

## Reasonable adjustments for mental health

### 1 . Understanding the law

Reasonable adjustments are changes an employer makes to remove or reduce a disadvantage related to someone's disability.

Disability is defined as a mental or physical impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out day-to-day activities. Some people might not recognise their mental health condition as a disability, but it's important that employers are aware that it could be.

The law (Equality Act 2010) says that employers must make reasonable adjustments for:

- workers
- contractors and self-employed people hired to personally do the work
- job applicants

Employers must make reasonable adjustments when:

- they know, or could reasonably be expected to know, someone is disabled
- a disabled staff member or job applicant asks for adjustments
- someone who's disabled is having difficulty with any part of their job
- someone's absence record, sickness record or delay in returning to work is because of, or linked to, their disability

Employers should try to make reasonable adjustments even if the issue is not a disability. Often, simple changes to a person's working arrangements or responsibilities could be enough to help them stay in work and work well.

Find out more about:

- [disability and the law](#)
- [what reasonable adjustments are](#)

### Making reasonable adjustments for mental health

Mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social wellbeing. It affects how we think, feel and behave.

If an employee has a mental health problem, it's important their employer takes it seriously and with the same care as a physical illness.

Mental health problems can:

- happen suddenly, because of a specific event in someone's life
- build up gradually over time
- be hard to spot because everyone has different signs and signals
- be hidden because many people find it difficult to talk about their mental health

- fluctuate over time which means that an employee's ability to cope with the demands of the job might change

When making reasonable adjustments for mental health it's helpful to remember that:

- every job is different, so what works in one situation might not work in another
- every employee is different, so what works for one employee might not work for another
- mental health fluctuates over time, so what works for an employee now might not work in the future

Employers and employees should work together to agree and review reasonable adjustments over time to make sure that the adjustments work well.

[Find out more about supporting mental health at work](#)

## Benefits of reasonable adjustments for mental health

Reasonable adjustments for mental health can help employees to stay in work while recovering from or managing a mental health condition. They can also help employees work safely and productively.

Reasonable adjustments for mental health can help employers to:

- retain employees, reducing recruitment and training costs
- reduce absence and associated costs
- make sure that people at work are well, safe and productive
- create a healthy work culture, building mental health awareness and demonstrating a commitment to good practice

## 2. Examples

It's important that employers and employees work together to find adjustments for mental health.

If an employee splits their time between the workplace and working from home, you need to think about how adjustments can be put in place for both.

## What reasonable adjustments can be made for mental health

Reasonable adjustments are specific to an individual person. They can cover any area of work, including:

- working hours and patterns
- changes to someone's physical working environment
- changes to someone's working arrangements
- finding a different way to do something
- adapting the way policies are applied
- providing equipment, services or support

### Working hours and patterns

For example:

- more frequent, shorter breaks
- paid time off for medical appointments
- flexible hours

- part-time or job share arrangements

## **Changing someone's role and responsibilities**

For example:

- reviewing tasks or deadlines to help someone have a reasonable workload while managing their mental health
- breaking down work into short term tasks to reduce the complexity of someone's work and to provide structure to the working day
- reviewing someone's responsibilities to reduce those that are more stressful – for example reducing phone calls or customer facing work
- moving someone into a different role or department if their current job has a negative impact on their mental health

## **Reviewing working relationships and communication styles**

For example:

- making sure someone is working with trusted people to limit the impact of different working and communication styles
- agreeing a preferred communication method to help reduce anxiety – for example by avoiding spontaneous phone calls

## **Changing the physical working environment**

For example:

- allowing someone to work from home to manage distractions or engage in activities that allow them to manage their mental health – for example, so they can take regular breaks without feeling other people are watching them
- relocating someone's workspace to a quieter area to reduce sensory demands
- providing rest areas away from the main staff area to allow someone to rest away from social demands
- providing reserved parking to reduce the stress of commuting

## **Policy changes**

For example:

- offering paid time off for someone to attend appointments in work time
- being flexible with [trigger points](#) for absence so that someone is not disadvantaged by taking absence when they are unwell
- offering an extended phased return to support someone to build up hours gradually and continue their recovery

## **Additional support**

For example:

- modifying supervision to provide regular check-ins, prioritising work and creating structure in the working day
- providing training or coaching to build confidence in skills relevant to the job
- providing a buddy or mentor to be a dedicated person who can support with work tasks

[Read case studies on making reasonable adjustments for mental health](#)

## **3. Requesting adjustments**

Everyone's experience of mental health is different, and mental health can fluctuate over time. This means that identifying, agreeing and monitoring reasonable adjustments can take time. It also relies on employers and employees talking openly so that everyone's needs are met.

As an employee, if you need a reasonable adjustment for mental health you should talk with your manager or employer. You should work together to agree any reasonable adjustments.

You can use our [template to request a meeting to discuss reasonable adjustments](#).

## Preparing for the meeting

Many people find it hard to talk openly about mental health, especially when they're under pressure.

You might find it helpful to:

- think carefully about what you want to disclose about your mental health
- write down notes which can be referred to during the conversation
- practise out aloud, or role-play with someone you trust, to help find the best words to put the points across
- read any policies your employer has relating to mental health, absence and reasonable adjustments – these should make clear what is expected of you and of your employer

## What to think about before asking for reasonable adjustments

You should take time to prepare for a conversation with your manager or employer about reasonable adjustments.

It's normal for people who are experiencing mental health problems to be unsure about what they need to manage their mental health. Many people might not feel ready to decide what adjustments to suggest.

There are several things you can think about when deciding what reasonable adjustments will help.

### Think about how your mental health affects your work

For example:

- Are there times in the day or week that are better or harder, or do you feel the same all the time?
- Are there tasks at home or at work that feel possible and easy to do now?
- Are there tasks at home or at work that feel unmanageable now?

### Think about how work affects your mental health

For example:

- Are there some tasks or situations that make you feel good?
- Are there some tasks or situations that make you feel anxious, worried or numb?

### Talk to a friend or family member

You can talk to a friend or family member to ask them what they see and think. People can find it hard to recognise patterns in their behaviour, especially when they are experiencing mental health problems.

For example, you could ask:

- When am I confident, settled and happy? What am I doing? Who am I with?
- When am I unsettled, anxious or withdrawn? What am I doing? Who am I with?

## Look through examples of reasonable adjustments

You could think about:

- what would help you manage your mental health and work
- what might be possible and reasonable for your employer

[Read our examples of reasonable adjustments for mental health](#)

## Get advice from an occupational health professional

An occupational health professional can give you advice on what adjustments might be suitable.

[Find out more about occupational health](#)

## Have the conversation and agree a plan with your employer

You should meet with your employer to discuss reasonable adjustments and agree a plan. You should:

- agree a time and place for the meeting in advance
- take notes in the meeting to refer to afterwards

It might be appropriate to ask someone you work with to join the meeting to take notes. This is helpful if you find it difficult to concentrate or remember things due to your mental health condition.

The meeting might include:

- explaining why you're requesting reasonable adjustments
- explaining which reasonable adjustments you want to make
- discussing the reasonable adjustments
- agreeing the reasonable adjustments
- agreeing a plan to review and monitor the reasonable adjustments
- what ongoing support is available

Your employer might not be able to make the changes that you ask for. But that does not mean they do not want to help you find a solution that works.

## Trial and monitor the reasonable adjustments

It's useful to monitor reasonable adjustments once they're in place.

You might sometimes find that reasonable adjustments:

- take time to work well as new routines are established
- need to be adapted to work effectively for everyone
- do not resolve the initial problem and need to be reviewed

Monitor the reasonable adjustments using the approach agreed during the meeting and [keep a record](#) of any changes made over time.

You can also use the [template for reviewing and monitoring reasonable adjustments for mental health](#).

## Put in place ongoing support and a process to review the reasonable adjustments

Mental health problems can last for a few weeks, months or longer-term. It's important that reasonable adjustments are reviewed on an ongoing basis.

You might find it useful to arrange follow-up meetings to discuss how the adjustment is working for you and your employer. These meetings might be weekly, monthly or less frequently depending on your situation.

Before the meeting it can be helpful to:

- agree with your employer when and where the meeting will take place
- how you and your employer will know if the reasonable adjustment is working or not
- agree what to do next if the reasonable adjustment is not working

## Get more advice and support

If you need more advice or support, you can:

- [contact the Acas helpline](#)
- [read our advice on asking for and agreeing reasonable adjustments](#)
- [read our advice on reviewing reasonable adjustments and keeping a record](#)

## 4. Responding to requests

As an employer, you should work together with your employee to agree reasonable adjustments for mental health.

Everyone's experience of mental health is different, and mental health can fluctuate over time. This means that identifying, agreeing and monitoring reasonable adjustments can take time. It also relies on you and your employees talking openly so that everyone's needs can be met.

## Preparing for a meeting to discuss reasonable adjustments for mental health

Many people find it hard to talk openly about mental health, especially when they are under pressure.

It can be helpful for you to:

- look through any organisation policies relating to mental health, absence and reasonable adjustments – the policies should make it clear what is expected of you and your employee
- think carefully about how confident you feel talking about mental health at work – you might find it useful to learn more about supporting someone with their mental health at work
- put yourself in your employee's position and think about what is going on for them and what they might need to support their mental health at work

## What to think about before responding to a request for reasonable adjustments

You should take time to prepare for a conversation with someone about reasonable adjustments.

It's normal for people who are experiencing mental health problems to be unsure about what they need to manage their mental health. Many people might not feel ready to decide what adjustments to suggest. This is why it's helpful to take a flexible approach, regularly monitoring and reviewing what works, and what does not.

There are several things you can think about which could help with deciding what reasonable adjustments will be possible.

## Look through the examples of reasonable adjustments

Think about:

- what might be possible given the employee's job
- what might the impact of these adjustments be on their ability to do the job to a satisfactory level
- what might the impact of these adjustments be to the rest of the team
- could any risks to performance or others in the team be minimised

[Find out more about examples of reasonable adjustments for mental health](#)

## Get advice from an occupational health professional

An occupational health professional can give you advice on what adjustments might be suitable.

[Find out more about occupational health](#)

## Have a conversation and agree a plan with your employee

You should meet with your employee to discuss reasonable adjustments and agree a plan.

Before the meeting you should:

- agree a time and place for the meeting
- share any policies that are relevant to reasonable adjustments for mental health
- explain to them the meeting is to help find a solution that will help them to stay well at work
- explain to them that some things might be possible and some things might not be possible but you're willing to support them access adjustments that are reasonable

Some people with mental health conditions find it difficult to concentrate or remember things. It can sometimes be helpful for employees to bring a trusted person to take notes on the conversation for them to refer back to after the meeting.

The meeting might include:

- checking in on how they are
- explaining what the organisation policy is on reasonable adjustments for mental health
- asking them what reasonable adjustments they would like to explore and why they think these will be helpful to them
- discussing how the reasonable adjustments could work in practice
- suggesting any reasonable adjustments you think might be appropriate
- agreeing the reasonable adjustments to try
- agreeing a plan to review and monitor the reasonable adjustments
- sharing what ongoing support is available

## After the meeting

After the meeting you should confirm the agreed reasonable adjustments in writing.

You can use our [template letter to confirm agreed reasonable adjustments](#).

## Trial and monitor the reasonable adjustments

It's useful to monitor reasonable adjustments once they're in place.

You might sometimes find that reasonable adjustments:

- take time to work well as new routines are established
- need to be adapted to work effectively for everyone
- do not resolve the initial problem and need to be reviewed

Monitor the reasonable adjustments using the approach agreed during the meeting and [keep a record](#) of any changes made over time.

You can also use the [template for reviewing and monitoring reasonable adjustments for mental health](#).

## Put in place ongoing support and a process to review the reasonable adjustments

Mental health problems can last for a few weeks, months or longer-term. It's important that reasonable adjustments are reviewed on an ongoing basis.

You might find it useful to arrange follow-up meetings to discuss how the work adjustments are working. These meetings might be weekly, monthly or less frequently depending on the situation.

Before the meeting it can be helpful to:

- agree with your employee when and where the meeting will take place
- how you and your employee will know if the reasonable adjustment is working or not
- agree what to do next if the reasonable adjustment is not working

## Get more advice and support

If you need more advice or support, you can:

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## 5. Managing employees

Managers play an important role in providing access to reasonable adjustments for mental health.

Managers are often concerned about having conversations about reasonable adjustments for mental health. For example, a manager might:

- want to do the right thing but do not know what to do or say
- find it difficult to understand how a mental health condition affects someone
- find it difficult as employees do not always say what they need



- be unsure what is 'reasonable' – sometimes employees can expect too much, or do not ask for enough help

As a manager, it's important that you know how to support someone to access reasonable adjustments for mental health.

## How to support someone to access the support they need

To support employees with reasonable adjustments requests, you should:

- check in with them – for example, ask how they are and if they need help
- recognise changes in their behaviour
- try to understand how their mental health impacts them
- understand that adjustments might not work the first time, and might need to change over time
- be flexible in your approach and respond to changing needs
- show ongoing support – mental health fluctuates over time and adjustments might need to be in place for days, weeks, months or sometimes years
- consider the needs of the employee and the team in case anything needs to change
- know when to ask for help from others, such as other senior leaders or someone from HR or occupational health

## Having a conversation about reasonable adjustments for mental health

Conversations about reasonable adjustments for mental health might come about because:

- you notice that someone in your team is struggling with their mental health
- someone in your team asks to have a conversation about work adjustments for mental health
- someone in your team has spoken to HR or occupational health who have recommended reasonable adjustments for mental health

You can help the person requesting reasonable adjustments look after their mental health at work and understand what to expect from a meeting to discuss reasonable adjustments requests.

For example, you could:

- ask them how they are
- make it clear they should look after themselves and focus on managing their mental health
- check if they have accessed support available through work – for example mental health support
- let them know about any policies that are relevant to reasonable adjustments for mental health
- let them know that the organisation will try to support them in accessing reasonable adjustments
- explain the reasonable adjustments process and procedures
- agree on a reasonable adjustment meeting date

If you're responsible for leading the conversation, you should follow advice from your employer.

You could also [read our advice on responding to a request for reasonable adjustments for mental health](#).

## Following the conversation

Reasonable adjustments might not work straight away. Allow some time for changes to take place.

As a manager, you should:

- monitor how the adjustments are impacting the employee, others they work with and work priorities

- review the reasonable adjustments as agreed
- arrange regular check-ins with your employee

## 6. Reviewing policies

Many organisations have absence and reasonable adjustment policies in place. Employers should review their existing policies to make sure they're suitable for employees with mental health problems.

### What to consider when reviewing the policies

It can be helpful to consider if the policies:

- are clear and accessible
- use language that demonstrates care
- use [triggers points](#) for absence that put employees with recognised and ongoing mental health problems at a disadvantage
- allow managers and employees to take a person by person approach
- are flexible to accommodate mental health conditions that might change over time
- are clear on what needs to be done by who, how and when
- are easy for employees to find
- are understood by managers
- are implemented consistently by managers
- provide opportunities for employees to give feedback on the policy and recommend changes

Following the review of the policies, it might be found that:

- the policies need to be revised
- managers need training and support to implement the policies effectively
- employees need training and support to implement the policies effectively

### The benefits of a reasonable adjustment policy

It's a good idea for your organisation to have a policy that covers reasonable adjustments for mental health.

A policy helps make clear:

- how and when reasonable adjustments for mental health can be accessed
- how managers can respond and support staff to put reasonable adjustments in place
- how reasonable adjustments for mental health will be reviewed and monitored
- what happens if the reasonable adjustments are not working for the person or the employer

### What the policy should include

To support mental health at work, a reasonable adjustment policy might also include:

- reference to a mental health or wellbeing strategy
- activities to raise awareness of mental health in the organisation
- information on the internal support available – for example mental health champions
- what external support is available – for example an employee assistance programme or occupational health services

- manager training and support

## If there is no policy

If there is no reasonable adjustment for mental health policy, the employer must follow the law. They should also try to be as fair as they can.

For example, they can look at how reasonable adjustments for mental health have been managed previously to help decide how it should be managed now or in the future.

Find out more about:

- [creating absence policies](#)
- [disability-related absence](#)