

# Employment Conversation Guide: Sample Responses

## Purpose of the Guide

- To begin conversations about work with SSI/SSDI beneficiaries and those applying for benefits.
- To ensure that the individual is receiving accurate information about employment and returning to work.
- To engage with an individual and determine their work goals.

EMPLOYMENT CONVERSATION GUIDE		
Name:		
Let's talk about work. (Add facts/positive statements about work)		
Questions to Ask	Responses	Case Manager Responses
How long have you been out of work?	<p>I'm only 18 but have never worked, ever.</p> <p>I get day jobs now and then, under the table work.</p>	<p>That is often the case when we are working with younger people like you. It is positive that you are considering work now. You can add in extra money to supplement your benefits and consider other good things that come from working like making new friends.</p> <p><a href="http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/meaningful-work-and-recovery">http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/meaningful-work-and-recovery</a></p> <p>That is great! Are there types of day work you like more than others? Painting? Construction? Would you like to do more of that type of work, if it was steady?</p>

	<p>I left the military three years ago, nothing has worked out since then.</p> <p>Since I started receiving benefits, I heard that I can't go back to work because I have SSI/SSDI.</p> <p>I've never been employed, or applied for a job, but I'd like to if I wasn't so nervous about the idea.</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about what hasn't worked out? Were there things you enjoyed doing in the military that you might want to try as a civilian?</p> <p>Have you checked your eligibility for the GI Bill or other education benefits? <a href="https://www.vets.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool">https://www.vets.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool</a>. There might be benefits available to study a trade, go to college, or try something completely new: <a href="http://benefits.va.gov/gibill/">http://benefits.va.gov/gibill/</a></p> <p>We could explore the Military Skills Translator together to brainstorm ideas of jobs your military expertise would be well suited for: <a href="http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator/">http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator/</a></p> <p>That is a very common misconception, however people who receive SSI and/or SSDI can definitely return to work! SSA offers comprehensive work incentives which allows you to keep your benefits for quite a long time. Should you be unable to continue working as a result of your disability, SSA will restart your benefits. Because some of SSA rules may be hard to understand, all states have benefit planning resources to help you plan. <a href="http://www.choosework.net">http://www.choosework.net</a> &amp; 'Yes You Can Work' handout</p> <p>I appreciate that you are willing to share this with me. So you feel nervous about the idea of working. How can I help you with trying out work for the first time? Does this sound like something you'd like to do? What about working may worry you? Where would you most likely want to look for work?</p>
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<p>Why do you want to work?</p>	<p>I want to make more money.</p>	<p>That is one great reason to work! I know where you are at with this. This is one of the most common reasons why we work. You will be able to afford the things you need a little easier, as well as have money to do things you like to do (movies, hobbies)! When will you most likely want to begin looking for work?</p>
<p>What kind of work do you want to do? How did you decide on that type of job?</p>	<p>Honestly, I really have no idea. I have never worked before.</p> <p>I don't like being around others. I'd like to just work by myself.</p>	<p>Well, there are a lot of different options that we can look into. First we will talk about the types of things you like to do. Also remember, work means different things to different people at different times. "Work" includes volunteering, part time and self-employment.</p> <p>Would you like information from me to help you better understand your skills, interests and abilities?</p> <p>There are plenty of jobs we can explore where you can work in an environment where you feel comfortable. There may even be opportunities for self-employment or working from home.</p>
<p>What do you feel are benefits to working?</p>	<p>I am sick of sitting in the program all day - I need to do something new.</p> <p>I want to feel like I am a part of something.</p>	<p>That is true, seeking/finding employment will be an exciting journey. Remember, we will be here to help you with this every step of the way.</p> <p>It sounds like you have spent a lot of your adult life in program settings which is no longer fulfilling.</p> <p>On a scale of 1 to 10, where do you rank the importance of work in your life? Would you like information on employment supports which would meet your needs?</p> <p>That is great perspective to have! Working can promote self – confidence, you'll meet new people and be contributing to your community!</p>

<p>How has unemployment affected you emotionally, financially, socially?</p>	<p>Being unemployed has left me always struggling to make ends meet, plus I am always sad and depressed.</p> <p>I feel not having a job has caused me to experience more emotional problems. I want to work, but won't my depression worsen even more? But I have made a lot of progress with my mental health treatment.</p>	<p>There are many benefits to being employed, you will have money on top of the public benefits you receive. You will also get to meet new people and have more 'direction' in your life, a sense of purpose.</p> <p><a href="http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2728809/">http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2728809/</a>  <a href="http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8685664">http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8685664</a></p> <p>It sounds like you may have heard that working may cause you to be worse off emotionally. This must be scary to know that work could cause more depressive feelings. What makes you think that work can cause you to struggle more? It sounds like you have made real progress, How does that make you feel?</p>
<p>What have other people told you about work?</p>	<p>My friend went back to work and he told me it was ok, but they wanted him to work too hard and he did not have the energy to work all day.</p> <p>I heard I'll lose my disability check.</p>	<p>It is usually a good idea to start out with working a few hours and then build up. That job and the hours may not have been a good fit for him. The important thing is to find a job where you do tasks that work for you and have hours that match your needs.</p> <p>I understand how difficult it must be to hear about your friend's job experience. Tell me some good things your friend first liked about going back to work? If you look for work, what do you see happening?</p> <p><a href="http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/meaningful-work-and-recovery">http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/meaningful-work-and-recovery</a></p> <p>I understand that can be scary, but Social Security has a number of benefits they call "work incentives" to encourage people to try out work without fear of losing your check or health insurance. Let's talk through some options of how you can work and retain eligibility for your check. There are worksheets and tools we can use</p>

		<p>as we explore these options:  <a href="https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/employment-resources">https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/employment-resources</a></p> <p>Yes, hearing that you will lose your disability check must have been scary to hear. Can I share with you some information from SSA that explains how you can work and retain eligibility for your check?</p>
<p>How do friends/family feel about you returning to work?</p>	<p>My sister told me that I should not go back to work because it might make my illness worse.</p>	<p>Well, it sounds like she really cares about you. Many times people think work will make someone’s symptoms worse, but the fact is - working is proven to be very helpful in actually reducing symptoms.</p> <p><a href="http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2728809/">http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2728809/</a>  <a href="http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8685664">http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/8685664</a></p> <p>It sounds like your sister is not enthusiastic about the thought of you working, especially due to your illness. It is common for family members to feel concerned about their loved one. Would you like me to share some information about the variety of services and supports?</p>
<p>Have others encouraged or discouraged you from working?</p>	<p>My neighbor told me that I would lose my Section-8 if I went back to work.</p> <p>My friend has been trying to get me to work like he does, but it’s different for him – things come easier for him.</p>	<p>That is not true. HUD, the agency that administers Section-8 has ways to protect you from rent increases or losing your voucher if you go back to work. I can work with you to make sure that you keep your voucher and can still afford your housing.</p> <p><a href="https://soarworks.prainc.com/article/income-housing-vouchers">https://soarworks.prainc.com/article/income-housing-vouchers</a></p> <p>It is fantastic that you have a supportive friend! It sounds like he wants you to have the positive benefits from work that he experiences. We all need different kinds of support when we work, and we can work together to identify those supports that will help you find work that you enjoy.</p>

<p>What do you believe are some of the barriers blocking you from working?</p>	<p>I am nervous because the last few times I tried working, my symptoms got really bad and I was unable to perform at the job.</p> <p>I don't know where to look for a job.</p>	<p>It is understandable that you are scared. You should consider your past experiences as an asset, bumps in the road that got you to where you are today. Remember, you are not alone and there are supports that will be available to help you in every stage of the process of finding something that works for your unique needs and gifts.</p> <p>There are many resources that can assist you with looking for and applying to jobs. Disability Program Navigators (DPNs) provide comprehensive services to people with disabilities seeking services and support with work incentives in DOL One Stop Centers. One Stop Centers provide job seekers with job listings, job finding workshops, and access to computers, copiers and fax machines.</p> <p><a href="https://www.doleta.gov/disability/new_dpn_grants.cfm">https://www.doleta.gov/disability/new_dpn_grants.cfm</a> (Case managers should also explore local organizations and agencies that provide job training and search assistance)</p>
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**You have something to offer the workplace! What are your past experiences?**  
 This may include former paid work but also consider military service,  
 school activities, volunteer work, hobbies, interests, and groups.

Questions to Ask	Responses	Case Manager Responses
Have you tried working in the past? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ If so, what did you like about working?</li> <li>▪ What challenges caused you to stop working?</li> <li>▪ What do you miss about working?</li> </ul>	I tried to work, but really struggled, I would like to work but would need assistance because of my disability.	Supported employment may be a great option for you. Supported employment assists people with disabilities to participate in the competitive labor market, helping them find meaningful jobs and provides ongoing support.  The Association of Persons in Supported Employment (ASPE) helps improve and expand integrated employment opportunities, services, and outcomes for persons experiencing disabilities. <a href="http://apse.org">http://apse.org</a>
Have you served in the military? What did you do?	Yes, I was a [insert military occupation]  I didn't like my job in the military, I want to do something else, which is why I got out.  Yes, but I don't talk about that.	Tell me more about what that involved. Did you like that type of work? Would you like to explore something similar as a civilian? We could explore the Military Skills Translator together to brainstorm ideas of jobs your military expertise would be well suited for: <a href="http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator/">http://www.military.com/veteran-jobs/skills-translator/</a> .  Have you checked your eligibility for the GI Bill or other education benefits? <a href="https://www.vets.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool">https://www.vets.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool</a> . There might be benefits available to study a trade, go to college, or try something completely new: <a href="http://benefits.va.gov/gibill/">http://benefits.va.gov/gibill/</a>  That's okay, we don't have to talk about it. Is there other work in the past that you've done that you really liked? Or, anything you know you don't want to do again?

What are your talents, interests, hobbies?	I love to read books and organize things. I am very organized.	That is great, many jobs involve keeping things organized. We will need to keep that in mind when we look to see what options are out there.
What skills/experiences do you have that could benefit a work place?	I like talking to people and learning about how to help them.	Wow! Those are great interests that will surely transfer into the workforce.
What skills or training do you think you need?	I am not good with computers.	Luckily there are a number of low cost or free classes you can take to teach you basic computer skills. I am pretty sure that you will be doing great in no time at all. Let's explore some local classes.  One stop, employment programs and organizations in your area may offer employment readiness classes to help with increasing your skills to return to work.  Have you considered a job training or readiness program?

### Future Goals/Planning

Questions To Ask	Responses	Case Manager Responses
What are your fears about working or going back to work?	I am afraid of losing my benefits!	That is an understandable fear, it takes a lot of time and effort to get those benefits. The fact is, there are a number of ways you can work without losing your benefits and we will work together to make sure your work does not negatively affect you.  <a href="https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/topics/employment-work-incentives">https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/topics/employment-work-incentives</a>
How work will affect your SSI/SSDI?	Good question, I am actually really worried about that. Will I lose my benefits?	I know you and your SOAR worker worked hard to get these benefits and you do not want to lose them. The fact is, SSA has a number of ways that you can work and still keep some or all of your payments. We will work with



		<p>you to make sure you are not negatively affected by working.</p> <p><a href="https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/topics/employment-work-incentives">https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/topics/employment-work-incentives</a></p>
How work will affect your Medicaid/Medicare?	I do not know, but I can't lose my insurance.	<p>I know your health insurance is invaluable. Social Security has a number of protections that allow you to work and keep your Medicaid/Medicare. For Medicaid, if you stop receiving SSI payments due to work you can keep your Medicaid as long as your earnings are under a certain threshold. Let's look at what the threshold amount is for our state this year:</p> <p><a href="https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/1619b.htm">https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/wi/1619b.htm</a></p> <p>For Medicare, if your SSDI payments stop after the trial work period, you can continue to receive coverage for 93 months and even purchase coverage after this point. So, no need to be afraid of losing your health insurance by going to work.</p>
How work will affect your housing?	I am not really sure.	<p>That is ok, we will speak with your housing provider to make sure your housing is not affected. If you are using a housing voucher, HUD has ways to protect you from rent increases or losing your voucher if you go back to work. I can work with you to make sure that you keep your voucher and can still afford your housing.</p> <p><a href="https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/income-housing-vouchers">https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/article/income-housing-vouchers</a></p>
What do you need to have in place (in your life or otherwise) in order to go back to work?	I do not have nice clothes to go to interviews and without a car, I have no idea how I will get to work.	<p>That is a very good point. There are a number of local organizations that provide clothes for people to wear to interviews. I will help you access these resources. In addition, while public transportation may be scary at</p>

		first, we will try using it together at first. I am sure you will get the hang of it.
How do you plan to work with people in your life who do not support your employment goals?	<p>I have been poor for so long, I need to do what is best for me. Working is not going to make me rich but at least I will be a little better off. There are also other benefits to working that have nothing to do with money. It will be good to get out of the house to meet new people.</p> <p>I am afraid they won't believe in me even if I tell them what you have said.</p>	<p>You are correct, making new friends is one great thing that being employed helps you do!</p> <p>Let's take some notes together about things that you want to say so that you can practice and be prepared with what you want to share with them.</p>

## Notes

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## Post-Conversation Next Steps

- Provide the individual with information regarding employment options
- Provide a warm handoff to an employment support agency