

Job Seekers' Frequently Asked Questions

Can I work?

Yes! If you really want to work, there is a job out there for you. Sometimes you have to look hard and be very creative to find the just the right job, but you can work if you choose to.

How do I decide what kind of job to look for?

For most of us, deciding what to do takes some thought and effort. Try different jobs to see what you like, take stock of your interests and skills and look for a job that matches them.

What if I don't know anything about work?

You probably know more than you think! Your parents and other family members, friends and teachers who work can answer a lot of your questions. Start by asking questions like "What do you do? Do you like your job? How hard do you work?" You can also get information from employment counselors and teachers who specialize in finding jobs.

What if I need help to work, even a lot of help?

Everyone needs help—even the President of the United States! Your family, teachers and employment specialist are like the 'presidential' team that works together to help you reach your goal! You and your team can work together to evaluate your strengths and skills—as well as areas where you may need some extra help. Then you can decide exactly what help you will need.

Don't be worried about or focus on things you cannot do. Instead, look at the things you can do. Even if you need lot of help, you can work!

Is there anyone who will help me find a job?

In school, there are specialized teachers, called vocational counselors or job coaches, who will work with you to help you find a job. They will help you learn the job. After you graduate, there are adult employment services with staff (job coaches, employment specialists) who can help you find a job or help you keep the job you have when you graduate.

Texas Rehabilitation Commission, Work Source Career Center and Mental Health/Mental Retardation community services are adult service agencies you should be in touch with. You will need to apply for services. There's more information later in this section.

Can I change jobs if I don't like the one I have?

YES! Before you change jobs, though, it would be a good idea to figure out exactly what you don't like about the job you have. Is it possible that, with a few changes, you would be happy in your current job? Maybe—maybe not. If not, it's OK. The thought process is still important and will help you make a better job match next time. Every job is a learning experience.

How often can I change jobs?

There are pros and cons to changing jobs frequently. While you're in school-and "in job training" there may be advantages to "trying on" a variety of jobs. Some students change jobs every few weeks-others change every year.

But, when you go to work as an adult and are getting paid for your work, you should think carefully about frequent job changes. Employers invest a lot of time and money in training and supporting employees. It can be costly and time-consuming for them to continually be filling positions and training new employees. So, if you're thinking of changing jobs, you need to carefully consider WHY you want to and how the change will benefit you.

As you change jobs and build your job history, you should always try to leave your current job in good standing: give notice of your intent to leave, talk to your supervisor and ask for a letter of recommendation.

How long will it take to find a job?

That depends. Every person is different. Every job is different. The more specific the job you are looking—the more conditions you have regarding what kind of job you want—the longer it may take to find it. Some people find jobs right away and feel OK about it. Some people approach job finding a little slower and take more time to find a good match for their career goals. If you talk to your family members and other people you know who have looked for jobs, you'll probably find out that sometime it happened quickly—and sometimes it took a while.

Preferences, competencies, connections and opportunities are all part of the job search formula. If you have very specific preferences and competencies, it may take longer to find a job that meets your requirements. The more connections you have or can make through family, friends and your social network, the more job opportunities you are likely to have.

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What hours can I work? How many hours can I work?

It's possible to find work hours pretty much any time of the day or night. And, some people work two jobs because they like to work! A lot of these decisions are based on:

- Your personal preferences. Do you like to get up early or sleep late? Do you like to work a full day-or prefer just a few hours each day. How much money do you want to make? Etc.
- The availability of jobs that match your preferences. You may need to be willing to be flexible and/or negotiate some issues.

How do I get to and from work?

Reliable transportation is very important for keeping a job. While you're in school, you may be able to ride the school bus to and from work. Parents often are asked to help.

During the summer or when you are out of school, you'll need to consider other options. How do you get around the community right now? Can your family or friends help you get places? Do you need a job you can walk or ride a bike to? Can a co-worker pick you up? If public bus service is available in your community, can you ride the bus? If you can't get to a particular job on a regular and reliable basis, you need to find a job that better matches the transportation that's available to you.

What if I fail at a job?

Everybody fails at something some time. Talk to your family, teachers and friends. It's very possible that many of them have failed at jobs or other things in the past. The important thing is to learn from any experience that does not work out the way you had hoped. What didn't work? What could you do different next time? What have you learned about yourself that will help the next job?

What if I have an "episode" on the job? Will I lose the job?

Whether you lose or keep your job may depend on what your employer knows about you. If your boss is supportive and prepared appropriately (i.e., knows you may need extra support occasionally) he or she may be more willing to work through rough times with you. You may need to talk to your employer about what may have lead to the "episode" and if there are accommodations that will allow you to keep your job, such as revised job duties, extra days off and/or working a different schedule.

Will people be afraid of me or think I'm different because I have a disability?

Part of working is learning to be around and work well with a lot of different kinds of people. There may be some co-workers who are curious, afraid, uninformed-or just not very nice. Fortunately, there are almost always others who are "welcomers"-they have a knack for being friendly and getting to know new people on the job. Find them and get to know them. They can help you break the ice. Also, if you have a job coach, he or she can help you find ways to fit in.

What happens after I leave school and need help on the job?

Graduation means moving away from the supports you used to get from the school—and moving into the services provided by agencies and programs that serve adults. These agencies have job coaches and employment specialists who will help you on the job. Although the adult service agencies will not have as many or the exact same kind of services as you're used to getting from school, but it's important to learn about the services they do have and how they may benefit you.

Usually, your transition plan will include getting set up with the appropriate adult service agencies *before* you graduate. That way, if you have a job when you graduate, there shouldn't be any disruption in your support. It's important to get started early because many adult supported employment providers have waiting lists.

The following are the major adult service agencies in Texas. As your teacher, counselor and/or a family member to help you decide which agencies you need to contact, based on your disability and/or support needs.

- Texas Rehabilitation Commission
- Local Mental Health Authority
- Local Mental Retardation Authority
- Texas Commission for the Blind
- Texas Commission for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing
- The Local Career Center (Resource Room available to anyone seeking employment)

(Note: Toolkit Section 6—*Life After School*—has more information about the adult service agencies. Section 9—*Resources*—has contact information for these agencies.)

What happens to my Social Security benefits if I go to work?

If you receive or have applied to receive Social Security, it is *extremely* important to let the Social Security Administration (SSA) know when you get a job. Ask a benefit planner in your area to assist you to use the work incentives to ensure that you follow all the Social Security rules.

(Note: Refer to *Navigating Social Security* in Toolkit Section 3 for more detailed information.)