



## The Hidden Disability

Employment Implications for Individuals with Substance Use Disorder and Mental Illness

May 6, 2019

NYS APSE Employment First Training Institute

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### Focusing on Mental Health and Substance Use Disorders Conditions

Acknowledgement that a "Hidden Disability" can take many forms:

- AIDS/HIV
- Chronic health conditions
- Attention Deficit Disorders
- Autism Spectrum Disorders
- Brain Injury
- Chronic Pain
- Hearing Loss
- Learning Disabilities
- Migraine Headaches
- Multiple Chemical Sensitivity
- Sleep Disorders
- Vision Impairments, etc...

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### Barriers to Employment

*Let's discuss some barriers that you think an individual with substance use disorder or mental illness might have...*

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### Typical Barriers

- Legal Conviction History
  - Gaps in employment / inconsistent work history
  - Lack of higher education / lack of high school completion
  - Restrictions on employment based on probation / parole
  - Inability to return to previous field of employment
  - Transportation barriers
  - Stable Housing
  - Lacking appropriate work clothing / interview clothing
  - Financial disincentives
- And last but not least... STIGMA

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<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QficvVNIxTI>

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### Disclosure

Let's look again at some of the common employment barriers and discuss benefits / drawbacks of disclosure:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • Legal conviction                                     | • Transportation barriers                     |
| • Gaps in employment                                   | • Stable housing                              |
| • Limited education                                    | • Financial disincentives                     |
| • Restrictions on employment based on probation/parole | • Lacking appropriate work/interview clothing |
| • Inability to return to previous place of employment  |   |

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Let's give disclosure a try!

*Disclosure Practice*

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Prepare a speech to discuss barriers during the job interview process.

First... *WHY* help your client prepare a speech?

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Speech tips for your client

- Bring it up before the interviewer does, if possible. (Why?)
- You want to stress that you take responsibility for the barrier and you don't put the blame on others. Why do this? Employers have stated that they want people to be honest and open about their backgrounds; and especially show that they have dealt with the barrier and have an attitude of acceptance / maturity.
- Be aware of your tone of voice when you discuss the barrier.
- Have responses prepared when they ask you about your barriers. Be positive about the steps you have taken since then, but don't go into unnecessary details. Be brief and to the point.

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### Speech tips for your client (continued)

- Focus on the future and talk about how your skills will make a positive contribution to the company.
- If you are still working with someone that is helping you with overcoming the barrier(s), consider offering that information to the interviewer as another person that can vouch for your rehabilitation.

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Disclosing a barrier is one thing...  
disclosing a diagnosis is another.

*When is disclosing a diagnosis a good idea for your client?*

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### What if your client does not want to disclose?

- Considerations
- Weighing pros and cons
  - Personal choice
  - Job references
  - Practice interviews
  - Other?

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### Small Work Group Discussion

*Do you think there any differences in the approach by the Employment Specialist/Job Placement professional when placing someone in employment with a mental health or substance use disorder disability versus other disability categories?*

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### Advocating with employers

*Strategies that work*

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### Strategies for advocating with employers

- Participate in business networks (i.e. Chamber of Commerce)
- Host employer open houses
- Maintain electronic database to track employer contacts
- Send thank you cards and holiday cards
- Maintain contact with employers after job has ended
- Patronize local businesses
- Network with former employees and colleagues
- Conduct informational interviews
- Try to meet with CEO or other key personnel (i.e. hiring manager, HR staff)
- Learn and use business language
- Sell the benefits of hiring people with disabilities

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