



# Working While Disabled

...Staying safe in the age of  
infectious diseases

Adapted from Working While Disabled...Staying safe  
in the age of COVID-19 and other pandemics

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A resource by [Ren Koloni](#)  
in partnership with [the RAISE Center](#)



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## What is this resource?

“Working While Disabled in the Age of COVID-19 and Other Pandemics” is a guide that can help disabled people learn more about finding, getting, and keeping a job in today’s world.

Disabled people deserve fair, safe, and fulfilling work environments, just like non-disabled people do. Infectious diseases, like COVID-19, flu, and RSV, have made it harder to find or make those kinds of work environments – but not impossible!

This guide has resources that can help you think about a plan for making your own choices about work in a world with COVID-19 and other pandemics.



## How should I use this resource?

This guide is just that - a guide! There is no “right way” to work in a world with COVID-19 and other pandemics, so this guide can’t tell you the “right way.” But **this guide can help you make a plan to find work in a way that works for you.**

This guide talks about different parts of life in a world with pandemics, and life at work. It asks you questions to help you think about what these things mean to you.

You can work by yourself, or you can work with a team of people you trust and who can help you think about the questions in this guide. You might want to talk to...

- Your family
- Your doctors
- Your career counselor or VR counselor
- Other people with disabilities

Just remember that **you make the decisions about your plan.** Nobody else gets to choose for you. You don’t have to answer every question, or look at every resource. Some questions and some resources might not be important for your plan.



**Your plan is about what matters to you.**

If you've never had a job before, you might not know what matters to you about work yet. That's okay. This guide is here to help you.

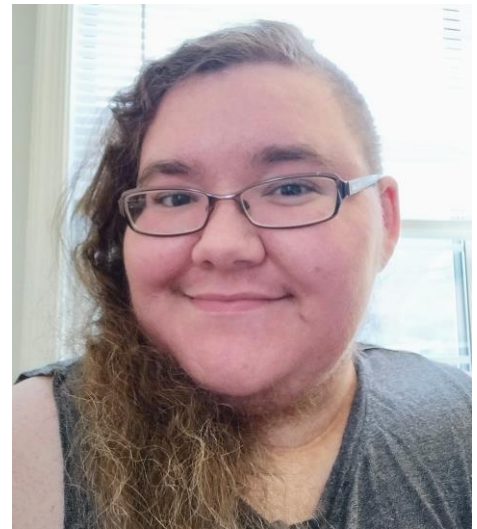
Keeping a record of your thoughts will help you remember and work on your plan later on. You can write down your thoughts, type them up, speak them into recording software, or use another way that works for you. You can ask for help or do it by yourself.

If you don't recognize a word or acronym, try the [Words to Know](#) document for this guide to read definitions and examples.



## About the author

Hi! My name is Ren. I'm 26 years old. I use they/them pronouns, and I live in Virginia. I am a White trans person, and I am autistic, chronically ill, and multiply disabled.



After high school, I went to college. I got a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Gender Studies. I learned about social factors that make life harder for different people, like race, gender, and disability. Being a trans, queer, and disabled person, I knew about many of these things firsthand, but I wanted to learn more about people who were like me, and people who weren't.

After I graduated, I kept going to school. I got a master's degree in English. I wanted to learn more ways that people like me could talk about what our lives were like. I found out that plain language was important to me. Plain language can make it easier for all kinds of people to learn. I wanted to help as many people as possible to learn and grow.

After college, I looked for a long time for a job that would fit me. I wanted to find a job that let me help people, because I knew I could make a big difference. I started working with the RAISE Center, which helps young people with disabilities with transition to adulthood. I offered my thoughts on different projects. I started writing this guide!



I also got a job working with [CommunicationFIRST](#), an organization that helps people with speech and communication disabilities. I am really excited to put my skills to work helping other people who are non-speaking or sometimes-speaking, like me.

College was hard for me because it wasn't designed for people like me. But for some of my friends, it was even harder. Lots of people I know had to drop out of school. Lots of my friends had trouble finding jobs. Some of them are still trying. I know how scary it is to be young, disabled, and totally lost.

I graduated because I got lucky. I had a lot of wonderful teachers and a few supportive friends. I don't think that success should be about luck, privilege, or accidents. Everyone should have access to the tools to succeed.

That's why I was excited to write this plain language guide, by a young disabled person, for other young disabled people. I hope this guide helps bring you some of the tools you need to succeed.



## What we need to know about COVID-19 and other infectious diseases

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### What is COVID-19?

COVID-19 is a disease caused by a virus, or germ, called coronavirus. It has made a lot of people sick, and some people have died because of it.

Because it has affected so many people all over the world, we say that there is a COVID-19 pandemic.

It is very contagious: it's easy to catch, and it's easy to pass on to other people.

COVID-19 can make people very sick. (You can learn more about the symptoms [here](#).) It can make it hard for us to breathe. Some people with COVID-19 have to go to the hospital to get help to breathe.

Even though it has been years since this disease was first spotted, COVID-19 is still around and still making lots of people sick.

COVID-19 can also leave some people with symptoms for a long time after they get sick, even when they don't have the virus anymore. This is called Long Covid.

The [CDC](#) has lots of information about COVID-19. They also have Easy Read resources about COVID-19 [here](#).





Long Covid can be disabling, or it can make disabilities you already have even harder to deal with. The best way to prevent Long Covid is to avoid getting COVID-19.

COVID-19 can be especially dangerous for disabled people. We are more likely to get very sick, more likely to need to go to the hospital, and more likely to die.

We need to plan carefully to stay safe.

There are other illnesses in the world that can be dangerous for disabled people. These safety suggestions can help for those illnesses, too.

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## Staying safe from COVID-19, flu, and RSV: vaccinations

There are vaccines available to help fight COVID-19, flu, and RSV.

Vaccines are shots that help your body prepare to fight a disease. People who are vaccinated are less likely to get these infectious diseases, and if they do, they are less likely to get very sick.

After getting your vaccine, you might feel tired or achy, and you might have a fever, but that doesn't mean you're sick. Your immune system is working hard to learn how to fight the germ, and that can make some people feel sick. These side effects only last a few days.



Even after we get vaccinated, it can help to get booster shots. Booster shots are made to refresh our body's ability to fight COVID-19.

For the flu, you only need to get one shot every year. Unless you are older than sixty years old, or having a baby, you don't need to get a vaccine for RSV.

If you haven't been vaccinated yet, but you would like to, talk to your doctor or visit your local health center to ask about the vaccine.

You can also visit the ACL's resource [DIAL](#) (the Disability Information and Access Line) to find out where you can get a vaccine and ask questions.

The CDC made a social story to help you prepare for getting your vaccine. You can read it [here](#).

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## Staying safe at work: vaccinations

Not all workplaces require their employees to get vaccinated. Some people choose to get vaccinated on their own, but other people choose not to get vaccinated at all.

Some of us might be worried about whether or not our coworkers are vaccinated. If you are worried about this, you should do what makes you feel safe, like staying up to date on your vaccines, wearing a mask, and social distancing.



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## Staying safe from infectious diseases: wearing masks

Over the past few years, some people around the world have been wearing masks while in public to help keep themselves and others safe from COVID-19. In some places, people have worn masks even longer, to protect others from things like the flu or common colds.

Some infectious diseases, like COVID-19, the flu, and RSV, spread through the respiratory system – the part of our body that helps us breathe, including our nose, mouth, and lungs. Covering our mouth and nose with a mask means that germs have a much harder time escaping and reaching other people.

Many doctors recommend wearing a mask to protect you and others from COVID-19 and other illnesses.

Masks could help you stay safe from other people who might be sick, especially if you use other ways to stay safe from infectious diseases, like social distancing or vaccines.

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## Staying safe at work: the right to wear a mask

You have the right to wear a mask in public, including at work. If you decide to wear one, nobody can make you take your mask off.

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Not every workplace requires their employees to wear a mask. This can be scary, especially for people who are at high risk for infectious diseases like COVID-19.

If you work somewhere that is outdoors, well-ventilated, or doesn't have many people, whether or not your coworkers wear a mask might not be a big deal.

But if you work indoors or with a lot of people, it might be more important to you that as many people as possible are wearing a mask.

If your work involves talking to customers, you probably can't convince them all to wear masks. But you can wear your own, and you can talk to your supervisor or HR about making sure there are other safety measures in place, like plastic dividers.

If you are at high risk for infectious diseases like COVID-19, try to avoid working in places with lots of people who might not be willing or able to wear masks, like retail stores or food service.



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## Staying safe from infectious diseases: social distancing

For the past few years, if you went to a grocery store or to get a vaccine, you probably saw reminders to stand six feet apart from other people. This is called **social distancing**.

The CDC says that social distancing, especially combined with wearing masks and getting vaccines, makes it less likely for us to catch the germs that cause some infectious diseases.

Germs can't move by themselves. They need a way to travel. Some germs travel in tiny droplets that come out of our nose or mouth when we cough, sneeze, talk, or breathe. But if you're standing six feet away, those droplets might not be able to reach you.

Six feet is about as long as a bed. If you're not sure you're standing far away enough, think: could you fit a bed, from the pillows to your toes, between you and the other person?

You might not always be able to stand six feet away from other people. For example, if you're riding in a car or a bus, the driver or other passengers might be close by. Or, if you're riding an elevator, there might not be enough room to stand exactly six feet away.



If there's just not enough room to social distance, that's okay. Sit or stand as far away from other people as you can if it helps you to stay safe and feel better. And, remember that you can use as many other ways to stay safe as you need to feel comfortable.

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### Staying safe at work: social distancing

You might not always be able to social distance at work, depending on where you work and what you do.

Some people work up close with other workers or with customers. The CDC says that these people are at higher risk of getting some infectious diseases, like COVID-19.

If social distancing is important to you, remember it when you are thinking about the kind of job you want to do.

If you are interested in one kind of job, but know you won't be able to social distance, you might want to choose a different kind of job instead.

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### Staying safe from infectious diseases: washing hands

Washing your hands can help keep you safe from germs that cause COVID-19, colds, the flu, and many other diseases.



You should wash your hands...

- After you use the bathroom.
- Before you make or eat food.
- After touching something dirty, like raw meat or garbage.
- After you sneeze, cough, or blow your nose.
- When you come home from being out with other people.
- Before and after taking care of someone who is sick.

To wash your hands safely, follow these steps:

1. Get your hands wet with water. It can be warm, cool, or cold. The temperature doesn't matter, so use the temperature that feels most comfortable to you. Don't burn yourself with hot water!
2. Put some soap in your hands and lather it by rubbing your hands together until there are bubbles.
3. Keep lathering the soap in your hands for 20 seconds. Some people suggest singing the happy birthday song twice. If you can only wash your hands for 10 seconds, that's okay, but it's better to wash for closer to 20 seconds.
4. Rinse your hands off in the water.
5. Dry your hands with a towel, or let them dry in the air, without touching anything.

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If you don't have running water and soap nearby, but you need to clean your hands, you can use hand sanitizer. Some people keep hand sanitizer in their car, purse, or backpack so they can clean their hands whenever they need to.

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## Staying safe from infectious diseases: testing

When you think you might be sick, it's important to take care of yourself and others.

If you have symptoms like a fever, sneezing, coughing, or throwing up, you shouldn't go to work. You should tell your supervisor that you are sick and need to stay home. This is true for all kinds of illnesses that you might be able to pass on to other people.

But if you think you might have COVID-19 or another infectious disease, or if someone who has been near you tells you that they have COVID-19 or another illness, you might want to do a test. A test can help you find out whether or not you are sick.

Many infectious diseases, including COVID-19, can spread to people even before you have symptoms. So, the people you were close to a few days before you knew you were sick could be sick, too.

If you get tested and it comes back positive, that means you are sick with that germ. You should tell the people you have been close to in the past few days. You should also self-isolate by staying away from people as





much as you can.

If you get tested and it comes back negative, that means you probably don't have the germ you tested for. But that doesn't mean you're not sick.

Sometimes, tests can give "false negatives," especially fast tests that you do at home. A false negative means that you really DO have the illness, but the test missed it. Because of this, the CDC suggests that if you have COVID-19 symptoms, you should still stay away from other people, even if you tested negative, just in case.

[Here's](#) what the CDC says you should do if you get sick.

You can get a COVID-19 test from your doctor, from nearby clinics, from a pharmacy, or by ordering them online. Doctors can test for flu or RSV in their offices.

If you decide to get tested by a doctor, the doctor will take a sample from your body to test. Usually, that means they'll put a cotton swab in your nose or throat to get mucus or saliva. You will usually have results in 15 to 30 minutes. Tests done by a doctor are usually more accurate.

If you buy a self-test from a pharmacy or online, you can test yourself at home. Follow the instructions inside the box carefully, and ask if you need help. Wash your hands before and after you do the test.



You can also visit the ACL's resource [DIAL](#) (the Disability Information and Access Line) to learn more about COVID-19 tests and find out where you can get one.



## Evaluating risk: making decisions about infectious disease

We need all kinds of skills to work safely and well. One of those skills is **evaluating risk**.

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### How do we evaluate risk in our daily lives?

Evaluating risk means understanding what is dangerous about a situation, and how dangerous it is.

You probably already know about danger and risks in your daily life.

**Dangers** are things that can hurt us. But we can't always avoid things that might hurt us. Sometimes we need to take **risks**, which put us a little bit closer to danger.

We need to make decisions and take action to help us **manage** risks.

When we manage risks, we make ourselves safer.

#### **Example: Managing risks**

If you touch a hot pan, there is a risk that you might get burned.

You can manage this risk by wearing gloves, waiting for the pan to cool down, and asking for help.

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The same danger can be more risky for one person than it is for another person. **Knowing how dangerous something is for YOU is important.**

## **Example: Evaluating risk depending on the person**

Some people with disabilities might have a hard time telling when they are getting hurt. They might not realize that they are being burned when they touch a hot pan. They might end up getting a very bad burn.

If you know that you have trouble telling when your body is getting hurt, you might have someone who helps you in risky situations to help you make safe decisions.

In this example, you might have a family member, caregiver, or friend with you while you cook. They can remind you that the pan is hot, so you remember not to touch it. If you touch the pan, they can remind you to move your hand before you get hurt.

Not everyone needs help remembering that pans are hot. But some people do. That means that some people need to be more careful around this risk, or need more help when they are around this risk.

## **Ask yourself...**

- Do I need help to avoid this danger?
- If I need help, what kind of help do I need to avoid this danger?  
*A person to remind me out loud, written reminders,*

# RAISE

*the things I need already close to the risk (like keeping oven mitts right next to the stove)*

- What would happen if I got hurt from this danger?  
Do I have a plan for what to do next?  
*Treating the burn with first aid at home, going to the doctor or the hospital, telling my caregiver*
- Would I be OK if I got hurt? Is this a risk I can safely take, or do I need to make sure I avoid this danger entirely?  
*No, other people should handle pans for me  
...or...  
Yes, I can manage the risk of getting burned from a hot pan, and most of the time, I won't get hurt*

You can apply these questions to all sorts of dangers.

The same danger can be more risky in a certain situation than it is in a different situation. **It's important to know how risk changes depending on the situation you're in.**

## **Example: Evaluating risk depending on the situation**

If the house is very cold, the hot pan might cool down faster after it comes off the stove. You might be able to touch the pan without getting burned. How can you tell?

**You can decide whether the situation means the risk is managed by learning more about the risk.**

For example, you can move your hand close to the pan without touching it to see how hot it feels.



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## How do we evaluate risk from infectious diseases?

To evaluate other risks in our daily lives, like hot pans, we think about our own risk and the situation we're in. We come up with ways to manage those risks.

We can do the same thing for managing the risk of infectious diseases, like COVID-19, flu, and RSV.

You can work by yourself or talk to your team about the questions in this section. This will help you get a better understanding of your risk for getting sick or getting very sick with COVID-19 or another infectious disease.

There are four big dangers we need to think about when it comes to infectious diseases like COVID-19.

1. Catching the illness.
2. Getting very sick from the illness, which might mean going to the hospital for help. (Not everyone gets this sick, but some people do, which means it is still a risk.)
3. Dying from the illness.
4. Getting a new or worse disability from the illness, like Long Covid.

You might be at more risk for some of these dangers than others, depending on your situation.

Some people are at higher risk for catching infectious diseases, like...

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- People who live in a place with lots of other people, like a group home, college dorm, or even just a house with lots of family members.

## Ask yourself...

- How many people am I close to every day?
- Do I share a room with someone else? (Are they high-risk for infectious diseases like COVID-19?)
- Do I have a support worker or caregiver that I am around every day?
- What do I do if someone who lives with me gets an infectious disease? Do I have a plan?

- People who are immunocompromised. Their immune systems are weak and can't work as hard as other people's to fight off infections.

## Ask yourself...

- Am I immunocompromised?
- Am I close to someone who is immunocompromised?

Being immunocompromised is a disability, too. The Immune Deficiency Foundation wrote an article about accommodations at work for immunocompromised people. You can read it [here](#).

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- “Essential workers” like healthcare workers, farmers and fruit pickers, food packagers, retail workers, grocery store workers, bus drivers, and other people who have to be around lots of other people every day at work. The more people someone sees every day, especially if they’re likely to be sick, the easier it is for them to catch an infectious disease.

## **Ask yourself...**

- Where do I work or want to work? How many people am I close to, or would I be close to, at work?
- Do I work or want to work on the “front lines” - in healthcare or emergency services that may see a lot of people sick with infectious diseases?
- What would I do if someone at work got sick? Do I have a plan?
- Where do the people who are close to me work? Are they “essential workers”?

- People who live in certain places. The CDC tracks how many people are getting sick in different communities. Check [here](#) to learn about the current risk in your county, according to the CDC.





Some people are at higher risk for getting very sick or dying from COVID-19. The CDC has a list of conditions that might make someone high-risk [here](#).

If you have one or more than one of these conditions, your body might have trouble fighting infectious diseases. Your body might not be able to deal with the symptoms without help from a hospital. You might have more trouble taking care of yourself than usual while sick.

The more health conditions you have, the more dangerous infectious diseases like COVID-19 might be.

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## Ask yourself...

- Do I have conditions on the CDC's "high-risk" list? Which ones? How many?
- Do I have needs that might get harder to meet if I am sick or in the hospital?  
*I need communication supports and people in the hospital might not understand me without help; if I'm sick, my support worker might have more trouble helping me safely*
- What does my doctor think about my risk of infectious diseases like COVID-19?
- Have I had this disease already? (Sometimes, this makes you safer from the disease. With COVID-19, every new infection puts you at higher risk.)
- How do I feel about my risk for infectious diseases like COVID-19?  
*Anxious, confident, curious, unsure*



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## Managing risk of infectious diseases: Making an Emergency Plan

We've already talked about some ways we can choose to manage infectious disease risk. But another important way to help manage risks is to know what to do if the worst happens. In this case, what do you do if you get sick?

Knowing what to do in a certain situation can help you handle anxiety, and can help you be prepared to deal with danger, like being sick with infectious disease.

### **Making a Plan For Getting Sick**

- What if I got sick and needed to self-isolate? What help would I need to take care of myself and stay positive?
- If I need a support person or caregiver, what would happen if one of us got sick?
- What if I got sick and needed to go to the hospital? What help would I need to communicate, make decisions, and advocate for myself?
- Which doctors would need to know if I got sick with an infectious disease, so they could help with my care?



Ask yourself...

**How can I manage my infectious disease risk and go to work?**

- Do I know how to stay safe from infectious disease?

Green Mountain Self-Advocates made a [visual chart](#) that helps you figure out if you are ready to go outside. You can use this to think about your own situation.

- What would happen if I got sick? Do I have a plan?
- Do I know how risky different situations and activities might be?

[This resource](#) helps you think about different kinds of activities and how risky they might be for getting infectious disease

- Can I risk getting an infectious disease, or do I need to do everything I can to avoid getting sick?

Risks can change when the situation changes. Going to work is a big change, and your risk for getting infectious disease depends on how and where you want to work.

Let's learn more about ways we can manage risk at work.



## Working remotely while disabled

Remote work, also called telecommuting, is a kind of work that you can do from home, or otherwise not in a usual workplace. It usually requires a computer and a good Internet connection.

Lots of people started working remotely during the early COVID-19 pandemic. Some of those people have gone back to work in person, but not everyone.

Remote work can be very helpful for some disabled people.

People who are high-risk for infectious diseases, like COVID-19, can work without having to be around a lot of people who might get them sick.

People with chronic illnesses, chronic pain, chronic fatigue, or unpredictable conditions might prefer working from home so they can manage their health more easily.

People who are easily affected by things in their environment, like chemicals, scents, or temperatures, might like to work from home so they can control their environments more easily.

But not everyone can work from home.

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It doesn't always make sense to telecommute. If your job is to organize shelves, you have to do it where the shelves are. If your job is to lift boxes, you have to do it where the boxes are. If your job is to water flowers, you have to do it where the flowers are.

Some people don't like remote work, either. You might prefer being physically around people. You might feel happier when you can get out of the house. You might like the routine of traveling to work. You might not like having to look at a computer screen all day.

There are lots of reasons that remote work can be helpful, and lots of reasons that remote work might not work for you.

Some jobs aren't being done remotely right now, but that doesn't mean it's impossible to do them remotely. If you think it would help you to work remotely, you can talk to a supervisor, HR, VR, or other people who help you at work and tell them how working remotely could help you do better.

In [this video](#) from early in the COVID-19 pandemic, people with different disabilities talk about different reasons why working from home has helped them.

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Ask yourself:

## Is remote work right for me?

- Can I work remotely at my job (or the job I want)? Does it make sense?
- Am I at high risk for infectious diseases like COVID-19? And, would my job (or the job I want) put me at higher risk of catching illness if I did it in person?
- What do I like about going to work in person (or the idea of going to work in person)?  
*Being around people, getting out of the house, a travel routine, keeping a schedule, means I can do more kinds of work*
- What do I like about working from home (or the idea of working from home)?  
*Not as many people, can control the temperature of my house, can lie down if I'm in pain, comfy chair, familiar surroundings*
- Are there things I like about working remotely that I could change about in-person work with accommodations?  
*Asking for a private workspace, setting up a fan, wearing headphones so it's not so noisy, getting used to my workspace with the help of a familiar person*

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Some support people can work remotely, too. Instead of coming to work with you in person, they might call you on the phone, talk to you over Zoom or another video chatting app, or text or instant message you. You can talk with your support person about options that might work for you.

If you want to work remotely, but you don't have a computer or Internet at home, try talking to your local VR center. You might be able to get help affording a computer and an Internet connection. Some companies hiring for remote work might also be willing to provide a computer or Internet connection.

People who decide to work remotely should set up a workspace. Setting up a workspace will help you work better from home. There is more information about setting up a remote workspace in this guide [here](#).

Remote workers should also remember that we need to take breaks no matter where we work. You should take breaks to use the bathroom and take care of your body, eat when you are hungry, spend time with other people or animals, and move around. If you need help remembering to take breaks, what kind of help do you need? You might set alarms, check in with a support person or friend, or put signs up on the wall that catch your attention.



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And just because your home is also your workplace doesn't mean you should spend all your time at home working! Figure out how many hours you want to work in a week, and keep track of when you start and finish working.

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## Making a workspace

If you decide to work remotely, you will want to have a workspace at home. Because of how our brains work, it's important to have a space that is only for working. This way, when you sit down at your workspace, your brain associates it with working, and knows that it means it's time to work.

A workspace should be comfortable and not too distracting. You will probably want a desk, a chair, and a way to light the area. It shouldn't hurt to sit at your workspace, even for several hours at a time, but some people might use a standing desk or special seating instead.

You might need extra help making a comfortable workspace, especially if you have trouble with pain or posture. There is assistive technology available that can help make a workspace more comfortable for disabled people, like special desks, chairs, or lighting.

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Think about other ways your workspace might be able to help you work. If music helps you focus, you might want to get a pair of comfortable headphones. You might want office equipment, like a stapler or printer. You might like to decorate your desk.

There might even be ways you can set up your computer to help you work, and avoid making you distracted. There is assistive technology available for this, too!



## Technology and Infectious Diseases

Technology has made dealing with infectious diseases much easier for a lot of people. Most people have been able to use computers and the Internet to connect with each other.

But not everyone is comfortable with technology yet. You might not know how to use some technology. You might have had bad experiences trying to use technology during the pandemic. You might not know what to do when technology stops working.

This section talks a little bit about technology that we might use to help us work and connect with coworkers.

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### On the computer

#### **Email:**

People have used email to stay in touch online for many years. Using a virtual mailbox, you can get mail from other people, and send mail to other people, too. You can also attach files to emails (just like sending packages).

Email is still a common way to talk to other people over the Internet. You can type emails, or you can use speech-to-text software to write emails.

You might work for a company that has their own email service. You might



also use a service like Gmail.

### **Instant messaging / IM:**

There are also programs that let you instant message, or IM, other people. You can type or use speech-to-text software in IMs. Different people use different websites or programs for IM, but popular services include WhatsApp, GroupMe, GChat, or Discord.

### **Video chat:**

Video chat has been around for a while, but it got very popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. When you join a video chat with a working camera and microphone, you can share video and audio of yourself in real time, and see and hear other people in real time, too. Many video chats also let you share your screen, so you can show people presentations or videos. There is also usually a way to chat by typing or using speech-to-text software.

The most popular video chat program is Zoom, but people also use programs like Microsoft Teams, Cisco WebEx, Facebook Messenger, or Skype.

Most video chat programs have some accessibility features, like automatic captions, but it's not always easy to access these features. Some programs require you, or the host of the video chat, to pay extra.

And video chat programs can sometimes be hard to use. If your computer

# RAISE

is old or your Internet connection is slow, you might have trouble sharing or seeing video. If this happens, it can sometimes help to move into the same room as your router, the box that connects you to the Internet, or to use an Ethernet cable instead. It might also help to set your program to only show you the person speaking, or turn off your own video.

Being on a video call all day can also be tiring. Talk to the people you're on call with about taking breaks. Ask if you can turn off your camera if it makes you anxious or tired to keep it on for a long time. If you get tired or overwhelmed when you talk aloud in video calls, you can use the text chat instead.

It might help to practice using programs before you use them for work. Choose someone from your team and practice a video call or IM conversation. Explore the program, click on things you don't recognize, and learn how it works. There are also lots of tutorials available online.

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## The phone

### **Phone calls:**

You probably know about phone calls already. Maybe you like them, or maybe you dread them. Maybe you can't do them at all.

There are usually ways we can use the phone even if we have a communication or hearing disability. You might use text-to-speech to speak aloud during your phone call. Or you might use a TTY device to interpret



the audio. You might also get help from someone who can use the phone more comfortably.

**Text:**

You can also choose to text, if you have a cell phone or smartphone. (Landline phones can't send or receive texts.) You can type or use speech-to-text. Many smartphones also have spelling suggestions and text predictions that help you write sentences.

**Video calls:**

Some phones can make video calls, but usually only with phones of the same type. Only iPhones can use FaceTime. There are also Android phones and Windows phones. Try not to assume that someone else has a specific kind of phone. Check first to make sure your phones can communicate in the way you expect.

**Instant messaging / IM:**

There are instant messaging (IM) apps on the phone, too. Most IM services that you can use on the computer also have app versions, or started out that way.

**Video chat:**

And, most video chat programs are also available as apps. They might be harder to use on the phone. They might be different from what you're used to. It could help to practice and explore the new app before you use it for



real.

Some IM and video chat apps are available on tablets, too. You might even be able to send texts with some apps on a tablet.

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### Other apps on the phone or a tablet

You might use a smartphone for other things at work.

Some people use their smartphone or tablet as an AAC device, at home and at work.

Some people have alarms and reminders to do things like take breaks, check in with support staff, or start a new task.

Some people use apps to remember how to do a task at work.

Some people use apps to help us calm down, relax from stress, or meditate. Other apps help us keep track of our symptoms.

There are a lot of apps that can help us in a lot of different ways. You might already have ones that help you. You might discover new apps that help you. VR and other programs usually have lots of suggestions.

Some workplaces might not allow you to use a cell phone while you are working. If you need to use an app to help you at work, you can talk to HR



about getting an accommodation so you can use your cell phone. If VR or another program helped you set up your app, they can help you talk to HR, too.

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## The Dos and Don'ts of technology at work

**Don't get distracted.** It's important to remember not to get distracted by our devices when we're using them at work. If you have games or social media on your device, you shouldn't use them when you're working! Wait until you have a break, or until you are done with work for the day.

If you are working remotely, this can be a little harder. But there are programs and apps for all kinds of devices that can help you stay on track.

**Do explore the accessibility features.** All devices have some accessibility features, like speech-to-text, screenreaders, and contrast options. Some devices have more features than others, and more are coming out all the time.

If you can, learn about your device's access features before you get it. Once you have one, feel free to explore the features it has. You should feel comfortable using your device.

If you need or want, you can label the buttons on your device, so you remember what they do.



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**Do take care of your device.** If you take your device with you, you might want to make sure you have a case, so if you drop it, it won't break.

Keep an eye on your device. If you tend to lose things, try to choose two or three places where your device "belongs." Try to put it only in those places. You might still misplace it, but you'll know where to check first!

Be careful with your device around food and liquids. If you get a lot of water or another liquid on your device, it could break.

**Don't panic if something goes wrong.** It can be really upsetting when technology breaks, or doesn't do what you want it to. Try to stay calm! Most of the time, it is something we can fix.

Talk to someone who helps you. Explain what you were expecting, and then explain what happened instead. Sometimes, just having another person look at the problem can help. Other times, you might need to get your device fixed.

If you were doing work on your device when it stopped working, you might lose progress on your work. It's normal to be upset when this happens. Take time to take care of yourself, and come back when you feel calmer. Most modern programs will save your work for you often, though.

If you were trying to meet with someone when your device stopped



working, try to find another way to let them know. That way, they are not panicking on the other end! They will understand what happened and can help you figure out another way to get in touch.

**Do ask for help if you need it.** If you don't have access to a device that you think you need, talk to your team. You might be able to buy your own device, or you might be eligible for help to get that device.

If you don't understand how to use the device or a program, you can ask someone else for help, or you can look up a tutorial online.

It's also okay to explore your device and learn by doing.

**Don't share information about yourself if you don't know where it's going or who could see it.** Be careful when you make posts on the Internet. Lots of people can see the information you put in these posts. Don't tell people your address or your passwords.

Some services really do need things like your address or real name. If you're not sure if it's okay to share certain information, ask someone you trust.

**Do communicate your needs.** What kind of device you use is your choice. If you want to type, not talk, say so. You can use a chat feature, IM, or text instead of a video call or phone call.

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Looking at a device for too long can be tiring, or it can hurt your head. If you are tired, in pain, or would rather communicate in a different way, you have the right to set your boundaries. Take some time to move around or take care of yourself. Ask to continue a conversation another day.

Some people don't like using technology. If you would prefer to talk to someone in person, you can say so. Whether or not you use a device is your choice, too.

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## What matters to me?

Staying safe from infectious diseases like COVID-19 can be a big factor in the kind of work you choose to do, but it shouldn't be the only one.

There are lots of different parts of going to work. As a self-advocate, you get to make choices about what you want, what you need, and what's important to you.

You can work by yourself or talk to your team about the questions in this section.

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## Why do I want to work?

Different people work for different reasons.

- To make money.

### **Example: Making money**

Julia works because she wants to be financially independent. She wants to be able to pay all her own bills.

Desiree works because they want to make enough money to buy figures of characters from their favorite TV show.

Andy works because he wants to help support his mother when she pays bills.

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- To be productive, or to make things.

## **Example: Being productive**

Ellen likes working because she likes to make things with her hands. It makes her feel good about herself. She feels proud of the things she makes.

- To be a part of their community.

## **Example: Part of the community**

Cai is a librarian. When he goes to work, he helps people in his community find books to read, access resources that help them with daily life, and get together to socialize. He likes seeing new and familiar faces in the library.

Janice is a nurse. When she goes to work at the hospital, she knows she is helping the people in her community to feel better.

- To make friends or meet new people.

## **Example: Making friends**

Enrique works at a grocery store. He loves meeting new people, whether they are coworkers or customers. He knows all his coworkers by name, and they enjoy eating lunch together and talking. Many regular customers recognize Enrique and greet him when they check out. Enrique loves being able to see so many people every day.

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- To stop being bored.

## **Example: Dealing with boredom**

Mellie works at her local shelter because she got bored just sitting around at home. She has much more fun spending time with the dogs and taking care of them.

- To build confidence.

## **Example: Building confidence**

When Jesse was younger, people told him that he would never be able to work. But Jesse always wondered if he could prove them wrong. He started out by volunteering just a few hours a month, so he could get used to what having a job might feel like. Once he felt more comfortable, he started applying for jobs.

Jesse realized that there were lots of things he could do. He could learn new skills. He could make things happen. He could achieve his goals. Getting a job helped Jesse feel confident and strong.

- To learn new things.

## **Example: Learning new things**

Amelia is a botanist. They work with plants at a university. Every day, they learn more about how plants live, and that

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makes them excited!

Leah is a programmer. Even though she already knows how to code, she often needs to figure out ways to solve new problems.

- To bring meaning to your life.

## **Example: Meaning in your life**

Dante has trouble going outside because of his disability. Even though he enjoyed playing video games, he felt like there was nothing to do. He started feeling bored, depressed, and lonely.

Dante learned how to use video editing software at home. He started recording himself playing video games and posting the videos online. He edits his own videos, manages his channel, and chats with his community. Sometimes, he raises money for charity.

Does one or more of these reasons sound like you?

Knowing why you want to work can help you think about what kind of work you want to do. For example, if you want to work so you can learn new things, you should think about jobs that focus on solving problems or doing research. If you want to work to be a part of your community, you should think about jobs that spend time with people, or jobs that help others.

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## How do I like to work?

There are lots of different kinds of work, different kinds of workplaces, and different ways you can do that work.

- Do you like to work with a team, or by yourself?

### **Example: Teams or solo?**

Ellen works best when she can talk to people. When she talks about her ideas, she can hear their opinions, and use them to make her ideas even better. This makes her feel energized and excited to keep working.

Pedro gets distracted when he works with other people. He likes to stay focused on his task. It makes him feel good to get work done without any interruptions.

- Do you like to work inside, or outside?

### **Example: Outdoors or indoors?**

Daniel works at a nature preserve. Being in the sun and working with plants makes him feel happy and fulfilled all day.

Nina has allergies and heat sensitivity. Working outdoors makes her feel sick and grumpy. She'd rather work indoors any day!

- Do you want to work in person, or remote, at home?



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## **Example: Where to work?**

Jade likes traveling to work. Taking the bus every morning and every afternoon makes her feel calm, and she likes being able to see people in person at work. It helps her feel more connected to her community.

Daya is much more comfortable at home. A daily commute makes them feel stressed and tired, and they get burned out on social interaction quickly. If they have to talk to people, they'd rather use email.

- Do you like working on a computer?

## **Example: Working with technology**

Ali grew up with computers, and he feels most comfortable when he can use one to communicate and to work.

Geoff doesn't like computers. When something goes wrong, he has trouble adjusting. And even if he uses assistive technology like blue light glasses, computer screens still give him headaches. Luckily, there are lots of jobs that don't require Geoff to use a computer.

- Can you commute? How far are you willing and able to travel to get to work? What kind of transportation can you take?

## **Example: Transportation**

Lee doesn't drive. They carpool with a coworker instead.

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Prisha is worried about using public transportation because of infectious diseases like COVID-19. She worked with her VR counselor to find a local driver for her daily commute.

Will doesn't want to commute to work. It makes him feel tired and stressed. He feels better working remotely.

- When do you like to work? Think about the time of day you feel most alert.

## **Example: Time of day**

Chrissy has a different circadian rhythm than other people, which means she sometimes sleeps at times when other people are awake. She found a job where she can work whenever she feels awake and alert, even if that time is 3 AM!

Jenna is an evening person, so she chose to teach night classes.

Loren doesn't wake up until later in the day because of her chronic illness. Her employer lets her come to work later and doesn't schedule meetings too early in the morning.

- When are you available to work, or when would you like to work? Can you work on weekends, or do you want to keep weekends free?

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## **Example: Weekends**

Kabir doesn't mind working on weekends, but he makes sure he doesn't work more than 5 days a week, so he doesn't get tired.

Dima doesn't work on weekends so he can spend Saturday and Sunday with his family.

- Do you like to get dressed up? Or do you want to be able to wear what's comfortable?

## **Example: Dress code**

Getting dressed and putting on makeup makes Lily feel confident and professional. She likes dressing up each day.

Paul is sensitive to textures. He only feels comfortable wearing soft, everyday clothing. He made sure to choose a job that wouldn't ask him to get dressed up in a suit.

- Are you bothered by loud, sudden, or constant noise? Or is a lot of noise okay?

## **Example: Noise**

Cara works in a calm and quiet office. But for a few months, there was construction next door to her workspace. She had meltdowns from the constant noise. She talked to her supervisor and moved to a different workspace until construction was over.

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Gia finds constant noise soothing. She enjoys all the sounds of her factory job.

- Do you prefer warm or cool temperatures?

## **Example: Temperatures**

Sean has heat sensitivity. He can't work outdoors, and when he works inside, he uses a fan to keep himself cool.

It's not because of his disability - Jake just feels more comfortable when he's warm. He likes his seasonal work in the summer.

- Do you like doing the same thing every day in a familiar routine? Or do you like being able to do different things?

## **Example: Routines or mixing it up**

Nia uses a schedule to remember what tasks she does each day. If it changes, she needs to talk to her job coach first so she feels ready. Routine is important to Nia.

Doing the same thing every day makes Lydia feel bored and restless. They like doing different tasks every day - it keeps them alert and excited.

- Do you want to work at the same time every day? Or is it okay if the times you work change?

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## **Example: Time each day**

Joshua works at a grocery store. He has different shifts every day he works. One day, he might work in the morning. Another day, he might work in the afternoon. Every Sunday, he gets ready for his new schedule this week.

Lawanda works at the same time every day. If her schedule changes, she feels upset all day. She takes extra time to prepare for days like holidays, when her schedule will be different.

- Do you like having someone tell you what to do? Or do you like deciding what to work on next by yourself?

## **Example: Direction**

Bri likes knowing exactly what she needs to do at work. Getting clear and direct instructions makes her feel more confident.

When someone tells Jason what to do, he doesn't want to do it as much anymore. That's why he likes making his own decisions about what to work on next.

- Do you like talking to people? Are you okay talking to people if you know them? Or would you like a job where you don't have to talk?

## **Example: Communicating**

Lizzy uses a speech-generating device. She

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communicates just fine with people at work, but prefers to let other coworkers handle things like phone calls, which can be harder to do with her AAC device.

Missy is autistic. She only speaks out loud when she feels very comfortable. She made sure to choose a job where she didn't have to talk to strangers. If she has to, her job coach can help her communicate.

Edie uses sign language. They chose a job where other people also knew sign language.

Danny loves talking to people! He made sure to choose a job where he could meet lots of different people.

- What kinds of physical activity can you do? Can you lift, stand, bend, type? Can you move around by yourself, or do you need help?

## **Example: Physical activity**

Neha used to stock shelves at the grocery store, but over time, it got harder for her to bend and lift items. Now she mostly works as a cashier. If she needs to lift something heavy, she asks a coworker for help.

Rohit works for a civil rights organization. He has a personal assistant to help him with self-care and mobility. He writes essays for his organization. He types slowly, and sometimes needs help typing.

- Do you like to work with your hands?

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## **Example: Working with your hands**

Phil loves the feeling of moving things under his hands to get them working. That's why he got training to be a mechanic.

Frank has a lot of hand pain. His job is mostly talking to other people, and he doesn't need to use his hands very much.

- Do you like to solve problems in your head?

## **Example: Working with your mind**

DJ is a professor. He spends a lot of time at work thinking and reading.

Tania has a traumatic brain injury. She gets headaches when she spends a lot of time thinking hard. She changed careers to become an artist, because doing art helps her relax and manage her symptoms.

- Do you need to work part time or full time? Think about how much work you feel good about doing. You should also think about how much money you want to make, and whether or not you need benefits like health insurance.

## **Example: Part time or full time**

Flavio works part time because it helps him manage his symptoms. He gets insurance through Medicaid, so it's

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okay that he doesn't get benefits through his job.

Alyssa wants to work full time. It helps her feel fulfilled. She starts with only a few hours a week and works up until she is confident about working full time each week.

- How much flexibility will you need? Some people have disabilities that get worse at times. Are there times when you might not be able to work, or when you might have to change the way you work?

## **Example: Flexibility**

On bad pain days, Jo works from home. They go to the office when they're feeling well. On really bad pain days, Jo can't work at all. They communicate with their boss and coworkers to make sure important tasks can still get done.

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## Talking about yourself: self-awareness and self-advocacy

Whether you look for a job on your own or ask for help from a program like VR or a CIL, it helps to be prepared with knowledge about yourself.

Most of these things, you probably already know about yourself. But it can still help to talk with a team of people you trust, because there might be things about yourself that you don't realize.



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What do you **like** to do? Or, put another way, what kinds of things would you do on a **good day**? *Play video games, walk my dog, spend time with my friends, sort things*

What do you **not like** to do? Or, put another way, what sounds like it would be a **bad day**? *Go clothes shopping, talk to people I don't know, fold laundry*

What are you good at? These are your **strengths**. *Figuring out how things work, being kind to people, typing fast on my phone*

What do you have a hard time doing? These are your **struggles**. They don't have to be related to your disability, but they might be. *Talking on the phone, doing math, remembering to take out the trash*

What **support** do you already know you need? Some things probably already help you in your day-to-day life. What helps you? *My support person, my service animal, my AAC software, being able to go places in my wheelchair, turning on captions when I watch a video*

What are your **dreams**? When you think about the future, what sounds like an amazing part of that future? *Having a partner who supports and loves me, living in my own home, traveling around the world, helping people*

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What do you want to **avoid** in your future? *Having to live with my parents forever, dropping out of school, getting COVID-19*

What **routines and rituals** do you have? What sorts of things do you do every day that you want to keep doing? This can help you understand what kinds of things are important to you. When you get a job, you'll want to make sure you still have space in your life to keep doing these things. *Reading a story every night before bed, riding the bus, showering in the morning and taking care of my hair*

Do you have special interests or **things that make you light up with excitement**? Do you know more about one thing than anyone else you can think of? *All things Disney and amusement parks, my disability / health condition, making quilts*



## Figuring out what I want to do

There are as many kinds of jobs in the world as there are people. It can be hard to know where to start!

You can take a quiz online to learn more about what you like and what you're good at.

The [O\\*Net interest profiler](#) asks you how much you would like to do a certain activity. It also asks how much training you are willing to get. Then, it tells you what kinds of jobs might make sense for you.

If you already know what kinds of things you like to do, you might like using the O\*Net tool.

The [CareerOneStop Skills Matcher](#) tool asks you how much you already know about certain kinds of work. Then, it tells you what kinds of jobs use those skills.

The Skills Matcher tool is best if you already have some skills and training, and want to know how you can use them.

If you like pictures better than words, you can try [Truity's photo career quiz](#). In this quiz, you choose the picture you like more. The quiz tells you what kinds of jobs might be similar to the pictures you picked. This quiz might not be very accurate, but it could be a good place to start for some people.



## Help, I'm anxious!

It's normal to feel afraid, worried, or overwhelmed about getting a job. For most of us, it's a big change in our lives. But you might feel anxious for other reasons, too.

In this section, we'll talk about a few of the most common fears that young people with disabilities have about starting to work.

Like always, you can approach this section by yourself or with a team. But remember that when it comes to feeling scared or worried, one of the best solutions is to talk to people who support you!

Humans are social animals. We need friendship, support, and conversation to feel okay. We're better at solving problems when we work together than when we work alone.

So consider reaching out to...

- Your family
- Your friends
- Other people with disabilities
- Your career counselor or VR counselor
- A therapist

Even having a conversation with a beloved animal friend can help you feel a little less lonely or overwhelmed.



## Remember, you are not alone!

That said, let's talk about some of the biggest fears we might have about getting to work.

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I don't know where to start. I'm overwhelmed and I feel stuck.

If you feel trapped or lost, it could be a sign that you need more help than you're getting.

- **Get together your team** of people you trust. Talk to them about feeling stuck.
- **Reach out to organizations** who are here to help you found here [here](#).
- **Use a structured plan**, like the [I Want to Work Workbook](#), the [T-Folio tool](#), or the tools from [Charting the Life Course](#). Explore these tools or talk with your team to figure out which one best fits your needs.



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## I've never worked before. What if I'm not good enough?

Everybody has to start somewhere!

Nobody started out already doing a job. Everyone had to learn new skills, try new things, and go to new places. You can, too - and it's okay if it takes a little time to adapt.

- **Learn more about what getting a job is like.** Try [this video](#), made by disabled young people, for disabled young people, about getting ready to get a job. Or read about the process of getting a job in [JAN's employment guide](#).
- **Listen to people explain what their job is like in a video.** You can learn more about what they do every day.
  - [CareerOneStop](#) has lots of videos sorted by “clusters,” or groups of jobs based on the kind of work they do. There are captions and transcripts for each video. Or, you can learn more about the different “career clusters” themselves [here](#).
  - [Dr. Kit](#) also sorts by “career clusters,” but this website includes pictures of each job that might help you understand what they do at a glance. These videos have captions available, but no transcripts.
  - [ConnectED Studios](#) has videos they call “A Day at Work.” You can just look through them, or you can organize by their career cluster. There are no captions or transcripts on this website.

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- If you can't find the job you want to do on one of these websites, you can go to websites like YouTube and look up what you're interested in.
- If you already have a role model who does something you might want to do, you can check to see if they have ever talked about their work in public.
- **Talk to someone who does the work you might want to do.** You could look for a formal mentor to talk to. Or you could just ask someone in your community who does a job you are interested in. Ask them what a typical day is like. What do they like about their job? What don't they like? What is the hardest thing they have to do?
  - If you already have a role model who does something you might want to do, reach out to them! Not everyone has the time to respond. But if your role model sees your message, most of the time, they will be excited to hear from you, and happy to help if they can.
- **Try volunteering first.** It's a low-stakes way to learn new skills, help others, get involved in your community, and figure out your interests and limits. There are lots of different ways to volunteer. Learn more about them [here](#).
- **Work with a job coach** or other support person to prepare for a job. You might need help with some things more than others. A job coach can help you figure out what the hardest things are. They can work

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with you to help you learn these skills.



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- Self-advocates with I/DD wrote a report about what they want and need from support people. You can read it to learn about what to expect from support people. You can read it [here](#).
- **Remember that everyone learns by doing!** Everybody, whether or not they have a disability, learns new things when they first start a job. Nobody knows everything on the first day, and no one will expect you to, either.

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I've never worked before, and I'm worried I won't ever be able to.

Many disabled people have worried that they might not ever be able to work.

Sometimes, people have spent a long time telling us that we won't be able to work. Maybe people have been mean to you about what you can and can't do. Maybe people have told you what THEY think you should do when you're an adult – and work wasn't part of it.

Sometimes, it's something we "learn" from the world around us. Maybe you have never seen a person with your kind of disabilities working before, in real life or TV. Maybe the only places you've seen other people like you have been in institutions or hospitals.

So, it can be easy to feel discouraged. It makes sense. After all, how are we supposed to know we CAN work if we've been told we can't, or if we've never seen people like us at work before?



But remember, people with disabilities can and do work, every day.

Everyone can work. There are so many kinds of work in the world. No matter what you can and can't do, there is a kind of work you can do. Big or small, with your hands or with your mind, with help or by yourself: **you can work, too.**

**The only person who can decide what you can and can't do is YOU.**  
**The only person who gets to choose your future is YOU.**

And talking to other disabled people, especially ones who have disabilities like yours, can help remind you that we can and do work.

- **Talk to other people with disabilities.** Maybe you know an organization or support group for people with similar disabilities to yours. Reach out to them. Who do they know who works? What kind of work do they do? What has it been like for them?
- **Reach out to a CIL.** Centers for Independent Living are run by disabled people who work very hard to make sure that other disabled people can live well and independently. That includes working! They can tell you what working life might be like and help connect you to your local disabled community.

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- **Learn about disability history.** Many disabled people have been pioneers of civil rights, but we have also been famous artists, inventors, scientists, athletes, writers, and actors.
  - Online, you could try the [Disability Social History Project](#), which has lots of articles.
  - Or you could visit the Smithsonian National Museum of American History's webpage on [disability history](#).
  - Or you could visit your local library.
  - If you find something that interests you, keep digging! We have always existed, and we have always been all kinds of people, living all kinds of lives.
- **Read real work stories** from other disabled people. If you can't find local community, many programs have posted real stories of people with disabilities going to work.
  - [ThinkWork!](#) has posted lots of work stories from people with I/DDs.
  - The Administration for Community Living wrote a report about what it's like to live and work in the community when you have an I/DD. It has stories and pictures. You can read it [here](#).
  - Autistic self-advocates wrote a book of essays called "An Autistic View of Employment: Advice, Essays, Stories, and More from Autistic Self-Advocates." You can read the book for free [here](#).

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I'm worried that working will make my disability worse. I'm scared

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it will stress me out really bad, and I won't know how to deal with it.

Some people have disabilities that get worse with stress or activity. When we try to do work that doesn't fit our needs and limits, it can make us feel worse. It can make us sicker. It can make us really stressed.

But we don't have to do work that makes us feel worse. Remember, **there are lots of kinds of work**. You don't have to do work that makes you feel bad or sick.

- **Ease into work slowly.** You could try volunteering for just a few hours a month. It's a way to get a better idea of what you can and can't do, and what you like and don't like about working, while still learning new skills and getting involved in your community. Or, you could start doing paid work for just a few hours at first, and do more work once you feel more confident.
- **Say no when you need to.** If someone asks you to do something that you don't want to do, can't do, aren't comfortable with, or aren't confident about, tell them! Saying no is one way to set boundaries.

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We need to set boundaries to stay healthy. You can say things like: “I don’t think I can do that. Can we talk about other options instead?”

- Sometimes, you’ll realize that a job isn’t a good fit for you.

Maybe you’ll realize after a few weeks, a few months, or even a few years. Talk to your team about your options. It could be that there are problems you can solve, but not all jobs will be right for you, and it’s okay to move on if you need to.

- **Be honest about your needs** with yourself and with people who are helping you.

- If a job looks really cool, but you know it would be really stressful for your body or your brain, try to imagine a different way you could get involved. Think about what you like about that job, and imagine other ways those things could be a part of your life.

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## **Example: Being honest with yourself**

Lisia really wants to be a doctor. She wants to help sick people get better. But Lisia is sick, too. She has to spend a lot of time in the hospital. She sometimes needs help to care for herself. She gets sicker when she is stressed.

Lisia learns more about what it would take to be a doctor. She finds out that it takes a lot of time at school to get a degree. She learns that working in a hospital is really stressful, and can make even people without disabilities feel sick.

Lisia still wants to help sick people. She thinks about what she really wants and needs out of a job. She wants to be

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able to talk to sick people and comfort them. She wants to be able to see sick people feeling better, and feel a sense of accomplishment. But she also needs to be able to rest often. She needs to be able to take time off for surgeries and hospital stays.

Lisia works hard and becomes a therapist. She works with people with disabilities and chronic illnesses to help them adjust and cope. Sometimes she goes to hospitals to talk to patients. She can talk to them over a video call or in person. She can take time off when she needs it.

- When you're working with people like a VR counselor or a CIL representative, remember to share how you feel on your worst days, not just how you feel when you're talking to them.
- **Consider disclosure.** This is talking to people at your job about your disability. If your supervisor or coworkers know about your disability, they might be willing to help you in ways they couldn't if they didn't know. But not everyone feels comfortable telling others about their disability. And we can't always tell how other people will react to learning about our disability.
  - There are many different ways to disclose your disability. You don't have to say what your disability is. You can learn a lot more about disclosure in [JAN's guide](#).
- **Have a plan for everything.** Stressful situations are easier to deal with when you already know different ways you can deal with them. You can work by yourself or with a team to write down the "rules" of

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your job.



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## Ask yourself...

### The rules of my job

- Where do I work? How do I get there? When do I go? What do I do if I miss my bus?
- When do I take breaks? Where do I go during my breaks? How long are they? How should I spend time during my breaks?
- When do I get paid? How do I make sure I can use my money?
- How do I call in sick?
- What do I do if someone else is sick at work?
- What do I do if there is an emergency at work, like a fire or earthquake?

There are lots of things you should know about how your job works. Brainstorm and talk to others to think of the different parts of your job you might need to remember.

- **Talk to people about what's going right and what's going wrong.** Even if you felt prepared for your job, there might be things you didn't know about that make it hard for you to work. You can talk to your family, to your VR counselor, to your supervisor, or anyone else who helps you. Tell them what is going well and what is making your job harder or more stressful. You might need different kinds of help or new accommodations. In some cases, you might need to change jobs. But you don't have to do any of that alone.

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- **Take care of yourself!** Even a job that is good for you can still cause stress sometimes. It's important to take care of yourself when you are not at work. That means different things to different people. You might like to spend time with friends, or you might like to have quiet time by yourself. You might like to take a soothing bath or watch your favorite show. Listen to your body and your mind, and notice when you are starting to feel stressed. Take breaks when you need to.

## **Ask yourself...**

### **Dealing with stress**

- How can I tell I am feeling stressed? How does my body feel? How does my mind feel?
- What things help me calm down from feeling stressed? What activities make me feel good? What activities help me take care of my body?
- Are some things harder for me to do when I'm stressed? Do I have a plan to make sure I can still do what I need to do?
- Do I need special help when I'm stressed?  
*Medicine to deal with increased pain, support from a therapist*

Some people make a "stress kit." A stress kit contains things that help you take care of yourself, like a journal, stuffed animals, stim toys, a favorite CD, sweet treats, or bubbles for a relaxing bath.

A stress kit could be items in a decorated box. Or it could be a pile of things in a place you can reach easily. It could even just be a list of ideas for things to do to calm down.



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I'm worried that I won't get hired because of my disability.  
Or, I'm worried I won't have the accommodations or assistive technology I need to work.

The Americans With Disabilities Act, or the ADA, makes it illegal for people to decide not to hire us just because of our disabilities.

Even though it is illegal not to hire us, it still happens sometimes. This is ableism. It is wrong. Not hiring someone because of a disability, even though you could do the work, is against the law. If you think this happened to you, you should talk to your team. They can help you report it if you want to. They can help you find a different employer.

The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network wrote about the ADA so disabled people can learn more about how it works. You can read it in plain language or in Easy Read format [here](#).

It is also illegal to say that we can't get accommodations when we need them. Employers can say no to some accommodations. But they have to have a very good reason to say no.

There are lots of different kinds of accommodations you can have at work. You can learn more about them at the [Job Accommodation Network's](#)



[website](#). You can talk to people who work at JAN, or use their tool SOAR, which stands for the [Searchable Online Accommodation Resource](#).

If you are having trouble getting an accommodation, you can talk to your team. You can talk to JAN. You can talk to human resources (HR) at work.

One accommodation that can help people with disabilities at work is assistive technology, or AT. There are lots of ways to get AT. If you use a VR program, they can help you get AT. Or you can talk to [an AT program in your state](#).

You can learn more about lots of different kinds of AT at [Explore AT's website](#). There is assistive technology for every kind of disability and every kind of activity. If you need help, you can get it.

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## I'm worried that my coworkers will be ableist.

Sometimes, the people who work with us are ableist towards us. They may make mean jokes or say hurtful things. They might do things that we are not comfortable with, like push a wheelchair when we have not said it was okay.

Sometimes, if you feel comfortable, you can talk to the person about what happened. You can tell them that what they did or said was hurtful. You can ask them to change their behavior in the future.

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But you can also talk to HR at work. It is their job to deal with harassment and discrimination. That means that if someone hurts you because of your disability, HR should help you.

You can also talk to your team of people who support you. They can help you feel better and understand what to do next. (Sometimes, “what to do next” might just be taking time to do things that make you feel happy and calm.) If you have a support person at work, they can also help you communicate your feelings.

Sometimes, talking about ableism can help you feel better, and it can help other people with disabilities, too. But sometimes it is just too much. It might be too stressful or painful. It might put you at risk of more ableism. You might not have the time or the energy. Deciding when to respond to ableism and when to step back and take care of yourself is up to you.



## I'm not ready to work yet

There are lots of reasons you might not be ready to work yet. Some reasons might be:

- You want to go to school for more education or training
- You're anxious about going to work
- You haven't decided what you want to do yet
- You want to wait for the pandemic to get better

It's okay to not feel ready. But there are things you can do in the meantime to help yourself prepare.

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### Volunteering

Volunteering might not be as scary as paid work, because you are working for free. You can also usually choose how much you work.

There are lots of places in your community where you can volunteer, like food banks or local parks. Or, if you go to a place of worship, like a church, synagogue, or mosque, you can ask people there for ideas.

You can also search online for “volunteer opportunities in my area.”

Or, you can use a website. [AmeriCorps](#) is run by the U.S. government.

They help match volunteers with nonprofit organizations. AmeriCorps might



ask you to travel. If you agree, they will help pay for you to live somewhere else while you volunteer.

You could also try the website [VolunteerMatch](#). Some organizations looking for volunteers put advertisements on this website. If one of them looks interesting, you can ask about the position. Some options on VolunteerMatch are even remote.

There are other ways to volunteer from your home. You can try the crowdsourced scientific research website [Zooniverse](#). This website has many projects you can work on, about topics like animals, space, and history. (Most, but not all, Zooniverse projects require good vision.)

If you feel confident with the work on Zooniverse and are ready to step up your contributions, you can volunteer with the [Smithsonian's Digital Transcription center](#). Your work helps digitize documents from the Smithsonian museum collections, so more people can search and learn from these collections. (Most, but not all, Digital Transcription projects require excellent vision and the ability to read unusual or difficult handwriting. But there are some audio transcription options, too!)

Volunteering is a great way to learn new skills and build your confidence. You can do just a little at a time if you're nervous about a lot of work. You can help people and meet others in your community. And you can put it on your resume!



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## Practicing for a job

Support workers like job coaches and VR counselors can help you with lots of things, virtually or in person.

You can work with your team or support staff to learn how to do job tasks.

You can practice interviewing with a member of your team, or you can practice interactions that you might have at work.

You can work on tools that will help you when you go to work, like visual schedules or cheat cards. Some people use apps on their phone to help them at work. If you are going to use an app, you can use it around your home to get used to how it feels.

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## Making a workspace

If you want to work remotely, you can start setting up a workspace for yourself at your house, even before you have a job. Spending time at a workspace and getting used to how it feels can help prepare you for working remotely in the future.

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## Learning new skills

You can learn new skills at home, even if you don't want or need post-secondary education like college or trade school. There are classes, videos, and other resources online that can help you learn skills like





programming, painting, cooking, and using software like Photoshop or Excel.

Some of these classes are free, and some cost money. You might also be able to access classes through a local self-advocacy network or through your local library.

Learning skills at home is a good way to remind yourself that you are capable. And you can include some of these skills on your resume, too!

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## Staying in touch

Reach out to other people in your community, especially people with disabilities, or people from other special communities you are a part of.

It really helps to be with people you can relate to. You can learn more about yourself and others. You can build confidence and become a better self-advocate. And you can stay connected, even if you are still mostly staying at home because of COVID-19.

If you have an I/DD, consider joining a local self-advocacy group. Or, if there isn't one nearby, start one! You can look for a self-advocacy group near you [here](#).



## Who can I talk to for help?

There are lots of groups that are ready and able to help you find and keep a job.

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### Your local VR organization

**Vocational rehabilitation** (also called VR or voc rehab) helps disabled people with every part of work: preparing for a job, finding a job that works for you, getting a job, and keeping the job. [This video](#) talks more about VR and how it works.

VR counselors will help you make an official plan for getting a job, called an IPE. Working with your counselor, you'll set goals for yourself, and figure out what help you need to achieve your goals.

VR can help you in lots of different ways: getting assistive technology, practicing job interviews, getting training or education, and many more. If you need help, VR can help you get it.

Every U.S. state and territory has their own VR program. Some states have two VR programs: one for blind or visually impaired people, and one for people with other disabilities.

You can find your state or territory's VR program [here](#).



**If you are indigenous...**

... VR might work directly with your nation or tribe to provide culturally competent services. Ask your local VR center for more information.

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## Your local CIL

**Centers for Independent Living** (also called CILs) are groups led and staffed by disabled people. They can help you with all kinds of things related to independent living, including working and self-advocacy.

The people working at a CIL know what it's like to be disabled, and believe strongly in independence, autonomy, and fairness for disabled people. If working with other disabled people is important to you, reach out to a CIL.

You can find your local CIL [here](#), or, if you prefer plain text, [here](#).

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## Your local AJC

**American Job Centers** (also called AJCs) aren't designed specifically for disabled people, but can still help you get ready for work. You can find one in your area [here](#).

They also have lots of helpful resources online on their website, [CareerOneStop](#).



**If you are indigenous...**

... there are culturally competent programs available through the AJC network. You can search for one near you [here](#).

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## JAN

The **Job Accommodation Network** (JAN for short) can help you learn more about what accommodations you can get at work, and how to get them. Visit them [here](#)!

You can also learn more about the ADA and what it means for you as a disabled person at work.

You can contact JAN via phone, TTY, email, or a live chat on the website.

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## Ticket to Work

If you get SSI or SSDI benefits, you can use the **Ticket to Work program** to get help. They connect you with different services to help you get to work, while making sure you have access to your benefits in case you still need them.

[This video](#) can tell you more about the Ticket to Work program. Or, [here's](#) an introduction to the program in ASL.

You can visit the Ticket to Work website [here](#).



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## The U.S. government

The United States government has many programs to help disabled people get hired to work with the government.

One program is called **Schedule A**, which can make it fast and easy for people with intellectual disabilities, severe physical disabilities, or psychiatric disabilities to get government jobs. You have to have a letter from a doctor, VR specialist, or an agency that provides disability benefits saying that you have one of these kinds of disabilities.

You can learn more about Schedule A [here](#).

If you're in college or just graduated, you can apply to government jobs through the **Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP)**. If you're eligible for Schedule A, there is an option to say so in your application.

You can learn more about the WRP [here](#).

If you aren't eligible for Schedule A, you can talk to a **Selective Placement Program Coordinator (SPPC)** in a department where you want to work. Their job is to help make it easier for disabled people to get a job with the government. They'll help you figure out if there's a space for you.

You can find an SPPC in your area [here](#).



If you're interested in a job with the U.S. government, you can learn more about these methods, or apply directly, [here](#).

The **Department of Labor** is in charge of jobs in the United States. They wrote a guide about getting and keeping a job during the COVID-19 pandemic called [Secure Your Financial Future](#). It has resources and videos that might help you.

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### Job search websites

Anybody can use job search websites like Indeed or LinkedIn. But there are also many job search websites specifically for people with disabilities. The Social Security Administration has a list of these websites [here](#).

Some websites require you to be on SSI or SSDI before they can help you. Other websites don't have any requirements.

The perfect job may not be on a job search website the first time you look. Most job search websites will let you register and set up search terms, so when new jobs become available that you might like, you can get an email or other notification. Thinking about why and how you want to work will help.



## We really can work!

When I was younger, I was afraid I would never be able to work. School made me feel so sick - how would I ever be able to get a “real job?” I wanted to support myself and my partner. But I didn’t really believe it was possible.

I wish I could tell my past self that **I really can work.**

I am good at writing and communicating with people. I like working with other disabled people. And it’s really important to me that my work helps other people. I need to be able to see that what I’m doing matters.

And I can do those things in ways that accommodate my disabilities. I don’t have to push myself into a sleep schedule that hurts my body. I can work in bed if I need to. I can use AAC to communicate with my coworkers and peers. And since I am at high risk for infectious diseases like COVID-19, it’s important to me to work at home.

The things that matter to me and the ways I accommodate my disabilities won’t work for everyone. **But it matters that I found the way that works for me.**

There are as many ways to work as there are people in the world - maybe more! It might take time to figure out the right way for you, and you might

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make mistakes along the way. There might be misunderstandings. You will have bad days. We all do.

But you will also have good days. You will have days where you succeed, and you will be filled with that wonderful feeling of knowing that **you worked hard, and it made a difference.**

It helps me to tell people when I have those good days. You might even want to keep a diary! If you have a record of those good feelings, you can look back at them when you feel discouraged. It can help break through the fog of sadness. But it can also help you problem-solve. Maybe you'll realize that you were doing something then that you need to be doing more often.

No matter what you choose to do, and no matter how you choose to do it, you will be amazing.

Working is a way to be part of the community. When we work, we support our community, and we make it stronger.

**When you work, you make our community - the whole world - a better place.**

Thank you! I am so glad you are here.