

INFORMATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS AND SUPERVISORS



Individual Placement and Support (IPS), an evidence-based supported employment model, assists people with mental health conditions gain employment and develop careers. IPS is defined by 8 principles, including eligibility based on consumer choice, focus on competitive jobs, service integration of employment services with mental health treatment, attention to consumer preferences, personalized benefits planning, job search starts after consumer expresses interest in working, IPS specialists build relationships with employers, and individualized long-term job support.

Why focus on employment?

People with mental illness have talents and abilities that are often overlooked, including the skills to work at regular jobs. Work is an important part of the recovery process for many individuals. Research has shown that:

- **60%** of adults with a mental health condition want to work.
- **Over 60%** of adults with a mental health condition who enroll in IPS successfully find and work a regular job.

Reflect on how employment impacts your own life. You probably need an income, but also benefit from daily structure, a sense of meaning, a feeling of belonging in your community, and the social benefits of being with people during the day. In addition, working a job is a social determinant of health. Being employed improves physical health, mental health, and reduces the likelihood that individuals will have substance use disorders. What benefits do you think people with mental illnesses derive from employment?

What is Individual Placement and Support?

Individual Placement and Support (IPS) supported employment is an evidence-based practice that assists people with mental health conditions to gain employment and develop careers. IPS is defined by eight principles, listed below.



1) Eligibility based on consumer choice

Research has demonstrated that individuals are their own best judges of when they are ready to work. People who are successful at employment include:

- Individuals with active substance use disorders.
- People who are unhoused.
- Job seekers who elect not to use medication or choose to use less medication than prescribed.
- People who have psychotic symptoms or other mental health symptoms.

- Workers who have difficulty interacting with others.

How is that possible? Desire to be employed helps workers overcome different obstacles to employment. And IPS specialists help people find jobs that accentuate their strengths and minimize possible problems. For example, a specialist may help a person with paranoid symptoms obtain a job where she can work alone or with just a few people. Or he may help a person with disorganized thinking find a job in a quiet environment with predictable work tasks to help her overcome problems with concentration. IPS specialists also help people ask for job accommodations, such as a change in hours worked or a change in job duties, that enable an individual with a disability to perform their job well. And they provide supports to working people including helping individuals with substance use disorders make plans to be sober while on the job.



Finally, people work successfully because everyone has strengths, including strengths that employers appreciate. Some examples are listed below:

- A person who works slightly slower than others is also a conscientious worker who is very reliable.
- A worker who needs limited working hours is a meat cutter with skills that are difficult for employers to find in candidates.

Some people may have lost confidence that they can find work they will enjoy so it is important for mental health practitioners to say, "I believe you can work. Only you know when it is the right time for you, but I have observed strengths in you that employers would appreciate."



2) Focus on competitive jobs.

IPS specialists help with regular jobs anyone can apply for, regardless of whether they have a disability. These jobs pay at least minimum wage (and the same wage as other employees in the position) and may be part-time or full-time jobs. The reason to focus on community jobs is that most people say that they want regular jobs so that they can be part of their community.



3) Service integration of employment services with mental health treatment.

IPS specialists coordinate plans with the treatment team which may include case managers, therapists, psychiatrists, housing specialists, nurses, substance abuse specialists, etc. They have office space located with their assigned mental health treatment team and receive referrals from that team. Occasionally, IPS specialists work with two teams.

Mental health practitioners share ideas for jobs the person may enjoy and excel at doing. They help working people consider strategies to succeed socially at work and discuss possible strategies to manage symptoms that occur while working. And the IPS specialist provides updates about the job search, job performance, and whether the person is enjoying her job.



4) Attention to consumer preferences.

Choices and decisions about work are individualized and based on the person's interests, preferences, strengths, experiences and other factors. An example is that some job seekers do not want their employers to know they are working with an IPS program or have a disability. Others want jobs related to their interests, jobs

within walking distance of their homes, a very limited number or working hours, or some other factor. Working people who find jobs related to their preferences typically maintain employment much longer than people who work jobs chosen simply because they are available. Further, help with employment is intended to improve the quality of people's lives, so positions sought should meet as many of the person's preferences as possible.



5) Personalized benefits planning.

IPS specialists offer to connect individuals with a trained benefits counselor who can explain how a person's disability benefits, food aid, housing subsidies, etc. will be affected by a return to work. This service should be offered before a person begins work and again as she accepts changes in working hours and pay. Mental health practitioners are welcome to attend these appointments with job seekers and, with a job seeker's permission, family members may also be invited to attend.



6) Job search starts after consumer expresses interest in working.

The job search starts after consumer expresses interest in working. Many people were surprised when research demonstrated that consumers were more likely to work competitively when they were helped with competitive, integrated jobs right away, rather than participating in pre-employment activities. That may be because some people found assessments, job tryouts, or job readiness groups to be dismissive of their strengths. And consumers often drop out of employment services when they realize that they are not getting direct help to reach their goals.



7) IPS specialists build relationships with employers.

IPS specialists build relationships with employers. Based upon a job seeker's choice, IPS specialists may visit businesses that have positions related to the person's preferences. They introduce themselves and ask for an appointment to learn about the business. By expressing interest in how the business operates and what employees do, IPS specialists demonstrate their desire to help employers find workers who are a good match for the jobs that they have. As a relationship progresses, the IPS specialist will ask the employer if she can introduce a job seeker with the skills and qualities that a position requires. And she may attend that meeting with the job seeker to help him share his strengths with the employer.



8) Individualized, long-term support.

Individualized, long-term job supports. IPS specialists, along with mental health practitioners, provide individualized supports to working people. When a person starts a job, they may need more intensive supports—sometimes more than once a week as they adjust to the new situation. An IPS specialist may meet with a supervisor and worker for extra feedback, meet with family members to discuss the job, provide rides to work when other transportation fails, teach a worker how to use public transportation, meet a working person for coffee to talk about the job, or provide other supports designed to help with specific situations. A psychiatrist may make medication adjustments to help workers manage medication side effects or symptoms that impact job performance. Therapists help individuals manage symptoms or social situations, and case managers may help working people organize their home life in ways that

support employment. As people become comfortable with their jobs, the IPS specialist provides fewer supports, and after someone has worked continuously for about a year on average, they transition off the IPS caseload and the mental health treatment team provides ongoing support.



What else is different about IPS?

IPS is community-based. For example, IPS specialists go to business to meet employers in person. And they meet with consumers at libraries to submit online applications, coffee shops to talk about jobs, family homes with consumers to talk about possible good job matches, businesses to follow up on job applications, their workplaces, and other locations that are convenient for consumers.

Will consumers experience increased symptoms or substance use if they obtain a competitive job?

Generally speaking, people who work do not experience symptoms at any higher rate than people who do not work. In fact, for many individuals, symptoms improve through the planned, purposeful activity of work. People who have substance use disorders may find that they need to reduce their substance use to keep a job they enjoy. But sometimes jobs do not work out. When that happens, the team helps the person consider what could help him succeed in future jobs and the IPS specialist helps him with another job right away. Taking limited risks is part of life and something that all adults do. It

should also be remembered that not working is also stressful and is often more stressful than working a job.

How can I help my caseload to consider a working life?

Some people have not worked for so long that they have stopped thinking of themselves as workers and others may not feel confident about finding a job that they enjoy. Still others may have tried vocational programs that did not focus on their preferences and do not want to repeat that experience. Helping people consider employment is more than a yes/no question such as, "Do you want to work?" Many people would like to work but have concerns about a job. Facilitate short conversations about employment over time so that people can gradually consider making a big change in their lives. Resist the impulse to cheerlead people into saying that they want a job. Going to work is a personal decision and all practitioners should respect their consumer's self-determination.

Help people consider the role that employment could play in their lives by discussing questions on different occasions. Some questions are below.

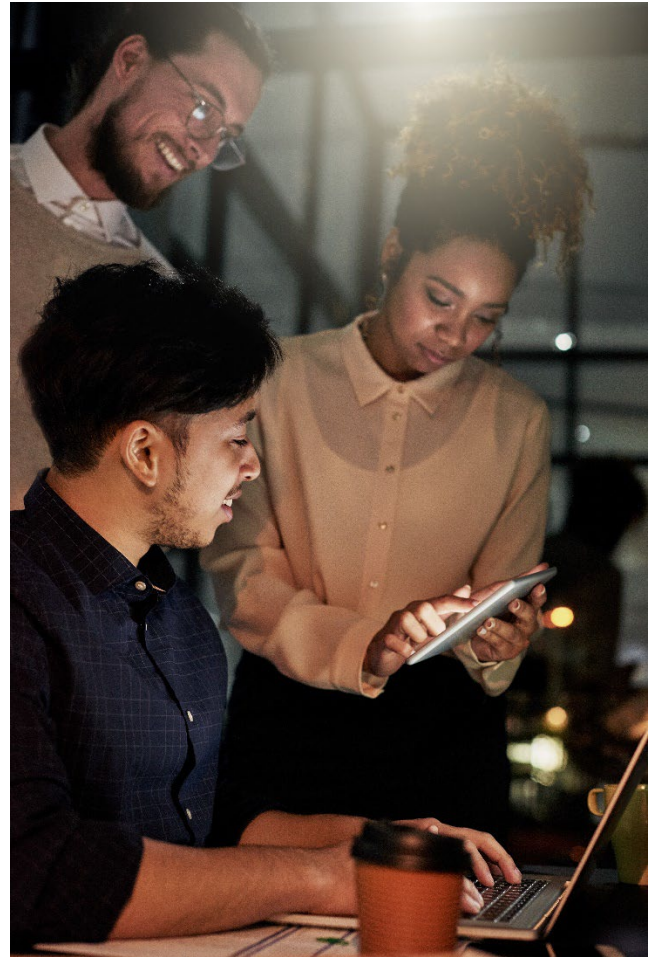
- How would your life be different if you worked a job? What would be the good things and what would be the not so good things about employment?
- When you were younger, did you imagine having a working life? What type of work did you think you would do?
- If you ever did decide to work, what type of employment would be interesting to you?
- How would your employment affect your family?
- Do you feel confident that you could find a job that you would enjoy? Why or why not?
- Do you think that you have skills that are valued in the workplace? What are those? What are your strengths related to a job?

- How would you spend the extra income from working a job?
- Do you know how your benefits would be affected by a return to work, or would you like to learn about that?
- What did you do yesterday when you woke up, and after that? And then what did you do...? Was that a satisfying day? Is this what you want for your life?
- Work can be stressful. How do you think people manage that? Could you manage that if you wanted to work?
- Have you heard about our IPS program? Would you like to meet an IPS specialist just to learn about what they do?

When a person says she wants to get a job, introduce her to an IPS specialist right away. People can become discouraged if they have to wait for employment assistance. When a person does need to wait for a few weeks, you can help them prepare for the job search by writing their work history together, discussing jobs they may enjoy, or meeting with their family (as defined by the person) to talk about employment.

For more information about IPS and employment:

This document is part of a SAMHSA toolkit. The Resource Guide in the toolkit provides links to more information about IPS supported employment.



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