DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Developmental disabilities are a variety of conditions that become apparent during childhood and cause mental or physical limitations. These conditions include autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy, mental retardation, and other neurological impairments. People with developmental disabilities may not learn as quickly as others or express themselves clearly. Some people may have limited ability to take care of their physical needs or have limited mobility. Individuals may have more than one disability.

Developmental disabilities have a variety of causes, which can occur before, during or after birth. Those occurring before birth include genetic problems, poor prenatal care or exposure of the fetus to toxic elements, drugs or alcohol. Occurrences during birth, such as a disruption of oxygen to the baby, or accidents after birth, like car accidents causing traumatic brain injury, may also cause developmental disabilities.

It is difficult to define the limits of people with disabilities, as we continue to discover extraordinary abilities within them. While people who have developmental disabilities face a more challenging future than most, they can still enjoy a full and active life. What they need most is encouragement, understanding, and the willingness of others to help them maximize their opportunities for becoming part of their community.

Symptoms may include limitations in cognitive abilities, limitations with motor abilities, and limitations with social abilities. The degree of limitation will vary from individual to individual.

Persons with Developmental Disabilities In The Workplace
Accommodation Examples For People With Developmental Disabilities
(From The Job Accommodation Network)

Cognitive Limitations:
Reading
• Provide pictures, symbols, or diagrams instead of words
• Read written information to employee or provide written information on audiotape
• Use voice output on computer
• Use Reading Pen on single words
• Use line guide to identify or hi-light one line of text at a time

Writing
• Provide templates or forms to prompt information requested
• Allow verbal response instead of written response
• Allow typed response instead of written response
• Use voice input and spell-check on computer
• Use a scribe to write the employee's response

- Provide ample space on forms requiring written response
- Use voice activated recorder to record verbal instructions

Calculations
- Allow use of large-display or talking calculator and use counter or ticker
- Make pre-counted or pre-measured poster or jig
- Provide talking tape measure and liquid level indicators
- Mark the measuring cup with a "fill to here" line

Handling Change
- Recognize that a change in the office environment or of supervisors may be difficult
- 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

Organization
- Minimize clutter and color-code items or resources
- Provide A-B-C and 1-2-3 chart
- Divide large tasks into multiple smaller tasks
- Use symbols instead of words and use printed labels instead of hand-written labels

Time Management
- Provide verbal prompts (reminders)
- Provide written or symbolic reminders and use alarm watch or beeper
- Use jig for assembly to increase productivity
- Arrange materials in order of use
- Use task list with numbers or symbols
- Avoid isolated workstations
- Provide space for job coach and additional training or retraining as needed

Gross And Fine Motor Limitations:
Computer Use
- Use key-guard
- Use alternative input devices such as speech recognition, trackball, and joystick

Telephone Use
- Use large-button phone
- Use phone with universal symbols (fire, police, doctor)
- Use phone with speed-dial, clearly labelled
- Use receiver holder
- Use headset

Workstation Use
- Place anti-fatigue mats at workstation

- Use motorized scooter
- Use stools at workstations
- Move items within reach
- Provide frequent rest breaks

Tool Use
- Use ergonomic tools, handle build-ups, or other tool adaptations
- Use orthopaedic writing aids
- Use grip aids
- Use jig or brace

Social Interaction:
- Implement a structure of positive feedback
- Use visual performance charts
- Provide tangible rewards
- Use co-workers as mentors and provide sensitivity training (disability awareness) to all employees
- Use Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- Provide job coach and use training videos to demonstrate appropriate behaviour in workplace
- Model appropriate social skills such as where to eat, when to hug, how to pay for coffee, and how to ask for help

Effective Supervision:
- Communicate one-to-one with employee
- Deal with problems as they arise
- Keep job coach and/or placement counsellor informed
- Train supervisors on communication etiquette
- Discuss disciplinary procedures
- Monitor effectiveness of accommodations currently provided

Handling Problem-Solving Deficits:
- Provide picture diagrams of problem solving techniques, i.e. flow charts
- Restructure the job to include only essential functions
- Assign a supervisor, manager or mentor to be available when the employee has questions

This information was compiled by Open Door Group to assist BC businesses to have successful working relationship with persons with disabilities in our communities.

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