

# DCIF Project – Accommodation Tool 2: Exploring Types of Accommodations

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## Tags

### Who is this for?

High priority:

- Direct managers
- Corporate cross-departmental managers

Practical information:

- HR Professionals

### What guidance does it provide?

- Understanding different types of accommodations that can be provided to workers with disabilities
- Practical suggestions for how to implement accommodations for specific needs

### Take home points

- There are 3 common categorizations for types of accommodation: flexible work arrangements, workstation modifications, and human and/or technical support
- If your worker requests an accommodation, you should engage in a collaborative process to co-determine what accommodation solutions may be implemented to support them in the workplace:
  - Assess stressors related to psychological, emotional, cognitive, and physical issues at work
  - Develop strategies that may best support worker success
  - Help maintain a safe and productive workplace
- Employers and workers may start by reviewing the worker's essential job responsibilities to both determine expectations and identify what barriers they may face when performing core tasks

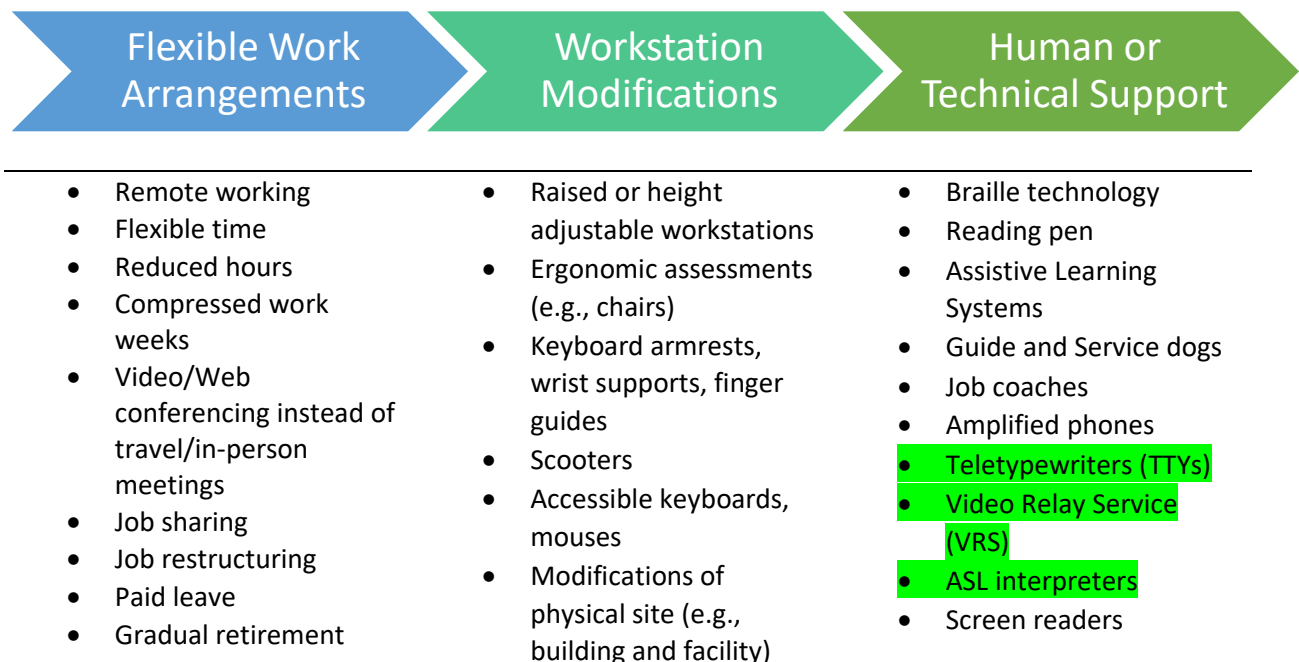
## Types of Accommodations

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*Nearly 40% of Canadian employees with disabilities aged 25-64 require workplace accommodations. Yet, accommodations are increasingly common among all employees irrespective of ability<sup>1</sup>.*

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While there are many different types of workplace accommodations that can be implemented to support the success and productivity of worker, they need not be daunting. The most common workplace accommodations can be classified into three groups:<sup>2</sup>



### Intersectionality Vignette

#### Leighton Roberts

Hi there. I'm Leighton and I'm going to talk about some of the accommodations that I have received as an employee.

I was originally introduced to my current organization back in 2019. Some of the barriers I had with finding employment were connected to having OCD, ADD, and some physical restraints and injuries that I had experienced over the years. The organization was nothing but kind, caring, and inclusive, and now I have a job I enjoy.

One of my accommodations is ergonomic mouse that helps me deal with my repetitive strain injury that I received about two years ago. Before, I couldn't work for many hours due to the pain in my wrist. So now I can work a full day without any problem. Same goes for having an ergonomic chair. I've been doing well emotionally, mental health wise, and general health wise as well, because of the organization's workplace supports and accommodations. I was able to take sick time off that was paid during a surgery I had. This meant I didn't have to worry about financial troubles while I was recovering, which was amazing.

So, to me, that's what inclusion really means – finding ways to support staff to do their best work. If there's one thing, I could tell people who are maybe new and worried about asking for accommodations in the workplace, it's to know your rights. You do have the right to work in a place that is comfortable and accommodating to you. If someone pushes back, know your rights, and implement them.

### Co-Determining Accommodation Solutions

If your worker requests an accommodation, you should engage in a collaborative process to co-determine what accommodation solutions may be implemented to support them in the workplace. Employers and workers may start by reviewing the worker's essential job responsibilities to both determine expectations and identify what barriers they may face when performing core tasks

Here are some important considerations:<sup>3</sup>

- ✓ Assess stressors related to psychological, emotional, cognitive, and physical issues at work
- ✓ Develop strategies that may best support worker success
- ✓ Help maintain a safe and productive workplace

If it is determined that the current description does not reflect the actual work, consider revising. Below are practical suggestions from Canada Life's Workplace Strategies for Mental Health website. Keep them in mind when determining types of accommodation that best support your worker:

	<b>Job Expectations<sup>3</sup></b>	<b>Practical Suggestions<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>Cognitive Demands</b>	Adaptability and flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider options related to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Hours of work</li> <li>○ The need for work travel</li> <li>○ Meeting deadlines</li> <li>○ Time of day that tasks are completed.</li> <li>○ Other routines or procedures</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	Attention to detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide training to improve quality of work</li> <li>• Reduce or eliminate distractions</li> <li>• Break large tasks into a series of smaller tasks</li> <li>• Provide more time to attend to work requiring attention to detail</li> <li>• Permit short breaks when concentration declines</li> <li>• Give instructions and assignments in writing</li> <li>• Create a checklist that includes each step of a task to be completed as quality control</li> <li>• Exchange tasks with other employees that maintain the balance of work while capitalizing on the strengths of each employee</li> </ul>
	Decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and address the potential impact of errors in judgment</li> <li>• Create checklists to guide judgment in routine tasks</li> <li>• Create a list of areas where decisions should be discussed</li> <li>• Address areas where judgments must be discussed</li> </ul>
	Problem solving and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a decision-tree template to assist with problem solving or analytical thinking</li> <li>• Create a list of situations that would indicate the need to reach out for assistance in analysis or problem solving</li> <li>• Have regular check-ins during the decision-making process</li> </ul>
	Recall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the use of recording devices to provide playback of information discussed at meetings if appropriate</li> <li>• Allow the use of digital organizers or handwritten notes as ongoing to-do lists, marking off items as they are completed</li> <li>• Provide instructions and assignments in writing to help provide clarity and improved ability for recall</li> <li>• Set up regular reminders of upcoming milestones, appointments or deadlines</li> <li>• Arrange regular supervisor and worker meetings to set priorities and keep work on track</li> <li>• Provide retraining and/or reorientation</li> <li>• Use individualized training approaches, such as increased learning time, reading materials in advance, or applied learning to help improve comprehension and retention</li> </ul>
	Time pressures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review assigned tasks to establish a reasonable amount of time required for completion and ensure that all parts of the process are included</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a process that establishes and monitors daily or weekly timelines for the completion of assigned tasks</li> <li>• Establish regular times to check in with the worker throughout more complex tasks or projects</li> <li>• Clearly define priorities</li> <li>• Where possible, avoid assigning tight deadlines or provide sufficient resources to effectively meet that deadline, especially in the early stages of an accommodation or return to work</li> <li>• Facilitate clear communication and collaboration to ensure timely completion of each team member's responsibility within a project</li> <li>• Discuss the best way to give feedback during times of pressure</li> </ul>
<b>Working with Others</b>	Degree of self-supervision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create detailed task lists and timelines</li> <li>• Have frequent check-in opportunities</li> <li>• Discuss priorities and direction for dealing with conflicting priorities</li> <li>• Organize outcome measurements by task, day, week, and month</li> <li>• Have a list of alternate supervisors or co-workers to contact when necessary</li> </ul>
	Degree of supervisor responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A list of specific behaviours that can assist in effective supervision of others</li> <li>• Discuss supervisory behaviours that may be interpreted by others as problematic</li> <li>• Develop strategies to deal with stress in the workplace</li> <li>• Have a mentor to call about challenging situations</li> <li>• Identify particularly challenging work relationships and brainstorm alternative responses to these individuals</li> <li>• Reduce or remove supervisory responsibilities</li> </ul>
	Exposure to confrontational situations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review policies and practices related to confrontational situations in the workplace with the worker</li> <li>• Educate workers on potential confrontational situations and recommended responses</li> <li>• Provide simulation training on confrontational situations to which workers are exposed</li> <li>• Provide or increase support for the worker in situations that are potentially confrontational</li> <li>• Exchange tasks with other employees that maintain the balance of work while capitalizing on the strengths of each employee</li> <li>• Allow more frequent breaks</li> </ul>
	Exposure to distressed people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help develop emotional intelligence and resilience</li> <li>• Consider how to provide or increase support in situations that may be stressful</li> <li>• Provide regular and genuine praise and positive reinforcement</li> <li>• Allow reasonable time off to attend counselling sessions or medical appointments</li> <li>• Provide supportive employment services or a work coach</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allow more frequent breaks</li> <li>• Provide an opportunity to debrief and share strategies for dealing with distressed people</li> </ul>
	Working relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review assigned tasks to establish a reasonable amount of time required for completion and ensure that all parts of the process are included</li> <li>• Develop a process that establishes and monitors daily or weekly timelines for the completion of assigned tasks</li> <li>• Establish regular times to check in with the worker throughout more complex tasks or projects</li> <li>• Clearly define priorities</li> <li>• Where possible, avoid assigning tight deadlines or provide sufficient resources to effectively meet that deadline, especially in the early stages of an accommodation or return to work</li> <li>• Facilitate clear communication and collaboration to ensure timely completion of each team member's responsibility within a project</li> <li>• Discuss the best way to give feedback during times of pressure</li> </ul>
<b>Workplace Conditions</b>	Exposure to distractions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a quieter workspace with fewer distractions</li> <li>• Permit the use of headphones to listen to calming sounds or music</li> <li>• Permit wearing of earplugs to reduce noise distraction</li> <li>• Where possible, allow exposure to natural lighting in the work area</li> <li>• Encourage less clutter in the work area</li> <li>• Ask workers to minimize use of scents if this has been identified as a medical issue</li> <li>• Consider modifications that reduce exposure to specific stimuli</li> <li>• Consider requests for some or all work to be done at home</li> </ul>
	Tolerance for stressful environments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the best way to provide instructions and feedback when in an emotionally stressful situation at work</li> <li>• Address the best way to personally cope in stressful situations at work and how to provide or increase support in situations that are emotionally stressful</li> <li>• Provide genuine praise and positive reinforcement during the work week</li> <li>• Allow for reasonable time off to attend counselling sessions or medical appointments</li> <li>• Allow reasonable phone calls to access necessary emotional support during the workday</li> <li>• Provide supportive employment services or a work coach.</li> <li>• Allow for more frequent breaks</li> <li>• Provide learning opportunities that focus on building resilience, emotional intelligence, civility, and respect</li> </ul>
	Overlapping tasks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Modify workplace processes to focus on one task at a time, if practical</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear, specific, and measurable expectations for all tasks</li> <li>• Create a list of all tasks to review to help establish priorities</li> <li>• Consider opportunities to improve efficiency on specific tasks</li> <li>• Provide training on time management skills</li> <li>• Consider job-sharing arrangements</li> <li>• Remove any non-essential functions of the job</li> <li>• Manage expectations by helping the worker develop a schedule that indicates the amount of time you and the worker feel should be spent on required tasks each week; review this against the actual time spent and adjust for future work as required</li> </ul>
	Degree of isolation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide the opportunity to interact frequently with other team members via online technology</li> <li>• Conduct regular team building activities through online webinars or live meetings</li> <li>• Bring remote team members together in a single location for meetings/events</li> <li>• Provide regular, positive feedback acknowledging the worker's contributions and value</li> <li>• As a perk or bonus, provide memberships that would allow more social interaction</li> <li>• Allow time in the workweek to attend business, volunteer and other functions that provide social interaction</li> </ul>
<b>Physical Demands</b>	Work endurance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide supports to help improve the worker's endurance (e.g., always making water and healthy snacks available; if safe, allowing headphones for music, etc.)</li> <li>• Allow for the exchange of tasks with other employees to maintain the balance of work while capitalizing on the strengths of each employee</li> <li>• Allow the worker to do intense tasks when energy is high and easier tasks when energy is low</li> <li>• Ensure reasonable breaks during and between shifts</li> <li>• If possible, remove the worker from the after-hours/on-call list</li> <li>• When possible, allow for more frequent, shorter breaks to restore energy and focus</li> <li>• Regularly check in with the worker to assess fatigue levels</li> </ul>
	Physical demands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult with an ergonomist to ensure best practices are being used to adjust work areas for physical function or limitations</li> <li>• Provide supports to allow for physical limitations</li> <li>• Allow for short breaks to restore energy and focus</li> <li>• Allow for the exchange of tasks with other employees that maintains balance of work while capitalizing on the physical abilities of each employee</li> </ul>

If you are looking for more information on different types of accommodations or are unsure which supports you can provide based on disability, topic, or limitation, please see the Job Accommodation Network for their A to Z listings on accommodations<sup>4</sup> or visit the Neil Squire Society's resources.<sup>5</sup>

## Accommodation Scenarios

*“Employers report that the vast majority of accommodations are low cost- or no-cost.”<sup>6</sup>*

Here are some examples that show how providing accommodations to your workers leads to shared benefits:

### Scenario 1:<sup>7</sup>

An insurance claims adjuster with cancer has difficulty concentrating, deals with fatigue, and experiences trouble when trying to remember tasks. Their physician says these are related to their chemotherapy and medication, which may sometimes impact their ability to focus.

- **Potential Solution:** The employer reduces auditory and visual distractions by moving the worker’s desk to a quieter area.
- **Reported Benefit:** The claims adjuster can more easily focus on their work and meets or exceeds their goals. The employer benefits from having a more satisfied worker and increased productivity.
- **Estimated Cost:** \$0

### Scenario 2:<sup>7</sup>

A bank branch manager with carpal tunnel syndrome experiences pain when completing quarterly reports.

- **Potential Solution:** The employer purchases an ergonomic keyboard.
- **Reported Benefit:** The branch manager experiences less pain and stress, which improves productivity and morale.
- **Estimated Cost:** \$70

### Scenario 3:<sup>7</sup>

A facilities worker at the corporate office with a back injury has trouble lifting, carrying, and kneeling.

- **Potential Solution:** The employer provides ergonomic and lightweight cleaning equipment.
- **Reported Benefit:** The worker can perform their job without pain.
- **Estimated Cost:** \$200

### Scenario 4:<sup>8</sup>

A financial advisor discloses during onboarding that they are living with Schizophrenia. At this time, the occurrence of symptoms is relatively low, but can increase due to environmental and personal triggers.

- **Potential Solution:** The employer develops strategies with the worker to deal with behavioural and health problems before they arise, including who to call (e.g., family, friend, health professional, etc.) if the worker appears to be unwell. The employer encourages ongoing, open communication with the worker to learn better ways to support.
- **Reported Benefit:** The financial advisor feels acknowledged and trusting of their environment. By having a gameplan, the worker feels prepared for when they may experience barriers at work.
- **Potential Cost:** \$0

To learn more, please view Angela’s experience in working successfully with Schizo-Affective Disorder:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sB8tfEtnEDl>



## References

- <sup>1</sup>Statistics Canada (2019). Canadian Survey on Disability Reports, Workplace accommodations for employees with disabilities in Canada, 2017. *The Government of Canada*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2019001-eng.htm>
- <sup>2</sup>Padkapayeva, K., Posen, A., Yazdani, A., Buettgen, A., Mahood, Q., & Tompa, E. (2017). Workplace accommodations for persons with physical disabilities: evidence synthesis of the peer-reviewed literature. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 39(21), 2134-2147.
- <sup>3</sup>Workplace Strategies For Mental Health (2016). A tool to support employee success. <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/ressources/supporting-employee-success>
- <sup>4</sup>Job Accommodation Network. A to Z of disabilities and accommodations. *Office of Disability Employment Policy*. <https://askjan.org/a-to-z.cfm>
- <sup>5</sup>Neil Squire Society (2022). Working Together. <https://www.neilsquire.ca/individual-programs-services/workingtogether/>
- <sup>6</sup>Hernandez, B., & McDonald, K. (2010). Exploring the Costs and Benefits of Workers with Disabilities. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 76(3).
- <sup>7</sup>Ohio's Workforce Integration Task Force (2019). Hiring Ohioans with disabilities. *The Government of Ohio*. [https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/614639be-eeb2-4ade-b013-2afcb6e6d03e/Hiring+Ohioans+with+Disabilities+-+Toolkit+Employers.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT\\_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18\\_M1HGGLK0N0JO00QO9DDDDM3000-614639be-eeb2-4ade-b013-2afcb6e6d03e-n2](https://ood.ohio.gov/wps/wcm/connect/gov/614639be-eeb2-4ade-b013-2afcb6e6d03e/Hiring+Ohioans+with+Disabilities+-+Toolkit+Employers.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CONVERT_TO=url&CACHEID=ROOTWORKSPACE.Z18_M1HGGLK0N0JO00QO9DDDDM3000-614639be-eeb2-4ade-b013-2afcb6e6d03e-n2)
- <sup>8</sup>Workplace Strategies For Mental Health (2016). Accommodation strategies. <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/accommodation-strategies>
- <sup>9</sup>Workplace Strategies for Mental Health (2017, April 6). *Angela's Experience: Working Successfully with Schizo-Affective Disorder*. Youtube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sB8tfEtnEDI>