**wintac – ID200303 Tailoring Assessments and Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) Process for Consumers with Autism - Transcript**

>> Welcome, everyone. I'm thrilled to be presenting this second seminar in our new series of >> Hello, everyone. Welcome to our third webinar focused on working with individuals with autism within the vocational rehabilitation service system. I'm very happy to be presenting today on the topic Tailoring Assessments and Individualized Plan for Employment: The IEP process for consumers with autism. I am Dr. Mary Baker Erickson [assumed spelling]. I'm a research scientist and a clinical psychologist. Both coming from the clinical psychology background in training but also as a as a practitioner who currently provides clinical services. I have over 30 years of experience working with individuals with autism. I also have decades of experience working with individuals with intellectual disabilities, other developmental disabilities and mental health conditions. I have a number of research grants from the National Institute of Mental Health, including grants that were specifically focused of working with individuals with autism within the VR service system. And they have a grant particularly focused on improving vocational soft skills for individuals with autism. I'm more recently joined the WINTAC team at the Interwork Institute in San Diego, at San Diego State University. And I'm so appreciative to get to know many of you across the nation now in VR services. So let's go ahead and get started. I've stated in previous seminars, there is a mix of preferences within the autism community between person first language and identity first language. So I'll be purposely interchanging forms and using different language variations throughout this seminar. And I'll be using terms such as individuals with autism, autism spectrum conditions, autism spectrum disorders and autistic individuals. And I'll be doing that to be respectful to all. So historically, research and practice has found a number of common challenges or problems in conducting vocational assessments. These often occur within educational and clinical assessments as well. And these are somewhat particular to individuals with autism, not solely. There's very limited -- in fact, I might call it no specific vocational assessments designed or validated specific to the autism spectrum population. However, there are some assessments that we'll be talking about today that are functional face and across a broad range of the functional areas, as well as looking at environmental assessments match for individuals with autism. But when we're thinking of more classic vocational assessments, maybe such as interest inventories, those have not been validated even on individuals with autism. So there can be a number of problems that can arise for use of these so-called typical standardized assessments with autistic individuals. Particularly there may be some difficulties within the administration protocols. One such example is protocols often have time limitations to them. And this can be particularly difficult for those with autism. Because many have slower processing abilities and just need more time to digest the directions or digest the information before giving the response. Another challenge area is often administrative -- standardized assessments have very specific administrative directions in terms of delivering of the protocol, meaning they will have standardized language to use or particular scripts to read verbatim. This can be a particular challenge because this descriptive [phonetic] language may have words or using a word choice that might have dual meanings or maybe not even make a good sense for the individual autism. This came particularly into play, for example, with this very common assessment used for diagnosing individuals with autism. And interestingly, this assessment was designed specifically for the autism population. However, one of the items asks, do you like dates? Now, this is particularly challenging for the autism population because dates has multiple meanings, right? They're not sure if we're asked -- the item is asking dates meaning the food, dates meaning social dates, or dates meaning a date on a calendar. And so, without knowing what is meant, it can become very frustrating for the individual and some actually won't respond to it because they don't have that clarity. On this assessment, the item actually is intended to mean calendar number dates. Another problem with these structured evaluations, the problem can arise due to kind of anxiety or this intimidation of just the fact of the environments of what's entailed with a structure evaluation. The structure nature of it can just elicit a particular amount of anxiety or stress. Many autistic individuals actually have test anxiety or performance anxiety. And so this becomes very activated or heightened during the assessment process. Lastly, there's a challenge with vocational interest interviews, particularly in the autistic population, using over or under responding patterns. And where this comes from, or why this occurs is sometimes related to not understanding the items but even more particularly if not knowing how to answer the items, meaning that maybe they have never experienced the number of these potential jobs don't know a whole lot about them. So they feel like they can't answer whether they're interested in the job or not interested in it because they just have little experience or no experience about it. And they don't really know how to kind of put themselves in somebody else's shoes, to be able to imagine what it would be like in that position, to be able to answer whether they would like it or not. So those can be particularly difficult, as well. So this leads us to a number of accommodations that can be used during the assessment process. Now remember, some standardized assessment tools don't allow for accommodations or you have to be careful which ones are allowable to use with that particular measurement tool. So you do need to research the measurement tool carefully and see what's allowable with the first example provided here for offering extended time. Extended time can be very helpful to many autistics if that measurement tool does not factor in time, and does not have that as a major component of the assessment. Another area to consider is assistive technology. Now we certainly think of as assistive technology for many other populations with disabilities, the Deaf immunity or hard of hearing, or visually impaired communities. But it can be particularly useful for the autism community as well, even though they may not be qualified as visually impaired or hearing impaired. But having that additional modality of delivery of the information can be particularly useful. So maybe VMO being able to have something delivered orally along with text, or as the next bullet indicates pictorial materials. These can be particularly useful, as many folks in the autism spectrum are visual learners. And that pictorial image gives additional context to understand the vocabulary or can understand better the instructions especially if they're lengthier instructions, and like those can be impacted due to their own attention issues. And so that pictorial image can reengage and then maintain the attention better. You also want to look for opportunities to clarify language and provide additional context as you're administering the assessment or having them fill out questionnaires or asking or responding to particular interview questions. You want to be paying particular attention to creating this safe and comfortable environment, right, having that in mind about the anxiety. One particular way of doing this is using priming. That basically means preparing the person ahead of time giving this information or exposing them to the environments like the location in this space for the people giving some introduction to the task and further explanation of the purpose all ahead of time. Ideally, even before the testing day, so that they have plenty of time to digest the information and get themselves prepared so on testing day, they've got a better understanding of what's going to take place and feel -- and can feel more comfortable. You also really want to think about the presence and particularly inviting or allowing support persons and/or support items. A person rank would be defined as a family member or a close friend often is the support person, somebody who can -- who knows them well and who can identify signs of anxiety or confusion, who could also personalize or translate information to the individual's needs. So if they see that there's some confusion that they know how to reframe, or use different language that would make more sense to that individual. As often in this initial assessment process, you don't know the individual very well. And so it can be very difficult to do that translating. Having comfort items is really helpful, letting them hold it to have near them. I had one individual that I worked with, within this assessment process who had a backpack who just -- it was a comfort item and so they wouldn't take their backpack off their bodies, off their shoulder even when they sat down, even when they were in the chair and when they were specifically, you know, asked to take the backpack off and put it on the floor with the intention that they would become more comfortable. It actually backfired. They became less comfortable by not having that item close at hands and have feeling it on their back. So something to keep in mind. We do want them to be able to have those items and if they want to keep that heavy jacket on, that's also something I've encountered quite often. It might become a warm in the room but they still keep that heavy jacket on because it's a comfort item. You want to be looking for the accommodation of allowing for movement. Those include both small and large movements. So small movements might be, you know, tapping their foot or flicking their fingers or maybe even manipulating something in their hands. But large movements sometimes can be full rocking within the chair, spinning in the chair or getting up and pacing within the room and within the assessment time period, I had one individual who literally spun in circles in their chair for the entire assessment which will ask you to over two hours. And I did -- I have to ask for him accomodations myself during that time, which was to not look at him or give him direct eye contact because I was getting dizzy myself. And so we both agreed to accommodations for each other during that process, but he was much more able to answer questions. Certainly I had to read them verbally. He couldn't spin and read them himself on the paper, but it allowed for him to feel more able to answer those types of questions. Providing breaks, another common accommodation, they may not ask for the break, they often don't think they can have a break. So you want to kind of direct them and give them those breaks. Often during those breaks, they you know, they may get a drink, they may go to the restroom, but a lot of times they'll do other things within that time, but they'll be doing movements, maybe again pacing or walking, kind of in a circular motion that within the space. They also may go directly to their device and do some kind of gaming or another preferred interest activity during that time. And it really can function as a way to re energize them during this taxing process. So look for ways to, again, accommodate that, allow for that just within a reasonable amount of time, right? It doesn't need to be too lengthy, you know, 5, 10 minutes is perfectly acceptable and plenty of time for those breaks. And last, you want to attend to the individual's responses or response of style. It really provides important clues to whether they are comprehending the items, are they understanding what the item is really asking about, as well as their possible mood state or comfort level. You can tell if, you know, using their types of responses, is it time to give a break, is it time to switch gears or maybe use a different method of providing the assessment. So those can be really meaningful to be looked at as response patterns as well as those tones, the facial expressions and how they're endorsing items. Also pay attention on paper forms. I had one individual who, because they didn't really understand the line of questioning on the paper form, decided to just make a very lovely pattern with their responses. It was a form that kind of allowed filling in bubbles as a response -- to indicate their responses. And they basically made kind of a neat zigzag pattern with the bubbles because that's what felt they were able to do and weren't able to answer the questions. So be on the lookout for some of those kinds of things. You also really want to consider alternative assessment methodologies. Particularly, you know, shifting to the methodologies of discovery processes or using narrative profiles as the form of assessments and potentially abandoning these types of standardized measures, maybe all together. So these processes, discovery processes, narrative profiles certainly include a really wonderful focus on their interests, their abilities, their skill sets, right, or very strength-based approach to the assessment, which is of highest value. But it does also provide an opportunity to understand their need and gather that need base information as well. Now, these processes rely heavily on observation and/or conversation. And these conversations are these dialogues really need to be with the consumers but also with those who know the individual very well. And so, there's kind of this multiple forms of getting this information. The observations should ultimately include both the natural environment, such as maybe their home or them participating in a leisure activity or some other kind of preferred activity in the community. But also should be observing contrived or simulated environments that are simulated as a work environment, especially if they are not working yet and usually they're not if they're going through this assessment an IPE [phonetic] process. They have lost their jobs or they never had a job. So trying to provide some kind of simulation and to observe that so you can kind of see what are some of these skill sets that they're doing already naturally within a work environment and what are some areas that stand out very clearly of meeting some supports. And sometimes that work environment is just your office, right, giving them -- it may be a simplified work task to do in your office, I've had somebody file within my office or sort books, or providing a task of adding labels to some forms, something where you can just kind of see how they're approaching it, seeing if they're asking clarifying questions, seeing how they're interacting if they can continue to keep their attention and looking for those kinds of things. As well as, again, those skills that they already got developed and those strengths that they're bringing to that kind of work. The narratives really evolved stories, right? It could be dialogues, but these stories can also come from other means or mechanisms such as photos, videos, images, music that they like and songs that they feel particularly fit for them, it could be movies or characters in movies or shows. It could be even video games and characters or scenarios or things from gaming, that they feel represent them or that they're kind of connected to. And when an individual is able to share their involvement in these kinds of activities and tell their story through these kinds of formats, you really gain a richness, again, in terms of their interests, abilities, the strength-based tools, but then it allows you to add some follow up questions that can give more information about their needs, and again, kind of looking to involve these closed contacts within this process as well. So that can be family members, and friends, but also think of some other people who may know them well, if they're more recently kind of graduating from high schools or transition programs, maybe teachers can be involved or some other support staff from another program that they've been in. So now let's take a little bit of time, talking about areas to assess. We all know that vocational supports don't take place in isolation, right? They really are focusing on the whole person and that's something that, you know, we're all attending to within this assessment process. And I would say this is even kind of more enhanced particularly important to acknowledge for individuals with autism. The assessment should include a vast number of life domains as they intersect. So an individual's abilities at home and to socialize and care for themselves to monitor their finances and to use transportation are always, you know, that impact their ability to obtain and sustain meaningful employment. So they're very much related to this career path and employment. We have one particular example of this I kind of wanted to share with you. Here in San Diego, we started a particular program for those with autism interested in tech skills and particularly in working within the software testing industry. And so this program is called NFAR Tech, and it's been operating here in San Diego for a few years now. And the program focuses on two main areas. One, in developing these software testing skills as well as developing their vocational soft skills. And it was designed to marriage these two areas of focus very nicely and the soft skill program that's being used is called success. It's a research-based intervention. And it also particularly addresses a lot of these other areas, right. It addresses things like not only communication skills and social interaction skills, but it also addresses organizational skills and executive functioning skills along with a number of other important areas of being successful in employment, so it incorporates self-determination, self-advocacy, really encourages independent daily living skills and provides outlets for socialization in recreation. And the program as a whole also is focused on developing those kinds of greater relationships, socializing and recreation within the stimulated work environment. And the program has found amazing success. These graduates are passing their certification tests, they're becoming certified software testers. They're getting hired at very big industry companies like Solar and Qualcomm and they're starting with great salaries, fully competitive employment. And then we learned of this new challenge that they were having a hard time getting to work on time. And that was absolutely impacting their employment in these, you know, high level fast-paced industries. And the challenge was we never really looked and incorporated in their areas of transportation and public transportation with in San Diego is very, very difficult, very challenging, slow, and the disability services transportation is even worse. It can take three hours to get to work from their home, using those kinds of mechanisms. So, eventually we caught on, we looked into what was happening with the transportation and also realize that many of these folks have capacity for driving. So we looked into why what was going on, why were they not obtaining driver's license? Why were they not driving? And it turned out many had anxiety about pursuing driving. So this led our community to develop through research community collaborative, another program that kind of go corresponded with it, that focused on teaching driving skills using cognitive behavioral interventions, for driving to address these transportation needs. And this really made such a big difference of folks were getting their driver's license, they had reduced that anxiety and fear and apprehension and increase their ability to be successful behind the wheel and their employment, you know, became that much more successful. It also enhance their ability to do leisure and recreation and to socialize because they could get themselves around places and increase their confidence so well that it also had positive impacts on areas like home and independent living and even within their own self-determination advocacy. So, again, it's just kind of one example of how all of this is connected and interconnected, and to be, you know, really considering all of these areas of need within the service delivery system. So, I mentioned, there were a few assessments designed particularly for the autism population. And this is one particular one, the functional skills assessment. It was developed by Paul Wyman and colleagues at Virginia Commonwealth University, in partnership with the Autism Speaks program and they developed it as a community-based functional skills assessment. It assesses in a number of different areas, which is really fabulous. It is looking at certainly career path and employment. But it is also taking in all of these other areas as looking at those other factors such as self-determination and advocacy skills. It's looking at areas of health and safety, peer relationships, socialization, social communication, leisure, recreation, home living environments, community participation and personal finances and transportation. So it's really kind of an ideal model to use an ideal tool. It's made available, I put the web page here of how you can access it. It's available in -- at no cost, it's in the public domain. And it has different modules for different age ranges within the autism population. And certainly it can be used with other populations as well. But it goes all the way down to transition age youth, including as young as 12 years of age, all the way through adulthood. And so, because there's differences, of course, across those age ranges, it's designed in different modules for the different age ranges, which is really fantastic. So it's based -- it's got the kind of these two main parts to it. It has a way of understanding functional skills and using this functional skills assessment through both an observation component, as well as an interview component. To give you a little bit more information about it, just so kind of a preview of it, hopefully to kind of get you interested and excited and then you can delve into reading more about it in terms of being able to really deliver it successfully. So what it does is it starts with this assessment and observation planning tool. And it talks about how it is essential that the assessment and observation planning tool in the booklet be completed prior to doing any of the observations because it really sets the scene and it provides this kind of preview information, this kind of priming function for the individual and their family or anybody else who's going to be involved in this process. It is recommended that this section be completed either over the phone or through email. So that's great, as we are certainly having less contact with some individuals during this time, face to face. And it also allows for clear communication of how these observations and/or interview or I should say -- and/or, I should say, and the interviews will take place. So, it provides guidance on how to set up some of these observations and how to conduct the interviews. Now, you know, during this time where, again, we can't always do face to face observations, I think, you know, somebody using a Zoom and taking that camera kind of with them, being able to see what they're doing in their home environments, and some other environments that they may be able to go to, would provide you with that richness. Because as you're conducting the observations, they do want you to be very careful not to disrupt what's going on? It really is an observation, but not intervening. And so you want to observe ongoing routines and activities. And you want to complete all these observations before conducting the interviews. And the interviews, again, are guided and have specific interview questions. They also are directed at multiple informants, so the individual themselves like your caregiver and educator or past employer and job coach, and has a series of interview questions provided. And so then what takes place is after all, that information is gathered from these multiple mechanisms and multiple informants. The assessor is a person who then scores, gives ratings on a number of domain areas on a number of questions. And it provides a rating scale between 1 and 5 for many of the items 1, 2, 3 for the environment ratings, and it gives a very defined criteria of what these ratings mean. So a rating of 1 is given when the individual does not perform the skill at all. A rating is 2, for example, is given when the individual requires some physical prompting to perform this skill. Maybe as much as, you know, hand over hand, or kind of a, you know, a nudging or movement of putting an item in somebody's hands for the task to be fulfilled. A rating of 3 is given when the individual performs this skill but requires another form of extensive prompting, but it's more in the verbal, you know, specific directives on what to do. A reading of 4 is given when the individual is able to perform the skill and requires very limited prompting, maybe just a prompt to get started. And a rating of 5 is when the individual is able to perform the skill with no prompts required. They may need some supervision still, but they're not needing to be directly prompted, they can use environmental-based prompts like a schedule or to do lists or something else to be able to function independently. And then those ratings, right, get totaled and put together and give you information about their strengths, their skills that already developed and then what are areas of need, what are they going to need programming to develop further to be successful in a workplace. So, I think it's a really excellent assessment, another assessment that was developed specifically for the autism population. But again, I think clearly could be used for other populations as well. It came from the Columbia Regional Program, and specifically from their Autism Spectrum Disorder transition tool kit. Again, the link is here so you can go right to it and access it yourself. And this tool provides guidance on how to conduct observational assessments of a worksite. So it's kind of taking a different angle and matching the abilities of the individual with autism to what is going to be expected and needed in the worksite. So it works really nicely in combination with the previous assessment, we just presented as well as any other assessment tools to get this other angle to see this good fit, right? Because the better the fit, again, the better success, that employments is going to be and it's going to be able to maintain. And that's what we're looking for when we're looking at these employment sites. So the website provided gives, I kind of pulled from the website for this slide, some information about the tool and a bit of a summary of the types of factors that it's looking at. So it's doing assessments within the environmental factors, those that are sensory based on that particular important area for those with autism, right, they can be very heightened and reactive to sensory information. And so, we'll be specifically looking at what are some of those sensory issues that might be coming up in this worksite temperature, noise level, visual distractions, lighting, workspace. It's also looking particularly in the social demands under environmental factors. So, is there going to be a lot of customer interactions? Is there a lot of teamwork? Is there a lot of work with unique populations? Is the person having to do a fair amount of socializing within this work area? Because again, that's a particularly difficult area for those on the autism spectrum. And those demands may be too high and not a good fit for them. It's looking at the -- at what they call a people factor. So in particular, the supervisor style is the supervisor using a style that provides clear instructions that's supportive, that is truly there behind the scenes. Those would be things that would be preferred for autistics. However, that's not always the case, right? Sometimes supervisors have different styles, they're more hands off, they're more distant or they might even be using more authoritative interaction styles or expect employees to know things without providing those clear instructions, as well as the kind of co-workers that another part of the people and what are the kind of general attitudes of co-workers, are they generally supportive? Or, are they generally working within this kind of team environment? Are they working more individually and kind of taking care of their own responsibilities? Do they appear to be accepting of diversity? Or, is that not yet built into the culture. So those are important to look at and to see if it's the right fit. Looking at physical demands such as standing, sitting, bending, walking, some of those things can be particularly difficult for autistic individuals, maybe because they have a tendency to have impairments in coordination skills, or even stamina. So if there's too much physical demands that may not be a good fit, lifting they may not have the upper body strength to do those kinds of things, or again, the fine motor coordination for particular tasks. Pacing, right, looking at -- is it individual versus group-based or what is the actual kind of fast versus moderate pacing, right? How quickly do things need to get done? What's that expectation of quantity versus the balance of maybe quantity and quality component, which may make for a different fit for somebody with autism? They're not always particularly fast workers, they tend to be detail-oriented. And so they're, maybe you have great strengths in quality, but quantity might not be an area of challenge. And then work hours. Are the work hours very fixed? Are they flexible? Are they changing a lot? Are they unique in terms of having an early start or late shift and date? Is there requirement special work on weekends? These things can be particularly challenging for autistic individuals, because sometimes some are -- have difficulty being flexible and can't keep changing their schedule, can't keep track of that. They prefer routines and consistency. Some have specific mindsets of what the workweek is, and that's Monday through Friday and it can be very stressful and impact them significantly at an emotional level, if they're required to work on a weekend, you know, so some have definitions of the work day and count, you know, kind of shift to having, you know, an early start or later start because it impacts dinner time or it impacts, you know, time they're supposed to be getting up. And so, that component that can be -- appear as rigidity also becomes really important for their functioning to be successful to be able to follow those routines. So those become a really important match as well. So moving on to the next part of the process, right? So now we're completed the assessment process and we're transitioning into the next stage of the individualized plan for employment that IPE process and document. Certainly, you know, person-centered planning is really important through all this process of getting this idea what kind of career, what kind of employment is the person interested in, those circles of supports is another you know, methodology for that, and they're particularly helpful with the autistic population. But we also want to, you know, keep looking at this idea of accommodations and how to make these adjustments. So what else can we do within this individualized plan for employment process is, first, again go back to that support person involvement. It can really be critical. Individuals with autism may not think to invite their family member or friend or other person to these meetings. So you do want to directly ask them to do so that can be particularly helpful. Again, as stated earlier, this person can sometimes be just an amazing translator, for lack of better words, they can really provide this information to the individual and look for their reactions, and then provide that to you. Whether, you know, things are fitting or not. The individual with autism too often can agree with things that they don't actually agree with internally. Because they felt like they were supposed to say yes or they felt the expectation was that they were supposed to endorse it. And don't always understand that they really do have so-called freedom of speech in this process and really can state their own thoughts and feelings and perspectives. So that person can, you know, help with that piece as well. Secondly, remember to incorporate all of those same accommodations that were used in the assessments during these IPE meetings. So those things like attending to those sensory sensitivities, attending to processing speed, input preferences, maybe, you know, having auditory and visual, giving those pictorials allowing for that movement. Or, having those items that they, you know, continue to hold on to, bring all of that, you know, and keep that thread going throughout the process. Third, look to provide choices. This can mean giving multiple choice options, formats in response in terms of when you're asking for these types of responses rather than using an open ended response line of questioning, open-ended responses can be particularly challenging for those in the autism population. Because again, they haven't had that experience so they don't have that concrete information to determine what their response would be. They may not really know what you're getting at. And so by providing multiple choice options, examples of responses that they can then identify with, choose the one they identify with, that helps them make sense of what's really being asked and what the intention of these questions or interviews are. Fourth, double check for comprehension, ask for information to be explained back to you. Make sure that they understand what is being put on the documents, understand what is being offered as particular supports. Fifth, attend to soft skills. And using soft skills in what I might call a two-way street. So what I mean by that is you want to attend to your own viewpoint of what this person is giving off in terms of soft skills. And be careful not to have specific expectations. And particularly be careful not to assume because you could be misinterpreting their verbal and nonverbal that are being expressed. They might show a flat expression on their face and you might be interpreting that as a disinterest or something that they don't want that might be completely the misinterpretation, that might be assuming something there, but their flat expression may not have any direct connection to what they're thinking and what they're feeling on the inside. So you want to make sure that that's being discussed. I use a particular motto, I might -- excuse me, my motto is assume nothing and look for explaining everything. So, we want them to explain if they think it's interesting or not, we want to explain as well. The other part of this attending the soft skills is make sure you attend to their needs for developing soft skills so that they can be successfully employed. This is one particular area of skill development that I would say -- I would say just about all. I was wanting to use the word majority, and it's even bigger than that. 99% could really benefit from soft skill trainings and the type would be defined curriculum and delivered in a particular model. And we will talk a little bit more about that. But it's important. And lastly, look to incorporate work exploration and/or work adjustment trainings. So often, we think about these for transition age populations and as somebody ages into adulthood, middle adulthood, and even later adulthood. We forget about the value of these and they're particularly useful for the autism population. They just may not know what kind of work they're good at because they haven't had a chance to try variations. They might have just been given one particular area to work in. And they followed that direction. So, really consider using these that are out there and available, again, for any age. Other services and supports to really consider building in functional behavioral assessments or positive behavioral supports. These are particularly important and have high value if this person lost previous employment because of behaviors, because of problematic behaviors, or they are coming in through the system, and they've got some history of that through their transition programs, or even kind of the high school is, we want to then look at this area within the vocational service system to start off successfully, right, to be able to prevent any future problem behaviors. So it's a model focused on understanding the function of the behavior, right, starting with a functional assessment and looking at is that behavior to avoid a task, is it to attain attention, is it to be focused on a sensory issue, et cetera, and then having a positive behavioral support plan that addresses those antecedents that addresses those consequences to maintain this positive behavior. Now, it does require somebody skilled in knowing how to conduct these assessments. But there's many programs, right, that can be contracted to do that or partner with that. Also consider incorporating job clubs or social skill type groups that are something that is conducted in a regular fashion weekly, or something along those lines. Workshops don't work that well with the autistic population. You want something that's kind of more ongoing groups. And it can be, you know, different mechanisms now, right? They can be email, support groups, they can be web-based. They can be Zoom meetings, but something that just has kind of this more ongoing component to it. You're also really wanting to look for a programs and that provide direct instruction through classes, but not just didactic classes, right? They need to have a practice component or role play and a rehearsal component, this experiential learning piece. So again, that can be different than some that are out there for more general disability programming that tend to be much more didactic based. This population really needs frequent feedback on their performance, both recognition and reward for the good performance, but also constructive feedback on what to do differently. They're responsive to that, but aren't that great at reading the context and gaining those clues from their context. They're not -- you know, that's an area of deficit to be able to read context clues and incorporate it into their own individualized feedback or giving themselves feedback. So they really need programs that give extra feedback, use of organizers and graphics and just can focus on skill development on the organizational executive functioning skills. This is often an area of major deficit for this population. So look to build some of those in and when you're using a job coach model, look to have the job coaches act as what I call here social interpreters so that they're not just teaching the skill on on-site, where often the individual with autism can learn that part quite well. But what they have trouble is navigating all of the other culture and climate expectations within the environment. What are they supposed to do, you know, in the break room? How does that food that's leftover on the table in the break room work? Does that mean it's open for everybody? Does that mean, you know, kind of help yourself? What are all of those other hidden components that they need to understand and work with them. The job coach also can play a particularly important role on teaching their co-workers that other people around them some of these differences between the autism brain and the non autism brain, so to speak, to really develop and nurture those natural supports, so that these co-workers are not misinterpreting them and not misinterpreting their behaviors. Because remember, autism is a hidden disability, right? Meaning you cannot see it on their faces, you cannot see it in their body, you cannot see it necessarily in their gait or their walk. Where other disabilities have a lot of visual components to it, you can see that somebody's got a disability within seconds or minutes. That's not always the case with autism. And so, it takes more explaining to those around so that they can see -- when they do see a behavior that's maybe concerning, they can understand that that's the disability. That's the autism part, and that's not this person being rude, or this person acting like a jerk. They don't want those areas to be misinterpreted. So continuing with some of these other supports, remember again, using clear verbal and written descriptions. So this will also really play out to though in the work environment, clear and written descriptions of job duties of, again, these rules within the work culture, what to do on breaks, as mentioned, expectations ahead of time, so that they can go in having these and that their supervisor understands that that's what's needed for successful employment is to have these things written out, right? So the idea of writing down the unwritten rules. Concrete language is very important, it goes a long way. Be on the lookout for not using too many phrases or idioms, things that that have a behind the scenes meaning, individuals with autism can get there. But often that's not what they're first thinking. So if somebody, you know, says what's up, their very first thing that comes to their mind might be looking up. And so, by being conscientious of that, and again, making sure the environment understands that. It can help support success. This population really does well with advance notice. And so, that should be built in, not only in the how you work with them, but particularly in setting up the successful job site. So having schedules, having tasks, having defined positions, but then knowing when things are going to change if there's going to be a change in the schedule, getting that as advanced as notice if the supervisor is going to be out giving that individual as advance notice as possible, letting them prepare much more than the other employee's need. Again, that providing consistency that structured work environments extremely valuable. We talked about dressing that hidden curriculum. So being able to provide a social context of work, being able to provide employment site education, right, again, because of that hidden disability part. So don't forget that though, you know, provide those employers or the supervisors, coworkers, what is autism and what are you going to see? What are behaviors or response styles that are a part of that disability? Many people still don't really understand what that is, especially if that person has so called high functioning autism, right, then it's really hidden. So, it's so important. And be creative, right, within this individualized plan for employment, be creative. Person-centered planning is such a great creative mechanism and continue that, right? Continue it into, hey, maybe job carving is the way to go for this person. Identifying tasks and subtasks for a given position and employing someone to perform them, right, the definition of job carving. The autism population needs this type of creativity. They don't work so well with just assigning in the typical positions. Job restructuring, right, is defined as modifying how a particular job is performed. Maybe it's splitting a job, maybe it's changing the order of tasks, maybe it's combining tasks, really valuable for this population and then job creation, right? We define that as identifying an employer's unmet need or needs in the form of a task list and then matching that to individual skill set. And certainly customize employment, right, is a major component certainly of job creation, sometimes they can be used with job restructuring and carving. But sometimes a regular position can then just have this added component of some restructuring a part of it or some carving out a particular skill set that this person has that wasn't traditionally a part of that position and it just gets redefined a bit to allow for the person to shine in their strength, area of strength. And then again, you know, kind of go back to what we do so well with transition age population. But think of these for the autism population too, job trainings. Often, you know, these programs are needed to be provided for longer periods of time for the autism population. So a traditional job training program often is two to four months in length. Well, we have found through both research and experience that 7, 9 months is a better length for the autism population. So keep that in mind, right? Longer duration, job experiences, paid internship programs, which allow the individual to become familiar with the type of work that they're pursuing. Learn through hands on experience first before being hired or before moving into competitive employment. It can be, you know, really instrumental. Learning from doing for this population is far better than learning from hearing or telling or, or even observing. And you'll see I'm biased in this area, but only because of this 30 years experience that soft skills development is so important. So as mentioned earlier, look for specifically involving them in soft skills development programming. And this should be taught directly using a set of curriculum that also involves practice with feedback. And it should be supported in ongoing fashion and over time, a soft skills workshop in one day is not sufficient, and in fact, potentially harmful for this population. So, it needs to be carried out a lot more. One particular curriculum that I'm highly involved in because I'm one of the developers of the program is called success. It stands for supported comprehensive cognitive enhancement and social skills. And it teaches those executive functioning social, cognitive and communication skills that are core components of soft skills. And it's research-based. We've got evidence that it works. So in our last seminar number four in our series, I'll be explaining that program even more, as we talk about evidence-based interventions for the autism population. But that's one particular model that I know well, but it's the type of programming that folks need. And you want to be creative with a format of information, how it's presented, reports and resumes be creative, go beyond what that looks like. So let's talk about that for a moment, right? Think visual resumes, think of portfolios, not just a few written things. This is particularly valuable for this population who doesn't interview very well, right? That's not an area of strength, that's taking a lot of social cognitive and social communication demands to conduct a good interview. And so, it then loses the opportunity to really present their other strengths and their other areas of skills. So look, be creative. Include videos or photos of the person doing the skills and action. Look for evidence in other ways. Examples of their skills, work samples, Dr. Temple Grandin of states, you know, forward in the book here, reference in the bottom of the slide titled Asperger's on the job must have advice for people with Asperger's or high functioning autism. And there are employers, educators, and advocates by Rudy Simone. And Temple Grandin states and I'm quoting her, I learned that to be successful, I had to show samples of my work to potential employers, instead of selling myself. A good portfolio in addition to a resume can help you get many types of jobs. And she's talked about this kind of many times throughout her life, and that it really was the only way she got hired because of her difficulty in interacting socially and those interviews. She couldn't sell herself in the interview. She couldn't talk positively about herself. So she just would give them these documents and have these people see what she could do. She is an individual with autism and is a highly prolific writer about her experience with autism. But by training, she's an animal scientist, PhD and working in the field of animal science and particularly in the slaughter industry. Right. She had to demonstrate her ability to be given those chances. And once they could see what she could do, and once they gave her the chance to show her work at the job site, or if they were sold, right, they really shine. So it can be creative in this way. And be creative within the customized employment fashion. So here's an example of a particular model of customized employment for the autism population. It goes by the acronym ACCESS, Achieving Competitive Customized Employment through Specialized Services. I put a reference here of an article that describes the program a little bit more written by Smith, Ching, Easton [assumed spelling], and others. And I'll -- again, we'll kind of discuss this a little bit further in our next seminar, under evidence-based models. But I wanted to kind of highlight this because and I use color here to highlight the four particular areas within these six key elements that ACCESS is stating is so important to be used using in this model, because they're ones that we've talked about today, other ones that have been, you know, presented. So ACCESS is, in some ways, described as a way of protocolizing, so having a particular protocol to the CE process, this customized employment process with individuals with autism. It's particularly focused on using user friendly systems and incorporating these different six key elements in an interconnected package of tools. It provides templates and logs that promote the consistent application of these key elements that are kind of geared for the autism brain that are digestible, that are multimodal, have visual components and verbal and written. And within these six key elements, the first four, right, are listed here. Number one, discovery process. How important that is, right? We talked about that too using of vocational profile, not just a resume, we just talked about that. Number three, having customized employment planning meetings and tell to have those using some of these accommodations that we, you know, we're talking about. And number four using portfolio visual resumes, as well. And I'm sorry, I talked about vocational profile under that category or profile is really more that discovery process and then creating that into this profile, moving that into profile. And then their last two key elements is customized job development and negotiation and accommodations and post employment supports, which actually we've talked about here too, so I really should have highlighted all of them. So, you know, great model that through research has shown that all of these components are really important in working with the autism population. So I just wanted to also announce, we do have one more topic in this series that is under development, so that will be available soon, probably towards the end of this summer. And any of you who might be hearing this seminar is as your first experience of our seminars geared towards working with individuals with autism. Please note there are two other seminars already recorded and available for you to view and participate in. Our first one is titled Understanding individuals with autism spectrum conditions within VR services. Our second one was entitled Engaging and communicating with individuals with autism before, during and after the intake process through eligibility determination. And you'll see here our last one is going to be entitled something along the lines of intervention services supports in a combination for individuals with autism to enhance competitive integrated employment outcomes. And that one will particularly integrate in the evidence-based interventions that have been developed to date that are geared specific for the autism population. So we'll be highlighting those in that last final seminar in our series. So thank you very much for your time and attention today. Please, please, please feel free to reach out anytime any questions, concerns or just similar things that you're already doing other findings or programs that you know that are working? I'd love to hear those. I'd love to incorporate those. I also have been providing some additional kind of tips for working with the autism population particularly in this time of COVID-19 pandemic. So stay connected to the WINTEC webpages, look for some of those other supports and contact me anytime. Thank you so much