



Best Practices For Community Rehabilitation Providers Delivering Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs)

In Partnership with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)

Overview

This manual provides guidance for Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) implementing short-term, **paid Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs)** for students with disabilities. These experiences are designed to build real-world skills in supported environments, with oversight from both the CRP and the VR program.

The Job Coach as a Collaborative Team Member

The job coach plays a critical role in the success of a Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE). While they provide direct, hands-on support to the student on the job site, they are also part of a broader team that includes the student, employer, family, Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) supervisor, and Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC).

A job coach's perspective is essential—they see firsthand how the student is progressing, interacting, learning, and responding to the workplace environment. Because of this unique role, job coaches are often the first to identify when a student may need additional support, when an employer might benefit from more guidance, or when adjustments to the plan are needed.

Job Coach Authority to Initiate Team Meetings

If a situation arises that cannot be resolved through on-site support—such as:

- Persistent behavioral or attendance issues
- Safety concerns
- Misalignment between employer expectations and student needs
- Lack of progress despite support
- Uncertainty about accommodations or site fit

The job coach has the authority and responsibility to initiate a team meeting.

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To do this, the job coach should:

1. Contact the student's VR counselor (VRC) as soon as the concern is identified
2. Share observations, documentation, and proposed areas for discussion
3. Request a team meeting that includes all relevant parties (VRC, CRP, employer representative, student, family, and others as needed)

The purpose of the meeting is to:

- Review progress and challenges
- Adjust supports, schedules, or expectations
- Clarify roles and responsibilities
- Align on next steps and ensure the student's continued success

Proactive communication and shared problem-solving lead to stronger outcomes—for students, employers, and the overall WBLE program.

Service Structure & Reimbursement Guidelines

- Total Reimbursable Hours:
 - 10 hours for site development
 - 45 hours for the paid work experience
- Direct support may be billed for all 45 hours, but only if support is provided on-site
- Hours worked without CRP support present are not reimbursable
- Site development hours may include:
 - Student interview prep and resume support
 - Employer outreach and site matching
 - Coordinating interviews and tours
- Students should be present for development activities when possible, but this is not required

Documentation & Reporting Requirements

- **Monthly reports** must be submitted to the VR counselor summarizing:
 - Student progress

- Hours billed (for development and experience)
- Employer feedback or concerns
- Any incidents, changes, or challenges
- **A Placement Report** is required when the student is officially placed in a WBLE site. This should include:
 - Site name and contact information
 - Start date and schedule
 - Job tasks and goals
 - Wage arrangement (VR-paid, OJT, or employer-paid)
- **Timely and accurate billing** is required. CRPs should follow VR guidance on:
 - Hourly documentation
 - Unit billing practices
 - Submission timelines
- **Ongoing communication with the VR counselor (VRC) is vital**
 - Notify the VRC of all placements and changes
 - Include the VRC in problem-solving and support planning
 - Engage the VRC early if wage reimbursement or an On-the-Job Training (OJT) contract is needed

Best Practices for Site Development (Up to 10 Hours Reimbursable)

- Match employer sites to student preferences, abilities, and career goals
- Prepare students for site visits, interviews, and initial conversations with employers
- When possible, have students attend site visits and meetings to promote ownership and practice self-advocacy
- Clearly explain the WBLE structure to employers, including:
 - 45-hour duration
 - VR-covered wages (if applicable)
 - No hiring obligation

- Ongoing support through a job coach

Topics to Review with Employers:

- Student's schedule, job duties, and supervision
- Accommodations or supports that may be needed
- The role of the job coach/worksite trainer
- How to give feedback and who to contact with concerns
- Safety protocols and emergency contacts
- Wage source (VR reimbursement, OJT contract, or employer-paid)

Implementation of the Work Experience (Up to 45 Hours Reimbursable)

- Provide on-site support as needed for all billable hours
- Deliver direct support through modeling, prompting, coaching, and fading when appropriate
- Maintain professionalism and consistency; the job coach supports—not replaces—the employer
- Track and document all support hours
- Monitor progress toward skill-building goals

Collaboration with VR & Business Services

- Bring VR into the conversation early—especially for **On the Job Training (OJT) Contracts**
- Use VR's business services team to:
 - Help secure employer partnerships
 - Set up OJT contracts
 - Discuss tax incentives or long-term hiring options

Engaging Parents & Families in the WBLE Process

Parents and family members are important partners in supporting students through their first work-based learning experience. They can help students prepare emotionally, build routines, reinforce learning, and celebrate successes. However, it's critical that families understand **their role is to support the student—not manage the workplace.**

Best Practices for Communicating with Families:

- **Set clear expectations upfront**

When preparing for the WBLE, take time to explain the role of the employer, the job coach, and the student. Reinforce that:

- The **job coach or worksite trainer is the main point of contact** for all workplace-related questions or concerns
- **Families should not contact the employer directly**, as this can confuse communication channels and interfere with the student’s learning experience
- The student’s experience is about **growing independence**, and allowing them to navigate challenges with support helps build that

- **Provide a family orientation (verbally or in writing)** that covers:

- What a WBLE is and how long it lasts (45 hours)
- Who pays the student (VR, employer, or OJT contract)
- The types of support the student will receive on-site
- Who to contact with concerns or questions (job coach, CRP lead, or VR counselor)

- **Encourage family support with pre-employment preparation**, such as:

- Helping the student with transportation routines
- Ensuring the student has appropriate clothing or supplies
- Reinforcing attendance, punctuality, and job responsibility
- Talking positively about the experience to build motivation and confidence

- **Keep families updated—but not involved in daily supervision**

Share general progress updates during key check-ins or milestones, and notify them of significant concerns or achievements. Focus conversations on:

- What skills the student is building
- What supports are working
- How they can reinforce learning at home

Supporting Skill Development: Reinforcing Learning on the Job Site

One of the most important roles a Community Rehabilitation Provider (CRP) plays during a Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE) is supporting the student in learning and mastering job

tasks. However, support must be **intentional and balanced**—students need opportunities to try, practice, and sometimes fail in order to build true workplace independence.

Tips to Reinforce Learning on the Job

1. Break Tasks into Steps

- Use task analyses or checklists to make the process more manageable
- Model each step, then fade support as the student becomes more confident

2. Use Multiple Teaching Methods

- Demonstrate visually, verbally, and physically (as appropriate)
- Let the student try the task after watching you model it
- Reinforce learning through repetition, consistency, and routine

3. Provide Immediate and Specific Feedback

- Tell the student what they did well: “You folded that shirt just like the example—nice work!”
- Offer constructive feedback gently and with encouragement: “Try putting the labels on this side like the instructions show.”

4. Create Visual or Written Supports

- Use picture cues, step-by-step instructions, or simple written checklists
- Post reminders or helpful visuals near the work area if allowed by the employer

5. Check for Understanding

- Ask the student to explain the task back to you
- Observe without interrupting to see if they’ve internalized the steps

Promoting Independence Through Learning by Doing

It’s natural to want to jump in and “fix” things quickly, but over-supporting can limit a student’s growth. The job coach’s goal should be to **guide, not do**. Students need safe spaces to **try, stumble, and succeed** on their own terms.

How to Support Without Taking Over:

- Wait before offering help—give the student time to try first

- Use prompts only when needed, and fade them as soon as possible
- Ask, “What do you think you should do next?” to build problem-solving skills
- Allow space for small mistakes (if safe), then debrief together afterward
- Praise effort and progress, not just the outcome

Example: If a student forgets to clock in, gently prompt them afterward rather than doing it for them—then talk through a reminder system they could use tomorrow.

Key Mindset: “Support to Independence”

The goal isn’t to make the student perfect—it’s to help them **grow** into someone who can self-manage, self-advocate, and recover from mistakes in a professional setting.

Let students:

- Ask questions
- Try new things
- Learn how to fix mistakes
- Reflect on what worked and what didn’t

This is where true learning happens.

Reinforcing Soft Skill Development on the Job Site

Soft skills—like communication, teamwork, reliability, and problem-solving—are just as important as job-specific skills in helping students with disabilities succeed at work. These are often the skills that determine whether a student will be able to **maintain** a job after initial training.

During a WBLE, the job coach plays a key role in observing, teaching, and reinforcing these skills in real-time, in real settings.

Core Soft Skills to Focus On

- **Communication** (greetings, asking for help, using appropriate language)
- **Teamwork** (working near others, helping coworkers, accepting feedback)
- **Time management** (arriving on time, staying on task, using breaks wisely)
- **Attitude and professionalism** (being respectful, showing interest, following rules)
- **Problem-solving** (asking questions, adjusting to change, handling mistakes)

Strategies to Reinforce Soft Skills

1. Model the Behavior

- Use “show, then do” techniques to demonstrate professional greetings, tone of voice, and body language
- Model respectful interactions with coworkers and supervisors

2. Set Daily Mini-Goals

- Help the student choose one soft skill to focus on each day (e.g., “Today, let’s practice asking for help when you need it”)
- Reinforce progress immediately with specific praise

3. Use Visuals and Social Scripts

- Create cue cards or visuals that break down expected behaviors (e.g., “3 steps for asking a question at work”)
- Review these before the shift or during breaks

4. Role-Play Scenarios

- Use short, low-pressure role-plays to practice workplace conversations or challenges
- Debrief after with constructive feedback

5. Praise Soft Skills—Not Just Task Completion

- Recognize and name soft skills when you see them

“You did a great job saying ‘good morning’ to your supervisor. That’s a big part of being professional.”

6. Reflect After Each Shift

- Use reflection questions during check-out time:
 - “What went well today?”
 - “Did you have to ask for help? How did that go?”
 - “Was there a time you had to stay calm when something changed?”

1. Allow for Learning Moments

Soft skills often take time, practice, and real-life context to develop. Allow students to:

- Make mistakes and recover with support
- Learn from real feedback in a safe, supportive environment
- Understand why soft skills matter—not just that they’re expected

2. Collaborate Across Environments

- Share soft skill goals with families, schools, and VR counselors so they can be practiced in multiple settings
- Use consistent language and reinforcement strategies to promote carryover

Remember: Every workplace task is also a chance to practice being a responsible, respectful, and adaptable team member. By embedding soft skills into daily coaching, you help students build the confidence and habits that lead to long-term employment success.

Addressing Behavioral Issues During Work-Based Learning

Work-Based Learning Experiences are opportunities for students to learn both job skills and professional behavior in real-world settings. As with any learning experience, challenges may arise—including difficulties with behavior, communication, or social expectations.

CRPs play a key role in **supporting students through these moments, modeling appropriate responses, and working collaboratively with the VR counselor and employer** to promote growth and resolution.

When Behavioral Issues Arise:

1. Use Positive, Supportive Strategies First

- Redirect the behavior calmly
- Use visual or verbal cues to reinforce expectations
- Offer a break, alternate task, or coping strategy as needed
- Reinforce appropriate behavior immediately when it occurs

2. Ensure Expectations Were Clear

- Check that the student understood the task or rule
- Confirm that environmental factors (e.g., noise, changes in routine) weren’t contributing to distress
- Review if accommodations were implemented as planned

3. Document and Communicate Promptly

- Keep detailed notes of the incident, your response, and the outcome
- Share a factual summary with the VR counselor and CRP supervisor
- Do **not wait until the issue escalates**—early communication can help resolve concerns before they become serious

4. Notify the Employer Respectfully

- If the issue affects the workplace, notify the employer using respectful, strengths-based language
- Reassure them that the job coach is actively supporting the student and will adjust strategies if needed
- Emphasize that the student is learning and developing, and challenges are part of that process

5. Coordinate a Plan of Action

- Meet with the VR counselor (and employer, if needed) to review support strategies
- Consider adjusting:
 - Support levels
 - Tasks or schedule
 - Communication or behavioral supports
- Set clear, shared goals with the student around behavior and progress
- Involve the student in developing coping or self-regulation tools

6. Know When to Pause or Exit the Experience

- If behavioral issues create a safety concern or cannot be resolved within the structure of the WBLE, consult the VR counselor immediately
- Do not terminate the experience independently—**all placement decisions must be made collaboratively with VR**

Preventative Tips:

- Review expectations and routines daily during the first week

- Use consistent reinforcement and visual supports
- Allow for breaks and quiet spaces if needed
- Build in daily check-ins to monitor emotions and energy levels
- Create a backup plan for overwhelming situations before starting

Remember: The goal of WBLEs is growth—not perfection. Many students are learning how to self-regulate, advocate for themselves, and manage workplace dynamics for the first time. With the right supports and communication, most challenges can become learning opportunities.

Success Factors

- Focus on the student’s independence, learning, and confidence
- Match students with meaningful tasks
- Build employer trust through clear communication
- Submit all reports and billing on time
- Keep the VRC in the loop from start to finish

Best Practice Guide for Group Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE)

This guide outlines best practices for delivering high-quality, small-group Work-Based Learning Experiences (WBLEs), designed for Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) and worksite trainers supporting groups of four students with one worksite trainer. It includes strategies for group organization, coaching, peer support, skill reinforcement, and measuring success.

Best Practices for Group Implementation

Student Grouping and Preparation

- **Assign students with complementary support needs and interests:** Strategically group students to balance skills and support needs, fostering peer collaboration and minimizing disruption.
- **Coordinate group orientation and site tours:** Provide a comprehensive introduction to the worksite, including expectations, safety procedures, and a walkthrough of key areas to increase comfort and preparedness.

- **Establish clear expectations and safety procedures:** Reinforce daily through visual reminders, verbal reviews, and modeling. Establish shared group norms that encourage accountability and respect.
- **Use visuals and task cues to support instruction:** Post visual schedules, step-by-step task guides, and labels to promote independence and reduce reliance on staff for redirection.
- **Rotate job tasks:** Expose students to a variety of roles within the workplace to build transferable skills and identify interests.

Effective Group Coaching Strategies

Instructional and Coaching Techniques

- **Plan short group mini-lessons:** Before each shift, deliver 5–10 minute lessons on key workplace soft skills such as time management, communication, and problem-solving.
- **Utilize peer modeling and group reinforcement:** Encourage students to learn from one another by highlighting positive behaviors and creating group-based incentives.
- **Provide individual feedback after each shift:** End each session with brief one-on-one feedback that celebrates success and sets goals for the next shift.
- **Establish shared group goals:** Set collective goals like “All students will clock in independently by week 2” to promote cohesion and mutual responsibility.

Leveraging Peer Supports

Promoting Peer Interaction and Leadership

- **Encourage peer support:** Allow students to assist one another with task reminders, skill modeling, and social interaction when appropriate.
- **Intentionally pair students:** Pairings should change over time to increase exposure to different work styles and strengths.
- **Facilitate peer check-ins and team reflections:** Lead structured discussions post-shift on what went well, how peers supported each other, and what could be improved.
- **Celebrate peer-led successes:** Publicly recognize students who demonstrate leadership, kindness, or collaboration.
- **Promote leadership roles:** Rotate responsibilities (e.g., materials manager, timekeeper) to build confidence and engagement.

Reinforcing Skills in a Group Setting

Job Skills Development

- **Demonstrate tasks one-on-one and as a group:** Begin with individual instruction before scaling to group-based modeling to ensure comprehension.

- **Conduct group debriefs:** Use brief discussions at the end of each shift to reflect on successes, challenges, and next steps.
- **Assign buddy pairs:** Use peer partnerships to reinforce task mastery and provide low-pressure practice environments.

Soft Skills Integration

- **Rotate leadership roles:** Roles such as shift leader, time tracker, or supply coordinator can help students develop a sense of ownership.
- **Embed teamwork and communication practice:** Include structured opportunities for collaboration and conflict resolution throughout the day.
- **Set daily soft skill goals:** Focus on one skill each day (e.g., punctuality), and revisit it in end-of-day reflections.

Behavioral Support in Group Contexts

- **Reinforce expectations daily:** Use consistent language and routines to build positive habits.
- **Redirect and prompt as needed:** Use calm, neutral strategies to address disruptions while maintaining the group's momentum.
- **Adjust supports thoughtfully:** Modify instruction or environment as needed while staying within staffing and ratio guidelines.
- **Collaborate with VR counselors:** Discuss behavioral patterns and needs regularly to ensure alignment with students' service plans and goals.

Success Indicators for Group WBLEs

A high-quality group WBLE demonstrates the following outcomes:

- **Student growth in independence:** Reduced need for prompting, increased initiative, and task completion without staff intervention.
- **Improved workplace readiness and soft skills:** Observable improvements in areas like communication, task persistence, and professionalism.
- **Positive employer feedback:** Host sites report satisfaction with student participation and indicate willingness to continue or expand partnerships.
- **Accurate and timely documentation:** Data logs, progress reports, and billing records are maintained and submitted consistently.
- **Collaborative relationships with VR and stakeholders:** Frequent communication and shared decision-making with VR counselors, families, and employers.

