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Office of Institutional Equity

Supervisor's Guide: Implementing ADA Accommodations in the Workplace

Purpose

Supervisors play a key role in ensuring employees with disabilities can perform their jobs effectively. This guide outlines expectations, best practices, and answers to common questions to help supervisors navigate ADA accommodations respectfully, consistently, and in compliance with applicable laws and university policy.

Quick Supervisor Checklist

If you remember nothing else:

- Acknowledge all requests and refer employees to the Office of Institutional Equity (OIE).
- Do not request or collect medical documentation.
- Maintain strict confidentiality.
- Address coworker concerns without sharing details.
- Contact [OIE](#) or [HR](#) if you have questions or concerns.
- There is no centralized university-wide fund/budget for employee accommodations.

Your Role as a Supervisor

- Respond promptly and respectfully to accommodation concerns or requests.
- Partner with the ADA Coordinator to engage in the **interactive process**.
- Implement approved accommodations as directed.
- Maintain confidentiality at all times.
- Foster a respectful and supportive work environment.

The Interactive Process

When an employee requests an accommodation (or when you become aware of a need):

Remember: Employees do not need to use specific language such as “ADA” or “reasonable accommodation.” Treat statements like the following as potential requests: “I’m having difficulty completing my work because of a medical condition” or “I need help or flexibility because of some health issues.”

1. Acknowledge the request (following up in writing is preferred).
 - “Thank you for letting me know. I want to make sure you understand your options and are connected with the appropriate resources.” (See OIE’s [template email](#))
2. Provide employee with the [Employee Disability Accommodation Request Form](#).
3. Notify the [ADA Coordinator](#).
4. Do not make decisions independently about eligibility or approvals.
5. Participate in discussions as needed to understand job duties and potential accommodations.
6. Once reasonable accommodations are agreed upon, the ADA Coordinator will draft a Letter of Agreement for the employee and supervisor to sign. This Letter of Agreement will be maintained by OIE in a secure document management system and will be kept separate from the employee’s personnel file.
7. **NOTE:** The interactive process is a collaborative discussion between the employee and supervisor facilitated by the ADA Coordinator/OIE.
8. **ALSO:** There is no centralized university-wide budget/fund for employee accommodations. The responsibility lies within the department for planning accommodation-related needs.

Confidentiality: What You MUST Protect

- An employee’s **medical condition or disability** is confidential. Do not share medical information with coworkers or the reason for an employee’s accommodation.
- Accommodation details should only be shared on a **need-to-know basis**.
- Redirect questions/concerns to OIE if needed.

Communicating with the Team

Coworkers may notice changes. You should:

- **Focus on work outcomes, not personal details.**
- Reinforce fairness without disclosing specifics.

Example response:

“We make adjustments when needed so all employees can be successful. I can’t share personal details, but I appreciate your understanding.”

“I am not able to discuss another employee’s situation, but we work to support everyone fairly.”

Addressing Coworker Questions or Concerns

If employees ask questions or make negative, disruptive, or inappropriate comments:

- Do not disclose any accommodation-related information.
- Reinforce expectations for professionalism and respect. You are responsible for setting clear boundaries and appropriate workplace behavior.
- Address comments or conduct that undermine a respectful workplace.

NOTE: It is important to address concerns appropriately because:

- Misunderstandings can escalate into conflict, resentment, burnout, etc.
- Employees may begin to view accommodations as “special treatment” rather than workplace support.
- Inappropriate comments or speculation can create a disrespectful or exclusionary environment.
- In some cases, this behavior can rise to the level of harassment or a hostile work environment.

DO NOT:

- Ask the employee to explain their accommodation to coworkers.
- Expect the employee to justify their needs to coworkers.
- Require the employee to “handle” complaints from others.

DO:

- Address team concerns yourself (with OIE and/or HR support if needed).
- Normalize accommodations as part of an inclusive workplace.
- Take responsibility for enforcing boundaries and expectations.

Implementing Accommodations Effectively

- Follow the approved accommodation plan as stated.
- Monitor its effectiveness and report concerns to OIE.

- If an accommodation is not working, do not modify it independently. Contact the ADA Coordinator to evaluate whether reengaging in the interactive process is necessary.
- Be consistent! Do not delay or selectively apply accommodations.
- Treat the employee with dignity and respect.

Performance Management and Accommodations

Employees with disabilities are expected to perform the essential functions of their job. Supervisors should:

- Continue to hold employees to established performance standards.
- Ensure accommodations are implemented.
- Address performance concerns in a timely and consistent manner.

If performance concerns arise:

- Focus on the job expectations and outcomes.
- Avoid assumptions about the employee's condition or accommodation.
- Consult HR regarding any performance issues/concerns or before taking corrective action. **NOTE:** Requesting or receiving an accommodation does not eliminate performance expectations. However, reasonable accommodations may be necessary to help an employee meet those expectations and to be able perform the essential functions of their job.

If an employee requests an accommodation during a performance conversation or after a performance evaluation or disciplinary action, consult with HR regarding any next steps and refer the employee to OIE regarding any disability accommodation requests.

Responding to Concerns Regarding Disability-Related Treatment

If an employee shares that they feel singled out, mistreated, or treated unfairly/negatively because of a disability or ADA accommodation:

- Take the concern seriously and respond supportively and appropriately.
- Do not attempt to investigate or resolve the issue on your own.
- Report the situation to OIE via the [Reporting Form](#).
- Contact and/or consult with OIE and/or HR as needed.

What NOT to Do

- Ignore or delay a request.
- Make medical inquiries outside of OIE processes.
- Modify or deny an accommodation on your own.
- Treat the employee unfairly or differently.
- Retaliate in any way.

When to Seek Help

Contact your [ADA Coordinator](#) if:

- You're unsure how to implement an accommodation.
- The accommodation impacts operations or team workflow.
- Issues or concerns arise after implementation.

Contact [HR](#) if there are performance concerns related to an employee receiving and/or requesting accommodations. Also, contact HR if an employee requests or references [FMLA](#).

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