

Employment and Careers

The Big Ideas:

Reasons to get a job

Work Incentive programs

Barriers to employment

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Job coach

Vocational assessment

Accommodations

Why would I want to get a job?

A job is work you usually get paid to do. There are many **reasons to get a job**, but a big one is that earning money makes it a lot easier to buy the things you need (like food and clothing), and the things you want (like the latest CD). Most adults, and many teenagers, have jobs so that they can **make money**. That's probably a big reason you want to work as well.

You might also want to work because a job would give you **something to do with your time**. Most people are bored and unhappy if they don't have places to go, things to do, and people to see. Jobs give people a place to go and a place where they belong.

Another important reason people choose to work is because they **enjoy the job** they have. Work should be something that you like doing. If you enjoy your job, life will be more fun! Sometimes people talk about **building a career**. That just means thinking about what kind of work you'd enjoy doing not just for today, but in the future, too.

Work Incentive programs were created so that people could earn money and not lose the government benefits, like health insurance, that they still need.

People used to think that if they had a disability of some kind, they could not work. Now we know that is not true. People with disabilities can work just like anybody else. People also used to think that if someone had a disability, they were better off if all their money came from government programs like Social Security. But that's not true, either. Work Incentive programs have been created to help make sure people are better off working at real jobs and earning their own money.

Right now, being a high school student is your job, and you're working hard to learn the skills you need to be a successful adult. Some high school students also have paid jobs after school or on weekends, and some high school students have jobs that are part of their school day. In this chapter, we're going to talk about how to get the supports you need so that you can get and keep the job you want.

Rita's story:

Rita is nineteen years old and has just finished high school. When Rita was in school, she had a hard time reading, and got extra help for that. Whenever people asked her what she wanted to do after high school, she would shrug her shoulders and say, "I dunno." When her mom asked her if she wanted to go to college, she would say, "Mmm, whatever." Rita didn't really know what she wanted to do, but since she was very quiet, people forgot that she sometimes needed help, too. This means that now that she's out of high school, Rita finds herself sitting home every day watching T.V., and feeling very bored.

Rita's next door neighbor, Mrs. M'Buzi, likes to tell people what they should and shouldn't do. Sometimes it makes Rita mad, but sometimes it's helpful. Mrs. M'Buzi has told Rita several times, "You're never going to get a job if you can't figure out what you want to do!" Rita doesn't like to hear this, but she knows Mrs. M'Buzi is probably right.

Is not knowing what she wants to do the only reason Rita doesn't have a job?

Mrs. M'Buzi is talking about something we call **barriers to employment**. "Employment" means jobs, and "barriers" are things that get in the way and keep us from going somewhere. Fences are barriers we see, but there are also barriers we don't see. Here are some common unseen barriers to employment that young people like Rita often face:

- **Not knowing what you want to do.** Think back to when we talked about likes and dislikes. Do you remember how knowing what you like is a first step in deciding what you want to do? Without that, it can be hard to know where to even start.

- **Not having the skills you need for a job.** That means you don't know how to do some things that are important for a certain kind of job. That's one reason it's important to learning skills now for the work you might want to do after you graduate.
- **Not having any real work experience.** Often an employer (or boss) likes to hire someone who has already had a job. This way, the employer knows that that person is able to do the work. Have you ever heard the expression, "Getting a foot in the door?" That means being given a first chance to show people what you can do. Sometimes it can be hard to get that first chance, which is why it can be a good thing to include getting some real work experience in your high school transition plan.

Are those the big barriers Rita is facing?

Yes, but there are a couple of others.

Rita is also a little **scared to work**. Like many people, she sometimes feels afraid of trying something new. She's scared about making mistakes in her job. She's also scared that she won't do well when she goes for an interview (interviews are when someone who might hire you talks to you and tries to find out a little more about you). Rita is afraid she might have a mean boss. She worries that people she works with might not like her.

Rita doesn't like to tell other people when she's having a hard time with something, so she feels like she **doesn't have anybody to help her figure out what to do to get a job**. That's a big barrier to employment. We talked before about how everyone needs supports in their lives. Well, the times we try something new are often the times we need those supports the most.

Activity:

- Either on your own, or with your classmates, think about what your barriers to employment are.
- The following are a list of Rita's barriers. Check off the ones that are barriers for you, too.
- Write down any other barriers that you feel you have.

Barriers to employment:

1. Not knowing what I want to do _____
2. Not having the skills I need _____
3. Not having any work experience _____
4. Being scared of doing something new _____
5. Feeling like I don't have anyone to help me figure things out _____
6. _____

7. _____

8. _____

9. _____

10. _____

What can Rita do to solve these problems?

Here's a little more of Rita's story... It's a nice, warm day, and Rita is standing outside a store in town. Her friend, Brendan, walks by. The two of them had been in reading classes together when they were in high school. They hadn't seen each other since then, but they'd always gotten along, and Brendan seems glad to see Rita.

After talking for a bit, Brendan tells Rita that he's working at a place called Springfield Mechanic. He's always liked fixing cars, and he's making pretty good money, so he's happy with this job. Rita asks him how he was able to get a job like that.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) is a government program that helps people with disabilities find work.

Brendan tells Rita that after high school he went to a place called the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (called VR for short). It's a place that helps people with disabilities get jobs. VR can help people figure out what kinds of things they want to do for work, not just for right now, but for the future, too (that's called "building a career"). It helps people learn what jobs there are in their community. VR can also help people figure out what kinds of skills they have, what skills they need, and how to learn the skills they need.

Job coaches help people find and keep jobs.

Through VR, Brendan got something called a "job coach." A job coach is someone who helps you find a job and then helps you learn how to do the job. A job coach can also help you if problems come up at the job that you aren't sure how to handle.

Rita has the help of her friends, Mrs. M'Buzi and Brendan. Mrs. M'Buzi helped Rita understand that she needs to start thinking about getting a job, and Brendan told her about VR. But neither Mrs. M'Buzi nor Brendan can give Rita the same kind of help VR can give her. That means that Rita needs to move from using only natural supports (friends and family), to using formal supports (supports for people with disabilities). VR is a formal support.

Activity:

- **Either on your own, or with your classmates, look up the phone number for the local VR office. You can either use the phone book or search on-line.**
- **Add the number to your List of Resources under “Formal Supports.”**

How does Rita know what to say when she calls VR?

Actually, Rita isn't at all sure what to say. To solve this problem, she takes out the worksheet called “What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?”

- For the goal she wants to work on, she writes, “Hook up with VR.”
- For the first task to be done, she writes, “Figure out what to say to VR.” She decides this is something she needs some help with. Even though it's hard for Rita to do this, she asks her mother to help her practice making a phone call to VR.

Activity:

- **With one of your classmates, a friend, a family member, etc. role play making a phone call to VR.**
 - **Use the worksheet called, “Getting the Formal Supports (public agency or private service provider) I Need.”**
 - **Think about other questions you'd like to ask.**
 - **Take turns asking the questions out loud, and pretending to be the person from VR who answers the phone.**

What kind of information will VR need from me?

When you call VR they'll tell you just what they need from you. Basically, it will be information that tells them something about your disability and what supports have been helpful in the past. This might include information from your high school and your doctors.

Rita finds that some of the information VR asked for is in a file in her house, but some of it is still at the high school. Rita goes to the school to meet with her old case manager, who is able to give her the information she needs.

So now is Rita all set to go to VR?

She is... except for one last problem. Rita's mother works too far away to drive her. Rita has to figure out how to get to the VR office.

Transportation is how we get to and from places. Public transportation is things like buses and trains that many people use for getting to where they need to go. Depending on where you live, public transportation can be a good way for you to get to and from work. Some places also have public vans for people with disabilities.

However, there are lots of places that have very little public transportation. This can make it hard for people to get to and from their jobs. **Not having transportation can be a big barrier to employment.**

Activity:

- Either on your own, or with your classmates, answer the following questions:

Make a list of the kinds of transportation you can use:

How might you get to and from a job?

Do you think transportation is one of your barriers to employment?

Yes _____ No _____

How does Rita solve this problem?

Rita's mom helps Rita look up the phone number for the local bus company. She also helps Rita think of the questions she should ask the bus company. Here are a few of the questions they come up with:

- Where is the nearest bus stop to my house?
- This is the address of the VR office. Is there a bus stop near that office?
- What times does the bus come to the stop near my house?

Rita practices a few times, then gets up her nerve to call the bus company herself. It turns out that taking the bus is something that Rita will be able to do on her own.

Activity:

- Either on your own, or with your classmates, think of what you'd have to know if you wanted to take a bus to and from a job interview.
- Make a list of the questions you would ask the bus company.

1.	_____

2.	_____

3.	_____

4.	_____

5.	_____

6.	_____

7.	_____

8.	_____

How will VR know what kind of job is right for Rita?

Vocational assessments can help you figure out what your strengths are, and what kind of job would be a good fit for you.

VR will do something called a vocational assessment. Remember, to assess something means to come up with an opinion about it. The word “vocation” has to do with jobs, so a vocational assessment means figuring out what kind of work might be right for you.

Rita is told that part of her vocational assessment will involve visiting different work places, trying out different jobs, and then deciding which jobs might be a good fit for her. However, before they do that, the VR counselor wants Rita to fill out a piece of paper that has a lot of questions on it.

When Rita looks at the paper, she realizes she can't read a lot of the words. She starts to panic. What if telling someone she can't read this paper means she can't get a good job? Rita decides she's not going to say anything to her VR counselor.

Activity:

- Either on your own or with your classmates, answer the following questions:

Do you think hiding the fact that she's having trouble reading is a good thing for Rita to do? Why or why not? _____

If not, what else could Rita do? _____

With one of your classmates, a friend, a family member, etc. practice telling another person about something you need help with (a "challenge").

Does Rita finally say something?

Rita is learning that she has to be honest about her challenges if she's going to get the help she needs. The next day, she calls the VR counselor and tells her she had a hard time reading the paper she was given. The counselor thanks Rita for letting her know, and asks Rita to remind her what she used in high school for help with reading. Rita tells her that she used something called a scan/read machine. It turns out that the VR office has a machine that's a lot like the one that Rita used in school. The counselor tells Rita she's welcome to use it anytime.

It sounds like Rita has reached her goal of "hooking up with VR."

Rita is proud of herself for reaching her first goal. She is especially proud because it's becoming easier for her to speak up for herself.

The VR counselor tells Rita about some work places she can visit. At first Rita thinks they're okay, but when she gets home and thinks about it some more, she realizes that all the jobs have to do with cleaning. Even though she's still a little nervous, she calls the counselor on the phone and tells her that she wants to visit different kinds of jobs, not just cleaning jobs.

Rita isn't sure exactly what career she'd like, but at least now she's ready to do what it takes to find out!

Activity:

- Either on your own, or with your classmates, look at the “What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?” worksheet that Rita filled out (a copy of this is at the end of the chapter).

What did Rita do herself?

1. _____

2. _____

Who or what was able to help Rita?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Put a check next to each level of support that Rita used to “hook up with VR.”

Natural _____ Community _____ Formal _____

Assistive Technology/ Environmental Adaptations _____

Learning from Leaders

When Patricia Wright was in her 20's, a muscle disease in her eyes left her with double vision. At that time she was in college, studying to become a surgeon. The loss of her eyesight changed those plans. It also taught Wright the importance of self advocacy. When she realized that programs and services were set up to "take care" of people with disabilities, she refused to go along with that way of thinking. Instead, she made it clear that just because a person needs some extra support, it doesn't mean that person gives up the right to control her own life.

Wright eventually went to Washington D.C. to fight for the civil rights of all people with disabilities. This included working hard with others for the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Part of her strategy for getting the ADA passed was asking people around the country to write about ways they had been treated unfairly. This helped Congress understand how important it was to have this law.

Since the passage of the ADA, Wright trains people about their rights under this law. She also travels around the world talking about the importance of civil rights for all people with disabilities.

Questions to think about:

1. Ask an adult you know to think about a time they had to change what goal they were working towards because something else changed in their life.
 - How did they feel at the time?
 - What new goal did they find to work towards?
 - How do they feel now about that experience?

Faruk's story:

Faruk is a young man who uses a wheelchair. His IEP says he has “moderate mental retardation.” That means it’s hard for him to learn and remember how to do things. One of Faruk’s strengths is that he loves animals. He enjoys watching animals when he is outside. At home, he feeds and brushes his dog, Pete, and exercises Pete by throwing a ball for him to catch in the backyard.

Although Faruk can’t say what he wants to do after high school, his family, friends and teachers all agree that he would probably like to do something that has to do with animals. At least, it would be a good idea for him to try that kind of work to see whether or not he likes it. The question everyone has, though, is, “What can Faruk do?”

It turns out that Faruk has a cousin who works at a local animal hospital. With the cousin’s help, Faruk’s teacher is able to set up a work experience for Faruk. A job coach from the school goes with Faruk several hours a week to help Faruk learn how to do different things that the hospital needs done. For example, with the help of the job coach Faruk is able to make sure each animal has enough food and water. He’s also been taught where all the supplies (like papers, pens, bandages, and sponges) are kept, and is able to bring the hospital staff the supplies they need.

Accommodations are supports like assistive technology and environmental adaptations that help someone do a job.

Faruk and his job coach have learned that with some accommodations (changes that help someone to do a job), Faruk can do more than he thought he could do. For example, even though he can’t stand up and reach high shelves, he can put things back where they belong. He does this by using something called a “compact material handling device” (this is an example of assistive technology). This helps him move heavy objects around. The animal hospital leaves it in the storage room for Faruk to use, but now other people who work at the hospital are using it as well. They find it makes moving heavy things easier and safer for them, too.

One of Faruk’s other challenges is remembering how to do things. Lately he’s been getting upset with himself for forgetting some of the things he has to do at his job.

Activity:

- Either on your own, or with your classmates, think about Faruk's story and answer the following questions:

Who are the people that help Faruk? _____

What are the things that help Faruk? _____

Who or what might help Faruk remember what he has to do at his job?

Let's Review:

- There are many reasons to get a job. These include:
 - making money so you can get the things you want and need
 - having something to do with your time so you're not bored
 - finding something to do, not just for now, but for the future (this is called building a career)
- There are things that can make it hard to get a job. These are called barriers to employment. Some barriers to employment are:
 - Not knowing what you want to do
 - Not having the skills you need for a job
 - Not having any real work experience
 - Feeling scared to work
 - Not having someone to help you figure out what to do
 - Transportation
- The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VR) is an agency that can help people with disabilities figure out what they want to do for work and how to do it. VR is a formal support. You have to apply for VR services.
- Vocational assessments are things you do to help you decide what jobs might be right for you
- A job coach is someone who helps you learn how to get a job, and then how to be successful at that job.
- Accommodations are changes that are made (including assistive technology and environmental adaptations) so that you can get your job done.

Additional Activities:

- A resume is a listing of the important things you have done.
 - Do you have a resume? If not, ask someone to help you write one.
 - There are many good, free internet supports available to help you create a resume. Try checking out www.onetacademy.com for some ideas of what to include in your resume.
- **PORTFOLIO: Put a copy of your resume in the section for “Official Information.” Remember to update your resume with new things you’ve done.**
- Learn more about federal Work Incentive programs by going to the Social Security Administration (SSA) website at:
<http://www.ssa.gov/work/ResourcesToolkit/redbook.html>
 - Read about Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS), which is a Social Security program that allows people with disabilities to set aside money to pay for items or services needed to reach a specific work goal. Go to:
<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/ResourcesToolkit/elements.html>
 - Go to www.careeronestop.org and click on the CareerInfo Net webpage. You can use this website to explore different careers. Look at some of the Career Videos on this page. If you find a Career that looks interesting, use the website to research the wages for this career, and to find out if there are many available jobs.
 - Check out the Access CAREERS website at www.washington.edu/doit/Careers. Look at the Resources for Students.

Additional Activities (cont.):

- Read through some of the resources included in the Resource Chapter at the end of this workbook.
 - Choose one resource that might provide employment-related supports.
 - Use either the phone or the computer to learn more about this resource.
- Talk to your family and friends about jobs they have.
 - Visit your family and friends and see what they do.
 - Look around your neighborhood to see what jobs are available close to your home.
- Sometimes working at a job, especially a new job, can be stressful. It's important to find healthy ways to cope with that stress. Either on your own, or with your classmates, read the "Ideas for Managing Stress" at the end of this chapter.
 - How do you handle stress in your life?
 - Do you feel the ways you handle stress are working well for you?
 - If not, are there different ways to handle stress that you'd like to try?

Using What You've Learned

1. Take out the worksheet, “What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?” Write down an employment goal you’d like to work on or a problem you’d like to solve.
2. Write down one or more things you have to do to reach that goal or solve that problem.
3. Are these things you can do on your own, or do you think you need some help?
4. If there’s something you can do on your own, fill out the worksheet called, “My To Do List.”
5. If there’s something you need help with, write down who or what might be most helpful to you on the “What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?” worksheet.
6. Depending on which kind of support you decide to try first, fill out the worksheet for getting natural, community or formal supports. Also, don’t forget to think about what kind of assistive technology and environmental adaptations might be helpful.
7. Once you’ve gotten the supports you need, fill out the worksheet for “Evaluating and Managing My Supports.”
8. Remember to thank the people who support you!
9. If a problem comes up that you cannot seem to find a solution to, go back to the “What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?” worksheet to see if there is someone or something else that would be more helpful.

What Kind of Support Would Be Most Helpful?

(copy of the form filled out by Rita)

This is the goal I want to work on (or the problem I want to solve): _____

Hook up with VR

Tasks to be done	What I can do myself	What I need some help with	Who or what might be able to help me	Natural Support	Community Support	Formal Support	Assistive Technology/ Environmental Adaptations
1. Figure out what to say to VR		X	Mom	X			
2. Get information from the high school		X	H.S. case manager		X		
3. Think of questions to ask the bus company		X	Mom	X			
4. Call the bus company	X						
5. Read the vocational assessment at VR		X	VR counselor			X	
6. Read the vocational assessment at VR		X	Scan/read machine				X
7. Speak up for myself to VR counselor	X						

IDEAS FOR MANAGING STRESS

REDUCE YOUR STRESS IN THE MOMENT:

Some situations are stressful. That means they make you feel tense, anxious, angry, etc. It's important to find a way to feel less stressed so that you can handle these situations in a positive way, rather than in a way that makes them worse. Different strategies work for different people, but here are some things that we have found to be helpful:

- Deep breathing - When you are experiencing stress, your breathing often becomes shallow and rapid. Rather than letting this happen, make yourself take long, deep breaths, and think about how that feels. Focusing on breathing is a feature of many different forms of meditation, and calms many people down.
- Visualization - When you get stressed, picture in your mind a calming scene. For example, you might think of being on a beach and feeling the warm sand on your feet, or you might think of a waterfall. Try to identify four things that you might visualize in a stressful situation.
- Take a break - This sounds too simple, but it really does work. When you are experiencing a lot of stress, the thing you are most likely to do is keep yourself in that situation. But that will often make things worse. Rather than doing that, make yourself do something else. You might think that you can't get away, but find out if that is really true. Even a short break can help.
- Go for a walk - One of the things you might do while taking a break is go for a walk. If you can walk outside and get some fresh air, that can be especially helpful.
- Face forward - Often when we get stressed out, we find ourselves thinking the same thoughts over and over again. If you find yourself thinking only about how angry, hurt, or disappointed you are, stop yourself by thinking of what you will do next to work on solving the problem.

IDEAS FOR MANAGING STRESS (cont.)

- Repeat a saying that is helpful - Find a saying that is meaningful to you and repeat it when you need to hear it. Write down sayings that are helpful so you can read them over whenever you feel the need.

If you can take a longer break, you might want to ...

- Take a bath
- Go for a run
- Go to the gym
- Take a nap
- Listen to good music
- Call a friend
- Do something totally different from whatever is making you feel stressed

There is something you need to be careful about: A lot of people use strategies to respond to stress that only cause them further troubles. Anything that might make you feel worse or feel ashamed of yourself later should be avoided. It's fine to go shopping if that's something you enjoy, but you don't want to put yourself in a position where you owe a lot of money you don't have.

Here's another example of what I'm talking about: When Karl got stressed about work, he had a habit of smoking. He had recently quit smoking, but when things overwhelmed him at work one day, he had a cigarette. Within days he was smoking as much as ever. Now he has two things he feels stressed about – his work *and* the fact that he's smoking again!

Good strategies for managing stress leave you feeling better about yourself, not worse.

IDEAS FOR MANAGING STRESS (cont.)

KEEPING HEALTHY:

1. FITNESS:

- Exercise three times a week. People say they do not have enough energy to exercise, but it is a proven fact that when we exercise, we gain energy, rather than lose energy.
- If you are able to, walk places rather than drive, and use the stairs rather than elevators.
- Learn something new like Tai Chi or yoga
- Dance

2. EAT WELL:

- Eat healthy snacks, like fresh fruits and vegetables, instead of chips and candy.
- Eat reasonable portions of food (that means don't eat too much).
- Drink plenty of water or other healthy beverages (coffee, soda and alcohol do not count).

3. GET ENOUGH REST:

- Most people report needing 6-8 hours of sleep per night. How much do you think you need? How much sleep do you usually get?
- Try setting a regular bed time that isn't too late.
- If you have ongoing sleep problems, consult your doctor.

TIME ALONE:

- Plan a few minutes alone each day for silent reflection.
- Pick times when you do not want to be interrupted and tell others.
- Do not answer your phone while you are enjoying alone time.

IDEAS FOR MANAGING STRESS (cont.)

HOBBIES:

- Have at least two hobbies that you do regularly. What are two hobbies that you enjoy, or that you think you might like to try?
- Find a club that is related to your hobby, or get to know other people who enjoy the same hobby.
- Try going back to something you used to enjoy but haven't done in awhile, like drawing pictures or playing a musical instrument.

HUMOR:

Using humor to manage stress means seeing things in a funny way to help you feel better. Laughter is good medicine!

- Write down funny things, or collect funny things like favorite cartoons, so that you can look at them later when you're feeling stressed.

Caution on humor: Especially in the workplace, we have to be careful with humor. What can be funny to you, particularly when you are stressed out, might hurt the feelings of another. If you say something or laugh at something, don't just use your judgment on whether it might be offensive. Strictly follow your organization's rules on what kind of humor is acceptable.

FRIENDS AND FAMILY:

- Call an old friend or write them a letter.
- Reach out to a friend who needs some extra care.
- Make up with a friend you had an argument with.
- Plan an evening out with a person who shares a similar interest.
- Tell at least two people how much you appreciate them.

IDEAS FOR MANAGING STRESS (cont.)

BEING AROUND LIVING THINGS (PLANTS OR ANIMALS):

- If you do not have a pet, offer to walk a friend's dog.
- Get to really know a pet.
- Get pets if you do not have one. If you are not home much, get an animal that needs very little care.
- Get houseplants.
- Take care of your houseplants well. If one needs repotting, do it soon.
- Go out and appreciate nature. It doesn't take long. If you drive past a river or creek, stop for five minutes and watch it flow. If it is dirty, pick up some trash.

FEELING LIKE YOU ARE ACCOMPLISHING GOALS:

- Start each week or each day by making a schedule of all that you want to do. Plan for things taking longer than you think they will.
- Plan small, doable things.
- Which do you like better? Tackling the small things first or the big things? Follow your preferences.
- Take time each week to review all that you got done.
- Appreciate all the things you do for others.

YOUR OUTLOOK ON LIFE:

- Be around people who lift your spirits.
- Do not forget that spirituality (of whatever sort) is important in many lives.
- Identify what you can change and what you cannot change.
- Know what you want out of your life, and think about things that either get you there or do not get you there. Focus on the things that get you there.
- Don't forget to laugh!