



Employment Rights Helpline at Equip for Equality

SELF-ADVOCACY ASSISTANCE ★ LEGAL ADVICE ABOUT EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS ★ SAMPLE LETTERS & FORMS ★ REFERRALS

FACT SHEET: Best Practices for Your First Job as a Person with a Disability

I am ready to apply for my first job. Do I have any rights?

Yes. As a person with a disability, you have rights under many different laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). You even have rights under the ADA before you get a job.

Among other things, the ADA has rules about:

- Your right to keep your disability private before you get a job
- Your right to a reasonable accommodation

Do I have to tell anyone during my job interview that I have a disability? What about on a job application?

No. You are not required to tell anyone about your disability during a job interview or on a job application. You are not lying by keeping information about your disability private.

There is one exception to this rule. If you need a **reasonable accommodation** for the job application or interview process, then you do need to disclose that you have a disability. However, even if you know that you will need a reasonable accommodation to do your job, you are not required to disclose your disability on an application or during a job interview. You can ask after you get the job.

Review our Fact Sheet about [Disclosing Your Disability](#) to learn more.

What is a reasonable accommodation?

A reasonable accommodation is any change in the work environment or in the way things are usually done so that you, as a person with a disability, have equal access to employment.

Examples of reasonable accommodations during the **job application process** include:

- Making online applications accessible, such as compatible with a screen reader
- Providing extra time to take a pre-employment test
- Permitting an applicant to bring a service animal to a job interview
- Providing a sign language interpreter for a job interview
- Holding an interview in an accessible location

What should I do if I need a reasonable accommodation during the application process?

- **First:** Consider what accommodation or accommodations you need to have equal access to the job application process. If you are not sure, the Job Accommodation Network is a great resource for identifying potential accommodations: <https://askjan.org/>
 - If your disability or need for a reasonable accommodation is not obvious, talk to your doctor to make sure that you can get medical support for your request as your employer may ask for this once you make your request.
- **Second:** Ask the employer for the accommodation. It is best to be as clear as possible about your request by saying “I am asking for a reasonable accommodation under the ADA.” It is also best to make this request in writing or follow up on any conversations in writing. Be sure to ask for the accommodation in advance so the employer has time to provide it.
- **Third:** Work with the employer to identify whether any other accommodations would be reasonable and effective.
- **Tip:** Review our Fact Sheet about [Requesting Reasonable Accommodations](#) to learn more about reasonable accommodations and the interactive process.

What else can I do to be successful during a job interview?

- Arrive on time
- Dress professionally
- Bring a copy of your resume
- Express your interest in the position
- Be prepared to discuss your strengths and abilities and why you think you would be successful at the job
- Research the company or organization that you are interviewing with
- Practice for the interview beforehand
- Send a thank you note following the interview

I need help finding a job. Are there any organizations that can help?

Yes. There are many resources that help job seekers with disabilities find jobs and provide job training.

- **DHS: Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS).** DRS is the state agency that helps people with disabilities with job training, placement services, and other supports. There are 48 different offices across Illinois. If you have trouble getting services from DRS, contact us.
 - Phone: (800) 843-6154
 - Website: <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=29736>

- **Centers for Independent Living (CIL).** CILs provide resources and advocacy for people with disabilities with the goal of full participation in the community.
 - Website (to locate your closest CIL): <http://www.incil.org/locate>
- **Ability Works.** This organization helps job seekers with disabilities by providing services such as Ticket to Work, benefits counseling, job development, resume preparation, interview practice, job coaching, work evaluation, and project searches.
 - Phone: (202) 292-0149
 - Website: <http://abilityworks.org/home>
- **Illinois WorkNet.** This website was launched by the Governor's Illinois Workforce Innovation Board (IWIB) to provide access to workforce development resources.
 - Website: <https://www.illinoisworknet.com>
- **Jewish Vocational Services (JVS).** JVS provides the direction and training needed to get a job and offers on-the-job support for people with disabilities, regardless of religious affiliation, in Chicago and surrounding areas.
 - Phone: (312) 673-3400
 - Website: <https://www.jcfs.org/jvs/who-we-serve/job-seekers/people-disabilities>
- **Chicago Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD):** Job Training and Placement Referral is a service provided to people with disabilities under the age of 60 in Chicago through MOPD's network of employment program partners. Services include job training and placement assistance including: resume writing; job readiness training and preparation; employer connection for job openings; and one-on-one counseling regarding the transition to the workplace and issues related to Social Security benefits.
 - Phone: (312) 744-7050
 - Website: <https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/mopd/provdrs/emp.html>

What important information do I need to know once I get the job?

Once you get the job, your ADA rights continue. The ADA protects you from being treated differently because of your disability. You still have the right to keep your disability private and to request a reasonable accommodation.

However, just because you have a disability, the ADA does not protect you from ever being fired or disciplined. You still need to be able to do the essential parts of your job with or without an accommodation. Additionally, you still need to follow reasonable workplace rules.

Should I tell my employer or anyone at work that I have a disability?

It depends. Whether you choose to tell anyone at work about your disability is a personal decision. Review our Fact Sheet about [Disclosing Your Disability](#) to think through the reasons you might want to disclose and the reasons you might not.

Even when you are an employee, you are not *required* to voluntarily tell anyone that you have a disability unless you need a reasonable accommodation.

Can my employer ask me about my disability once I am an employee?

It depends. After you start your job, your employer can ask you about your disability or make you take a medical exam if it has a reasonable basis to believe that:

- You are not qualified for your job
- You need a reasonable accommodation
- You pose a direct threat to the health and safety of yourself or others

There is also a short window of time (after you get a conditional job offer but before you start working) where your employer can ask a lot of disability related questions or require medical exams. Learn more about these rules in our Fact Sheet on [Disclosing Your Disability](#).

Can I ask for reasonable accommodations on the job?

Yes. There are endless examples of potential workplace accommodations. Common **examples** include:

- Making an existing workplace accessible (installing a ramp, widening a doorway)
- Providing qualified readers or interpreters (ASL interpreters for important meetings)
- [Job restructuring](#) (removing marginal tasks)
- Part-time or modified work schedules (allowing a flexible schedule)
- Leave (providing unpaid leave in addition to leave available through the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and employer policies)
- Providing or changing equipment (installing computer software, such as JAWS)
- Modifying testing requirements, training materials, or policies (providing additional training)
- [Reassignment](#) (transferring to a vacant position for which you are qualified)
- [Working from home](#) (also known as telework)

How do I ask for a reasonable accommodation for my job?

The same rules we shared above apply here too. Our Fact Sheet on [Requesting Reasonable Accommodations](#) has more strategies for requesting accommodations and participating in the interactive process.

What should I do if I start having problems at work because of my disability?

Think about whether any **reasonable accommodations** may be able to help you. Remember that you can ask for reasonable accommodations at any time during your employment; it does not matter if you did not do so at the beginning.

If possible, ask for a reasonable accommodation **before** you have any performance problems. The ADA usually does not require employers to excuse past performance problems as a reasonable accommodation.

What else should I do to succeed at my job?

- Make sure to arrive on time to work and dress appropriately
- Be positive and a problem solver
- Work with your boss to address issues
- Learn from your setbacks
- Take initiative
- Understand your rights as a person with a disability

What should I do if I am being treated differently because of my disability?

If you are having any difficulties at work, contact our Helpline for free legal advice.

- It is much better to talk to us before problems get worse so we can help you come up with ideas and solutions to address the problems. You can reach our **Employment Rights Helpline** at (844-RIGHTS-9 or www.equipforequality.org/employment)

You may also want to start documenting (put in writing) your experiences.

- For best practices, see our Fact Sheet on [Documenting Discrimination](#).



DO YOU HAVE A QUESTION?

Contact Equip for Equality's Employment Rights Helpline

1-844-RIGHTS-9 (toll free) or (844) 744-4879

800-610-2779 (tty)

employment@equipforequality.org

www.equipforequality.org

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

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