



Work-Based Learning Experience Preparation Guide for Parents, Families, and Support Teams

This guide helps families and caregivers support youth with disabilities as they prepare for and participate in a paid Work-Based Learning Experience (WBLE). These experiences are structured with support (like a job coach or worksite trainer) and help students build job skills, confidence, and independence.

Use this guide to support your student before, during, and after their work experience.

1. Determining Readiness for a Paid Work Experience

Work-based learning is designed to help students learn by doing—not to be perfect from day one. Readiness means a student is willing to try, open to support, and motivated to work.

What Does Readiness Look Like?

- Interest in working or earning money
- Ability to follow directions or routines with support
- Willingness to use tools like checklists, schedules, or communication devices
- Ability to take breaks or ask for help (even nonverbally)

The Importance of Motivation

Motivation—wanting to work or learn something new—is one of the biggest keys to success. A student doesn't need to have all the skills yet, but they do need to be interested and engaged. Motivation may look different for each student:

- Wanting to earn money to buy something
- Wanting to be around others or get out in the community
- Feeling proud to try something new

Helping your student connect their job to personal goals can increase motivation and success.

Research Matters: Predictors of Success in Pre-ETS

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Studies show that students who participate in early paid work experiences, have family support, and develop self-advocacy skills are more likely to succeed in adult employment. This is why your role—and your student’s motivation—matters so much.

2. Supporting a Student in Preparing for a Work Experience

Practical Preparation

- **Help gather hiring documents:**
 - Social Security card
 - Photo ID (school or state)
 - Banking or direct deposit info
- **Support your student in making sure they have what they need:**
 - Uniform or work clothes
 - Reliable transportation or travel training

Understanding Public Benefits

- If your student receives SSI, SSDI, or Medical Assistance, working may affect benefits
- Help them report earnings to Social Security or other benefit agencies
- Ask your VR counselor about connecting with a benefits counselor
- Explore options like ABLE accounts to save money without losing eligibility

Encourage Confidence & Responsibility

- Talk with your student about what to expect at work
- Help them set small, meaningful goals
- Celebrate each step forward—trying something new is a big deal!

3. Supporting a Student During a Paid Work Experience

Be a Supportive Partner

- Stay in touch with the VR counselor, job coach, or CRP—do not contact the employer directly
 - Job coaches act as the communication bridge with the worksite
 - This helps the student grow independence and keeps roles clear

- Join scheduled check-ins or planning meetings
- Encourage the student to express how things are going

Promote Self-Advocacy

- Help your student practice how to ask for help, take a break, or share feedback
- Encourage the use of visuals, AAC, or support tools if needed
- Let them lead conversations when possible—they are the worker!

If Problems Come Up

- Reach out to the support team—not the employer
- Work together to adjust goals, supports, or schedules as needed
- Focus on learning, not perfection—work is a skill like any other

4. Understanding Workplace Accommodations

What Are Workplace Accommodations?

Workplace accommodations are changes or supports that help a person with a disability do their job. Examples include:

- Extra time to learn new tasks
- A written checklist or picture schedule
- Help with communication (AAC, scripts, visual supports)
- Quiet workspaces or headphones to reduce noise
- A job coach or support person to explain tasks

How Is This Different from School?

At school, accommodations are provided by the IEP team.

At work, accommodations must be requested by the worker—this is called self-disclosure. The employer must provide reasonable accommodations, but they need to know what's needed.

How Can Families Help?

- Help the student understand their needs and how to talk about them
- Practice how to ask for help in different ways
- Talk with the job coach or VR counselor to make sure accommodations are in place

- Support the student in learning how to use their accommodations on the job

Remember: Motivation, preparation, and your support are the foundation for your student's success. Every step they take at work builds skills that will help them in the future—with your guidance helping to make it possible. Encourage your student to speak up about what helps them do their best. Workplace accommodations—like checklists, extra time, visual supports, or job coaching—can make a big difference, and your support in helping them understand and use these tools is key to their success.