

Work Accommodations

A How-To Guide

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The Basics

- ▶ A work accommodation is a physical or procedural change from normal operations to allow a person with a disability to integrate into a work environment.
- ▶ It is different from an IEP because it isn't about individual goals, it's about ensuring that an employee can achieve the pre-defined goal of the job description.
- ▶ Enabling people to become employees or keep existing jobs by providing simple modifications can not only be fulfilling for the employee, but can provide productive diversity for the employer.
- ▶ Just over 4% of the civilian workforce in September 2017 had a disability according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, but there was a 3.9% unemployment rate among people with disabilities, compared to 7.5% among people without.

Do I Have to Ask?

- ▶ According to Melissa Abich-Espinoza, who is a certified Senior Professional in Human Resources®, “There is nothing worse than learning that an employee was let go for something that could easily have been avoided by an accommodation.”
- ▶ You may not need to disclose the actual disability - you were hired because they had faith that you could do the job, and even if it is not said, they believe that you are good at what you were hired to do. Most people are more than willing to help if you admit that you’re not good at something.
 - ▶ Examples:
 - ▶ I’m not able to reach that item on the top shelf, can you please help?
 - ▶ Since the report isn’t due until next week, do you mind if I take a day to perform a time study? (for people not good at quantifying)
 - ▶ Caveat: If, for those examples, it is your job to stock the top shelf or to estimate how long it takes to do things, the job might not be a good fit.

Your responsibilities

- ▶ Put the company on notice for need. If you don't tell them, they will not know.
- ▶ If not visible, be prepared to provide medical documentation.

Even if don't know what to ask for, it's OK to ask for help with the challenge.

Don't worry about knowing the resolution, tell your manager or the Human Resources department what issue you're struggling with. Stay focused on the restrictions, not the accommodation solution. Don't let this stop you from coming forward.

Steps to take

1. Ask the right questions about the job. Can you still do essential requirements of the job if your special needs are met? Example, if you need routine, a job where every day is different might not be a good fit.
2. Unless you need an accommodation during the application or interview process, wait until the time of the job offer to make your request.
 - ▶ It is OK to ask later if there is a factor that you were not aware of before you were offered the job, or if your role changes.
3. Be prepared with medical documentation or to have your doctor fill out a form created by your company.
4. Requests must be reasonable.
 - ▶ Don't expect that "can't interact with people" can be accommodated.
 - ▶ A call center associate, for example, may not be able to work from home due to information security requirements, but find out about the work environment, maybe cubicle walls are high enough, or perhaps a corner seat would help reduce distractions.
5. Read the employee manual or online policies and procedures to familiarize yourself with your new company's expectations.

Protect Your Rights

- ▶ If your request is done verbally, send a follow-up letter or e-mail to “recap” what was discussed and print a copy to keep at home. This will give your employer the opportunity to let you know if there was a miscommunication and ensure you have documentation of the request.
- ▶ If the accommodation they grant is not what you asked for, or if your request is completely denied, ask for their response in writing if they did not already provide it in that format. Do not press them for more information, nor engage in an argument.
- ▶ If you feel that your rights have been violated after the above, seek help from an advocate or attorney.

Example Autism Spectrum Disorder Accommodations

- ▶ Noise cancelling headphones
- ▶ Raising cubicle walls
- ▶ Desk in less trafficked location or a private office
- ▶ Detailed process maps and procedures for core function
- ▶ Manager on point to provide more details than co-workers need without penalty
- ▶ Additional time for training on new processes
- ▶ Utilize communication technology for day-to-day work
- ▶ Communication aide for group meetings/secondary functions
- ▶ Give assignments verbally, in writing, or both

Note: Every individual's needs are different; this is not a complete list.

Q & A