others. Scripts can be developed to practice typical work social situations. As such, instruction in the following communication skill sets may help:

- ▶ Expressing preferences or likes
- ▶ Ordering one’s lunch
- ▶ Excusing oneself to use the restroom
- ▶ When, and with whom, it might be appropriate to start a conversation
- ▶ Listening skills
- ▶ Obtaining help when necessary
- ▶ Level of response to others
- ▶ Eye contact during regular interaction
- ▶ Voice volume, tone, and tempo

■ Social Behaviors

Social behaviors, by definition, are particularly challenging for autistic individuals. Complicating this issue is the belief among many employers that social competence on the job (e.g., being a team player) is as important as production competence. Therefore, some areas of social competence that should be covered in your transition plan include:

- ▶ General manners, including responding to greetings, not interrupting others, etc.
- ▶ Table manners, particularly if one wants to be socially included with colleagues during lunch
- ▶ Awareness of others' personal space across all work environments
- ▶ Understanding private behavior as being different from public behavior
- ▶ Recognizing when assistance is needed and obtaining it
- ▶ Tolerance of unusual sounds, actions, behavior of others, and changes in schedule of activities
- ▶ Social rules regarding the appropriate touching of others
- ▶ What to do during breaks
- ▶ What to talk about and what not to talk about at work (confidentiality)

REINFORCING SUCCESS – SUPPORTING THE NEW EMPLOYEE

Considering, searching, applying, and getting a job requires a tremendous amount of effort, but the process can lend itself to incredible skill-building and independence. As with all parts of the transition planning process, your young adult should take center stage as the main advocate, decision-maker, and planner, according to their needs, skills, and desires. They can and should take great pride, as will you, in each step along the way to becoming an employee!

RESOURCES

- ▶ Disability: IN (neurodiversity initiatives): <https://www.disabilityin.org/what-we-do/committees/autism-at-work-roundtable/>
- ▶ Grandin, T., & Duffy, K. (2008). *Developing talents: Careers for individuals with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism*. Autism Asperger Publishing Co.
- ▶ Hire Autism: <https://www.hireautism.org/>
- ▶ Job Accommodation Network: <https://www.askjan.org/>
- ▶ National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>

- ▶ OCALI. (n.d.). *The employee with autism spectrum disorder*. https://www.ocali.org/project/employee_with_asd
- ▶ Office of Disability Employment Policy: <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/odep>
- ▶ Virginia Commonwealth University. (n.d.). *Workplace readiness toolkit*. <https://www.centeron-transition.org/transition/employment/workplacereadinessskills.html>

KEY POINTS – CHAPTER 4



Employment skills can start being developed as early as middle school, and can be built into the transition planning process.



Your autistic young adult should lead the way in searching for and finding employment.



Many job search options and resources are available to support an autistic individual in finding a job.



A wide range of employment options, settings, and formats are suitable for autistic individuals.



Workplace-specific social skills can be practiced, and employers can also be educated about creating and maintaining workplace environments that contribute to an autistic individual's success.

Chapter 4: Handouts/Activities ▷



JOB IDEAS FOR AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS WHO NEED MORE SUPPORT

Reshelving library books – Memorizing numbering system and shelf locations

Factory assembly work – Especially if the environment is quiet

Copy shop – Running photocopiers; printing jobs could be lined up by somebody else

Janitor jobs – Cleaning floors, toilets, windows, and offices

Restocking shelves – Available in many types of stores

Recycling plant – Sorting jobs

Warehouse – Loading trucks, stacking boxes

Lawn and garden work – Mowing lawns and landscaping work

Data entry – Office work or research assistance

Fast-food restaurant – Cleaning and cooking jobs with lower demands on short-term memory

Plant care – Watering plants in a large office building

JOB IDEAS FOR AUTISTIC INDIVIDUALS WHO REQUIRE LESS SUPPORT

Autistic individuals tend to be specialized in how they think. There are three common types of thinking styles: (a) visual thinking or thinking in pictures; (b) music and higher math; and (c) nonvisual, verbal thinkers.

Jobs That Match the Talents of Visual Thinkers

Architectural and engineering drafter	Theater lighting director
Auto mechanic	Jewelry maker and other crafts
Photographer	Industrial automation programmer
Machine maintenance technician	Web designer
Animal trainer	Landscape designer
Computer troubleshooter	Veterinary technician
Graphic artist	Biology teacher



HANDOUT 4-1: Job Possibilities

Jobs That Match the Talents of Nonvisual Thinkers and Verbal Thinkers

Journalist	Stocks and bonds analyst
Budget analyst	Book indexer
Translator	Copyeditor
Bookkeeper and record keeper	Speech therapist
Librarian	Accountant
Special education teacher	Inventory control specialist

Jobs That Match the Talents of Music and Math Thinkers

Computer programmer	Electronics technician
Math teacher	Musician/composer
Engineer	Music teacher
Chemist	Statistician
Physicist	Scientific researcher

Adapted from Grandin, T., & Duffy, K. (2008). Developing talents: Careers for individuals with Asperger Syndrome and high-functioning autism. Autism Asperger Publishing Co.



WHEN TO DISCLOSE

On-the-Job Application/Cover Letter

Pros	Cons	Other Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Allows applicant to relax about employer possibly finding out. ▪ Enables the employer to decide if autism is a concern. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ May exclude your child before having a chance to present themselves and demonstrate strengths and capabilities. ▪ No way of knowing if hiring was based on diagnosis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Immediate disclosure may make finding a job more difficult; however, when your child does find employment, they are less likely to have autism-related problems on the job.

At the Interview

Pros	Cons	Other Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offers the opportunity to answer any questions about autism and its impact on the job. ▪ Allows applicant to request accommodations for the interview. ▪ Discrimination is less likely in person. Can help the employer make sense of any observed autistic characteristics, potentially reducing fear, confusion, or misinterpretation of these characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Too much emphasis on diagnosis may distract from discussion of your child's strengths and abilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your child will need to be comfortable answering questions and leading a discussion about autism and how it affects them specifically.



HANDOUT 4-2: When (*and If!*) to Disclose

WHEN TO DISCLOSE

After Hired But Before Beginning Work

Pros	Cons	Other Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If the hiring decision is changed and you are sure your child's autism will not interfere with their ability to perform the job, legal action is warranted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employer and personnel department may distrust your child and feel they should have been told beforehand. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Will need to evaluate your child's autism to determine its impact on the specific job duties and then be able to explain specifically that it will not interfere with their performance.

After Beginning Work

Pros	Cons	Other Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your child will have the chance to prove themselves before disclosing. ▪ They will be able to discuss and educate their peers and supervisors about autism. ▪ Your child may be protected by law if disclosure affects employment status but ASD does not keep them from performing job safely. ▪ Can help the supervisor and coworkers make sense of any observed autistic characteristics, potentially reducing fear, confusion, or misinterpretation of these characteristics. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Your child may be anxious at work. ▪ Employer may be upset that they were not told sooner. ▪ Could lead to disability-related stereotypes, discrimination, or bullying from supervisors or coworkers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It may be harder for your child to disclose the longer they wait. ▪ Your child needs to decide to whom to disclose their diagnosis (e.g., no one, supervisors only, supervisors and close coworkers, or everyone).



WHEN TO DISCLOSE

After a Problem

Pros	Cons	Other Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your child will have the chance to prove themselves before disclosing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employer may be upset that they were not told sooner. Could perpetuate myths and misunderstandings about autism. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be difficult to re-establish trust with coworkers.

Never

Pros	Cons	Other Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your child's employer cannot provide accommodations or respond to difficulties due to autism unless they are aware of the diagnosis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Risk of being fired for reasons that employer may have been more understanding about if they were aware. Could lead to myths and misunderstandings about autism. Coworkers may have been more understanding if they were aware of your child's diagnosis. It may be emotionally stressful for your child to "mask" part of their identity at work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As you and your child become more confident that performance will not be hindered by having an autism, the issue of disclosure becomes less important.



HANDOUT 4-3: Reasonable and Common Job Accommodations

ADA guarantees that your young adult may request certain accommodations in the workplace. Other accommodations may be needed, depending on their needs and where they are working.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How do the employee's symptoms impact their performance on specific tasks?
- What reasonable accommodations can be provided to address them?
- Do the supervisors and coworkers require training?

ACCOMMODATIONS TO CONSIDER:

Presentation		Timing and Scheduling	
Daily checklists for completing and prioritizing tasks Written or verbal reminders Written or picture instructions next to machines, such as postage machine, copier, printer Pictures or drawings of the assigned task Templates of forms or documents Performance feedback presented visually (charts, diagrams) Task flow chart		Consistent schedule Advanced notice of schedule or activity changes Timers and watches Wall calendars and planners Large tasks broken down into small steps Timer or alarm as a reminder Timelines for completion of task Assignment of one task at a time Multiple breaks	
Training	Response	Setting	
Mentor or job coach Training on appropriate workplace behaviors (e.g., interacting with customers) Consistent supervision by one person Regular and immediate feedback on performance (positive and constructive)	Provision of qualified readers or interpreters Voice recorder Written instructions Headset for telephone or a speaker phone Acquisition of new or modification of existing equipment	Minimal clutter in the work environment Minimal noise in the work environment (e.g., no radios or music) or permission to use noise-canceling earplugs Information for coworkers about autism Designated desk or workspace Alternative lighting for photosensitivity Desk organizers Fidget devices	