

# Work Information Newsletter

**ERGO-Wise**

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## Accommodation in the Workplace

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There has been a lot of media attention lately around the need to accommodate individuals in the workplace. There is confusion about who needs to be accommodated, and how does one go about accommodating. Furthermore, what is the responsibility of the employer as well as the employee in the accommodation process?

There are many employers who already 'accommodate' workers. Some individuals request a part time schedule, some ask to work from home, while others ask for flex hours to accommodate personal schedules and/or individual circumstances. These modifications to an otherwise 'standard' job are referred to as accommodations.

The types of accommodations that are being legislated by government refer

to workers who have specific disabilities that require accommodations. In these cases, the person can be a productive, useful worker but needs some workplace adaptations in order to work competitively and perform the job effectively. Any modification of the workplace and/or any modification in workplace procedures that makes it possible for a person with special needs to do a job is considered an accommodation.

**Physical disabilities** that may require accommodation include: mobility impairments, visual impairments, hearing impairments as well as a chronic medical condition such as diabetes. Job accommodations usually require an adjustment that is concrete and

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The Work Information Newsletter is developed by Adeena Wisenthal, owner of ERGO-Wise, a centre that specializes in Occupational Therapy for the workplace.

This issue focuses on workplace accommodation issues; in particular, as they relate to mental health disabilities. Adeena offers job accommodation assessments as well as workshops on workplace accommodation.

Adeena is a registered Occupational Therapist with a Masters degree in Counselling. She also holds the designation of Registered Rehabilitation Professional (RRP) and has been working in the field of rehabilitation and mental health for over 15 years.

## People with Disabilities: A Client's Perspective

by D.L.C.

I had the opportunity to work with a group of people with various disabilities. Over the course of several months we would gather to have lunch as a group. Over time the following ideas became common in my thinking:

The person with cerebral palsy would think that the deaf co-worker was OK since he could walk; it was just his hearing that was

causing him problems. The low vision person would think that the person with cerebral palsy was OK since she could see. Just because your legs or hand etc. did not work was OK as long as you could see.

The co-worker that had a cognitive disability would think that the chronic fatigue person was OK since her brain

worked; she just tired easily.

Each person, although disabled, thought that the other disabled people were functional or normal because, "just because X does not work does not mean you are useless". Because the part in you that does work is my disability and therefore you are OK.

What is also reinforced is

that unless you have the same disability and severity there is still some lack of understanding of others' problems, concerns and delays. What is also emphasized is a common understanding that handicaps still affect each group in a profound and significant way, which makes daily life and chores an extra burden.



## Accommodation in the Workplace

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well defined. This can include a ramp for a wheelchair, a special computer for someone with a visual impairment and accessible washrooms for wheelchairs.

**Mental health disabilities** are less understood and require special consideration. They are not always visible and accommodation requires sensitivity and flexibility. A disability may be short or long-term, and can be cyclical. Mental health disabilities include diagnoses such as Manic Depression (Bipolar), Schizophrenia, and Depression. They also include anxiety, stress, learning disability, chronic pain, and chronic fatigue. Mental health disabilities can impair thinking, feeling and behavior and can interfere with a person's capacity to be productive and to enjoy fulfilling relationships.

Mental health may affect a person's ability to perform some duties. A variety of limitations may result and can include the following difficulties:

- Getting to work on time / consistent attendance
- Concentrating on tasks
- Memory
- Managing time & organizing information
- Getting along with others

Types of accommodations for mental health related disabilities include the following:

- Designate a co-worker as a peer support
- Provide individualized training
- Provide instructions in writing as well as verbally
- Use of a job coach
- Permit telephone calls to supportive individuals
- Provide a private work area for individuals who are easily distracted
- Allow people to work at home
- Allow flexible hours for medical appointments

A professional is sometimes called in to assess the *need* for accommodation as well as identify *necessary accommodations*. Ongoing monitoring of the effectiveness of the accommodation should be done by the employer and employee and, may also include the professional. This is a process that requires open communication so that difficulties are discussed and addressed as early as possible. With such communication and openness, the employer retains a trained worker who is more productive and committed.

### Useful Websites

**Canadian Abilities Foundation**  
[www.enablelink.org](http://www.enablelink.org)

**Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work**  
[www.ccrw.org](http://www.ccrw.org)

**Office for Disability Issues, HRDC**  
[www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/bcph-odi](http://www.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/bcph-odi)

**Workplace Equity**  
[info.load-otea.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/workplace\\_equity/home.htm](http://info.load-otea.hrdc-drhc.gc.ca/workplace_equity/home.htm)

**Assistive Devices Industry Office-Industry Canada**  
[strategis.ic.gc.ca/adio](http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/adio)

**Canadian Human Rights Commission**  
[www.chrc-ccdp.ca](http://www.chrc-ccdp.ca)

**Workink and Michael Lynk Research On Duty To Accommodate Case Law**  
[www.workink.com/workink/national/Lynk/Lynk.htm](http://www.workink.com/workink/national/Lynk/Lynk.htm)

*People with disabilities have the right to be provided with equipment, services or devices that will allow them to do their job.*

#### Ontario Human Rights Code (1999)

ERGO-Wise offers Occupational Therapy and Counselling services focusing on various aspects of the workplace environment.

Services range from return-to-work planning, cognitive work hardening programs, and work-related evaluations including ergonomic assessments, functional work assessments and job accommodation assessments.

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*Occupational Therapy for the Workplace*