



AMERICA'S HEROES AT WORK

SUPPORTING THE EMPLOYMENT SUCCESS OF
RETURNING SERVICE MEMBERS WITH TBI & PTSD

★★★ Workplace Accommodations

Accommodating Employees with Traumatic Brain Injury

Transitioning service members and veterans experiencing the effects of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) may face day-to-day difficulties—particularly in the workplace. However, employers can play a vital role in these individuals' recovery by recognizing the challenges associated with TBI and making adjustments and/or reasonable accommodations to help ensure workplace success.

People with TBI may experience some of the limitations discussed in this fact sheet; however, they seldom will develop all of them. In addition, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Employers should be aware that not all people with TBI will need accommodations to perform their jobs, and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of the types of accommodations and/or adjustments an employer might consider.

Questions to Consider



- What limitations is the employee with TBI experiencing, and how do these limitations affect the employee's job performance?
- What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
- What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems?
- Has the employee with TBI been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
- Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee with TBI to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
- Do supervisory personnel and employees need training regarding TBI?

★★★ Workplace Accommodations

ACCOMMODATION IDEAS:

Physical Limitations:

- Install ramps, handrails, and provide handicap parking spaces
- Install lever style door handles
- Clear travel pathways of any unnecessary equipment and furniture
- Assure handicap accessible bathrooms
- Assure sidewalk accessibility for wheelchairs

Maintaining Stamina During the Workday:

- Permit flexible scheduling, allow longer or more frequent work breaks
- Provide additional time to learn new responsibilities
- Provide self-paced workload
- Provide backup coverage for when the employee needs to take breaks
- Allow for use of supportive employment and job coaches
- Provide for job sharing opportunities
- Allow part-time work schedules
- Develop job opportunities that are accommodating for those with special needs
- Avoid scheduling more challenging tasks at the end of the work shift when fatigue is more likely to be a factor

Difficulty Staying Organized and Meeting Deadlines:

- Encourage the employee to use daily TO-DO lists and check items off as they are completed
- Provide a special calendar to mark meetings and deadlines
- Remind employee of important deadlines via memos or e-mail or weekly supervision
- Provide a watch or pager with timer capability
- Provide electronic organizers
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps
- Assign a mentor to assist employee in determining goals and provide daily guidance
- Schedule weekly meetings with supervisor, manager or mentor to determine if goals are being met

Visual Problems:

- Provide written information in large print
- Change fluorescent lights to high intensity, white lights
- Increase natural lighting
- Provide a glare-resistant screen for computer monitors
- Consult a vision specialist, particularly for an employee with a vision impairment

Maintaining Concentration:

- Reduce distractions in the work area, including clutter in the employee's work environment
- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Allow for use of white noise or environmental sound machines
- Encourage the employee to focus on one task at a time
- Increase natural lighting or provide full spectrum lighting
- Plan for uninterrupted work time
- Divide large assignments into smaller tasks and steps
- Restructure job to include only essential functions

Memory Deficits:

- Allow the employee to tape record meetings
 - Provide type written minutes of each meeting
 - Provide notebooks, calendars or sticky notes to record information for easy retrieval
 - Provide written as well as verbal instructions
 - Allow additional training time
 - Provide written checklists and use color-coding to help identify items
 - Post instructions close to frequently used equipment
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Problem Solving Deficits:

- Provide picture diagrams of problem solving techniques (e.g., flow charts)
- Restructure the job to include only essential functions
- Assign a supervisor, manager or mentor for when the employee has questions

Attendance Issues:

- Provide flexible leave for health problems
- Provide a self-paced work load and flexible hours
- Provide part-time work schedule or job sharing arrangement

Working Effectively with Supervisors:

- Provide positive praise and reinforcement
- Provide written job instructions
- Write clear expectations of responsibilities and the consequences of not meeting them
- Allow for open communication with managers and supervisors
- Establish written long term and short term goals
- Develop strategies to deal with problems before they arise
- Provide written work agreements
- Develop a procedure to routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodation(s)

Difficulty Handling Stress and Emotions:

- Recognize that emotionality and irritability can be common following some TBIs
- Recognize that the individual's ability to manage stress can be impacted by a TBI
- Provide realistic praise and positive reinforcement
- Refer to counseling and employee assistance programs (EAP)
- Provide sensitivity training to co-workers
- Allow the employee to take a break as a part of a stress management plan
- Provide family/caregiver open communication and assistance for the TBI patient's new job experience



EMPLOYMENT ENABLES MANY PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND COMBAT-RELATED CONDITIONS, INCLUDING THOSE WITH TBI, TO FULLY PARTICIPATE IN SOCIETY. IN FACT, ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON DISABILITY, PEOPLE WHO REGAIN EMPLOYMENT FOLLOWING THE ONSET OF A DISABILITY REPORT HIGHER LIFE SATISFACTION AND BETTER ADJUSTMENT THAN DO PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT EMPLOYED.

Issues of Change:

- Recognize that a change in the office environment or of supervisors may be difficult for a person with a brain injury
- When transitioning supervisors, maintain open channels of communication between the employee and the new and old supervisor
- Provide weekly or monthly meetings with the employee to discuss workplace issues and production levels

Additional information about TBI and employment can be found on the America's Heroes at Work Web site: www.AmericasHeroesAtWork.gov.

This fact sheet was developed in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy, the Job Accommodation Network, the Veterans' Employment and Training Service, the Defense Centers of Excellence for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury, and the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center.

Help For Employers:

For personal assistance related to job accommodations for veterans with disabilities call:

Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

800-526-7234 (voice)

877-781-9403 (TTY)

