

# Guide for hiring a job coach for early employment

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## Introduction

**Starting your employment journey can be both exciting and overwhelming.** Early employment may include activities like volunteering, self-employment, or sometimes finding a summer job. In some cases, families will hire a support person, also referred to as a 'job coach' to help promote success as their young worker begins their employment path.

## What is a job coach?

A job coach (also referred to as a 'support person') is someone who provides personalized support to help individuals with disabilities and those who experience barriers to employment learn how to perform job tasks and retain their position.

A job coach can assist with skill development, workplace integration, and communication with employers. A key part of job coaching is that support is **ideally gradually reduced over time**. When the worker is performing the job as expected, and is comfortable, the job coach plans a gradual fading of support. The job coach then primarily provides check-ins and remains available to consult if needed.

A job coach is not there to perform the worker's job. Instead, they provide the worker and employer with the support and tools needed so the worker can learn and excel on their own within the role.

Additional resources about "what is a job coach"

- [Holland Bloorview Employer Resource Hub](#)
- [Connectability](#)

## What does a job coach do?

A job coach's role may involve:

- Preparing job search materials such as job applications, resumes, and cover letters.
- Supporting the job search process by helping the worker identify roles that align with their skills.
- On the job coaching:
  - Integrating learning strategies and accommodations into routines (i.e. adapting the daily schedule format, making a checklist of the steps in a task etc.).
  - Finding solutions to challenges that arise while performing job related tasks.
- Working with supervisors/leads/managers to respond to feedback and ensure standards for quality and output are being met.
- Promoting social inclusion within the workplace

**Important: A job coach is not there to do the job for the young worker. Instead, they: teach skills, provide strategies and support, and help your youth succeed independently**

## Who can be a job coach?

Although job coaches are typically individuals with experience supporting people with disabilities in learning new skills, job coaches may come from a variety of backgrounds.

They may be:

- Students in fields like occupational therapy, education, or psychology
- Support workers
- Rehabilitation assistants
- Family members
- Friends

## When hiring someone to provide support you can

- Hire someone yourself
- Work with an agency to purchase support from the workers they employ
  - Examples of agencies include:
    - [wm+a](#)
    - [Bartimaeus](#)
- Hire a family member over 18 who isn't the main caregiver, parent, step-parent, or spouse

## What matters most is not the job title, but that the person

- Understands how to effectively teach and support skill development
- Is patient, adaptable, and reliable
- Can build a positive working relationship with the youth

## Who could benefit from a job coach?

Individuals with disabilities who may take longer to learn new things and who are interested in and motivated to obtain self-employment, volunteering, early work experiences, and employment-based program participation may benefit from job coaching.

## Does my youth need a job coach?

- **A job coach may be helpful if your youth:**
  - Benefits from hands-on, structured support to learn job tasks, routines, and workplace expectations
  - Learns at a different pace and may need extra time, repetition, and guidance to build independence
  - Experiences challenges with communication, social skills, confidence, or transferring skills across settings
- **A job coach may not be the right fit if your youth:**
  - Does not require support with learning
  - Primarily needs physical or medical assistance
    - If you only require support for physical and/or medical needs this does not require a job coach. Instead, this would be related to **attendant care and workplace accommodations**
  - Requires long-term, ongoing 1:1 support for later paid employment
    - In these cases, more structured or long-term support through day programs or community employment programs may be a better fit.
    - See [Life after Highschool](#) Resource Sheet

## What should I look for in a job coach?

When looking for a job coach to work closely with your young worker, you may want to consider someone who:

- Has experience working with youth with disabilities
- Is patient, reliable, and a good communicator
- Understands and values the importance of promoting independence (not dependence)

You may also want to consider:

- Does your young worker feel comfortable with them?
- Do they listen and adapt to your young worker's needs?
- Are they open to feedback and collaboration?

## How do I find a job coach?

There are several ways to find and hire a qualified job coach:

### University/college job boards

- This creates a reciprocal relationship where students gain relevant experience and families get support.
- Families can hire students in relevant fields such as: occupational therapy; education, psychology, behavioural sciences etc.
- For example, educational institutions (universities, colleges) often have job boards and department specific email lists.
  - Example: [University of Toronto Job Board](#)

### Online job advertisements

- Posting a job online often involves creating an employer account at clicking and entering job details (title, location, description, pay). Most jobs can be posted for free.
- Common online job boards (with links) include:
  - [LinkedIn](#)
  - [Indeed](#)

### Family, friends, or trusted connections

- Ask other parents or caregivers on how they hire support workers
  - Utilize online community groups or forums you're already connected with (ex: parenting, disability specific forums) to find connections or ask for advice
- Some families choose to hire someone (18+) they already know, such as a:
  - Family friend
  - Neighbor
  - Community member
  - Cousin or sibling
- Things to consider:
  - Be clear about roles, expectations, and boundaries
  - Treat this as a professional role (set hours, responsibilities, and pay)
  - Ensure they are truly supporting skill development not just doing tasks for them
  - Consider whether your young worker will respond well to this person in a work-related role (ex: will they maintain professionalism in the presence of a family member?)

### Note on hiring support workers

You and your family may be responsible for recruiting, interviewing, hiring and managing employees. If you're inexperienced with hiring, the following resource contains some tips to guide you during the process: [Planning Network - Hiring Support Workers](#)

## Employees vs independent contractors

Hiring a support worker as an **employee** means you control their schedule, tasks, and withhold taxes (CPP, EI, income tax), and you are responsible for Employment Standards Act (ESA) standards. An **independent contractor** works for themselves, sets their own hours/methods, and invoices you directly without tax deductions

For more information on this topic see the following resources:

- [Support Worker Central](#)
- [Planning Network - Hiring Support Workers](#)
- [The Business Development Bank of Canada \(BDC\)](#)

## Potential interview guide for hiring a job coach

When hiring, treat this like any other job interview. You are choosing someone to work closely with your youth and family so comfort, trust, and compatibility matter just as much as experience.

### Examples of questions you may want to ask a potential job coach during an interview

- What experience do you have related to working with youth with disabilities?
- How do you support someone to become more independent over time?
- How would you handle a situation where my youth is struggling at work?
- How will you communicate progress?
- Can you describe a time you successfully supported someone in learning a new skill?
- How do you balance helping vs. stepping back?
- How do you adapt your approach for different learning styles?
- Are you comfortable collaborating with employers?
- How familiar are you with navigating workplace accommodations?

### For more ideas regarding interview questions, see the following resources

- [Better team - Job coach interview questions](#)
- [UNC School of Medicine - Hiring potential caregivers](#)
- [Interviewing a potential respite worker or aide](#)

## Funding a job coach

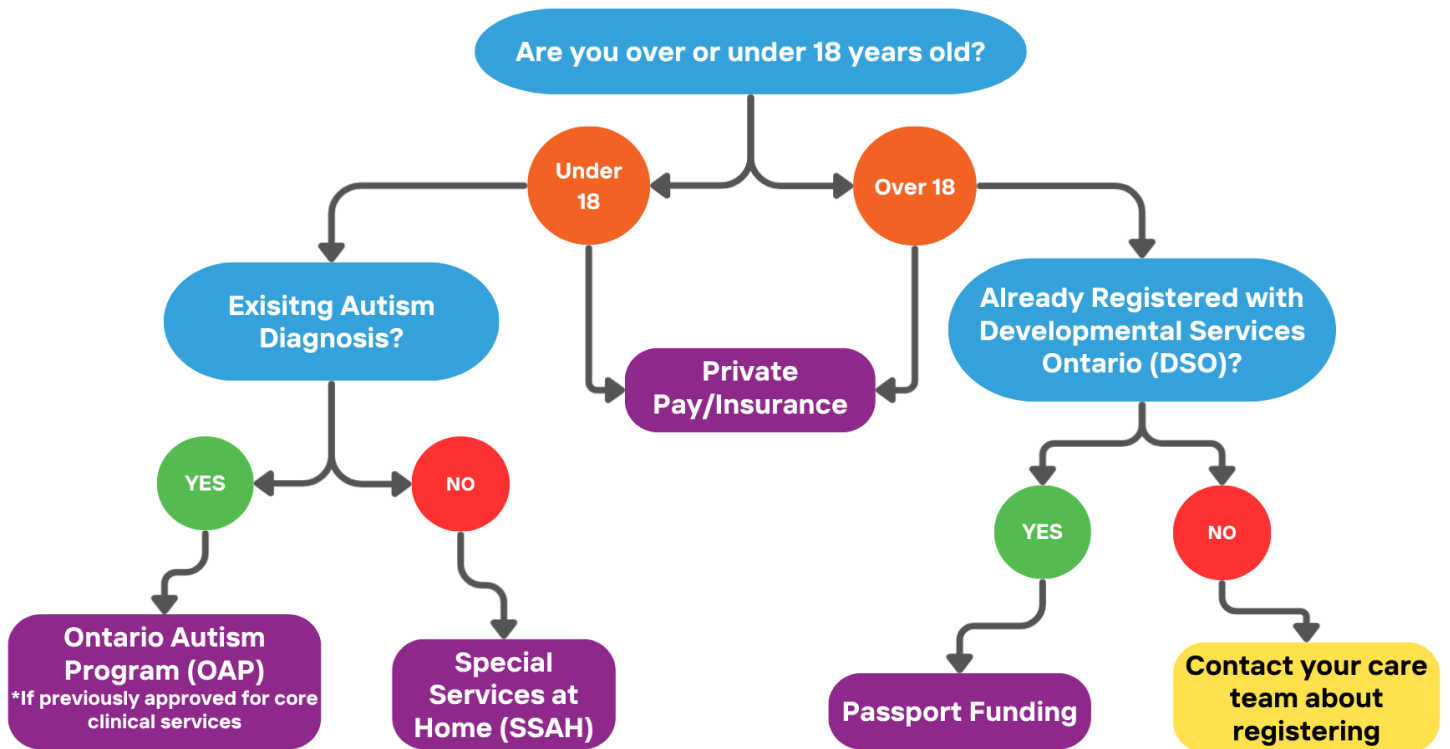
There **may** be several potential options to pay for a job coach. The right option depends on your young worker's age, needs, and sometimes their diagnoses. Below is a brief overview of what may be available.

**General Tip:** Sometimes understanding funding eligibility and rules can be difficult. It's okay to ask for help! If you are unsure about next steps contact individuals within your care team (i.e. your occupational therapist, social worker), or private insurance representative.

Ask the **right** questions to the **right** people (i.e. insurance representative, social worker, occupational therapist):

*"I'm looking to hire an OT with experience in life skills, would this service qualify for funding"*

## Funding flowchart:



## Passport Funding (Ages 18+)

### What is passport funding?

Passport is a program that helps adults 18 years or older with a developmental disability to participate in their communities and live as independently as possible.

### How passport funding works

- You receive funding and pay for services upfront, then submit receipts for reimbursement
- Alternatively, you may use a brokerage who will pay for services upfront, and receive the reimbursement
- You can hire your own support worker or use an agency.
- Passport provides funding for adults with developmental disabilities to participate in community classes and recreation, build work, volunteer, and daily living skills, hire support workers, create person-directed life plans to achieve personal goals, and access temporary respite for caregivers.

## Special Services at Home (SSAH) (Under 18)

### What is SSAH?

SSAH is a program that helps families in taking care of a child with a developmental and/or physical disability. It provides funding to buy services and supports that help parents with caring for their child, or that support the child to join activities at home and in the community. Funding through SSAH is needs based and is not dependent on a youth's diagnosis or their families income

### Job coaching support may fit under

- Skill development (e.g., job skills, independence)
- Participation in community or daily activities
- Learning supports or tutoring
- Respite (if the support also provides caregiver relief)

## Ontario Autism Program (OAP) (Under 18)

### What is OAP?

OAP is a provincial financial support program for Ontario families with children and youth (under 18) diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It provides funding for regulated healthcare services (ex: Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA), speech therapy, and occupational therapy)

### How OAP funding works

- First determine if you receive core clinical services funding. Core clinical services is one of the streams of support for children and youth registered in OAP based on individual need. If you are unsure of this, reach out to your care team or [OAP directly](#)

- If you do receive funding for core clinical services, then next steps would involve finding a **regulated health care professional** that could potentially support your goals of employment and can bill their services to core clinical services.
  - OAP Provider list: <https://oaproviderlist.ca/>
  - Regulated health care professionals that may be able to help support job coaching may have experience with building practical skills related to confidence, independence, transition planning, strengthening social skills etc.

## Private pay/insurance coverage

You may choose to hire a job coach and pay out-of-pocket. If you have insurance coverage, you may also be able to use this to connect with a **regulated health care provider** that your insurance has coverage for.

### This may be helpful if

- You are waiting for funding
- You don't qualify for funding
- You need more flexible or immediate support
- You want to hire someone not covered by other programs
- You are looking to complement your current supports

## Other ways to access support

If you are not interested in hiring your own job coach, alternative early employment supports may include:

### Community organizations

Depending on the individual's circumstances, diagnoses, location, and goals there may be other community organizations available. Some of these organizations may receive their own funding to operate and some may charge for service. If they require a fee for service, you can use your passport funding or pay out of pocket.

### In order to learn more about supports available you can

- Research employment supports in your area
- See [Life after Highschool](#) Resource Sheet
- Connect with your care team (i.e. social worker, OT, etc.) as they may have insight into community programs and eligibility requirements.

## Future employment services

### Employment programs through DSO

***It is important to note that waitlists for these programs may be long*** and we typically do not see youth access these services during high school. Due to this, we encourage applying to DSO as early as 16. During your DSO application, you can indicate your interest in employment-related programming. We encourage you to consider these steps for your future, and recognize that participation in these programs is impacted by waitlists and timing.

If already approved for [Disability Services Ontario \(DSO\)](#), DSO determines eligibility and compatibility to match young workers with community organizations that fit their needs. If your youth is not currently registered with DSO, then you can ask for a referral or you can contact [DSO directly](#) for more information. Even if you're not registered with DSO you may still be able to reach out to these organizations. **It's always good to try!**

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## Contact

For further information on Holland Bloorview's Employment Pathway programs and services or for questions about this guide, please contact: [employmentpathways@hollandbloorview.ca](mailto:employmentpathways@hollandbloorview.ca)

*For information on our programs and pathway model:*

<https://hollandbloorview.ca/services/programs-services/youth-employment-participation-programs>

*For information for employers, see our Employer Resource Hub:*

<https://hollandbloorview.ca/employer-resource-hub>