Workplace Accommodation Guide

Accommodations for employees with disabilities aren't complicated or expensive. Learn about some of the accommodations that are available.

What is the "Duty to Accommodate?"

Duty to accommodate means providing reasonable accommodation unless it causes undue hardship.

What is "Reasonable Accommodation?"

While reasonable accommodation differs on a case-by-case basis, it generally means any change to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done that allows an individual with a disability to apply for a job, perform job functions, or enjoy equal access to benefits available to other individuals in the workplace.

An employer must make accommodations to a 'reasonable' degree—unless it means incurring undue hardship.

What is "Undue Hardship?"

Undue hardship also differs on a case-by-case basis. Generally undue hardship means that an employer would encounter significant difficulty in the workplace in doing anything more to accommodate the employee.

Myth:

Making accommodations for employees with disabilities is complicated and expensive.

Fact:

Various sources in Canada note that between 50-80% of suggested accommodations cost the employer less than $500.

Examples of Workplace Accommodations

These examples are good to consider for both visible (e.g. uses a wheelchair, has a stutter) and non-visible disabilities (e.g. Autism, depression, Crohn's Disease).

1. Scheduling/Hours of Work as an Accommodation.

- Part-time hours.
- Flexible work schedule.
- Ability to work from home.
- Split shifts.
- Scheduling work only at one location.

2. Providing written materials in alternative formats.

- Documents with a font size of at least 18pt and easy to read sans-serif font types (e.g. Verdana, Arial) accommodate employees who have low vision.
- You can also provide these documents in accessible PDF formats (either remediated internally, or remediated by a professional service provider like Able Docs) to be used with screen reader software (e.g. JAWS).
- Written materials that include photos will also make it easier for some employees with cognitive challenges to understand what is being described.

3. Ensuring all paths of travel to the workspace are clear of barriers.

Ensure that all major pathways to key areas/functions of your workspace are clear of obstacles. This will make it easy for all employees to navigate the space.

4. Allow flexibility in job duties for non-essential tasks.

Example 1: Maria is offered a position as a history teacher. The job description mentions that she would be expected to accompany an annual school trip to visit another country. Mari is a single parent with a child aged 4. It is impossible for her to be away for several days in a row. She mentions that she would not be able to take part in the annual school trip. This is not a compulsory element of the curriculum and only a minority of students and staff take part each year.

The school concludes that this is a non-essential task, and that Maria can take up the position without needing to go on the school trip.

Example 2: Jin is offered a position as a geography teacher. The position requires the teacher to take students on field trips, some of which entail overnight stays. However, Jin is caring for his elderly mother who has dementia. He needs to be available in the evenings for her care. Jin explains this to the school. However, there is only one geography teacher in the school and field trips are an essential part of the curriculum for students.

The school is unable to modify this part of the job, so Jin is unable to take the position.

5. Other workplace accommodations may include:

- Working with a job coach.
- Peer mentoring.
- Maximize employees' strengths by minimizing distractions (e.g. quiet space to work, providing earplugs if necessary).
- Relocating the employee's workstation to be closer to other required equipment/rooms.
- Providing written job instructions.
- Providing a list of prioritized job tasks.
- Providing optical magnifiers to magnify written material.
  - o Learn more about tech tools for employees with vision loss.
- Allowing audio recording devices for note-taking of instructions or meeting minutes.
- Hands-free telephones or voice-to-text/text-to-voice translation.
- Document holders to assist in typing.
- Keyboards with keys that use high-contrast colours.
- Speech recognition software (e.g. Dragon NaturallySpeaking).
- Noise cancelling headphones.