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Topic 1

Promoting disability support

An environment free of discrimination means staff can work to their full potential.

As a manager, you need to provide the necessary support and eliminate the barriers some staff face in fulfilling the requirements of their job. You must ensure the rights of all staff are protected, including those with disabilities.

In this topic you will learn about:

- 1A Promoting the rights and needs of people with disability
- 1B Support strategies and adjustments
- 1C Providing information to staff

Reasonable adjustments include:

- reviewing and adjusting the performance requirements of the job
- flexible work hours
- providing telephone typewriter (TTY) phone access for staff members with hearing or speech impairments
- purchasing screen-reading software for staff members with vision impairment
- approving more regular breaks for people with chronic pain or fatigue
- buying desks with adjustable heights for people using wheelchairs.

Unjustifiable hardship

Employers are not required to make adjustments to their workplace if they can prove that it would cause unjustifiable hardship.

An employer does not need to make an adjustment where they can prove that they comply with a disability standard under the DDA, or where they have been granted an exemption under that standard.

For example, the adjustment may be too expensive, too difficult or too time-consuming to implement. Additionally, an employer may be able to prove that:

- the adjustments are not reasonable
- the person with the disability could not perform the genuine and reasonable requirements of the job even if the adjustments were made.

The nature of an organisation's work, its size and resource base are all factors in determining whether certain adjustments are reasonable. Larger organisations are more likely to have the resources and capacity to make adjustments to accommodate staff with disability.

Many adjustments or modifications involve the application of good human resources practice that would be incorporated for any new employee.

You can read about reasonable adjustments here: <http://aspirelr.link/reasonable-adjustments-in-employment>.

Anti-discrimination legislation

Anti-discrimination legislation makes it illegal to discriminate against a person due to disability.

Under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010* (Cth), employers are required to make reasonable adjustments for a person with disability who requires the adjustments in order to participate in the recruitment process or perform the genuine and reasonable requirements of the job.

In addition, each state and territory has its own anti-discrimination laws that came into effect around the same time federal legislation was introduced. Each of these laws contains specific references to people with disability.

1B

Support strategies and adjustments

Support strategies and adjustments should be tailored for each staff member.

Many people with disability encounter barriers and difficulties in the workplace. Commonly experienced challenges include:

- Access – Physical access to buildings, workspaces, amenities and the ease with which someone can move around the workspace
- Transport – Getting to and from work or accessing work-related transport
- Flexibility of work hours – The degree to which workplaces are willing to accommodate flexible start and finish times and days
- Flexibility of work tasks – The degree to which work tasks can be managed or altered to accommodate cognitive and physical disability
- Supports and resources – The availability and cost of support strategies, such as modifications and the time taken to implement them in the workplace



Communication methods

A fundamental requirement in any workplace is the need for effective communication.

Providing the supports and resources to enable communication for people with disability will lead to more inclusive practices and greater participation in the workplace.

Communication methods can be adjusted to meet the individual capabilities and preferences of the person. Everyone has different communication needs depending on factors such as their age, first language, education level, physical and mental ability.

Factors that can affect communication

- The ability of someone to understand, including cognitive ability, application of logic, linking ideas, etc.
- Memory – both short- and long-term
- Speech, including problems with pronunciation, speech patterns, stammers, etc.
- Hearing impairment
- The ability to form ideas and opinions
- Language memory and word formation, such as an inability to form or remember words
- The rate at which someone can express themselves and communicate
- The rate at which someone can process information and formulate a response
- The capacity of someone to listen in group settings or with background noise or distractions
- Social confidence and competence
- The ability to understand and respond to social cues – taking turns, recognising pauses, recognising when someone has finished speaking, etc.

Voice amplifiers

These are used by people with quiet voices to amplify their voice.

Voice Output Communication Aids (VOCAs)

Also called speech-generating devices (SGDs), these produce speech in a synthesised voice based on typed words. They can be used to supplement or replace speech.

Eye gaze devices

These devices use eye movement and blinking as a method to select letters, which are displayed on a screen.

Using plain English

Plain English helps to make communication easier.

Plain English means presenting information that is clear to the reader or listener. It started as a movement some decades ago to improve the readability of documents produced in the public sector (government departments).

When communicating with another person, ask yourself:

- How familiar are they with the words you are using?
- What can you assume they understand?
- What background information or context do they need to make sense of what you say?
- What details do you need to explain?

When writing or talking using plain English, make sure you:

- use everyday words
- keep sentences short
- check for understanding
- spell out acronyms
- use an active voice.

Sentences written in an active voice require less effort to process and understand. Using an active voice means the person doing the action (subject) is introduced before the action (verb). The opposite is the passive voice, where the subject follows the verb. Here are some examples.

Active voice: Subject + Verb + Object	Passive voice: Object + Verb + Subject
We will do it.	It will be done by us.
Jane wrote the letter.	The letter was written by Jane.
The organisation will provide your accommodation.	Your accommodation will be provided by the organisation.

Type of disability	Examples of workplace adjustments
Blindness or low vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure workplace lighting meets Australian Standards. • Consider additional lighting for increased brightness or contrast. • Place all frequently used items within easy reach. • Provide text-to-speech software to assist with reading text on-screen. • Provide a larger computer monitor to assist with viewing text, along with magnification software and modification of brightness and contrast levels. • Provide magnification aids or devices to magnify hard-copy documents. • Provide large-button mobiles with text to speech software for text messaging.

Source: JobAccess, 'Disability and adjustment': <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au>

Assistive technologies, devices and aids

Assistive technology extends the range of activities that people with disability can perform.

Anything that assists individuals to perform daily activities can be considered assistive technology. It includes devices, systems or designs used by individuals to perform tasks that might otherwise be difficult or impossible for them to complete.

Here are some examples of assistive technologies.

Category	Examples
Aids for daily living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eating utensils • Page turners • Emergency call systems
Augmentative communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication boards • Speech synthesisers • Modified typewriters • Head pointers • Text to voice software
Computer access aids	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headsticks • Light pointers • Modified or alternate keyboards • Switches activated by pressure, sound or voice • Touch screens • Special software • Voice to text software

Disability Employment Services

Helping people with disability to prepare for, find and keep a job:
<http://aspirelr.link/disability-employment-services>

Mental Health Line

A confidential mental health telephone triage service that provides the first point of contact to public mental health services:
<http://aspirelr.link/mental-health-line>

Example

Accessibility and inclusion plan

In 2016, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia launched a mental health and wellbeing platform. It offers staff a portal with access to information on more than 50 topics related to mind, body and life. It hosts articles written by industry experts, as well as videos, webinars, training and a space for employees to share their personal stories. The portal links to a live chat with a counsellor for people seeking information.

As part of its accessibility and inclusion plan, Commonwealth Bank introduced the following initiatives around mental health and wellbeing:



- senior leadership and executive manager mental health briefings
- dedicated Safety Day campaigns on wellbeing and mental health
- the consolidation of Employment Assistance Programs across seven countries, including the introduction of online chat functionality to accompany face-to-face and over-the-phone counselling
- a three-part campaign for employees and managers to understand the importance of recognising the signs and having a conversation with an employee who is struggling
- the development of a group-wide mental health and wellbeing approach
- a practical workshop for managers and HR in managing mental health in the workplace
- mental wellbeing toolkits for employees, managers and HR operatives
- best practice for mental health intervention framework
- mental health activities embedded into the group's safety plans, including Mental Health Month in October and participation in the national RUOK? Day.

Setting goals

Once expectations have been discussed, the implementation plan can be developed with a focus on specific goals.

There are several ways that goals may be determined. One way is using the SMART method, outlined here.

Specific

Goals must be well defined and clear to everyone involved.



Measurable

There must be clear and specific outcome indicators to track progress towards the goal.



Attainable

Goals must not be set that exceed the person's capabilities. The staff member must participate in the goal-setting and decision-making process so you can agree on achievable aims.



Relevant

Goals must be relevant to the work performed by the staff member or organisation.



Time-framed

Goals must have a time frame. For complex or long-term goals, setting key milestones on the time frame will help the person to achieve them. Goals need to have a clear amount of time dedicated to them.





Summary

- The staff member with disability must drive the process of consultation.
- Using person-first language means that the person's humanity is expressed before their disability is mentioned.
- Trust must be established when discussing support needs with a person with disability.
- When discussing needs, use a mix of open and closed questions to gain the information.
- Part of creating an implementation plan is checking that the expectations of the staff member are expressed and can be met through the support being planned.
- Setting SMART goals will mean the staff member gets the specific support they need when and where they need it.
- Implementation plans should include actions, resources, responsibilities and time frames.
- A formal agreement with the staff member can indicate what support is being provided and what commitment the workplace is making in providing that support.

Training sessions in diversity, inclusion and disability awareness may be arranged by management. This may be conducted inhouse by existing staff, such as staff from a specialist department, or by external consultants who may be employed to implement the adjustments.

Training sessions may cover the following topics:

- understanding the legislative framework and employer responsibilities
- understanding what it means to be discriminated against because of disability
- understanding the barriers faced by people with disability and how to remove or help staff overcome these barriers
- understanding what it means to be inclusive in both actions/behaviour and communication
- understanding the concept of a person-centred approach.

For staff training, raising awareness may involve a staff member with disability communicating directly to their team and other staff they interact with about their experience in the workplace. Such an approach must come from the person themselves with the support of their manager.

Your role as a manager is to facilitate the communication and ensure that learning takes place. Discussion can explore the staff member's perspective and suggestions for improvements that can be made. The purpose of the sessions should be for staff to think differently about how to engage, communicate and work with their colleague so that everyone can do their job to the best of their ability.

Here is an overview of the topics that could be covered:

Communication

- Barriers to communication
- Improvements in ways to communicate and maintain a conversation
- How disability can affect thinking and reasoning
- Augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and why this is effective

Modified equipment and assistive technologies

- Examples of modifications and what they can enable the person to achieve
- Examples of assistive technologies and how they make a difference
- Changes to work practices that allow modifications to be used
- AAC devices that can aid communication

Flexible work options

- Modifications to a working day to make tasks more manageable
- The impact of disability on work schedules, completion of tasks, etc.

Cognitive and work tools

- Strategies that assist with work
- Tools that assist with mental processing, such as memory and concentration

Staff providing direct support

You may need to clarify the role of staff who provide support to others.

The capacity of the organisation to provide support will depend on the skills and expertise of the manager and their staff. Position descriptions may need to have duties and responsibilities altered to include these new roles and responsibilities.

Direct support provided by employees to staff with disability may include:

- offering additional training on adjusting work tasks
- assisting with physical supports to enable staff with disability to navigate and move around the workplace, or to operate equipment or set up their workstation
- being a workplace buddy and providing:
 - learning support and guidance
 - work routine guidance
 - assistance with keeping on top of tasks.

The following steps can be used when advising staff of their support role.

