

Preparing For Employment: Why Does Employment Matter?

Have you imagined what job your son or daughter might do after school? Before you stop reading because graduation seems far away or overwhelming to imagine, let us give you a few things to consider.

Anyone who wants to work can work! There are nearly a dozen agencies in Kitsap County that help young adults with disabilities find jobs in the community. These employment agencies use a variety of creative solutions and accommodations to discover unique jobs for each person's specific skills and talents. Sometimes finding the right job takes time, but the more prepared a job seeker is when they graduate, the easier it is to find a great job match.

Work matters because it offers these things for young adults:

- Professional identity
- Contributing to a workforce and company's success
- Social connections
- Personal growth
- Power and choice that comes with a paycheck
- Reflection of the benefits of diversity in the community

Many families feel nervous about their son or daughter working independently in the community, so it's a great to start a few things now.

- Build work skills by having your child do chores at home.
- Talk about work when you are out in the community seeing other people work. Ask what interests them. Set the expectation that they will work!
- Talk with other families about their experiences with supported employment.
- Brainstorm with your student's IEP team about what needs to happen to prepare for work. The best results are achieved when we work as a team!

Over the next few months, you will receive tips for how to start planning now so that you can be ready when graduation comes. By thinking about it now, you'll be able to help your son or daughter be prepared for their first job.



Preparing for employment at home

You can start preparing your son or daughter now to find a job by building community connections, practicing soft skills, and gaining work experience. Each of these will expand your son or daughter's marketable job skills and widen the network of advocates.

- **Practice at home**
 - Do chores: have your son or daughter regularly complete chores at home. This will add transferrable job skills to his or her repertoire as well as set an expectation of regular work and positive work habits.
 - Have high expectations: the first step in success is expecting your son or daughter to succeed and teaching him or her to expect to succeed. Having high expectations in all areas of life allows room to rise to the challenge.
 - Increase independence in everyday tasks: this builds confidence to learn new things and try new tools or strategies that help with independence.
 - Build and keep a list of references.
 - Share professional information with your connections and network when calling on them to help support the job search. Focus on strengths!
- **Practice soft skills that are important for work:**
 - Communication: using the phone appropriately (calling at appropriate times of day, calling once and leaving a message, calling a friend vs. an acquaintance), appropriate conversations and questions (general "small talk," avoiding personal or sensitive topics)
 - Professional contact: personal space; handshakes vs. hugs
 - Difference between personal and professional relationships
 - Accountability
 - Following directions
 - Receiving feedback
 - Self-advocacy
 - Time management
 - Problem solving
- **Build community connections:** build a team of supporters who will advocate for your son or daughter during the job search. Talk with connections at faith-based organizations, places you volunteer, family friends, and places you frequent (grocery store, restaurants, medical offices). Most first jobs happen through a personal connection.

You can contribute to the success of this process by helping your son or daughter make all scheduled appointments and dress appropriately for the meeting, making work your first priority, and respecting the independence of your son or daughter at work. Talk with other parents about how they prepared!



Connecting to adult services

Once your son or daughter graduates, there are a handful of services available to help provide supports for employment and other areas. These services are available only to people who apply for them and seek them out, so it's important to know what is available to you. Case managers and teachers are great resources to provide information about the timeline of connecting, who to talk to, and tricks for navigating the system.

- **Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA)**
 - Long-term supports for individuals with certain documented disabilities. Apply at any age, but you must be found eligible to receive services prior to graduation in order to access long-term employment supports. Ask your DDA Case Manager to ensure you can access a waiver that includes long-term employment supports
 - Support with connecting to respite, residential, medical, mental health, and other Medicaid services.
 - [Eligibility | DSHS \(wa.gov\)](#)
- **Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)**
 - Short-term supports for assessment, job development and training.
 - May provide support with connecting to assistive technology, accommodations, benefits planning, and other services that will contribute to job success.
 - Available to applicants 16 and older with a documented disability, depending on eligibility.
 - [Division of Vocational Rehabilitation | DSHS \(wa.gov\)](#)
- **Kitsap County**
 - Provides oversight, quality assurance, training and funding to contracted supported employment providers.
 - Coordinates the Job Foundation (JF) and School-To-Work (STW) program. JF and STW offers employment support to DDA eligible students in their final two years of transition. Applications are accepted during students' second to last year of transition.
 - [Developmental Disabilities \(kitsapgov.com\)](#)
- **Supported employment providers**
 - Employment "vendors" offer support in every step of the job search process- resume building, interview preparation, job development, interview support, job acceptance, and onboarding.
 - Employment consultants/job coaches provide assistance on-the-job- identifying and creating accommodations, providing supplemental training, building relationships with coworkers and management, and providing long-term support to maintain the job and pursue career growth.
 - Access through DDA, DVR, or STW during the final two years of transition or after the age of 21.



Critical documents

When you start at a new job, proof of eligibility to work will be required, for which you can use a State ID and Social Security card or birth certificate. Many employers also require that you set-up direct deposit, for which a bank account is required. In addition, many people utilize public transportation or Access to get to and from work. It is important to ensure that you have each of these things before connecting to adult services. Contact information and application information is included for each.

- **Washington State ID**
 - Apply at your local driver licensing office or online
 - Before 18: need birth certificate and guardian's ID or driver's license
 - After 18: birth certificate; school transcript with DOB; SS card with signature; school yearbook with photo. Other combinations of documents accepted- check website for more details.
 - [WA State Licensing \(DOL\) Official Site: Get your WA identification card](#)
- **Social Security card**
 - Apply on-line or at a Social Security office
 - Required application documents: Social Security card application (available online), Washington State ID, and birth certificate.
 - [KA-02017 · Customer Self-Service \(ssa.gov\)](#)
- **Birth certificate**
 - Call (360) 236.4300 or order online
 - [Vital Records :: Washington State Department of Health](#)
- **Bank account**
 - Most banks require a photo ID and social security number
 - Minimum opening balance depends on bank
- **Kitsap Transit card**
 - In person at the Bremerton Transportation Center
 - Over the phone: 800.501.RIDE
 - \$5.00 card purchase
 - Need photo ID
 - [ORCA | Kitsap Transit](#)
- **Kitsap Transit Access**
 - Get eligibility application form from [ACCESS | Kitsap Transit](#)
 - (360) 479.7272
 - Requires medical verification



What does my pathway to employment look like?

Each person's pathway to employment looks different. Everyone needs different kinds of support- some people need initial support in building a resume, applying for jobs, and practicing for interviews. Others need support through the interview process and the initial training phase at their new job. Some people need support through each of these stages, as well as regular ongoing support to maintain success at their job. Whatever your son or daughter needs to be successful, there's a pathway to get them there.

- **Job Foundation (JF) and School-to-Work (STW):** Job Foundation and School-to-Work is a pathway available to students with DDA eligibility who attend a transition program after high school. In the second-to-last year of transition, they will choose an employment vendor to work with during their final two years of transition with the goal of finding a job by the end of school. Eligible students will be contacted by Kitsap County during their second-to-last year of transition and required to apply for DVR services. JF and STW is a partnership between Kitsap County, DVR, and your selected employment vendor.
- **Individualized employment (IE):** if you don't get connected through the JF/STW program, but are still eligible for DDA services, you still can qualify for individualized employment supports after age 21. Your DDA case manager can recommend the best route to get connected to services. Your case manager can support you to apply for DVR services then select a supported employment vendor to assist with your job search. Some people may connect directly with a supported employment vendor and later utilize DVR services. Individualized employment services are available through certain waivers and provide ongoing on-the-job support for employees. Talk to your DDA case manager for more information.
- **Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR):** While DVR provides funding for a variety of employment services, one important pathway is funding for job seekers who need extra assistance but are not eligible for long-term supports through DDA. DVR can help connect job seekers with employment vendors who will assist short-term with the job search process and initial training. Job seekers can return to DVR for assistance as many times as needed throughout their lifetime.

Your chosen supported employment vendor is responsible for assisting with finding, training, and keeping a job, which may include resume development, interview practice, skill development, job development activities on your son or daughter's behalf, and on-the-job training. For those with long term IE services, the employment agency is actively supporting the employee and employer with communication issues, additional training, and ongoing support. There are a lot of new players at the table, so help yourself be prepared by attending transition nights, resource fairs and parent coalition meetings. Keep yourself organized by making a binder with all applications, signed papers, and a calendar with deadlines. It takes a team to help some find success on the job, so share your ideas with your job coach, and learn from others that have already gone through the process.



Focus on independence

Your employment support professionals will work hard to discover what types of tasks and environment will contribute most to your son or daughter's success at work. They will consider tasks they enjoy, environments they prefer, and their personal interests as they relate to work. Regardless of the job or the kinds of supports your son or daughter needs, the goal will be to help them be as independent as possible in their work.

Independence looks different for everyone, but is an important factor to consider on the job. Job coaches will likely not be at someone's job all the time, so they focus on matching someone with a job that they can successfully perform with the assistance of tools and the natural support of coworkers. There are things that you can do now to build independence that will transfer to their work life.

- **Break it down:** if your son or daughter can't complete an entire task independently, break it down into smaller steps and encourage independent growth in each step. When you master one, move to another!
- **Focus on independence in non-work related tasks:** blowing your nose, putting on a jacket, using the restroom, etc. Independence in these types of everyday tasks will contribute to independence at work.
- **Start using tools that will contribute to independent self-management,** such as timers to independently start or stop activities, visual schedules for morning routines or weekly activities, and alarm clocks to wake up independently.
- **Encourage your son or daughter to express their needs and ask for help:** at work, coworkers won't be able to anticipate needs like you may be able to as a parent, so it's important to teach them to communicate needs and request assistance.
- **Ask yourself: "what would they do if I wasn't here to help?"** Answering this question may give you ideas of how to step back and increase independence. Pause before jumping in to help, so they have time to request the assistance. Create a tool, like a calendar, to help them remember what the schedule is today.

Be prepared that your role will change when your son or daughter begins work. As a great advocate for your child the best way to support their success and growing independence is to work with the employment consultant as the primary liaison with the employer. Employers are not used to parents stopping by or asking for an accommodation, but they are familiar with an employment consultant's role in supported employment. Use the employment consultant to brainstorm ideas, request time off, or to get feedback about work.

Independence is a process, so start practicing now!



Practicing professionalism

Managers provide training for the tasks and skills required to complete the essential functions of a job, but usually expect their employees to come with knowledge of professionalism, such as how to behave on the job and interact with customers and coworkers in an appropriate manner. Professionalism is a broad concept, but it can be broken down into specific skills related to on-the-job performance and can be practiced now in a variety of situations.

- **Dress appropriately for the environment:** interviews are uncomfortable, and they're even more uncomfortable if the interviewee is not used to wearing professional attire. Help your son or daughter become accustomed to dressing to match the environment.
- **Meeting new people:** the job search process and starting a new job involves meeting a lot of people, and first impressions are important. Practice shaking hands, saying their name, and greeting new people. If they need alternatives to verbal communication, give them a way to introduce themselves with technology or a simple card they keep in their pocket.
- **Share only professional information:** it can be hard to learn "what is appropriate" to talk about with prospective employers or coworkers. As topics come up, review if that is something to share at work or not. We all need a safe place to talk about personal issues (relationships, personal care, intimacy), so help your son or daughter identify who in their life they can talk to about those things. It's important that your son or daughter can talk about what supports may help them be successful at work without oversharing personal information.
- **Professional attitude and appearance:** active listening when your manager or trainer is talking to you, eye contact or turning your body to indicate you are listening are important professional attributes.
- **"Leaving it at the door":** successful employees are able to self-regulate their mood and actions when they walk through the door at work. Even if it was a rough morning before work, it's important to practice setting aside negative feelings or experiences to maintain a professional attitude at work. It's also important to practice how to explain the situation if it's not possible to leave it at the door. For example, it's ok to ask your manager to leave work early to deal with a family situation, but it's not appropriate to share every detail of a fight with a family member with your manager. Come up with a "leave it at the door" strategy and practice it at school or social engagements (like sports, or family gatherings).
- **Receiving feedback:** starting a new job means hearing directions and feedback from managers and co-workers, and following directions and reasonable requests. You can support your son or daughter to practice hearing feedback and reviewing appropriate ways to respond.
- **Self-management and initiative:** employees are expected to work on their tasks, problem solve, ask for help as needed, and find work to do to stay busy. Start practicing this expectation now!



Using tools

Employment support professionals will use a variety of tools to help your son or daughter work independently and transition independently between tasks. Many of these same tools can be used at home to increase independence in everyday tasks. It is also helpful to practice using tools now so that they are familiar supports when introduced at work. Try some of the following ideas now!

- **Wake up to an alarm clock.**
- **Timers:** set timers to know when to start or stop a task. They can be used as a reminder to transition to another step in a routine or to indicate that it's time to start something new. Many different electronic timers or timer apps are available on tablets or smart phones, or use a kitchen timer. For example, try setting a timer for thirty minutes of video game time, or an alarm when it's time to leave for school.
- **Visual or written schedules:** schedules can be used to follow routines at home, such as getting ready for school or unloading the dishwasher. They can be used to help remember each step in a process and can replace needed verbal prompts to transition between steps. For easy use, try laminating it and using a dry erase marker to check-off items.
- **Use a calendar** to write down upcoming events, then reference the calendar each time your son or daughter asks when something is happening. You can also use it as a self-management tool where your son or daughter can write down their own upcoming events.
- **Use self-management tools** like chore/work charts and checklists for things that need completed each day. Teach your son or daughter to track their work using these tools.
- **Communication tools at home:** if your son or daughter uses communication tools, practice using them at home. Even if you can anticipate their needs, it's great practice to use assistive technology in a variety of environments.

Remember, your son or daughter's job coach will not be at work all the time, so it's important to develop strategies that will allow independent transitions and self-management on-the-job. Practicing now will increase preparedness for the future!



Whole life planning

While employment is an important piece of life after graduation, it is not the only piece. Many people do not want to work full time, or will start with part-time hours at their first job, so other planning must be done around filling graduates' schedules. In addition, activities that naturally happened at school, such as opportunities for skill building, spending time with friends, and physical activity, should be considered. The following is a list of ideas to consider when doing "whole life" planning:

- **Volunteering:** volunteering with a nonprofit is a great way to continue developing job skills, build your resume, and make community connections. Many people fill times that they are not working with volunteer positions. Check [Volunteer Center of Kitsap County \(volunteerkitsap.org\)](http://volunteerkitsap.org) for ideas.
- **Recreation:** join your local gym or a hobby club; it's a great way to also build more relationships. Other recreation opportunities are available through organizations like city Parks and Rec, the YMCA, and Special Olympics. Physical recreation provides social and community connections, as well as health benefits.
- **Professional or personal development classes:** places like Kitsap Regional Libraries, Olympic College, Parks and Rec, or local art studios may have ongoing classes that you are interested in and that may add to your resume of marketable job skills.
- **Respite:** talk with your DDA case manager about what options you may have for respite services.
- **Multiple jobs:** since many jobs only start with part-time hours, some people get multiple jobs to obtain their desired number of work hours. Talk with your employment vendor about your options.
- **Housing:** start planning now for your future housing goals. Many people explore options such as adult family homes and supported living. Talk with your case manager about current options.
- **Benefits planning:** DVR and nonprofits like Plan to Work can help you learn about how employment will affect your Social Security benefits.
- **Trust funds:** a special needs trust allows you to hold assets above the Social Security \$2000.00 limit, and can be a valuable tool for saving money for future needs or purchases. Find out more about Washington State's unique programs at ddlot.org or Washington State ABL Savings Plan
- **Guardianship/payee:** when your son or daughter turns 18, you are no longer considered his or her legal guardian unless you have pursued legal guardianship through the court. If your son or daughter is his or her own guardian but needs assistance with financial management, you may consider finding a payee.



What to do during the summer to build work readiness

We hope that this series of employment planning and readiness tips has been beneficial- now it's time to practice the skills! Summer is a great time to build work readiness through volunteer positions, job shadows, or targeted skill building. You can use the following list of ideas to brainstorm activities for the summer, or plan your own!

- **Volunteer:** since most graduates don't have much work history when the graduate, volunteer positions are a great way to build a resume. They also teach practical work skills that are transferrable to real jobs, and provide opportunities to practice professionalism and soft skills.
- **Find a mentor:** a mentor can help guide you through developing skills, making connections, and learning the language of a specific industry. They can also support growth in important soft skills for the job you're interested in.
- **Shadow a friend or family member at work:** job shadows are a great way to gain industry-specific knowledge and experience. It's a great way for someone who thinks they may be interested in a certain job to learn more and test the waters, or a good strategy for someone who is unsure about what type of job they want to see multiple jobs in action.
- **Camps or classes to build skills:** check places like the YMCA, Olympic College, Kitsap Regional Libraries, the Arc and Parks and Rec for skill building and professional development classes.
- **Learn to ride the bus:** getting to and from work independently is part of the employment process, so it's great to learn how to ride the bus now. Many people take transit or Access to and from work each day. Getting a new job means a lot of "firsts," so learning to take the bus is one "first" that can be taken care of beforehand. Maybe a sibling or friend who is also on summer break can practice riding the bus with you to fun destinations like shops, the library, or to a summer concert in the park.
- **Build a network to find a job:** Many people get their first job through personal connections. Now is a great time to start considering who you know, and who they know, and how they can help connect you to opportunities. Building a team of advocates for your son or daughter will expedite the job search process by utilizing everyone's ideas and networks.

Anyone who wants to work can work! Following this series of ideas will allow you to be better prepared when the time comes to transition out of school and into employment. Take it one step at a time, and watch your son or daughter grow into a successful, working adult!

