

Helping People with Substance Use Disorders to Obtain Employment

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Employment Center

Important considerations when working with people that have substance use disorders

- Stigma impacts not only the person with an addiction but those people that are around them.
- People with substance use disorders learn to hide their addiction and tend to minimize and justify their behavior.
- In reality addiction is a mental health disorder, but the person with addiction is usually being blamed for their desire to use drugs and alcohol. “You are doing this yourself”
- Employment specialists need to have a basic understanding about addiction and be aware of their own transference.

Zero Exclusion

- IPS programs welcome people who want to work, whether or not they have problems with substance use disorders. Clients are not asked to achieve sobriety or engage in treatment before receiving assistance with competitive jobs or school.



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The Role of Employment in Recovery from Substance Use.

- Recovery is not a lineal path; there will typically be relapses followed by abstinence, usually over several years. During this period of time people are learning to develop healthier ways to live.
- Working gives people purpose, greater self-esteem, and a reason to reduce or stop using substances.
- Focusing on people's desire to work is healthy.
- Unemployment in the general population leads to higher incidents of substance use, depression, and legal issues.

- What are common concerns that IPS teams have about employment for people with substances use disorders?
- What are some creative problem-solving strategies to help people achieve their goals?

1. Concerns the Person Will Fail at Work

- Many practitioners think that people with active substance use disorders will fail at work; especially people who are in the early stages of recovery. But research studies have demonstrated that many people with substance use disorders hold jobs in spite of ongoing problems with drugs and alcohol.
- There is no crystal ball to predict who will be successful
- Losing a job is not necessarily a bad outcome for a person with a substance use disorder when practitioners help the person learn from the experience. Use a job loss as an opportunity to develop discrepancy.



Strategies

- The team works with the person in order to develop a plan to be sober on the job.
- What substances are problematic for the person?
- What is the person's current stage of recovery from substances use disorder?
- What time of day or other circumstances is the person most likely to want to use substances?
- What factors or circumstances have helped the person to abstain or reduce substance use in the past?
- What information do you have about how substance use has impacted previous jobs?
- Assist person in preparing for possible triggers in the workplace. For example, role play responses to co-workers going out for a beer.



Strategies

- Find jobs that support recovery
- Avoid workplaces that serve alcohol or have access to other substances in which the person has or had issues.
- Preferences regarding what shifts work best for the person, afternoons versus early mornings.
- Offer to assist the person with plans to manage paychecks.
For example, automatic deposit, saving for something the person really wants.
- Work closely with the integrated treatment team.
- Use the team to problem solve issues and celebrate successes.



2. Concerns About Safety.

Strategies

- When someone has a substance use disorder, you should consider safety factors and address those on the employment plan. For example, if a person is not able to control when they drink, you would avoid driving jobs or jobs operating heavy machinery. The goal is for the person to go to work sober.
- Regardless of your client's job preferences, when you and the team believe that the person might go to work under the influence of substances, offer to help the person consider other job options.



3. Concerns About Pre-employment Drug Screening

Strategies

- Many employers drug test, but that is not true for all employers.
- IPS specialists build relationships with employers to learn about their businesses and often find out who does pre-employment drug testing. This information is shared with the client, and they decide whether or not they want to apply at those companies.
- When a person does not get a job based upon a positive drug test it will provide them with more information about how their substance use interferes with their goals.



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4. Concerns About Damaging Employer Relationships “Burning Bridges”

Strategies

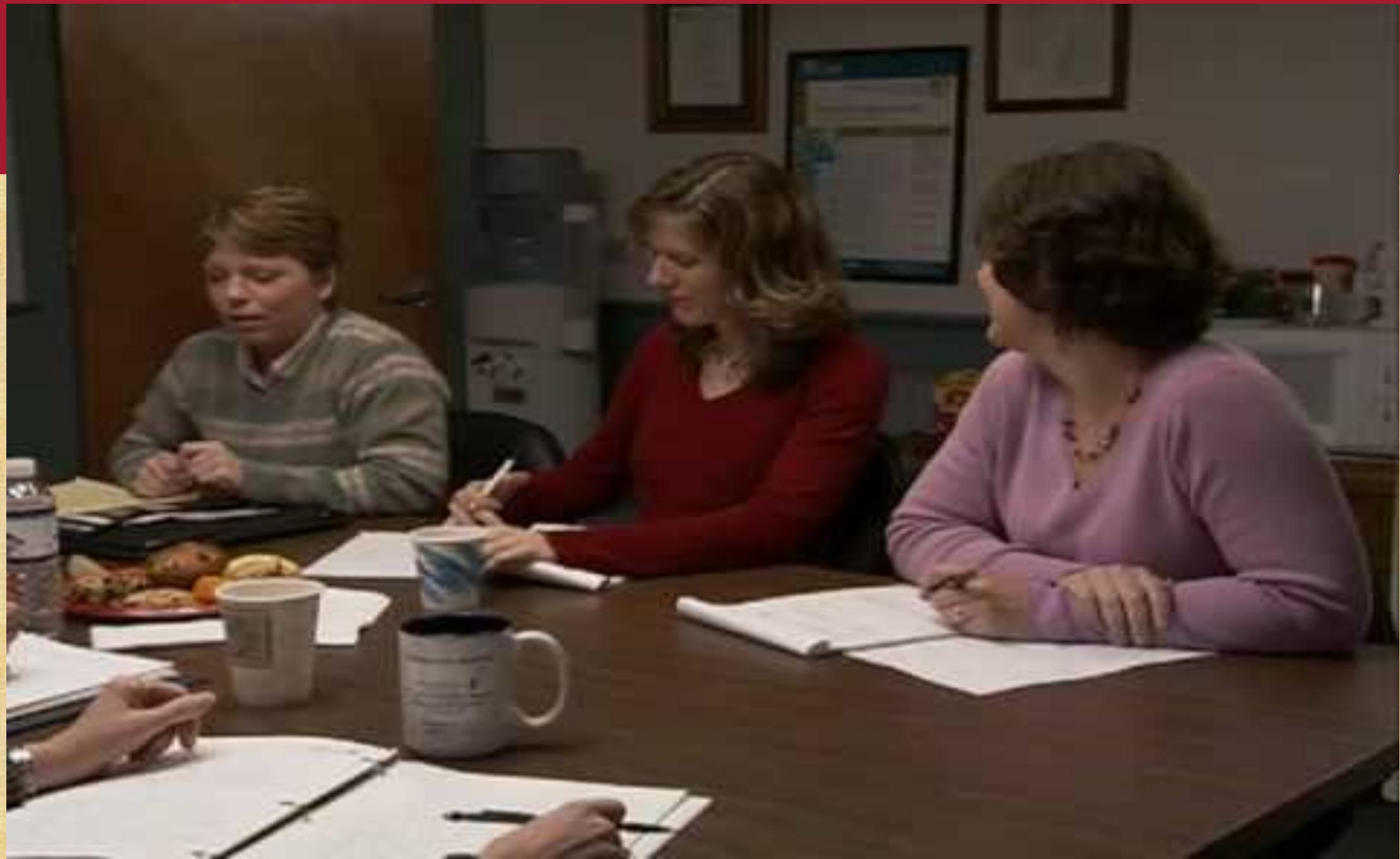
- Employers frequently hire people that don't work so they are not shocked when they find out that someone has a substance use disorder.
- IPS specialists need to be available to provide support and assistance to employers if issues surface.
- The goal is to work with the client, mental health treatment team, RSA counselor, and others to make a plan for the person to be sober on the job.
- If the plan does not work out, the IPS specialist needs to immediately visit the employer to apologize and ask what they could have done differently.

How do you respond when someone loses their job due to substance use?

- With IPS, each job is viewed as a positive learning experience. If someone loses their job due to substance use the IPS specialist may learn that their client needs a job during a different time of day or may need help budgeting their paycheck. The client might decide that when they get another job they will try to cut back on drinking or avoid drinking the night before work.
- People who have substance use disorders are often ashamed of their problem. Practitioners need to be nonjudgmental to help people move forward again. IPS specialists use a strengths-based approach and should not express disapproval for factors that led to losing the job.
- The IPS specialist does not put conditions on helping the person with finding another job. Instead, they try to help the person think about another job and strategies to maintain the job.

Always Remember to Foster Hope

- Point out the person's accomplishments.
- View setbacks as learning experiences and offer ongoing assistance with employment.
- Talk with the person about their long-term goal including career development plans.



Harry's Story

- How do you think Meka is feeling?
- How do you think Harry is feeling?
- What do you think went wrong?
- What could be done differently?

Harry's Story Vignette

- List all of Harry's strengths
- What questions would you ask about Harry during the treatment team meeting?
- What supports can each team member provide?



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Thank you



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