

WorkFirst: The Basics

❖ You can find all the fact sheets we link to here at WashingtonLawHelp.org.

What is WorkFirst?

Most families who get Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) must also take part (must *participate*) in WorkFirst to keep getting TANF. This means that you must take part in a job search as organized by DSHS for at least 12 weeks. It also means that you must take any job you are offered that meets DSHS' standards. See "Do I have to take a job for less than minimum wage," Below.

As part of your job search, you must work with a WorkFirst case manager to make a written Individual Responsibility Plan. See "What is an Individual Responsibility Plan?" below. You must do the activities set out in the IRP.

What is an Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP)?

You and your DSHS case manager will agree to this written list of things you must do to get a job in the shortest time possible. Your IRP also lists services DSHS will provide you to help you get a job. Read [DSHS support services for WorkFirst participants](#) to learn more.

What if I have a disability?

If your disability makes it hard for you to work or look for work, tell your DSHS case manager right away. You will need to ask your medical provider to address your ability to work.

If you need special help to be able to take part, ask for it. Read [DSHS help for people with disabilities: Necessary Supplemental Accommodations](#) to learn more.

Can I be excused from doing WorkFirst?

Maybe. You do not have to take part in it (you are *exempt*) if any of these is true for you:

- You have a child who is under 2 years old.

- You are caring for your child or relative's child who is age 6 or younger. Other arrangements for care will not work.
- Starting July 23, 2023, your situation is keeping you from taking part. For example, you have health problems, are experiencing homelessness, or are a domestic violence victim. You will need different support from DSHS to help you out of your situation.

Are there other situations where I should not take part in WorkFirst?

Yes:

- You already work 32 hours or more a week (35 hours or more for 2-parent households).
- You do work-study 16 hours a week and go to community or technical college at least half-time.
- You are under age 18, and you are still in school full-time.
- You are under age 20, and you are still in a high school program (or equivalent) full-time.

What if I am pregnant?

You will take part in "Pregnancy to Employment." This program provides parenting education, parenting skills training, mental health and substance use disorder treatment, domestic violence services, and job services. You can get these services throughout your pregnancy to help you look for work while meeting your child's needs.

During your 3rd trimester, you do not have to take part in work activity. But you must be in mental health or substance use disorder treatment if your DSHS case manager says you need it.

What if I do not take part in WorkFirst at all?

After 2 months of not doing WorkFirst, DSHS will lower the amount of TANF you get by 40%, unless it decides you have a good reason for not taking part. Read [WorkFirst sanctions](#) to learn more.

If you do not do an activity listed in your IRP, DSHS will reduce your benefits (will *sanction you*) as if you had failed to take part in job search. Read [WorkFirst sanctions](#) to learn more.

Do I have to take a job for less than minimum wage?

No. In fact, you can only accept a job if all these are true: the job pays at least minimum wage, has industrial insurance and health and safety standards, pays unemployment benefits, and gives the same benefits to the TANF worker as to other employees.

What if I cannot find a job?

You and your DSHS worker will try to figure out why you did not find a job. You both will also consider experiences, activities, and services to add to your IRP to help you. You and your worker will agree on and sign a revised (changed) IRP.

Can I get training as part of my IRP?

Yes, if your WorkFirst evaluation shows you need it to get a job, or a better job. You might be able to get approval for training for 12 months, depending on your situation. Starting July 23, 2023, you can get training for up to 24 months.

Can I get help with childcare while I am doing WorkFirst things?

Probably. You can get help with childcare costs through the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program. Ask your case manager for help applying, or call the Child Care Subsidy Contact Center at 1.844.626.8687 or apply online at WashingtonConnection.org.

Can I get basic education through WorkFirst?

If you are 16 or 17 years old, yes. You may also be able to get this if you need it to get a job. Ask your case manager.

What if my DSHS worker and I disagree about a WorkFirst requirement?

You can ask for an administrative hearing if you disagree with any decision DSHS makes about your WorkFirst plan. For example, you might believe you should have gotten an exemption from work activity, or your case manager wouldn't include

something in your IRP that you asked for. Read [How to fight a termination or reduction of DSHS public assistance](#) to learn more.

You ask for a hearing by writing to Office of Administrative Hearings (OAH), P.O. Box 42488, Olympia, WA 98504. You should also get legal advice right away:

Get Legal Help

- **Apply online:** nwjustice.org/apply-online
- **Facing Eviction?** Call 1.855.657.8387
- **Facing Foreclosure?** Call 1.800.606.4819
- **Facing a legal issue in King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call 211 (or toll-free 1.877.211.9274) weekdays 8:00 am to 6:00 pm. They will refer you to a legal aid provider.
- **Facing a legal issue outside of King County** (other than Eviction or Foreclosure)? Call the CLEAR Hotline at 1.888.201.1014 weekdays between 9:15 am and 12:15 pm or apply online at nwjustice.org/apply-online.
- **Seniors (age 60 and over)** with a legal issue outside of King County can also call CLEAR*Sr at 1.888.387.7111

Deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired callers can call any of these numbers using the relay service of your choice.

Interpreters provided.

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