

CHAPTER 9

IPS for Youth, Their Family Members, and Educators

Please share this chapter with the youth and family members you know. Educators, such as high school teachers, guidance counselors, or counselors at offices for accessibility, may also be interested in this information. To download and print copies, go to www.ipsworks.org.

IPS stands for Individual Placement and Support. IPS supported employment is a type of employment program that has been well researched and is effective at helping people with regular jobs related to their interests. When education goals are related to careers, support is provided for education, as well. In this document, we use the term family to describe personal supports such as siblings, partners, parents, close friends, or other people who help youth with their employment goals.

9.1 Making decisions about employment

Most people feel better when they work. Jobs are a way to connect with others and jobs provide opportunities for youth to use their skills and talents. Employed people have someplace to go each day and higher incomes. Almost everyone reports that their self-esteem improves when they are employed. Jobs and education are especially important for young people because long gaps in employment make it more difficult to be employed in the future.

Some youth consider applying for disability benefits rather than pursuing employment. Or, they may hope to collect benefits temporarily and pursue work later. But fewer than three percent of people who are awarded Social Security benefits in the United States ever go on to support themselves through work. That is problematic because people who are unemployed have more health problems, addictions, and mental health issues. An alternate strategy is for youth to try working a job even if they are experiencing difficulties in their lives. Youth should try different positions to learn what they enjoy, what skills they have, and what type of long-term careers they want. A young person may always apply for disability benefits later, but she should try working a few jobs first. And, someone from the IPS program can help the young person explore different careers and education/training programs related to her interests.

9.2 Engaging in IPS services

In IPS, every young person decides for herself when she is ready for work or school, and IPS practitioners should honor those decisions. Youth should not be excluded from IPS even if they have trouble remembering appointments, use drugs or alcohol, have mental health symptoms, are homeless, have legal problems, or other issues. Desire to work helps people overcome many different barriers to employment. And IPS specialists can also help young people consider different approaches to succeed in work and school.

Every person who is interested in work or school is eligible for IPS.

IPS programs do not require people to complete short-term jobs (job tryouts), volunteer jobs, or work assessments to prepare for employment. Everyone has abilities that employers will appreciate. IPS specialists simply help people discover which jobs are good matches now, and help develop a plan for long-term career goals. Participants learn what they are good at doing the same way everyone else learns about their employment related strengths—by going to work.

Likewise, IPS specialists help youth investigate regular training and education programs. Examples include high school programs, General Educational Development (GED) programs, English as a Second

Language (ESL) classes, vocational training/certificate courses, community college programs, and four-year college degrees.

9.3 Getting started in IPS

When someone is interested in getting a job right away, or planning for a career, she should be referred to IPS immediately. Young people or their family members can ask how a person can refer herself to IPS. An IPS specialist will meet with the young person a few times to ask about her interests, what type of workplace sounds appealing, what hours she is available to work, whether she would like help with school or training programs, and about her other preferences. And the young person and IPS specialist may also ask family members (or close friends) to share their ideas about good job matches. If the young person receives mental health services, the IPS specialist will also ask mental health practitioners about the young person's strengths, skills, and what jobs she may enjoy.

Typically, within a few weeks of meeting each other, the IPS specialist and the young person will act on the person's goals. Based on the program participant's preferences, they may begin searching for a job, learning about educational or training programs, or investigating different types of employment. Examples of what they may do together are listed below:

- Submit job applications and résumés
- Follow up on job applications by visiting businesses to speak with a manager
- Go to community colleges to learn what programs are available
- Visit GED programs to learn about classes
- Attend Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings at the high school with parents or legal guardians
- Interview people who work in different fields to learn what their jobs are like
- Observe people working in different occupations
- Apply for financial aid for school

9.4 Finding regular jobs

IPS specialists help young people find regular, paid jobs for which anyone can apply. Examples include cooking in a commercial kitchen, ushering at a playhouse, working with computer software, grooming dogs, cleaning offices, caring for children in a daycare center, landscaping, factory work, etc. The types of jobs that young people find depend on their qualifications for different types of work and the jobs available in their communities. Jobs may be part or full time.

9.5 Sharing information with employers or teachers

Each program participant decides for himself whether to share personal information with employers and teachers. Examples of what may be shared include mental health symptoms related to a job accommodation, different learning styles, living in housing programs, or receiving services from an IPS program. Some people ask their IPS specialists to share some information, but not everything. For example, one person asked his IPS specialist to introduce him to employers. He said it would be okay to explain that he was living in a housing program for youth who were transitioning out of foster care. But he did not want his IPS specialist to tell employers about his treatment for depression.

Some IPS participants decide to share personal information in some situations, but not in others. A student may ask an IPS specialist to meet with his instructor and himself to talk about learning problems and to ask for extra credit work. But that same student may not want his IPS specialist to talk to his employer.

The IPS specialist should ask each person about his preferences about what information should be kept private. She can provide examples of what she may say so that the participant can explain what sounds okay to him. And program participants can change their minds about disclosing private matters at any time. For example, a working person who did not want his specialist to talk to employers during the job search may decide that it is okay for the specialist to talk to his employer after he is working. Or a jobseeker may decide to share information with some hiring managers, but not others.

9.6 Including other professionals in career plans

IPS uses a team approach. That means that IPS specialists, mental health practitioners (such as counselors, medication prescribers, or case managers), and housing specialists collaborate. The point is for all practitioners to know the young person's career goals and what steps he is working on. Different practitioners support the person based on their roles. For example, an IPS specialist may help the young person apply for jobs while a counselor shares possible strategies to manage mental health symptoms on the job.

Some youth may also have open cases with state vocational rehabilitation. Each state has vocational rehabilitation offices staffed by counselors who help people with all types of disabilities, including mental health conditions, to return to work. When people work with both IPS and state vocational rehabilitation, the IPS specialist and vocational rehabilitation counselor each share their knowledge and resources. For example, an IPS specialist may assist a young person with an application for federal student aid, while a vocational rehabilitation counselor helps to pay for books that are not covered by grants and loans. Services provided by vocational rehabilitation counselors vary by person and are based on each person's employment plan.

9.7 Selecting job supports

IPS specialists can provide different types of assistance to working people based on their jobs and their preferences. Some examples include wake-up calls, getting together to talk about the job, meetings with supervisors to discuss how the job is going, help getting clothing for work, learning the bus system together, help reviewing orientation materials, assistance learning a new job, help asking for a different work schedule or different work duties (employers may, or may not, agree), family meetings to talk about the job, help reporting income to entitlement systems, and assistance finding a new job. Because working people are busy, IPS specialists make supports convenient by offering to meet working people in their homes, at coffee shops, or while giving a ride to work.

Job supports are based on each working person's preferences.

Some people only want help finding a job and do not feel that job supports are necessary. But many workers report that when they do accept job supports, the extra assistance is helpful. Another advantage to staying in the program is that IPS specialists can help with transitions to new jobs or training programs. Each worker decides for herself how long she would like job supports, but IPS specialists typically provide supports for about a year.

When jobs end, the young person and IPS specialist talk about what went well and what (if anything) did not. They may include family members in these discussions based on the young person's preferences. The

purpose is to learn what would be a better job match. Would the person prefer a work shift that starts later in the day? Would it be better to have a job that includes more or less interaction with others? What did the person like most about the job? Least? What job supports would have been better? Next, the IPS specialist and young person begin looking for another job based on what was learned. Many young people try several jobs to learn what they like and what they want to do.

9.8 Considering educational supports

IPS specialists can also provide help with education and training goals that are related to a person's career goals. Just like employment supports, assistance with education is individualized to each person's preferences, interests, and past experiences.

High school students in the United States may benefit from asking an IPS specialist to attend their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 meetings if they are receiving accommodations for learning. The IPS specialist can help the student set up a study schedule, learn good study skills, obtain a weekend or summer job, and plan for transition from high school to work or postsecondary education.

IPS specialists help young people and their families learn about different postsecondary educational programs by visiting schools together and meeting with advisors or instructors. They also assist with applications for financial aid, school applications, and other steps to get started in school. Once a person is enrolled, specialists offer assistance in keeping track of assignments and test schedules, learning good study skills, locating tutoring services, and requesting accommodations, as needed.

9.9 Involving family members in IPS

“Family” in this context may indicate parents, adult siblings, aunts and uncles, foster parents, close friends, or others identified by a young person. Family members have an important role to play in IPS because they know what their family member enjoys, what has been learned about the person as a student or worker from his past experiences, and what supports have been helpful. They may know important information about the person's strengths, daily habits, and other factors that can affect career plans. Family members should be invited to participate in meetings to plan job and education goals, (although youth who have reached the age of majority, age 18 in most states, must agree to family inclusion). Family members contribute their ideas about how to help the young person achieve her goals. Some family members join meetings as the young person considers his employment/education goals, as he selects school programs or jobs, as he begins working or attending vocational training, and at other points along the vocational process. If you are a family member who would like to be involved in this way, ask to be included in their next meeting with the young person and IPS specialist.

“Early on, Cindy's IPS specialist came to our house to explain what IPS services were all about and how she would help Cindy find work. Now my daughter is employed but her IPS specialist, Sandy, advocates for Cindy at work and she helped her improve her work performance. I continue to be involved in many appointments with Sandy and my daughter. Today, for example, Cindy and I met with her IPS specialist and state vocational rehabilitation counselor to talk about how we can all support Cindy.”

Irene, parent of an IPS participant