

# DCIF Project – Accommodation Tool 5: Sharing Responsibility with All Employees

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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?

- The benefits of creating a shared responsibility amongst all employees
- How to help manage co-workers concerns about workplace change whilst respecting confidentiality

### Take home points

- Shared responsibility facilitates psychological wellbeing and supports performance. Both employers and employees feel responsible; they feel the organization has a collective source where all can invest their energy into to ensure its future success
- **Disclosure** could be ongoing - colleagues will react differently depending on their working relationship with the employee with the disability. Managers need to be aware that disability inclusion and a culture of support spans much further than the first conversation about **disclosure**
- As a manager, it is your responsibility to communicate the importance of privacy and confidentiality of personal information, such as accommodation plans and disability **disclosure**, to all employees

## Addressing Co-worker Concerns with Accommodation

People tend to talk and think about disability **disclosure** as a singular event. But the truth is, even after an initial conversation with their acting manager, a worker with a disability may feel pressured to disclose to other colleagues if they start to notice or ask about their accommodation.

**Disclosure** could be ongoing – colleagues will react differently depending on their working relationship with the worker with the disability. Managers need to be aware that disability inclusion and a culture of support spans much further than the first conversation about **disclosure**. It needs to be continuous, and it needs to come from all employees.

Co-workers' concerns about an employee who is being accommodated can be considered while respecting confidentiality. These are some steps that help build a workplace culture where all employees are treated with civility and respect:

- ✓ Educate all employees on your accommodation process
- ✓ Share the ["How Can I Help Someone in Mental Distress?"](#) resource by the Mental Health Commission of Canada for information about how to respond to a mental health crisis in the workplace<sup>1</sup>
  - Other relevant resources that may be helpful include:
    - Workplace Resources for Mental Health Support<sup>2</sup>
    - Mental Health Crisis Support for Managers<sup>3</sup>
- ✓ Do not require employees to attend all work-related social functions so that those who are uncomfortable can choose to abstain
- ✓ Provide awareness education about mental health and emotional wellness to all workers
- ✓ Deliver conflict response training for leaders, to provide an approach for addressing co-workers' concerns in a way that respects everyone involved
- ✓ Provide general information and education on disabilities and accommodations to all co-workers
- ✓ Teach all staff how to apply **disability confident** principles in the workplace to protect and improve workplace mental health overall

### What Can You Do: Assess the Situation<sup>4</sup>

Colleagues' reactions can significantly impact the success of an accommodation or return to work. While it is important to refrain from sharing personal information about a worker, there are effective ways you can address the concerns that their colleagues may have:

- **What does the colleague know, or think they know about the accommodation process for another employee?** Even with the requirement for confidentiality in the workplace, it is not unusual for others to be at least partially aware of the reason for absence or accommodation of a colleague. As a manager, it is your responsibility to communicate the importance of privacy and confidentiality of personal information, such as accommodation plans and disability **disclosure**, to all employees. If a colleague continues to discuss another person's accommodation in the workplace, speak to the colleague directly and work together towards a solution that protects the right to privacy and confidentiality of the person who has requested an accommodation.
- **What has the colleague experienced that may be impacting their concern?** When a manager is focused on implementing a requested accommodation for a worker, sometimes their colleagues can feel neglected in not being part of the conversation. They may also develop negative attitudes towards another person and their approved accommodations that are rooted in

stereotypes or misconceptions about disability. Take the time to discuss these false assumptions, and provide training. For more information, [please visit Accommodations Tool 7 - Breaking Down The Accommodation Process](#) and ([link to training landing page](#)) that focuses on disability awareness and stigma.

- **What are possible concerns going forward?** Colleagues may experience fear, anxiety, frustration if there is conflict and workload is being impacted. Seek to understand:
  - Investigate the validity of any fears
  - Be clear about what constitutes as inappropriate behaviours
  - Communicate a plan for promptly responding to the concerns
  - Assure all employees that their right to safe workplace will be protected

## The Importance of Sharing Responsibilities in the Workplace

Workplace accommodations are much more than the provision of an ergonomic keyboard, an adjusted schedule, or a shift of on-the-job tasks. Accommodations represents an employer's desire to support their employees and enable them to bring their best selves to the workplace. They enable everyone to work better together.

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*"There is a big emotional toll placed on many people to educate their peers and colleagues about racism, and to lead the anti-racism charge in their organizations. It can be exhausting and stressful. Knowing this, we have been offering support to colleagues to be able to say, "I am not alright." Whether it is reaching out one-to-one, or being able to provide mental health support, or other specific resources and tools to help make their workloads more manageable." – Shelley Sylva, TD Social Impact*

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A culture of accommodation and accountability in the workplace strongly impacts company success. Here's what a sense of shared responsibility might look like:<sup>5</sup>

- Complete transparency about the organization, its policies, and its management
- The expectation that workers can voice their opinion in a respectful manner for any aspect of the organization and its management
- Workers focus on the success of the organization and not its leaders and managers
- Leaders and managers' actions and behaviours will be judged by workers in the context of what is best for the future success of the organization
- Employees are expected to provide ideas about how to make the organization more successful in the future

### Benefits of Shared Responsibility

Unifying workers and shared responsibility support psychological wellbeing and performance across a company. When both employers and workers feel responsible for a common goal, all can invest their efforts into ensuring the organization can realize its goals and mission.

### Intersectionality Vignette

#### **Alana Ng**

I'm Alana, and social anxiety has been a huge part of my life since I was young. As a youth with a

disability who requires an accommodation, it can be very scary because you feel even at your best, you'll be less than or less productive than others. But it's simple not true. I, and so many people I know, just need a little bit of confidence.

I also have a learning disability, which means I have difficulty with reading and with numbers. After counting to a certain number of digits, I just forget. This was one of the biggest workplace troubles for me. If a customer comes in and I need to ask for their phone number, some will say it very quickly. I would get half of it done and would have to ask them to say it again. I apologized for the inconvenience, but I always must ask people to say it slower.

Disability often comes with a lot of shame. You are told you are lazy, not trying enough. But genuinely, you are giving them all you can. When I disclosed and told my manager, "I need help," it was not that I did not want to work here, or I do not want to participate. I just needed a little bit of help to overcome the barriers I face. I really appreciate when someone else recognizes my struggles as valid, because they are. People invalidate your disability all the time, and you start to believe it. But you are valid. There needs to be less stigma around being disabled. It doesn't mean that you are less than other people, everyone just has different strengths.

After I requested accommodations and my employer successfully implemented the adjustments, one of my co-workers also opened up to me and told me they were dyslexic. My manager created a work environment where asking for help is always welcomed. Because of that, employees felt more comfortable identifying the barriers they faced in the workplace and our manager was able to support us.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada (2021, Nov 1). *How Can I Help Someone in Mental Distress?* <https://mentalhealthcommission.ca/resource/how-can-i-help-someone-in-mental-distress/>
- <sup>2</sup> Mental Health Commission of Canada (2020). *Workplace Resources*. Mental Health First Aid Canada. <https://www.mhfa.ca/en/workplace-resources>
- <sup>3</sup> Environment and Climate Change Canada (n.d.). *Mental Health Crisis Support Guide for Managers*. <https://tc-ca.github.io/hww-cnt/incl/MentalHealthCrisisSupportForManagers.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> Workplace Strategies for Mental Health (2022). *Managing Co-worker Reactions to Accommodation*. <https://www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com/resources/managing-co-worker-reactions-to-accommodation>
- <sup>5</sup> Management Advisory Service (2018). *Sharing Responsibility for the Future Success of the Organisation Amongst Everyone*. WellBeing and Performance Agenda. [http://www.mas.org.uk/wellbeing-performance/sharing\\_responsibility.html#:~:text=Sharing%20responsibility%20is%20about%20being,to%20what%20is%20being%20said](http://www.mas.org.uk/wellbeing-performance/sharing_responsibility.html#:~:text=Sharing%20responsibility%20is%20about%20being,to%20what%20is%20being%20said).