



Think Possible! - Supporting Competitive Integrated Employment Module 2 Transcript

Welcome to part two of the Think Possible! employment webinar series for service coordinators in the Wisconsin Department of Health Service's children's programs. This is the second in a series of three webinars designed to help service coordinators understand how to support youth and families along the path to achieving the goal of employment in the community.

In this module you will learn about another DHS guiding principle for competitive integrated employment. The learning objectives for this module include being able to:

- Summarize the key building blocks of successful employment planning.
- Engage families in developing employment outcomes.
- Describe activities youth and families can do to enhance employment development.
- Identify ways to explore career development across the lifespan.

DHS's eighth guiding principle for competitive integrated employment is "To make informed choices about employment, people with disabilities need opportunities to receive comprehensive information about services available, work incentives benefits counseling, reasonable accommodations, supports, and opportunities to try a variety of community jobs." As a service coordinator, you do not need to become an employment expert or job developer to support youth on the path to employment. You play an important role by being aware of the building blocks for employment planning and connecting youth and families to important resources.

Family expectations are the key to employment success for youth with disabilities. Research conducted by Carter, Austin, and Trainer in 2012 "found that young adults with significant disabilities whose parents definitely expected them to obtain post-school work way back in high school were more than five times as likely to have paid, community employment within two years after exiting school...and the unexpected finding was that these expectations were a stronger predictor than anything else they examined."

As a service coordinator, there are five fundamental strategies you can use with families to encourage and develop employment outcomes.

Strategy number one is to engage families early and often in conversations about employment. It's never too early to help families establish high expectations and a positive vision that includes employment for their child's future. Try to keep the conversation strengths-based and focused on how, not if, their child can work.

Keep in mind that families may have been told by doctors and other professionals that their child will never work because of the severity of his or her disability. After building trust with the family, introduce some possibilities and help the family understand that youth, no matter how significant their disabilities, can work in the community with the right planning and support.

Strategy number two is to help families understand how they can raise expectations by fostering responsibility and teaching skills at home by engaging their child in age-appropriate chores and having a role in family activities. For example, toddlers can help put away toys, and elementary schoolers can help parents in the kitchen. These activities not only teach tasks, they teach valuable soft skills and work ethics like taking direction and working as a team.

Click on the screen to download a Skill Development at Home checklist you can use with families.

Strategy number three is to help families understand how they can use the supports available to expose their child to age-appropriate activities in the community, explore their interests, and gain life experiences that will help their child learn skills that contribute to employment when they are teenagers and adults.

Help families understand the difference between children and youth just doing an activity and having a role in something that interests them. Having a role changes an activity into an opportunity. Take cooking for example. Rather than just encouraging youth who like to cook to make food at home, involve them in a community cooking class or making food for their school booster club. Involve children who like to listen to music in school band or church choir. Children who like to read could be members of a book club or could volunteer to lead story time at the local library.

Strategy number four is to maximize planning with schools by offering to be a part of the child's resource team and attending Individualized Education Program, or IEP meetings. Creating a resource team around a child with schools and other service providers helps to break down service silos and creates a holistic approach to life planning that can lead to better outcomes. You can encourage team planning focused on inclusion, the development of new learning experiences, and ways the youth can have a valued role at school and in the community.

In module three you will learn more about collaboration with schools.

Strategy number five is to connect youth to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (or DVR) for employment services at least two years prior to leaving school. DVR plays a vital role in helping youth gain work experience and achieve their employment goals. Research shows that youth with disabilities who have at least two paid jobs while in high school are five times more likely to be successful with employment as adults.

During the transition from school to adult life, it is essential for schools, long-term care programs, and DVR to maximize and coordinate supports and services for employment and independent living. In the next module, you will learn more about collaborating with DVR.

Career development is a lifelong activity that begins very early in childhood. The life experiences we have shape our self-concept and preferences. The same is true for individuals with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities. By supporting engagement in a variety of meaningful, age-appropriate, and inclusive opportunities, youth learn and grow, and those around them begin to raise their expectations about what is possible in their lives.

Children begin to formulate preferences and self-concept very early in life. They begin to make choices about what they want to eat, how they want to play, and who they want to be around. They also begin to formulate beliefs about themselves and their abilities. Families also begin to create their hopes and

dreams and vision for their child's future. For infants and toddlers without disabilities, it is common for parents to start wondering, "What will my child be when she grows up?" Birth to 3 Program service coordinators can encourage families to think hopefully about the future of their children with disabilities and support families to:

- Learn about the experiences of people with similar disabilities living and working in the community by attending family conferences, such as the Circles of Life Conference, or connecting with a local parent network.
- Safely encourage their baby or toddler's curiosity about objects, people, and places and help them make choices and express their preferences.
- Teach skills and typical developmental milestones.
- For a website with lists of these skills and milestones, click on the box that says "Child Development and Positive Parenting."
- Between the ages of 4 and 13 years, children should learn about the general world of work and age-appropriate responsibilities at home and school. Service coordinators can support families to:
 - Develop a list of age-appropriate chores and ways to support the child to do them.
 - Advocate for their child to be included in the school's general education classes and extracurricular activities.
 - Support their children to learn skills outside of school and have a valued role in the community by taking community recreation classes, volunteering, joining scouts, and more.

Click on the box to see examples of age-appropriate chores.

Starting at age 14 in Wisconsin, schools develop post-school employment goals with youth with disabilities. Teenagers, including those with disabilities, should be engaged in career exploration and work experiences to help them make decisions about jobs and future careers. You can support families to:

- Encourage their teen to explore their interests and develop hobbies. Youth can be supported to use career exploration tools on the web, talk to people in their family networks about their jobs, and try new activities in the community.
- Look at their teenager through the eyes of an employer and support their teenager to develop responsibilities and adhere to a code of conduct at home and school.
- Take an active role in employment planning with the school team and connecting with DVR at least two years prior to leaving school.
- Dispel myths and misunderstandings about benefits by connecting with a work incentives benefits counselor to understand how people with disabilities can work and keep the benefits they need.
- Help families understand how they can advocate for what they need and acquire additional help if the services and supports they are receiving are not meeting their needs.

This slide has a link to a list of common transition activities by age as students advance through the high school years. This list, developed by the Wisconsin Transition Improvement Grant, can be downloaded by clicking on your screen.

Thank you for viewing part two in the Think Possible! training series, Supporting Competitive Integrated Employment. Some key takeaways to consider as you support children, youth, and families in their pursuit of competitive integrated employment include:

- Engaging families in conversation about competitive integrated employment early and often to help them develop high expectations.
- Being aware of the building blocks for employment planning and resources you can connect families to.
- Helping children, youth, and families recognize that career development is a lifelong activity.

In the next Think Possible! module, you will learn about the roles schools and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation have in supporting youth with employment and how to engage in interagency collaboration. You will also learn about other important resources for employment planning and fostering learning and leadership experiences for youth and families.