



## WHAT ARE NATURAL SUPPORTS AND HOW CAN THEY BE UTILIZED IN MY CLIENT'S WORK ENVIRONMENT?

### ***What are natural supports?***

"The term, natural supports, refers to the resources inherent in community environments that can be used for habilitative and supportive purposes."

*West, M.D., Kregel, J., Hernandez, A., & Hock, T. 1997*

"Natural support approaches emphasize integrating individuals into the workplace culture in ways that are natural and typical, rather than accentuating limitations of individuals and supporting individuals with specialized assistance from a professional."

*Banks, B., Charleston, S., Grossi, T., & Mank, D. 2001*

Within supported employment, there are two models utilized to provide services: (1) the job coach model and (2) the natural supports model (Unger, Parent, Gibson, Kane-Johnston, & Kregel, 1998). In the former model, a job coach is used at the worksite as a primary support to the consumer in helping him/her to integrate into the work environment. The job coach often serves in the role of a teacher or worker assisting the client in completing job tasks. In the natural supports model, the job coach typically serves in the role of a consultant, assisting the consumer and employer in identifying other supports inherent to the work setting. These supports may come from those other than the job coach including but not limited to: the employer/business, family, or community. Natural supports are intended to foster the consumer's independence on and integration in the job.

### ***Who are the support providers?***

Employers/Coworkers/Other Personnel

Employer Resources (e.g. Employee Assistance Programs, Wellness Programs)

Friends or Family

Volunteers or Mentors

Community Organizations/Resources (e.g. clubs/social groups, professional groups, faith-based groups, etc.) Online communities

Transportation Providers

## ***What types of natural supports can be used in the workplace?***

<b><i>Type of Natural Support</i></b>	<b><i>Definition of the Natural Support</i></b>	<b><i>Example of the Natural Support</i></b>
Training Supports (Job Tasks)	Developing the consumer's competence and skill in the job within the work setting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Job shadowing a co-worker for a few days</li> <li>• Utilizing a mentor on the job</li> <li>• Creating a checklist of job tasks to aid in learning</li> <li>• Scheduling routine meetings with the supervisor to review training progress</li> </ul>
Training Supports (Social Skills)	Developing the consumer's competence and skill in relating with others on the job according to the workplace norms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilizing a "buddy" in the workplace to learn social norms</li> <li>• Creating a schedule for part-time employees that allows them to participate in the social rituals in the workplace</li> <li>• Having the human resources department offer sensitivity training on disability in the workplace for all staff</li> </ul>
Organizational Supports	Entails the preparation and organization of tasks in the work setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a daily schedule for tasks and meetings</li> <li>• Using an alarm on a watch for meeting reminders</li> <li>• Ordering job tasks in a way that promotes work production</li> <li>• Rearranging materials in a work area in an accessible way</li> </ul>
Job Retention/Promotion Supports	Ensuring the consumer is satisfied on the job and meeting the expected level of performance necessary to retain the position or to be considered for promotion opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Holding routine meetings with the supervisor to review performance</li> <li>• Carpooling with a co-worker</li> <li>• Utilizing a mentor for ongoing support following initial training</li> <li>• Participating in professional development offered by the employer</li> <li>• Maintaining a detailed map that outlines key job functions and the expected level of performance.</li> </ul>
Community Supports	Accessing community agencies and services available to the public at large	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessing public transportation to get to/from work</li> <li>• Participating in an adult literacy program via a community college</li> <li>• Participating in workshops or job clubs sponsored by the local library</li> <li>• Utilizing a guide dog for commuting independently</li> </ul>
Social Supports	Accessing professional & nonprofessional disability-related supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Utilizing peer support services</li> <li>• Participating in self-help groups</li> <li>• Relying on family/friends to discuss job stress</li> <li>• Participating in an EAP via the employer</li> </ul>

## **What are the steps for implementing natural supports in the workplace for my clients?**

1. Determine your client's individual needs as it relates to successful integration in the work environment.
2. Brainstorm potential options for natural supports that account for the needs of both the client and employer.
3. Assess for available supports within and outside the workplace that can promote the client's successful integration. This includes job and community supports.
4. Identify choices that are suitable for the client and employer. These choices should consider individual preferences.
5. Develop strategies for accessing these supports.
6. Implement and evaluate the initial effectiveness of the these natural supports
7. Develop a monitoring plan to continuously evaluate the utility of these natural supports over time.
8. Make modifications where necessary in the event a natural support does not prove effective as initially anticipated.

## **What are indicators of best practice when using the natural supports model within supported employment?**

- Clients have control of the employment process.
- There are opportunities for the client to make informed choices.
- There is early identification of long-term supports.
- There is an emphasis on the use of both community and business supports.
- There is the use of person-centered planning.

## **References/Resources:**

Rogan, P., Banks, B., & Howard, M. (2000). Workplace supports in practice: As little as possible, as much as necessary. *Focus on Autism and Other Developmental Disabilities*, 15 (1), 2-11.

Trach, J.S., & Mayhill, C. (n.d.). Analysis of the types of Natural supports utilized during job placement and development. RSA Region Retrieved February 29, 2012 from <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/education/sences/classinfo/summer02/article3.pdf>.

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