Identifying Barriers

What is a barrier, and why is it important to be aware of barriers?

A barrier is anything that makes it difficult for a person to achieve his or her goals. Barriers may be related to health, finances, family situation, level of education, transportation, or any number of other factors. Some barriers can be resolved easily, while others will take much time and effort to resolve. Some barriers will likely never be completely resolved.

Barriers often affect the kind of job or career a person can pursue, so it’s important to be aware of any barriers a person may face as you work with him or her.

How can I help someone identify his or her barriers?

If the person you are helping is someone you know well, you may already be aware of some of his or her barriers. However, if you are working with someone you don’t know well, you may need to take time to learn more about the person. Consider conducting an interview that will help you understand his or her barriers. This form provides questions that will help you learn about possible barriers.

It’s important to remember that the purpose of asking these questions is not to make people feel bad about themselves. You simply want to understand their situations better so that you can help them more effectively. As you ask someone to discuss his or her barriers, give him or her the opportunity to highlight strengths as well.

Once I am aware of someone’s barriers, how can I help him or her select an appropriate vocational goal?

When helping someone select vocational goals, help them brainstorm jobs or careers that will not be prohibited or hindered by their barriers. Or, help the person determine what needs to be done to overcome the barrier so that he or she can continue working toward the goal.

If a person faces a barrier that cannot be overcome (for example, a chronic health condition), he or she may have to adjust the vocational goal. Help the person to be realistic, and encourage him or her not to be discouraged. Help the person focus on his or her strengths when selecting a new goal, and encourage him or her to have a positive attitude.