

CREATING A WELCOMING WORKPLACE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

The following are some guidelines to follow when creating a welcome workplace for people with disabilities:

Greet

A proper greeting makes a person feel welcome, demonstrates professionalism, and fosters courtesy.

- Greet individuals courteously.
- Address the individual by their first name if that is your practice with others.
- Extend your hand if a handshake is customary for you. Many persons with disabilities customarily shake hands. If an individual cannot shake hands, touching the person's hand or shoulder may be acceptable. (Do not pat anyone on the head.)

Consult

Consult employees with disabilities to learn what needs to be done for them to feel included.

- Each person has individual needs that may vary over time. Follow up to ensure continued inclusion and participation in the workplace.
- Each individual has the right to privacy. It is their choice to fill out a self-identification form.
- However, an employee does not need to complete a self-identification form in order to receive accommodation.

Communicate

The workplace values communication - presenting, explaining, listening, brainstorming and discussing. Employees with disabilities engage in these activities as an integral part of their daily work. Demonstrate courtesy and respect in the following ways:

- Focus on abilities and adapt your communication skills to the individual's needs.
- Ask what assistance, if any, they would like and then provide it. Respect the individual's desire to be independent.
- Give employees with a disability time to do or say things at their own pace.
- An expression like "See you later!" is acceptable to someone who is blind, and "Did you hear about that?" is unlikely to bother someone who is deaf.
- Speak directly to the person, even if an attendant is present.
- Ask someone with a severe speech impediment to repeat or spell out key words if you do not understand what is said.
- Be prepared to use an alternative format as requested and plan accordingly.

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Network

Establishing networks enhances one's work life. Remember to include persons with disabilities in networking opportunities and in activities and discussions within and outside the office. Here are some ways to facilitate the inclusion of a colleague with a disability:

- Ask the individual what is required to facilitate inclusion.
- Offer to accompany the individual to a meeting, training session or event.
- Invite the individual for coffee or lunch, after ensuring that facilities are completely accessible.

Adapt

All employees should be able to participate and contribute to the progress of the team. Environment and accessibility are important. Dark or noisy places make it difficult for people with visual, speech or hearing disabilities to participate in a conversation. Adapt settings and information delivery methods to the needs of all participants.

Information for this fact sheet came from the Employment Equity Division of the Human Resources Branch of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.