

FRONTLINE

Practical Information for Managers & Supervisors
©2023, No. 417

Reasonable Accommodations for Employees with Mental Health Conditions

A mental health condition can impact various aspects of an individual's life, including the ability to achieve maximum productivity in the workplace. The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that one in five people will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime, and one in four Americans currently knows someone who has a mental health condition. It is likely that most employers have at least one employee with a mental health condition.

Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other nondiscrimination laws, most employers must provide "reasonable accommodations" to qualified employees with disabilities. Many employers are aware of different types of accommodations for people with physical and communication disabilities, but they may be less familiar with accommodations for employees with disabilities that are not visible, such as mental health conditions. Over the last few years, increasing numbers of employers have expressed a desire and need for information and ideas on accommodations for employees with mental health conditions.

Reasonable accommodations are adjustments to a work setting that make it possible for qualified employees with disabilities to perform the essential functions of their jobs. The majority of accommodations can be made for minimal (if any) cost and a small investment of time and planning. Moreover, effective accommodations can be good for business. They help employees return to work more quickly after disability or medical leave, eliminate costs due to lost productivity and can be key to recruiting and retaining qualified employees.

Not all employees with mental health conditions need accommodations to perform their jobs. For those who do, it is important to remember that the process of developing and implementing accommodations is individualized and should begin with input from the employee. Accommodations vary, just as people's strengths, work environments and job duties vary.

Below are examples of accommodations that have helped employees with mental health conditions to more effectively perform their jobs. The list below does not



include all possible accommodations, but it is a good starting point and provides some of the most effective and frequently used workplace accommodations. For example:

- ▲ Flexible Workplace - Telecommuting and/or working from home.
- ▲ Scheduling - Part-time work hours, job sharing, adjustments in the start or end of work hours, compensation time and/or "make up" of missed time.
- ▲ Leave - Sick leave for reasons related to mental health, flexible use of vacation time, additional unpaid or administrative leave for treatment or recovery, leaves of absence and/or use of occasional leave (a few hours at a time) for therapy and other related appointments.
- ▲ Breaks - Breaks according to individual needs rather than a fixed schedule, more frequent breaks and/or greater flexibility in scheduling breaks, provision of backup coverage during breaks, and telephone breaks during work hours to call professionals and others needed for support.
- ▲ Other Policies - Beverages and/or food permitted at workstations, if necessary, to mitigate the side effects of medications, on-site job coaches.

Modifications

- ▲ Reduction and/or removal of distractions in the work area.
- ▲ Addition of room dividers, partitions or other soundproofing or visual barriers between workspaces to reduce noise or visual distractions.

Continued From page 12

- ▲ Private offices or private space enclosures.
- ▲ Office/work space location away from noisy machinery.
- ▲ Reduction of workplace noise that can be adjusted (such as telephone volume).
- ▲ Increased natural lighting or full spectrum lighting.
- ▲ Music (with headset) to block out distractions.

Equipment/Technology

- ▲ Tape recorders for recording/reviewing meetings and training sessions.
- ▲ “White noise” or environmental sound machines.
- ▲ Handheld electronic organizers, software calendars and organizer programs.
- ▲ Remote job coaching, laptop computers, personal digital assistants and office computer access via remote locations, such as pop-up screens.

Job Duties

- ▲ Modification or removal of non-essential job duties or restructuring of the job to include only the essential job functions.
- ▲ Division of large assignments into smaller tasks and goals.
- ▲ Additional assistance and/or time for orientation activities, training and learning job tasks and new responsibilities.
- ▲ Additional training or modified training materials.

Management/Supervision

- ▲ Implementation of flexible and supportive supervision style; positive reinforcement and feedback; adjustments in level of supervision or structure, such as more frequent meetings to help prioritize tasks; and open communication with supervisors regarding performance and work expectations.
- ▲ Additional forms of communication and/or written and visual tools, including communication of assignments and instructions in the employee’s preferred learning style (written, verbal, e-mail, demonstration); creation and implementation of written tools such as daily “to-do” lists, step-by-step checklists, written (in addition to verbal) instructions and typed minutes of meetings.

- ▲ Regularly scheduled meetings (weekly or monthly) with employees to discuss workplace issues and productivity, including annual discussions as part of performance appraisals to assess abilities and discuss promotional opportunities.
- ▲ Development of strategies to deal with problems before they arise.
- ▲ Written work agreements that include any agreed upon accommodations, long-term and short-term goals, expectations of responsibilities and consequences of not meeting performance standards.
- ▲ Education of all employees about their right to accommodations.
- ▲ Relevant training for all employees, including co-workers and supervisory staff.

Resources that can assist you in helping employees with Mental Health Conditions:

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service from the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy that provides individualized accommodation solutions and information on the ADA and services related to employment for people with disabilities. JAN can be accessed at 1-800-526-7234 (V/TTY) or <https://askjan.org/>.

The Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation’s Reasonable Accommodations page includes specific tips for employers on developing and implementing accommodations. <https://cpr.bu.edu/resources-and-information/reasonable-accommodations/>.

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s Enforcement Guidance on the ADA and Psychiatric Disabilities answers some of the most common questions about the ADA and persons with psychiatric disabilities. <https://www.eeoc.gov/laws/guidance/enforcement-guidance-ada-and-psychiatric-disabilities>.