

Roles and Responsibilities of an Employment Support Professional

Innovations in Employment Supports

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NEXT-LEVEL WORKFORCE EDUCATION

Assumptions and bias

An assumption is a conclusion we accept before we have enough information. Bias influences what we notice, how we interpret it, and what opportunities we consider. These patterns can develop through prior experiences, workplace habits, or expectations about disability.

An ESP may sincerely want to help while still making an assumption that narrows a person's choices. Checking assumptions creates room for better information and more individualized support.

Separate observation from interpretation

Observation: "During the store visit, Jordan spoke only when the coach asked a direct question."

Interpretation: "Jordan cannot work with customers."

The observation describes what happened in one setting. The interpretation predicts an ability across settings. Jordan may need time to become comfortable, a defined role, a different communication method, or an opportunity to practice.

Common patterns to watch for

- Confirmation bias: noticing evidence that supports an existing belief while overlooking information that challenges it.
- Generalizing from one experience: treating difficulty in one task or setting as evidence about all work.
- Preference bias: steering someone toward work that seems comfortable or sensible to us.
- Attributing difficulty only to the person: overlooking unclear instruction, inaccessible information, transportation, or the work environment.

Checking assumptions in practice

First assumption	Another possibility	What to explore
"She is not motivated."	The experiences offered do not interest her, or earlier setbacks affect her confidence.	Ask what she wants and what she liked or disliked about previous experiences.
"He cannot work independently."	The instructions or teaching method may not fit.	Try clearer steps or a useful tool and observe the result.
"Her family will not let her work."	Family members may have unanswered concerns.	Hear her goals directly and identify specific questions about support.
"He is too quiet for customer service."	A familiar setting or defined task may change how he communicates.	Offer a relevant experience and accessible communication options.
"That career is unrealistic."	We may know too little about the field and its different roles.	Explore actual tasks, workplaces, entry routes, and supports.

Before I decide

- What did I directly observe, and in what circumstances?
- What am I interpreting or predicting?
- What does the person say or communicate about the experience?
- What support has been tried, and what has changed?
- What further information or experience would help?
- Would I interpret this differently if the person did not have a disability?

Ableism in everyday support

Ableism includes beliefs, actions, and systems that devalue disabled people or treat non-disabled ways of doing things as the expected standard. In employment support, it can shape who gets an opportunity, whose voice carries weight, and which supports are considered acceptable.

Ableism may be obvious, such as assuming someone cannot work because of a diagnosis. It may also appear in routine decisions made with helpful intentions, such as answering every question for an employee.

How it can appear

- Lower expectations: offering only a narrow range of jobs without exploring the person's interests.
- Speaking over the person: asking the coach about an employee's preferences while the employee is present.
- Overprotecting: ruling out an experience because it may involve frustration or ordinary workplace challenges.
- Treating access as an extra: describing a useful communication or learning support as unfair special treatment.
- Ignoring lived experience: dismissing what a person says about their own needs.
- Infantilizing: using a childlike tone or praise that would be unusual for another adult employee.

Expectations and support

High expectations mean taking the person's goals and capacity to learn seriously. Appropriate support responds to actual tasks and conditions. A person may meet workplace expectations using a checklist, assistive technology, additional practice, or another communication method.

Example: Sam uses a photo sequence to prepare meeting rooms. The useful question is whether Sam prepares the rooms accurately and on time. The presence of a support tool alone does not tell us the quality of the work.

Recognizing ableism and changing practice

Practice to reconsider	A more respectful response
Speaking to the coach instead of the employee	Address the employee directly; support communication in the way the employee prefers.
Offering only familiar job types	Explore the person's interests and a wider range of real tasks and settings.
Praising an adult excessively for ordinary tasks	Offer specific, adult feedback: "You checked the order and caught the missing item."
Assuming an accommodation lowers standards	Identify the job expectation and explore how access supports help the employee meet it.
Preventing an experience because it may be difficult	Discuss the actual concerns with the person and explore useful supports.
Calling someone "our placement" in every conversation	Use the person's name or the relevant role, such as applicant, employee, or coworker.

Language and adult respect

Ask about language and communication preferences rather than assuming one term suits everyone. Speak to the person as an adult. Describe skills and support needs specifically and avoid presenting disability as a reason to disregard their voice.

Practice example

An employer asks, "Can she follow directions?" while Renee is standing beside the coach. The coach can redirect respectfully: "Renee can tell you about how she learned the inventory task. Renee, would you like to explain, or would you like me to help?"

The goal is to make space for Renee's participation without putting her on the spot or assuming she wants the coach to speak.

Supporting informed choice

Informed choice means helping a person understand a decision, exploring available options, consider likely consequences, and communicating a preference. The ESP makes information accessible and supports the person's participation without taking ownership of the decision.

Understand the choice

Explain the actual decision in manageable language. Use pictures, examples, demonstrations, or communication tools when helpful. "Do you want this job?" may be too broad if the person has not seen the tasks or understood the schedule.

Compare options

Explore what differs between opportunities: tasks, hours, pay, transportation, workplace culture, supports, and growth. Include the option to seek more information or continue exploring when available.

Consider consequences

Discuss potential benefits and difficulties fairly. Explain what is known and what still needs confirmation. Arrange qualified benefits counseling when earnings raise questions about benefits. Avoid promises about promotion or future jobs without evidence.

Express a preference

Give the person time and their preferred way to respond. Ask them to describe what appeals to them, what concerns them, or what they want to try. Checking understanding should support communication rather than become a test the person must pass to be heard.

When our recommendation differs

Explore the person's reasoning and offer information respectfully. A choice may involve a tradeoff we would not make ourselves. Revisit options when circumstances change and use supervision or appropriate consultation when responsibilities conflict.

Limited experience can limit choice

Someone may choose the only type of work they know. Offer relevant experiences so choices have substance. Trying a different setting can help the person confirm a preference or discover a new interest.

Our role across all services

The purpose of support will change with the service and the person's goals. Across services, the ESP helps turn experiences and information into meaningful action while keeping the person involved.

Guiding question	What it asks us to do
Direction — What does the person want?	Listen to goals and preferences; revisit them as experience grows.
Discovery — What are we learning?	Observe strengths, interests, learning methods, and conditions that support success.
Support — What will help?	Teach, remove barriers, coordinate resources, and adjust support.
Progression — What is the next useful step?	Use evidence and the person's priorities to plan learning, employment, stability, or advancement.

Shared responsibilities across all services

- Offer meaningful experiences and accessible information.
- Understand the person and learn about actual business needs.
- Teach skills using methods that fit the person and task.
- Support self-advocacy and workplace relationships.
- Document observations, supports, the person's perspective, and next steps.
- Coordinate with the team, with the person involved, and appropriate permission for information sharing.

Our role and its boundaries

The ESP supports decisions and provides information within their competence. Benefits, legal, clinical, or specialized questions may require qualified colleagues or outside resources. Identify the question, connect the person to appropriate expertise, and follow up on how the information affects the plan.

Example: when someone worries that earnings will affect benefits, help gather the questions and arrange qualified benefits counseling rather than offering an unverified estimate.

Support that builds ownership

Before stepping in, ask what the person can do, what they want help with, and whether a tool or natural workplace support could help. Independence can include knowing when and how to ask for assistance.

Community Based Prevocational

Purpose and practice focus

Use community experiences to build general work-related skills and learn about interests, strengths, and support needs. Connect activities to the person's vocational goals and use what is learned to guide the next steps.

ESP actions

- Plan experiences with an identified learning purpose and the person's input.
- Offer variety so the person can compare tasks and settings.
- Observe communication, task completion, problem solving, and response to instruction.
- Try supports and record whether they help.
- Reflect with the person and adjust experiences rather than repeating activities without a reason.

Pathway to Employment

Purpose and practice focus

Bring discovery information together into a career, vocational, and transition plan that reflects the person's strengths and goals. Experiences should help clarify direction and the steps needed to pursue it.

ESP actions

- Combine interviews, observations, experiences, and reflection.
- Seek the person's perspective throughout discovery.
- Look for themes that appear across settings and tasks.
- Identify conditions for success, including useful instruction and supports.
- Connect findings to a vocational direction and specific next steps.

Employment Training Program

Purpose and practice focus

Use discovery, job development, and a paid internship to support movement toward employment. The ESP helps ensure that the experience relates to the person's career interests and provides useful information about job fit and support.

ESP actions

- Support the referral or application process as appropriate.
- Coordinate with the ETP Supervisor.
- Connect assessment and internship opportunities with career interests and business needs.
- Teach tasks and document progress, support needs, and the person's response.
- Use findings to guide the discovery report and job development plan when appropriate.

Supported Employment and service transitions

Intensive support

Focus on discovery with the person, learning about businesses, and matching strengths and preferences with opportunities. Support applications, interviews, and preparation for the start of work.

Extended support

Once work begins, support learning, workplace communication, independence, and continued growth. Adjust coaching when duties, supervisors, schedules, or support need to change. Keep discovery active as the person develops new interests or skills.

Transition from ACCES VR

A handoff should preserve useful knowledge and continuity. Involve the person, clarify who will provide ongoing support, and coordinate appropriate information sharing.

- Confirm the continuing provider, contact person, and support arrangements.
- Share strengths, effective supports, and current workplace needs.
- Clarify who will communicate with the employer and when.
- Include the person's preferences about communication and coaching.
- Record outstanding actions and arrange follow-up after the transition.

Ethical Dilemma Activity

1

Identify the ethical tension.

What values or responsibilities are in conflict?

2

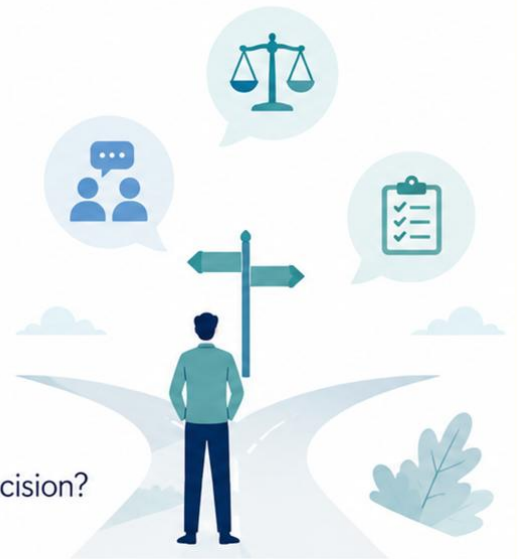
Decide what you would do.

What action would you take in this scenario?

3

Explain why.

What principles, risks, or consequences shaped your decision?



Select a spokesperson to share your group's thinking.

Ethical Dilemma – Alisha



Alisha wants to work in clothing retail and recently completed an unpaid CBPV assessment at a local clothing store. The assessment ended several weeks ago, and the business was pleased with her work. However, the manager did not offer Alisha a paid position or identify a clear path toward employment.

You recently discover that Alisha has continued returning to the store for a few hours each week without your knowledge. The manager has allowed her to help with tasks such as organizing merchandise, returning items to racks, and preparing displays.

Alisha explains that she enjoys going to the store, feels accepted by the employees, and refers to them as her coworkers. She says she did not tell you because she was worried you would make her stop. The manager appreciates the additional help and says Alisha is welcome to continue because “she enjoys being here.”

Ethical Dilemma – Jenny

Jenny completed Discovery and identified beauty retail as her preferred career direction. She is especially interested in helping customers, learning about cosmetics, and eventually working as a beauty advisor or makeup artist. These goals are reflected in her Job Development Plan.

After several weeks of job development, Jenny has not yet secured an interview in beauty retail.

A Kohl's store with a Sephora located inside it has an immediate opening on its overnight cleaning team. The position would provide steady income, but it offers little customer interaction, no direct cosmetics experience, and no guaranteed pathway into the Sephora department.

Jenny is unsure what to do. She wants to begin earning money as soon as possible because she is struggling to pay her bills. At the same time, she is concerned that accepting the position could pull her away from the career direction she identified through Discovery.

Her job developer believes the position could help Jenny build a work history, earn income, and potentially make connections within the store.



Ethical Dilemma – Gabby



Gabby works at a local college and performs well in her role. After another employee reports that Gabby and a coworker have been making jokes, changing song lyrics to include the employee's name, and sharing memes about the employee in a workplace group chat, you are asked to meet with Gabby and her supervisor.

Gabby says everyone was laughing and that they were “just joking around.” The supervisor reviews the college's anti-harassment policy and tells Gabby the behavior must stop, explaining that further incidents could lead to termination.

After the meeting, you talk with Gabby about the difference between shared humor and humor that targets someone who does not welcome it. Gabby understands the policy, identifies ways she can respond differently, and agrees to stop participating.

Several days later, the supervisor reports the behavior has continued. After reviewing another complaint and speaking with those involved, the college decides to terminate Gabby's employment.

Gabby is upset and asks you to defend her and ‘fight’ to get her job back, saying she did not intend to bully anyone and believes the college is being unfair.

Ethical Dilemma – Max



Max works at a grocery store and has consistently received positive feedback about attendance, productivity, and completing assigned tasks.

Over the past several weeks, Max has noticed a shift in their schedule. Although they were hired to stock shelves, unload deliveries, and organize merchandise, they are now being assigned almost exclusively to cleaning duties, including restrooms, spills, and end-of-shift cleanup.

Cleaning is part of the job, and Max is capable of doing it. However, other associates continue to rotate through a wider range of responsibilities and are not being assigned cleaning duties as often.

Max tells you they dislike the change and feel singled out, but they do not want you to speak with the supervisor or “make a big deal out of it.” Max worries that raising the issue could create tension, make coworkers resent them, or put their job at risk.

You are concerned that the new assignment pattern may reflect unfair or differential treatment. At the same time, Max understands the situation and has clearly asked you not to intervene.