

# SUCCESS IN THE WORKPLACE

## EMPLOYER TOOLKIT

Strategies from  
Autistic Employees

## ADJUSTMENTS NOT ACCOMMODATIONS



85% of organizations surveyed for this toolkit project have provided accommodations and/or supports for an employee.

### What is an accommodation?

An accommodation is a modification or adaptation made to an employee's work environment or how an employee performs their tasks.

Accommodations are simply adjustments to help an employee succeed, and that's the way we should approach them. Some common examples of everyday on-the-job adjustments include: **providing a flexible work schedule to accommodate childcare or school drop-off and pick-up schedules or buying a larger chair for an employee who needs one.** When thinking of adjustments in this context, it is not onerous for employers to provide adjustments for a qualified autistic employee.

### Adjustments & COVID-19

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many **employers implemented adjustments for all employees virtually overnight**, including flexible working hours, the ability to work from home, and increasing the number of services offered virtually. While these adjustments were borne out of necessity, it **proved that adjustments could be made for any employee**, often at little or no expense and with no negative impact on the business.



"Accommodation" implies special treatment for people with disabilities, whereas the term "adjustment" recognizes you're making simple changes to ensure an employee can perform at their best. Accommodation is the term used in legal contexts.

## Most adjustments cost nothing

When employers hear the word “disability” disclosed by a job seeker, one of the first things that may cross their mind is, “Will the employee require accommodations?” Employers sometimes hesitate to hire qualified autistic candidates out of concern the candidate will require expensive accommodations. While it’s true that most autistic employees require some adaptations to their work environment, the cost is usually much lower than employers expect.

In a 2019 US study of **776 employers** by the **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**, employers reported that:

**58%** of accommodations cost absolutely nothing  
the rest of the accommodations made had a typical cost of only **\$500**<sup>1</sup>

## Adjustments - low cost, high impact

While the **cost of providing adjustments to an autistic employee is usually low, the positive impacts the employer receives in return are relatively high.**

In the **Job Accommodation Network** study, employers mentioned they received three main direct benefits from supporting an employee with a disability: <sup>1</sup>

- 1** allowed the company to retain a valued employee
- 2** increased the employee’s productivity
- 3** eliminated the costs of training a new employee

**The Presidents Group**, a British Columbia based leadership table of inclusive employers, reaffirms the **high impact of the business case**. Hiring and supporting employees with disabilities, including autism, employers were **“2x more likely to reach or exceed financial targets, 6x more likely to be innovative, and 6x more likely to anticipate change.”** <sup>2 3</sup>



An example of an easy, sensory adjustment is initially talking in a soft tone of voice.

## Legal responsibilities

*The Canadian Human Rights Act* states that employers have a legal duty to accommodate employees with protected status, including those with disabilities, up to the point of undue hardship. Most employers accommodate employees because it's good for their business, but it's worth noting the legal aspects of providing accommodations. If an employer fails to provide reasonable accommodations and cannot prove that providing those accommodations would create an undue hardship, they risk being fined by the jurisdiction's human rights tribunal. Each province and territory has its own human rights statutes, so it's a good idea for employers to familiarize themselves with the obligations they have in their jurisdiction.<sup>4</sup>

## Return to work policies & practices

**Most employers already have experience offering adjustments** that align well with the adjustments autistic employees may request. Many employers have policies and practices for employees returning to work after having time off for medical reasons. Usually, these policies require the employer to provide workplace adjustments to employees as they transition back into the workforce. While these adjustments will vary depending on the company and the individual employee's needs, standard adjustments may include flexible working hours, time off for medical appointments, and possibly physical adjustments to the employee's work environment.

**Employers have been providing these and other adjustments for years to employees returning to work.** Many of these same adjustment policies and practices can be easily implemented for autistic employees throughout their employment lifecycle. It requires a simple change in thinking to realize that autistic employees' needs are supported just as easily as the needs of employees returning to work from medical leave.



**To inform the toolkit Sinneave in collaboration with the Centre For Interdisciplinary Research and Collaboration in Autism (CIRCA), conducted surveys of both autistic workers and inclusive employers.**

Some examples of **common physical and sensory adjustments** mentioned by respondents in the **Autistic Workers Survey** include:

- 1** Control over their work environment, including being “able to wear loose-fitting clothing” and the “ability to listen to music.”
- 2** Sensory adjustments, such as noise-cancelling headphones, “being able to wear sunglasses on shift indoors” and the ability to control the temperature (use a space heater, wear a blanket, use a quiet fan etc.)
- 3** Assistive devices, such as the “option of [a] headset for phone calls,” and the “ability to wear earplugs.”



# RESOURCES

## The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution: Eight Powerful Truths

Juliette Bourke and Bernadette Dillon

## Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Collaboration in Autism (CIRCA)

Based out of the University of British Columbia

## Presidents Group



# REFERENCES

- 1 Accommodation and Compliance: Low Cost, High Impact  
Job Accommodation Network, October 2020
- 2 Why is Hiring People with Disabilities Good for Business  
Accessible Employers, January 2021
- 3 New Deloitte Research Identifies Key to Creating Fair and Inclusive Organizations  
Deloitte, May 2017
- 4 Employer Obligations Webpage Accessed November  
Canadian Human Rights Commission, January 2020