

**INCLUSIVE BEST PRACTICES & DISABILITY ETIQUETTE**

**Disability:IN Inclusion Works logo**

**Preface – About Disability:IN**

**Who We Are**

Disability:IN is the leading nonprofit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide. Our network of more than 160 corporations expands opportunities for people with disabilities across enterprises. Our organization and 50 Affiliates raise a collective voice of positive change for people with disabilities in business.

**What We Do**

Disability:IN promotes disability inclusion by heightening awareness, advising corporations, and sharing proven strategies for including people with disabilities in the workplace, supply chain, and marketplace. We expand opportunities for people with disabilities by helping companies invigorate their disability initiatives, explore best practices, drive cultural transformation, and realize positive business outcomes.

**Our Key Initiatives:**

**FOR CORPORATIONS**

* We establish benchmark standards for disability inclusion and measure corporate efforts through our [**Disability Equality Index**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/disability-equality-index/), a joint initiative with the American Association of People with Disabilities.
* We share insights and methodologies that educate corporations on how to attract, hire, and grow talent with disabilities through our [**Talent Accelerator**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/nextgen-leaders/talent-accelerator/) and [**Mentorship Exchange**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/nextgen-leaders/mentorship-exchange/) programs.
* We provide customized disability inclusion support for corporations through our [**Inclusion Works**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/inclusion-works/) program.
* We guide businesses on how to expand disability inclusion in their supply chain through our [**Supplier Diversity**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/supplier-diversity/) program.
* We gather and educate employers, talent, suppliers, and nonprofits at our [**Annual Conference**](https://conference.disabilityin.org/).
* We recognize leaders and achievement through our annual [**Inclusion Awards**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/annual-national-conference/annual-inclusion-awards/).

**FOR NEXTGEN WITH DISABILITIES**

* We create opportunities for young people with disabilities to explore their career options through our [**Mentorship Exchange**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/nextgen-leaders/mentorship-exchange/) and [**Talent Accelerator**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/nextgen-leaders/talent-accelerator/) programs.

**FOR DISABILITY-OWNED BUSINESSES**

* We certify disability-owned business enterprises, including service-disabled veterans, connecting them with leading corporations through our [**Supplier Diversity**](https://disabilityin.org/what-we-do/supplier-diversity/) program.

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**INTRODUCTION**  
The information provided in this guide is as a result of a collaborative effort between Disability:IN Inclusion Works team of disability inclusion experts, the participating Inclusion Works companies, and external partners.

The guide was created for anyone, with or without a disability, who wants to interact more effectively with applicants, employees and customers with disabilities.

The Inclusion Works team has collected numerous resources on the subject matter, which you will find throughout this document. It is our hope that the guide will answer your questions and concerns related to this topic.

You will notice use of the phrase "people with disabilities" rather than "disabled people." This is referred to as ‘people first language’. People with disabilities are – first and foremost – people who have individual abilities, interests and needs.

*“The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”*

*- Mark Twain*

One in 5 Americans has a disability in the U.S; approximately 56.7 million people. In 2010, 19 percent of the population had a disability (*Source: U.S. Census Bureau, July 2012*). People with disabilities constitute our nation’s largest minority group, which is simultaneously the most inclusive and the most diverse. Everyone is represented: of all genders, all ages, all religions, all socioeconomic levels and all ethnic backgrounds. The disability community is the only minority group that anyone can join at any time.

The contributions of individuals with disabilities enrich our communities and society as they live, work and share. In addition, using person first language is not just a matter of semantics; the language we use reflects our perceptions. Throughout this guide, we want to stress the idea that individuals who have a disability are people who happen to have a disability. They are not defined by their medical conditions, and we must strive to avoid terms that label them as such.

When employing people with disabilities, do not exempt them from the normal expectations of work ethics and performance. The ultimate in equal rights for people with disabilities is to be allowed to succeed or fail like everyone else. And including training around disability etiquette and inclusive hiring practices within your organization is key to more inclusive and educated staff, and when supervisors and co-workers use disability etiquette, employees with disabilities feel more comfortable and work more productively. If a problem arises with an employee who has a disability, try to determine if the issue is a function of attitude, accessibility or health. If the problem is the result of that person's attitude, there should be no concessions, lowering of standards, or waiving of requirements and expectations.

For the benefit of the company and people who want to contribute their best work, always leave the door open to opportunity, explore all the options and make informed decisions.

# **STARTING WITH THE BASICS**

## **What Does Disability Mean?**

*The ADA defines the term disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; a record (or past history) of such an impairment; or being regarded as having a disability.*

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) defines the term disability as a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; a record (or past history) of such an impairment; or being regarded as having a disability. This would include physical, medical, mental or psychological conditions.

A qualified candidate under the ADA is someone who can perform the essential functions of the job with or without an accommodation.

So, what are the ‘essential functions’? They are duties that are fundamental to a position that the individual holds or desires that he/she cannot do the job without performing them. A function can be “essential” if, among other things:

* The position exists specifically to perform that function
* Only a limited number of employees are available to perform the function
* The function is so specialized and the individual is hired based on their ability to perform the function
* The function cannot be delegated.

Evidence of what constitutes an essential function may include, but is not limited to: the manager’s judgment; written job descriptions; the amount and/or proportion of time spent performing the function; the consequences of not requiring a function; and the work experience of incumbents.

## **Tips for Interacting with People with Disabilities** *The information below was developed by the United Spinal Association; for more information on the United Spinal Association and this guide please visit* [*http://www.unitedspinal.org*](http://www.unitedspinal.org)*.*

**Ask Before You Help**

Just because someone has a disability, don’t assume she needs help. If the setting is accessible, people with disabilities can usually get around fine. Adults with disabilities want to be treated as independent people. Offer assistance only if the person appears to need it. A person with a disability will often communicate when they need help. And if they do request assistance, ask how to help before you act.

**Be Sensitive About Physical Contact**

Some people with disabilities depend on their arms for balance. Grabbing them, even if your intention is to assist, could knock them off balance. Avoid patting a person on the head or touching his/her wheelchair, scooter or cane. People with disabilities consider their equipment part of their personal space.

**Think Before You Speak**

Always speak directly to the person with a disability, not to his/her companion, aide or sign language interpreter. Making small talk with a person who has a disability is great; just talk to him/her as you would anyone else. Respect the person’s privacy. If you ask about their disability, the individual may feel like you are only focused on the disability. Some people with disabilities are comfortable with questions about their disability after getting to know someone. A simple “I don’t feel comfortable sharing” by the person with a disability can set the tone of they are unwilling to share.

**Don’t Make Assumptions**

People with disabilities are the best judge of what they can or cannot do. Don’t make decisions for them about participating in any activity. Depending on the situation, it could be a violation of the ADA to exclude people because of a presumption about their limitations. Even once you know the name of the person's particular condition, keep in mind that no two people with the same condition experience the same impairments. Treat each person as an individual. Focus on abilities not limitations.

*A request for an accommodation, it is not a complaint or favor.*

**Respond Graciously to Requests**

When people who have disabilities ask for an accommodation at your business, it is not a complaint or favor. It shows they feel comfortable enough in your establishment to ask for what they need. And if they get a positive response, they will probably come back again and tell their friends about the good service they received.

## **Terminology Tips**

* Put the person first: say “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person.” If you are not sure what words to use, ask. Avoid outdated terms like “handicapped,” “crippled,” or “retarded.”
* Avoid “confinement” or “confined to…” Say “person who uses a wheelchair” rather than “confined to a wheelchair” or “wheelchair bound.” The wheelchair is what enables the person to get around and participate in society; it’s liberating, not confining.
* Avoid negative, disempowering words like victim and suffers.
* It is okay to use idiomatic expressions: “See you later” to a person who is blind is completely acceptable; they use these expressions themselves.

**Communicating About People with Diverse Abilities**

**Don’t Say Do Say**

Handicapped Person with a disability

Crippled, lame Person with a physical disability

The blind Person who is blind

Suffers from a hearing loss Person who is hard of hearing

Mute Person who communicates differently

Nuts, crazy Person with mental illness  
Retarded Person with intellectual disability

Additional notes: In general, it is most correct to use the person-first language when referring to people who have hearing loss, i.e., persons who are deaf and persons who are hard of hearing. It never hurts to ask a person how they like to refer to themselves and their hearing loss. If they lost their hearing after childhood, you may hear them refer to themselves as being “late-deafened.” This means they were not born deaf and at one time they could hear. Persons who are “late-deafened” will usually prefer to communicate orally, as opposed to using sign language, although some will sign.

# **DISABILITY INCLUSION IN THE RECRUITING AND HIRING PROCESS**

## **Inclusive Recruiting Best Practices**

People with disabilities continue to be the most unemployed and underemployed population in the United States. They represent an untapped labor pool offering valuable skills, qualifications, and assets for employers.

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A multi-faceted approach is critical in recruiting experienced talent with disabilities, such as:

* Online job boards specifically for
* professionals with disabilities, including those offered by local and national disability organizations, as well as college and university career centers.
* Utilize resume databases that contain carefully vetted job seekers with disabilities
* Advertise vacancies within disability-related publications and websites
* Participate in diversity Career Fairs known to cater to professionals with disabilities
* Outreach to local service providers who assist job seekers with disabilities in securing employment
* Ensure your Social Media strategy is inclusive and highlights the message you are an inclusive employer, include images of persons with disabilities on both internal and external sites and recruiting collateral.
* Tap into your disability ERG/BRG as a referral source of applicants with disabilities.

**Here are a few examples:**

**Online job boards:**

* [GettingHired](http://www.gettinghired.com/Employers.aspx)- post openings, seek Career Seekers with Disabilities who match openings, and other employment resources
* [Talent Acquisition Portal](https://tapability.org/) (TAP)- online job board of vetted job seekers with disabilities including Veterans; opportunity to post jobs; access to a resume database, compliance and application reports (including hires)
* [US Olympic Committee, Athlete Careers and Education](http://www.teamusa.org/Athlete%20Resources/Athlete%20Career%20and%20Education%20Services/Employers): online job board to view Olympians and Paralympians seeking employment and post jobs; service is at no cost
* Research local organizations that host job boards such as: <https://jobswithoutlimits.org/> run by Work without Limits in MA

**Resume Database:**

* [TAP](https://tapability.org/): once employer establishes an account, will have access to an online resume database of vetted job seekers with disabilities from 80 state Vocational Rehabilitation agencies across the country
* [Disability:IN Resume Databases](https://resumedatabase.disabilityin.org/): resumes include students, recent graduates, and experienced professionals with disabilities who participate in our “Inclusion Works” and “NextGen Leaders” programs.

**Organizations:**

* [Advocations-](http://www.advocations.org/about/) boutique staffing firm, serve professionals with disabilities and employers who want to hire them
* [Bender Consulting](http://www.benderconsult.com/) - mission is to recruit and hire people with disabilities for competitive career opportunities in the public and private sectors.
* [SpectrumCareers](https://hiring.thespectrumcareers.com/)- Job placement assistance for people on the spectrum
* [Specialisterne](http://usa.specialisterne.com/business-services/) - Technical services are customized depending on the local business needs, the profiles of the Specialisterne consultants and the specific services offered by each Specialisterne branch.
* [Operation PAVE](http://www.pva.org/site/c.ajIRK9NJLcJ2E/b.7750849/k.36C/Operation_PAVE_Paving_Access_for_Veterans_Employment.htm?s_src=google&gclid=CLOzidOK8tECFZNLDQodNpAC1A): Paving Access for Veterans Employment, a vocational rehabilitation program offered by Paralyzed Veterans of America with offices in every VA spinal cord injury center across the country, provides one-on-one career counseling and assistance to veterans and their families.

**Career Fairs:**

* [CAREERS & the disABLED Magazine's Career Expo](http://www.eop.com/expos-exhibitor-intro.php)
* [Bender Consulting Virtual Career Fairs](http://www.benderconsult.com/our%20services/bender-virtual-career-fair-people-disabilities)
* [GettingHired Virtual Career Fairs](http://www.gettinghired.com/Events.aspx)

**Sourcing Partners:**

* [Rochester Institute of Technology/National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Center on Employment](http://www.ntid.rit.edu/nce): assist deaf and hard-of-hearing students, graduating students and alumni with their job search and works with employers to facilitate hiring of highly qualified students and graduates
* [American Job Centers- Business Services](http://www.careeronestop.org/BusinessCenter/index.aspx): assist employers to recruit, hire, and retain job seekers with disabilities; locations nationwide, a part of DOL; can post jobs; search database of job seekers; access hiring events
* [Vocational Rehabilitation, the National Employment Team](http://www.rehabnetwork.org/customers-2/business/) (NET): assigned Business Consultants in every state; single point of contact to connect with qualified applicants, resources and support services in local area, multi-state or national marketplace.
* [Workforce Recruitment Program-](http://wrp.jobs/) offers employers the opportunity to post permanent and temporary positions; qualified students with disabilities from WRP can then search and apply for these positions using employers’ standard application processes.

## **Recruiting on College Campuses**

**Considerations for Internships for Students with Disabilities:**Through an effective outreach and partnerships with university partners’ Career and Disability Services, the Inclusion Works participating companies are finding success in recruiting students with disabilities. These companies have developed comprehensive experiences for interns that include small workgroup projects, interviews and mentoring experiences as well as additional activities both on and off the corporate campus. Some also offer corporate housing for student interns. Remember, students may need to request accommodations to fully and successfully participate in an internship program. The following was designed to assist companies in effectively communicating the structure and requirements of their internship program to better inform students and improve their overall experience.

**External Communications of Available Internships and/or Co-Ops:**When creating internships, it is important for candidates to understand the difference between the development activity of an internship and permanent employment. A clear and detailed job posting is key. Ensuring that the candidate is fully informed of the format of the internship will assist them in determining what accommodations they may need so they may request them in a timely manner.

**Recommendations:**

* Review company communications about internships and ensure they thoroughly and accurately depict the overall experience, not just the benefits of the experience.
* Candidates should have information about the process for applying for and accepting an offer for an internship; available transportation and housing if provided; format of scheduled activities; facilities and location of internship; and how to request more information and/or accommodations.
* Communicate and ensure the availability of accommodations during recruiting events. This includes opportunities to request interpreters, CART services, large print materials, quiet place for interview, accessible location, etc.

**Process for Applying for Internships**A detailed explanation of the entire application process is very helpful. It should include descriptions of virtual and in-person interviews, assessments, site visits and a contact for requesting an accommodation. In addition, provide clarity to the post interview process: recommendations for follow up with the interviewer and expectations on feedback during the application process. Finally, engaging your Employee Resource Group (ERG) for people with disabilities as buddies/mentors to interns will make it easier for interns to be successful. Interns may also welcome contacts from other ERGs.

**Transportation**

For any of the activities related to applying for or being successful in the internship:

* Are shuttles provided?
* Do employees provide rides in their vehicles for interns?
* What is the expectation for getting to off-site activities?
* Is there accessible parking and accessible on-site transportation?

**Housing**Internship housing contracts should ensure that housing suppliers accommodate students with disabilities and that they have a clearly defined process for communicating this to the students that includes a prompt response to any reasonable accommodation requests during the initial contact. Following an accepted offer, accessible housing should be secured as quickly as possible, if requested, and may be verified by a community service organization that assist individuals with disabilities to be fully included in their communities. Extended delays in meeting a request for accessible housing can negatively impact a student’s experience in the program.

**Format of scheduled activities**A syllabus or schedule of the primary activities of the internship can be helpful. These may include:

* Information on conference calls, webinars, and presentations.
* Information on activities whether in groups or individual assignments. If all of the activities are in groups, describe where these activities will occur. This information will assist an individual in deciding whether an accommodation is needed to fully participate.
* Information on meals or snacks. Offer an opportunity to request dietary exceptions to meet the needs of those who have dietary restrictions, are vegetarians, vegans, or have food allergies.

**Facilities**A brief physical description of the different facilities (and their proximity to each other) will help a candidate determine if transportation between facilities may require a request for assistance or accommodation.

**How to request more information and/or assistance/accommodations**The company should provide a link and/or instructions on how to access the Reasonable Accommodations (RA) request form during on-boarding and orientation and ensure there is an expeditious approach to fulfilling such requests. The employer needs to anticipate that the interns may not know exactly what they need, only that they are having a problem that is related to their disability. If you are uncertain how to handle such situations, an excellent resource for employers is the Job Accommodation Network <http://askjan.org/>.

For more information on inclusive internship programs, please visit the [Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy’s](#_Resources) Inclusive Internship Program guide found at: <https://www.dol.gov/odep/pdf/InclusiveInternshipPrograms.pdf>.

## **Inclusive Interview Best Practice**

**Scheduling the Interview**

*To assure consistency, recruiters should be trained to use a uniform method to let applicants know accommodations can be provided upon request and whom to contact for more information.*

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* Schedule interviews at an accessible location, and be aware of the interview location’s accessible features including restrooms and accessible parking. If the workplace is inaccessible, be prepared to conduct the interview at an alternate, accessible location.
* Be familiar with travel directions to the interview location, including the path of travel into the building.
* Notify applicants in advance with the names of all interview participants.
* Be aware that an applicant with a disability may need to arrange for transportation following the interview. Provide the applicant with an estimate of interview duration and expected end time, if requested.

**Greeting the Interviewee**

* Use a normal tone of voice when welcoming the interviewee. Only raise your voice upon request.
* Call the person by his first name only when extending similar familiarity to other interviewees.
* Always introduce yourself and other interview participants. Offer to shake hands, if appropriate.
* Speak directly to the interviewee instead of any companion, personal attendant, or interpreter, when greeting the person for the interview.

**Interviewing**

* Always ask similar questions of all interviewees, regardless of disability.
* Conduct the interview emphasizing abilities, achievements, and interviewee qualities.
* Treat all interviewees with respect.
* Select an interview location with adequate lighting.
* Speak directly to the interviewee instead of any companion, personal attendant, or interpreter throughout the meeting.
* Never ask about the nature or severity of the disability; however, if the candidate self-identifies or if the disability is apparent, you can ask about the candidate’s ability to perform the essential functions of the job with or without an accommodation.
* Do not underestimate what someone with a disability can do.

**Assessing candidates with disabilities**

* If a career-seeker is referred by a known source of talent that serves people with disabilities, and/or the candidate has disclosed or has an apparent disability, the typical screening and selection process may need to be altered to accurately assess their ability to perform the position for which they have applied.
* There are many companies that have developed and leveraged alternate methods to screen and select candidates to better evaluate the candidate’s ability to perform the job well vs. interview well.
* Recruiters may need to work with the Hiring Managers to educate them on the company/ organization’s commitment to consider “non-traditional” candidates who may need extra support for selection.

**Examples of alternate assessment strategies may Include:**

* Allowing more time to complete a test.
* Asking the candidate to demonstrate how the candidate would perform the job.
* Exploratory interviews.
* Answering questions in writing vs. verbally.
* Conducting the interview in a quiet/low distraction environment.
* Simplifying/breaking down questions.
* De-emphasizing skills that are not really essential functions of a specific position, e.g., does “everyone” need excellent communication skills?
* Providing enabling tools/resources such as screen readers, job coaches and interpreters during the interview.

Additionally, to ensure a full diverse pipeline of talent, the interview process and protocol may need adjusted to support people who may behave differently in interviewing but are capable (if not highly competent) of doing the job for which they are being considered. Consider the following different styles for behavioral interview questions:

* STANDARD QUESTION: Tell me about a time when you realized you made a mistake that would eventually impact the rest of your team. How did you handle the situation?
* RESTATED: Have you ever made a mistake or error at work? Did this mistake affect the work result? Did you inform your supervisor or co-workers? Were you able to fix the error? What would you do next time if this ever comes up again?
* STANDARD QUESTION: Tell me about a time you witnessed a peer or supervisor violating a safety procedure. What was the situation and how did you handle it?
* RESTATED: Have you ever seen someone at work doing something you thought was wrong or "against the rules"? Please explain. Did you tell anyone what you saw? What happened because of their wrong action?

It is also important to remember there are disability-related questions **prohibited** by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Examples of **prohibited** questions:

*Interview questions cannot focus on the nature or severity of a person’s disability. Questions should focus on the job duties and the person’s ability to perform the essential functions of the job with or without a reasonable accommodation.*

* Please list any conditions or diseases for which you have been treated in the last five years
* Do you have any physical impairments that prevent you from performing certain kinds of work?
* Are you currently taking any prescription drugs?
* Have you ever filed for Worker's Compensation insurance?

Although an employer may not ask disability related questions prior to making a job offer, certain questions pertaining to any candidate’s medical history and ability to meet health and safety standards may be asked once a conditional job offer has been made and before the employee starts work. Such questions should be consistent with the company’s practice with all new hires, not isolated to the person with a disability.

During the post-offer stage, to explore forms of reasonable accommodations, an employer may ask:

* What accommodations do you think will be necessary?
* What sort of equipment is available that may help us accommodate you?

Remember, questions cannot focus on the nature or severity of a person’s disability. Questions should focus on the job duties and the person’s ability to perform the essential functions of the job with our without a reasonable accommodation.

For additional information on interviewing applicants with disabilities, including the items listed above, you may visit the following online resources:

* Job Application/Interview Stage Dos and Don’ts: <http://askjan.org/ENews/2014/Enews-V12-I2.htm#2>
* Focus on Ability: Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities: <https://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/focus.htm>
* Job Applicants and the Americans with Disabilities Act: <https://www.eeoc.gov/facts/jobapplicant.html>
* Employer Tips on Interviewing Applicants with Disabilities: <http://www.onestops.info/article.php?article_id=2>

## **New Employee Etiquette**

* Provide training, information and orientation on disability-specific issues to your recruiters, hiring managers and others. Such training will improve your staff’s comfort level with people with disabilities as candidates and coworkers. An overall disability awareness initiative is best.

*When it comes to accommodating employees with disabilities, ask them about their preferences.*

* Review physical features of the work environment. If any create potential barriers for new employees with disabilities, make adjustments as necessary.
* Identify assistive technologies available to increase workplace accessibility and productivity.
* Provide alternate formats, e.g., large print, of all necessary work-related documents including benefits information, employee manuals and policies, and professional development materials, as needed.
* Remember to include employees with disabilities in emergency evacuation planning and procedures.

# **DISABILITY SPECIFIC ETIQUETTE**

## **People Who Are Blind, or Have Low Vision**

Many employers cite safety as a reason for not hiring workers who are blind or who have low vision. They forget—or do not know—that people who are blind receive special training that teaches them to operate safely in the world. In fact, safety statistics for workers who are blind do not differ significantly from workers who have sight.

Technological advances have provided people who are blind or have low vision with access to written materials. Not long ago, Braille was the only tool, but now many other options are available.

For those with low vision, aids range from hand held magnifiers that enlarge up to 60 times to closed circuit TV systems. For those who cannot see text with these tools, scanners and other devices convert printed material into spoken language. Most of these devices can be obtained at a reasonable cost through government agencies, or employees who are blind or have low vision may already possess such equipment.

Adapting to blindness is a very personal thing, and people choose the tools that are most comfortable and efficient for them. Some choose to use a guide dog, while others find a cane sufficient. Some are comfortable with technology, while others do not like devices.

**Suggestions for interacting with employees/individuals who are blind or have low vision:**

* Don't make assumptions. When escorting someone who is blind, ask, "Would you like to be guided?" If the answer is "yes," offer your arm. Most people who are blind are comfortable gently holding an arm just above the elbow when being guided. As you maneuver for both of you, describe any obstacles in the course of a normal conversation, e.g., stairs, narrow aisles, low ceiling.
* Don't play with a guide dog or try to get its attention. Doing so distracts the dog from its duty of guiding the person and can be dangerous.
* Don't avoid using phrases like "Do you see what I mean?" People who are blind use these common phrases themselves and are not offended if you use them, too. Feel free to discuss movies, sunsets and other visual aspects of our culture and environment. It is helpful, however, for you to describe these events in detail if they are an integral part of your narrative.
* Consult with your State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, <http://www.rehabnetwork.org/resources/state-vr-directors/>, if you have questions about the employee's commute to work. State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency or Blind Services’ personnel may be available to provide orientation and mobility instruction to assist employees to develop an acceptable and safe commute route.
* Don't marvel at an applicant's ability to perform simple life functions without sight. Doing so indicates that you have serious doubts about that person's potential to perform the duties of the job.
* Be prepared to show the candidate the work site and describe the work to be accomplished. Ask what accommodations, if any, would be required to do the job.
* Try to avoid imagining how you would do the job if you lost your sight. You have had neither motivation nor opportunity to develop these skills, so there’s little value in trying to imagine the obstacles that you would face in such circumstances. This line of thinking may cause you to focus on the person’s disability rather than evaluating their ability, which is the legitimate consideration for a prospective or current employee.

## **People with Physical Disabilities**

While people with physical disabilities have the most representation in the media and are familiar to most of us, these individuals are still widely misunderstood. Consequently, people with physical disabilities continue to be undervalued and underutilized in the workforce.

Although posted parking spaces, ramps into buildings, curb cuts, door openers and accessible bathrooms are prevalent, many subtle but equally important accommodations—for example, raising or lowering a desk or making things easier to reach—are frequently overlooked. These accommodations are considerably less expensive and require more creativity and resourcefulness than financial investment.

People who use wheelchairs have different disabilities and varying abilities. Some can use their arms and hands. Some can get out of their wheelchairs and even walk for short distances. People who use wheelchairs are individuals, not equipment. Don’t lean over someone who uses a wheelchair to shake another person’s hand or ask a wheelchair user to hold coats. Setting your drink on the desktop attached to someone’s wheelchair is a definite no-no. Here are some basic etiquette guideline when interacting with people who use a wheelchair or mobility device:

* Don’t push or touch a person’s wheelchair; it’s part of their personal space. If you help someone down a curb without waiting for instructions, you may accidentally expel them from the chair. You may detach the chair’s parts if you lift it by the handles or the footrest.
* Keep the ramps and wheelchair-accessible doors to your building unlocked and unblocked. Under the ADA, displays should not be in front of entrances, wastebaskets should not be in the middle of aisles, and boxes should not be stored on ramps.
* Be aware of a person’s reach limits. Place as many items as possible within their grasp. And make sure there is a clear path of travel to shelves and display racks.
* When talking to a person using a wheelchair, grab your own chair and sit at their level. If that’s not possible, stand at a slight distance, so that they aren’t to make eye contact with you.
* If the service counter at your place of business is too high for a person using a wheelchair to see over, step around it to provide service. Have a clipboard handy if filling in forms or providing signatures is expected. A business may also want to make sure employees are prepared to angle down or detach a key pad so a person using a wheelchair can sign their electronic signature after making a credit card purchase.
* If your building has different routes through it, be sure that signs direct people to the accessible routes around the facility. People who use canes or crutches also need to know the easiest way to get around, but stairs may be easier for them than a ramp. Ensure that security guards and receptionists can answer questions about the most accessible way around the building and grounds, including the location of elevators.
* People who use canes or crutches need their arms to balance themselves, so never grab them. People who have limited mobility may lean on a door for support as they open it. Pushing the door open from behind or unexpectedly opening the door may cause them to fall. Even pulling out or pushing in a chair may present a problem. Always ask before offering help.
* If you offer a seat to a person who has limited mobility, keep in mind that chairs with arms or with higher seats are easier for some people to use.

Many workers with mobility disabilities don't need any type of accommodation. If they do need some alteration to the work environment, the easiest way to determine the type of accommodation is to ask the employee in a straightforward manner, "Is there anything I can do to make it more comfortable for you to perform your job?"

If the employee does not volunteer anything the first time you ask, ask again when the person appears to feel more comfortable discussing the topic with you. That person is more likely to be forthcoming with accommodation ideas when no longer afraid that the job or future promotion opportunities might be at risk.

Here are some examples of simple, easy-to-implement accommodations:

* Cart on wheels to make transporting materials easier
* Handrail to ease the way along a ramp
* Sit/Stand stool to minimize the need to stand for long periods.

Some mobility disabilities may be accompanied by a speech impediment and/or an awkwardness of movement that can lead to the person being perceived as less capable intellectually or unable to perform tasks that require manual dexterity (which is rarely the case). Avoid pre-judging ability and, as always, offer the opportunity to discuss accommodations.

**Suggestions for working with employees with physical disabilities:**

* Notice if you experience a change in mindset when you walk into the lobby and see that the job candidate has a disability. Your curiosity and possible discomfort are natural, but remember to focus on the candidate's qualifications, and ask if there is anything you should know about how the person will perform the job. Make your questions specific and tied to the job functions.
* Ask whether the person has any suggestions or comments regarding the accessibility of the workspace or the demands of the job.
* Be accommodating. A person who is short statured or has other special physical needs may need a footrest or other alterations in the workspace. Ask if these accommodations would be helpful, and then make them happen.
* Bring work materials close to the workspace to avoid unnecessary traveling and carrying whenever practical. The job may need to be restructured so that a minor duty that is physically difficult, such as lifting heavy boxes, is delegated to another employee. The workload can then be redistributed so that it remains equal for both employees.
* Be flexible. If possible, arrange flex time schedules to accommodate the employee’s needs. Job sharing may also be an effective solution if you have two employees who need to work part time.

If an employee is experiencing weakness of the extremities, look for tools that minimize physical effort. Many kinds of electronic equipment are available with upgrades that require a lighter touch or come in push-button or voice-activated models. Sometimes something as simple as a book holder or a thick handled attachment to a tool will suffice.

Don't be afraid to look for creative, cost effective solutions. If available, Rehabilitation Engineers at your state’s Vocational Rehabilitation Agency may be a great resource when trying to identify low cost innovative solutions. Your state’s Vocational Rehabilitation Agency may also be able to help offset costs associated with accommodations: <http://www.rehabnetwork.org/resources/state-vr-directors/> .

## **People Who Are Deaf or Have a Hearing Loss**

Many (but by no means all) people who are Deaf communicate with sign language and consider themselves to be members of Deaf culture. They refer to themselves as Deaf with a capital “D,” and may be offended by the term “hearing impaired.” Others may not object to the term, but in general it is safest to refer to people who have hearing loss but who communicate in spoken language as “hard of hearing” and to people with profound hearing losses as Deaf or deaf.

The spectrum of hearing loss is broad. Some individuals may experience adult onset of a minor hearing loss that is fully corrected with a hearing aid; others may have been deaf from birth or an early age.

The time of life at which the person's hearing became affected is important because it significantly impacts oral communication skills. A person who experiences significant hearing loss or deafness from an early age will have greater difficulty speaking intelligibly and mastering the nuances of language than someone who learned to speak before the onset of hearing loss. Individuals who have been deaf from birth may experience difficulty learning grammatical English, which could also impact their written language skills. Remember not to make assumptions and treat each person individually.

Technology has made it easier for people with hearing loss to communicate. Telecommunications devices such as video displays, operator-assisted relay services and phone amplifiers have made it possible for people with hearing loss to communicate more effectively. Computer technology and the greater availability of sign language interpreters have also had a positive impact.

When interviewing a person who is deaf or has hearing loss, find out how the individual is most comfortable communicating. People who can read lips may still want to have an interpreter present during the interview process and possibly during the first few days of employment. It takes a while for someone who is lip reading to become accustomed to new speech patterns, and it’s important to avoid misunderstandings during this initial on-boarding process.

Once the employee is hired, coworkers may express interest in learning sign language. A local school or nonprofit organization may be available to provide on-site training in rudimentary sign language skills. For those individuals with hearing loss who also have an “accent” or unusual way of pronouncing words, you’ll find the person’s speech easier to understand with time, just like anyone who has English as a second language.

As in the hearing world, not all people who are deaf are equally good at interacting with others. Isolation is the single greatest problem for employees with hearing loss, so it’s important to make extra efforts to ensure that they are fully integrated into the work environment. While some thought must be given to facilitating communication with employees who have a hearing loss, the task is not difficult enough to justify excluding them from the work culture.

**Suggestions for working with employees who are deaf or have hearing loss:**

* Look directly at the person to whom you are speaking. Avoid gum chewing or other activities that obscure lip reading.
* Speak slowly and clearly, but do not overemphasize or exaggerate words or speak loudly; those actions distort your language and do not help the person understand. In situations where a certain word or phrase is difficult for the person to catch, try to rephrase the thought rather than repeating it in the same words.
* Make sure that you have the person's attention before you begin speaking. Tap the individual's shoulder or wave, and make eye contact before beginning.
* Use facial expressions and hand gestures to facilitate spoken language as much as possible.
* Maintain eye contact with the person who is deaf, even if an interpreter is present. The person who has a hearing loss will look for cues from both you and the interpreter and prefers to be responded to directly. The interpreter is there to facilitate communication and will translate everything you say, including telephone conversations, sidebar conversations and remarks to other employees in the area.
* Make every attempt to have an interpreter available when an employee requests one. If one absolutely cannot be found, have a staff member take notes at group meetings. The person who is deaf can glance at the notes, watch the speakers, and ask questions at the end of the meeting. You may also want to consider using a Video Relay Service. You can dial into one of the many resources for this service your company has contracted with (we recommend having a contract in place), and the operator will type or sign the information being conveyed during a meeting electronically.
* Don't avoid using paper and pencil, texting or emailing; writing is also an effective way to communicate.
* Introduce the worker to others individually, rather than in a group, to make it easier for the person to catch names and other pertinent facts.
* Discuss job expectations, training, and promotional possibilities with a new hire and periodically after that. This kind of information is usually picked up during informal communications on the job and may be missed by someone with a hearing impairment.
* Determine if telephone modifications are necessary; special devices are usually available through your company’s phone provider at no charge.
* Encourage other employees who are interested in learning sign language. Many community colleges offer classes that can be taken by individuals offsite, or may be available for groups of employees on site. Invite the person to participate as an assistant to the sign language teacher. Do not pressure them, but they may be interested in and excited about this opportunity to assist their coworkers.

As always when it comes to working with an individual who has a disability, find out how the employee prefers to communicate. Don’t assume what the person needs—ask!

## **People with Developmental Disabilities**

According to the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, a developmental disability is a severe, chronic disability which:

* is attributable to a mental or physical impairment or a combination of mental and physical impairments;
* is manifested before the person attains age 22;
* is likely to continue indefinitely;
* results in substantial functional limitations in three or more major life activities.

Examples of developmental disabilities include:

* Autism
* Intellectual disability
* Brain injury
* Cerebral palsy
* Down syndrome
* Fetal alcohol syndrome
* Spina Bifida

Developmental disabilities is an umbrella term that includes disabilities that are apparent during childhood. The term encompass a wide range of individuals with an even wider range of abilities. It is recommended that you focus on what the person can do.

**Below are some examples of how to work with employees who have developmental disabilities:**

* Individuals with Asperger’s syndrome, an autism spectrum disorder, are talented in many ways, often have superior intellects, and make excellent employees when the positions are well-matched to their skills and abilities; however, they may not interact typically and may need customized support to be successful. Many of the support strategies used in the workplace to accommodate individuals with Asperger’s syndrome may benefit other employees as they enhance supervision.
* For those with intellectual disabilities, break each job into its basic components. Since it may be difficult for someone who has an intellectual disability to learn quickly or to simultaneously master multiple tasks, provide an opportunity to grasp each individual step before presenting the overall picture. Once the task is mastered, their production speeds will improve, and you can look forward to having good workers who are likely to stay in the position and perform as well, if not better, than their peers. There are many business case examples where companies have benefited from tapping this talented pool of highly motivated employees for a broad range of jobs.
* Use existing resources when additional assistance beyond what you can provide is needed. Outside trainers or “job coaches” may be available through a supported employment program. They can reduce training time, and provide support to employees with disabilities, their supervisors and coworkers.

For ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ on intellectual disabilities, please visit the American Association on Intellectual and Development Disabilities website, <https://aaidd.org/intellectual-disability/definition/faqs-on-intellectual-disability#.WMgZQvnys2w>.

## **People with Learning Disabilities – Also Referred to as Learning & Attention Issues**

A learning disability is a neurological condition that interferes with an individual's ability to store, process, or produce information. Learning disabilities can affect one’s ability to read, write, speak, spell, compute math, reason and also affect an individual's attention, memory, coordination, social skills and emotional maturity.

*Did you know that Albert Einstein couldn’t read until he was nine? Walt Disney, General George Patton, and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller had trouble reading all their lives. Whoopi Goldberg, Sir Richard Branson, Charles Schwab and many others have learning disabilities which haven’t affected their success.*

Having these issues doesn’t mean someone isn’t intelligent. In fact, most adults who have a learning disability have average or above average intelligence. Because learning disabilities cannot be seen, they often go undetected. Recognizing a learning disability is even more difficult because the severity and characteristics vary.

Did you know that Albert Einstein couldn't read until he was nine? Walt Disney, General George Patton, and Vice President Nelson Rockefeller had trouble reading all their lives. Whoopi Goldberg, Sir Richard Branson, Charles Schwab and many others have learning disabilities which haven't affected their success.

More often, however, people with learning disabilities are everyday people such as the local architect who can picture a completed house from a blueprint, or the interior designer next door who can imagine a fully decorated room from swatches of paint and fabric. These people are very talented, but they may have difficulty simply reading the newspaper or taking a telephone message.

Attention disorders, such as [Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder](http://www.ldonline.org/adhdbasics) (ADHD) and learning disabilities often occur at the same time, but the two disorders are not the same.

**Common learning disabilities**

* [Dyslexia](http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/reading) – a language-based disability in which a person has trouble understanding written words. It may also be referred to as reading disability or reading disorder.
* [Dyscalculia](http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/math) – a mathematical disability in which a person has a difficult time solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.
* [Dysgraphia](http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/writing) – a writing disability in which a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space.
* [Auditory and Visual Processing Disorders](http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/processing) – sensory disabilities in which a person has difficulty understanding language despite normal hearing and vision.
* [Nonverbal Learning Disabilities](http://www.ldonline.org/indepth/nonverbal) – a neurological disorder which originates in the right hemisphere of the brain, causing problems with visual-spatial, intuitive, organizational, evaluative and holistic processing functions.

As an employer, you can help employees with learning disabilities succeed by listening carefully as they describe their particular circumstances. Chances are the employee has found some solutions during their schooling and other past experiences.

Strategies for helping workers with learning disabilities succeed are similar to those noted for helping workers with developmental disabilities and traumatic brain injuries. However, remember that there are quite a few important differences. Specifically, a person with a learning disability will not have the same functional limitations as some individuals with a developmental disability or the same types of memory challenges and physical manifestations as those with a brain injury.

For detailed information on assisting an employee with a learning disability to be successful, please go to the Job Accommodation document on this topic: <https://askjan.org/media/downloads/LDA&CSeries.pdf>

Remember that a person with a learning disability is likely to be hesitant to disclose the problem. Very often they have experienced a lifetime of having been told to “try harder” or “pay more attention” or that they are "slow." The emotional scars left by unkind remarks of this kind can be long lasting, and employees with learning disabilities may go to any length to hide their disability.

## **Persons with Substance Abuse/Addiction**

As millions of Americans struggle with alcohol and substance abuse every year, we as a society must confront issues surrounding individuals in recovery who are returning to the workplace. Employers need to offer incentives to combat addictive behaviors and give people an opportunity to practice a healthy lifestyle that includes productive employment.

The Job Accommodation Network offers excellent information on drug addiction, how it relates to the ADA, and accommodating employees with drug addiction, including the following excerpt from <http://askjan.org/media/drugadd.html>:

Is drug addiction a disability under the ADA?

Current illegal users of drugs are not "individuals with disabilities" under the ADA. However, persons addicted to drugs, but who are no longer using drugs illegally and are receiving treatment for drug addiction or who have been rehabilitated successfully, are protected by the ADA from discrimination on the basis of past drug addiction (EEOC, 1992).

* A person who casually used illegal drugs in the past, but did not become addicted is not an individual with a disability based on the past drug use. For a person to be "substantially limited" because of drug use, s/he must be addicted to the drug (EEOC, 1992).
* Individuals who are not illegally using drugs, but who are erroneously perceived as being addicts and as currently using drugs illegally, are protected by the ADA (EEOC, 1992).

And to be clear, the workplace is not an appropriate place for a person who is currently using drugs and/or alcohol. The Americans with Disabilities Act does not prohibit drug testing or corrective action for individuals who are not substance free while at work.

Denial is a major symptom of substance abuse. The key to getting better is admitting the illness and seeking treatment.

There are no "gray areas" for an alcoholic. One drink is too many; one sip is too many. Yet company activities frequently include social drinking and getting together for a drink after work or indulging over lunch as part of the social interactions. A person who is recovering from an addiction may be uncomfortable in these situations.

If you, as the person's manager, observe or are made to know that there is a problem, it’s important for you to make clear that attendance at the event is not mandatory, and be sure to offer non-alcoholic beverages.

Addiction has become a major health problem in our society. Now is the time for us to confront our fears and begin to deal with substance abuse directly. Unfortunately, the problem won't disappear if we ignore it. Terminating addicted employees out of hand, refusing people employment because of a history of substance abuse, or looking the other way when the problem interferes with performance won't help either. No matter where in the company hierarchy the person with an addiction sits, the problem must be confronted with the right kinds of support and understanding.

**Suggestions for working with employees in recovery:**

The suggestions that follow will help you deal with new or existing employees who are recovering from substance abuse. Remember that you are not being asked to lower your standard of work performance or compromise the safety and quality of production in your department; nor are you being asked to be a counselor or a watchdog. You only need to be a manager who cares enough to help the employee fight the disease and maintain sobriety by focusing on important life issues, such as work. The best way to reinforce good work behavior is to state your policy clearly and concisely and follow up consistently.

* Do not pass judgment when you learn that an employee has a problem. Thank the individual for entrusting you with knowledge of this very personal issue and recognize the courage it took to share this potentially incriminating self-disclosure. Be sure to hold the information confidential.
* Once the subject has been opened for discussion, ask if the person is currently getting support through some kind of program and/or whether they would like a referral to your company’s Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
* Agree to maintain an open, honest relationship that allows for frank discussion of this matter in private. It is vital that the employee not fear dismissal at the first sign of trouble. Rather, the employee should feel confident of receiving fair warning if unable to perform the duties of the job for any reason.
* All actions a supervisor takes at the worksite should be performance-based. Your job as a supervisor is to set the levels of expected performance on the job. If an employee fails to meet these standards, take action. For assistance, speak to a Human Resources representative.
* Recognize the enormous effort it takes to remain substance free. It is not necessary to make direct reference to the recovery process, but if you are aware of the situation, a lot can be read between the lines of comments such as, "How's it going?" "Keep up the good work!" or "I'm sorry to hear that, what can I do to help?" You are not responsible for the employee's behavior, but it is to your benefit as well as the company's to keep the lines of communication open and to encourage a focus on work responsibilities.

## **People with Traumatic (or Acquired) Brain Injury**

People with traumatic brain injury have had damage to the brain usually as the result of trauma, such as an accident or stroke. Some of the more obvious signs are awkward gait, slurred speech, uncontrollable twitches, and paralysis. As scientists learn more about the complexities of the brain, efforts to restore brain functions are becoming more successful, and increasingly large numbers of people are surviving their injuries and attempting to return to regular life activities

* Some of the factors that affect people with learning disabilities also apply to people with traumatic brain injury. People with brain injury may have a loss of muscle control or mobility that is not obvious. For example, a person may not be able to sign her name, even though she can move her hand.
* A person with a brain injury may have poor impulse control. The person may make inappropriate comments and may not understand social cues or “get” indications that she has offended someone. In frustration, they may seem overly-demanding. All of these behaviors arise as a result of the injury.
* A person with a brain injury may be unable to follow directions due to poor short-term memory or poor directional orientation. They may ask to be accompanied, or use a guide dog or service animal for orientation, although they do not appear to be mobility impaired. In the workplace, a person with a traumatic brain injury may need time to relearn skills. It’s easy to imagine how frustrating it must be to have to start over again, and a loss of confidence is not uncommon for someone with a traumatic brain injury. The employee returning to work after an illness or injury may initially be very self-conscious—it’s essential that the person be met with patience and encouragement.
* If you are not sure that the person understands you, ask if she would like you to write down, email or text what you are saying.
* The person may have trouble concentrating or organizing her thoughts, especially in an over-stimulating environment, like a crowded movie theater or transportation terminal. Be patient. You might suggest going somewhere with fewer distractions.

Neurological professionals usually tell people who have been out of the workforce during much of the rehabilitative process that they will need to undergo retraining and work their way back to their previous level of employment. While you are not expected to lower expectations for work performance, you should make a point of recognizing the employee’s tremendous effort and progress.

**Suggestions for working with employees who have traumatic brain injury:**

* Consider using the “supported employment model” of reintroducing workers with brain injuries into the workforce. This successful approach involves a specially trained job coach who comes to the job site and assists the employee in re-learning the tasks, with no cost to the employer. The coach may teach the person by demonstrating the specific steps, writing out instructions, and/or helping the person perform several repetitions of the task to reinforce the correct functioning. The coach remains with the employee until the task is mastered and may return to teach new skills or to solve problems.
* This type of training is an invaluable resource, for both employer and the employee. It relieves the employer of the extra training time, and eases the employee’s anxiety about getting up to speed in a reasonable amount of time.

If this type of training is not available, here are some general rules that apply when teaching someone who has memory loss and retention problems:

* Break the task into simple steps, and write the steps down as a reminder.
* Have the employee repeat each step and then the sequence of steps several times while you’re watching to reinforce correct procedures.
* Have a quality assurance check system in place until the person is confident that the skill has been mastered.
* Remember that a person may need to perform a task in a way to which you are not accustomed. As long as the outcome is timely and up to standard, the method should not matter.

## **People with Psychiatric or Mental Illness**

*“One in five Americans lives with mental illness, conditions that affect people during their prime working years and have a tremendous effect on one’s ability to fully participate in life – both at home and in the workplace. Treatment for the most common conditions is effective 80% of the time…”*

“One in five Americans lives with mental illness, conditions that affect people during their prime working years and have a tremendous effect on one’s ability to fully participate in life – both at home and in the workplace. Treatment for the most common conditions is effective 80% of the time yet only 33% of the people who need help will get it, because of the societal stigma, the fear of repercussions at work and the lack of access to quality, affordable treatment. The effect is not only immeasurable human costs – but quantifiable costs to business and the economy.” (Source: *Working Well Toolkit: Leading a Mentally Healthy Business,* [*https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/download-working-well-toolkit-business-leaders-hr-practical-ricci*](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/download-working-well-toolkit-business-leaders-hr-practical-ricci)*)*

Psychiatric or mental health disabilities may include distressing thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that involve targeted treatments such as medication, certain types of behavioral exercises, and/or counseling. People with psychiatric disabilities may at times have difficulty coping with the tasks and interactions of daily life. Their disorder may interfere with their ability to feel, think or relate to others. Most people with psychiatric disabilities are not violent. One of the main obstacles they face is the attitudes that people have about them. Because it is a hidden disability, chances are you will not even realize that the person has a

mental health condition.

At any given time, every person has a mixture of emotional strengths and weaknesses. Two people may experience life events that are on their face equally distressing, but cope with them in different ways. One may choose to ignore a problem, behaving in ways that worry family and friends. The other may choose to seek professional help, recognizing an inability to handle the situation alone.

It’s important to remember that asking for help is a sign of strength. Ironically, the person who seeks help is more likely to suffer from stigma. Those who are most challenged are those who do not get help, in part because they are afraid of the social judgment consequences.

For employment purposes, the technicalities of a diagnosis are rarely useful. Differences exist even among psychiatrists on how to label certain sets of symptoms. Labels such as Bipolar, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Post Traumatic Stress (PTS) do not help you to better understand an employee's individual capabilities or needs.

**Suggestions for working with employees who have a psychiatric or mental illness:**

* Stress can affect the person’s ability to function. Try to keep the pressure of the situation to a minimum.
* Be prepared to reiterate instructions or work policies during the initial days of employment. This reassurance helps the person become acclimated to the work site and will be less necessary with time. The anxiety associated with a new job can be amplified for a person with a mental disability, making it more challenging to go through the on-boarding process.
* Do not make any reference to the employee's history of mental challenges. When and if the time arises that such a reference is appropriate, avoid any misleading and/or degrading terminology.
* Make clear your job and performance expectations. If the employee seems especially anxious, it may be helpful to write down, email or text the time to report to work, quitting time, and the essential job responsibilities.
* Be aware. In many cases, the employee will already be receiving support and assistance from an outside agency or individual; provide reasonable accommodations for them to keep appointments.
* People who have psychiatric disabilities have varying personalities and different ways of coping with their disability. Some may have trouble picking up on social cues; others may be supersensitive. One person may be very high energy, while someone else may appear sluggish. Treat each person as an individual. Ask what will make them most comfortable and respect their needs to the maximum extent possible.
* In a crisis, stay calm and be supportive as you would with anyone. Ask how you can help, and find out if there is a support person who can be sent for. The Mental Health First Aid acronym, ALGEE, will be helpful to you when dealing with such situations. For more information on Mental Health First Aid: <https://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.org/cs/>
  + A: Assess for risk of suicide or harm
  + L: Listen nonjudgmentally
  + G: Give reassurance and information
  + E: Encourage appropriate professional help
  + E: Encourage self-help and other support strategies
* Some company’s security personnel and first responders have received Crisis Intervention Training (CIT) to improve the way they respond and interact with individuals with mental illness who are in crisis. The training helps to deescalate the situation to prevent harm to the person in crisis and the individual who is responding. For more information on CIT: <https://citdac.org/CourseOverview.aspx>

## **People with Non-Apparent Disabilities**

According to the U.S. Census, 75% of disabilities are not apparent. People with non-apparent disabilities may make a request or act in a way that seems strange to you. That request or behavior may be disability-related. For example, you may give seemingly simple verbal directions to someone, but the person asks you to write the information down. He may have a learning disability that makes written communication easier for him. Or a person may ask to sit, rather than stand, in line. This person may be fatigued from a condition such as cancer, or may be feeling the effects of medication. Even though these disabilities are hidden, they are real.

*According to the U.S. Census, 75% of disabilities are not apparent.*

Non-apparent disabilities also include those with depression, chronic illnesses and conditions, such as diabetes, epilepsy, heart disease, cancer, stroke, arthritis, and HIV/AIDS. Misinformation, stereotyping, and a fear of recurrent problems prevent many people with chronic illnesses from gaining employment. Employers say that they fear unpredictable behavior, high absenteeism, and low productivity.

Depression ranks among the top three workplace problems for employee assistance professionals, following only family crisis and stress. Statistics tell us that about one in four people will develop cancer or lung disease. These three conditions alone represent a significant portion of the workforce. Factor in diabetes, epilepsy, hypertension, heart disease, strokes, and other conditions, and it becomes obvious that most people will be affected by chronic illness at some point in their careers. Additionally, research tells us that individuals who are able to maintain meaningful employment have better health outcomes than those who are not given an opportunity to remain employed.

The decision to reveal the existence of a non-apparent disability is a very personal one. Some people fear that such a disclosure will cause them to be treated differently by their supervisor and co-workers. If a person does choose to self-identify, it’s important that this information be kept strictly confidential unless the person gives permission to disclose it.

**Suggestions for working with employees with non-apparent disabilities:**

* Base productivity evaluations on outcomes that are scheduled and planned in advance. Avoid basing evaluations on the number of hours involved; look at adherence to the timeline that was set for completion and the quality of the work performed; manage by objectives vs. “face time.”
* Be prepared to excuse workers who experience periodic, debilitating pain or illness from meetings and events. Allow the person to get the information at a later time via telephone, minutes of the meeting, or a video and/or audio replay.
* Help workers who are susceptible to casually transmitted illnesses avoid working in conditions where contagion is present or the climate is unpredictable. They may need to work at home on occasion.
* Negotiate timelines to avoid excessive pressure and tension whenever possible. When a worker becomes depressed and/or anxious about a personal condition, that person will need to keep stress to a minimum and perhaps seek professional support services.
* Set a flexible work schedule to accommodate the times when the person is seriously ill. Frequent medical appointments may sometimes require an alteration to work schedules, as well. Exchanging or transferring duties or granting a paid and/or unpaid leave of absence may be necessary if the illness becomes debilitating.
* Move or alter the workspace to accommodate physical limitations, if any.
* Honor confidentiality. Fear of discrimination and pity from others when the diagnosis is revealed makes confidentiality critical. The condition should be revealed to others only if the affected employee grants permission. If the condition is obvious, the person may prefer privacy to minimize public contact.

*\* The Disability:IN Inclusion Works team recognizes the United Spinal Association, their publication of the* [*Disability Etiquette, Tips on Interacting with People with Disabilities*](#_Resources) *toolkit, and the* [*Job Accommodation Network’s*](#_Resources) *online Accommodation and Compliance Series for the information cited in the Disability Specific Etiquette section of this guide.*

# **ACCOMMODATION AND THE INTERACTIVE PROCESS**

*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.*

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.

Furthermore, it is important your organization has an interactive process in place to negotiate effective workplace adjustments for people with disabilities throughout the employee life cycle. The most important aspect is to have transparent, actionable policies and processes as well as a robust training on these processes for all involved, but with a particular focus on people managers.

The [Job Accommodation Network’s Workplace Accommodations Toolkit](#_Resources) provides excellent guidance on the interactive process, including the information below:

The interactive process is simply the ongoing conversation between you and the candidate or employee. This productive dialogue needs to accomplish two purposes:

1. Provide you with the information necessary to make the workplace adjustment consistent with your commitment to equal opportunity, and
2. Demonstrate you engaged in a good faith effort to resolve the workplace challenge with the individual.

With you as a resource; a clear job description to work with; and policies, forms and checklists spelling out what needs to happen, the next element needed is a well-communicated and actionable accommodation process that is defensible and consistently implemented. Strong accommodation processes have the following elements:

* A step-by-step process for disclosing the need for and negotiating an accommodation throughout the employee lifecycle including pre-hire, onboarding, stay-at-work, and return-to-work (includes occupational workers' compensation and non-occupational)
* Roles of Key players - Making workplace adjustments is a team effort. A supervisor may be responsible for providing a flexible schedule; facilities may need to widen a doorway; absence management may need to offer additional leave. Everyone understanding and being vested in performing their role on a timely basis ensures effective accommodations.
* Timeframes for various steps of the process are essential. How soon after the disclosure and request for an adjustment is the supervisor required to communicate with the employee? How long before the accommodation is implemented? Commitments to when the person can expect a response are essential towards understanding whether or not your process is effective. That said, it is normal for timeframes to shift due to specific circumstances involved. Stating a timeframe does not mean that it is not changeable, it just means the commitment is revisited and shifted if/as needed.
* Keeping the lines of communication open is critical: Applicants, new hires, and employees need to know that they are valued and that progress is occurring in relation to the accommodation being requested. A good process stipulates how and how often this communication should occur.

Consistency in implementation of the accommodation processes is essential to the success of the program. JAN has developed process steps that are easily adaptable for your program. This includes six distinct steps including:

Step 1: Recognizing an Accommodation Request

Step 2: Gathering information

Step 3: Exploring Accommodation Options

Step 4: Choosing an Accommodation

Step 5: Implementing the Accommodation

Step 6: Monitoring the Accommodation

**Based on the experience of the JAN subject matter experts, the following is a list of typically requested workplace adjustments:**

* Modifying schedules or allowing flex time and/or remote work
* Making the workplace or work station accessible for someone returning to work with a change in mobility or range of motion
* Modifying or creating policies enabling a person to bring their service animal into the workplace
* Assistive technology such as screen readers for someone who is blind
* Purchasing a service for someone who is deaf and requires an interpreter, closed captioning, phone with captioning, and/or computer aided transcriptions
* Restructuring a job for someone on the autism spectrum where a minor portion of the job requires strong communications skills
* Adjusting the work location to one with fewer distractions for individuals with attention, learning, or other conditions that are aggravated by noise and interruptions
* Reassignment to another position for someone whose disability has caused them to be unable to perform the essential functions of their current job.
* Adjusting the supervisory method to enhance productive communication
* Ensuring effective means of communication for individuals with hearing loss or safe means of egress for individuals with mobility impairments during emergency evacuation process.

To view more examples of accommodation situations and solutions, please go to JAN’s Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR). SOAR is designed to let users explore various accommodation options for people with disabilities in work and educational settings. These accommodation ideas are not all-inclusive. If you do not find answers to your questions, please contact JAN directly. The staff of experienced consultants is available to discuss specific accommodation needs in a confidential manner. To use SOAR, go to <http://AskJAN.org/soar/index.htm> and start your SOAR search by clicking on the magnifying glass icon.

# **RESOURCES**

**ADA National Network**: <http://adata.org/audience/employer>

A network of 10 regional centers that offer businesses, government agencies and individuals information, guidance and training on the ADA, including its employment provisions. You may also found information on accessible technology useful from the ADA National Network: <http://adata.org/topic/technology-accessible>

**Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy:** <https://www.dol.gov/odep/>

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is the only non-regulatory federal agency that promotes policies and coordinates with employers and all levels of government to increase workplace success for people with disabilities. They sponsor policy and technical assistance resources, and manage a number of efforts designed to advance disability employment. In addition, ODEP offers many [resources for employers](https://www.dol.gov/odep/topics/Employers.htm) on how to effectively recruit, retain and advance people with disabilities, such as

* Inclusive Internship Programs: A How-to Guide for Employers: this guide is designed for public and private employers of all sizes to learn about the benefits and logistics of facilitating internship programs that attract all young adults, including those with disabilities.
* Building an Inclusive Workforce, A Four-Step Reference Guide to Recruiting, Hiring, & Retaining Employees with Disabilities.

**Job Accommodation Network’s Workplace Accommodation Toolkit,** [**http://*AskJAN.org/toolkit***](http://askjan.org/toolkit)

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN), the leading source of free, expert and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues, has developed an online tool to help U.S. businesses successfully recruit, hire and retain applicants and employees with disabilities. The newest addition to JAN’s suite of products, the Workplace Accommodation Toolkit packages JAN’s deep knowledge into an online platform with the information businesses need to create inclusive workplaces while complying with disability-related employment laws. The Toolkit includes sample accommodation procedures, examples of policies and forms from leading U.S. businesses, training presentations, roleplay videos and best practices for creating an inclusive workplace for people with disabilities. The Toolkit provides inclusive practices at various phases of the employment life cycle for recruiters, hiring managers, and supervisors; human resource professionals; accommodation consultants; and allies of employees with disabilities. Checklists are also available to help keep track of the accommodation process.

Additionally, the following JAN resources and information may be useful:

* Disability Etiquette in the Workplace: <http://askjan.org/topics/disetiq.htm>
* A to Z of Accommodations and Disabilities: <http://askjan.org/links/atoz.htm>
* SOAR (Searchable Online Accommodation Resource): <http://askjan.org/soar/index.htm>
* Multimedia Training Library: <http://askjan.org/training/library.htm>
* Workplace Accommodations: Low Cost, High Impact: <http://askjan.org/media/LowCostHighImpact.doc>
* Employers' Practical Guide to Reasonable Accommodation Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): <http://askjan.org/Erguide/>

**The Employer Assistance and Resource Network** **on Disability Inclusion** (EARN): <http://askearn.org/>

The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion (EARN) is a free resource that helps employers tap the benefits of disability diversity. They educate public and private sector organizations on ways to build inclusive workplace cultures, and empower them to become leaders in the employment and advancement of people with disabilities. It is a service of the Employer T/A Center, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy under a cooperative agreement with The Viscardi Center. The following resources are just a few examples of what EARN provides to employers:

* FAQ on Employing People with Disabilities: <http://askearn.org/docs/brochures/pdf/FAQ_2-ACC.pdf>
* When interviewing a candidate with a disability, some employers find themselves nervous or uncertain about how to act and what they can ask. Included in this link is guidance on navigating the interview process with candidates with disabilities: <http://askearn.org/refdesk/Recruitment/Interviewing>
* Accommodations vary depending upon the nature of the job and the needs of the individual applicant or employee. Not all people with disabilities (or even all people with the same disability) will require the same accommodation or any accommodation: <http://askearn.org/refdesk/Supervision_Management/Accommodations>

**United Spinal Association Free Publications:** <https://www.unitedspinal.org/disability-publications-resources/disability-publications/>

United Spinal Association is dedicated to enhancing the quality of life of all people living with spinal cord injuries and disorders (SCI/D), including veterans, and providing support and information to loved ones, care providers and professionals. It was founded in 1946 by a determined group of paralyzed WWII veterans in New York City who advocated for greater civil rights and independence for themselves and their fellow veterans, And today the United Spinal is the largest non-profit organization dedicated to helping people living with SCI/D. They are committed to providing active-lifestyle information, peer support and advocacy that empower individuals to achieve their highest potential in all facets of life. They offer a number of free publications, including the Disability Etiquette toolkit referenced throughout this guide.

**Disability:IN 3-Minute Animated Video, *Empowering Inclusion: Disability in the Workplace***<https://vimeo.com/189856895>

Disability:IN Inclusion Works has produced a three-minute, animated video, *Empowering Inclusion: Disability in the Workplace*, to make your employees more comfortable with candidates and coworkers with disabilities. To view the Inclusion Works animated video please go to the link above and when prompted, enter password: GFG.

**Disability:IN Corporate Partners Webinar Series,** <https://disabilityin.org/partner-login/>:

The webinars are a membership benefit and exclusive for Disability:IN partners only. There is no registration fee and you are welcome to invite associates at your company to register. The webinars are always on the third Wednesday of the month at 1:00 pm Eastern for 1 hour. Registration must be done separately for each webinar; members will receive an email with registration instructions prior to each webinar. To access this members only website, please email [info@disabilityin.org](mailto:info@disabilityin.org) .