



Medical Advisory Service

Occupational and Environmental Medicine, Public Health, and Toxicology Consultants

A Checklist of Options for Accommodation

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The modern concept of disability is that of a mismatch between individual capacity and the environment in which that person functions. The old way of thinking treated disability as a characteristic, a mark or burden of the individual.

The new way of thinking treats disability simply as the reverse of the capacity: it reflects limitations on what a person can do and has no significance unless the disabled person is in an environment that requires some action they cannot do. The new way of thinking therefore concentrates on practical measures to change the environment so that obstacles are reduced and limitations do not matter. The old way of thinking treated the job and the workplace as unyielding and impervious to change, requiring the worker either to adapt to the workplace or change jobs. This usually meant changing to a lower-paying job and sometimes one that was out of sight, sheltered, and marginal to society.

In the new way of thinking, capacity is what matters and how that person can achieve their personal goals and assume their role in society and within their family. The new way of thinking recognizes that everyone passes through one or more stages of disability at some time during their life, if only during infancy and childhood, and for that time requires help to achieve their full potential. The old way of thinking treated the person as a special case, as if the disabled person had a disease.

The Americans with Disabilities Act, the Disabilities Act (UK) and the Canadian Charter of Human Rights have adopted the new way of thinking. The employer may need help to be responsive to the provisions of these laws and to manage particular issues involving “disabled” employees (that is, workers with capacity limited in some specific way). The following Table is a checklist is intended to help the manager or supervisor identify reasonable options.

Table: Checklist of Options for Accommodation

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> An assistive device, such as large screen for the vision impaired, an amplification system for the hearing impaired, or ergonomic tools that are easier to grasp and use (particularly scissors)<input type="checkbox"/> Companion animals, specifically guide dogs for the blind, which would be considered an accommodation rather than a policy against pets at work because guide dogs are not pets<input type="checkbox"/> Workplace modification, such as a wheelchair-friendly workstation or enhanced illumination<input type="checkbox"/> Rebalancing job assignments so that the person with the disability can do those parts within their capacity and other workers can do the rest<input type="checkbox"/> Restructuring work organization so that medical and rehabilitation appointments can be kept without disruption, responsive leave policies, and modified work hours, if needed<input type="checkbox"/> Modification of equipment, such as ergonomic adaptations and interventions for persons who do not have full use of their hands<input type="checkbox"/> Removing barriers to access to the workplace, such as reserved parking spaces for the disabled or use of a different entry point<input type="checkbox"/> Removing barriers to access at the workplace, such as placing files in lower drawers for easier access to persons in wheelchairs, providing Braille labels beside elevator buttons, or ensuring that there are no barriers to washrooms |
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Table: Checklist of Options for Accommodation (con't)

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Adjustment of examinations and evaluations, as for a worker with a cognitive impairment may require more time to finish a test (but a timed test might be acceptable if it addresses a specific work requirement, for example, the to read and act on messages rapidly, and is given to all applicants)<input type="checkbox"/> Training materials and policies for coworkers, to help them understand the implications of disability<input type="checkbox"/> A dedicated assistant, such as an amanuensis to take dictation for a worker who cannot physically write, a sign-language interpreter for a worker who is deaf, a page-turner for someone who cannot use their hands, a travel assistant for required business trips, or a reader for a worker who is blind<input type="checkbox"/> Communications devices, such as Text Telephone (TTY) and Braille devices<input type="checkbox"/> "Reassignment to a vacant position" is an accommodation mentioned in ADA that would apply to current employees |
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