



Raising Expectations for Better Futures

NEW RESOURCES TO ENGAGE FAMILIES IN
EMPLOYMENT PLANNING!

TIER 1. WORK IS FOR EVERYONE: SEEING OPPORTUNITIES IN EMPLOYMENT

Facilitator Guide





This training was developed by the Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment (MPTE), a federal system change project designed to improve transition outcomes that lead directly to paid employment and/or post-secondary options for individuals with ID/DD. The MPTE is led by the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services with partners that include Department of Developmental Services, MA Rehabilitation Commission, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Autism Commission, Institute for Community Inclusion, Mass Advocates Standing Strong, The Arc of MA, the Federation for Children with Special Needs, MassFamilies, and the MA Developmental Disabilities Council. MPTE is funded through September 2021 by a 5-year federal grant from the Administration on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.



INTRODUCTION

Purpose of Session and Target Audience

This session is designed to be a 60 to 90 minute family training session broken up into 5 modules. The intent is to introduce family members of youth with disabilities, including those with high support needs, to possibilities for competitive employment in the community for their loved one. It should give families the opportunity to ask questions and express fears. The content is appropriate for families and caregivers whose loved ones have a wide range of disabilities. This session lays the foundation for more in-depth sessions to follow.

The content is delivered via pre-recorded video segments incorporating Massachusetts experts as presenters. These segments are 2-9 minutes per module and are accompanied by discussion questions, activities, and related resources. Facilitators may choose to use the materials to conduct a longer session using all 5 modules, or may wish to hold shorter sessions using 1 or 2 modules at a time.

The Charting the Life Course trajectory exercise will act as a common thread throughout the 5 modules. At each step attendees will complete and/or discuss setting a vision for a good life, how employment contributes to realizing that vision, and action steps that lead towards employment and meaningful community participation.

The tenor of the session should be positive. Discussions should not center on the limitations presented by the disability, but rather on increasing opportunities for persons with significant disabilities to be successful in community-based competitive employment. Employment supports and services will be touched on, but not presented as the only option for youth with high support needs. Ultimately, this session is intended to provide accurate information that generates hope and enthusiasm in families and caregivers.

It is important to note that the term “competitive integrated employment”, or its variations used in this session, refers to work that is performed on a full-time or part-time basis (including self-employment) that pays above minimum wage and not less than the customary rate paid by the employer for the same or similar work to individuals who have similar training, experience, and skills, with eligibility for the level of benefits provided to other employees in similar positions, at a location where employee interacts with other people who are not individuals with disabilities to the same extent as other employees without disabilities in comparable positions, and as appropriate, presents opportunities for advancement that are similar to those for other employees who are not individuals with disabilities and who have similar positions.

Competitive integrated employment may or may not involve ongoing support services. Segregated employment (alongside only other people with disabilities) is not the outcome this session is advocating for. However, it is understood that people may require or choose to have a combination of competitive employment and other types of services such as community based day services or day habilitation.



Overview of Content

This session is designed to be an introduction to the idea of competitive employment for families and caregivers who may not have considered it, or who are apprehensive about considering it as an option for their loved one. The concept of a “good life” is used to help attendees think about employment beyond the scope of it being a formal service. Employment can lead to achieving a good life through offering purpose, structure, connection, and income.

Module 1: Setting a Vision for a Good Life

Module 1 helps attendees set a vision for what they want adulthood to look like, and not look like for their loved one. It gives permission for families to dream about supportive relationships, strong community connections, engaging hobbies, and ideal living situations. It also asks families to focus on what is not desired, which may include isolation, vulnerability, low expectations, and an over-reliance on formal services. After setting a positive vision, employment can then be discussed as a main influencer.

Module 2: Raising Expectations

Module 2 requires attendees to examine their own expectations for what their loved one with a disability will achieve in adult life. If we better understand the origin of low expectations, we might better be able to raise those expectations. For many families, a paid job in the community is an expectation they have not considered. If families go into the employment conversation with low expectations they may not be willing to explore options that maximize what their loved on is capable of.

Module 3: Work is Possible

Module 3 provides an example of a person with a significant disability who is successfully employed in a competitive job. The module acknowledges the fears families have when considering community employment and offers ideas about navigating those feelings while still allowing their loved one to take risks. This module also highlights the importance of developing skills and having opportunities to practice work.

Module 4: Preparing for Employment Success, The Role of Family

Module 4 stresses the crucial importance of families being involved in the employment preparation and support process. This includes setting the expectation that work will be part of the future, using personal networks and community connections to help find work experience opportunities, communicating with employment support staff (if needed) and assigning chores at home. Families who are invested in their role as partners in the employment process are likely to have loved ones who are successful on the job.



Module 5: Exploring Supports and Getting Started

Module 5 provides a brief overview of various aspects of employment that families may not have thought of. This includes advocating for strong employment-related goals in the IEP, recognizing that there are employment supports and programs available (if needed), and understanding that accurate information is needed before making employment decisions based on Social Security benefits. Attendees are then asked to consider all of the information presented in the 5 modules and identify action steps they will take to get their loved one started on the path to employment success.

Facilitator Responsibilities

- » Know the material
- » Have appropriate meeting space, including audio/visual
- » Supply handouts to attendees

Role of the Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment

The Massachusetts Partnership for Transition to Employment (MPTE) is a project designed to improve employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities transitioning from school to adult life. The MPTE Consortium involves an array of partners, including the Department of Developmental Services, MA Rehabilitation Commission, Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, Autism Commission, Institute for Community Inclusion, Mass Advocates Standing Strong, The Arc of MA, the Federation for Children with Special Needs, MassFamilies, and the MA Developmental Disabilities Council. Development of these materials was supported by MPTE under its Family Engagement focus area.



Module 1: Setting a Vision for a Good Life

Discussion Questions

1. Think about your loved one in 10 years. What would you like a good life to look like for them?
2. Although it may be difficult, we must also consider the opposite. What do you not want your loved one's adult life to look like?

Activity

Ask attendees to fill in the “Vision for a GOOD LIFE” and “What I DON'T Want” boxes on the trajectory worksheet. Encourage them to think about multiple domains including community living, employment, relationships and needed supports. If they are having trouble generating answers consider using the following guiding questions:

- » Where do you think your loved one will want to live?
- » What do you think your loved one will want to do for work?
- » What hobbies will your loved one enjoy?
- » How will your loved one earn an income?
- » What types of people will be in your loved one's life?
- » Who will be there to provide support if needed?
- » How will they continue to learn new things and explore interests?

Related Resources

Real Work Stories highlight employment successes of people with disabilities:

www.thinkwork.org/project/real-work-stories

Get the Facts: You can achieve competitive integrated employment even if you need job supports on an ongoing basis.

https://employmentfirstma.org/files/getfacts_1_F.pdf

More information about the Charting the Life Course framework and trajectory:

www.lifecoursetools.com/lifecourse-library/exploring-the-life-stages/

Note to facilitators: Family members and caregivers may have a difficult time envisioning a “good life”, or may offer limited answers such as “be safe” or “be happy”. Use the discussion question processing time to encourage them to think specifically about various aspects of a person's good life. You can even ask them to answer the question for themselves. They may respond with things like “travel”, “giving back to the community”, “be financially independent” or “spend time with family”. Point out that we tend to wish for the same things for our loved ones, even if they experience a disability.



Module 2: Raising Expectations

Discussion Questions

1. What are your expectations for what your loved one will achieve in terms of employment?
2. What has shaped those expectations? (Information from school staff or medical professionals? Opinions from family members? Your own views on or experience with disability?)

Activity

On the trajectory ask attendees to note (above or below the arrow) past life experiences that have shaped their expectations of their loved one's future. Experiences that have raised expectations should go above the arrow, while those that have lowered or limited expectations go below the arrow.

If attendees are having trouble deciding where on the trajectory their expectations fall, have them consider these questions:

- » Do your expectations of employment help your loved one be as independent as possible?
- » Do your expectations of employment help your loved one be connected to people without disabilities in their community?
- » Do your expectations of employment help your loved one feel sense of worth that comes with having a job and getting paid a real wage?
- » Will your expectations of employment lead to your loved one being isolated from others or only being able to spend time with people with disabilities?
- » Will your expectations of employment lead to an over-reliance on public services to fill your loved one's day?

Note to facilitators: *The purpose of this module and exercise is to help attendees recognize the power of expectations. High expectations that competitive employment will be part of their loved one's future are more likely to lead to positive employment outcomes. Lowered expectations (thinking competitive employment is not possible) likely leads to lack of opportunities or underemployment. However, the session should not make families feel bad or guilty. Stress that expectations change all of the time and that seeing where low expectations fall on the trajectory may help families reassess the impact of their expectations.*

Related Resources

A New Way of Thinking (A guide for students with disabilities to help build self-confidence)

<https://witig.org/self-advocacy-tools/a-new-way-of-thinking/>

On the Job: Stories from Youth with Disabilities

www2.waisman.wisc.edu/cedd/naturalsupports//pdfs/YS.pdf

Explain It! Raising Expectations

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OZnQNktGXio>



Module 3: Work is Possible

Discussion Questions

1. After hearing this information, are you more open to or optimistic about employment possibilities for your loved one?
2. What is your loved one's greatest skills or attribute?

Example: An attendee might say “My daughter is very friendly and likes to keep things clean and organized”. The facilitator might say, “Can you think of any employers who are looking for friendly staff to help keep things organized?” This helps family members see the connection between skills and employer needs.

Activity

On the trajectory, plot at least one skill that your loved one has that could lead to employment success (above the arrow) and one skill they still need to learn (below the arrow).

The second part of the activity asks attendees to plot a skill that their loved one may lack. They could also choose a behavior or support need that could be a barrier to working in the community. Examples might include being distractible, transportation needs, inability to count money, lack of motivation, or complicated health needs. It is very important to point out that perceived barriers are things that can improve. Schools, employment programs, families and other stakeholders can all work together to find creative solutions and accommodations. Families play a crucial role in identifying potential barriers and providing ideas that lead to success on the job.

Related Resources

**Talk to Your Child about Employment:
A Checklist for Parents**

www.pacer.org/transition/resource-library/publications/NPC-16.pdf

Employment: A Families Perspective

<https://youtu.be/EVcnLAeymwU>

By Youth for Youth: Employment

<https://transitioncoalition.org/blog/resource-by-youth-for-youth-an-employment-guide-download/>

Note to facilitators: One of the goals of this session is to help family members and caregivers have positive feelings about employment as an option for their loved one. Point out that employers are looking for employees with skills that can help their business. Everybody has skills, or has the ability to learn new skills valuable to an employer. Tell attendees that this is their chance to brag about their loved one. What is something they do really well or a personality trait that is endearing? We often don't recognize all of the great things a person brings to the table, especially when most of our conversations about our loved ones center around the disability.

Note to facilitators: Encourage attendees to think about skills employers might be looking for or would find useful. Good examples might be organization, ability to mow, ability to use technology, strength and stamina, ability to count money, or ability to learn new tasks (with or without support). Remind them that there is a difference between “skills” and “traits”, and that both are sought after by employers.



Module 4: Preparing for Employment Success: The Role of Family

Discussion Questions

1. Have you assigned your loved one chores at home?
2. What are some businesses in your community that you think your loved one would like to learn more about (for a work experience)?

Activity

Ask attendees what they are currently doing to help their loved one build employment skills. Ask them to write down some of these activities above the arrow in the “Moving Forward” section of the trajectory. Then ask if there are things they are doing currently that might not support their employment vision and have them marked below the arrow in the same section.

Attendees may not have an answer for the second part of the activity, and that is OK. Facilitators can prompt answers by asking the following questions:

- » Are you currently making employment decisions based on your understanding of Social Security benefits or program requirements?
- » Are you avoiding the prospect of community employment in an effort to keep your loved one safe?
- » Are you avoiding assigning chores to your loved one with a disability in the home?
- » Have you avoided setting the expectation that employment will be part of your loved one’s future (and conveyed that expectation to your loved one)?
- » If your loved one is still in school and has an IEP, have you checked to make sure it contains employment-related goals?

Note to facilitators: *It is very important that families begin making the connection between what their loved one’s skills and interests are and what career areas those skills and interests fit into. They may not realize that many types of skills and the ability to learn them transfer to employment situations. For example, teaching a person to make a simple meal may not seem like an employment skill, but the ability to gather needed materials, follow a process, and see something through to conclusion is very valuable to employers. As attendees fill out the first section of the trajectory (Moving Forward above the arrow) encourage them to think broadly about all skills they have helped their loved one learn.*

Related Resources

The Arc of Massachusetts Transition Timelines

<https://thearcofmass.org/resources/topic/transition>

Federation for Children with Special Needs

<https://fcsn.org/linkcenter/>

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission Pre Employment Transition Services

www.mass.gov/mrc-transition-services-for-students-and-youth



Module 5: Exploring Supports and Getting Started

Discussion Questions

1. Are you aware of the continuum of employment supports available to persons with disabilities in Massachusetts?
2. Does your loved one currently receive any form of Social Security benefits?

Activity

Ask attendees to identify any supports that their loved one is currently accessing. Have them plot those supports on the trajectory, above the arrow if they view the supports as leading to the “good life” and below if the supports might be leading towards what they don’t want. Encourage them to add any supports that they want to look in to, in the “moving forward” part of the trajectory.

Related Resources

Employment First Massachusetts

Benefits

<https://employmentfirstma.org/pages/bens.html>

Quality Employment Practices

employmentfirstma.org/pages/quality-employment-practices.html

Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services

www.mass.gov/dds-turning-22-services

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secondary Transition

www.doe.mass.edu/sped/secondary-transition/

Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission

www.mass.gov/mrc-transition-services-for-students-and-youth

ThinkWork

www.thinkwork.org/topicssupporting-job-seekersemployees/job-support

Note to facilitators: Encourage attendees to think about “services and supports” in 2 different ways; 1) Eligibility-based supports such as special education, vocational rehabilitation, waived services or Social Security, and 2) other supports such as family relationships, technology, or strong personal attributes. Remind them that not all services and supports automatically lead towards the vision for a good life. Much depends on how the services are delivered and how they influence decision making. For example, if a person is on Supplemental Security Income, that often acts a barrier to reaching financial independence because families value the benefit over exploring employment. Stress that eligibility-based services are not the only way build supports around a person.



End of Session Q&A

Be sure to save enough time at the end of the session to ask the question below. Setting action steps helps reinforce the main concepts and reminds attendees that they have a role to play in supporting their loved one towards employment success.

- 1. Based on this session, what are 1 or 2 action steps you will take to begin exploring community-based employment for your loved one?**