

# **Holding Engaging Conversations about Work**

## ***Toolkit to Support Informed Choice in Employment***

**Minnesota Department of Human Services**  
**2017 Informed Choice for Employment**

This toolkit was developed to help support professionals in helping people with disabilities consider employment as an option and plan for work. The toolkit was developed by the MN Departments of Education, Employment and Economic Development, and Human Services. It is a work in progress. This is just a guide; it is not an all-inclusive list of activities, resources, or tools that will help you facilitate informed choice. You may have other resources, information or tools that you have also found to be helpful. Feel free to use those resources, and let us know about them. Please use the “Give Feedback” button on DB101 to share your thoughts about the toolkit, suggest additional resources, or provide other feedback.

The toolkit contains information, tools and videos about:

- How to prepare yourself to engage a person in conversations about employment
- How to better support people where they are at with work
- Encouraging people to explore employment as an option in the future if they’re not ready today
- Tips on how to help people see competitive work as a possibility
- How to facilitate successful employment outcomes
- Assess your organization’s readiness to support people in competitive, integrated employment

### **What is informed choice?**

- Informed choice means that the person you are supporting is able to make decisions based on complete information that connects to their situation.
- It means that people are given accurate information about what they need to achieve their goals.
- Informed choice occurs when a person understands all of their options and the *risks* and *benefits* of their decisions.
- Informed choice is an ongoing process that happens through engaging, person-centered conversations and activities. It is circular and does not occur just one time - it is an ongoing process.

### **What is my role in informed choice?**

Support professionals role in informed choice is to help ensure the person:

- Understands all of their options

- Understands methods to overcome barriers
- Understands the potential risks and benefits of their decisions.

And:

- Know where to direct people when you don't know the answers
  - Be sure to include community resources and supports that may not be disability-specific.
  - Explore and utilize community and other informal supports and resources.
  - Follow up or assist them to ensure that the connections are made, the resources/support met their needs and they were able to make an informed choice.

Actions	Resources
<p>1. <b>Prepare Yourself:</b></p>	<p>You can prepare yourself to have engaging conversations about work by understanding <b>Employment First, Person Centered Planning, and Informed Choice</b>.</p> <p>Some things you can do include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the "<a href="#">Employment First – Person Centered Planning – Informed Choice</a>" document to get a better understanding of what informed choice is and how it fits into your work.</li> <li>2. Watch the 4 minute <a href="#">Make Work Part of the Plan video</a>.           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. There are <u>discussion questions</u> after the video which you may answer on your own or use at a staff meeting to promote a dialogue about employment and people with disabilities.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Review the "<a href="#">Best Practices for Success in Employment</a>" document to consider what has worked for other to achieve success in employment.</li> <li>4. Watch the following person-centered planning videos to learn about applying person centered planning techniques to conversations about employment:           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. <a href="#">Introduction</a> (10 minutes)</li> <li>b. <a href="#">Think Differently</a> (12 minutes)</li> <li>c. <a href="#">Communicate Differently</a> (4 minutes)</li> <li>d. <a href="#">Work Differently</a> (14 minutes)</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

Actions	Resources
<p><b>2. Hold engaging conversations:</b></p>	<p>Holding an engaging conversation is far more than asking if a person wants to work. It is important to ask open ended questions so people can share their narrative and story. Find out about their:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Interests – what do they like to do, not just related to work but in their spare time;</li> <li>○ Hobbies,</li> <li>○ Chores at home,</li> <li>○ Activities they enjoy,</li> <li>○ Mentors they look up to,</li> <li>○ Favorite school subjects, and</li> <li>○ Where they spend their time.</li> </ul> <p>Asking these kinds of questions can help identify the person’s preferences. This can lead to work they will enjoy instead of just following a pre-determined plan, which may not be a good fit.</p>
<p><b>3. Figure out where the person is at:</b></p>	<p>Use your current assessment tools and processes (IEP, MNCHOICES, etc.) to help figure out where the person is at related to employment. Using these tools in a person-centered way, you can collect information to help support and document informed choice.</p> <p>Some things you can do include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Review the <a href="#">Meeting the Person Where They Are</a> document to help target your conversation to the person.</li> <li>2. Review the <a href="#">Interviewer Companion Guide</a> to get ideas about how to assess.</li> </ol>
<p><b>4. Person is ready and interested to working</b></p>	<p>A person who is ready for work should move into job exploration right away. You can help facilitate this through a variety of ways, like authorizing, providing or referring for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Appropriate and necessary employment services through a home and community based services waiver,</li> <li>● Customized employment,</li> <li>● Workplace learning experiences, and</li> <li>● Exploring other community employment options.</li> </ul> <p>See the <a href="#">Work Experince Guide</a> for more ideas and information.</p> <p>Do a <a href="#">DB101 Estimator Session</a> (or contact the Disability Hub MN at 1-866-333-2466) to see how benefits may be affected by work. This can also help in thinking through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ How many hours a week the person wants to work,</li> </ul>

Actions	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Their earning goals,</li> <li>❖ Health care coverage options, and</li> <li>❖ If they will be better off financially.</li> </ul> <p>It's important to document any insight into how the person came to choose work.</p>
<p><b>5. Person is not sure about work or does not want to work:</b></p>	<p>The person may be unsure for a number of reasons. Maybe they have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Never been asked if they want to work,</li> <li>• Had a bad experience with work in the past,</li> <li>• Been told they can't work, or</li> <li>• The idea they will lose their benefits if they go to work.</li> </ul> <p>You need to dig in deeper to get a better understanding of their thoughts and feelings.</p> <p>Activities you can support a person in doing can include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Engage in a dream building exercise using the "<a href="#">Build Your Dream</a>" document. This document helps frame questions to help the person figure out what they want in their lives, like where they want to live, activities they want to do, how they get around, etc. This can be used to help create a budget to reach these dreams.</li> <li>2. Discuss how work can be a path to achieving many of their goals beyond financial (socialization, utilizing skills and abilities, etc.). See number 8 – Using Work as a Solution, and the "<a href="#">Interviewer Companion Guide</a>" for more information.</li> <li>3. Sign up for a MyDB101 account and complete an estimator session using the person's information or information in the "<a href="#">DB101 Estimator Session</a>" document to show how income and benefits go together. See number 10 for instructions on how to sign up for a MyDB101 account.</li> <li>4. Help the person gain work experience. Review the <a href="#">Work Experience Guide</a> to learn more about helping a person build their resume.</li> </ol> <p>If the person begins to see work as an option, go back up to number 4. If the person decides not to work at this time, as long as they understand what this means for their life, that's okay – it's their decision. See Question 7 for more information about what to do in this situation.</p>
<p><b>6. Addressing barriers and pitfalls</b></p>	<p>Plan ahead and prepare for common barriers you may encounter.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Common barriers include: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. I have had a bad experience with work.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

Actions	Resources
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestion: Discuss how we all experience this in our work sometimes. Review the <a href="#">Work Experience Guide</a> to learn more about potential ways to help a person gain work experience.</li> </ul> <p>b. My disability prevents me from working.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Suggestion: Discuss potential accommodations, point out examples of other people with disabilities who work, and give information on legal rights. The DB101 article on <a href="#">Progressive Disabilities</a> may be helpful.</li> </ul> <p>c. I need supports/services (transportation, assistive technology, etc.) in order to work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <a href="#">Services and Supports</a> document offers some tips in this area. There are many funding sources for services and supports, like home and community based services waivers, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, or an employer.</li> </ul> <p>d. My family or others are not supportive.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help the family understand the pros and cons, and what’s working and not working in the person’s life. Help problem solve by looking at the situation from the person’s perspective, as well as the family or other’s perspectives. Watch the 10-minute video <a href="#">Working and not Working</a> to get a better idea of how to facilitate this.</li> </ul> <p>e. People won’t hire me because I have a disability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many employers hire people with disabilities. Explore the neighborhood, or places the person is interested in working and ask about the needs of those employers. Try to match employer needs with the person’s skills and abilities.</li> <li>• Help the person gain work experience and additional training to increase their competitiveness on the job market. Review the <a href="#">Finding the Right Job For You</a> article on DB101.</li> </ul> <p>f. I don’t know what I want to do.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Try some career exploration activities with the person. Look at the <a href="#">“Work Experience Guide”</a> and <a href="#">“My Skills My Future”</a> for more ideas.</li> </ul> <p>Remember that family and friends may be an important source of information about the person’s strengths and abilities. They may also be a great source of support and connection to employment. See the <a href="#">“Interviewer Companion Guide”</a> for more information about getting the person’s preferences about what they want to do.</p>

Actions	Resources
	<p>You might also hear “I can only work this many hours a month or I’ll lose my benefits.” To help a person in this situation, explore benefits together. You can:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Familiarize yourself about benefits by watching the “Public Benefits: A Bridge for People with Disabilities,” and other benefit videos on the <a href="#">DB101 Videos</a> page.</li> <li>3. Help the person set up a MyDB101 account (see question 10), and run a DB101 Estimator session to see how benefits and work go together. Use Talk to an Expert live chat on DB101 if you have questions.</li> </ol>
<p><b>7. Person decides not to work</b></p>	<p>If the person decides not to work in competitive employment at this time, it’s their choice. It is important they understand what this means for their life – their income, benefits, housing, etc. Informed choice isn’t about forcing a person into competitive work. It’s about helping them understand options, addressing fears and barriers, and coming to a decision based on available, accurate information.</p> <p>However, just because competitive employment was not chosen <b>right now</b>, that doesn’t mean it won’t be an option in the future.</p> <p>Document the results of the conversations. Include the reasons the person decided not to pursue competitive employment. Be sure to check in <b>at least</b> twice a year to see if a person has changed their mind about working.</p>
<p><b>8. Using work as a solution</b></p>	<p>Work may not directly come up in a conversation. Instead you might hear things like, “I want to be able to visit my grandchildren,” “I want to meet more people,” “I want to move out of my parent’s house” or “I want a new cell phone.” You can bring up work as a way to meet those goals.</p> <p>Work can be a strategy to achieve all kinds of goals including: meeting new people, increasing income, accessing health care, living independently, pursuing a hobby, or just getting the things a person wants.</p> <p>For example, if someone wants to live on their own, you might work through a conversation using the <a href="#">“Build Your Dream”</a> guide. In this guide you help the person create a budget. When they see that moving out might require more income, you can talk about how work is the strategy to help them have the resources to move to their own place.</p>
<p><b>9. Knowing informed choice happened</b></p>	<p>Remember, informed choice is a process and is the result of holding engaging conversations. In this toolkit we have given you resources to help engage in that process. Doing the activities in this</p>

Actions	Resources
	<p>toolkit with the person, increases the likelihood that they have the information they need to make informed choices. You need to document these activities and conversations in the person’s plan. This will help determine next steps and to show what you did to help ensure person-centered planning and informed choice occurred.</p>
<p><b>10. Setting up a myDB101 account</b></p>	<p>My DB101 lets you customize the DB101 site to meet your needs, and the needs of people you serve. With My DB101, you can: save favorite DB101 pages, find DB101 mini-tools easily, and save your DB101 Estimator sessions and return to them later.</p> <p>To set up a DB101account:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Go to <a href="https://mn.db101.org/">https://mn.db101.org/</a></li> <li>2. Click on “Register” at the top of the DB101 home page</li> <li>3. Enter your email, create a password, and enter your organization</li> <li>4. Click “Submit”</li> <li>5. Click on “My DB101” on the top of the page. It says, “Welcome (your email)”</li> </ol>