

Ask Me Anything About “Making the Interview Matter – Practical Strategies for Employment Specialists”, with guest expert Kim Mueser, Ph.D.

This call is being recorded.

Lisa Krystynak:

If you want to go ahead and get us started, well, hello and welcome to, uh, uh, ask me anything about employment today. We are so glad you are here. Um, and I will get us started here in just a second. I just want to remind everybody to come on the chats if you feel comfortable, and just say who you are and where you are from and or where you work. Um, and we, uh, will love to see that from you or say hey to each other, even if you know each other. So, but welcome, welcome, welcome. We are going to get started. Um, so good afternoon and welcome to Ask Me Anything about Employment with our expert, Dr. Kim Meuser. My name is Lisa Krishna and I'll be your moderator today. And Amanda Lowe will be our tech support. So, today's event is funded by Nadler, which is the National Institute on Disability Independent Living and Rehabilitation Research. This webinar is not a huge presentation, but it's a small presentation, but we choose to, uh, to focus on the interactive question and answers. So that's why we encourage you to put your questions out there as we are presenting today, and it'll keep that conversation going and the learning. So, for the next hour, Dr. Meuser will respond to any questions you have related to today's topic. And the topic is making the interview matter Practical Strategies for Employment Specialists. So, for today, I will introduce Dr. Meuser and give him time to expand on our topic. Then we'll take questions. Uh, so please put your questions in the chat, um, throughout the whole thing, and we'll make sure that we grab those and get those answered for any questions we cannot get to today. We will, um, make sure we get with Dr. Meuser, get some, um, clarification or a response that he would give, and we will get that to you. But hopefully we'll get to all of it today. Uh, it is my pleasure to introduce Dr. Kim. Uh, he is a distinguished professor of occupational therapy and Psychological and Brain Sciences at Boston University and a researcher at the Center of Psychiatric Rehabilitation. He is also an adjunct professor of psychiatry at Dartmouth Gaulle School of Medicine. Dr. Meuser is renowned for his research on developing and evaluating psychosocial interventions for individuals with serious mental illnesses. His work has significantly contributed to areas such as supportive employment, integrated treatment for co-occurring disorders and treatment for PTSD among many others. With more than four, 400 peer reviewed publications and more than 10 co-authored books, Dr. Meuser research has received support from leading organizations such as the National Institute of Mental Health and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. In 2017, he was honored with the Michael s Neil Award by the American Psychological Association's Division 18 for his contributions for public service, Dr. Meuser, we are excited to have you here with us today, and I will turn it over to you in just a second. And once you are finished sharing, I'll present the questions from our audience. So, audience remember, feel free to start putting your questions into the chat throughout Dr. Uh, ER's presentation. So, let's get started. And Dr. Meuser, I'm going to hand it over to you.

Kim Mueser:

Thanks very much, Lisa. I'm delighted to be here, um, and to be presenting on this topic. Um, can everybody see my slides? Okay, great. I'm going to take that as a, uh, yes. Um, so today I'm going to be talking about making the interview matter and I'm going to be describing practical strategies for employment specialists. And I'm going to get into a set of strategies that is commonly referred to as social skills training. Uh, before I go any further, let me give you, my disclosures. Uh,

unfortunately you can't quite appreciate this as much, um, from the web, but all my clothes are made by my son, Jay Meuser, who is a bespoke hand tailor, who is, is a bespoke hand tailor, uh, crafter of suits and shirts with stores in New York City. It's supposed to be a joke, but, uh, cause everybody's muted. Uh, we will go on from there. <laugh>, Sorry. So why is the job interview important? First, we're used to thinking that in supported employment, the job interview often isn't as important because we know that employment specialists are actively involved in helping people develop jobs and often creating what is sometimes called a soft landing or a receptive, uh, um, uh, uh, greeting, uh, from a potential employer. But we also know that not all people, uh, in IPS supported employment choose to disclose having a psychiatric disability when they're applying for a job. Uh, in fact, in um, studies that we do, we see somewhere around 40 to 60% of individuals in supported employment choosing to disclose and others to not disclose. So that means that for many individuals, the job interview is even more important, um, when the, uh, employment specialist, uh, is not, uh, um, playing an upfront role in the development of the job. Job interviews provide a first impression of the applicant to the employer, and that can provide information about whether the person is qualified, whether they seem socially skilled, if they seem intelligent, and if they seem motivated to have the job. Uh, we know in the general population that job interviews are critical to getting, uh, job interviews. And as noted before, it could be especially important, uh, to clients who do not disclose, uh, their mental illness to a prospective job employer. So, what are common challenges that people with serious mental illness have in job interviews? Uh, overall, maybe the biggest challenge is not being as prepared for the job interview as they could be. Another problem can be not having a very good social skill. By social skills. I'm talking about specific behaviors when somebody is interacting with somebody else that often convey the meaning, uh, of the, the interaction, including the emotions underlying them, such as motivation, interest, and things like that. So, examples of common social skill difficulties include things like a low voice tone, meaning speaking very quietly so that the person is, is hard to hear. A lack of facial expressiveness, which we know can sometimes happen a blunted affect. Um, sometimes it can be a symptom of schizophrenia, but it can also be a medication side effect that people sometimes need to compensate for by, uh, uh, giving more feeling statements. Sometimes people aren't as articulate in terms of, uh, uh, enunciating the words that they need to say, or they may be not as responsive to an interviewer as they could be. Uh, there may be questions that they have difficulty answering. People might not appear to be as motivated or interested in the job as would be good. Uh, and sometimes people aren't that good at, uh, selling their own strengths and their relevant experience. Uh, we know that part of a good job interview is convincing the employer that you are the right person for the job. And so sometimes, uh, people with serious mental illness, uh, underplay their own strengths and don't sell themselves as well to a prospective employer as they could. So, in a good job interview, uh, one of the things or some of the different things that an applicant should be striving to do is to be on time, of course, to be appropriately dressed and groomed. And of course, the nature of this is going to, uh, depend on the nature of the job, just how much you dress up. But, uh, certainly, uh, uh, you know, good grooming, clean clothes and the like. Uh, the person needs to be able to describe a relevant job experience that they've had. They should know something about the job they're applying for. Um, they should be as socially skilled and articulate as possible and appear to be comfortable in the interview, and they should appear to be interested in the job. These are all just basics that you want to shoot for, um, in a job interview. So how do you prepare clients for job interviews? Well, one of the most important things about preparing a client for a job interview is helping them figure out or to prepare in advance effective answers to common questions that are asked. In job interviews, I'm going to be getting into role playing and the importance of role playing and feedback as preparation for a job interview. But before role playing is useful because role-playing focuses on job interviewing performance. And before you focus on performance, what you need to do is to focus on content. And by content, I'm meaning how is the person going to respond or

what are the optimal ways of responding to common questions that come up in job interviews? Once a client has gotten prepared for how to respond to the different kind of questions that typically come up on job interviews, then you can help the person practice, job interviewing, and then the practice focuses on improving their performance. But before you practice job interviewing, you first need to help the person decide what are effective answers to common questions. And so, what you do is you go through common questions, and I'll, in the next slide, show you a bunch of different common questions that are asked during job interviews and talk over with the client what would be effective responses for each of these kinds of questions. And the client can take notes, of course, on the optimal response to the interview questions. And they can consult, uh, their notes if, if they want, because over time, and as they practice the job interview in, in role plays, they will learn the responses, uh, and they can let go of the notes. But for the time being, it's perfectly fine to take notes so that the client knows what the best ways are of responding to some of the common questions. So, what are common interview questions? Well, this is just a set of them, and, and you folks as employment specialists may know of many more. Uh, these are the ones that kind of came to mind and that I'm familiar with, uh, from my, uh, work with employment specialists and, and with job, uh, interviewing, what made you interested in this job? What are your qualifications or relevant work experience for this job? What makes you the best person? All three of these are, are kind of lead questions in, in terms of, um, the relevant, uh, experience that the person has for the job. What are some of your strengths as a worker? There's often a kind of a trick question that's asked, what are some of the weaknesses or things that you have difficulty doing? And, uh, employment specialists can help people come up with good answers to this. The key to answering this question is not to admit to, uh, very, very many or, or significantly stronger weaknesses. Uh, like you wouldn't want to say, oh, well, you know, I sometimes steal from my employer. Uh, with that would be an obviously bad thing, uh, to say, uh, uh, sometimes you, you could admit to trying too hard or, or things, or being overly perfectionistic. Those are the kind of things where, uh, it's a so-called weakness, uh, but not really, maybe even something that the employer values to a certain, uh, a degree. Sometimes people will ask, uh, uh, questions just to get to know the person a little bit. Like, what are hobbies or activities that you like to do in your spare time? It's always important that the person have at least some questions about the job. And, and so, uh, although you can prepare for having general questions in job interviewing, there's some amount of preparing for job interviews that needs to be done specifically for each job interview. Uh, and this is one of them. Um, the person should try to identify at least, um, a few questions that could be asked of a, uh, uh, a job. Um, it's also, um, helpful for the person to, uh, um, have an idea about how they might respond to the question of, if you are offered this job, uh, when could you start? Because sometimes employers do, uh, want to fill the job quickly. And so being able to have some way of responding to it, it doesn't mean that they need to give a specific date, uh, but they do need to know that they could be asked this, uh, question. Now, of course, this isn't all of the questions, and there may be other, uh, common, uh, uh, questions, but the more, uh, relatively common questions you can come up with and talk over with the client in order to come up with the best response, the better because then the person can, uh, be more prepared in knowing how to respond to common questions. Okay, so now let's talk about improving job interviewing performance. So here what we're talking about is improving the social skills or the effectiveness with which one interviews, uh, for, um, a job after you've already figured out what are the most effective responses to common questions. So, social skills training is the most established method for improving interpersonal skills, uh, in both people with a serious mental illness, but also in the general population. Social skills, uh, training, which originally got its start as assertiveness training back in the 1960s, is a systematic, programmatic way of teaching new interpersonal skills that is based on the principles of social learning. When I say the principles of social learning, what I'm talking about is the fact that many people learn things by observing other people, uh, during interactions. And that the observation of other

people during effective social interactions and, and what happens itself can be an effective teaching strategy. And so in social skills training, in a nutshell, and I will be going into this in in more detail, uh, the, uh, the person teaching the skill, uh, first after talking about the skill and talking about the different components of it, or the definition of it models it or demonstrates the skill in a role play with the person, um, that's where the social learning begins to take place. The modeling or the demonstration of the skill. Following that, you have what is called behavioral rehearsal, which is where the client practices this, this skill in a role play, uh, where the person teaching it. And the idea is that you use the same kind of role play and the same kind of situation, um, that the person is teaching and, and that the other person is, um, is learning. cause then that makes it easier to learn it. So, the person practices the skill, um, in a role play. And then what happens is that the, uh, person, the teacher, or the employment specialist gives positive feedback about what the person did well, um, during the role play, and then gives some suggestions for how they can improve their performance in the role play. And then they do an additional role play, at least one more role play, where the person focuses on improving their performance in the role play based on the feedback. And, and so the idea is that you're doing a role play of the exact same situation. You're going through much of the same material, but you're focusing on improving a few things, like helping the person speak more loudly, um, giving more specific explanation to, uh, uh, questions, uh, smiling occasionally, uh, things like that. And then after a role, this next role play, uh, you again give positive, uh, feedback for what the person did well and suggestions for how they could do it more effectively. And then you might do a third or fourth role play, or maybe at one time you'll stop after the second role play, although it's generally recommended that you do at least two role plays, if not three at a time, because of the learning that takes place from the first to the second to the third role play. And then what you do is you have the person practice the generalization of the skill for role plays. And what that means is you have them practice with other people, you have them use the skill in actual, uh, job interview situations and so on. So that's the kind of the big picture of skills training, which is the systematic way of using modeling or demonstrating a skill, um, in role plays. And then having people practice role plays with each practice of a role play, followed by positive feedback for things that they, that they did well and upbeat, positively phrased, uh, suggestions for how, how the person could, uh, improve it. And fact this process of gradually improving skills. One role play after another role play is what is called shaping. And shaping refers to the reinforcement of successive approximations to a desired goal. And because, uh, um, interpersonal skills are complex skills that take a long time to develop, it turns out that shaping is one of the most powerful ways of teaching people more effective interpersonal skills for a broad range of different things, whether it's having conversations or dating or saying no, uh, to, uh, offers to use drugs or alcohol, um, or being effective in a, um, uh, dur during an interview or interacting with other, uh, coworkers, um, on, on the job. So now let me delve a little bit more specifically into, um, the specifics of doing some job interviewing training. Uh, but before I do that, let me mention that there is a, uh, new resource. It only came out six weeks ago. Um, uh, our recently, uh, published third edition, uh, of our book on social skills training, uh, for schizophrenia. Um, the second edition came out 20 years ago. So, it's been, uh, significantly updated. There are curricula for 84 skills, and in fact, one of the skill areas, um, is in fact skills, um, related to work. And that includes job interviewing, but it includes other skills like, um, asking the boss for a raise or a promotion, uh, making small talk with, uh, uh, coworkers, uh, responding to criticism from a boss and so on. But all the skills that are taught, um, in this book, um, can be taught using the principles of social skills training. And I'm going to kind of spell them out a little bit more in the next few slides on how to do skills training for job interviewing. Okay, so this is hints on improving job interviewing skills. So, first, I mentioned how you, uh, how it's important for the employment specialist to demonstrate, uh, effective job interviewing, uh, skills before engaging the client in a role play. And the importance of this is, um, well, there's several aspects of it. First, everybody finds role playing feels a little bit funny or awkward at first, and

that's fine. You can normalize that and, uh, uh, acknowledge it, but also explain that people generally become, uh, com more comfortable with it after a few tries. Um, so to have the employment specialist first demonstrate the skill in a role play, uh, takes the pressure off the client because they're observing the client, they're interact, um, they're observing the employment specialist, but they're interacting with them, and they don't have to have to be the first one trying the skill. They're observing the skill while they are, um, uh, um, in a role play, pretending to be the, um, uh, the employer. So that makes people feel a little bit more, uh, relaxed. Um, another reason for the employment specialist to first demonstrate it is that it gives a good example. The more that you can give a good example of a skill for a person to use, the easier it is for them to use that skill, and it avoids the awkwardness of, of them trying it when they don't really have a very good idea of how to do it. So, when you're modeling a skill, the skill of, um, a job interviewing in, in a role play, the employment specialist takes the role of the client in the interview, and you have already figured out the answers to the questions. And so, the employment specialist is providing an example of how the client could answer those questions. So, you don't want to do a, um, a role plays of the employment specialist interviewing for a different kind of a job, uh, that the client wouldn't be interviewing. You want to have them, uh, demonstrating how to handle a job interview exactly like the kind of a job that the client is applying for. And what then you then do is you have the client take on the role of the employer in conducting the interview. Now you want to agree on what the specific job is that the, um, a client is going to be interviewing for. Of course, the employment specialist is going to be playing the role of the client, and you want, um, uh, uh, give the client a list of specific questions to ask because you want this to be a, a plan sort of thing. And, and especially early on when you're helping a person get familiar with role playing and job interviewing, you don't want there to be a lot of surprises and things like that. Just stick to a standard set of questions. That is, people get comfortable, and they get more skilled. You can begin to switch it up, change the questions a little bit and so on. But you want to avoid kind of awkwardness or people feeling unprepared in the middle of a, of a, a role play. And then what you want to do before you start the demonstration is you want to check to make sure that the, uh, client understands their role, their role in the role play, of course, is to be the job interviewer and to ask, uh, the employment specialist who will be playing the role of the, the client, um, questions, uh, ab uh, about the job, so, and about their experience for it and so on. So, then the employment specialist should also tell the client that they are going to demonstrate the job interviewing in a role play, uh, you don't need to this to go on a long time. Five or 10 minutes is more than sufficient. It might even be fine to have it shorter than that. Um, at first. And then after the role play, the employment specialist immediately gets feedback from the client on how effective they seem to be, um, at that, uh, role play. And you want them to talk a little bit about it, not very long, two or three minutes, but were they effective? Did they seem interested in the job? What made them seem effective? What, what did the employment specialist and demonstrating the skill do? Well, that made the client who was conducting the job interview feel as though, uh, they were well qualified for that. And so that's what you do for the modeling, the demonstrating of it. Now, let's go on to the next, uh, uh, step, which is engaging the client in role play practice of, of the skill. So here, what you're essentially doing is you're just switching the roles instead of the employment specialist playing the client, the client is playing himself or herself, and the employment specialist is playing the, in the, um, interviewer, the employer. And so, the employment specialists should use the same set of questions that they just had the, uh, the client use during, uh, the practice, job interview that went before. So, the employment specialist requests the client to practice interviewing, interviewing skills in a role play. The same situation with the employment specialist. This time is the interviewer. As I noted before, the client can use their notes when answering the questions if they want to, and gradually over time, you can fade the use of those notes. But if they're helpful, that's perfectly fine. And you try to set up the room so that it resembles a job interview. And again, it's always helpful to check on the client's understanding of what they're

supposed to do in a role play. Sometimes people get a little bit confused, and it can also be very helpful to say, to be very clear and to say, let's start the role play now. And, and then when the role play is over to say something like, let's stop the role play now. And I like to use like a, a signal, like a t, like a timeout or something like that. So, it's very, very clear when it begins and ends. Okay. So, you do the role play again this time, uh, having switched roles and the client is playing himself or herself. So now, as soon as the role play is over, what you want to do is to provide the client, uh, with feedback about their performance in the interview. And here is possibly the most important feature of social skills training, if not the most important, the second most important, which is that immediately at the end of the role play, you always must find something positive and preferably some, some something specific or a few specific things to say about what the person did in the role play. It's always critical to provide positive feedback first in a role play. And we do this whether we're doing it individually or in groups for two reasons. One is that you want to always, second of all, what you want to do is to set the person at ease a little bit. And by acknowledging something that the person has done well, that helps set them at ease a little bit. You want to be warm and genuine when you're giving feedback about things that they did well. You want to give, uh, at least two or three pieces of specific feedback about what the client, uh, uh, did well, like, you could talk about how they had a strong voice tone, you know, it was very good to hear, or that, uh, their eye contact was really good, or that they seemed expressive, or they sounded confident, or they gave a good description of some of their job experience, or that they sounded really, uh, clearly interested in the job. Um, even if a client's performance isn't very good, you want to find something, a couple specific things to be positive and genuine about, uh, what they had done. Uh, uh, well then after that, and you spend just a couple of minutes giving positive feedback, none of this needs to go on a huge, long amount of time. Then what you want to do is to give some suggestions for improvement. And you can, uh, typically what you want to do is to give just a couple of suggestions. You don't want to give 10 things that the person could improve because nobody could remember how to do all 10 different kinds of things, uh, to focus on them. What you really want to do is to identify one or two specific ways that the client could improve their performance in the job interview the next time you do it. And you're going to do a role play right after that, that last one. Um, and you could discuss the specific behaviors that the client should, uh, uh, change in the role play. Now, the idea here is to try to focus on behaviors that are going to make the greatest improvement in interviewing performance from one trial, from one role play to the next. Um, one good example would be, uh, sometimes you have clients who speak very quietly. It's very quiet and soft, and the quietness sometimes is a problem cause it's hard to hear the person. And it's also a problem because it makes the person sound meek and unconfident in themselves. And when you're hiring somebody as an employer, you want them to feel confident in, in their skills. And so, if a person's been speaking quietly, sometimes before even working on anything else, you might just work on getting their voice volume up. And so, what you might ask them to do is to try the role play again, and to this time speak more loudly. Now when it comes to speaking more loudly, it can be helpful to set up a prompt to remind the person to speak more loudly. And the prompt that I like to do is simply to, in, to put my thumb up. And you can do this in the middle of the job interview, even when you're playing the role of the, uh, employer, uh, because sometimes people will begin to speak more loudly, but then it'll trail off. And so, you want to be able to kind of give them continuous feedback. And if a person spoke quietly, your time would be well spent doing nothing but focusing on helping them speak more loudly for at least one role play. And as soon as it begins to trail off, go like this to remind them to speak more loudly, and then they speak up again, um, and, and so on. So, the idea is that you want to focus on one or two things at a time to gradually help them improve their performance from one role play, uh, to the other. Now, sometimes it might not be exactly clear, the kind of change, it might not be clear to the client. And so, the employment specialist could model just a part of the skill. Like, let's say the client wasn't clear about their experience for the job, um, and the employment specialist

might say, you know, I thought you could have been a little bit clearer about your experience for the job. Let me give you an example. And so, the employment specialist could demonstrate just that part where they talk about their experience for the job. They could demonstrate that again, and then switch roles again. And you have the, uh, the client practice, the whole job interview, but this time they pay particular attention to, um, giving a better description of their, uh, job experience. So, the idea is that you focus on one or two changes that you, you want the person to try to make you check in with them to make sure that they understand. Uh, sometimes you can also elicit suggestions, uh, from the client. That's perfectly fine. And then you do another role play, okay? And then you provide more feedback following the same principles as the last role play. And again, what you always do is you provide positive feedback first about what the client did well in the role play, and you're trying to be, uh, warm and genuine. Now, one of the important things is you tried to get the person to make a change in a particular behavior or something that they did in that role play, such as the person speaking more loudly. And so, if the person made the change that you're trying to help them make, then when you give positive feedback, the first thing you give positive feedback is that new behavior. So, let's say the person spoke up and they were loud, louder, even if they weren't as loud as they could be, let's say that they were, they were louder. You could say, oh, you did a nice job in that interview. You know, I noticed, I really liked the, the fact that you spoke more loudly. It was much easier to hear you. And, and when you, when you spoke more loudly, you also sounded more confident. And then you can go on and give another, uh, a few pieces of, of positive feedback. So, the importance of this is that the things that you give positive feedback on first are the most reinforcing. And because you're teaching these new behaviors, the new behavior that you focused on changing from the first role, play the next one. That's the most important one to reinforce. So that's why you always try to, to focus on giving positive feedback about new improved behaviors that the person that has, has done. And then you can give some more feedback. You can give some suggestions for, uh, improvement, especially if you're going to do another role play or two. Um, but depending on how much time you have, you could, uh, do 2, 3, 4, uh, uh, role plays is, is common in one setting. Even if you have many other things that you're doing with a client, it's easy to do, say at least two role plays in 10 or 15 minutes or something like that. So that's the basics of that. Um, uh, this has to do with, uh, the suggestions for more improvement. Uh, you always want to give it an upbeat, uh, uh, uh, manner. Um, clarify any questions that the client may have, provide additional modeling, uh, if needed, um, and use the same methods as, uh, before. Lemme just see. And then just a, a few tips in Jo in terms of just wrapping it up. Um, social skills training. It's a little bit like the old, uh, expression. Rome wasn't built in a day. Um, interpersonal skills were also not built in a day, but they can be taught, um, if you have regular opportunities for people to practice them, and you have a lot of positive feedback and modeling and, and things like that. Sessions can be brief, 15 or 20 minutes. They can also be more extended, um, if you like, it is desirable to shoot for at least two role plays per session. And, and if more, if there's the, the opportunity, if the client uses notes to help in responding to some of the questions, which is fine, gradually fade the use of these notes, uh, while practicing skills training sessions should always be positive, upbeat, and even fun experiences for the client. So it's important to, to be enthusiastic, um, and to try to make the experience a positive one as clients skills improve, arrange for other people to role play, uh, the role of the employer, uh, uh, conducting the interview, as well as to ask additional unexpected questions that could come up in interviews to help a person become even more familiar with different kind of questions that could come up. But even more comfortable with the job interviewing situation. And whenever the client has an actual job interview, uh, coming up, customize the interview training, uh, for that job. Um, in terms of the client's work experiences, as well as being able to come up with a few questions about the job. All of this, uh, uh, takes some degree of practice, uh, but, um, you folks, uh, you know, have the goodwill and these are some of the strategies that can make you, uh, even more effective as employment specialists and as teachers of, of interpersonal skill.

So, I know this went on longer than many, ask anything, uh, uh, questions, but I wanted to kind of lay down these as, um, really a specific technology for improving interpersonal skills. Uh, I'm happy to take any questions.

Lisa Krystynak:

Thank you, Dr. Muser. Uh, this is great information, just a great reminder of, uh, to all of us, how important that interview is. I know as someone who worked in, um, supportive employment, this was something that we kind of dropped the ball on a lot, and we need this great reminder in some extra things to think about. So, I appreciate that there are several folks who have asked if we can put the, um, the, the PowerPoint slides, uh, into folks. We can, I have sent that to Amanda, and she can put that in the chat so folks can, um, grab that and download it so they'll have the material. So, thank you guys for being interested in that. We do have a lot of questions. If we are not able to get to all your questions, we will, um, get the questions to Dr. Meuser and have him, um, answer those for you. So hopefully we will. So, let's get started. So, we have several questions, um, about, um, work history. Dr. Meuser, um, so Victoria and Leslie asked the question, and maybe a few others about how to help someone address, uh, having a large gap in their employment during an interview. Uh, if that has not been tackled in the right way on a resume and it, there's showing this great thing, do you have any suggestions for folks on how to help someone answer that question in an interview?

Kim Mueser:

Um, well, I guess the, the central question as I understand it, is how to answer it for clients who are not, um, not disclosing, having a, a psychiatric or a, a substance use, uh, uh, a difficulty for, for individuals who have had a, um, you know, who, who are willing to talk about, um, certain, you know, mental health or, or substance use challenges, um, being able to practice talking about, um, having experienced those challenges, um, having been out of the work, uh, force for a period of time, having, um, uh, learned how to manage those problems and now wanting to work and being a, a contributor to society. Um, something along those lines. I think it, uh, can, uh, can meet with a very receptive response. There's a lot of employers who want to give people the opportunity, uh, for job, um, individuals who may have, um, experienced, uh, substance use and mental health, um, issues, um, in, in, in the past. Um, I know that there may be creative ways of handling gaps, um, uh, in one's work history, um, when doesn't, when one does not want to, um, acknowledge having had mental health and substance use, uh, problems in the past. Uh, but to be honest, without, um, consulting employment specialists and supervisors, um, I don't know those offhand. Uh, certainly if, if you have somebody who has been at home with the, the children when they've had other competing tasks that have taken them out of the workforce, uh, that can certainly be good excuse. Um, when people have a history of having volunteered, uh, that can be, uh, an excuse. Uh, but to, um, to know how to, to talk about gaps in work history, um, without being, um, open, uh, a about, uh, mental health or substance use issues, uh, I would have to consult, um, a colleague of mine in, in supported employment.

Lisa Krystynak:

Thank you. Thank you so much, Dr. Muir. Um, that is a, a big one that we, we must think about a lot and prepare for in supportive employment as folks that support that, uh, support people who, for whatever reason have been out of work for long periods of time. Um, so our next question, um, is kind of a question. When we notice something, uh, with the person we're supporting, uh, this, this question talked about, uh, the person, um, mumbles or rambles on, uh, during their practice interview, whether it's that or, or, or something we see as not very strong. Um, this person, uh, has a hard time believing even after it was a videotaped, you know, a practice video,

which is a great thing to do if they're comfortable with it. Uh, even after watching, uh, what the employment specialist brought to their attention, they still had a hard time really, uh, holding on to that feedback. So, their question is, you know, how do you handle that with your person who, who doesn't want to accept the feedback that you're giving them around what they're doing in the interview?

Kim Mueser:

Right? So, um, one of the things is that it's interesting you would think that having people, um, see videos of themselves would be self-correcting, but it often, um, is not as useful as one might hope. Um, the more useful thing to try to do is to, first, to get people to articulate more, uh, clearly it may take a lot of, um, a practice and shorter, uh, role plays. Um, I think that the most important thing that needs to be done is to have a back and forth where the employment specialist demonstrates the, uh, how to articulate something, and then has the client practice, um, articulating it better. Um, if the client tends to drone on and on in response to specific, uh, kind of questions, it would be preferable to, um, agree on what the optimal amount of responding is, and then to stop at that, and then to practice it. But I think that the most important tool that the employment specialist has for, um, convincing and helping people do a skill differently is their own ability to demonstrate the skill in a role play, and then to have the client immediately practice and try that skill after the role play. People are often, uh, often find it easier to imitate somebody, um, than to be told how to do it differently. And remember that when they see themselves doing it, even if they recognize it as not being that effective, they don't necessarily know how to be more effective. So, it's more important to, um, to give them good role models of how to do it correctly than it is to help them understand, uh, that they're not doing it as effectively as they could. Does that make sense?

Lisa Krystynak:

Yes, thank you.

Kim Mueser:

In other words, you're, you, you could be spending your time helping the person see that they're doing it wrong, or you could be spending your time helping the person see how to do it more effectively, and you want to do the latter.

Lisa Krystynak:

Right? Right. Thank you. Um, our next question is, um, from, uh, someone who says, I find the most valuable thing I have done when doing mock interviews is to identify the purpose of the question. What is your greatest weakness? Always trips people up. And so I really spend time on that. And the tell me about yourself questions. I'd be interested to hearing how you would handle those types of questions.

Kim Mueser:

Okay, great question. So, to tell me your greatest weakness, I kind of think this is a trick question because nobody wants to hear about a weakness that is really going to be a problem on the job. So one kind of example of we, well, of, of a weakness would be, oh, I, I, I find it hard to, uh, you know, one thing would be, uh, you know, I'm very, I'm overly perfectionistic, and so, you know, sometimes I don't know when I need to go on, when something is good enough. Um, say I'm, I'm like very worried about being late. I'm overly, I, I, I sometimes get too organized. I sometimes get, get anxious about doing a job, right? Um, you know, these are the kinds of things where you are

kind of admitting a, so a, a kind of a weakness, but they're not necessarily going to be viewed as a weakness, um, uh, by the employer. Um, here's an example of a weakness. I sometimes don't know when to ask for help. I'm not sure that that would be a good one to admit to, you know, because the employer would prefer somebody, you know, be able to, you know, to a, to ask for help, uh, for, for help. Um, I think that the idea of it is to pick qualities that can sometimes be a little bit problematic, but that are not viewed as being genuine limitations in the person's ability to do, to do the job. The kind of like, I don't know when to quit, I try too hard type of, of thing. Uh, I think the real goal is to ensure that the person doesn't talk about something that is a genuine, uh, uh, weaknesses, and it's going to make them appear to be, uh, less desirable as, as an employer. Um, the other kind of question, um, there was a, a common weakness, and what was the second kind of question?

Lisa Krystynak:

I'm so sorry. I went, I was prepared for the next question, <laugh>, so that you're asking me from the other question? No,

Kim Mueser:

The person that, there were two kinds of questions. One was your common weaknesses, and then the other was,

Lisa Krystynak:

Let me try to find that one. Um, so while I find that one, uh, there is a question about, uh, anxiety. Um, you're working with someone who has high anxiety, and they are not able to kind of get through that interview process and their confidence is very low because of that. Any suggestions? Sure.

Kim Mueser:

Um, first, um, it may be helpful to practice a relaxation strategy before the interview. There are lots of different relaxation interviews, like teaching people relaxed breathing, which is, um, where people are, are taught how to take a normal breath in and then to exhale very slowly. This could be, can be taught as a skill and, and practiced on a regular basis at first practicing it when the person isn't feeling anxious. Um, and then when they get the skill down, they can practice it when they feel more anxious. A second thing is that what you might consider doing is breaking a role play of a job interview, um, into smaller parts. Like to do the first five minutes of a job interview and then give, you know, so you demonstrate the first, you demonstrate it in a modeling, you have the person practice it, um, just the first five minutes of it. Give them positive feedback about what they did well, some suggestions for improvement. You spend a little more time on those first five minutes, then what you do is you make it a little bit longer. Um, and so what you're doing is you're gradually helping the person ease into feeling more and more comfortable with the job interview until they can do, uh, the whole job, uh, um, interview. Another thing is that the more role plays you do and the more practice the person will do, um, the more their anxiety will go down, because anxiety is often related to, um, exposure to feared, but unsafe situations. And a job interview is that kind of a situation. People are kind of afraid of it, but nothing really that terrible ever happens in a job interview, and especially if you're talking about role playing a, a job interview. And so, the more that people do it, the more their anxiety will go down. And, and in fact, role-playing has been used, um, as an approach therapeutically to helping people with social anxiety, uh, uh, quite often has been found to be, um, effective. The idea is just to get lots and lots of practice, um, uh, uh, doing it and, uh, you know, at first just with the employment specialist,

highly predictable, uh, but then changing it up a little bit, making it a little bit less predictable, then having them practice with other people. And like any other skill people will become, uh, more comfortable, uh, uh, uh, with it. And that along with practicing an anxiety reduction skill, um, is, is really the, the, um, uh, the best way to overcoming, uh, uh, uh, the anxiety. Thank you. Did you find out what that other question was? No.

Lisa Krystynak:

Okay.

Kim Mueser:

I'm sorry. I, you know, I should have, I, I should have written them, uh, down. Maybe it'll come.

Lisa Krystynak:

That's okay. That's okay. Like I said before, we're, we have multiple, we're going to have questions that we're not going to get to. I just remembered it and Amanda's going to send those to us.

Kim Mueser:

I just remembered it. It's the Tell me about yourself.

Lisa Krystynak:

Yes. Tell me about, yeah.

Kim Mueser:

Right. So, tell me about yourself. That one I think is easier because I think, I mean, whenever I work with clients, um, when I get to, um, exploring what their lives are like outside of work and school and, and, and, and interest and things like that, when I find out about their hobbies, the things that they like to do, I almost invariably find something that I think is interesting. And so, I think the way to do this is for the employment specialist to use their own curiosity in getting to understand the person. You, sometimes people play musical instruments, or they've got a collection of, of, of music, or they have some kinds of trivia things they know about, uh, a ton about sports. So they read, you know, lots of books about real World War ii, or they're, uh, you know, they're, you know, experts in particular types of TikTok videos, or they, they cook particular things or they, they crochet, they knit, or they, you know, I just having the, and it may take a bunch of different discussions, but, and, and sometimes you need to take the focus off the here and now and go back and talk about things that they used to enjoy doing. Um, uh, you know, people, you know, who are like, you know, very artistic and things like that. People who have written poetry, sometimes those things persist and, and they continue to, to, to do those things. But just showing a genuine interest in curiosity, in, um, in different things that they've done, things that have interested them. Maybe they've spoken different kind of languages. Maybe they've got a, uh, a particular religious, uh, community that they are, uh, very much a, a part of. But getting curious about people's lives, um, in there, in the, their, their day-to-Day lives with their families, um, how things were perhaps even before, uh, they, they develop their, their mental illness, things that they like to do, that they like to spend their time. And just, and then pursuing things, you know, sometimes, uh, you know, when I've had, uh, clients who are artists, you know, I've asked 'me to bring in artwork that they've done or poetry, poetry, you know, shared, uh, a poetry. So, I think showing an interest in, in those things. And then as you become interested and you learn more about what they do, then that becomes something that they can talk about with, with other people. And, and sometimes you could be just amazed at the, at the talents that, that, that people

have. Sometimes they were more in the past, although they often will have, often they are, you know, completely intact talents, uh, even though the person may be, um, uh, suffering from a, a, a major mental illness.

Lisa Krystynak:

Very good. Thank you. Final question, and we'll wrap it up, uh, and I promise we will get, uh, answers to all the questions that we weren't able to get to. Um, several folks have asked when a client they're working with is just undecided, if they want to, um, disclose or not disclose, um, how would you address that? How would you guide someone who's sitting on the fence not being able, they don't know how they feel about it?

Kim Mueser:

Great, great question. First of all, I do know, although I can't remember offhand, I, I think in the supported employment and education manual of the Navigate program for first episode psychosis, there is at, in at least one place a worksheet for helping people decide about whether to disclose or not disclose. And I will try to get the reference for that. But the short answer to this question is to help them come up with a list of advantages of disclosing and disadvantages of disclosing and kind of going through and, um, helping the person, you know, prompting the person to come up with all of the advantages that they can think of, prompting them to come up with all the disadvantages that they can think of if they come up with disadvantages that seem clearly maybe inaccurate or out of line, having a discussion about that. Uh, so for example, a disadvantage might be, well, no employer would ever hire somebody with a mental illness. And well, the employment specialist may know about that, and so they can discuss that. But I think that the process of weighing the pros and cons of, of disclosing or not disclosing, um, is the most practical, um, approach to helping the person, uh, decide. Um, one other thing that is worth bearing in mind is that you can, um, uh, when a person has made a decision not to disclose, um, and if they've gotten a job, and, um, uh, if that job didn't work out and then they move on, then I think it does become important to have another discussion about whether disclosure might be helpful. And what we have seen is that, um, people do sometimes choose not to disclose earlier on, and then to, uh, to disclose at a later point in time when they see it, too, it is to their advantage. And so, using somebody's experience of not disclosing, um, in trying to help them decide whether they should try to change their mind and try disclosing this the next time around, can also be useful. Um, we did a study where we looked at, um, disclosure and a supported employment, uh, study. And the interesting thing that we saw was that the people who disclosed, tended to have more symptoms and tended to have a little bit worse functioning than the people who did not disclose. And that's, uh, partly a reflection of the fact that, that sometimes the importance of disclosure is a practical necessity. It, it really, uh, can help people who, where their impairments are more obvious can really help them get their foot in the door. But the interesting thing is that even though the people who disclosed were more impaired than the people who are not disclosed, they worked on average about twice as long as the people who did not disclose. So even though they were more impaired, the fact that they were able to get the support of their employment specialist and the fact that their employer had a little bit of an understanding about what was going on enabled them to stay the job significantly longer. Uh, I will give the, um, the article that this, uh, that these findings are described, uh, uh, to you that you could share with, with people, um, uh, who, who are on the call.

Lisa Krystynak:

Thank you. Yeah, we just had someone ask for that. So, I said we would get that out to everyone. Well, it is time to put a pretty bow on this thing. Thank you so much, Dr. Mueser, for all the,

information that you shared, answering the questions. Like I said before, we will get all the questions that were answered to you, and we'll work with you to get those out to everyone as well as the PowerPoints. So, um, so thank you so much for today. Just want to remind everyone, um, as you come off today, you'll have a brief, very quick survey about, uh, our webinar today. Please take time to fill it out. It really helps us to figure out what we can do better, what we're doing right, and, uh, just a great resource for us. But we'll say goodbye to everyone and hopefully we'll see you next time. Thank you so much.

Kim Mueser:

Thanks.