



PROGRESSIVE EMPLOYMENT IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

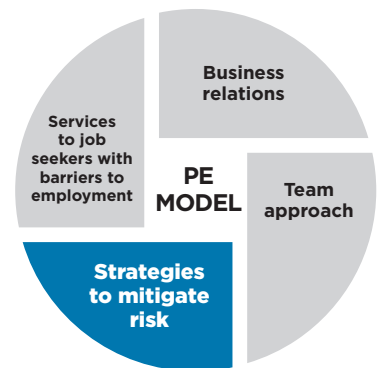
Risk Mitigation Strategies to Help Job Seekers & Their Influencers

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Progressive Employment is a dual-customer, service delivery model that uses work-based learning strategies (activities in real workplaces) to introduce job seekers to businesses and meet their collective needs. Progressive Employment rapidly engages job seekers in work settings to aid informed choice as they develop their career goal. The Progressive Employment model offers businesses a variety of options for meeting, interacting with, and trying out a new pool of potential job applicants. The underlying premise is that “everyone is ready for something.” In 2009, Vermont Division of Vocational Rehabilitation developed Progressive Employment and numerous states across the US have since adopted it.

There are four components of Progressive Employment:

1. Services to job seekers with significant barriers to employment
2. Business relations
3. The team approach
4. **Strategies to mitigate risk**



In this brief, we examine the fourth component of Progressive Employment: **strategies to mitigate risk**. In the Progressive Employment model, risk mitigation applies to both the job seeker and business. The focus of this brief is on risk mitigation **for job seekers** and the people in their lives who influence their decision-making. These influencers may include family members, counselors, case workers, friends, or appointed guardians.

In the Progressive Employment model, specific preparations help mitigate perceived risks to job seekers and businesses. One preparation is a plan to cover Worker’s Compensation and general liability insurance coverage when a job seeker is in a worksite setting. This helps reduce employer fears about injuries or damage in their workplaces. Additionally, there is a plan to cover payment of wages during worksite experiences. This not only ensures a job seeker can earn wages while trying out a job, but also removes the financial burden on the business during worksite experiences, as the business has not hired the person for the position.

Navigating Risk

Perceived risks can limit some activities for job seekers with disabilities who are interested in exploring jobs or careers as part of considering competitive integrated employment. The impact of earnings on public benefits is one such perceived risk. Since changes in benefits can have an impact on an entire household, having concerns about the potential loss of those benefits is

understandable. Understanding these risks can lead to [informed choice](#) and the [dignity of risk](#).

Much of the general population has limited exposure to employees with significant support needs in business settings, apart from a few entry-level positions: bagging groceries, retail stocking, cleaning, and collecting shopping carts. Often, people with disabilities, and their family members can find it difficult to envision other types of employment opportunities, let alone careers. However, exploring a broad range of jobs and careers in a variety of community business settings helps broaden understanding of the vast number of possibilities. Facilitating such exploration leads to making one's own choices and promotes independence.

Worksite activities such as company tours, informational interviews, mock interviews with employers, job shadows, and hands-on experience through paid work experiences or internships help address job seeker concerns, questions, and perceived risks. These activities also help with career exploration and informed job seeker choice. The Progressive Employment team works directly with the job seeker to choose activities that meet their needs; not all activities may be appropriate or necessary.

However, there can be concerns and misperceptions that may serve as roadblocks to the pursuit of this exploration. This next section examines potential barriers to getting job seekers into workplaces and provides some guidance on how the Progressive Employment model can help address them.

Common Roadblocks

- » **Fear**
- » **Perceived financial risk of loss of benefits**
- » **Safety risks**
- » **Potential for exploitation**
- » **Social isolation**
- » **Communication limitations, physical barriers, or support needs**
- » **Transportation challenges**
- » **Perpetuated low expectations or misperceptions of a person's abilities and capabilities**
- » **Unknown customization options available in the workplace**

Breaking Down Roadblocks

Before reviewing the list of roadblocks, let's start with an important reminder that people have rights to question and have concerns. As professionals, it's essential to remember the first step in helping people with their concerns is to actively listen. Next, one must demonstrate an understanding of the concern and acknowledge the legitimacy of the person's feelings and apprehension without judgment. That said, let's examine and consider strategies to support the person and address their concerns.

Informed Choice

The process of choosing from options based on accurate information, knowledge, and experiences.

Dignity of Risk

Being able to make a choice even if it could have negative consequences for you.

Fear. Speculating on the “what ifs” can feel overwhelming for job seekers, family members, and/or guardians who are charged with keeping a loved one safe. Regardless of who experiences angst, **fear** may be the overarching roadblock to work for people with disabilities.

Strategy: Listen/empathize. It can be comforting to know there is a team of professionals who are using demonstrated methods to safely assist anyone with exploration and exposure on a worksite. Explain that the Progressive Employment model enables job seekers to explore business settings and jobs, and try hands-on, multi-sensory work experiences without any commitment to accept a job. Progressive Employment helps job seekers explore options and opportunities to inform the ultimate choice of working or not working.

Financial risk and loss of benefits. Families, guardians, representative payees, and often job seekers know that wages impact benefits. They may fear that once a job seeker earns more money, there will be an immediate change to or loss of benefits/entitlements and other income-based programs, such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), housing benefits, and Medicaid/Medicare.

Strategy: Benefits counseling addresses individualized financial circumstances resulting from increased earnings on household benefits. Early benefits counseling can help ease fears and concerns about working in competitive integrated employment. Benefits counselors are available to answer questions, explain various work incentives and options for reporting income, explain how to use ABLE accounts for saving money without impact, and provide support.

- With job seeker permission, invite those in supportive roles (parent/guardian, representative payee, case worker) to scheduled benefits meetings
- Encourage additional consultation as hours and/or wages fluctuate

Safety risks. Family members and other influencers may speculate on countless worksite safety risks for their loved one. Physical injury or damage due to lack of training, skill, or problem-solving and disability-related implications or behaviors could cause harm and disruption. Recognize and validate their concerns and work together to implement protections to satisfy everyone’s uneasiness.

Strategy: The Progressive Employment team develops or amends a **safety plan** to protect both the job seeker and the business. If **accommodations** are needed for a worksite activity, and with job seeker permission, the Progressive Employment team can assist with **disclosure** of disability-specific details with the supervisor. The team will work together to:

- arrange for assessment, training, demonstration, maintenance, and funding for adaptive equipment and or/technology necessary for work
- secure job coaches, personal care, or interpreter support
- provide mandated supervision requirements
- monitor self-inflicted injury
- consult [Job Accommodation Network](#) for additional resources

Exploitation or being taken advantage of: Family members often worry about the vulnerability of their loved one. They may fear the person will be treated unfairly at work and will have a reduced capacity to self-advocate. They may also fear manipulation, bullying, emotional abuse, or more overt assaults.

Strategy: The Progressive Employment team can help reassure families and address exploitation risks in multiple ways. This would involve working with the business at the time

of arranging worksite activities to:

- watch for unwanted physical or sexual advances (they may or may not be manifested in atypical behaviors)
- observe hours worked, tasks completed, and finances for uncommon themes
- work with a job seeker’s counselor/therapist or medical professional for wraparound supports
- use the safety plan to address exploitation concerns

Social Isolation or exclusion, or loss of contact with friends: Leaving an established, predictable social network and entering an unfamiliar setting may feel overwhelming for a job seeker and scary for families. Transitioning from spending time solely with staff and friends with disabilities is a major loss and adjustment to anticipate.

Strategy: It is healthy for people to have friends with and without disabilities and social connections with people who are not their paid staff. Job coaching can help with social inclusion in and out of the workplace with the goal of developing new friendships through their work.

- They may need to help them pursue organized group activities that align with their interests
- The Progressive Employment team must consider how to help the job seeker remain connected with friends they may no longer see once working in the community
- Reference [Develop Relationships & Build Skills to Decrease Reliance on Paid Supports Guidepost](#) and [Friends: Connecting people with disabilities and community members](#).

Communication limitations, physical barriers, or support needs: Family members often feel strongly that they know their loved one best and have a better sense of “what they need.”

Strategy: Hear them out and work together toward agreement on a comprehensive support plan. It can take time and resources to arrange assistive technology, devices, or individualized approaches for each person and jobsite. The Progressive Employment team can:

- connect with an assistive technology agency early in the referral process
- consider assessment, demonstration, training, maintenance, and funding for adaptive equipment and or/technology
- arrange job coaching, personal care, and interpreter support, as needed

Transportation challenges: The Progressive Employment team can anticipate that transportation is particularly worrisome for job seekers who do not drive. They and their family may feel a time, resource, and financial burden in lining up rides and schedules, which sometimes cannot be resolved. Sufficient access to reliable, accessible, affordable, and safe modes of public and private transportation is a common concern for people regardless of whether they live in an urban, suburban, or rural setting.

Strategy: To address transportation needs, the Progressive Employment team can:

- analyze options, contact, and schedule details, training, and practice implementation during worksite activities
- explore work incentives to help fund transportation
- plan for emergency or back-up modes
- review [Accessible Transportation Resource Center site](#)

Perpetuated low expectations/misperceptions of person's capabilities: Many families and people with disabilities feel apprehensive and uncertain about employment, which may keep people from trying it out.

Strategy: The Progressive Employment team can promote raising expectations for integration by encouraging families to talk with a parent support network or other families who have had positive work experiences for their loved ones. Apprehension may organically diminish when there is an intentional opportunity to:

- explore a wide range of jobs
- connect with peer mentors
- discuss any concerns and hesitations shared
- experience small successes in a work experience

Unfamiliarity with customization options: Job seekers and their influencers may question the viability of work in the community due to their unfamiliarity with employment options, funding strategies, and accommodations available to support people with disabilities as they consider competitive integrated employment. This can result in a contentment with their current situation. Questions may or may not arise, based on what they have heard and experienced.

Strategy: Champion the Progressive Employment model for job seekers and families by providing information and examples of customized worksite activities in various formats (**success stories, short videos, written documents, connection to peers with similar experiences**). Pairing a job seeker's interests and skills to the business needs is particularly important for those with minimal to no experience who will require more advocacy and support. The Progressive Employment team can promote individualized choice and customization options by committing to:

- match job seeker skills, abilities, preferences, and cultural considerations to task-specific positions, work hours, and environments, based on a business's need
- arrange and implement essential accommodations
- coordinate funding services and supports the job seeker requires
- determine training approach and timelines for teaching skills

Progressive Employment Leads Job Seekers on a Journey to their Desired Destination

Many people may wish to pursue competitive integrated employment, but there may be hesitations. Progressive Employment provides dedicated attention to job seekers and businesses by using a team approach and risk mitigation strategies. While we cannot anticipate or avoid all issues in the workplace, we can mitigate many risks by combining informed choice, team support, and accommodations with the Progressive Employment worksite activities. Risk mitigation strategies provide inroads for inclusion, creating a path to informed choice and dignity of risk for job seekers as they consider competitive integrated employment.



For more information on the Progressive Employment model:
www.explorevr.org/progressive-employment

ABOUT

The Scale-Up Progressive Employment Project is a 3-year field-initiated development project of ExploreVR at the Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston. ExploreVR offers VR agencies easy and convenient access to a range of VR research, related data, training and tools for planning, evaluation, and decision-making.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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