



Successful Onboarding and Early Days – Employees with Disabilities

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Employers participating in the 2024 THRC pilots of new tools can also refer to their [resource list](#) and are welcome to contact their designated advisor for consultation and guidance.

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 guidance and tips for employers to support successful onboarding of employees with disabilities.**

For advice related to the recruitment and hiring stages, see these [THRC resources](#) *Attracting New Talent: Persons with Disabilities* and *Disability Inclusive Hiring Practices*. You can find practical suggestions for adapting work practices in *Common Types of Industry Accommodations*.

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

- Strengthen the company's safety and wellness practices
- Foster an inclusive work culture and a collaborative team
- Create a foundation of trust among the employee, manager, and HR
- Clarify decisions and document commitments for shared understanding
- Ensure the company is complying with relevant legislation
- Identify employee needs early, which will foster a safer work environment

Before the First Day

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. You can read more about how to support disclosure in this THRC tool: [Supporting Disability Disclosure](#).

Consider the following when preparing for onboarding a new hire who has disclosed a disability or when supporting an existing employee who has disclosed a new or changed disability.

Contact the Employee:

1. **Tell them what to expect:** Describe the planned work location and conditions. For people new to your workplace, describe relevant transportation options. Provide a brief overview of what the first few days will look like.
2. **Ask questions:** Ask a few questions to help make the first day run smoothly.
 - a. *Do you have any accommodation requests I can prepare before your first day?*
 - b. *What information, if any, would you like to share in advance with your 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?*

3. **Talk about confidentiality:** Talk to the employee about what to share with colleagues, manager, etc. Let them know their manager or any other relevant employees will be made aware of their accommodation.
4. **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:

1. **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](#).
2. **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. Click here for an [Accessible Canada Act Sample Accessibility Plan](#) developed by THRC.
1. **Do your research:** Learn about [Supporting Disability Disclosure](#). Remember, many accommodations are very low cost or free, such as alternative text sizes or schedule changes. See some practical examples for the trucking and logistics industry at this THRC tool [Common Types of Industry Accommodations](#).
2. **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 an [Individual Accommodation Plan – A Sample](#).
3. **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

Say hello to your new employee! First impressions matter, so start the day off in a friendly and inclusive manner.

1. **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.
2. **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 an employee without a disclosed disability. Assign a mentor or buddy to the new employee.

3. **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.).
4. **Review formal policies:** during discussions about general benefits and workplace policies, remind the employee of inclusive policies and employee resource groups or networks.
 - a. Pay special attention to benefits paperwork; ensure the employee understands and can complete it.
5. **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.
 - 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. [Click here for a sample IAP](#)
6. **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

As the employee continues onboarding and getting to know the role, be sure all processes and materials are accessible.

1. **Discuss the accessibility of training:** It is good practice to ask all new employees how they learn best. Provide options for written instructions, visual aids, shadowing opportunities, and demonstrations as ways to learn.
2. **Request feedback:** The early days are critical for a new employee to learn, but also for the new 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 new role.
3. **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 – it can ease the 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.

1. **Ask about accommodation effectiveness:** Make small adjustments as needed and discuss their overall experience.
2. **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.

3. **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.

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 on [Ensuring Safety of Employees with Disabilities](#).

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.

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.

Any disclosure of disability or request for accommodation should be kept confidential between the employee, their manager, and HR. 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.

Summary List of Resources

Newly developed [THRC tools and resources](#) (in the pilot stage as of September 2024) provide industry-relevant information and tips:

- Attracting New Talent: Persons with Disabilities
- Disability Inclusive Hiring Practices
- Reflecting AODA and Best Practices: An Employer Compliance Checklist
- Supporting Disability Disclosure
- Common Types of Industry Accommodations
- Individual Accommodation Plan – A Sample

For digital accessibility in particular, see this Government of Canada website:

- [Government of Canada Digital Accessibility Guidance](#)