

Accommodation strategies for Employers



Background Information

Statistics Canada just released the results of its *2017 Canadian Survey on Disabilities*.

The survey is conducted every five years, but the 2017 survey cannot be compared to the 2012 because the sampling frame for the two surveys differed.

Source: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-654-x/89-654-x2018002-eng.htm>

Top Five Takeaways

1. Mental health-related and learning disabilities are the most common types of disabilities among Canadian youth (aged 15-24).
2. The majority of youth with disabilities (77%) have a mental health-related disability and/or learning disability.
3. Nearly nine in ten (87%) who were neither in school nor employed had a mental health-related disability, a learning disability, or both. In fact, 3 in 10 had both.
4. Youth with mental health-related and learning disabilities are disproportionately affected when it comes to being neither in school nor employed.
5. Taking this into account is important when supporting youth with disabilities into post-secondary education or the labour market since specific accommodations may be required for youth with these types of disabilities.

The survey shows how prevalent learning disabilities are in Canadian youth, and how this affects educational and employment outcomes. Understanding examples and possible workplace solutions of mental health-related and/or learning disabilities can assist employers supporting youth employees.



Best practices for Employers for Learning Disabilities.

Accommodation is most often legally defined as the extent to which an employer, provider of goods, services or housing available to the general public is required to make modifications that would assist the integration of people with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups, short of undue hardship.

Four steps to take with your employee to assess the need for accommodation.

- 1.** Determine the purpose and essential functions of the job.
- 2.** Establish what kinds of jobs-related limitations are caused by the disability.
- 3.** In consultation with the employee, determine what possible accommodations could be considered and how effective each one would be in helping the employee to perform the essential functions of the job.
- 4.** Determine which accommodations the employee would prefer.

Major types of Learning Disabilities, examples and possible workplace solutions.

1. Information Processing Problems: Auditory Perception Problems

Difficulties in receiving and/or processing accurate information from their sense of hearing. This may be characterized by an inability to hear one sound over background noises or hearing the difference between similar sounds. There may be difficulty in remembering a series of commands or instructions or in retrieving stored information.

EXAMPLES IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Difficulties hearing verbal instructions or questions if there are other noises in the room
- Slowness in responding to verbal instructions or questions
- Poor information sequencing
- Poor listening skills

SOLUTIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE:

- > Reduce background noises (telephones ringing, noisy machinery or background conversations)
- > Allow sufficient time for instructions and questions to be repeated
- > Let candidates sit near interviewers, speak slowly and deliberately, allow time for the candidate to process information
- > Provide written copy of instructions
- > Whenever possible provide copy of the questions
- > Demonstrate exactly what needs to be done, rather than describing the task
- > Encourage note taking or recording using phone



2. Information Processing Problems: Visual Perception Problems

Difficulties taking in and/or processing information from the sense of sight, which may be characterized by difficulties seeing specific images or picking out an object and/or seeing things in the correct order. There may also be difficulties perceiving how far or near an object may be.

EXAMPLES IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Incapacity to find key information provided in written form
- Inability to pick out one line of print from another
- Interferes with the ability to read, compute or complete an inventory or a budget
- Difficulties filling out an application form
- May be clumsy, trip or bump into things

SOLUTIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE:

- > Provide a room with minimal physical distractions
- > Provide a written exam in an alternative format such as on tape
- > Provide voice-activated computers for written material
- > Give verbal instructions
- > Provide a talking calculator
- > Provide information on tape; and
- > Give time to complete the task.

3. Academic Problems

Difficulties in the ability to use language and to express oneself in reading, writing, spelling, and/or mathematics. There may also be difficulties sounding out letters, confusing words that sound similar, and expressing thoughts on paper.

EXAMPLES IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Not able to write reports
- Frequent spelling and grammar mistakes
- Unreadable penmanship, poor spelling
- Difficulties filling out an application form
- Unable to do simple calculations

SOLUTIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE:

- > Provide information using a recording device (iPhone, tablet)
- > Provide a computer and/or spell checker
- > Allow extra time for written documents
- > Provide verbal instructions that are clear and simple
- > Demonstrate exactly what needs to be done
- > Preview information to prepare for interview

4. Motor, temporal and organizational problems

Difficulties in moving one's body to achieve its goals, perception of time and space, and the sequencing of information.

EXAMPLES IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Difficulty in using the hands while writing
- Showing a lack of organization in written work
- Arriving late or unusually early
- Inaccurate movement such as clumsiness, awkwardness or stiffness



- Confusion between left and right
- difficulty telling time

SOLUTIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE:

- > Use timers or verbal response as reminders
- > Allow extra time for travel between different job locations
- > Use alarms to signal changes
- > Use visual cue to indicate change
- > Allow candidate to work at their own pace
- > Allow extra time to process information

5. Attention Problems

Difficulty sustaining attention during a long period of time characterized by distractibility, inconsistent performance and/or problems focusing on details.

EXAMPLES IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Easily distracted by background noises during an interview
- Difficulty paying attention to verbal instructions or questions
- Sometimes not remembering or understanding verbal information
- Fidgeting, need to be on the move (feet/pencil tapping)

SOLUTIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE:

- > avoid sarcasm, say what you mean
- > don't expect hints, body gestures to convey information
- > allow extra time
- > maintain eye contact
- > paraphrase information to convey the message

6. Social skills problems

Difficulties in assessing one's impact on others, acting impulsively and not having the ability to judge non-verbal body language.

EXAMPLES IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Standing too close
- Inappropriate body language and/or talking too loudly or too softly
- Inability to read facial expressions, body gestures and/or tone of voice.

SOLUTIONS FOR THE WORKPLACE:

- > Avoid sarcasm, say what you mean
- > Don't expect hints, body gestures to convey information
- > Allow extra time
- > Maintain eye contact
- > Paraphrase information to convey the message

Persons with learning disabilities will not require all of the above accommodations, but employers can assist interview candidates and employees by identifying and mutually agreeing upon appropriate accommodation based on their strengths and weaknesses.

Source: Barriers-free Interviews and Competitions, Learning Disabilities Association of Canada.



Best Practices for Employers for Mental-health Related Disabilities

There are a wide range of possible accommodations for employees with mental health disabilities that might work. Some are self-evident, but others aren't. Being creative will go a long way when identifying and evaluating possibilities.

Common accommodations for mental-related disabilities

Flexible or modified scheduling

This could include changing the existing schedule, retaining the existing schedule or working reduced hours. For example, allow an employee with an anxiety-related mental disability to work earlier or later to avoid crowds, or permit more frequent or differently scheduled breaks.

Modified work environment

This could be changing the employee's workspace or their location. For example, physically move an employee's workspace, such as to a window to allow access to natural light, or allow an employee to work from home for some or all of the time.

Modified supervision

Consider modifying instructions or feedback, or providing coaching.

Modifying certain job duties

Adjusting the employee's job duties, including changes in training, is another possible solution.

Individualized rate of absenteeism

Sometimes, the required accommodation is for the employer to simply tolerate a level of absenteeism that, but for the disability, would be unacceptable and excessive and allow for an individualized rate of absenteeism.

For example, allow time off for employees to attend medical, counselling or therapeutic appointments.

Reassignment

An employer's duty to accommodate can extend to reassigning job duties among employees, or transferring an employee to create or free up a position that an employee requiring accommodation can successfully perform.