

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Effective Accommodation Practices (EAP) Series

### Job Accommodations for People with Mental Health Impairments

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**ODEP**

Office of Disability  
Employment Policy

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## JAN'S EAP SERIES

### JOB ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH IMPAIRMENTS

According to the National Mental Health Association (<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/>), a mental health impairment is a disease that causes mild to severe disturbances in thought and/or behavior, resulting in an inability to cope with life's ordinary demands and routines. There are more than 200 classified forms of mental illness. Some of the more common disorders are depression, bipolar disorder, dementia, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), panic disorders, seasonal affective disorder (SAD), and anxiety disorders. Symptoms may include changes in mood, personality, personal habits, and/or social withdrawal.

The following is a quick overview of some of the job accommodations that might be useful for people with mental health impairments. For a more in depth discussion, access JAN's publications at <http://AskJAN.org/media/atoz.htm>. To discuss an accommodation situation with a consultant, contact JAN directly.

#### **Maintaining Stamina During the Workday:**

- Provide flexible scheduling
- Allow longer or more frequent work breaks
- Allow employee to work from home during part of the day, or week
- Provide part time work schedules

#### **Maintaining Concentration:**

- Reduce distractions in the work area
- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Allow for use of white noise or environmental sound machines
- Allow the employee to play soothing music using a cassette player and headset
- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Allow for frequent breaks
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals
- Restructure job to include only essential functions

#### **Staying Organized and Meeting Deadlines:**

- Make daily TO-DO lists and check items off as they are completed
- Use several calendars to mark meetings and deadlines
- Remind employee of important deadlines
- Use electronic organizers
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and goals

**Dealing with Memory Deficits:**

- Allow the employee to tape record meetings
- Provide type written minutes of each meeting
- Provide written instructions
- Allow additional training time
- Provide written checklists

**Working Effectively with Supervisors:**

- Provide positive praise and reinforcement
- Provide written job instructions
- Develop written work agreements that include the agreed upon accommodations, clear expectations of responsibilities, and the consequences of not meeting performance standards
- Allow for open communication to managers and supervisors
- Establish written long term and short term goals
- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise
- Develop a procedure to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation

**Interacting with Coworkers:**

- Educate all employees on their right to accommodations
- Provide sensitivity training to coworkers and supervisors
- Do not mandate employees attend work-related social functions
- Encourage employees to move non work-related conversations out of work areas

**Handling Stress and Emotions:**

- Provide praise and positive reinforcement
- Refer to counseling and employee assistance programs
- Allow telephone calls during work hours to doctors and others for needed support
- Allow the presence of a support animal
- Allow the employee to take breaks as needed

**Maintaining Attendance:**

- Provide flexible leave for health problems
- Provide a self-paced work load and flexible hours
- Allow employee to work from home
- Provide part-time work schedule
- Allow employee to make up time

**Dealing with Change:**

- Recognize that a change in the office environment or of supervisors may be difficult for a person with a mental health impairment
- Maintain open channels of communication between the employee and the new and old supervisor in order to ensure an effective transition
- Provide weekly or monthly meetings with the employee to discuss workplace issues and productions levels

## **Resources Specifically for People with Mental Illness**

### **Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation**

Boston University  
940 Commonwealth Avenue West  
Boston, MA 02215  
Direct: (617)353-3549  
Fax: (617)353-7700  
psyrehab@bu.edu  
<http://cpr.bu.edu/>

### **Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance**

730 North Franklin  
Suite 501  
Chicago, IL 60610-7225  
Toll Free: (800)826-3632  
Fax: (312)642-7243  
questions@DBSAlliance.org  
<http://www.ndmda.org>

### **Mental Health America**

2000 N Beauregard Street, 6th Floor  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
Toll Free: (800)969-6642  
Direct: (703)684-7722  
Fax: (703)684-5968  
info@mentalhealthamerica.net  
<http://www.nmha.org>

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI)**

Colonial Place Three  
3803 N. Fairfax Dr., Ste. 100  
Arlington, VA 22203  
Toll Free: 800-950-NAMI  
Direct: 703-524-7600  
<http://www.nami.org>

### **National Mental Health Consumer Self-Help Clearinghouse**

1211 Chestnut Street  
Suite 1207  
Philadelphia, PA 19107  
Toll Free: (800)553-4539  
Direct: (215)751-1810  
Fax: (215)636-6312  
info@mhselfhelp.org  
<http://www.mhselfhelp.org>

**National Institute of Mental Health**

Science Writing, Press, and Dissemination Branch

6001 Executive Blvd, Room 8184, MSC 9663

Bethesda, MD 20892-9663

Toll Free: (866)615-6464

Direct: (301)443-4513

TTY: (301)443-8431

Fax: (301)443-4279

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<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

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