



# Accommodations for Your Workplace



The **Inclusive**  
Workplace

If you're new to inclusive hiring and have questions about accommodations, or if you are an inclusive employer and are looking for additional information about accommodations, this document will support you.

**Disclaimer:** This is not legal advice.

## Before you begin

Does the candidate/employee have a support person who works at an employment agency (often called a job coach)? If so, this person will be able to assist you with understanding and implementing accommodations.

## What's an accommodation?

- An accommodation is a modification or adjustment to the application process, the selection/interview process, the job, or the work environment.
- Accommodations may involve adapting a workplace policy, adjusting the work environment, or applying equipment or technology.
- Accommodations help employers tap into the full potential of their employees.

## Accommodations are common

Accommodations are not just for persons who are on the autism spectrum or who have an intellectual disability. They can be applied to all applicants, candidates, and employees.

Did you know that accommodations are a healthy part of a workplace? Here are some examples:



Allow for changes to an employee's hours so they can leave in time to pick up their child from school.



Provide an ergonomic chair to alleviate an employee's back pain.



Allow an employee to do their job while sitting down instead of standing, or vice versa.

## What's the purpose of an accommodation?



### DURING THE JOB APPLICATION PROCESS

To assist job seekers to access and be considered for employment opportunities.



### DURING THE SELECTION AND INTERVIEW PROCESS

To assist candidates to showcase themselves and their skills.



### IN THE WORKPLACE

To allow employees to meet the requirements of their job and to work to their maximum potential.

## What are the benefits of providing an accommodation?

There are significant benefits. For example:

- Hiring a candidate who is a good match for the job.
- Keeping a valuable employee.
- Having an employee who feels included and valued.
- A reduction in missed days from work.

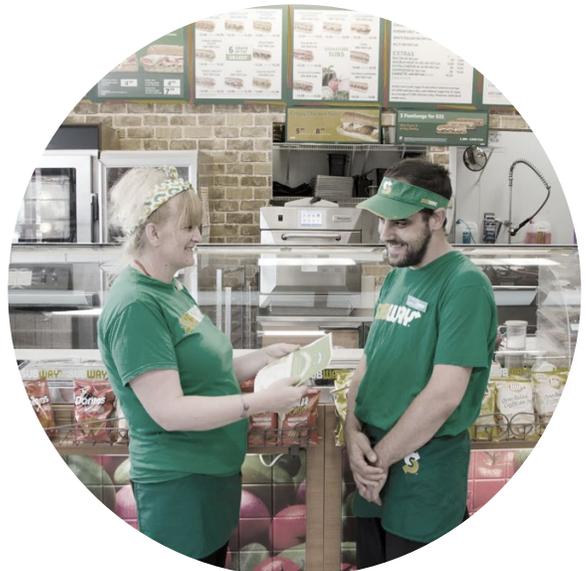


## Who can request an accommodation?

- Accommodations must be requested by:
  - An applicant
  - A candidate
  - An employee
- They can be requested by a support person (job coach) on behalf of and with the permission of an applicant/candidate/employee.

## A note about the term **accommodation**

- There are many adjustments you can make to create a more inclusive workplace. Some adjustments will benefit all staff.
- Not all **adjustments** are formal **accommodations**.
- Accommodations for people on the autism spectrum or with an intellectual disability may look different than the kinds of workplace adjustments we might typically think of when we think about the word “accommodation.”
  - When we think about workplace accommodations, we often first think about adjustments made to the physical environment, such as ramps, automatic doors, or desks to accommodate mobility devices.
- People on the autism spectrum or with an intellectual disability may process information, interact with their environment, communicate, and learn in different ways. The accommodations needed may sometimes be less physical and more relational or communication based (for example, adjustments may involve changes to how information is conveyed, shared, and communicated).
- Many of these adjustments are easy to make, require minimal to no time and resources, and often benefit everyone. For example:
  - Ensuring that work schedules or important project details and expectations are conveyed in clear writing.
  - Having more frequent face-to-face check-ins.
  - Building breaks into long staff meetings.



## Examples of workplace adjustments

Here are some examples of common adjustments that might be made to support candidates and employees on the autism spectrum or with an intellectual disability. Remember, every individual on the autism spectrum or with an intellectual disability is different and may have different support needs on the job. Some employees may require a job coach at work, and others may not require any workplace accommodations. Some modifications to the workplace may require a formal workplace accommodation request, and some may simply involve a small adjustment to existing practices or ways of working.



### The job application

Accept applications in **any format**. For example, if your business uses an online application system, but an applicant submits a paper application, accept it.

Highly structured online applications can mean that response choices to key questions are narrow and restrictive and do not provide the opportunity to capture different experiences or skill sets. Standardized forms are, by design, not created to capture diversity!



### Interview and pre-screening

Offer the candidate **alternatives** to the impromptu pre-screening call. Schedule the pre-screening in advance so the candidate can be prepared when you call. Consider providing the candidate with the questions that will be asked in advance.



### Suitability tests

Consider **alternatives** to administering a suitability test (tests that evaluate personality traits or emotional intelligence). Candidates who are on the autism spectrum or have an intellectual disability may think in concrete or literal terms. Tests like these often require intuitive thinking, requiring candidates to make inferences and understand situational nuances. As such, test results may not give you an accurate picture of the candidate's suitability for the job. Instead, consider inviting the candidate to provide a list of their personal attributes and examples of each.

## Prior to the job interview

- Always ask **all** candidates if they require any accommodation for their interview. If a candidate responds yes, then ask which kind of accommodation is required.
- Consider providing the **list** of interview questions to the candidate before the job interview.
- Prepare **alternative** ways to ask the interview questions in case a candidate asks for clarification.
- **Reduce** the number of interviewers so the candidate can interact with a smaller group of people.
- Allow a **support person** (job coach) to join and support the candidate during the interview.
- For virtual interviews, consider using your smartphone to pre-record and send a **virtual tour** of the workplace to the candidate to introduce them to their interview. For example:
  - A short video of what the exterior of your business looks like.
  - A short video of you entering your building and walking to the reception desk.
  - A short video of you walking from the reception desk to the interview room.



## During the job interview

For **any type** of interview:

- Hold the interview in a **quiet** space, without interruptions, and with soft lighting (avoid flickering lights). If using video, avoid sitting where there is movement in the background.
- Keep small talk to a **minimum** at the beginning of the interview.
- Ask short, direct questions using **plain** language.
- Speak **directly** to the candidate, not to the support person who may also be attending.
- Allow for extra **time** in case the interview runs long.
- Allow the candidate to **pause** before answering your questions, to formulate their answer.
- Allow the candidate to **write** out their responses before answering.

For an **in-person** interview:

- Rather than using a traditional boardroom, consider conducting the interview in an **informal** setting that is free of distractions.
- Instead of a traditional question-and-answer-style interview, consider conducting an interview that allows the candidate to perform some of the core tasks of the job. This will allow them to **demonstrate** their skills and strengths, rather than trying to explain them.



## After the job interview

Provide or allow **assistance** to the candidate in filling out required paperwork/forms.

## Virtual onboarding

Use your smartphone to create short **videos** that provide a virtual tour of the workplace to introduce the new employee to the workplace.

For example:

- A short video of you walking to the lunchroom and what it looks like.
- A short video of you walking to the new employee's workstation and what it looks like.

## On the job

- Many new employees who are on the autism spectrum or have an intellectual disability may be supported by a **job coach**. Welcome and work with the job coach supporting the employee.
- If your business allows, consider offering a **flexible work schedule** so the employee can work when they are most productive.
- Provide an employee with a workstation with **fewer distractions**.



- Common accommodations for sensory sensitivities may include:
  - Providing the employee with noise-cancelling headphones or noise reduction barriers for their workspace, or moving their workstation to a quieter area.
  - Exchanging overhead fluorescent lighting for a desk lamp, or moving the employee's workstation to a less bright or differently lit area.
  - If an employee is unable to wear a standard over-the-ears face mask (for example, due to sensitivity, anxiety, or communication purposes) explore alternatives such as face shields.
- When **communicating** with employees (for example, safety protocols or job tasks):
  - Use simple, **plain** language to help with understanding.
  - Use **visuals and pictures** that help convey the message.
- Considerations during COVID:
  - Provide **clear** face coverings (masks) so employees can see each others' mouths as they speak.
  - Provide lanyards that include a **picture** of the employee's face. This helps other employees know what the employee looks like without a face covering (mask).
- When holding virtual meetings, consider the following approaches to support employees to prepare for and engage with the meeting content:
  - Send the agenda and meeting expectations **before** the meeting.
  - Keep meetings **short** or build **breaks** into longer meetings.
  - **Record** virtual meetings and make the recording available for attendees.
- To support a healthy and safe work environment, consider the following:
  - Offer a **flexible** work environment (for example, work from home instead of in the workplace, or work in the workplace instead of at home, if the role allows it and if it can be safely done).
  - Create opportunities for **peer-to-peer support** through employee mentoring between new staff and long-term employees.



## Accommodations benefit many people

- The sample list of adjustments and accommodations above may benefit people who are on the autism spectrum or have an intellectual disability.
- However, take a second look. Can you think of other candidates or employees who would also benefit from such adjustments?
- Many of these adjustments and accommodations would benefit others too. For example:
  - A candidate who experiences anxiety
  - An employee who speaks English as a second language
  - An employee with young children
  - An employee who experiences migraines
- There is a **universal** aspect to accommodations. The solutions you implement can be beneficial for many or even all employees—not just those who are on the autism spectrum or who have an intellectual disability. Accommodations or adjustments can make your workplace accessible and safe for **everyone**.



## Inclusive hiring and workplace tips

You don't have to wait to receive an accommodation request to begin to make your workplace more accessible. There are changes you can easily make **now** to create a more inclusive workplace.

### For your candidates



Develop a formal workplace policy that addresses inclusion. This policy can be included on job postings and shared with candidates when setting up an interview.

All job applicants should know accommodations are available to them, who to contact to make a request, and how to request accommodations.

Where possible, requests for accommodations during the **selection** process should be separate and distinct from requests for **on-the-job** supports. (In other words, if an employee requires on-the-job accommodations, they would make a separate request.)

### For your employees



You can inform **all** employees that accommodations are available to them at the organization. Let them know how to request an accommodation (who to contact, such as an employee in Human Resources).

If you notice an existing employee who may benefit from an accommodation, discuss the availability of accommodations with them.

### For your workplace



Consider providing **workplace inclusion training** to your staff.

Learning and understanding the value of inclusion in the workplace and typical workplace accommodations can be one of the most impactful accommodations of all.

## Considerations

Questions or concerns you may have	Good news for you
Is the cost reasonable?	Most accommodations require <b>little or no expense</b> .
Does the business have the size, time, and resources available?	Most accommodations take <b>little time or effort</b> to implement.
What impact will it have on the business?	Most accommodations have <b>no negative impact</b> on the business. In fact, most businesses benefit from implementing accommodations, as these adjustments to the workplace help businesses tap into the full potential of their employees.
Does it lower the performance standards of the job? Does it remove an essential function or task of the job?	Accommodations should <b>not</b> lower the performance standards or essential tasks of the job. Accommodations allow the employee to complete the essential functions or tasks of the job. How they complete the tasks may simply look different.



## Implementing accommodations

### Make reasonable accommodations



- If an accommodation request is reasonable, implement it.
- Implementing an accommodation shouldn't cause undue hardship for the business.
- Provide the requested accommodations in good faith.

### Work with your employee



- Work together with the employee (and their job coach, if available) to determine and implement appropriate accommodations. Employees know their needs best and can provide useful solutions.

### Be creative



- As an employer, you have room for creativity when providing accommodations. Your solutions can be innovative. For example, instead of receiving a progress report over email, allow an employee to share their weekly progress update in a short, recorded video.

### Be timely



- Implement the accommodation in a timely manner. Provide the employee with specific details as to when the accommodation will be implemented and how. If you don't know yet, be transparent and let them know when you will follow up.

### Keep a record



- Small businesses aren't required to document an accommodation process. However, it is good practice. It is recommended that businesses keep records of accommodation requests and actions taken.
- A written accommodation plan preserves the information even if there are changes in personnel (for example, if the employee's manager leaves the business).



### Maintain privacy

- Accommodations are to be kept private and confidential. Information should only be shared as needed to implement the accommodation and with the permission of the employee.



### Get feedback

- After implementing an accommodation, get feedback from the employee. Is it helpful? Is it making a difference? Is it achieving the goal? You want to implement effective accommodations. Effective accommodations help employers retain talented employees!



### Ongoing check-ins

- Plan and schedule how often you'll review the accommodation plan with the employee.
- Have regular check-ins (for example, every six months) with the employee (and their job coach) to monitor the accommodation. Is it continuing to meet the employee's needs? Does the employee have feedback or suggestions?

## Next steps

- Do you have questions about accommodations? Consider reaching out to the candidate/employee's job coach, or employment agency, or [Ready Willing & Able](#).
- Consider providing workplace inclusion training to your staff.
- Consider reaching out to [Ready Willing & Able](#) to discuss training that is available for you and your employees.
- What actions can you take to make your hiring process and workplace more inclusive?
- As a business, consider creating an [accommodation plan template](#) to be used for recording accommodation requests and implementation.

## Links



[Understand the Role of a Job Coach](#)



[Inclusive Communication Strategies](#)

## Sources

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