

Employment First Practices for Youth with Disabilities

Employment First is a nationwide framework based on the belief that everyone is capable of work and should be prioritized as the first option for youth with disabilities that are transitioning out of school. The goal is for individuals with disabilities to have the opportunity to work along others without disabilities and to receive the same pay as others who are doing similar work.

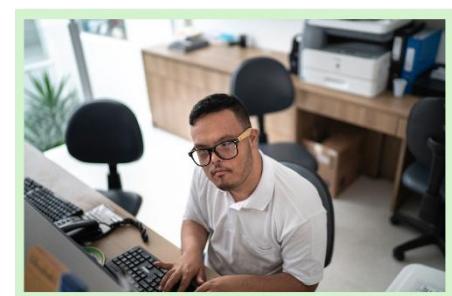
Many individuals with disabilities want to work. Work can provide more rewards than just a paycheck like:

- Developing a sense of purpose and identity beyond disability
- Increased opportunities to take responsibility and have a greater sense of control over their own life
- Build confidence, self-esteem, independence, and self-advocacy skills by demonstrating their skills, talents, and contributions
- Being a meaningful part of a diverse and inclusive workforce
- Learning new skills
- Planning for the future including their hopes and dreams with more choices
- Being a part of their community
- Meeting new people, making new friends and increasing social interactions
- Developing a regular routine which can improve physical and mental health

What happens at age 18?

Most youth who get Social Security Income (SSI) will have a **review at age 18**. Before age 18, Social Security looks at:

- Family income
- The youth's disability



At age 18, Social Security uses **adult rules**:

They do **not** look at family income.

They look at **how the disability affects the youth's ability to work**.

Many young adults may not meet the adult rules and could lose SSI. This is why learning work skills early is very important.

It is normal for parents to have concerns about their young adult working and they may have some fears, questions, and concerns.



Fear: My young adult will lose their benefits for Medicaid or SSI



Possible Solution: The Social Security Administration provides many work incentives, and the rules of social security encourage people to work. Work with a **Benefits Counselor** who can provide work incentives planning and assistance.

Social Security has **work incentives** that can:

- Help youth keep some or all of their SSI
- Reduce how much earned income “counts”
- Help youth keep their **Medicaid**
- Let youth try work without risk

A **Benefits Counselor** can help families understand:

- How work and earnings affect SSI
- How to keep health insurance
- How youth can be better off financially
- What rules apply in Maryland



Fear: My young adult has medical or behavioral challenges



Possible Solutions: Customized employment, job coaches, supported employment, and behavioral supports can be explored. If the youth receives a Medicaid waiver, they might be able to receive these supports.



Fear: My young adult does not understand what work means or the type of job they want



Possible Solutions: They can try activities like volunteering, Pre-Employment Transition Services through DORS which can provide job exploration, job shadowing, tours of local businesses, and work-based learning.



Fear: My young adult has communication challenges



Possible Solutions: It is important that employers, service providers, and co-workers learn how your young adult communicates best - through pictures, technology, or sign language. There are many service providers that can support this.



Fear: Transportation is a problem



Possible Solution: DORS can provide transportation training and the youth's team can explore Medicaid transportation, paratransit, ride-share, or learning to use public transportation.



Fear: My young adult struggles to fit in or make friends and is fearful of new environments



Possible Solutions: The more the youth is included, the more comfortable they will feel. Disability awareness training, job counseling, and life skills coaching can be explored. The youth can start out with a small amount of work hours and gradually add more.



Fear: Transition activities will change benefits



Possible Solution: Transition activities that do not change benefits include transition planning, job exploration, career and technical education, Pre-employment Transition Services.

Learn more at:

www.mdtransitions.org

Get Free Benefits Counseling in Maryland Through DORS

Maryland's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) provides **free benefits counseling** to many youth with disabilities. Refer to DORS by [clicking here](#).

If Not Eligible for DORS

Families can also get support from: [Maryland Work Incentives Network \(MD-WIN\)](#)

Ticket to Work Help Line

1-866-968-7842

1-866-833-2967 (TTY)

Monday–Friday, 8 a.m.–8 p.m. ET

Other Resources:

- [Embrace Employment First Practices](#)
- [All-Youth-Can-Work-Fact-sheet-11.20.2019.pdf](#)
- [The Benefits of Work](#)
- [Social Security Benefits: Practical Tips for Teachers, Families, and Students](#)
- [Competitive Integrated Employment - Can My Child Do This?](#)
- [Maryland's American Job Centers - Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning](#)
- [MWEJobs](#)
- [Home - MarylandABLE](#)
- [Tuition Waiver for Students with Disabilities Receiving SSI or SSDI](#)
- [Resources for People with Disabilities - Division of Unemployment Insurance - Maryland Department of Labor](#)