Employment

Transition to Adulthood

SECOND EDITION

GUIDELINES FOR INDIVIDUALS WITH
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

What Is Transition to Adulthood?

"Transition to adulthood" is a complex and ongoing process that starts as soon as a child is born and continues as the child becomes an adolescent, to early adult life and then through the stages of adulthood. While this process is complicated at best for any person, the individual with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) faces unique challenges that require specialized considerations. This set of guides will help the user understand these challenges and raise awareness of these important considerations

A critical time for transition planning is in the early years of middle school through the first few years following graduation from high school. This time period is the focal point of the *Transition to Adulthood* guides and will assist the individual with ASD and his or her team in reviewing the issues of adulthood related to employment, postsecondary education and adult living during these years. Implications for the individual with ASD to consider are highlighted throughout. Identification of resources and many active links to important information are provided. Use this set of guides as a reference and resource and to help frame a way to think about the issues related to adulthood.

Introduction to Employment

In this volume, *Employment*, the user will focus on the post school outcome of employment. The guide begins with a focus on planning and preparing the individual with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) for employment during the transition years. As the user moves through the volume, the focus comes to include information and considerations for those seeking employment or for those currently employed. Implications for the individual with ASD are highlighted as well as resources for improving career development and employment support. The goal of this volume is to help the user understand the issues surrounding successful employment for the individual with ASD and to highlight the supports and resources that lead to and assist in maintaining meaningful employment.

Introduction

Implications and Strategies

Next Steps

Summary

Preparing for and Achieving Meaningful Employment

Currently, the employment outcomes for adults with ASD are not encouraging. Some studies suggest that as few as 6% of individuals with ASD have full-time employment.

(Barnard et al., 2001).

**Employment Rate
of Youth with ASD**

32.5%

**Of the 32.5%
with employment**

42%	37%	21%
worked < 20 hrs /wk	worked 20-34 hrs /wk	worked > 34 hrs /wk

(National Longitudinal Transition Study 2009)

Barnard, J., Harvey, V., Potter, D., & Prior, A. (2001). *Ignored or ineligible?: The reality for adults with autism spectrum disorders.* London: The National Autistic Society

Current Statistics

Limited Full-Time Employment

A 2002 study of 405 adolescents and adults with ASD indicated that:

• Those in supportive employment worked an average of 15 hours per week

• Those in competitive employment spent roughly 27 hours per week at their jobs

• Those in sheltered workshops worked an average of 24 hours per week

(National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research, cited in Seltzer & Krauss, 2002)

Less Likely to Work Than Most Groups

Although current data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, a 10-year study of youth who received special education services, suggest trends may be somewhat improving, they also indicate that young adults with ASD are less likely to work than most other disability groups. In 2009 when participants were age 23-26 the following information was reported:

• 32.5% of young adults with ASD currently worked for pay versus an average of 59.0% for all respondents at the time of the interview.

• 47.7% of youth with ASD worked for pay in the past two years versus an average of 78.4% for all participants.

• 29.0% of young adults with ASD were looking for work if they were unemployed compared to 47.7% for all participants.

(www.nlts2.org)

Introduction

Transition Planning and Preparation for Employment

Current employment outcomes are poor for many individuals with disabilities. However, those with ASD have some of the most disappointing results. In order to change these trends, meaningful transition planning and employment preparation that is directly aligned with employment goals is essential for transition-age youth. This requires individualizing supports and services to allow the student with ASD to experience and engage in meaningful work experiences and opportunities.

Transition Assessment: Identify Employment Goals

Begin preparation for employment with meaningful Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment (AATA). AATA includes identification of the student's interest/ability which can be used to identify areas of meaningful employment. This may require having students experience many types of employment or career options in order to determine a preference or skill. In other words, "How will someone know if they like or are good at something unless they have experienced it?" Once an employment goal is determined, services needed to achieve the specific employment goal can then be included in the IEP Transition Plan. (See Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment.)

Customized Work Situations

Individuals with ASD may find the visual or auditory environment of a potential employment situation to be distracting, stressful or even painful. Adaptations to the environment, such as headphones or dividers, can allow an individual to enter the employment setting.

Proactive strategies, thoughtful preparation and providing necessary supports can minimize or accommodate sensory, social, communication or cognitive challenges and allow students to gain necessary experience and skills. The next section reviews specific strategies to consider when preparing the environment and the individual for the employment setting.

Community Involvement Improves Outcomes

Family Participation

Teaching students functional life skills is a high-evidence secondary transition practice (Test, 2007) that can positively affect employment success. This holds true for all individuals on the autism spectrum, including those with high communication and cognitive skills.

Parents can support the development of employability skills by teaching life skills. For example:

- Assign household chores
- Incorporate following directions in family routines
- Use visual supports to support independence
- Provide incentives for work completion
- Reinforce attempts at grooming and hygiene
- Teach shopping and making change or use of debit/credit cards
- Explain the difference in interactions between employer to employee, friend to friend, coworker to coworker

These activities should begin at a young age and continue into the adult years.

Work Experience Is Vital

Often individuals with ASD are provided limited opportunities for career development and work experience while in high school because of sensory, social or communication challenges associated with ASD. School personnel and/or parents may avoid community work experiences out of fear that the student cannot handle a work situation. The Ohio Longitudinal Transition Study (OLTS) has identified authentic work experience while in high school as one of the strongest predictors of successful post-school employment. Therefore, supports must be provided so the student can participate in the following types of meaningful work activities:

- Work experience opportunities in authentic, community-based environments
- Extended and intensive opportunities vs. brief, sporadic experiences
- Community volunteer opportunities
- Summer employment
- Unpaid or paid internships and mentorships
- In-school work experiences that can be easily connected to other environments
- Job shadowing to learn more about careers and employment options

Sensory

Individuals with an ASD often have sensitivities to the environment that can cause great stress. The resulting responses and reactions can be difficult for others to understand. Sensitivities may intensify in situations such as:

- Transitions to new environments or people
- Changes in schedules or routines
- Unexpected work deadlines
- Illness, sleep disturbances or difficulties outside of the workplace

Considerations

Environment Assessment

Assess the workplace environment or a potential workplace environment. What types of sensory input might hinder the work performance of the individual with ASD?

- Noise or specific sounds?
- Bright or dim lighting?
- Smells/odors?
- Visual clutter?
- Lack of personal space?

Potential for Adaptation

In addition to coping strategies, consider a variety of adaptations that can be made to the sensory environment of the workplace. This may include addressing the workplace sounds, odors, visual overload, personal space and opportunity for movement. The individual with ASD may not have enough coping ability for all the sensory stressors, so the modification or removal of some may be necessary.

Supports to Cope

After assessing the work environment or potential work environment, determine what types of strategies might be useful to help the individual cope with the sensory demands of the setting.

Strategies

Use Proven Strategies

Often effective strategies and environmental adaptations to address sensory issues are documented in the IEP. Consider how these proven strategies and interventions can be adapted and used in the work setting.

Establish Predictable Work Routines

Sensory processing challenges and sensitivities often intensify during unfamiliar routines and with unfamiliar people. Prepare! Use visual supports such as pictures, videos, social scripts, and clear descriptions of the work routines, especially when changes are to occur.

Modify the work environment/schedule

Before assuming that sensory challenges are a barrier to a specific employment setting, attempt to make modifications in the work setting. Environmental modifications and supports made during work experiences can be part of Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment as the information gained can help to identify employment that is the "Right Fit".

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Schedule Modifications

- Starting and ending times adjusted to avoid crowding
- Working shorter hours
- Working a shift with fewer people or activity
- Extra breaks in low stimulation areas

Location Selection

- Corner or end desk/work area rather than middle of group
- Room dividers to provide personal space (use office dividers, file cabinets, room screens, curtains, bookshelves, etc.)

Adaptions to Sights, Sounds and Smells

- Use ear buds/headphones to reduce sounds or to provide calming music
- Locate away from (if sensitive) or close to (if preferred) specific odors such as air fresheners, perfumes, food, cleaning fluids, inks, etc.
- Use preferred type of lighting: natural, indirect or overhead

Physical Activity

- Allow pacing, walking, stretching. Make this part of the job, if possible, such as delivering mail, returning items to shelves, greeting coworkers, etc.
- Explore the possibilities of "heavy work," as lifting, pushing and stretching can be a calming routine

Communication and Socialization

Social competency can be one of the most difficult skills for individuals with ASD, and yet, it is one that is most valued by employers! Individuals with ASD often struggle to understand and respond to the expected and sometimes subtle social aspects of work situations. In fact, social mistakes are reported as the reason why many individuals with ASD lose their job. Their performance of the job tasks may be exceptional, yet employers may terminate employment in some situations due to a lack of social competence. This is often referred to as the "hidden curriculum." Without intervention and support, issues that may arise include:

- Difficulty learning the rules of the workplace
- Difficulty developing a comfort level with new supervisors and coworkers
- Not knowing whom to go to with questions or for help
- Unintended comments or actions that are considered inappropriate, rude or even harassment

Needed competencies may range from the very basic social skills expected of a young adult to the complex aspects of reading body language and interpreting another's perspective or point of view. This includes understanding the workplace culture, nonverbal body language and coworkers' feelings.

Considerations

Need for Social Competency

How will the individual's current social competency impact success on the job?

Social Instruction

What types of social instruction, social supports and social cueing does the individual require to successfully complete the job, as well as engage in social interactions with coworkers and supervisors?

Following Directions

Is the individual able to follow the directions and instructions typical to the workplace environment?

Alternate Directions

Does the individual need directions in alternate or multiple formats – verbal, visual or demonstrations?

Strategies

Use Reliable Strategies

Review available transition assessment information for effective social and communication supports. Do not assume that the individual has "grown out of" the need for these interventions.

Remember That Visual is Key

Use visual supports in conjunction with the more frequently used verbal and demonstration strategies to reinforce new tasks and skills, including social skills. Consider the need for strategies and interventions for:

- The interview or trial work experience
- Transportation to and from the job
- Preparation for the job
- Initial days/weeks of the job
- Changes that may occur
- The ongoing supports that will remain in place

Encourage Natural Supports

Help coworkers understand, recognize and value the employee with ASD. Model for the coworkers how to successful interact with the individual. This can help stimulate the development of natural supports.

Provide Technology for Communication

For users of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) device users must have the worksite vocabulary programmed into the device. Having a back-up of low-tech alternatives in case of a device failure is essential.

Begin with Intensity

In new situations, supports will likely need to be intensified initially and then modified, as the situation becomes more familiar and predictable.

Use a Full Spectrum of Visual Supports

Visual strategies and supports to consider include:

- Concrete and visual descriptions of job duties, break times and workplace expectations
- Daily schedules and routines using words, pictures, symbols and/or objects
- Consistent structured physical environment
- Visual reminders of workplace rules and social norms in terms of "what to do"
- Visual cues used by support person to remind when too close, too loud, need to respond, etc.
- Videos of the individual or others performing job or desired social skills
- Email as an adjustment to other communication

Use Reinforcement

To motivate and teach skills, reinforce the individual as he performs new job or social skills. Reinforcement can range from earning a tangible reward to verbal or gestural praise as long as it is valued by the individual and specific to him.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Executive Function and Organization

Individuals with ASD may have difficulty with organization, attention and mental planning. This is referred to as difficulty with "executive functions" and can impact the ability to learn and to perform a job or task, even when skilled at the task. Difficulties with "executive function" can cause the person to want to do a job differently than it is presented by the supervisor or job coach. Indication of executive function challenges may appear as:

- Being overwhelmed by a relatively "simple" task

- Difficulty getting started or knowing what to do when finished

- Being easily distracted, with difficulty re-engaging with the task or activity

- Viewing a simple problem-solving situation as insurmountable

- Having a messy or disorganized work area, even if the individual desires routine and predictability

Environmental organization and strategies may need to be permanently in place in the workplace, even when the person has been doing the job for years. The goal is not to "fade" environmental supports. The goal is to embed them into the work routines. Potential environmental supports should be explored with the employer to determine how to improve the "job fit."

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Considerations

Prioritize Environmental Supports

Explore the environmental supports such as visual reminders and workspace organization BEFORE asking coworkers, supervisors and job coaches to serve as "personal reminders."

Assessment

How much planning and organization is required for the job? Will the individual require tools and supports to accomplish the necessary workplace organization?

Strategies

Develop Lists

Develop lists of the items that the individual needs for work. The list, whether in pictures or words, is used as an organizational checklist.

Enhance Environmental Structure

Organizational supports should assist the person in understanding:

- What work is to be completed
- Where it is to be completed
- How much is to be completed
- Where to begin and end
- The time allotted for completing the work
- What to do when the work is finished

Use Maps

Maps of the work area labeled with bathrooms, lunch areas, offices, etc., can be helpful

Provide Apps

There is an App for almost every type of visual support. Calendars, routines, schedules, timers, choices, reminders and more. Many include both pictures and words and are easily customized with personal pictures. Some offer voice output as well. Visit the OCALI website in the document archive to review "Apps for Transition."

Utilize Routines

Create predictability and structure so that the individual is able to limit time in routine/repetitive behavior. Incorporate routines and rituals into the work plan or job requirements. Identify employment and careers that view the routine or ritualistic behaviors as a strength.

Establish Visual Routines

Make available visual routines/checklists (words or pictures) of frequent routines encountered at work. They may be used extensively on some days and not at all on others. Routines to consider include:

- Arrival and departure routines
- Break or lunch activities
- Job routines (a person may have several jobs that can be reflected in a step-by-step visual routine)
- Template/diagram for organization of work area (e.g., photograph of desk organization)
- Templates or "jigs" that assist a person in completing a task by offering a visual "roadmap" throughout the task (some templates provide an example of each step of the task)

Use Timers

Timers come in multiple types. Some are only visual. Some have an auditory cue. Use what works best for the individual.

Use Calendars and Timelines

Post and review calendars or timelines of deadlines, important tasks, holidays and other aspects of the work or the schedule. Break down a long-term task/assignment into planned steps over the course of several days/ weeks/months with a timeline

Use Quick Fixes

Use sticky note reminders when needing a "quick visual support."

Repetitive Behaviors and Routines

Individuals with ASD may demonstrate ritualistic or repetitive behaviors, ranging from physical routines, to verbal repetition, to topical restrictions. In some situations, these behaviors or interests might interfere with the workplace plan. In other situations, they can become an asset.

Repetitive behaviors may be more obvious when adjusting to new settings as the rigid behavior may intensify. Requirements of the new job may not easily align with the individual's established routines. Patience and support can lead to adjustments that work for everyone.

Considerations

The Right Fit

Some individuals develop routines that revolve around a special interest. While these topical interests may interfere with some situations, in the right environment they may be an asset. Finding the job or career that aligns with the individual's special interests or daily routines is making the right match or the "right fit".

Routines on the Job

Routine-oriented behavior can be a strength when the routines can be aligned with the workplace or job schedules and tasks. Supporting the individual and allowing time to modify routines to fit a new job can lead to successful employment.

Strategies

Avoid Creating an Issue

Some routines or ritualistic behavior do not interfere with the productively and accuracy of the work. For example, hand-flapping briefly and periodically during the day may not bother or interfere for an individual who is unloading trucks, sorting mail or repairing computers. Needing to watch the same TV show on the lunch break may not be an issue for coworkers when there are several TVs in the lunchroom or break area. Singing or humming while working may not be an issue in situations such as stocking, landscaping, delivery services or in environments where coworkers use headphones.

Create Alternatives to Rituals

Sometimes, providing an alternative to the ritualistic behavior may decrease stress and ultimately reduce the behavior if it is interfering with the individual's ability to engage in, continue or complete an activity or a task. For example, if the individual with ASD typically engages in an extensive routine of pacing and walking around the room before beginning the job, provide a visual schedule that begins with a functional movement task and then transitions into to the typical work routine. Supports such as the visual support, the directed movement and the predictability of the schedule can help move the person through the ritualistic behavior.

Use Special Interests

Incorporating an individual's special interests into some aspect of the job is a very individualized process. For example, John has a special interest in trains. He works at the main train station of a large city answering questions about train schedules and connections. This job capitalizes on his attention to detail and indirectly supports his intense interest. Socially he can handle the brief encounters that all follow a certain "script" and the short interaction time prevents him from becoming too detailed.

Provide Preparation and Structure

Providing a clear expectation of the job can lower stress and potentially decrease the individual's need to engage in other routines or rituals. Use of visual supports and other environmental supports may be helpful (see "Executive Function and Organization").

Difficulty with Change

Adjusting to change is often difficult. Many people with ASD avoid or resist change because of the anxiety associated with the unknown. Adjusting to changes in routines, people, jobs, materials, etc. may take more time and preparation for the individual with ASD than for other employees.

Considerations

Change

Unexpected occurrences can impact the individual's ability to work or to work at the usual rate and efficiency. Be aware of daily or life changes that may impact work such as:

- Disruptions in daily transportation
- Change in where one shops
- Change in TV viewing schedule
- Change in someone's appearance (example: hair color)
- Changes in living situation
- Change of season and time
- Crisis within the family
- Family or roommates moving in or out
- Births, deaths or other changes in the family and friend network

"Good Stress"

At times the disruption that triggers a problem may be something that most others consider pleasing, which can be confusing to coworkers and employers. For example:

- Vacations or holidays
- An unexpected "snow day"
- New furniture
- A new work area
- Help to lighten the work load
- A new pet
- Remodeling or painting

Melody, an 18-year-old high school student, participated in a community work experience in a consignment shop that required her to do as many as 16 job tasks. She was very intrigued with the many items that came in for sale and developed a strong working relationship with the five other employees of the shop.

However, because of the work load and nature of the business, Melody was sometimes asked to change the daily plans and tasks, sometimes unexpectedly. This caused her to became anxious, somewhat upset and to have difficulty completing tasks.

The team decided to use several strategies to help Melody to continue her work experience with the possibility of future employment.

1. VISUAL SUPPORTS. A visual schedule was provided with moveable words and icons. Melody was presented with the schedule when she arrived; however, if the day changed, the schedule items were adjusted and reviewed with Melody. Eventually, she began to make the schedule adjustments herself when she was informed of the change in schedule.

2. TECHNOLOGY. Visual routines of the 16 jobs were developed and placed on an iPad. When Melody had difficulty remembering the steps to a routine she could refer to the iPad visual routines. These were especially helpful when the schedule changed and she was becoming anxious.

3. CREATING SUCCESS. Task demands were also reviewed. When a change was necessary, the supervisor attempted to assign several of the favorite and less demanding tasks to Melody to help her successfully make the adjustment.

4. SENSORY SUPPORTS. Job routines that required Melody to work in a noisy setting tended to be the most stressful. When the schedule was changed, Melody was always given several jobs that could be accomplished in a quiet location in order to reduce her sensory stressors as she made the adjustments.

5. TEAM COMMUNICATION. Melody's supervisor, coworkers, school job coach, mother and teacher developed a team approach to support her. This team communicated regularly to create a plan to support her through the changes that occurred during the work experience. Ideas were shared, and as a team they were successful in helping Melody accept the changing nature of the employment.

As a result of this plan and the targeted supports, Melody began to understand that change could be managed and that predictability can be reinstated using the identified supports. Melody showed interest and ability to work in this setting. Ultimately, this work experience led to part-time paid employment in the consignment shop.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Strategies

Use Structure and Predictability

Change may mean that what is familiar is either different or gone. One way to re-establish predictability is to implement or expand visual supports and routines. These supports add security, predictability and structure.

Reduce Demands

When the schedule, staff, routines or environment changes, request the supervisor to temporarily reduce demands. As the individual regains control and stability and supports are established for the new situation, demands may be reintroduced.

Reduce Sensory Stressors

Sensory challenges and the resulting anxiety and stress can escalate when routines or environments change. Review the sensory supports and sensory environment to make sure the supports are sufficient and that the environment is not overwhelming.

Remember That It Takes a Team

When situations change and challenges surface, an individual can become stressed and sometimes unsuccessful. In these situations, even a talented job coach may require team support. Before a situation escalates, invite and include team members who are able to share information, suggest supports and proactively support the individual through a potentially difficult situation.

Next Steps

Agencies and Collaboration

Collaboration with agencies and supports for the adult environment is critical. In order to achieve successful and meaningful employment, school transition team members, community transition services and adult agencies must come together before the student exits high school. Connections to agencies should be made while the student is still in high school and early enough so that the agencies can develop meaningful relationships and connections with the youth and his/her family.

Collaboration Is Vital

Identify the Agencies

Agencies such as the Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD), Rehabilitation Services Commission/Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (RSC/BVR), mental health agencies, autism advocacy groups and provider agencies (such as Easter Seals or Goodwill) may provide information, funding or vocational services.

IEP Participants

Potential community and agency partners should be invited to participate in IEP transition planning at least two years prior to the student graduating high school.

Supportive Funds

Most agencies and programs that provide employment services utilize funding from Medicaid, Social Security Administration and agency-generated dollars. Families, schools and adult providers should become familiar with the variety of funding sources in order to understand how to qualify and access funds in a timely manner in order to provide the highest level of support possible for the individual.

Family Contribution

Although the individual with ASD may be able to access a number of funding sources to support employment, the individual and/or family may be asked to contribute financially to the service plan based on their resources.

"The Big Two"

	Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (ORSC)/Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)	Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD)
What Does the Agency Do?	**ORSC Employment Agency.** Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (ORSC) is the state agency that provides vocational rehabilitation (VR) services to help people with disabilities become employed and independent. **Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)**. BVR is the arm of ORSC that assists people who have physical, mental and emotional disabilities by providing vocational rehabilitation and other services. **Services.** BVR can provide a variety of employment supports, including vocational assessment, job development, job coaching, equipment and other supports and services needed to obtain or maintain employment.	**Lifespan Supports Include Employment.** DODD is the state agency that supports many individuals with ASD throughout their lifespan. This can include employment supports. **Spectrum of Service Delivery.** Services include, but are not limited to, community competitive employment, customized employment, supported employment, mobile work crews, enclaves, entrepreneurships and sheltered employment. However, individuals may need to explain clearly their option of choice rather than accepting an available opening in a service model. **Providers of Service.** DODD may be the lead agency and the provider for employment services for an individual. In some cases, however the service providers (e.g., job development, job coaching, transportation to work) are a separate agency or individual who works jointly with DODD.

Next Steps

Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (ORSC)/Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)

Three Requirements Areas. Specific eligibility criteria must be met before accessing RSC services. Transition teams should facilitate eligibility by providing evidence/documentation of the following requirements:

- A significant disability
- The disability creates a substantial barrier to employment
- A need for RSC/BVR services to obtain or maintain employment

Priorities. In addition, BVR uses an "Order of Selection," which prioritizes individuals with the "Most Significant Disabilities." This means that one can meet all the eligibility requirements but still not be considered a priority and, therefore, may be put on a waiting list.

Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD)

Eligibility Requirements. Eligibility for DODD services requires evidence of a substantial limitation in three out of seven functional areas: mobility, receptive and expressive language, self-care, self-direction, capacity for independent living, learning and economic self-sufficiency (adults only).

Assessment Tools. DODD establishes eligibility by utilizing assessment tools that identify "substantial functional limitations" (such as those listed above) . These tools are the OEDI and COEDI (read about these tools here and here.)

Focus of Eligibility. Many individuals with ASD are eligible for services from DODD due solely to difficulties with daily living skills, socialization and problem solving. Some also present with co-occurring cognitive challenges.

Adult Re-eligibility. Note: A child who has been determined eligible using the COEDI must be re-determined as eligible using the OEDI at age 16.

Who Is Eligible?

Youth Programs. Transition-age youth are an important focus for RSC services. Specialized programs for transition youth have been supported by RSC, including "Bridges to Transition."

ORSC Transition Guide. Refer to the RSC website and the document "A Guide to Transition Services: Helping Students with Disabilities Move from School to Work."

Youth Programs. DODD also participates in the "Bridges to Transition" initiative that supports the preparation of eligible youth for the workforce.

DODD/OCALI Customized Employment (CE) Initiative. One example of a youth-focused employment initiative is the DODD CE Project implemented by OCALI. Read and view videos about CE and the project at this website.

Transition Youth

	Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission (ORSC)/Bureau of Vocational Rehabilitation (BVR)	Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD)
Implications for Classic Autism	**Needs Hide Strengths.** The BVR counselor may not find some individuals with ASD eligible for BVR services because they are viewed as requiring more assistance than is available through BVR to obtain and maintain employment. To assist the counselor in determining eligibility, it is essential that documentation highlight skills, talents and potential for employment, as well as the environments in which the person will be successful.	**Needs Hide Strengths.** The individual with classic ASD may be directed to sheltered environments such as workshops. Due to the overwhelming nature of these environments and limited individualization, many individuals with ASD are unable to function in these settings and may be inappropriately viewed as unable to work instead of needing a different employment setting. Assessment for employment must focus on strengths and talents and the "right fit" for the job.
Implications for High-Functioning ASD or Asperger Syndrome	**Strengths Hide Needs.** The high-functioning individual with ASD may appear on the surface to be capable of independently locating, obtaining and maintaining employment. Interviews may not result in obvious concerns, and the BVR counselor may not easily identify the need for employment assistance. The transition team should provide BVR with documented information as to how the characteristics of ASD can prevent employment without appropriate intervention and support. (see *Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment* booklet).	**Strengths Hide Needs.** The person with ASD who appears independent in daily routines may not be seen as having enough functional needs to qualify for DODD services. It is imperative that the transition team provide documentation to DODD and explain how the challenges with social competency, communication and problem-solving skills impact the potential of employability for the individual that is high functioning.
How to Apply and More Information	**Apply Locally and Early.** Students and adults with ASD should apply for BVR services from a local BVR office. Referrals can be made as early as age 14. More information at the Ohio RSC website.	**Request Services Early in Transition Years!** Individuals should contact the local DD intake department or their service and support administrator early in the transition years (recommend no later than age 16) to request supports for future employment or to become eligible for adult services. Click here to find your local County Board of DD. Click here to read about DODD services.

Selecting Adult Employment: "The Right Fit"

As graduation time draws near, it is time to identify an employment situation that will have the best chance of success based on the information gained from employment preparation and activities.

When assessing employment options and opportunities for a youth with ASD, it is critical to assess the social environment and expectations, the predictability and structure of the workplace and the sensory demands that may be present. Compare this information about the potential employment to what has been discovered about the youth's strengths, interests and needs through the transition years. When the characteristics of the potential job and the strengths and needs of the youth match, this is the "right fit" for employment.

Internet Modules to Guide Employment Preparation and Success

The Autism Internet Modules (AIM) offer free web-based modules that provide specific information about employment of individual with ASD.

Preparing Individuals for Employment: This module explains strategies to support persons with autism in the transition process from school to employment.

The Employee with Autism: This module provides a basic introduction to autism for vocational rehabilitation staff and others providing disability employment services. It covers the basic features of autism in adults that are relevant to the workplace and to the provision of employment services.

Walgreens made a significant effort to create supports and accommodations in their distribution centers. In one of the centers, 40% of the workforce were individuals with disabilities. This center became one of the most productive distribution centers in the Walgreens company.

MOVIE: CUSTOMIZED EMPLOYMENT AND JOB DEVELOPMENT

Customized Employment Approach to Job Development

Funded by CMS Medicaid Infrastructure Grant 1QACMS030330 CFDA 93.768

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Use the Customized Employment Approach

Individuals with ASD require individualization in employment options and supports. Customized employment (CE) is based on utilizing the individual's strengths and preferences while selecting employment that can provide the conditions under which the person most successfully performs. Employer needs are equally important in this process. The negotiated job by the employee and his representative must meet an important need for the employer and his business. Learn more about customized employment at through the OCALI CE guide.

Documentation of Need

Mitchell, a young man with Asperger Syndrome, assumed he could receive BVR services because he was entitled to an IEP in school. However, with only the IEP available and given no history or documentation of previous difficulties, the BVR counselor had difficulty identifying if Mitchell would require and benefit from BVR services. Fortunately, Mitchell's teacher was able to provide evidence of his inability to work in large groups (although he has the ability to address the job requirements). Mitchell also provided documentation of his anxiety disorder. Although the school team clearly described Mitchell's many strengths and employment potential, the documentation of the social and emotional challenges that he faces related to Asperger Syndrome helped the BVR counselor to understand why he would require assistance obtaining and/or maintaining meaningful employment.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Funding for Ongoing Employment Supports

Ongoing employment supports for individuals with ASD can be obtained from a variety of sources, if eligible. One agency that frequently offers long-term support is the Ohio Department of Developmental Disabilities (DODD). The source of the funding that supports these services is most often Medicaid Waivers or local county dollars.

Medicaid Waivers. DODD administers several waivers for the Ohio Department of Jobs and Family Services (ODJFS) and helps determine eligibility. Each County Board of DD coordinates the federal Medicaid Waiver program for residents in their county. Local county dollars are combined or "matched" with federal Medicaid dollars to create the waiver funding.

Local Dollars. County Boards of DD also provide a limited amount of employment services funded through local county dollars not associated with a Medicaid Waiver. The amount of service available varies from county to county based on funds raised at the local level.

Be Aware of Limits! Medicaid Waiver funds are limited. Counties often have long waiting lists. Apply early for the Medicaid Waiver and services

There are currently three DODD Waivers:

Level One

Individual Options (IO)

Self-Empowered Life Funding (SELF) begins July 1, 2012.

Although the level of support (amount of funding) differs, all waivers offer services that could potentially support an individual to access or maintain employment.

Agency Providers

Artie receives specialized transportation to and from work. He also receives the services of a job coach who assists him several hours a day, several days a week. Both of these services are provided through a local agency that is an approved Medicaid Waiver provider. The agency bills Artie's Individual Options Medicaid Waiver for these services.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Additional Resources for Employment Supports

Private Agency. Occasionally, a group or organization offers services funded by their agency dollars; however, many organizations utilize the same funding streams that DODD and BVR access in order to finance services (i.e., Medicaid)

Grants. Some organizations obtain grant funding to implement a program or support. These are often time limited and focus on a specific group of people (i.e., autism or transition youth).

Natural Supports. Ideally, as the individual become familiar with the employer and coworkers, typical workplace supports can become part of the broad spectrum of employment supports that allow for success.

Individual. In some cases, the individual's income can be used to purchase or partially purchase employment supports (such as job coach, transportation or equipment). If the person is receiving Social Security benefits, these expenses can be used to assist the person in maintaining eligibility for benefits through Social Security that are otherwise lost due to income. These options are referred to as work incentives.

Activities/Interventions to Facilitate Successful Employment

Many activities or steps can be taken to prepare and support youth and young adults in employment. Many of these activities can appear on a transition plan. Some are ongoing through adulthood as one develops a career or transitions to a new job. The following are several ideas to help facilitate successful employment.

Incorporate ASD Awareness

Knowledge of the characteristics of ASD is essential to the identification of successful employment and the development of necessary supports. General ASD training should occur for all staff providing support for individuals with ASD.

Provide Tailored Career Development

Career development activities should be focused on locating the "right match" or "best fit" for the individual rather than picking a convenient or available option. Select the vocational experiences that are motivating and support adult goals.

Begin with Meaningful Assessment

Build employment options based on skills, abilities and interests highlighted in transition assessment. Students and families should be integral participants in this process to ensure the results are valid.

Include Employers

Provide the employer with ASD resources, information and strategies. Eventually, the employer may serve as the strongest advocate for the employment of individuals with disabilities.

Include a Focus on Life Skills

Teaching students functional life skills, self-determination, social and communications skills are evidence-based secondary transition practices and should be considered part of employment preparation.

Seek Out or Establish Job Clubs

Organized after work, job clubs function as a problem-solving peer group for employees with ASD. Such groups can offer ongoing peer and facilitator support for problem solving, communication and social issues on the job.

Prepare the Workplace

Successful employment begins with matching the potential job with the potential employee. Successful employment also requires proactive steps to prepare the physical and social environment. This requires knowledge of how the characteristics of ASD impact the specific individual and being able to communicate that information to the employer and coworker. Job fit and workplace preparation are two of the most important aspects of job development. Learn more about job development and ASD by watching this short interview with Dr. Peter Gerhardt.

MORE EXAMPLES ▶

Life Skills Matter!

Brianna, a young woman with Asperger Syndrome, demonstrated exceptional talent in the area of graphic design. However, it was only after she learned how to advocate for herself, how to dress in clean clothing, shampoo her hair and use the basic courtesies expected in an office setting that she received job offers.

Summary

Effective Employment Preparation Includes Authentic Experiences
Transition programs should include community work experiences in "real" settings with "real" jobs. Transition outcome studies (National Longitudinal Transition Study, 2009) indicate that students who participate in paid or unpaid work experiences in school have better employment outcomes.

Supports Are Necessary
Rates of employment are higher when individuals with ASD work in situations where needed supports are provided (89% retention rate with TEACCH support services (Hinton, Mesibov, & Woods, 1997), 68% placement in Prospects-supported employment (Howlin, Alcock, & Burkin, 2005) and 75.3% successful RSA closure in supported employment (Schaller & Yang, 2005). "Individuals with autism can be successfully employed when the proper supports are identified, put into place, and evaluated periodically to ensure effectiveness." (Inge, n.d.)

Job Coach Role
The job coach plays a critical role by providing training in the mode suited to the worker (verbal, written, demonstration or a combination). The job coach must also help the person with ASD to interpret and understand the social rules of the workplace.

Use Visual Supports and Structure
Use of a structured predictable environment, supported by visual routines and reminders has been found to improve independence and success on the job for individuals with ASD. Visual supports vary from objects to checklists to pictures to iPads and iPods.

Inge, K. (n.d.) *Supporting individuals with autism in integrated community jobs: Identifying support needs to facilitate success.* Retrieved April 13, 2012 from: http://www.worksupport.com/research/printView.cfm/618

Life Skills and Social Competency Support Employment
Obtaining employment requires more than job task skills and knowledge. Employers want employees who can communicate and work with others as well as handle typical life situations that arise.

The Right Match!
Individuals with ASD can have difficulty finding work that matches their abilities or keeping a job that creates social, communication or sensory challenges. "Be sure to consider features of a work place, which either meet the needs of the individual's characteristics or can be adapted to support the person." (Inge, n.d.) Making the right job/career match can improve the chances that the individual will work more hours with improved efficiency.

Apply Early for Adult Service and Support
Moving from services that are an entitlement to services that are based on eligibility and availability requires a shift in thinking. School services are provided regardless of how many other students require them. However, in the adult system, an individual must meet specific eligibility guidelines and, even then, may be faced with issues of availability and waiting lists.

Eligibility Based on Functional Limitations
A diagnosis does not guarantee services. The individual's identified needs drive both eligibility and the level of service. To improve the likelihood of meeting eligibility criteria for VR and DD services, provide a clear picture of the "substantial functional limitations" presented by the individual and how they affect employment and adult living. For example, provide documentation from multiple sources to that explains how an individual with Asperger Syndrome can drive and understand complicated technical manuals and procedures but makes significant social workplace errors and is unable to prioritize work.

Consider Part-Time Employment
Many individuals with ASD work part-time. Daniel Tammet, in Born on a Blue Day (2007) revealed that in the United Kingdom, the National Autistic Society reports that only 12% of people with high-functioning autism or Asperger Syndrome had full-time jobs. Hours of employment can increase when the proper supports are provided. However, due to the strain of sensory, social and communication demands, a shortened work day or work week may need to be considered.

Tools & Resources

This list of helpful resources is included to assist the user in accessing additional information.

Adult Autism and Employment

This manual edited by Scott Standifer, Ph.D. from University of Missouri was written for vocational rehabilitation professionals and employment services providers. The guide contains detailed information about how the features of people with ASD and the needs of the workplace interact, with suggestions for how to address common challenges to those interactions.

Fact Sheet on Autism and Employment

This fact sheet was originally presented at the Autism Works national conference in 2012. This document provides concise information and data about autism spectrum disorder and employment.

JobTIPS

JobTIPS is a free program designed to help individuals with disabilities such as ASD explore career interests, seek and obtain employment and successfully maintain employment. This practical program provides printables, assessments, and videos and can be accessed directly by individuals with ASD or facilitated by teachers, family members, mentors and job coaches.

Life Journey Through Autism: A Guide for Transition to Adulthood

This free guide contains a chapter on vocation and employment. The appendices include state and federal agencies for transition assistance, job ideas and a list of reasonable and common job accommodations.

Video on Autism and Employment

This brief video clip from YouTube shows a young man with autism working in a supported job. His supervisor and school staff are interviewed.

Supporting Individuals with Autism in Integrated Community

Jobs: Identifying Support Needs to Facilitate Success

This article describes the characteristics of autism and strategies that may be used to promote successful employment outcomes.

The Undiscovered Workforce

The National Autistic Society offers this free manual, The Undiscovered Workforce, which was written by a successful supported employment program in the United Kingdom. It contains helpful information about accommodations and supervising individuals with ASD.

Employees with Asperger Syndrome

This booklet from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN) helps the employer understand Asperger Syndrome and provides information about effective accommodations and compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Examples, resources and references are included.

Picture Set

This is a collection of downloadable visual supports that can be used by students for both receptive and expressive communication in the classroom, at home and in the community.

Autism Internet Modules (AIM)

The Autism Internet Modules provide comprehensive, up-to-date and usable information on autism. Several modules focus specifically on employment and ASD. These free modules are written by a variety of experts from across the U.S.

OCALI Transition and CE Webcasts

OCALI offers free archived webcasts on a variety of topics related to preparing for and maintaining employment for individuals with ASD. Several webcasts focus specifically on customized employment.

Autism Society

The Autism Society web page offers information and resources to assist in supporting youth and adults in community employment.

VCU Autism Center of Excellence

Virginia Commonwealth University offers free PDF versions of articles specific to autism. At this link are articles related to adults and autism, including a focus on employment.