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ABSTRACT

The manual provides information and suggestions to parents of youth with psychiatric disabilities, based on the program at Thresholds, a psychiatric rehabilitation center in Chicago, Illinois. The manual includes case examples, exercises, and space for parent responses. Chapters have the following titles and topics: "The Importance to You of Your Youth's Employment" (the role of values and work, loss and adjustment of expectations, and fear of the unknown); "Understanding Your Youth's Feelings about Working" (adolescence, typical adolescent attitudes toward employment, special employment issues for mentally ill youth); "Ways You Can Help Your Youth Prepare for Employment" (communication techniques, raising self-esteem, and influencing adaptive behaviors); "Supporting Your Youth through the Job Seeking Process" (career exploration, assessing job readiness, the application and interview process); "Holding a Job Over Time: Helping Develop Social Skills" (social skills needed to begin, maintain, and terminate a job); "Stress Management: Helping Your Youth Stay On the Job" (sources of stress, methods of coping with stress, and managing tasks under stress). Fifty-one suggestions for further reading are included. (DB)

Strengthening Skills For Success: A Manual To Help Parents Support Their Psychiatrically Disabled Youth's Community Employment

Thresholds

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Strengthening Skills for Success:

A Manual to Help Parents Support their Psychiatrically Disabled Youth's Community Employment

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Strengthening Skills for Success:

A Manual to Help Parents Support their Psychiatrically Disabled Youth's Community Employment

Introduction

The purpose of this manual is to provide information and suggestions to parents whose youth with psychiatric disabilities are pursuing the goal of community employment. At Thresholds, a psychiatric rehabilitation center in Chicago, Illinois, we have long believed that vocational achievement has much to offer persons with mental illness, especially younger persons. The evidence indicates that our program of work-readiness crews, followed by supervised job placements with community employers offers benefits beyond conventional psychotherapeutic treatment alone. At any one time, approximately 50% of our young adults are working and, while employment is no cure, we feel that it can be highly influential in building self-esteem, confidence, independent living skills, and economic self-sufficiency.

But youth need our support: support to feel that employment can be a goal for them; support to prepare themselves for the workplace; support for entering and mastering new and unfamiliar situations; and support for handling stress on the job and interacting socially with co-workers and supervisors. Typically, we find that the parents of our youth are unsure of just how to provide such support, particularly when their previous attempts to help their child have met with rejection and failure. Moreover, we feel that **parents themselves** need help and encouragement, if they are to understand what has happened to their child and its meaning for the future. It is to this end that we have created the Strengthening Skills for Success manual, and we invite you to use it for your own information, growth and self-awareness, as well as your child's.

CHAPTER 1:

The Importance to You of Your Youth's Employment

This chapter will address parents' feelings regarding their mentally ill child and work. Two separate, but related, questions will be discussed:

1. How does your youth's vocational achievement affect **your feelings about yourself as a parent?**

2. How do **your feelings about work** affect your youth's attitudes and behavior regarding vocational issues?

Answering each of these questions requires that you think about how you see yourself as a parent, a worker, and as an individual, and that you consider where work fits into the values that you hold.

Before reading any further, please take some time for the following exercise.

Who Are You?

In the space below, please write down 10 responses which come to mind when you ask yourself the question, "Who am I?" Write down your immediate responses, without pausing to censor your thoughts. You might have a list of nouns (i.e., mother, reporter), descriptive words (i.e., attractive, irritable), and phrases (i.e., happily married, worried about other people) when you are finished.

_____

_____

_____

Next, consider how you think of yourself as a parent. Write down ten characteristics which describe the way you see yourself as a parent (i.e., caring, worried about my children's future, strict, tired all of the time).

Look over your list of descriptive words. Are the words you chose to describe yourself as a person different from those you chose to describe yourself as a parent? How are they different? Does either list have more negative statements in it? Can you see the effects of your youth's disability in any of the statements?

Your Feelings About Yourself as a Parent

The purpose of the above exercise is to ask you to consider the way you think of yourself -- your self-concept. One's self-concept is formed largely through interactions with others. One explanation, referred to as the "looking glass self" theory, suggests that people see themselves as they believe they are perceived by others. That is, through social interaction, one receives information from others about how they are viewed, much as a mirror reflects one's image. Family interactions are especially significant, when you think about how important the feedback you get from others is for how you see yourself.

Everyone within the family has a great influence on each of the other family member's self-concept. With this in mind, look back at your list of attributes above, and think about how your experiences of raising a disabled child have influenced the way you see yourself. If you listed "tired-out" or "disappointed," perhaps your child has been unable to get a job and keep it, and your efforts to help your son or daughter have failed. These experiences may have left you feeling ineffective or incompetent as a parent. On the other hand, if you listed "optimistic" or "proud," you may be noticing improvements in your child's work performance; he or she may have just received a promotion or a raise. Your child's accomplishments may give you feelings of pride, hope, and satisfaction.

Researchers and social scientists have long commented on how society tends to judge parents by the children they produce.

This is so despite a large body of evidence that parents are not the sole or even major determinants of their offsprings' intelligence or personality. Still, the tendency is to judge parents -- especially mothers -- by whether or not their children are successful. It is natural for parents to respond to this by increasing their investment in producing a well-employed child, as well as one who is married, and a parent. We need to recognize that a disabled child is also considered in this scenario, and to examine how your feelings about this child's vocational achievement will influence how you feel as a parent.

The Role of Values and Work for Parents

How important work is to you may depend on your values. Some parents of special needs youth want their offspring to work because they feel that this will increase their child's feelings of belonging and acceptance. Other parents stress work for their children because they aim to treat their disabled child as normally as possible (or the same as the non-disabled siblings are treated). Still other parents want their child to work because employment is a measure of how successful they have been as parents. As a parent and role model, you may have a lot of influence on your child's perception of work, and of his or her abilities as a worker. Therefore, it is important to consider first how you feel about work and your role as a worker, and then to look at how your values and self-image impact on your child.

Think about how you see yourself as a worker. Regardless of whether you are employed outside of the home, are self-employed,

are a homemaker, are unemployed, or are retired, try to identify your feelings about work. Now, take a minute to write down ten characteristics which describe your attitude toward work (i.e., boring, challenging, time spent doing something I really don't enjoy), and your perception of yourself as a worker (efficient, responsible, over-worked, stressed-out).

Which of the attributes you identified on your list are characteristics you feel are positive, and which are negative? Looking these over will provide you with some idea of your feelings about employment and how you see yourself as a worker. You may notice that you listed both good and bad feelings about your work and about your job.

This exercise may also help you to see what features of work you feel are valuable for you. There are many ways that one may measure success in the working world: making money, taking on increased responsibility within the workplace, maintaining a job

for a long period of time, or attaining higher educational degrees are some examples. If you are one who works hard to attain goals such as these, you place a high value on work as a means to achievement.

On the other hand, perhaps these goals are not as important to you as achievements outside of the workplace, such as being physically healthy, creating a comfortable home, developing your religiosity, or spending time with family or with friends. Your values have naturally influenced your own career decisions, and also your expectations of your childrens' vocational achievement. While your values may or may not change as a result of having a mentally ill child, your expectations of that child probably will need to be adjusted.

Loss and Adjustment of Expectations

One of the most commonly reported feelings of parents whose child is chronically ill is loss. That is, loss of their dreams of having a healthy child, and loss of their hopes for their child's future. Whether a child has experienced psychiatric problems since birth, or had their first mental break in college, parents still have to cope with feelings of loss. Mental illness can significantly affect an individual's personality to the point where there is very little resemblance to the child known before the illness. Some parents claim that it feels as if their child has disappeared and there is a different, and much more difficult child in his or her place. This "new" child has different abilities from those possessed by the youth before the onset of

mental illness. One of the hardest things for parents may be accepting the loss of the healthy child they knew, or hoped to have, and adjusting their expectations for their chronically ill child's future.

After a child has been stabilized as much as possible, and is involved in the rehabilitation process, it is important for everyone involved to make an assessment of what goals seem realistic for the individual. There may be a strong tendency to resurrect goals held for a child before the illness, or to set up the goals of healthy siblings, or even the goals you have for yourself. Unfortunately, these goals are usually not appropriate for one who is mentally ill. At this point, it becomes necessary to adjust your expectations of your child for vocational achievement.

It may be helpful to identify what goals you had for your child's future <u>before</u> you realized that he or she had psychiatric problems, and what goals you have <u>now</u>. Try these questions to start:

> What do you think is the most successful job situation you could expect for _____?
>
> What do you think is the most successful residential situation you could expect for _____?
>
> What do you think is the most successful job situation _____ expects for him or herself?
>
> What do you think is the most successful residential situation _____ expects for him or herself?

Are your current goals for your child different from what they were before she became ill? In what ways? Now ask yourself

about the bases of your responses. What factors were you considering in your assessment of your child's potential (e.g., your child's past performance in school, his current behavior, your ideal scenario)? How well do your goals for your child match her goals for herself? Why is your assessment of your child's potential different from how you think your child sees his own future? Which assessment is more realistic: The way you see your child's future, or the way your child sees her future?

Asking yourself questions such as these may help you to adjust your expectations of your child for vocational achievement. This adjustment may involve reformulating your goals for your child so that they are more in line with actual abilities. It may also require that you help your child to adjust his or her career expectations. For example, you may feel that your child underestimates what she is capable of, and that this keeps her from working to potential. In this case, you may want to help your child to see herself as a more capable person, and thereby lead her to set higher goals for herself [see the section on Raising Self-Esteem]. On the other hand, you may be faced with helping your child accept the fact that he must reformulate career goals, and adjust to lowered job expectations.

Fear of the Unknown

One thing that makes it hard to assess how realistic your goals for your child actually are is that it is very difficult to determine the prognosis for persons with mental illness. The experts do not know to what extent people can resume their prior

lives after first becoming ill. In most cases, individuals need a job which is simpler and less stressful than what they were doing. However, this is not always the case. Some people can return to their prior work setting with minimal problems.

With persistent mental illness there is always the fear of relapse or regression. Disorders such as manic-depression tend to run in cycles. Depending on where persons are in a cycle they may be more or less functional on the job. As a parent of a mentally ill child, you are certainly familiar with the fluctuations in your child's behavior. One week your child may be doing very well, and the next be in the hospital. This uncertainty makes it very hard to plan for the future, and to make progress on the goals you and your child have established.

When one's child has been severely ill, the tendency of parents may be to try to protect their child so that he or she will not become ill again. Mentally ill people are often highly sensitive to stress, and therefore, may have a difficult time managing the everyday stressors of the workplace. You may have also observed your child having difficulty facing new situations, such as a job or an apartment away from the family.

Recognizing that work may precipitate the onset of frightening and disturbing symptoms in your child, a natural reaction is to try to protect your child from as many stressors as possible. While this strategy has some positive results -- your child feels secure and is less symptomatic, you have more control over the daily experiences of your child, you feel needed

-- it has some negative consequences as well. These negative consequences include your child's increased dependency on you, less independence for yourself, and the fact that your child will not be learning stress management techniques and work skills that would help him or her to live independently.

Parents of disabled children are faced with a number of difficult conflicts. While you want to leave some autonomy for your child and encourage him or her to live up to full potential, you also need to be realistic about what your child can accomplish. The presence of siblings in the family complicates this situation. If siblings are high achieving, or simply doing well, the ill child may feel compelled to reach beyond his or her abilities. Having a psychiatrically disabled child requires allowing the child to try and fail while being supportive and non-critical.

Seeing Yourself as Part of the Picture

Because there are so many unanswered questions, and because mental illness can be such a devastating disability, parents may think there is little they can do to influence what happens to their youth. Often, parents do not become involved in their youth's vocational rehabilitation because they do not understand what would be helpful, and because they are often struggling with feelings of failure and guilt. Parents who feel they "always do the wrong thing" may hesitate to try some of the support techniques we suggest. However, **developing an understanding** of your own attitudes about work is something you can do on your

own, without fear of failure. Another type of understanding you can begin to develop concerns your child's feelings about working, to which we now turn.

CHAPTER 2:

Understanding Your Youth's Feelings About Working

Now that you have spent some time thinking about your own values and attitudes toward employment, it is important that you also understand how your child feels about these things. Learning to see things as your child sees them will help you be better able to support your youngster's steps toward growth and independence. Being a parent may put you in the best position to understand what your child is thinking and feeling.

Why you need to understand your child's work issues. Your child has had to deal with a severe disability at a very early age. This means he or she has been side-tracked from taking some important developmental steps, and has not learned to think or behave with the same complexity as youth who haven't had to deal with mental illness. It is important to recognize this in your youngster, and work to help correct it.

Helping make up for missed developmental steps may be difficult, because you may never have had to think about some of the things your child still needs to learn. You are trying to help your child see things that you learned easily, almost without knowing you'd learned them, such as how values are tied to a person's satisfaction or dissatisfaction with work, or why a person's self-concept is tied up in the work he or she does.

On top of this, your child may resist your efforts to help. Many youth with psychiatric disabilities are quite sensitive

about their lack of work experience, especially when they compare themselves to peers and siblings who are able to hold down a job. Your son or daughter may feel embarrassed by a lack of employment history, and may read criticism into your well-meaning comments.

Other youngsters may be curt or unresponsive when you bring up some things, or may reply that "That's obvious, Dad" even when they do not fully understand the implications of what you are trying to say. Still other youth may become anxious when they think about or discuss going to work. The youngster who finds such conversations threatening may look scared as he or she tells you "I don't want to talk about that now Mom."

The important thing to keep in mind when confronted by these reactions is that they indicate a need for help, rather than a sign that you should avoid the topic of work altogether. There are ways to encourage work behavior even among youth who seem to reject such support. A better understanding of your youngster's work attitudes and beliefs will be of great help to you as you decide how best to provide such encouragement without upsetting your youngster. Providing you with such an understanding is the intent of this section of our manual.

Understanding Adolescence

The psychiatrically disabled young adult (age 16 through early 20's) is in many ways a "typical" adolescent. Many parents of mentally ill teenagers focus so much on the disease that they forget the normal ups and downs of late adolescence. Tasks of separation from the family, identity formation, developing a

future orientation, and getting along with peers are of utmost importance to youth during this phase of "growing up." As a result, your mentally ill youngster may have a higher than average need to assert his or her independence, experiment with various roles and identities, and emphasize friends over family.

Some parents find their youngster's adolescence a "trying time," to say the least. Their child may become rebellious, refuse to take part in activities with the family, and become very self-centered. Part of this is the nature of adolescence and part is the nature of your child's disability. One way to sort out what is typical and what is not typical behavior is to read a book or article on adolescent development (several good ones are suggested at the end of this manual) or talk to other parents of teenagers. The last point is especially important, since parents of disabled teens often do not "compare notes" with other parents, mistakenly thinking that their emotionally disturbed child has nothing in common with so-called "normal" kids. Quite the opposite is often the case, and parents do not find this out unless they talk to other mothers and fathers who are coping with the trials and tribulations of raising a teenager in today's society.

On top of the normal strains of adolescence, having a psychiatric disability may make it even harder to discuss vocational issues, since youngsters may be afraid to talk about their fears or problems with others. This may be because they feel distant from their families and misunderstood by their

parents. A youngster with emotional difficulties may be fearful of acknowledging that he or she is different from other teens such as school friends, and siblings. Teens with a psychiatric disability often feel a strong need to be "normal" (something, by the way, that all adolescents worry about). Finally, your child may avoid talking about upsetting feelings and attitudes because he or she thinks that allowing these feelings to become conscious will cause a relapse of the illness, with the return of symptoms. Particular reactions of individual children may vary, but you may want to keep these reasons in mind if your child seems hesitant or reluctant to share feelings and opinions about employment.

What the Psychiatrically Disabled Youth Needs to Learn

One of the reasons work is considered an "adult" activity in our society is that the modern workplace requires a variety of skills and abilities. Persons who are unable to understand how to stay on a job once they have been hired are very likely to lose that job. Here are some of the things your young adult needs to be able to understand in order to achieve job success:

- the link between work and personal values;
- the connection between job and self-concept;
- what behaviors are expected by employers and why;
- what behaviors are expected by co-workers and why;
- how to use social skills and stress management to negotiate situations that come up at work.

Typical Attitudes of Adolescents toward Employment

Many parents don't realize how non-disabled teens feel about employment. Studies have shown that most teenage workers have a

short-term orientation to their jobs. Youth tend to change jobs frequently; in one study of young workers, only 30% held their same positions for the entire 12 months of the study. One researcher has called this period of experimentation the "job hopping" stage; this researcher found that youths' early job changing did not harm their later vocational performance as long as the youth settled down into a job by his or her early-to-mid-twenties. (Parents who are interested in learning more about this research will find suggestions for further reading in the Appendix).

At Thresholds, we have also been studying youths' attitudes and behavior regarding work. One question we ask our young adults is, "What is more important to you when you think of future work, liking a job or good wages?" The large majority of youth (over 70%) tell us that liking their job is more important to them than being highly paid. As parents, we need to keep this in mind when we try to understand how a mentally ill youngster reacts to particular jobs as well as employment in general. What we as parents think is a "good job" may not look that way to a youngster who has had emotional difficulties. This may be particularly the case when the job is well paid but the activities of the job are low-status, or the workplace consists entirely of co-workers who are handicapped.

Types of teenage employment in the general population. Some scholars have called attention to the fact that youth tend to be clustered in entry level positions, or in the secondary labor

market (a term for jobs that are part-time and/or informal). Others have even gone so far as to claim that the mindless tasks characterizing most youth employment are actually bad for youngsters, perhaps encouraging youthful cynicism and white collar crime. The menial, entry-level nature of most positions youth can obtain results in low youth involvement in the job itself along with low motivation for performing it, and a low level of commitment to keeping it.

The Benefits of Youth Employment

Others, including both federal government panels and independent researchers, point out the benefits of youth employment. For youth in particular, employment is thought to build character, and to educate young people about what to expect in the "real world" of adult life. Policy analysts stress the importance of the transition to adulthood, and argue that schooling alone is not enough to prepare young people for their future roles. There is much to be learned out of school, including responsibility and self-management, and work is thought by some to reduce crime and delinquency. Others point out that teenage employment is linked to improved prospects for employment in adulthood, and to higher educational attainment.

Both sides of this argument are probably right. That is, work most likely can have some good and some bad effects on younger workers. But, used carefully and sensitively, employment in community work settings may provide some therapeutic benefits that few other approaches can offer.

The Special Value of Employment for Mentally Ill Youth

There are many ways in which working in the community is beneficial to handicapped youngsters. Our own federal government has recognized this in its mandate to provide vocational services (such as job training and placement) for all special education students at the high school level. In this manual, however, we are concerned with helping parents understand their sons's or daughter's perspective; thus, this section deals with how youngsters themselves feel that work is valuable in their rehabilitation process. This includes:

- work as a "normalization experience" for youth;
- employment as a way out of the mental patienthood status;
- work as a means of attaining future independence from the family along with economic independence;
- work as a means of goal attainment for a youth who is faced with giving up many life goals he or she may have had before becoming ill.

The following case histories, adapted from the experiences of youth served at our agency, describe each of these therapeutic benefits that employment can offer.

NORMALIZATION

Seventeen year old Shirley works part-time at a well-known, national fast food chain. Shirley has been in the hospital three times since she was fourteen and has been coping with emotional problems for most of her life. She worked very hard to get this job and is quite proud of it. Aside from the money, Shirley loves the chance to work next to other girls who are not disabled, and she feels particularly proud when people ask her where she works, because all of them have heard of her restaurant chain. "Works makes me feel just like everybody else," she explains. "Many of the kids I went to school with are working at

_____'s." "I like doing what everybody else in the world is doing, like riding the bus to work in the morning," Shirley relates. Recently, a group of young women who regularly go out after work to a nearby shopping mall asked Shirley to come along. "I'm starting to feel really accepted," she explains excitedly, "for the first time in my life."

Shirley is realizing the NORMALIZATION benefits of work in the example above. By this, we mean that Shirley's job has led her to engage in behaviors and hold attitudes that reinforce fitting in and coping socially. The experience of working in a job setting can reinforce acceptable behavior and reassure young adults of their ability to be "just like everybody else."

REPLACING THE MENTAL PATIENT ROLE

Tara was abused as a young child and developed serious depression problems as an adolescent living with her elderly aunt and uncle. She tried to kill herself two times and spent a total of 8 months in the state mental health facility. She grudgingly agreed to try a rehabilitation program including job placements. Now she works at a large downtown drugstore in Chicago, stocking shelves, doing inventory, and cashiering. "I had it bad as a kid and its bad now so why should I expect it to get any better?" was Tara's attitude initially, but that soon began to change. "I began to see a way out of always being sick and always seeing myself as a victim," she explains. "At the store they didn't know all about my problems and they expected me to keep it together when we were really busy. To my surprise, I found that I could." Tara credits the fact that "at the store, <u>others</u> lean on <u>me</u>. I'm the strong one and it's a whole new role for me."

Tara's work experience is showing her that her ROLE AS AN EMPLOYEE can serve as an alternative to the "mental patient" role. It provides enough reinforcement and satisfaction to counter the anxiety she feels when leaving the safety of her role as a disabled person. Since the work role calls forth personal attributes that are often self-affirming, work is giving her a new way to look at herself that may promote greater health.

FAMILIAL AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

Tony comes from a large, close-knit, upper middle class Italian family that prides itself on pulling together in a crisis. When Tony was first hospitalized with schizophrenia at age 18, his brothers and sisters and cousins came to visit him regularly. Once he was home they continued to involve him in their social events and outings. After a few months Tony started avoiding his old gang. "So many are going to college or starting their own businesses," he explains, "I could never handle anything like that so I don't have anything to say to those guys." The people Tony feels more comfortable with are those from his job at a light-manufacturing plant on the West side of Chicago. There are a few young men there his own age who just graduated from high school and who have no plans for college. "I feel more comfortable with people who are just content to work and have a nice life," he explains.

Tony is experiencing the effects of PERSONAL AND ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE that often come with working. Because he feels excluded from his siblings' and cousins' experiences of striving for a career, they can no longer serve comfortably as a reference group for him. Work can fill that gap and provide Tony with a group of young male friends whose goals are more in line with what he can handle. Thus, Tony feels better about himself.

A WAY TO REALIZE GOALS

Stan is a very bright 20 year old whose emotional difficulties and substance abuse problems began in his junior year of high school. After his first hospitalization for a bipolar disorder (manic-depressive illness), Stan had a tendency to get angry and explode violently. He was a hard worker but disinterested in the jobs he was given, and continued to fail at every janitorial placement he tried. Finally, a position became available at a veterinarian's office and it was offered to Stan. At the end of his first week, Stan returned home proud and excited. The young couple he worked for, both veterinarians, had allowed him to work with some of the dogs and cats. "They said they'd call my rehabilitation agency to see if I could do some simple pet care tasks as part of my job," he related proudly. Ten months passed, with no explosive "incidents" from Stan. One day his vocational counselor glances at an old occupational interest battery and notes that Stan had the goal of being a veterinarian as a child.

In the example above, Stan is able to partially REALIZE A PERSONAL GOAL, but adjust its expectations to his current illness status and level of disability. While he will not likely become a veterinarian, he can work in a vet's office and be around animals. Work can help other youth realize some of their important goals if creativity and understanding are used in finding a good "job match" between youth and employer.

Special Employment Issues for Mentally Ill Youth

Heightened stress. No one could deny that youth with mental illness have special issues and problems related to two aspects: the nature of their disability, and other people's reaction to mental illness. Some of the young adults at Thresholds fear tha- being too successful on their jobs will result in abandonment by the program, which will pronounce them "well" and close their cases. Other young people worry that each job is their "last chance" to finally fit in with others and act "like other people." Their desire to do well often creates a heightened sense of urgency for youth who may be overly self-critical or negative about how they are doing at work. Even the youngster who appears blase or uncaring about an upcoming job is very likely to be experiencing anxiety about how he or she will cope with the new, and therefore frightening, situation.

Symptoms. Depending on the nature of your youngster's disability, a thought disorder may interfere with job performance. The symptoms of diseases such as schizophrenia and bipolar disorders (e.g., manic-depression) may create confusion

and make it hard for the youngster to concentrate. The newness and technological nature of many job settings can result in feelings that one's mind is being controlled at work among youngsters prone to delusional thinking. It is important for parents to recognize these reactions as part of their child's illness. Studies show that even persons with active psychiatric symptoms can work in integrated environments and benefit from the experience. It is the ability to manage delusions and hallucinations in the workplace that needs to be taught and supported by parents.

Social skills. A major determinant of vocational success among adults with mental illness is the level of social skills the worker can bring to bear on the job. This has also been found in studies of youngsters with other types of disabilities than mental illness. This makes sense when considered -- youth who get along better with supervisors and co-workers do better than those who do not. One of the major symptoms of psychiatric disturbance is erratic, unpredictable behavior; the poor social skills of persons with this disability are widely recognized by experts. On top of this, many youth with mental illness have not had the opportunity to have normal relationships and are therefore deficient in relating to others. Part of the youth's poor social skills is related to an inability to empathize; persons with this disability often show little regard for others' feelings and perceptions. Developing empathy is something you

can do with your child, using some of the techniques to develop social skills presented in later chapters of this manual.

CHAPTER 3:

Ways You Can Help Your Youth Prepare for Employment

After reading the preceding sections, you are aware of the important role parents play in helping their children select and prepare for jobs that match their interests, abilities, and values. Adolescents with psychiatric disabilities are more likely to have greater feelings of anxiety, insecurity, and uncertainty regarding employment. This makes it important for parents of children with severe mental illness to learn and practice supportive behaviors that will help their children in the process of finding and staying on a job.

Career education is a continual, life-long process which does not depend only on a formal education. It is important for your youth to begin learning early by developing self-awareness and self-understanding, in order to identify strengths and limitations before gathering information about which occupations he or she would like to pursue. As parents, you are the best supporters and teachers in this process because you tend to know your child best.

Being Realistic About Your Ability to Help

The way the members of your family interact, and the roles each individual in the family takes, have certainly been influenced by the presence of a mentally ill family member. Over time, family members develop ways of relating to each other which are generally aimed at minimizing tension. These patterns of

interaction, therefore, serve a purpose for the family. They are adaptations for coping with a difficult situation -- a mentally ill person's unpredictable behavior.

Attempts to alter these set ways of interacting may be met with resistance because they will disrupt the balance in the family. You will be less frustrated if you prepare yourself for this resistance before you try to change your behavior and that of your child. It is much easier to maintain the status quo than to create change, but keep in mind that changes may be necessary for growth to occur.

At the same time, parents need to be realistic about what they can accomplish in supporting their youth's attempts to work. As convenient scapegoats, parents all too easily blame themselves if their child fails vocationally. We think it is important for parents to resist self-blame, and to try the suggestions in this manual without feeling pressured to succeed. It is our contention that simply trying to help your child is an indication of your caring.

Communication Techniques to Use with Your Youth

The ways in which parents communicate can have a significant, powerful, and positive influence on their child. Many times, it is difficult to communicate with your child if he or she is behaving badly, talking about things that others cannot understand, or just withdrawing entirely. It has been shown, however, that there are certain responses to use with your children which may help to break that communication gap. These are called "communication facilitators" and they are verbal and

non-verbal. Some examples of these are door openers, passive listening, acknowledgement responses, and active listening. It is worthwhile to describe each of these more fully because, as you support your child in the employment process, communication will always be of great importance. Sometimes, merely telling your child what may or may not happen on the job might be a your only way of helping the young adult to prepare.

Door openers are responses that show the child that you are listening, want to continue to listen and to help, and that you are paying attention, even if you don't fully understand. Examples of door openers are:

"Can I be of help?"

"I've got time if you want to talk about it."

"Tell me about it."

"Would you like to talk?"

Passive listening is characterized by being silent and really listening. Sometimes, nothing needs to be said if the child feels that he/she is being heard.

Acknowledgement responses are those that let the child know that you are listening. Some are non-verbal, others are one word or simple statements. Examples of these are:

Eye contact

Nodding

"Mmmmm. . ."

"I see. . .

"I hear you."

"That's interesting."

Active listening uses counseling techniques such as restating, clarifying, and asking questions. In this way, you can check to see if what you heard was what your child meant. Some ways in which to do this are:

"So what you're saying is (repeat what you heard). . ."

"I'm not sure I understand. Do you mean (repeat what you think he/she meant to say). . ."

"Could you repeat that?"

By making an effort to listen well and to communicate effectively, parents can help their children talk about problems, positive events, their feelings, or their hopes as they enter the working world. Parents interested in reading more about these techniques are referred to the manual authored by Lee and Katz (1987) and referenced in the Appendix of this manual.

Raising Self-Esteem

As already discussed, a person's self-esteem can greatly effect one's actions, values, successes, and failures. Often times, the young adult may have a lowered sense of self-worth due to certain characteristics of mental illness (e.g., impaired concentration, disordered thought processes, poor memory and difficulty following directions), which lead youngsters to believe that they will always fail or be rejected, and cause them to withdraw. If your adolescent has had difficulty or has faced rejection in work or social environments in the past, he or she may never want to face either again. This is where you can help

by raising your child's self-esteem and conveying the message that just because he or she has problems in certain situations, does not mean that he or she will have problems in all situations.

While you may accept that this is true, it is often quite difficult to know exactly how to help your child improve his or her self-esteem. It is an individual process and one that a young adult may not know how to explain or be willing to share with you as parents. Most likely, you alone will not be able to directly change something as abstract as your youngster's self-image, but you certainly can encourage specific actions, attitudes, and behaviors that can help to make your child feel better about himself or herself.

Situations or relationships that may affect self-esteem. It may help to begin by describing some of the things that may affect self-esteem over time. You may not be able to talk to your teen about these things directly, but it is useful to understand what events and relationships might influence a person's sense of self-worth. It is important to keep in mind that these things can be positive as well as negative; the idea behind mentioning some of these is not to say that one thing is right and another is wrong, but to give a sense of how self-worth may be determined and maintained over time. Some of these factors are:

Relationships with Family Members - Given the looking glass self theory of self-esteem you might ask yourself: Have the youth's siblings avoided their brother or sister? Is your spouse having difficulty relating to the youth? Do you feel

distant from your disabled child? Were there already some tensions in your family before the youth became ill? All of these things are likely to be influencing your youth's self-esteem.

Past Successes and Failures - Depending on the stage of your youth's illness and recent events in your child's life you might consider the following questions: How did you handle your child's latest failure? How did the family react? Was the youth upset? How did you handle your child's latest success? Was the achievement acknowledged by other family members? Your youth's confidence level is most likely related to his or her past attempts to achieve a goal.

Friends and Peers - Because the peer group is so important to youth, your child's self esteem is influenced by how his or her friends react to the illness. Have your youth's friends drifted away? Does your youth avoid the old gang? Does your youth complain of not fitting in anymore? Do fewer friends come to your house? Acceptance by a peer group is vitally important to youth and will play a part in your child's self-esteem.

Targeting Good Behaviors

Once you have a better understanding of how your child feels about himself or herself, it may be easier to think of ways you might raise self-esteem. It always helps to focus on those things that your child already does well. For instance, if your teen is nicely groomed one morning, be sure to praise her appearance (be careful not over-emphasize these compliments, however, as this may cause feelings of discomfort or suspicion). Compliments and positive statements can help to strengthen the young adult's weakened self-image.

Special activities. Another way to help boost your youngster's self-esteem is to encourage him or her to participate in activities outside of the home. This can be through volunteer work or through hobbies or other recreational pursuits. Often times, schools, churches, and park districts appreciate extra

help. This is an excellent preparation for the real world and can help instill self-confidence. Skills such as taking initiative, accepting responsibility, working at a reasonable pace, and willingness to accept difficult tasks can be further developed and practiced in these situations. Often, it is not necessary to commit to a long period of time. Holiday seasons are a particularly good time for brief volunteer experiences, such as singing carols at a nursing home or making valentines for children at a day-care center.

Hobbies. If your teen is hesitant to volunteer, it may be helpful to encourage a hobby or some kind of recreational activity. Many times, youth can express their feelings through music, art, writing, or making of crafts. These types of hobbies can be done alone without any feelings of external pressure to succeed. Moreover, these activities can give youth something of which to be proud, thereby increasing their sense of self-worth.

Even when your teen does become employed, it is often worthwhile to encourage some kind of hobby, particularly one that is not stressful, which has little or nothing to do with the tasks at work, so that there is an outlet for feelings or anxieties.

In general, the skills learned through volunteer work, hobbies or recreational activities may help to determine in which atmospheres and areas your adolescent works best. Moreover, these activities might give some ideas about future employment interests and abilities. Knowing what your child does best is a good place to start when thinking about what he/she can learn to

do in the world of work.

The Importance of Work and Self-Esteem

One last thing to be mentioned which greatly affects one's feelings of self-worth (especially in American society), is whether or not one believes that all work, no matter of what it consists, is good and important. It can be extremely painful for a teen who always dreamed of being a doctor or author to have to work in an area completely unrelated to this dream.

However, it is absolutely necessary to help your teen to understand that any career is a process which, many times, involves holding several different jobs for long periods of time. It is not at all unusual for anyone aspiring to be a lawyer to work in a lawyer's office or a firm running errands, sorting mail, or doing clerical work. Many young adults do exactly this and these jobs are just as important and necessary to the office or firm as is the lawyer's.

If your child cannot do the job that he/she has always aspired to, there is a chance that he/she may do volunteer work in that area after coming home from another job. For instance, if your teen wants to be a gym teacher or a coach, but cannot, he/she might still volunteer at the neighborhood recreation center after school or in the evenings. It is important to help your child to understand that plenty of people do not do the jobs they always wished that they could do, but still remain active in the field through related jobs and activities or volunteer work.

Influencing Adaptive Behaviors

It is important to encourage not only certain attitudes that your teen may have towards self and others, but also certain behaviors and actions that will help ease the transition into the world of work. For example, good habits related to punctuality, attendance, responsibility, and grooming can be taught in the home. If you encourage the adolescent to be on time to family functions or to bathe and dress nicely as often as possible it might help him/her to realize the importance of these things once work begins. Many times, however, if you try to tell your adolescent of the importance of these behaviors, he/she may choose to ignore or purposely do the opposite of what you have suggested. In this case, consistently modeling the desired behaviors might be the only way to show your teen the value of certain actions. This would mean, for instance, that you should try to be on time, dress nicely, or willingly do chores around the house as often as possible so that, on a regular basis, your youngster sees that certain behaviors are good and important, no matter what the situation.

Setting limits. Often times, parents report that they have been able to influence their child's behavior, while, at the same time, helping themselves to feel better and more in control, by setting clear limits on what defines acceptable and unacceptable actions within their household. Of course, this is completely different from family to family, but the main point is that, by clearly marking the limits of behaviors, your child can be taught

how to follow directions and accept certain things that he/she may not like or agree with. This is an especially important skill in the world of work because, on the job, there will be plenty of directions to follow and unpleasant tasks to complete. There are certain strategies that families have reported as being useful when setting limits with any of their children. The following are some examples of these limits:

- being firm about not tolerating behaviors that they do not like;
- knowing their limits and not waiting until they are pushed over the edge;
- living through the upset feelings their limits may cause their children and getting through it;
- knowing that even though it doesn't always seem like it, these limits can communicate that they care; and
- encouraging the behaviors that are in their children's best interests.

Although difficult, it may be useful for you to sit down with all of your children and openly discuss what you find to be acceptable or unacceptable behaviors and what you will do when these limits are not respected. The even more difficult, but perhaps most important, task would then be to consistently enforce these limits in spite of upset or hurt feelings. (For further reading on this subject, we suggest the book Families of the Mentally Ill edited by Hatfield and Lefley (1987) and referenced in the Appendix).

Using household tasks. Some parents use household tasks creatively to teach children basic skills in the home that can then be taken into the world of work. Household duties which are regularly performed in the kitchen, for instance, could be given to adolescents as a way to teach following directions, completing

tasks, or taking on certain responsibilities. Sometimes, it seems much easier to just do a household task (like setting the table or taking out the trash) yourself. Of course it may be done more quickly this way, but by allowing your teen to do it, he or she will feel like a functioning part of the family, capable of contributing, even if he/she takes 15 minutes to complete a task that another family member might do in 2 or 3 minutes.

Remember to give a sincere statement of praise for chore completion, getting up on time, good grooming habits, or punctuality. If, for instance, the young person makes breakfast in the morning, say in a low quiet tone, "Thanks for making your own breakfast. It really helps me out." This will help to reinforce the proper behaviors that you are seeking to teach your teen as well as to help him or her to understand his or her positive contribution to the family atmosphere.

CHAPTER 4:

Supporting your Youth through the Job Seeking Process

As any person who has gone through the process of finding a job knows, it involves quite a bit of preparation. Perhaps the first step in making an occupational choice is exploring what types of jobs are available, while the second step is to find a job that best suits individual capabilities and needs by emphasizing strengths and skills already mastered. As parents, you can assess your youth's needs, abilities and strengths by identifying certain characteristics that indicate readiness for employment.

Career Exploration: Job Choices and Sources

There are so many different types of jobs from which to choose, it can seem overwhelming to someone who does not know where to begin. You can be of assistance in sorting out the many available choices with your youth. Some sources for job opportunities which can direct your child include local newspapers, private employment agencies, the "yellow pages," the Chicago Public Library, or public offices.

Friends and family as a source of information. Another way to broaden your youngster's knowledge of job opportunities is to have him or her discuss with relatives and acquaintances the ways that they went about finding their jobs, especially in their teenage years. Encourage your youngster to ask questions to determine whether or not the options that relatives or acquaintances present are realistic and interesting to your teen.

You can model questions, if necessary, so that your child will know to ask such things as:

- Did you work when you were my age?
- How did you get your job?
- What qualifications did you need?
- Did they train you at work?
- What did you like or dislike about your first job?
- How did you come to leave your 1st job for your 2nd?

While open discussion with family and friends can be a great help in broadening your adolescent's vocational horizons, persistent questioning of your youngster about career plans can be very negative in its effect. If your teen is constantly feeling pressured to describe his career plans, then chances are that he will try to either avoid thinking about the subject of careers or will refrain from doing anything to explore the options.

Part of exploring the opportunities for employment is realizing that the types of jobs in which your young adult may be interested will not necessarily be found immediately. Identifying what is out there takes time, effort, and patience.

Assessing Job-Readiness in Your Youth

As was mentioned previously, part of career exploration is being able to assess individual capabilities and strengths, so that whatever job is chosen will emphasize a youth's strong points rather than weak ones. There are four main areas you can consider when deciding whether or not your youth is ready to enter the world of work successfully:

- actual work readiness;
- work attitudes;
- interpersonal relations; and
- quality of work or performance.

Work Readiness: When assessing work readiness you can focus on such things as whether or not your youth is willing to attend a job daily, is punctual, is able to dress as requested, and is able to control inappropriate behaviors.

Work Attitudes: Work attitudes cover such things as taking initiative, accepting responsibility, persistance with task, flexibility, and willingness to accept disliked tasks.

Interpersonal Relations: Characteristics such as cooperation with co-workers and supervisors, willingness to help others, being able to ask for help, and the ability to accept criticism should be considered when deciding whether or not your youngster has strong interpersonal relational abilities.

Work Quality and Performance: You can measure your teen's levels of work quality or performance by deciding whether or not he/she follows directions, the quality of work done, how efficiently this work is completed, and how well he/she recognizes errors and whether or not he/she has the ability to correct them. Most likely, you will have to base these assessments on the work and interactions in which your youngster are involved while at home.

Keep these four factors in mind as you try the following exercise, designed to help you practice judging job-readiness. You might then consider applying these criteria to your own disabled child, and making your own assessment decision. Keep in mind that there are many additional factors to be considered, and that no set of criteria is always effective in predicting who can work. Each child is an individual, and may bring certain skills to a job that will override other, more negative features.

WHO IS READY FOR WORK?

Test your own ability to evaluate four youths' job readiness, using the following case examples. For each, decide which factors indicate whether or not the youth is ready for a job in the community, and rate the case as a "GOOD" or "POOR" risk.

Seventeen year old Jocelyn is a hard worker but shows sporadic attendance at her rehabilitation program and is always late for appointments. Able to complete tasks and follow instructions, she continually has trouble controlling her temper and "blows up" under pressure. Jocelyn wants training as a food service worker.

Circle one: GOOD POOR

Readiness factors: _____

Factors indicating non-readiness: _____

Twenty year old Dwayne is hampered by a thought disorder that causes concentration difficulties and some mental confusion. He shows regular attendance and punctuality at his rehabilitation program. Easy-going and friendly, Dwayne wants a job where he earns benefits and where he does not have to travel too far.

Circle one: GOOD POOR

Readiness factors: _____

Factors indicating non-readiness: _____

Gary is a shy, withdrawn twenty-one year old who comes to his day program daily, but seldom interacts with others. Able to work well alone, Gary has difficulty when work tasks require group coordination. Gary wants a janitorial placement so he can work in one of the downtown office buildings at night.

Circle one: GOOD POOR

Readiness factors: _____

Factors indicating non-readiness: _____

Beth is nineteen and medication non-compliant. When she takes her medication her work performance is average to good, although she complains of sluggishness. Without her medication, she is unable to control her behavior on the job. Beth refuses to acknowledge her emotional difficulties and her need for medication. She wants a job as a disk jockey.

Circle one: GOOD POOR

Readiness factors: _____

Factors indicating non-readiness: _____

Answer Key: Jocelyn is a POOR job-readiness risk. Her readiness factors include being a hard worker, having follow-through and comprehending instructions. However, her non-readiness factors -- including poor attendance, tardiness, and explosive outbursts -- make her a poor risk for keeping a job.

Dwayne is a GOOD job-readiness risk. His readiness is indicated by his regular attendance, punctuality, good social skills, and realistic job aspirations. His only non-readiness feature is his thought disorder, which can be handled through an appropriate job match.

Gary is a GOOD job-readiness risk. His readiness is indicated by his steady attendance, ability to work independently, and appropriate job choice for one with poor interactional skills. At the same time, however, his inability to interact with others may cause problems in the future, and should be remedied, perhaps through a vocational support group.

Beth is a POOR job-readiness risk. Her medication compliance is a major obstacle to employment, especially since she is unable to control her behavior without it. Her unrealistic career aspiration, lack of insight, and lack of understanding of her disability are also problematic. Beth has no job-readiness features yet.

Supporting your youth's efforts to explore careers. If your teen seems confused by the many jobs in the world of work, you may make it a point to relate your own uncertainties about how and where you fit into the employment scene. You can share ways in which you resolved these uncertainties and where and how you began the job search. You can try to remember your feelings about your first job or your most favorite job. Try relating to your teen what made that job good or bad. If it seems right, you may even talk about your most embarrassing moment at work. It is a good idea for you to be honest and open and to show the awkward or difficult sides of work experiences, as well as the positive aspects.

Viewing job seeking as an individual process. It is unlikely that any worker stays with his or her first job choice. You can offer your youth some guidance in thinking about careers, but it is best not to pressure them into making hard and fast job choices. What many youngsters with special problems need the most is the opportunity to explore, to try different things so that they can see what fits best without pressure or fear of failure. Some youngsters worry that if they haven't selected a career goal or taken some steps down their chosen path by the time they are 18-21 years old, they are failures. If this is the case with your youth, you can help by reminding your son or daughter that each person has his or her own timetable for achievement and that it is never "too late."

Helping Your Youth Through the Application and Interview Process

Once your youth is ready to enter the world of work, he or she will then be expected to fill out an application and go through an interview. Both of these things can be overwhelming and stressful for psychiatrically disabled youth if what is expected of them is not clear. You can offer good advice and support your son or daughter when the time comes to fill out an application and be interviewed for a job.

Applications. You can reduce anxieties about filling out applications by helping your youth pull together all the necessary information and practicing ways that it can be stated ahead of time. On the following page is an Information List

which covers most of the questions that are found on job applications. If you help your son or daughter fill in this information, he or she can then use this form to help fill out actual job applications.

INFORMATION LIST

Name _____

Address _____

_____

Telephone number _____

Social Security Number _____

EDUCATION

Grammar school _____

High School _____

Trade or Business School _____

Special Skills _____

_____

PREVIOUS JOBS (List most recent job first.)

1. _____

   from _____ to _____

2. _____

   from _____ to _____

3. _____

   from _____ to _____

REFERENCES (List people you have known for at least one year.)

1. Name: _____ Title: _____

   Business: _____ Address: _____

   _____ _____

   Phone: _____

2. Name: _____ Title: _____

   Business: _____ Address: _____

   _____ _____

   Phone: _____

3. Name: _____ Title: _____

   Business: _____ Address: _____

   _____ _____

   Phone: _____

Handling questions about the disability. Often times, parents and their children wonder how to handle some of the gaps that may appear when filling out an application, including such things as lack of a work history due to hospitalization, or attendance at a special school. Many times, potential employers will not even question this aspect of a youth's background. However, if they do, it is perfectly appropriate for these adolescents to refer briefly to personal problems. The key is to not dwell on the problematic aspects, but to move on to discuss strengths and current competencies. Past problems can thus be presented as a source of learning and growth, instead of as a handicap. For further information on how to present the past in

a brief, positive manner, see the discussion on "Handling Questions about Mental Illness" in the Social Skills section.

Some places of employment will expect the applicant to have a resume, outlining the things that were covered on the application as well. Typically, resumes are one-page, typed statements of background information about the person applying for the job. The format of a resume is similar to the format used in the Information List above.

Interviews. It is helpful for your child to know that almost everybody is scared on their first (or second, or tenth) job interview and that it is a normal, appropriate reaction. Most people become nervous when interviewing, especially when they do not know what to expect. You may be of help to your child by mentioning some of the questions, statements, or procedures that are typically covered in a job interview.

Role playing the interview. It can be very helpful to do practice interviews with your youth, if he/she requests or agrees to this and feels comfortable. Role playing can help your child gain confidence. You can try pretending that you are the employer and work through any questions or requests for information that may come up in an interview. In this way, your youngster may be less likely to be confused or overly-anxious when it is time for the real interview.

Helping your youngster work on subtle cues such as making eye contact, as well as maintaining a calm presence during an interview, are two ways you can use your intimate knowledge of

your child. Make sure that your son or daughter is familiar with all of the information that is listed on applications (and resumes if any were given) so that he/she can easily answer any questions that may be asked. It is helpful, if possible, to find a non-family member to role play an interview with your teen in order to better approximate what a real interview is like.

Questions to expect when in an interview. There are certain questions that are often asked at an interview. It would be of help to your child to know the answers to these before the actual interview. Some of the most popular questions are ones such as:

- What was your favorite job?
- What did you like about this job?
- Why did you leave this job?
- What are your main strengths?
- What are your main weaknesses?
- What do you hope to be doing 5 years from now?
- Why do you think you would like to work for our company?
- How do you feel you get along with other employees?
- How would you be traveling to work?
- Do you plan to continue your education?
- When will you be able to start work?

If your child has answers in mind for each of these questions, he/she will tend to feel more confident and prepared when the questions are presented.

Questions your child can ask while in an interview. Tell your youth that interviewers often favor applicants who show

initiative by asking questions and displaying interest in the job and the company. This means that your youngster should also try to ask some questions during the interview. Coach your child to ask some of the following common questions:

- What are the responsibilities of this job?
- Could you explain my responsibilities in more detail?
- What are the hours and days that I am expected to work?
- Will I be expected to work overtime?
- What type of dress is appropriate for this position?
- What are the opportunities for advancement in this job?

We all know that filling out applications and going through interviews are necessary steps in the employment process. What may not be obvious, however, is that they both can be major stumbling blocks to young persons with low levels of self-confidence or tendencies to be overly-anxious about presenting themselves in a good light. Parents can ease this process by preparing their young adults for the questions and information covered in an application or an interview. Often, such preparation is the only tool that will allow youth to anticipate and deal effectively with stressful hurdles of job seeking.

CHAPTER 5:

Holding a Job Over Time: Helping your Youth Develop Workplace Social Skills

The employment process is hardly over once your young adult obtains a job. At this point, most youth will need to learn or strengthen certain skills that will help them keep the jobs they worked so hard to get. In particular, your youth needs to work on social skills such as being able to get along with others in the work environment.

Social Skills

Recent studies have shown that one of the areas where psychiatrically handicapped individuals are considered to be the most "different" while on the job is that of social skills. The ability of persons with mental illness to interact appropriately at work is generally very limited. Also, as we learned earlier, youth have not always reached levels of maturity sufficient to allow them to handle community employment.

There are different types of skills involved in work place socializing, depending on which phase of the job young adults find themselves in. If we think about the social skills needed for "starting," "maintaining," and "terminating," a job, we can obtain an idea of which behaviors are appropriate at certain times in your youth's employment career.

Social Skills Needed When Starting a Job

When your child begins a job, you can help by making sure that he/she is on time and well organized. Help your youth lay

out appropriate clothes the night before or, if your teen wishes to make this decision alone, monitor the choice to make sure it is appropriate. Reduce stress by having your teen make a lunch to bring the night before. If necessary, it might help to go over the directions on how to get to the job, in case, in the excitement of new work, your child forgets or becomes confused.

Getting along with co-workers: Preparing your youth. Moreover, if your youth will be working with others, it may help to discuss why it is good and important to get along with one's co-workers. As parents, you can explain that getting along with the people at work makes the job easier and more fun. If your child does not mention the following points, it may be helpful for you to bring them up:

- co-workers can help new workers learn the job;
- co-workers may be available to lend a hand when needed;
- co-workers can provide encouragement and support;
- people at work can become friends (especially because they work together, they will have something in common).

Social Skills Needed to Maintain a Job

It is often difficult for youth with psychiatric disabilities to know how and when to socialize with their fellow workers, even if they do understand that it is a necessary and fun part of working. These young persons have trouble initiating conversations, talking about their illness if it comes up, or doing the proper things in a social setting.

Communicating with co-workers. As part of their efforts to help adolescents develop ways to socialize, parents can have their teens think about topics that they feel comfortable discussing. These could be such things as the weather, sports, music, or books. Sometimes, giving compliments to fellow workers is a way to break the ice. Noticing that someone has a new briefcase or a different hair style can help young persons fit into the mainstream of social relations on the job. Practice making such comments out-loud with your youth, perhaps after reading the case example below.

Simon was hospitalized twice last year. Just before he went into the hospital the second time, he had spent most of his days in his room. Simon now has a job, but he still tends to withdraw from social situations because he is afraid of losing control. He has decided that the best way to help him overcome his fear of interacting with people is to exchange information about weather, sports, or a topic of interest he holds in common with co-workers, like cars or movies. Simon watches the news every evening and morning to keep up with current events and shares what he has learned with co-workers. Just this morning, he told Bonnie at work about the snow that was on the way. Bonnie was interested because a big snowstorm would mean that she would have to leave early to catch a train home. Simon knows that he can manage conversations like these since they are casual, and since most employees are interested in topics like weather and sports.

Many times, co-workers use harmless teasing as a way of interacting on the job. This is sometimes difficult for adolescents with mental illness to urderstand or cope with because they tend to feel unsure of themselves. It may be useful for parents to mention that there are various ways to tell if a person is kidding. A person's tone of voice, facial expression, and body language provide clues to how that person is really feeling. Youngsters with mental illness might feel better if

they understand that teasing is normal and used to make them feel more comfortable in the work environment.

It is important to emphasize that there are times when it is appropriate to socialize and times when it is not. Young adults should be able to tell the difference. Times before work, at breaktime, at lunchtime, or after work should be identified as times during which getting to know the people at work is most appropriate. First and foremost, youth should be reminded that working hours should be devoted to carrying out job responsibilities and not to socializing with other workers.

Handling questions about mental illness. Sometimes, the subject of the adolescent's past psychiatric history may come up with co-workers. If your youth is not prepared for this, it can be very painful and embarrassing. As parents, you might be able to help by mentioning that people are naturally curious about a person's problems, and that a good response to questions about their past mental health should be brief and direct. Above all, emphasize that youth do not have to reveal facts that they find embarrassing. Therefore, to the question, "What did you do before this job?" your youth could be coached to respond, "I had some personal problems but I'm getting back on my feet now, and this job means a lot to me." To the comment, "I hear you were in a mental hospital" your youth might answer, "I was ill for a while last year, but I'm feeling much better now and ready to tackle this job." By helping your child think about what kind of response should be given when the subject of the illness comes

up, you can help keep the focus on a positive present, rather than on the past.

Smoking etiquette in the workplace. Awareness of smoking etiquette is one of the social skills that should be addressed as soon as your youth begins working. If your son or daughter smokes, make sure he or she understands why this etiquette is important at work. The youth should be directed to find out where and when smoking is allowed. In most work places, smoking is limited and youngsters may not understand this. It may help if you explain to your youth that smoking can be very irritating to non-smokers (producing watery eyes, itchy noses, shortness of breath or coughing).

Even in the areas where smoking is permitted, especially in the cafeteria, it is very important for youth to ask those people around them if they mind smoking. Prepare youngsters to discover that the people who befriend them at work may not like smoking at all, and that this should be respected.

Getting along with the supervisor or boss. Another area of social skills that deserves attention is that of getting along with the supervisor or boss. Being able to relate to one's supervisor is very important when maintaining a job. Good communication is the first step towards a satisfying relationship with the boss.

Some of the strategies mentioned in the Communication Techniques section (such as both active and passive listening or acknowledgement responses) may be mentioned to youth as good ways

of communicating with the boss.

It is also advisable to help the youth figure out what kind of personality the boss has. Knowing what kind of person the supervisor is will help the young person to work with him or her more efficiently and with fewer conflicts. Some bosses are very friendly and enjoy joking with their employees, some are much more serious and want to talk only about the job at hand. Sometimes, bosses are quite flexible and understanding, while, other times, when they need the job done quickly and correctly, they are not as understanding. Knowing how and when to spot different types of personalities and moods of the boss could be of great help to your youth's relations with superiors.

Romance in the workplace. Another social situation at work that your youngster needs to understand is that of potential romances with co-workers. Youth should be aware from the start that dating a co-worker is different from dating other people in their lives. Most businesses realize this and discourage romantic involvements among employees. This may be especially hard for youth to understand, but it may be helpful if you offer some reasons before involvement begins as to why romance in the office is normally forbidden.

It is important to emphasize that romantic relationships keep people from being effective at work because the two persons involved are likely to be too preoccupied with one another to do their best work. Moreover, romance in the workplace is likely to cause problems because other workers may be upset by it.

Finally, if the relationship ends, the two persons once-involved will find it extremely difficult to work with one another every day. If asked out on a date, you may want to help your youth decide how to handle his or her response, keeping in mind the "norms" of the job site where your child is working.

Social Skills Needed in Terminating a Job

It may happen that once the newness of a job wears off, your youth will feel dissatisfied and want to quit. If this comes up, it is usually best for parents to suggest that the young person may want to wait a few months before making such a big decision. Point out that it usually takes a number of months before people know if a job is right for them. Emphasize that **you** are very proud of the job your youth holds, and that many people would admire such an accomplishment. You may need to help your youth recognize and express feelings of disappointment that he or she can no longer pursue an earlier career goal.

However, if your youth has been at the job for a long period of time and still feels that it is not working out, all involved should consider whether or not the reasons for termination are valid. Some valid reasons for quitting are that pay is so low that the young persons cannot maintain a decent standard of living, or that they have received a better job offer, or that the hours do not fit in well with their schedule (especially if they are taking some educational courses), or that the work is too difficult for the teens, either physically or emotionally.

If the decision is made to terminate a job it will be important to keep in mind the difficulty with separation faced by youth with mental illness. It is natural to feel sadness when ending anything in life, including a job. Your child may have made friends at work, and leaving them will be difficult. Being aware of this sadness may help your youth to eventually overcome it. It is also natural to feel anger, especially at the boss, when leaving a job. Nevertheless, it is very important for parents to emphasize that no hostility should be shown to the boss. Remind your child that a supervisor can give a recommendation for another job, so it is to the departing employee's advantage to stay calm and pleasant, even "faking it" if necessary. Your youth should leave a positive final impression of him or herself with co-workers and the boss.

Lastly, youth need to be reminded that it is common to feel frightened or panicked when leaving a job because it means facing the unknown, and perhaps, a renewed job search. It is helpful for parents to reassure their youth that it is normal to feel this fright or lack of confidence, but that if they found a job and made friends once then it can be done again.

CHAPTER 6:

Stress Management: Helping Your Youth Stay On the Job

All new situations, including a new job with new people, create some amount of stress for participants. It is natural to feel anxious in a new environment. This is especially true for psychiatrically disabled youth who find it difficult to cope with change and unexpected events. A large factor in your young adult's ability to keep a job depends on the ways in which your youth copes with stress.

Stress is an individual thing. Because tolerance of stress varies from person to person, family members cannot rely on their own judgement of what feels stressful to predict stress for a psychiatrically disabled youth. In other words, events that one family member might easily tolerate may be extremely stressful for another.

Parents need to pick up cues from their youth about how they react to different events. Some young persons react to stress by becoming preoccupied and withdrawn; others by becoming agitated or "hyper." Some show stress by a rigid facial expression or body posture. When under stress, some youth will have difficulty sleeping or complain of fatigue. Because of the time you spend with your child, you as a parent are in an especially good position to observe and understand how your youth responds to stress.

Sources of Stress

There are two general sources of stress: internal sources

and external sources. Both can lead to overwhelming feelings of anxiety. Being able to identify these sources may help parents know when and why their adolescents most need support.

Internal stress. Internal stress means that whatever is causing the young person to feel anxious is coming from inside, sometimes regardless of outer circumstances. Some youth may feel internal stress because of a low sense of self-worth or because of a lack of confidence in their ability to succeed at work. Young persons often feel anxious about whether they will be accepted by co-workers. Some youth feel anxiety when they are around many new people in a unfamiliar environment.

Sometimes, after doing well at work, a youth may experience inner stress due to vocational success. Fear of success may lead psychiatrically disabled youth to feel that, because they are doing so well, the support given by caseworkers and parents may be withdrawn. As we discussed earlier, there may be great reluctance to give up the safety and security of the sick role in favor of a healthier role with higher expectations. You need to keep in mind that just because your youngster is doing well does not mean that he or she no longer needs your encouragement and reassurance. Times of success at work (such as a raise or promotion) often call for you to be especially alert for signs of stress in your youngster.

External stress. External stress comes from situations outside of the individual. Job tasks may be too fast-paced or demanding on certain days, leading to feelings of external

pressure. Your young adult may work with a boss or co-worker who is overly critical and demanding. Perhaps the greatest source of stress is the amount of change and instability typical of most work settings. There are changes in relationships with other workers and in job tasks. Supervisors come and go, machinery is modernized, schedules are altered, new products are assembled, and the reactions or requests of customers vary.

It is not always easy to recognize, but changes in your home may also be sources of external pressure which affect a youth's work performance. If a brother or sister graduates from medical school, for example, chances are that your child feels that his work is not as meaningful, making it difficult for him to go to work every day or maintain good performance. Similarly, if there are too many demands placed on your youth to participate in all family events, especially during holiday seasons, it may be too difficult for her to cope and could show up in her work performance as well.

Methods of Coping with Stress

Whether or not the source of stress is internal or external, there are ways to successfully deal with the pressure. Again, what works for one person may not always work for another, but having some stress management techniques in mind may serve as a starting point for helping your youth cope more effectively.

Recognizing and managing bodily reactions to stress. If your child complains of feeling stressed and anxious at work, you can help by identifying the source of these unpleasant feelings.

Many times, it will be difficult for your young person to say exactly what is causing feelings of stress. If this is the case, it may help if you explain how to recognize bodily reactions to pressure. Tell your youth that pressure on the individual, whether internal or external, causes activity in a portion of the nervous system. The individual feels his blood pressure rise, heart rate increase, and muscles tighten (particularly facial and stomach muscles). Tell your youth that when she notices similar physical reactions, she can then assume that the situation at hand is causing stress.

If youth are taught to identify the physical symptoms of stress, they can work towards consciously reducing them, thereby helping themselves to feel better. You might explain that, upon feeling these bodily reactions, your youth should take several deep breaths while slowly and silently counting to ten. Practice doing this together and model the correct technique by doing the deep breathing yourself. Tell your youth to follow the breathing with a silent statement that is positive, such as "I can handle this" or "I will figure this out." Both of you should practice this sequence together: counting silently to ten while taking deep breaths, followed by a self-affirming statement, over and over. What is important about this exercise is that it become automatic for your youth to use whenever confronted by stress. Most likely, once the body relaxes, your youth will be able to think and act much more clearly and effectively.

Managing tasks. If your young person feels stress because of the amount of work assigned (and the amount seems reasonable to you), then it may help to teach your youth a type of "task analysis," in which you break the job down into smaller, more manageable parts to think about. Remember that psychiatrically disabled youths' job stress may result from difficulty concentrating or remembering at work, due to the thought disorder that is found in some types of mental illness. Suggest "common sense" solutions for problems remembering and organizing. For example, if your teen is working at a concession stand and the customers tend to order food too quickly to remember, suggest a shorthand for taking orders. Explain that if a customer orders 2 hot dogs, 3 cokes, and 1 pretzel, this can be shortened to the number and first letter of each of the items (such as "2-H, 3-C, and 1-P"). Taking the time to listen and make simple, concrete suggestions without over-emphasizing the difficulty, can be quite effective in helping manage this type of stress.

Sometimes, youth are better able to deal with a stressful situation by acting out the ways they would like to behave. For example, if your son complains that the boss is overly critical, he can be taught to envision the situation happening again, and this time, see himself as taking a deep breath and repeating silently that he is capable of dealing with this criticism. The next time the boss criticizes his work unfairly, he can remember this envisioned best response and try to act it out.

Along these lines, sometimes the only way that you will be

able to help your young person cope with stress at work is to help identify possible pressure situations that may arise there. However, because you are not on the scene at your child's job, it is nearly impossible for you to predict workplace stressors for your youngster. It may be useful to direct your youth to his or her co-workers for guidance. Many co-workers enjoy talking about how they handle "rush" times or deal with demanding customers. For instance, a fast-food co-worker might tell your youth that a source of stress for her is lunchtime when the restaurant fills up with hungry people who are in a hurry, and the boss expects her to do too many tasks at once. This will help your young person understand that stress at work is a common occurrence for everyone.

Encourage your youth to find out what other workers view as stressful and how they handle these types of situations. Sometimes, anticipating events may be the only way to help prepare your young person for stressful feelings on the job.

Stress Management: Not "For Kids Only"

In thinking about stress and helping their youth deal with it, many parents find that they too can benefit from learning and applying stress management techniques. Persons who live with a disabled family member often experience a high degree of stress, making stress management an important skill in maintaining positive family relations. There are several good books suggested in the Appendix for parents who want to learn about how to recognize and cope with stress. Also, keep in mind that

exercise and other forms of physical activity can aid in reducing stress. Planning family outings that involve physical exercise and fun will serve a dual purpose of encouraging family interaction and providing an outlet for everyone's stressful feelings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we hope that by reading this manual and thinking about the information, case examples and exercises you have gained a better understanding of your young person, and his or her work issues. We also want all parents who read these pages to be able to feel good about themselves **as parents**, simply for caring enough to want the information and for trying to help. In short, we don't believe that your measure of yourselves as parents needs to depend entirely on whether your disabled youth can maintain a job in the community. While we certainly want that for your child, we also want **you** to feel good about your efforts to expand your thinking and knowledge in this area, regardless of your child's success.

We would like very much to hear from you, with comments or feedback about this manual. Our address is on the copyright page, and we encourage all interested parents (and other family members) to write to us regarding their reactions to what they have read here and tried at home. For parents who would like to read more, the Appendix contains a bibliography of books arranged in topical areas corresponding with the manual's different sections. We encourage you all to explore whatever titles you find interesting in your search for understanding.

Appendix

Further Reading for Parents and Other Family Members

Books for Families Coping with Mental Illness

1. Bernheim, K., Lewine, R. and Beale, C. (1982). The caring family: Living with chronic mental illness. Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, Inc.

2. Vine, P. (1981). Families in Pain: Children, Siblings, and Parents of the Mentally Ill Speak Out. New York: Pantheon.

3. Hatfield, A. (1984). Coping with Mental Illness in the Family: A Family Guide. Washington, DC: Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

4. Hatfield, A. and Lefley, H. (1987). Families of the Mentally Ill: Coping and Adaptation. New York: The Guildford Press.

5. Carlisle, W. (1984). Siblings of the Mentally Ill. Saratoga, CA: R & E Publishers.

6. Dearth, N., Labenski, B., Mott, M. and Pellegrini, L. (1986). Families Helping Families: Living with Schizophrenia. New York: W.W. Norton.

7. Wasow, M. (1982). Coping with Schizophrenia in the Family: A Survival Manual for Parents, Relatives and Friends. Palo Alto, CA: Science and Behavior Books.

8. Walsh, M. (1985). Schizophrenia: Straight Talk for Families and Friends. New York: William Morrow.

9. Hinckley, J. and Hinckley, J.A. (1985). Breaking Points. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Chosen Books.

10. Spungen, D. (1983). And I Don't Want to Live this Life. New York: Fawcett Crest.

11. Johnson, J. (1988). The Silent Witness. New York: Doubleday.

12. Group for the Advancement of Psychiatry. (1986). A Family Affair: Helping Families Cope with Mental Illness. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Books For Parents of a Disabled Child

1. Featherstone, H. (1981). A Difference in the Family: Living with a Disabled Child. New York: Penguin.

2. Kelker, K.A. (1988). Taking Charge: A Handbook for Parents Whose Children Have Emotional Handicaps. Families as Allies Project, Research and Training Center to Improve Services for Seriously Emotionally Disturbed Children and their Families, Regional Research Institute for Human Services, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon 97207-0751.

3. Lee, M.K. and Katz, D. (1987). Training Parents as Educators of Children with Handicapping Conditions: A Manual for Parent Educators. Center for Advanced Study in Education, Graduate School, City University of New York, 33 West 42nd Street, (620N), New York, NY 10036.

4. Bell, R. and Harper, L. (1977). Child Effects on Adults. Hillsdale, NY: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.

Books About Mental Illness and Mental Health Care

1. Stroul, B.A. and Friedman, R.M. (1986). A System of Care for Severely Emotionally Disturbed Children and Youth. National Institute of Mental Health, CASSP, Technical Assistance Center, 3800 Reservoir Road, N.W., Washington, DC, 20007.

2. Knitzer, J. (1982). Unclaimed Children: The Failure of Public Responsibility to Children and Adolescents in Need of Mental Health Services. Children's Defense Fund, 122 "C" Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20001.

3. Torrey, F. (1988). Surviving Schizophrenia (Revised Edition). New York: Harper and Row.

4. Andreasen, N.C. (1984). The Broken Brain: The Biological Revolution in Psychiatry. New York: Harper and Row.

5. Gottesman, J. and Shields, J. (1982). Schizophrenia: The Epigenetic Puzzle. New York: Cambridge University Press.

6. Bohn, J. and Jefferson, J. Lithium and Manic Depression: A Guide. Lithium Information Center, Department of Psychiatry, University of Wisconsin, 600 Highland Avenue, Madison, Wisconsin, 53792.

7. Fieve, R. (1975). Moodswing. New York: Bantam Books.

8. Winokur, G. (1981). Depression: The Facts. New York: Oxford University Press.

9. Estroff, S. (1981). Making it Crazy: An Ethnography of Psychiatric Clients in an American Community. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

10. Sheehan, S. (1982). Is There No Place on Earth for Me? Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

11. Thomas, A. (1986). Riding the Dolphin. New York: Beauford Publishers.

Books About Youth Employment

1. Stephens, W. (1979). Our Children Should be Working. Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas.

2. Greenberger, E. and Steinberg, L. (1986). When Teenagers Work: The Psychological and Social Costs of Adolescent Employment. New York: Basic Books.

3. Elkind, E. (1981). The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

4. Lewin-Epstein, N. (1981). Youth Employment During High School. Washington, DC: National Center for Educational Statistics.

5. Mangum, G. and Walsh, J. (1978). Employment and Training Programs for Youth: What Works Best for Whom? Washington, DC: US Department of Labor.

6. Sewell, W., Hauser, R.A. and Featherman, D.L. (1976). Schooling and Achievement in American Society. New York: Academic Press.

Books About Adolescence

1. Lerner, R. and Galambos, N. (1984). Experiencing Adolescents: A Sourcebook for Parents, Teachers, and Teens. New York: Garland Press.

2. Leigh, G. and Peterson, G. (1986). Adolescents in Families. Cincinnati, Ohio: South-Western Publishing Company.

3. Patterson, G. and Forgatch, M. (1987). Parents and Adolescents Living Together. Eugene, Oregon: Castalia Publishing.

3. Csikszentmihalyi, M. and Larson, R. (1984). Being Adolescent. New York: Basic Books.

4. Spacks, P. (1981). The Adolescent Idea. New York: Basic Books.

5. Miller, D. (1974). Adolescence: Psychology, Psychopathology and Psychotherapy. New York: Jason Aronson.

Books About Growth and Acceptance

1. Kushner, H. S. (1981). When Bad Things Happen to Good People. New York: Shocken Books.

2. Claudia, B. (1981). It Will Never Happen to Me. Denver: M.A.C.

3. Whitfield, M. and Charles, L. (1987). Healing the Child Within. Florida: Health Communications Inc.

4. Woititz, J. (1985). Struggle for Intimacy. Florida: Health Communications, Inc.

5. Napier, A. and Whitaker, C. (1985). The Family Crucible. New York: Bantam Books.

6. McKay, M., Davis, M. and Fanning, P. (1983). Messages: The Communication Skills Book. Oakland, California: New Harbinger Publications.

7. McKay, M. and Fanning, P. (1986). Self-Esteem. A Proven Program for Assessing, Improving, and Maintaining Your Self-Esteem. Oakland, California: New Harbinger Publications.

Books About Stress Management

1. Davis, M., McKay, M. and Eshelman, E. (1982). The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook, 2nd Edition. Oakland, California: New Harbinger Publications.

2. Kutash, I., Schlesinger, L. and associates (1980). Handbook on Stress and Anxiety: Contemporary Knowledge, Theory and Treatment. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

3. Benson, H. (1975). The Relaxation Response. New York: William Morrow and Company.

4. McKay, M., Davis, M. and Fanning, P. (1981). Thoughts and Feelings: The Art of Cognitive Stress Intervention. Oakland, California: New Harbinger Publications.

5. Charlesworth, E. (1984). Stress Management. New York: Atheneum.

6. Lerner, H. (1985). Stress Breakers. Minneapolis, Minnesota: Comp Care Publications.