

Disability Rights IOWA

Law Center for Protection and Advocacy™

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

What is a “reasonable accommodation”?

A “reasonable accommodation” is any modification or adjustment to a job, or to the work environment, that will enable a qualified applicant or employee with a disability to participate in the application process or to perform essential job functions. Reasonable accommodations may also include adjustments to assure that a qualified individual with a disability has rights and privileges in employment equal to those of employees without disabilities.

What are some of the accommodations that job applicants and employees may need?

Some of the most common types of accommodations include:

- physical changes, such as installing a ramp or modifying a workspace or restroom;
- sign language interpreters for people who are deaf, or readers for people who are blind;
- providing a quieter workspace or making other changes to reduce noisy distractions for someone with a mental disability;
- training and other written materials in an accessible format (such as in Braille, on audio tape, or on computer disk);
- TTYs for use with telephones by people who are deaf, and hardware and software that make computers accessible to people with vision impairments or who have difficulty using their hands; and
- time off for someone who needs treatment for a disability.

Other examples of reasonable accommodation include restricting a job, modifying work schedules, acquiring or modifying equipment, or appropriately modifying examinations, training, or other programs.

Reasonable accommodation may also include reassigning a current employee to a vacant position for which the person is qualified if the person is unable to do the original job because of a disability.

Employers are usually not required to lower quality or quantity standards as an accommodation.

Are there limits on reasonable accommodations?

Yes. Generally, the person with a disability who is asking for an accommodation must be otherwise qualified, and the disability must be known to the employer. In addition, an employer does not have to make an accommodation if it would impose an “undue hardship” on the operation of the employer’s business.

Do I have to ask for an accommodation?

Yes, usually you have to ask for one. There are exceptions, however. For example, an employer may have a duty to ask about the need for accommodations if the employer knows you have a mental disability that makes it hard for you to ask for an accommodation yourself.

If a person with a disability requests an accommodation, the employer and the individual should work together to identify the accommodation.

How do I ask for an accommodation?

Although there are no magic words that have to be used in the request, using the term “reasonable accommodation” can help. A request may be oral, but it is usually a good idea to put it in writing. You do not need to complete any special forms, although you may want to use your employer’s form (if there is one), so there is no misunderstanding. Also, a family member, friend, health professional, or other representative may request a reasonable accommodation for you if you cannot do it yourself. The request should be made to your supervisor or to your company’s personnel or human resources department.

If I ask for an accommodation, can my employer make me provide medical documentation?

Sometimes, yes. Your employer may require you to go to a doctor unless both your disability and the need for reasonable accommodation are obvious, or unless you have already given that information. Sometimes, your employer may ask that your own doctor give certain information, and you may have to pay your doctor for that evaluation. Sometimes, your employer may ask that you go to a doctor that they have chosen.

Do I have to pay for a reasonable accommodation if I need one?

No.

Can an employer lower my salary or pay me less than other employees doing the same job because I need a reasonable accommodation?

No.

Where can I get more information about reasonable accommodations?

Disabilities Rights Iowa
400 East Court Avenue, Suite 300
Des Moines, IA 50309
1-800-779-2502/1-866-483-3342 TTY
info@disabilityrightsiowa.org

This resource material is intended as a guide for people with disabilities. Nothing written here shall be understood as legal advice. For specific legal advice, an attorney should be consulted.