



ACCOMMODATIONS

TOOL 2: Exploring types of accommodations

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TYPES OF ACCOMMODATIONS

Nearly 40% of Canadian employees with disabilities aged 25-64 require workplace accommodations. Yet, accommodations are increasingly common among all employees irrespective of ability. [1]

While there are many different types of workplace accommodations that can be implemented to support the success and productivity of worker, they need not be daunting. The most common workplace accommodations can be classified into three groups: [2]

Flexible Work Arrangements

- Remote working
- Flexible time
- Reduced hours
- Compressed work weeks
- Virtual conference
- Job sharing
- Job restructuring
- Paid leave
- Gradual retirement

Workstation Modifications

- Adjustable workstations
- Ergonomic assessments
- Keyboard armrests, wrist supports, finger guides
- Scooters
- Accessible keyboards/mouses
- Modification of physical site (e.g., building and facility)

Human or Technical Support

- Braille technology
- Reading pen
- Assistive learning systems
- Guide and service animals
- Job coaches
- Amplified phones
- Teletypewriters (TTYs)
- Video Relay Service (VRS)
- ASL interpreters
- Screen readers

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Intersectionality Vignette

Leighton Roberts

Hi there. I'm Leighton and I'm going to talk about some of the accommodations that I have received as an employee.

I was originally introduced to my current organization back in 2019. Some of the barriers I had with finding employment were connected to having OCD, ADD, and some physical restraints and injuries that I had experienced over the years. The organization was nothing but kind, caring, and inclusive, and now I have a job I enjoy.

One of my accommodations is ergonomic mouse that helps me deal with my repetitive strain injury that I received about two years ago. Before, I couldn't work for many hours due to the pain in my wrist. So now I can work a full day without any problem. Same goes for having an ergonomic chair. I've been doing well emotionally, mental health wise, and general health wise as well, because of the organization's workplace supports and accommodations. I was able to take sick time off that was paid during a surgery I had. This meant I didn't have to worry about financial troubles while I was recovering, which was amazing.

So, to me, that's what inclusion really means – finding ways to support staff to do their best work. If there's one thing, I could tell people who are maybe new and worried about asking for accommodations in the workplace, it's to know your rights. You do have the right to work in a place that is comfortable and accommodating to you. If someone pushes back, know your rights, and implement them.

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Co-Determining Accommodation Solutions

If your worker requests an accommodation, you should engage in a collaborative process to co-determine what accommodation solutions may be implemented to support them in the workplace. Employers and workers may start by reviewing the worker's essential job responsibilities to both determine expectations and identify what barriers they may face when performing core tasks.

Here are some important considerations: [3]

- Assess stressors related to psychological, emotional, cognitive, and physical issues at work
- Develop strategies that may best support worker success
- Help maintain a safe and productive workplace

If it is determined that the current description does not reflect the actual work, consider revising. Below are practical suggestions from Canada Life's Workplace Strategies for Mental Health website. Keep them in mind when determining types of accommodation that best support your worker:



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Cognitive Demands

Job expectation - Adaptability & Flexibility

Practical Suggestions:

Consider options related to, hours of work, work travel, meeting deadlines, other routines or procedures

Job expectation - Attention to Detail

Practical Suggestions:

- Provide training
- Reduce or eliminate distractions
- Break large tasks into a series of smaller tasks
- Provide extra time for work that requires attention to detail
- Permit short breaks when concentration declines
- Give instructions and assignments in writing
- Create a checklist that includes each step of a task to be completed as quality control
- Exchange tasks with other employees that maintain the balance of work while capitalizing on the strengths of each employee

Job expectation - Decision-making

Practical Suggestions:

- Identify and address the potential impact of errors in judgment
- Create checklists to guide judgment in routine tasks
- Create a list of areas where decisions should be discussed
- Address areas where judgments must be discussed

Job expectation - Problem solving and analysis

Practical Suggestions:

- Create a decision-tree template to assist with problem solving or analytical thinking
- Create a list of situations that would indicate the need to reach out for assistance in analysis or problem solving
- Have regular check-ins during the decision-making process



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Job expectation - Recall

Practical Suggestions:

- Encourage the use of recording devices to provide playback of information discussed at meetings if appropriate
- Allow the use of digital organizers or handwritten notes as ongoing to-do lists, marking off items as they are completed
- Provide instructions and assignments in writing to help provide clarity and improved ability for recall
- Set up regular reminders of upcoming milestones, appointments or deadlines
- Arrange regular supervisor and worker meetings to set priorities and keep work on track
- Provide retraining and/or reorientation
- Use individualized training approaches, such as increased learning time, reading materials in advance, or applied learning to help improve comprehension and retention

Job expectation - Time pressures

Practical Suggestions:

- Review assigned tasks to establish a reasonable amount of time required for completion and ensure that all parts of the process are included
- Develop a process that establishes and monitors daily or weekly timelines for the completion of assigned tasks
- Establish regular times to check in with the worker throughout more complex tasks or projects
- Clearly define priorities
- Where possible, avoid assigning tight deadlines or provide sufficient resources to effectively meet that deadline, especially in the early stages of an accommodation or return to work
- Facilitate clear communication and collaboration to ensure timely completion of each team member's responsibility within a project
- Discuss the best way to give feedback during times of pressure



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Working with Others

Job expectation - Degree of self-supervision

Practical Suggestions:

- Create detailed task lists and timelines
- Have frequent check-in opportunities
- Discuss priorities and direction for dealing with conflicting priorities
- Organize outcome measurements by task, day, week, and month
- Have a list of alternate supervisors or co-workers to contact when necessary

Job expectation - Degree of supervisor responsibility

Practical Suggestions:

- A list of specific behaviours that can assist in effective supervision of others
- Discuss supervisory behaviours that may be interpreted by others as problematic
- Develop strategies to deal with stress in the workplace
- Have a mentor to call about challenging situations
- Identify particularly challenging work relationships and brainstorm alternative responses to these individuals
- Reduce or remove supervisory responsibilities

Job expectation - Exposure to confrontational situations

Practical Suggestions:

- Review policies and practices related to confrontational situations in the workplace with the worker
- Educate workers on potential confrontational situations and recommended responses
- Provide simulation training on confrontational situations to which workers are exposed
- Provide or increase support for the worker in situations that are potentially confrontational
- Exchange tasks with other employees that maintain the balance of work while capitalizing on the strengths of each employee
- Allow more frequent breaks



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Job expectation - Exposure to distressed people

Practical Suggestions:

- Help develop emotional intelligence and resilience
- Consider how to provide or increase support in situations that may be stressful
- Provide regular and genuine praise and positive reinforcement
- Allow reasonable time off to attend counselling sessions or medical appointments
- Provide supportive employment services or a work coach
- Allow more frequent breaks
- Provide an opportunity to debrief and share strategies for dealing with distressed people

Job expectation - Working relationships

Practical Suggestions:

- Review assigned tasks to establish a reasonable amount of time required for completion and ensure that all parts of the process are included
- Develop a process that establishes and monitors daily or weekly timelines for the completion of assigned tasks
- Establish regular times to check in with the worker throughout more complex tasks or projects
- Clearly define priorities
- Where possible, avoid assigning tight deadlines or provide sufficient resources to effectively meet that deadline, especially in the early stages of an accommodation or return to work
- Facilitate clear communication and collaboration to ensure timely completion of each team member's responsibility within a project
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Workplace Conditions

Job expectation - Exposure to distractions

Practical Suggestions:

- Provide a quieter workspace with fewer distractions
- Permit the use of headphones to listen to calming sounds or music
- Permit wearing of earplugs to reduce noise distraction
- Where possible, allow exposure to natural lighting in the work area
- Encourage less clutter in the work area
- Ask workers to minimize use of scents if this has been identified as a medical issue
- Consider modifications that reduce exposure to specific stimuli
- Consider requests for some or all work to be done at home

Job expectation -Tolerance for stressful environments

Practical Suggestions:

- Discuss the best way to provide instructions and feedback when in an emotionally stressful situation at work
- Address the best way to personally cope in stressful situations at work and how to provide or increase support in situations that are emotionally stressful
- Provide genuine praise and positive reinforcement during the work week
- Allow for reasonable time off to attend counselling sessions or medical appointments
- Allow reasonable phone calls to access necessary emotional support during the workday
- Provide supportive employment services or a work coach.
- Allow for more frequent breaks
- Provide learning opportunities that focus on building resilience, emotional intelligence, civility, and respect



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Job expectation - Overlapping tasks

Practical Suggestions:

- Modify workplace processes to focus on one task at a time, if practical
- Provide clear, specific, and measurable expectations for all tasks
- Create a list of all tasks to review to help establish priorities
- Consider opportunities to improve efficiency on specific tasks
- Provide training on time management skills
- Consider job-sharing arrangements
- Remove any non-essential functions of the job
- Manage expectations by helping the worker develop a schedule that indicates the amount of time you and the worker feel should be spent on required tasks each week; review this against the actual time spent and adjust for future work as required

Job expectation - Degree of isolation

Practical Suggestions:

- Provide the opportunity to interact frequently with other team members via online technology
- Conduct regular team building activities through online webinars or live meetings
- Bring remote team members together in a single location for meetings/events
- Provide regular, positive feedback acknowledging the worker's contributions and value
- As a perk or bonus, provide memberships that would allow more social interaction
- Allow time in the workweek to attend business, volunteer and other functions that provide social interaction



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Physical Demands

Job expectation - Work endurance

Practical Suggestions:

- Provide supports to help improve the worker's endurance (e.g., always making water and healthy snacks available; if safe, allowing headphones for music, etc.)
- Allow for the exchange of tasks with other employees to maintain the balance of work while capitalizing on the strengths of each employee
- Allow the worker to do intense tasks when energy is high and easier tasks when energy is low
- Ensure reasonable breaks during and between shifts
- If possible, remove the worker from the after-hours/on-call list
- When possible, allow for more frequent, shorter breaks to restore energy and focus
- Regularly check in with the worker to assess fatigue levels

Job expectation - Physical Demands

Practical Suggestions:

- Consult with an ergonomist to ensure best practices are being used to adjust work areas for physical function or limitations
- Provide supports to allow for physical limitations
- Allow for short breaks to restore energy and focus
- Allow for the exchange of tasks with other employees that maintains balance of work while capitalizing on the physical abilities of each employee

If you are looking for more information on different types of accommodations or are unsure which supports you can provide based on disability, topic, or limitation, please see the Job Accommodation Network for their A to Z listings on accommodations [4] or visit the Neil Squire Society's resources. [5]



ACCOMMODATION SCENARIOS

“Employers report that the vast majority of accommodations are low cost- or no-cost.” [6]

Here are some examples that show how providing accommodations to your workers leads to shared benefits:

Scenario 1:

An insurance claims adjuster with cancer has difficulty concentrating, deals with fatigue, and experiences trouble when trying to remember tasks. Their physician says these are related to their chemotherapy and medication, which may sometimes impact their ability to focus

- **Potential Solution:** The employer reduces auditory and visual distractions by moving the worker’s desk to a quieter area.
- **Reported Benefit:** The claims adjuster can more easily focus on their work and meets or exceed their goals. The employer benefits from having a more satisfied worker and increased productivity.
- **Estimated Cost:** \$0

Scenario 2:

A bank branch manager with carpal tunnel syndrome experiences pain when completing quarterly reports.

- **Potential Solution:** The employer purchases an ergonomic keyboard.
- **Reported Benefit:** The branch manager experiences less pain and stress, which improves productivity and morale.
- **Estimated Cost:** \$70

Scenario 3:

A facilities worker at the corporate office with a back injury has trouble lifting, carrying, and kneeling.

- **Potential Solution:** The employer provides ergonomic and lightweight cleaning equipment.
- **Reported Benefit:** The worker can perform their job without pain.
- **Estimated Cost:** \$200



ACCOMMODATION SCENARIOS

Scenario 4: [7]

A financial advisor discloses during onboarding that they are living with Schizophrenia. At this time, the occurrence of symptoms is relatively low, but can increase due to environmental and personal triggers.

- **Potential Solution:** The employer develops strategies with the worker to deal with behavioural and health problems before they arise, including who to call (e.g., family, friend, health professional, etc.) if the worker appears to be unwell. The employer encourages ongoing, open communication with the worker to learn better ways to support.
- **Reported Benefit:** The financial advisor feels acknowledged and trusting of their environment. By having a gameplan, the worker feels prepared for when they may experience barriers at work.
- **Potential Cost:** \$0

To learn more, please view: Angela's Experience: Working successfully with Schizo-Affective Disorder on YouTube.



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