

Discussing ADHD in the Workplace

ADHD can have a significant impact on a person's experience in the workplace. The average person with ADHD takes approximately 16 days off per calendar year and may experience burnout, time management difficulties, and stigma from colleagues (ADHD Australia, 2022; ADHD UK, n.d).

A person with ADHD can learn to better manage their symptoms using various compensatory skills, but they will also likely benefit from workplace accommodations and the understanding of co-workers and employers.

The Decision to Disclose

The decision to disclose a diagnosis is a deeply personal one and disclosure of ADHD is not compulsory in the workplace. In fact, it has been found that most adults with ADHD do not disclose their diagnosis at work (The Neurodiverse Safe Work Initiative, n.d).

However, there are a few reasons why you might want to disclose an ADHD diagnosis to your workplace.

Reasons for Disclosing	Reasons for Not Disclosing
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May help to obtain necessary accommodation in the workplace.• Fosters a higher level of understanding if your boss is concerned by issues that you may be experiencing with attention to detail and distractibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concerns about potential stigma and discrimination arising from the belief that ADHD does not impact one's work performance.

Reasonable Expectations

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 protects individuals from workplace discrimination on the basis of disability, which includes ADHD (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014). There is also a growing appreciation of the benefits of neurodiversity in the workplace (ADHD Foundation, 2023).

It is important that both employers and employees negotiate and understand what is reasonable regarding accommodation for employees with ADHD. Accommodations should not change the inherent requirements of a job, but they should provide the necessary scaffolding to assist an individual to perform these requirements (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014).

You might want to reflect on past experiences to make an informed decision about which accommodations are likely to help you fulfil essential tasks (Hoey, 2024). For example, it may be possible for an employee to perform a task while sitting or standing. Therefore, if alternating between the two helps them to concentrate, allowing this would be a reasonable accommodation (ADHD Foundation, 2023).


Accommodations should be deemed reasonable so long as they do not cause 'unjustifiable hardship' to the employer (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014).



Possible Accommodations

Accommodation for employees with ADHD needs to be personalised as different accommodations will be appropriate for different people and workplaces (Low, 2023; ADHD UK, n.d.).

However, accommodations may include a selection of the following:

Minimising distractions and inattention	Organisation, time management, and memory	Interpersonal issues and stigma
Work in a quiet area	Reduce the number of less essential meetings	Workplace education regarding neurodiversity
Record ideas in a notebook to avoid interruption of the task at hand	Flexible arrival time (if appropriate for the job)	Human resources (HR) anti-discrimination policies should specifically reference neurodiversity
Wear noise cancelling headphones	Receive regular management check-ins to ensure adequate progress is being made with tasks	
Take regular breaks to get up and walk around	Use of electronic scheduling tools	



It can be hard to negotiate accommodations with an employer, especially if you lack allies in your workplace, but one can learn to better engage in self-advocacy.

Self-Advocacy Hints

Definition: Self-advocacy means you know your rights and responsibilities, you speak-up for your rights, and you are able to make choices and decisions that affect your life.



It is important to be able to clearly assert your needs and get the help you require to make the most of your unique set of strengths and challenges. Doing so may involve discussing the possibility of specific accommodations, such as written instructions if you know that you struggle with verbal instructions.



Discussing the reasons for the challenges you face and sharing information about ADHD can also form a part of self-advocacy.



You may want to plan and write down a request for accommodation before making it. This may be helpful as there can be specific considerations that need to be made when self-advocating in the workplace. These may include channels that employees are expected to go through, such as HR departments.

“Building a network of allies can make it easier to engage in self-advocacy”

(Hoey, 2024)

The Bottom Line

Managing ADHD in the workplace is a collaborative process. On the one hand, employees have a responsibility to ensure that they are meeting the requirements of their jobs. On the other hand, employers have a responsibility to provide an inclusive workplace.

Clear and open communication is important for ensuring that this is achieved. One must engage in self-advocacy, request reasonable accommodations, and disclose a diagnosis of ADHD if you are comfortable doing so.

References

- ADHD Foundation. (2023). *Neurodiversity in the workplace: An information guide for employers* [PDF]. ADHD Foundation.
https://www.adhdfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/ADHD-F-Neurodiversity-at-work-and-Training-Guide_Business.pdf
- ADHD UK. (n.d.). *Reasonable adjustments*. ADHD UK.
<https://adhduk.co.uk/reasonable-adjustments/>
- ADHD WA. (n.d.). *In the workplace*. ADHD WA.
<https://www.adhdwa.org/what-is-adhd/in-the-workplace/>
- Admin. (2023, April 19). *ADHD at work: Tips for thriving in the workplace*. psychiatristsaustralia.com.au.
<https://psychiatristsaustralia.com.au/adhd-at-work-tips-for-thriving-in-the-workplace/>
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2014). *Disability discrimination* [PDF]. Australian Human Rights Commission. https://humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/GPGB_disability_discrimination.pdf
- Hoey B. (2024, April 16). *Self-advocacy strategies for neurodivergent adults*. Relational Psych.
<https://www.relationalpsych.group/articles/self-advocacy-strategies-for-neurodivergent-adults>
- Low, K. (2023, December 5). *ADHD job rights and accommodations*. Verywell Mind.
<https://www.verywellmind.com/job-rights-and-accommodations-20403>
- Managing ADHD in the workplace*. (2022). [PDF]. ADHD Australia.
<https://www.adhdwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/ADHD-Workplace-Practical-Strategies-202007-v1.1-web.pdf>
- Webinar: ADHD Safe Work – More than just noise cancelling headphones with Catherine Lee*. (n.d.). The Neurodiverse Safe Work Initiative.
<https://neurodiversesafework.com.au/adhd-safe-work-webinar/>