

## Tips for Talking about Employment A Resource for Mental Health and Housing Practitioners

When clients or their families talk about applying for disability benefits, encourage them to **consider employment first**. Less than 3% of recipients of Supplemental Security Income or Social Security Disability Insurance ever exit the system. That means that people who plan to use benefits for a short while almost always end up receiving benefits for life. And that's a problem because people with long-term unemployment have worse physical and mental health problems, and they often feel disenfranchised from their communities.

Think about your own career. Your job provides you with an income. Why else is work important for you?

**Discuss employment with everyone.** For many individuals, employment is part of recovery from mental illness or substance use disorders. Ask, "Have you thought about working a job? How would your life be different if you worked—what would be the good things and the not-so-good things?" What would be your dream job?" When a person is not interested in employment now, keep reminding the person that she has options.

**Get an IPS specialist involved:** When clients begin to consider employment, ask if you can invite an IPS specialist to describe how they help people with jobs and careers. Schedule the IPS specialist to attend the last 15 minutes of the appointment to talk about IPS services and the client's interests. At the following appointment, ask the person what he thought about what he learned from the specialist.

**Do not try to predict who will be successful.** Research demonstrates that people can work in spite of all sorts of barriers. That's because desire to be employed helps people overcome many obstacles to employment.

Offer to **invite an IPS specialist to appointments** to answer questions about IPS or what types of jobs people have found recently.

**During the pandemic,** resist the urge to protect your clients. You make decisions about your own safety, and your clients have the right to decide what is best for them.

Many jobs are still available, and some types of jobs have many openings. IPS programs have demonstrated that they are able to help with employment even during these difficult times.

Ensure that clients are informed of possible risks and review what they think the advantages to working now are for them. A decision aid that can help with these discussions is "Talking with Potential Job Seekers about the Coronavirus." Help job seekers consider options to be as safe as possible while working.