

JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

Fact Sheet Series

Job Accommodations for People with Mental Health Impairments

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JAN'S ACCOMMODATION FACT SHEET SERIES

JOB ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH IMPAIRMENTS

According to the National Mental Health Association (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>), a mental health impairment is a disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life's ordinary demands and routines. There are more than 200 classified forms of mental illness. Some of the more common disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, dementia, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorders, seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and anxiety disorders. Symptoms may include changes in mood, personality, personal habits, and/or social withdrawal. An estimated 54 million Americans suffer from some form of mental disorder in a given year.

The following is a quick overview of some of the job accommodations that might be useful for people with mental health impairments. For a more in depth discussion, access JAN's publications at <http://askjan.org/media/atoz.htm>. To discuss an accommodation situation with a consultant, contact JAN directly.

Maintaining Stamina During the Workday:

- Provide flexible scheduling
- Allow longer or more frequent work breaks
- Allow employee to work from home during part of the day, or week
- Provide part time work schedules

Maintaining Concentration:

- Reduce distractions in the work area
- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Allow for use of white noise or environmental sound machines
- Allow the employee to play soothing music using a cassette player and headset
- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Allow for frequent breaks
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals
- Restructure job to include only essential functions

Staying Organized and Meeting Deadlines:

- Make daily TO-DO lists and check items off as they are completed
- Use several calendars to mark meetings and deadlines
- Remind employee of important deadlines
- Use electronic organizers
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals

Dealing with Memory Deficits:

- Allow the employee to tape record meetings
- Provide type written minutes of each meeting
- Provide written instructions
- Allow additional training time
- Provide written checklists

Working Effectively with Supervisors:

- Provide positive praise and reinforcement
- Provide written job instructions
- Develop written work agreements that include the agreed upon accommodations, clear expectations of responsibilities, and the consequences of not meeting performance standards
- Allow for open communication to managers and supervisors
- Establish written long term and short term goals
- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise
- Develop a procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation

Interacting with Coworkers:

- Educate all employees on their right to accommodations
- Provide sensitivity training to coworkers and supervisors
- Do not mandate employees attend work-related social functions
- Encourage employees to move non work-related conversations out of work areas

Handling Stress and Emotions:

- Provide praise and positive reinforcement
- Refer to counseling and employee assistance programs
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow the presence of a support animal
- Allow the employee to take breaks as needed

Maintaining Attendance:

- Provide flexible leave for health problems
- Provide a self-paced work load and flexible hours
- Allow employee to work from home
- Provide part-time work schedule
- Allow employee to make up time

Dealing with Change:

- Recognize that a change in the office environment or of supervisors may be difficult for a person with a mental health impairment
- Maintain open channels of communication between the employee and the new and old supervisor in order to ensure an effective transition
- Provide weekly or monthly meetings with the employee to discuss workplace issues and productions levels

Resources Specifically for People with Mental Illness

Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University

940 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
Direct: (617)353-3549
<http://www.bu.edu/cpr/>

National Depressive/Manic Depressive Association

730 North Franklin, Suite 501
Chicago, IL 60654-7225
Toll Free: (800)826-3632
<http://www.ndmda.org>

National Mental Health Consumer Self-Help Clearinghouse

1211 Chestnut Street, Suite 1207
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Toll Free: (800)553-4539
Direct: 215-751-1810
<http://www.mhselfhelp.org>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)

Colonial Place Three
2107 Wilson Blvd., Suite 300
Arlington, VA 22201-3042
Toll Free: 800-950-NAMI
Direct: 703-524-7600
<http://www.nami.org>

National Mental Health Association

2000 N. Beauregard Street, 6th Floor
Alexandria, VA 22311
Toll Free: (800)969-6642
Direct: (703)684-7722
TTY: (800)433-5959
<http://www.nmha.org>

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

Information Resources and Inquiries Branch
6001 Executive Blvd., Room 8184, MSC 9663
Bethesda, MD 20892-9663
Toll Free: (866)615-6464
Direct: (301)443-4513
TTY: (866)415-8051
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

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