Supporting Employees with Mental Health Conditions

# Course Objectives and Content

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* Mental health conditions and work
* Myths and misconceptions

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# Section 1: Introduction

## What does this section include?

* Common mental health conditions
* Mental health conditions and work
* Myths and misconceptions

## Basics on Mental Health Conditions

An estimated 18.5% of Americans 18 and older experience a diagnosable mental health disorder in a given year—about 44.7 million people.

## [Next Slide]

Mental health conditions affect a person’s thinking, feeling or mood.

They may affect a person’s ability to relate to others and function each day.

However, each person will have different experiences, even people with the same diagnosis.

## [Next Slide]

Mental health conditions can include:

* Mood Disorders: Depression, Bipolar Depression
* Anxiety Disorders: Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, PTSD
* Personality Disorders: Borderline Personality Disorder
* Thought Disorders: Schizophrenia

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Many people face mental health issues during their prime working years.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI):

* 50% of mental health conditions begin by age 14.
* 75% of mental health conditions develop by age 24.

This increases the likelihood of mental health conditions impacting vocational and educational development.

## Mental Health Conditions and Work

The greatest barrier in the workplace to employees who need treatment for mental health conditions is stigma.

In spite of increased awareness and openness about mental health conditions, social stigma remains a significant barrier to well-being and may deter an employee from seeking help.

## [Next Slide—Video]

Interview with Sondra Nielsen, Director of Facilities, Downtown Emergency Service Center:

“Some of my best hires in the past several years have come from just non-traditional thinking, and meeting with the person. Going into an interview with no expectations, having just a kind of prepared list of questions that I ask the same people so I'm always kind of getting the same answers, and not, if somebody doesn't give me the right answer or they are trying to answer questions that they think are what I want to hear, not letting that put me in a place where I say, ‘Oh I'm not gonna hire that person, they answered the question wrong.’

My advice to employers is you've just got to be open, experience it, and then really look at what makes a good hire, and doing well in an interview doesn't make a good hire. What makes a good hire is if the person's background is suited for the job, if the person has the ability to perform the tasks, and whether the person and you are mutually aligned about working together. If you have non-traditional approaches and you approach everything with a place of positivity and a place of 'what if' and 'can be' and 'may be', you get a lot of different hires. You get a lot of people that have been, like I said, some of the best hires I've ever made.”

## [Next Slide]

Fortunately, many people are able to return to work and other life activities after receiving medical and supportive services.

For most mental health conditions found in the workplace, there are effective treatments including medication, counseling, social support and education.[[1]](#footnote-1)

## [Next Slide]

Effective treatment for mental health conditions will have a net positive impact on employees and your bottom line through:

* Lower total medical costs
* Increased productivity
* Lower Absenteeism

## [Next Slide]

True or False? People with mental health conditions are violent and unpredictable.

False: The vast majority of people with mental health conditions are no more likely to be violent than anyone else. Most people with mental illness are not violent and only 3%–5% of violent acts can be attributed to individuals living with a serious mental illness.

In fact, people with significant mental illnesses are over 10 times more likely to be victims of violent crime than the general population.

## [Next Slide]

True or False? Personality weakness or character flaws cause mental health conditions. People with mental health conditions can snap out of it if they try hard enough.

False: Mental health conditions have nothing to do with being lazy or weak, and many people need help to get better. Many factors contribute to mental health conditions, including:

* Biological factors, such as genes, physical illness, injury, or brain chemistry
* Life experiences, such as trauma or a history of abuse
* Family history of mental health conditions

## [Next Slide]

True or False? People with mental health conditions can get better and many recover completely.

True: Studies show that many people with mental health conditions get better and many recover completely.

Recovery refers to the process in which people are able to live, work, learn, and participate fully in their communities.

There are more treatments, services, and community support systems than ever before, and they work.

## [Next Slide]

True or False? People with mental health needs can tolerate the stress of holding down a job.

True: People with mental health conditions are just as productive as other employees.

Employers who hire people with mental health conditions report good attendance and punctuality as well as motivation, good work, and job tenure on par with or greater than other employees.

## Mental Health Conditions Affect People in Different Ways

Each person is an individual, who experiences their condition in a unique way.

The effects of mental health conditions vary in type and intensity.

## [Next Slide]

Some people experience good control of their symptoms with medication, and/or have effective support networks that assist them in recovering and compensating.

Other people with mental health conditions experience residual symptoms – in other words, symptoms that continue after medical treatment and therapy – and which may cause them to need assistance in working, living independently, and having social relationships.

## [Next Slide]

You may be surprised at the variety of ways mental health conditions can impact people on the job.

One person might require several accommodations; while another may need only time off for regular counseling appointments.

Understanding this will help you thoughtfully support your employees whether they need reasonable accommodations or just an empathetic ear.

We will discuss accommodations in depth in Section 3 of this training.

## [Next Slide—Video]

Interview with Kristi Dore, Employment Specialist, Harborview Medical Center:

“People's symptoms are so different. There's some commonality that you'll see throughout, you know, the diagnoses, but yeah, everybody is, just like our personalities, we're so, each one is so different and unique.”

Interview with Sara Parrett, Program Specialist, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“I have a tendency to work a little bit slower if it's a day where I'm kind of just like, the little voice in my head saying, ‘This is not worth it, it's pointless,’ kind of thing. On those days I tend to, like, just give myself some breathing room, walk around the office, go outside if it's nice out. But luckily, luckily I'm in a position where I can do that and I've been able to kind of implement that into my work.”

## [Next Slide]

The following series of slides will explore five types of issues and their potential effects:

* Cognitive, or thinking—memory, planning, understanding
* Emotional, or feeling—extreme variations in mood
* Social, or interacting—inappropriate or unusual social behavior
* Physical, or moving—pain, balance, speech, fatigue
* Sensory, or perceiving—sensitivity to light and noise, loss of hearing, vision

## [Next Slide]

Cognitive Issues. The employee may:

* Be great at completing the specific tasks but need help with organization and planning;
* Have difficulty processing information, understanding directions, learning job duties and schedules;
* Take action without thinking through the consequences;
* Appear “unmotivated” due to low self-confidence, fear of mistakes, or work inexperience;
* Be easily distracted;
* Need assistance remembering instructions or work assignments.

## [Next Slide]

Emotional issues. The employee may:

* Seem pessimistic or defeatist;
* Seem easily stressed;
* Act nervous, restless, or irritable; or passive and withdrawn at times;
* Appear highly energetic and creative while not actually getting much work done.

## [Next Slide]

Social issues. The employee may:

* Have difficulty establishing or maintaining relationships with others on the job, or avoid social contact;
* Have difficulty understanding other people’s behavior as well as the unwritten “culture” of the workplace;
* Have difficulty accepting criticism;
* Have a self-concept that does not match what others think of them.

## [Next Slide]

Physical issues. The employee may:

* Have low stamina and endurance, or experience fatigue;
* Experience a lot of aches and pains;
* Have hand tremors or poor fine-motor coordination;
* Have a slowed gait and awkward movements;
* Be restless and need frequent movement.

## [Next Slide]

Sensory issues. The employee may:

* Experience hallucinations, such as hearing voices;
* Have visual distortions or difficulty processing environmental cues (for example, a person may have difficulty seeing where a flight of stairs begins and ends);
* Be hyper-sensitive to noises, smells, bright lights.

## End of Section Quiz

Question 1/3

Multiple Choice (Select One): What is the percentage of Americans 18 or older that experience a diagnosable mental health disorder in a given year?

* 5.5%
* 18.5%
* 56.5%

Answer: 18.5%. An estimated 18.5% of Americans 18 and older experience a diagnosable mental health disorder in a given year - about 44.7 million people.

## [Next Slide]

Question 2/3

Multiple Choice (Select One): What is the greatest barrier in the workplace to employees who need treatment for mental health conditions?

* Stigma
* Lack of time
* Work duties

Answer: Stigma. In spite of increased awareness and openness about mental health conditions, social stigma remains a significant barrier to well-being.

## [Next Slide]

Question 3/3

True or False: Mental health conditions affect only a person's mind and emotions, and do not result in physical issues.

Answer: False. Some people with mental health conditions experience physical issues as a result of their condition.

## Section Wrap Up

Many people face mental health issues during their prime working years.

Each person will have different experiences, even people with the same diagnosis.

The greatest barrier in the workplace to employees who need treatment for mental health conditions is stigma.

Understanding the common effects of mental health conditions will help you thoughtfully support your employees whether they need reasonable accommodations or just an empathetic ear.

# Section 2: Disclosure

## What does this section include?

* What is disclosure?
* Encouraging employees to disclose
* How to handle disclosure

## [Next Slide—Video]

Interview with Kristi Dore, Employment Specialist, Harborview Medical Center:

“Somebody might not want to disclose disability if they can do the job, if they don't need any accommodations. Stigma. They might think that if they say they need some sort of accommodations, this person might know more about them than they're willing to disclose.”

Interview with Robert Newcomb, Janitor, Downtown Emergency Service Center:

“Walking into a job and explaining all that what you need to explain, I think they would look at me in a different form than if they wasn't, than if they weren't, how would you say, primed to what I have prior to coming in. I think they might look at me differently. Like, say I went into a job that didn't even know about mental health, and I just went in and said, ‘Hi I'm looking for a job, I hear you have an opening,’ and just went in, and they wouldn't understand why I'm doing things a certain way, or why I would need the time off to go see the psychologist. And I think it would be a lot harder.”

## What is disclosure?

Disclosure is divulging or giving out personal information about a disability.

## [Next Slide]

While individuals with obvious physical disabilities don't have the option of not disclosing their disability status, people with mental health conditions may be able to get through the interviewing and hiring process without anyone knowing that they have a disability.

## [Next Slide]

Disability disclosure can occur during any stage of the employment process, including pre-employment, post-offer, and while employed – whether it be within days, months, or years of initially being hired.

## [Next Slide]

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protects the employee’s right to disclose and ask for accommodations at any time during the hiring process or the tenure of their employment.

This is important for people with mental health conditions, who may not need accommodations when they are hired but may experience increasing symptoms some time later – even months or years later – and need accommodations at that time.

Legal protection under the ADA occurs only when the employer knows about the disability.[[2]](#footnote-2)

## [Next Slide]

It is up to the individual with the disability to determine the right time to disclose, given his or her particular circumstances and comfort level.

Ideally, employees will disclose a disability and request accommodations as soon as they need them, or at least before performance problems become too serious.[[3]](#footnote-3)

## [Next Slide]

Disclosure also allows a worker to involve an employment service provider, a job coach, or other third party to assist in learning skills and developing accommodations.

This type of employment support is generally arranged and paid for by state Vocational Rehabilitation or mental health services.

## Did you know?

Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act requires covered federal contractors and sub-contractors to invite applicants to self-identify as an individual with a disability during the pre-offer and post-offer phases of the application process, and to invite employees to self-identify every five years.[[4]](#footnote-4)

## [Next Slide]

The self-identification of disability form is a voluntary form, so each individual may choose to disclose his or her disability status, or not.

Obviously, covered employers have a vested interest in encouraging employees to disclose so that their employment can help the employer meet their 503 requirements.[[5]](#footnote-5)

## Why would someone not disclose a mental health condition to an employer?

Select your answer:

* Risk of being fired/not hired
* Risk of being viewed and treated differently
* Desire for privacy
* Lack of self-acceptance
* All of the above

## [Next Slide]

Answer: All of the above

* Despite the ADA, employers may find ways to avoid hiring or promoting individuals with known disabilities.
* There are risks that disclosure might backfire, or make the worker more conspicuous. (Co-workers may tease, harass, or otherwise discriminate.)
* The person may find that self-advocacy is difficult.
* Disclosing information about a disability can be sensitive and is not easy to do.
* The person may not see himself or herself as “disabled”—to do so may conflict with his/her beliefs or self-image.

## [Next Slide—Video]

Title: “How can I help an employee who wants to disclose?”

Interview with Kathe Matrone, Director, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“Well I think the first thing is to create a safe place at the worksite, and to maybe have those discussions upfront with employees, so that people feel it's ok to make that disclosure.

When we think about the statistics, one in three people have some kind of mental health condition, it's in our workplaces, it exists. And so I think when we either hire someone knowingly that has a mental health condition, or whether they disclose after they've been hired, that just benefits everybody. People are able to feel safe, they're able to recognize their own health issues, and I think it just increases productivity in the long run.”

Interview with Kristi Dore, Employment Specialist, Harborview Medical Center:

“Employers cannot just ask, ‘Do you have depression?’ But they can ask, ‘Are things going okay with you?’

The way I would go about it if I was an employer, that I see has worked, is if an employer would go to an employee and say, ‘You know Sheila, I noticed that your performance has dropped lately, is there anything going on that we could help you with to keep you at a productive level here on the job?’

So it is a group responsibility, kind of, to keep an eye on each other. Asking the person if they need any kind of help, if they need time off, just kind of reaching out to that person, opening that door so that it's comfortable to maybe disclose to that person. If the person is feeling comfortable, just like anybody, if we're feeling comfortable, we'll maybe state our needs a little bit easier.”

## How can I encourage my employees to voluntarily disclose?

Create a disability-friendly workplace: [[6]](#footnote-6)

* Include disability in the company’s diversity mission statement;
* Extend recruitment efforts to target jobseekers with disabilities;
* Create accessible workplaces, spaces, processes, and opportunities;
* Implement professional development programs for employees with disabilities;
* Conduct disability awareness and diversity training for all employees.

## [Next Slide]

Develop a clear process for requesting and considering reasonable accommodations: [[7]](#footnote-7)

* Communicate this process to supervisors, HR personnel and employees ;
* Consider providing the accommodation policies and procedures on the organization’s intranet and in any online or printed materials related to orientation, onboarding, or employee handbooks.

## [Next Slide]

Foster supportive staff-supervisor relationships: [[8]](#footnote-8)

* Establish and communicate fair systems and procedures;
* Avoid focusing solely on disability or holding employees with disabilities to different standards;
* Increase comfort in discussing disability issues through training in management practices and disability awareness and etiquette.

## When an employee decides to disclose…

It is important for the employee to provide information about:

* The nature of the disability;
* The limitations involved;
* How the disability affects the ability to learn and/or perform the job effectively.

## [Next Slide]

* The employer has a right to know if a disability is involved when an employee asks for accommodations, but the specific diagnosis likely does not need to be disclosed when requesting an accommodation.
* Managers and supervisors often do not need to know the specifics of an employee’s medical impairment to implement accommodations.
* Information about how best to support the employee may be all that is needed to make a schedule change, provide equipment, modify a policy, etc.

## Addressing Questions from Coworkers

There is no requirement to inform coworkers about a disability or need for accommodation. While coworkers may be aware that an employee is receiving accommodations, they are not entitled to know why.

Informing ALL employees about the ADA and the right to request accommodations, and encouraging a workplace culture that is inclusive of workers with disabilities, are ways to ward off unnecessary questions related to coworker accommodations.[[9]](#footnote-9)

## Maintaining Confidentiality

The ADA requires employers to keep all disability-related information confidential and in a file separate from the employee’s personnel file.

Employee medical information should only be shared with those who are considered need-to-know.[[10]](#footnote-10)

## Checking In on Your Employees

Whether or not the employee has disclosed that they have a mental health condition, you may:

* Ask generally about an employee's wellbeing (e.g. How are you doing?);
* Ask an employee who looks tired or ill if they are feeling okay;
* Ask how they are doing following the end of a marriage/relationship or other significant change.

## [Next Slide]

You may:

* Ask, “How can we support you?”
* Share accurate observations and/or concerns about job performance (“I notice that you seem distracted lately.” “Your productivity is down.” “You have been late twice this week.”)

## “I think my employee has a mental health condition that is causing difficulty…”

You should not:

* Make an assumption that all issues are related to the person’s mental health condition.
* Fish for information about the person’s mental health, e.g., “You seem distracted lately. Are you taking your meds?”

## [Next Slide--Video]

Interview with Sondra Nielsen, Director of Facilities, Downtown Emergency Service Center:

“It is a huge personal risk for somebody to tell you something very meaningful to them, and very, something that they may not have told a lot of people, something that they're very uncomfortable telling people, and I think being in a place of non-judgement while you're hearing the information and while you're responding to the information really helps people feel comfortable and relaxed.”

Interview with Sara Parrett, Program Specialist, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“At a previous job I had, I was just talking, you know, to my direct supervisor about it because I needed to have, you know, hours off to go to my counseling appointments. It turned into a talk with one of the head higher-ups, where he kind of implied that depression wasn't a good enough reason to take sick time for it to, just to go see a counselor to talk through your problems.”

Interview with Kristi Dore, Employment Specialist, Harborview Medical Center:

“So if you're not disclosing and you're not upfront with your employer, they're never gonna know. They're not gonna know what sort of things you might need, and each person, disability or not, needs, needs, we're all unique humans, we need different things on the job.

If the performance starts to go down from an employee and the employer doesn't know, there's no way to make that right, unless miraculously this person can just get on the up-and-up again, but normally it will take some support.”

Interview with Sara Parrett, Program Specialist, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“I do take medication for depression and anxiety. Unfortunately I let it lapse for a couple of weeks, I just couldn't get to the doctor to get my prescription renewed, and I had to switch doctors and stuff. I just walked into Susan's office, who's my direct supervisor, and she asked me, "How are you doing today?"

And I just like, broke down, like I just started crying and like, I just couldn't deal with the stress of, you know, what was going on in my head. And so she was amazing about it, like she just kind of took me into her office, calmed me down, and said, ‘Let's get you to your doctor. Make a doctor's appointment, if you can't get in today, we'll take you to the emergency room and see what we can do about medication.’

So it was kind of like, I wasn't planning to disclose it, because I figured out how to work around it, but it kind of just happened that way, so.”

Interview with Kathe Matrone, Director, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“If someone is willing to disclose, then we're able to work around the condition. And sometimes that may mean a change in work hours, it may mean some periods when there is time required to be off, but it's not, it's upfront, we're able to plan for it, and we're able to distribute the workload however it's needed to be.”

Interview with Sara Parrett, Program Specialist, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“I think it's totally within every individual's right to not disclose it if they don't want to, like that's their choice. If they feel like they're in a comfortable environment enough to do that, I think they should, just because you'll find that people are willing to accommodate it. They're understanding.”

## End of Section Quiz

Question 1/3

Multiple Choice (Select One): When can disability disclosure happen?

* Pre-employment
* Post-offer
* While employed
* Any time

Answer: Any time. Disability disclosure can occur during any stage of the employment process, including pre-employment, post-offer, and while employed.

## [Next Slide]

Question 2/3

Multiple Choice (Select One): When does legal protection under the ADA occur?

* It always occurs
* It occurs once the covered employer knows about the disability
* It never occurs

Answer: Legal protection under the ADA occurs only when the covered employer knows about the disability.

## [Next Slide]

Question 3/3

True or False: Managers and supervisors often need to know the specifics of an employee’s medical impairment to implement accommodations.

Answer: False. Managers and supervisors DO NOT need to know the specifics of an employee’s medical impairment to implement accommodations.

## Section Wrap Up

Disclosure is divulging or giving out personal information about a disability.

Disability disclosure can occur during any stage of the employment process, including pre-employment, post-offer, and while employed – whether it be within days, months, or years of initially being hired.

Employers can encourage employees to voluntarily disclose by creating disability-friendly workplaces and fostering supportive staff-supervisor relationships.

# Section 3: Reasonable Accommodations

## What does this section include?

* What is a reasonable accommodation?
* Accommodation examples for different concerns
* How to identify and implement accommodations

## What is a Reasonable Accommodation?

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things usually are done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity.

## [Next Slide]

The ADA requires reasonable accommodations in three aspects of employment:

* To ensure equal opportunity in the application process;
* To enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job; and
* To enable an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.

## [Next Slide—Video]

Interview with Kristi Dore, Employment Specialist, Harborview Medical Center:

“Reasonable accommodations are a way to make it so that everybody can do their job. So this doesn't mean that the employee is going to be less productive. It's meaning we're trying to figure out ways that the person can be, the employee can be, as productive as everybody, to their extent.”

Interview with Sara Parrett, Program Specialist, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“The accommodations that I receive are the ability to work from home if I'm having days where I can't be around people, and also just the ability to use my sick leave to take an hour or two here and there off.”

Interview with Kathe Matrone, Director, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“One individual who requested a period of time off, and that was fairly easy to accommodate. We were able to distribute the workload to other employees, that was not an issue.

I think we had another individual who requested the office space, in terms of something that was a little quieter and not so much traffic in front of it.”

Interview with Robert Newcomb, Janitor, Downtown Emergency Service Center:

“I'm there, yes, sometimes I do, and they're very lenient with that, and they understand that, and the job does, because they know of the disability, so if I say I have to go up to mental health to see the psychiatrist today or do something, they'll go ahead and give you that time off to go ahead and do that. That's why I think it's very important for the employment specialists to have a good relationship with the job so that they can understand that as well, and here they've been, at Downtown Emergency Service Center, they've been really well at letting you do what you need to do to take care of that.”

## Employees with Mental Health Conditions

Some workers with mental health conditions experience few barriers on the job and need no accommodations.

Others do need accommodations in order to be productive and satisfied with their jobs.

## [Next Slide]

Employers are encouraged to explore how to accommodate their employees with mental health conditions by engaging in an open dialogue with them to understand:

* Their workplace challenges;
* The unique ways in which they manage those challenges each and every day.[[11]](#footnote-11)

## [Next Slide]

It is also crucial to keep in mind that an employee who violates the conduct standards at their place of employment is not immune from discipline just because the violation is a direct result of the mental health condition.[[12]](#footnote-12)

## [Next Slide]

Specific accommodations for people with mental health conditions are often not as obvious as those for physical or sensory disabilities.

A sign language interpreter or wheelchair ramp is easily understood in a disability context, while flexible scheduling or extra supervisor support may not be.

TIP: The Job Accommodation Network’s Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR: https://askjan.org/soar/) is a great place for employers or employees to get more ideas for accommodation.

## Accommodation Examples for Different Concerns

Remember: No one accommodation will work for everyone – it depends on the individual employee and the environment they are working in.

In general, it is a good idea to:

* Provide frequent feedback and positive reinforcement;
* Identify short/long term goals;
* Communicate in different ways: email, written, face to face, private;
* Set clear expectations for productivity and conduct.

## [Next Slide]

For Distraction:

* Allow employee to work at home to minimize stimuli;
* Provide a workspace with walls and/or sound barriers, away from constant noise such as machinery;
* Allow employee to use earphones, radio, or “white noise” devices;
* Move non-work related conversations out of work areas.

## [Next Slide]

For Memory:

* Use a watch, computer, or beeper with prompts;
* Use checklists or other reminders (e.g. post it notes, signs);
* Record meetings; provide written minutes/notes;
* Provide an on-site mentor, or allow a job coach to assist.

## [Next Slide]

For Handling Stress and Emotions:

* Allow phone calls at work for information or support;
* Have flexible policies about paid/unpaid leave;
* Allow a support animal in the workplace;
* Do not mandate social function attendance;
* Provide access to Counseling and Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs).

## [Next Slide]

For Physical Support:

* Adjust work schedule to accommodate fatigue/stamina levels;
* Allow employee to eat or drink as needed;
* Use typewriter or PC to compensate for hand tremors;
* Use magnifying devices, large print or lighting to compensate for visual distortions;
* Consider environmental changes such as anti-fatigue matting, full-spectrum lighting, non-glare work surface and/or flooring.

Situations and Possible Solutions  
The following four slides present animated case studies for PTSD, Bipolar Depression, Severe Depression, and Borderline Personality Disorder.[[13]](#footnote-13)

## [Next Slide—Video]

PTSD: “Susan, an administrative assistant, was the victim of a carjacking several years ago. Today, she continues to experience symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. Knowing that she will have to commute after dark, in particular, causes her to become irritable and have difficulty concentrating at work. Susan struggles with meeting deadlines on seemingly simple projects. When co-workers provide feedback, she responds defensively, as if her co-workers are being unreasonable. After a discussion with her employer regarding her ongoing symptoms of PTSD, they have agreed upon the following accommodations for her: the inclusion of a support animal at work and the creation of a more flexible schedule, which allows her to occasionally work from home or commute during daylight on short winter days.”

## [Next Slide—Video]

Bipolar Depression: “Fred is an accountant for a large agency. His duties include researching, writing, and filing reports. His bipolar disorder causes difficulties with concentration and short-term memory during very busy periods that require long hours. His employer has accommodated him by providing a more consistent caseload that does not result in extreme fluctuations of work. In addition, his employer provides a work area that is away from the noise, and allows him to listen to music on the job. He and a supervisor meet briefly once a week to discuss any workload issues.”

## [Next Slide—Video]

Severe Depression: “Jerome is an electrician who experiences severe depression. In order to maintain his license, he attends periodic refresher trainings provided by his employer. But due to his mental health condition, Jerome has difficulty taking notes and paying attention during these sessions. His employer has accommodated him by arranging for what's called a Remote Communication Access Real-Time Translation service, also known as a CART service. The CART service provides Jerome with the transcription of the training session. This allows Jerome to review the information later and complete all of his required training at his own pace.”

## [Next Slide—Video]

Borderline Personality Disorder: “Louise, a hairstylist at a beauty salon, has been in ongoing treatment for borderline personality disorder. At times, Louise becomes very upset and leaves work abruptly. Louise has disclosed her disability to her supervisor. Because of her work schedule, she has been unable to attend therapy and psychiatrist appointments. This results in an exacerbation of her symptoms. As a result, her employer has provided her with a more consistent schedule, allowing her to keep the early part of the day open for her therapy and medical appointments. The employer has also agreed to allow Louise to take two additional unpaid breaks per shift. The accommodations have resulted in Louise getting the treatment she needs so that she can continue to work successfully in her position.”

## How to Identify and Implement a Reasonable Accommodation

With consistent, honest, and ongoing dialogue, you and your employees can explore and identify accommodations that work well for everyone.

The reasonable accommodation process should be considered on a case-by-case basis, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).[[14]](#footnote-14)

## [Next Slide]

All parties involved should document information about the reasonable accommodation process:

* Dates of meetings
* Actions taken
* Adjustments made

This will help maintain an accurate record, and will allow you to track the process.[[15]](#footnote-15)

## [Next Slide]

Here are the five phases of the reasonable accommodation process:[[16]](#footnote-16)

* Obtain preliminary documentation
* Initiate dialogue
* Suggest accommodations
* Implement accommodations
* Communicate and make adjustments

## [Next Slide]

Phase 1: Obtain preliminary documentation

* The employee may be required to provide documentation of a disability from the appropriate medical professional if the need for the accommodation is not obvious.

## [Next Slide]

Phase 2: Initiate dialogue

* Discuss with the employee how their limitations affect work activities and what can be done to enable them to perform .the essential functions of the position.
* The employer must agree to maintain confidentiality when discussing accommodations.
* The employee may disclose information about their accommodations to people outside the “need to know” group, if they so choose.

## [Next Slide]

Phase 3: Suggest accommodations

* Both the employee and the employer may suggest appropriate accommodations.
* The employer knows detailed aspects of the workplace, the range of accommodation options, and what accommodations might be best in the work environment.
* The employee knows what accommodations work best because they know their limitations.
* However, the employer may offer alternative accommodation ideas, and he or she ultimately makes the decision about what is “reasonable.”

## [Next Slide]

Phase 4: Implement accommodations

* Agree what accommodations will take place.
* Agree when the accommodations will begin.
* Agree on what the accommodation will achieve. (How will the accommodation allow the employee to be more successful at work?)
* Implement the agreed upon reasonable accommodation.

## [Next Slide]

Phase 5: Communicate and make adjustments

* The interactive accommodation process should be ongoing.
* The employer and the employee should continue communicating to ensure that the accommodation is working, and make adjustments accordingly.

## [Next Slide—Video]

Interview with Sondra Nielsen, Director of Facilities, Downtown Emergency Service Center:

“There's equity and there's equality. And it's not special treatment, because everybody is different. So we can't hold everybody and then assume that that's the baseline for every single person. And what's interesting is, what could be perceived as special accommodation for one and not another, doesn't always equate in job performance. So what's interesting is, the more flexible you are, and the more accommodation you're able to make, and the more you're able to allow people to be successful in their environment, the better work performance you get. I find that they're less of a performance issue because of the fact that you're in this dynamic where you're always communicating, you're making changes as needed, you're making sure that they're getting what they need to complete their tasks, and then you're getting the tasks completed in a way that's just highly beneficial and efficient.”

Interview with Sara Parrett, Program Specialist, Center for Continuing Education in Rehabilitation:

“I think it allows for a significantly less amount of stress in the office 'cause everybody has their own thing that they're dealing with. So being able to provide accommodation for that, I think it just makes for a happier office.”

## End of Section Quiz

Question 1/3

Multiple Choice (Select One): The ADA requires reasonable accommodations in several aspects of employment…

* To ensure equal opportunity in the application process
* To enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job
* To enable an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment
* All of the above

Answer: All of the above. The ADA requires reasonable accommodations in several aspects of employment to ensure equal opportunity in the application process; to enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job; and to enable an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.

## [Next Slide]

Question 2/3

True or False: An on-going interactive dialogue is the best way to explore and implement reasonable accommodations.

Answer: True. Employers are encouraged to explore how to accommodate their employees with mental health conditions by engaging in an open dialogue with them.

## [Next Slide]

Question 3/3

Multiple Choice (Select One): What is a common accommodation for an employee that has memory difficulties?

* Adjust work schedule to accommodate fatigue/stamina levels
* Record meetings; provide written minutes/notes
* Do not mandate social function attendance

Answer: Record meetings; provide written minutes/notes. A common accommodation for an employee that has memory difficulties is recording meetings and providing minutes/notes.

## Section Wrap Up

A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job, the work environment, or the way things usually are done that enables a qualified individual with a disability to enjoy an equal employment opportunity.

No one accommodation will work for everyone – it depends on the individual employee and the environment they are working in.

With consistent, honest, and ongoing dialogue, you and your employees can explore and identify accommodations that work well for everyone.

# Additional Resources

## Additional Resources for Employees with Mental Health Conditions

Job Accommodation Network—Office of Disability Employment Policy of the U.S. Department of Labor  
<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/media/Psychiatric.html>

Great Minds at Work: Making the business case for hiring people with treated mental or behavioral health issues  
<https://greatmindsatwork.org/>

Center for Workplace Mental Health  
<http://workplacementalhealth.org/>

Anxiety Disorders Association of America  
<http://www.adaa.org>

Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation, Boston University  
<http://www.bu.edu/sarpsych/>

Knowledge Exchange Network (KEN)  
<http://www.mentalhealth.org>

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)  
<http://www.nami.org>

Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance  
<http://www.ndmda.org>

Mental Health America  
<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net>

National Mental Health Consumer Self‑Help Clearinghouse  
<http://www.mhselfhelp.org>

International OCD Foundation   
<http://iocdf.org>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)  
<http://www.eeoc.gov>

National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitative Research (NIDILRR)  
<https://www.acl.gov/node/606>

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

## Thank you for completing this course on Supporting Employees with Mental Health Conditions.

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1. https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Effective Accommodation Practices (EAP) Series: Disability Disclosure and Employment. Job Accommodation Network, Morgantown WV [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Effective Accommodation Practices (EAP) Series: Disability Disclosure and Employment. Job Accommodation Network, Morgantown WV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/faqs/503\_faq.htm#Q10 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.dol.gov/ofccp/regs/compliance/faqs/503\_faq.htm#Q10 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.askearn.org/topics/federal-contractor-requirements/encouraging-self-identification/; Disability Disclosure and Self-identification: Benefits, barriers and implementable solutions; von Schrader, Bruyere, and Murray, October 10, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. http://www.askearn.org/topics/federal-contractor-requirements/encouraging-self-identification/; Disability Disclosure and Self-identification: Benefits, barriers and implementable solutions; von Schrader, Bruyere, and Murray, October 10, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://www.askearn.org/topics/federal-contractor-requirements/encouraging-self-identification/; Disability Disclosure and Self-identification: Benefits, barriers and implementable solutions; von Schrader, Bruyere, and Murray, October 10, 2013 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Effective Accommodation Practices (EAP) Series: Disability Disclosure and Employment. Job Accommodation Network, Morgantown WV [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Effective Accommodation Practices (EAP) Series: Disability Disclosure and Employment. Job Accommodation Network, Morgantown WV [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. http://www.workforce.com/2018/06/06/the-unique-challenges-of-workplace-accommodation-for-psychiatric-disabilities/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://www.workforce.com/2018/06/06/the-unique-challenges-of-workplace-accommodation-for-psychiatric-disabilities/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Case studies based on material from JAN https://askjan.org/disabilities/Mental-Health-Impairments.cfm [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. http://www.workforce.com/2018/06/06/the-unique-challenges-of-workplace-accommodation-for-psychiatric-disabilities/ [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. http://www.workforce.com/2018/06/06/the-unique-challenges-of-workplace-accommodation-for-psychiatric-disabilities/ [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. http://nwadacenter.org/factsheet/reasonable-accommodations-workplace [↑](#footnote-ref-16)