



Successful Onboarding and Early Days – Employees with Disabilities

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SUCCESSFUL ONBOARDING AND EARLY DAYS – EMPLOYEES WITH DISABILITIES

Early days deserve some special attention for your employees with disabilities. These workers might be new hires or current employees who have new or recently disclosed disabilities. **This guide provides direction and tips for employers to support successful onboarding of employees with disabilities.**

For advice related to the recruitment and hiring stages, see THRC's [Inclusive Recruitment and Hiring](#) tool.

In the all-important early days and weeks, good practices will have several important benefits, including:

- Strengthening the company's safety and wellness practices
- Fostering an inclusive work culture and a collaborative team
- Creating a foundation of trust among the employee, manager, and HR
- Clarifying decisions and documenting commitments for shared understanding
- Ensuring the company is complying with relevant legislation
- Identifying employee needs early, which will foster an improved work environment

Starting with the Job Offer

When making offers of employment, employers should notify successful applicants of company policies regarding requests for accommodation. You can do this by including a statement in your job offer.

Examples of statements to include in job offers:

- [\[Company Name\]](#) is committed to providing accessible employment practices. If you have accommodation requests related to your employment at [\[Company Name\]](#), please contact your hiring manager. As part of the orientation to your role, you will receive training on the relevant employment regulations and the related [\[Company Name\]](#) policies.

If you require a workplace accommodation in order to perform your job more effectively (for example: workstation and/or work area access, modifications to technology or equipment, or vehicles), please let us know! We will work with you to meet your needs and accommodation requirements.

It is also useful to include similar statements in letters to internal candidates who are moving into a new position where a disability might require new accommodation.

Before the First Day

Consider the following when preparing to onboard a new hire who has disclosed a disability or when supporting an existing employee who might be moving into a new job and who has disclosed a newly relevant or changed disability. You can read more about how to support disclosure in this THRC tool: [Supporting Disability Disclosure](#).

Remember that a candidate may disclose a disability at any point during the hiring process. It is good practice to remind all potential employees of your company's commitment to accommodation throughout the recruitment and selection process.

Contact the Employee:

- ☐ **Tell them what to expect:** Provide a brief overview of what the first few days will look like. For people new to your workplace, describe relevant aspects that might create barriers to a welcoming start. For example, explain transportation options for getting to and from work including accessible parking options as needed. Describe the culture and pace of work and how information is shared. Highlight a few of the key points from your company's accessibility efforts. Don't make assumptions about what might be important for the employee to know – explore by asking questions.
- ☐ **Ask questions:** Explore what might help make the first day run smoothly.
 - a. *Do you have any accommodation requests I can prepare?*
 - b. *What information, if any, would you like to share in advance with colleagues?*
 - c. *What works best for you when learning and accessing information (digital, print, audio, etc.)?*
 - d. *What might make your first few days more comfortable and successful for you?*
- ☐ **Talk about confidentiality:** Talk to the employee about what will be shared with colleagues, their manager, etc. Be clear that the specifics of their disability will not be shared. Discuss what their manager or specific colleagues will need to be made aware of, regarding their accommodation.
- ☐ **Exchange information:** Share the contact of the designated accommodation coordinator and let the employee know they can reach out with any additional information or requests prior to their first day. Ask the employee if they have any contacts who might be helpful in their accommodation.

Planning and Preparation:

- ☐ **Review onboarding materials for digital accessibility:** Remember to review training, policies, safety information, etc. Explore the Government of Canada's [resources](#), including the [Document Compliance Checklist](#).
- ☐ **Ready the workspace:** Ensure that any adjustments are in place before Day One – even if they will be adjusted as needed. This should be a part of your company's ongoing accessibility efforts.

FOR PILOT – June 2025

- ☐ **Prepare an Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP):** Pre-fill information in their IAP with any information you currently have related to their disability and accommodation. Click here for a THRC developed template [Individual Accommodation Plan \(IAP\) – A Sample](#).
- ☐ **Communicate with current staff:** Ensure only those who need to know are aware of the employee's disability and equip them with training or resources to adjust their approaches as needed. Most accommodations don't need to be shared with the broader team.

Tip: Have colleagues prepare a short bio with a photo – to help new hires make connections.

First Day Checklist

First impressions matter, so start the day off in a friendly and inclusive manner. For new employees, you may need to walk through the following in more detail. For employees who are changing jobs or departments, or who have newly disclosed a disability, reflect on the types of information below that might be helpful in having a smooth adjustment to the new situation.

- ☐ **Workspace tour:** When touring their workspace highlight accessible features available to all staff. Highlight any tasks or areas where their disclosed disability and requested accommodation are especially applicable. Be observant and considerate of any accommodation needed on the tour.
- ☐ **Introduce them:** Remember confidentiality – most team members do not need to know the details of another employee's accommodation, introduce your new employee just like you would anyone else. Consider assigning a mentor or buddy to the new employee so that they have someone to go to as questions arise.
- ☐ **Review cultural norms:** Every organization has informal rules and cultural norms; explaining these clearly can be very helpful to employees whose disability might have behavioral impacts (such as ADHD, autism, anxiety, etc.). Even different departments and work groups within an organization can have different norms to adjust to.
- ☐ **Review formal policies:** During discussions about general benefits and workplace policies, inform the employee of inclusive policies and employee resource groups or networks. Remember to go over this information also with current employees who have newly disclosed a disability – do not assume that they are familiar with it, even though they have worked in the company.
 - a. Pay special attention to benefits paperwork; ensure the employee understands and can complete it.
- ☐ **Work together to create an Individual Accommodation Plan (IAP):** Have an open and collaborative conversation while filling out the accommodation plan.
 - a. Be concise and clear, including details like specific equipment, schedule adjustments, or modified procedure.

FOR PILOT – June 2025

- b. Only request details that are relevant to creating the plan. Avoid questions about home life, how the disability was acquired, and other personal questions not relevant to the job requirements.
- ☐ **Set expectations and follow up:** Be clear about mutual expectations related to training and the first few weeks. Plan for more frequent check-ins.

First Week Checklist

As the employee continues onboarding to the new role and/or becomes more accustomed to their disability and possible accommodation(s), be sure all processes and materials are accessible.

- ☐ **Discuss the accessibility of training:** It is good practice to ask employees how they learn best. Provide options for written instructions, visual aids, shadowing opportunities, and demonstrations as ways to learn.
- ☐ **Request feedback:** The early days are critical for an employee to learn, but also for the employer to adjust as needed. Ask your new employee if there are any areas that you (the company, manager, trainer) could adjust to help them better thrive in their role.
- ☐ **Monitor progress:** Explicitly ask if the accommodation meets their needs. If accommodation(s) is still being co-developed, check in about the progress.

Check-ins

Schedule regular check-ins to review IAP's and accommodation measures. It can be difficult for employees to ask for help or support sometimes, especially if they are newer to the company or the work team, or if they are newly disclosing a disability. It can ease the accommodation process if supervisors or HR intentionally schedule meetings with the employee to discuss needs. This becomes an important part of creating a positive and inclusive work culture.

- ☐ **Ask about accommodation effectiveness:** Make adjustments as needed and discuss their overall experience.
- ☐ **Follow up on documents:** Make sure policies are signed and IAP's are updated. Having clearly documented changes to accommodation and adjustments helps both the employee and employer be clear about expectations.
- ☐ **Plan for future needs:** Set scheduled check-ins and share information about whom to contact (HR, manager, specialist) in case any needs change or challenges come up.

Safety

When you are reviewing safety practices with a new hire, ask them about anything that may be a safety concern. Remember – not all safety concerns are disabilities, and not all disabilities are safety concerns.

FOR PILOT – June 2025

Examples of safety concerns that the employee may not think of as a disability include:

- Mental health challenges – can present challenges during high stress situations or stretches of isolation.
- Asthma – can present challenges during emergencies that require evacuation.
- ADHD – can present challenges remembering or retaining information, staying focused on the job, or keeping track of tasks.
- Sleep problems – can present challenges during long-haul drives and nightshifts.

If an employee discloses a safety concern, ask them if it might also pose a barrier to their work performance and offer the option of developing an accommodation plan. Otherwise, make a note in their file about the safety challenges they shared. In collaboration with them, take any action that is needed to support the safety of the employee and their colleagues.

If an employee does disclose a disability, let them know the next step is an individual accommodation plan. As you are going through the accommodation plan, remember to ask about any concerns or challenges related to safety.

For more information, see the THRC resource: [Supporting Safety for All](#).

Culture and Privacy

A positive company culture is the foundation for a genuine inclusive and welcoming onboarding experience. When new hires, especially those with disabilities, feel supported from day one it sets the stage for successful employment.

For current employees, consider how their previous experience with your company culture can impact their willingness or comfort in disclosing an existing or newly acquired disability. In companies, departments or work groups with a toxic culture surrounding disability, some employees may go through their entire careers without disclosing a disability or requesting accommodation for fear of perceived “special treatment” or incompetence by their coworkers or managers.

When you make changes and improvements to your accessibility measures, contact all existing employees to update them. Emphasize that having an accessible workplace is valuable to everyone and part of your company’s culture.

The importance of confidentiality cannot be overstated. In cases where information about the accommodation needs to be shared with other colleagues or supervisors for safety or operational purposes, limit the information to the minimum required.