Considerations in Employment Supports for Individuals with an Autism Spectrum Disorder

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Learning Objectives

• Increase knowledge of…
  – how characteristics of autism spectrum disorders (ASD) can affect employment.
  – current status of vocational programming in ASD.
  – issues and considerations for supporting individuals with ASD in employment settings.

Employment & ASD

• Employment outcomes in ASD indicate…..
  – 50-75% unemployed.
  – Many underemployed.
    • Menial jobs relative to educational attainment.
  – Job instability common.
    • Social, behavioral and mental health problems.
  – Often earn less than other disability groups.
Employment & ASD

- 121% increase in Vocational Rehabilitation services in the past 5 years.
  - Generic services, not ASD specific.
  - Costly.
  - Many denied services due to severity of the disorder.

Why these outcomes for ASD?

Employment & ASD

- Several reasons often cited …
  - ASD and related impairments.
  - Less than effective transition preparation.
  - Less than effective vocational preparation.
Asd & Related Impairments

Autism Spectrum Disorders
• Refers to a group of neurodevelopmental disorders characterized by...
  – Social impairments
  – Communication impairments
  – Restrictive, repetitive, & stereotyped behaviors & interests

Autism Spectrum Disorder
Social Impairment
• Non-verbal behaviors
  – Eye contact
  – Gestures
  – Body position
• Social interest
  – Some may have little interest in others and their activities
  – Some may be overly interested in others activities
• Social & emotional reciprocity
  – Social understanding
  – Perspective taking

Possible Affect
• May appear odd, aloof, and/or unsocial.
• May not establish cooperative working relationships
  – “Difficult to work with”
• Viewed as too direct.
• May be unaware when behavior is perceived as offensive.
• May not recognize or follow organizational policy and procedure without direct instruction.
• May not be motivated by social factors.
### Autism Spectrum Disorder

#### Communication Impairment
- Limited functional communication
- Poor conversational skills
- Unusual or repetitive language or vocalization
- Limited social or pretend play skills

#### Possible Affect
- May not communicate support needs or need for assistance.
- May not bring issues or ideas to supervisor or project team.
- May exhibit vocal behavior that is hard for others to understand or is disruptive.
- May not communicate with co-workers when needed—may not initiate.
- May not engage in appropriate behavior during “down time” or “break time.”

### Autism Spectrum Disorder

#### Behavioral Impairment
- Repetitive and restrictive patterns of behavior and/or interests.
- Routines and rituals.
- Stereotypic motor movements.
- Preoccupied with parts of objects.

#### Possible Affect
- Behaviors may interfere with task initiation and completion.
- Interruption of rituals/routines may cause personal distress and behavior problems.
- May have difficulty with object use due to over focus on parts of objects.

### Autism Spectrum Disorders

- High rate of co-occurring disorders.
  - Cognitive & neurocognitive.
  - Emotional & behavioral (anxiety/depression).
  - Medical (e.g., seizure, GI, sleep).
  - Sensory-motor.
Autism Spectrum Disorders

Related Impairments

• Mental health symptoms and/or disorders.
• Neurocognitive impairments.
• Sensory-motor

Possible Affect

• Low motivation.
• Poor coping skills.
• Poor problem-solving skills.
• Difficulty listening to and understanding directions.
• Difficulty with multi-step directions.
• Difficulty organizing and planning tasks or scope of work.
• Difficulty with learning new tasks.

• ASD and related impairments affect….
   – development and use of skills needed for employment and independent adult living.

Preparation for Employment……

TRANSITION & VOCATIONAL TRAINING
ASD & Transition Planning

• Inadequate or less than effective transition planning & preparation....
  – Lack of evidence-based transition guidelines for ASD.
    • Personnel may lack of knowledge of ASD and how to modify transition practices to improve outcome.
    • Current models may not be most effective for ASD.
  – Limited opportunity to develop essential employment skills.
    • Professional, parent, and/or student may not be knowledgeable of strategies and/or resources to assist in vocational preparation.

ASD & Vocational Training

• Insufficient capacity in state/regional vocational rehabilitation services.
  – Personnel may lack knowledge of current recommendations for ASD vocational preparation practices.
    • Current service model may not ‘fit’ ASD needs.
  – Student, parent, and/or personnel not knowledgeable of resources to assist in vocational preparation.
    • Limited opportunity to develop skills.
    • Limited personnel to meet current demand.

IMPLICATIONS
ASD & Employment

• ASD and related impairments may result in barriers to learning needed skills…
  – expectations for learning work skills.
  – participation and engagement in learning work skills.
  – opportunity for learning work skills.

Considerations to reduce barriers to successful employment

Vocational Rehabilitation Support
Ecological Framework
ASD Accommodations & Supports

Rehabilitation Act & ADA


• Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA; PL 101-336).
Rehabilitation Act & ADA

- Civil rights laws protecting against discrimination based on disability.
  - Individual must present evidence of disability and history of impairment in that area.
- Equal access & reasonable accommodations.
  - NOT a guarantee of appropriateness of services.
  - Reasonable accommodation-cannot place undue hardship on the employer.

New York State

- Adult Career and Continuing Education Services-Vocational Rehabilitation, (ACCES-VR) is ...
  - a program of the NYS Department of Education
  - provides vocational rehabilitation services to individuals with disabilities.
    - administers vocational rehabilitation, special education, and independent living programs.

ACCES-VR

- Requirements include ...
  - the individual has to apply for services.
  - the individual must meet the eligibility requirements.
  - the individual must work with a qualified vocational rehabilitation counselor employed by ACCES-VR to determine eligibility.
ACCES-VR

• Acces-VR has a number of eligibility requirements including...
  – must have a physical or mental impairment.
    • documentation required.
  – the impairment is an impediment to employment.

ACCES-VR

– The individual intends to work.
  • ACCES-VR may discontinue service if it determines the individual is not motivated to work.
– The individual would benefit from and/or requires VR services to achieve his/her employment objective.
  • May be time limited assistance.

ACCES-VR

• ACCES-VR offers a range of services including...
  – assessment…
    • Identify skills, abilities, interests & limitations.
  – career counseling & guidance.
  – rehabilitation & assistive technology.
  – Training…
    • vocational school
    • community college
    • on-the-job
ACCES-VR

- ACCES-VR offers a range of services including (cont.)...
  - supported employment, job placement and job retention.
  - other services that may be needed to achieve the individual’s employment objective.

EMPLOYMENT MODELS: A CONTINUUM

Employment Models

- There are a number of employment models currently described in the USA including...
  - Competitive Employment
    - Independently employed
  - Supported Employment
    - Individual, clustered (enclave), mobile crew
    - Entrepreneurial Supports
      - For-profit corporation
  - Secure Employment
    - Continuum of services
  - Sheltered Workshops
    - Factory setting, segregated
Employment Models

• No ASD specific model has been identified….nor is one model likely to meet the needs of all individuals with ASD.
  – Varied abilities require various models of employment.
  – Most models likely to also require considerations for specific accommodations.

Employment Models

• Little research to guide appropriate assessment and support practices, so....
  – Apply ‘best clinical practice’ to employment planning, including...
    • Assess interest & training needs.
    • Select appropriate employment model & site.
    • Evaluate employment site for needed accommodations & supports.
    • Apply needed accommodations and supports.
    • Evaluate outcome & revise as needed.

CONSIDERATIONS IN ASD EMPLOYMENT
Considerations
• The following should be considered...
  – Ecological framework to reduce barriers.
    • Ecological assessment.
      – Assessment of individual.
        » current developmental levels.
        » employment model and site selection.
      – Assessment of employment context.
        » accommodations and supports.
  – Develop, implement & evaluate a training and/or support plan.
    • Revise plan accordingly.

Ecological Framework
Describe individual’s current levels of performance in areas related to employment.
Training & Support Plan
Describe the employment context: job tasks & setting.

ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT
Ecological Assessment

Individual
- Vocational interests & skill set.
- ASD symptoms.
- Cognitive & neurocognitive profile.
- Adaptive skills.
- Social communication skills.
- Mental health status.

Work Environment
- Policy & Procedure.
- Contextual assessment.
- Job analysis.

Training & Support Plan

- 5 core components including...
  - Job Placement.
  - Personnel training.
  - Work Place Accommodations.
  - Worker Training.
  - Long Term Support.
Job Placement

- Two methods for job placement...
  - Job Match
    - Individualized, based on interests and skills.
    - Environmental supports.
    - Tasks.
  - Job Placement
    - Preference Assessments:
      - Exposure method.
      - Sampling method.

Personnel Training

- Provide ASD awareness training.
  - Supervisor and others, as appropriate.
  - Increase supervisor ability to problem-solve worker difficulties.
- Provide training to supervisors on how to modify the work environment and/or tasks to fit the individual.
  - Proactively plan reasonable accommodations.
- Promote policies of inclusion.

Workplace Accommodations

- Common ASD accommodations....
  - Reduce/eliminate distractions/sensory stimuli.
  - Clearly define work space=task specific.
  - Establish functional workspace.
    - Daily and Activity Schedules.
    - Various Visual Supports.
    - Social Communication supports.
    - Behavior Supports.
Workplace Accommodations

Strategy
• Scheduling Systems
• Visual Supports.
• Social Communication Supports

Type
• Daily & Activity (task specific).
• Clarity, instruct & organize.
• Social Stories & Social Scripts.

Workplace Accommodations

Strategy
• Positive Behavior Supports

Type
• Rules for pro-social skills necessary for successful worker relationships and job stability.
• Contingency management.
• Work site problem-solving.
• Job coach.

Worker Training

• Training is likely to be needed on....
  – Job specific skills:
    • Task analysis of each required task.
    • Activity schedule for each task.
    • On-the job and simulation training.
    – Site specific context.
Worker Training
• Training is likely to be needed for....
  – Job related skills:
    • Participation in work routines.
    • Self-management of work assignments.
    • Social interaction and social integration.
    • Functional communication.
    • Behavior self-regulation.

Long-Term Support
• Identify and prepare natural job supports.
  – Supervisors
  – Project team members
  – Co-workers
• Identify and prepare external job supports.
  – Job coach/supported employment staff.
  – Psychological or social services.
    • Focus on job related skills, problem-solving, anxiety/stress management, treatment of mental health problems.
Considerations

• Providing effective and appropriate employment supports requires...
  – knowledge of ASD and co-occurring impairments and their affect on the individual’s vocational performance.
  • Professional development & training.
  – knowledge of how to establish and maintain an effective work environment by eliminating barriers.
  • Ecological assessment.
  – collaboration with worker, vocational personnel, and community providers for supports and to problem solve for work and behavior difficulties.

Resources

• To learn more about the ACCES-VR program, visit the following website.
  – http://www.acces.nysed.gov/vr/do/home.html
• To learn more about transition activities at the national level, please visit the following website, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.
  – http://www.ncset.org/
Resources

• Visit the Institute for Community Inclusion’s website for a One-Stop Disability Resource manual.
• And, to learn about more about situational assessment for support planning.

Resources

• To learn more about considerations in employment for individuals with ASD, visit the following websites.
  – www.afaa-us.org

Resources

• To download a free copy of a supported employment guide by the Alpine Learning Group (publications tab).
  – http://www.alpinelearninggroup.org/
• To download a free copy of their Adult Autism & Employment guide by the Missouri Disability Policy & Studies.
  – http://dps.missouri.edu/Autism.html
Resources

- Autism Speaks provides multiple resources including a Transition Toolkit, Visual Supports, & an Autism Apps listing.
  - http://www.autismspeaks.org/
- The Organization for Autism Research provides multiple resources including a Guide to Transition.
  - http://www.researchautism.org/

Resources

- The Geneva Center provide various tip sheets for visual supports and a Choice Board (see Visual Aids Gallery).
  - http://www.autism.net/
- The Rochester Regional Center for Autism provides training DVD for Schedules & Direct Instruction for Social Skills.