



ACCOMMODATIONS FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL RETARDATION OR OTHER DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

By [Suzanne R. Gosden, MA](#)

[Preface](#)

Terminology

Asperger Syndrome is a social and communication disorder. Individuals with Asperger Syndrome may have problems with social interaction, nonverbal communication, or managing change. They appear to lack common sense. Other difficulties include motor skills, writing, math, abstract reasoning, or concept formation. People with Asperger Syndrome may have anxiety, depression, or behavioral problems. <http://www.asperger.org>

Autism is a complex developmental disorder. Symptoms of autism include impaired social interaction, problems with verbal and nonverbal communication and imagination, and unusual or severely limited activities and interests. The most severe cases of autism are marked by extremely repetitive, unusual, self-injurious, and aggressive behavior. The mildest forms of autism resemble a personality disorder associated with a perceived learning disability.

<http://www.autism-society.org>

Cerebral Palsy is a disorder caused by brain damage, affecting ability to control movement and posture. People with Cerebral Palsy exhibit muscle weakness (paresis), inability to make voluntary movements and suppress involuntary ones. It can be associated with other problems such as seizures, mental retardation,

ear/hearing problems, eye/vision problems, or verbal communication problems.
<http://www.ucpa.org>

Developmental Disabilities are severe, chronic disabilities which are attributable to a mental or physical impairment or combination of mental and physical impairments; are manifested before the person attains the age twenty-two; is likely to continue indefinitely; and results in substantial functional limitations in three or more of the following areas of major life activities:

- ▶ self-care
- ▶ receptive and expressive language
- ▶ learning
- ▶ mobility
- ▶ self-direction
- ▶ capacity of independent living
- ▶ economic self-sufficiency

<http://www.arch.gatech.edu>

Down Syndrome is a genetic condition caused by extra genetic material (genes) from the 21st chromosome. Individuals with Down Syndrome also have some degree of mental retardation, or cognitive disability and other developmental delays. Sixty to eighty percent of people with Down syndrome have hearing deficits. Fourty to fourty-five percent of people with Down syndrome have congenital heart disease. Other important medical aspects in Down syndrome, including immunologic concerns, leukemia, Alzheimer disease, seizure disorders, sleep apnea and skin disorders. <http://TheArc.org/faqs/down.html>

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is a series of mental and physical birth defects that include mental retardation, growth deficits, central nervous system dysfunction, craniofacial abnormalities and behavioral maladjustments. Fetal Alcohol Effect is a less severe set of the same symptoms. <http://www.nofas.org>

Fragile X Syndrome is a hereditary condition which can cause learning problems ranging from subtle learning disabilities and a normal IQ, to severe mental retardation and autism. Individuals with Fragile X syndrome may also have physical and behavioral disorders, and speech and language delay.
<http://nfx.org>

Mental Retardation begins in childhood and is characterized by limitations in both intelligence and adaptive skills. An individual is considered to have mental retardation based on three criteria: intellectual functioning level (IQ) is below 70-75; significant limitations exist in two or more adaptive skill areas; and the condition is present from childhood (defined as age 18 or less) (AAMR, 1992). The three major known causes of mental retardation are Fetal Alcohol

Syndrome, Down syndrome, and Fragile X syndrome. <http://thearc.org>

Prater-Willi Syndrome is a complex genetic disorder that includes short stature, mental retardation or learning disabilities, incomplete sexual development, characteristic behavior problems, low muscle tone, and an involuntary urge to eat constantly, which leads to obesity. <http://www.pwsausa.org>

Spina Bifida is a congenital deformity that begins early in pregnancy. It is characterized by a defective closure in the vertebral column. The most common impairment is partial or total paralysis of affected muscle groups. People with spina bifida may also have bowel and bladder dysfunction. Individuals may develop hydrocephalus at birth, which can create learning disabilities and other cognitive impairments. <http://www.arch.gatech.edu>

Other related conditions or symptoms of MR/DD can include:

- ▶ Pervasive developmental disorder-not otherwise specified
- ▶ Semantic-pragmatic disorder
- ▶ Hyperlexia
- ▶ Developmental language disorder
- ▶ Mixed expressive-receptive language disorder
- ▶ Speech disorders-not otherwise specified
- ▶ Hearing impairments
- ▶ Vision impairments
- ▶ Gross motor impairments
- ▶ Fine motor impairments

Accommodation Ideas for People with MR/DD

Note: People with MR/DD may experience limitations in cognitive abilities, motor abilities, and social abilities that can affect workplace performance. People who have MR/DD may have some of these limitations, and possibly all of these limitations. The degree of limitation will vary from individual to individual, and therefore, the accommodation provided will also vary.

Limitations in Cognitive Abilities

Reading: Depending on IQ and other cognitive abilities, people with MR/DD may not be able to read information in the work environment.

- ▶ Provide pictures, symbols, or diagrams instead of words
- ▶ Read written information to employee
- ▶ 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: Depending on IQ and other cognitive abilities, people with MR/DD may not be able to write, spell, sign documents, or otherwise communicate through written word.

- 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 on computer
- Use spell-check on computer
- Use a scribe to write the employee's response
- Provide ample space on forms requiring written response

Memory: People with MR/DD might have memory deficits due to auditory processing problems, cognitive inability to retain information, or congenital hearing impairment.

- Use voice activated recorder to record verbal instructions
- Provide written information
- Provide checklists
- Prompt employee with verbal cues (reminders)
- Post written or pictorial instructions on frequently-used machines

Performing Calculations: Depending on IQ and other cognitive abilities, people with MR/DD may not be able to count, tally, measure, or track due to an inability to "do math" or perform calculations involving numbers.

- Allow use of calculator

- ▶ Large-display calculator
- ▶ Talking calculator

- Use counter or ticker
- Make pre-counted or pre-measured poster or jig
- Provide talking tape measure
- Use liquid level indicators
- Mark the measuring cup with a "fill to here" line

Organization: People with MR/DD may be disorganized due to an inability to retain information and/or an inability to transfer or apply skills in different work environments.

- Minimize clutter
- Color-code items or resources
- Provide A-B-C chart

- ☒ Provide 1-2-3 chart
- ☒ Divide large tasks into multiple smaller tasks
- ☒ Avoid re-organization of workspace
- ☒ Label items or resources

- ▶ Use symbols instead of words
- ▶ Use print labels instead of hand-written labels

Time Management/Performing or Completing Tasks: People with MR/DD may have limitations in adaptive skills, such as self-initiating tasks.

- ☒ Provide verbal prompts (reminders)
- ☒ Provide written or symbolic reminders
- ☒ 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
- ☒ Provide additional training or retraining as needed

Limitations in Motor Abilities

Using Computer: People with MR/DD might have difficulty using the computer due to motor problems, such as manual dexterity deficits, spasticity or rigidity, paralysis, or birth defects involving the fingers, hands, or arms.

- ☒ Use key guard
- ☒ Use alternative input devices

- ▶ speech recognition
- ▶ speech output
- ▶ trackball
- ▶ joystick
- ▶ touchscreen

Using Telephone: People with MR/DD might have difficulty using the telephone due to motor problems, such as manual dexterity deficits, spasticity or rigidity, paralysis, or birth defects involving the fingers, hands, or arms.

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

Accessing Workspace: People with MR/DD may have difficulty accessing the workspace due to gross motor problems, such as muscle weakness or fatigue, an inability to stand for long periods of time, inability to walk long distances, inability to reach items, or an inability to carry/move heavy objects.

- ▶ Place anti-fatigue mats at workstation
- ▶ Use motorized scooter
- ▶ Use stools at workstations
- ▶ Move items within reach
- ▶ Provide frequent rest breaks

Handling or Grasping Objects: People with MR/DD might have difficulty handling or grasping objects due to fine motor problems, such as an inability to pinch or grip, inability to maintain a steady hand, muscle weakness, or joint pain.

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

Limitations in Social Abilities

Emotional Support: People with MR/DD may need more or different emotional support in the workplace.

- ▶ Give positive feedback
- ▶ Use visual performance charts
- ▶ Provide tangible rewards
- ▶ Use co-workers as mentors
- ▶ Use Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- ▶ Provide job coach

Interacting with Co-Workers: People with MR/DD may have limitations in adaptive skills, such as communicating with others, or exhibiting appropriate social skills.

- ▶ Provide sensitivity training (disability awareness) to all employees
- ▶ Use role-play scenarios to demonstrate appropriate behavior in workplace
- ▶ Use training videos to demonstrate appropriate behavior in workplace
- ▶ Model appropriate social skills

- ▶ Where to eat at work
- ▶ When to eat at work
- ▶ When to hug other co-workers
- ▶ How to pay for coffee
- ▶ What to do if you are mad

- ▶Who to ask for help
- ▶When to leave your workstation

Working Effectively with Supervisors: People with MR/DD may have limitations in adaptive skills, such as communicating with others and exhibiting appropriate social skills.

- ☒ Communicate one-to-one with employee
- ☒ Deal with problems as they arise
- ☒ Keep job coach informed
- ☒ Train supervisors on communication etiquette
- ☒ Discuss disciplinary procedures
- ☒ Monitor effectiveness of accommodations currently provided

To discuss further accommodations for people with mental retardation or developmental disabilities, contact JAN at 1-800-526-7234.

Job Accommodation Network's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR)

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Accommodation Examples

Mental Retardation

- ▶ A production worker with [mental retardation](#) and [Cerebral Palsy](#) had difficulty grasping a plastic bottle to accurately apply an adhesive label. JAN suggested making a wooden jig to hold the bottle while the employee applies the label. Approximate accommodation cost was under \$50.
- ▶ A cookie maker with [mental retardation](#) cannot count, but must bake cookies in sets of twelve. JAN suggested using a twelve-hole plastic template, which is inserted on the cookie sheet during preparation, but removed before baking. The employee can use the template as a guide, filling every hole in the template with cookie batter, ensuring that she makes twelve cookies every time. Approximate accommodation cost is under \$20.
- ▶ A grocery stock person with [Autism](#) cannot remember to wear all parts of his uniform. JAN suggested taking a picture of the employee in full uniform. Give him the picture, and allow him to use the picture as reference when preparing for work. Approximate accommodation cost is \$5.
- ▶ A video store clerk with [Fragile-X](#) did not know her ABCs, and could not read movie titles. She had difficulty stocking returned videos to the shelf. JAN suggested the employer make xerox picture labels for the movie cases that matched shelf display boxes. This will allow the employee to match pictures, not words, when returning videos to the shelf. Approximate accommodation cost is under \$75.
- ▶ A cleaning staff person with [Asperger Syndrome](#) was not cleaning to quality standards. JAN suggested using a job coach to model skills and techniques for cleaning. JAN also suggested using a multi-set alarm watch to help the employee budget time, allowing herself enough time to complete each task to the employer's standards. Approximate accommodation cost is under \$35.
- ▶ A production line worker with [mental retardation](#) wears bulky safety gloves and

uncomfortable safety glasses while separating cardboard in manufacturing plant. Her productivity is below average. JAN suggested purchasing correct size safety gloves, so her manual dexterity is not affected. JAN also suggested purchasing correct size safety glasses, so employee is not losing time pushing her glasses up. Approximate accommodation cost is under \$100.

▶A grocery store clerk with [mental retardation](#) cannot tell time. He does not know when to take his break, and is often late returning from breaks. JAN suggested using a multi-set alarm watch that beeps or vibrates. A supervisor can set the alarm to alert employee when to go on break, or return from break. Approximate accommodation cost is under \$35.

▶A kitchen worker with [Autism](#) has difficulty controlling emotions at work when his routines or job tasks are changed. JAN suggested providing employee with a picture chart, which would identify all tasks to be completed in a week. Meet with the employee daily or weekly to remind the employee of upcoming tasks or changes in routine, so he will not become anxious or upset. Approximate accommodation cost is \$0.

▶A janitor with [mental retardation](#) and [Prader-Willi Syndrome](#) cleans physician's offices at night. His compulsion to eat any food product prevents him from staying on task, and sometimes makes him sick. JAN suggested storing all food in a locked cabinet or locked area. JAN also suggested providing a job coach for this employee, to help keep him on task, and to model appropriate behavior. Approximate accommodation cost is under \$250.

▶A clerical aid with [Down Syndrome](#) would sometimes get lost or become disoriented when delivering mail items to different floors in her building. JAN suggested providing an employee with a color-coded map of the building, identifying each department or office, and location of elevators. This employee could also use a walkie-talkie to communicate with a supervisor in the event she was lost in the building. Approximate accommodation cost is under \$75.

▶A mail clerk with [fetal alcohol syndrome](#) has difficulty filing forms alphabetically, and has difficulty reading hand-written labels. JAN suggested making print labels for the files. JAN also suggested providing an ABC poster in the filing area for the employee to use as an educational reference. Approximate accommodation cost is \$10.

▶A receptionist with [cerebral palsy](#) could not remember how to transfer telephone calls, due to a cognitive deficit. JAN suggested providing a color-coded flip chart that would explain the procedures one step at a time. This employee can keep the flip chart by her phone, to refer to as needed. Approximate accommodation cost is under \$30.

▶A social worker with [Asperger Syndrome](#) works for a group home. He is

extremely disorganized, and often comes to work unprepared. JAN suggested making a list of job-essential items (keys, cell-phone, calculator, day-planner, and roster) for the employee to tape inside his book bag. The employee can review the list prior to leaving for work, to make sure he has the items he will need to perform his job tasks. Approximate accommodation cost is \$5.

▶A cafeteria worker with [mental retardation](#) cannot remember to clock out after completing his shift. He also forgets to turn in keys that will be used on the next shift. JAN suggested posting a reminder at the employee exit, one with words and pictures that asks, "Did you clock out? Did you return the keys?" Approximate accommodation cost is \$0.

▶A mail clerk with [spina bifida](#) cannot stay on task because she is easily distracted by conversations in the workplace. JAN suggested allowing the employee to wear a headset that plays music, or providing her with a radio or an environmental sound machine at her workstation. Approximate accommodation cost is \$65.

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MENTAL RETARDATION / DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

Job Accommodation Network

West Virginia University

PO Box 6080

Morgantown, WV 26506-6080

Toll Free: (800)526-7234

TTY: (800)526-7234

Fax: (304)293-5407

jan@jan.wvu.edu

<http://www.jan.wvu.edu>

►The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free consulting service that provides information about job accommodations, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the employability of people with disabilities.

Office of Disability Employment Policy

200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room S-1303

Washington, DC 20210

Direct: (202)693-7880

TTY: (202)693-7881

Fax: (202)693-7888

infoODEP@dol.gov

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/welcome.html>

►The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the U. S. Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

President's Committee for People with Intellectual Disabilities

Administration for Children and Families

370 L'Enfant Promenade, S.W.

Washington, DC 20447

Direct: (202)619-0634

Fax: (202)205-9519

<http://http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/pccpid/index.html>

►Acts in an advisory capacity to the President and the Secretary of Health and Human Services on matters relating to programs and services for persons with mental retardation.

Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities

200 Constitution Avenue NW

Room S-2220

Washington, DC 20210

Direct: (202)693-4939

TTY: (202)693-4920

Fax: (202)693-4929

ptfead@dol.gov

<http://www.dol.gov/sec/public/programs/ptfead/main.htm>

►Evaluates existing Federal programs to determine what changes, modifications, and innovations may be necessary to remove barriers to employment opportunities faced by adults with disabilities.

ARC of the United States

1010 Wayne Ave.

Suite 650

Silver Springs, MD 20910

Direct: (301)565-3842

Fax: (301)565-3843

info@thearc.org

<http://thearc.org>

►Provides easy access to facts, contacts, and news updates that will help you learn more about its constituents and advocacy.

ASPEN of America, Inc.

2020 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.

Box 771

Washington, DC 20006

Toll Free: (866)4AS-PRGR

Direct: (904)745-6741

<http://www.asperger.org>

►Committed to providing the most up-to-date and comprehensive information on Asperger Syndrome and related conditions.

Association for Persons in Supported Employment

1627 Monument Avenue

Richmond, VA 23220

Direct: (804)278-9187

Fax: (804)278-9377

apse@apse.org

<http://www.apse.org>

►Created to improve and expand integrated employment opportunities and services for persons with severe disabilities, including mental disabilities.

Autism Society of America

7910 Woodmont Avenue

Suite 300

Bethesda, MD 20814-3067

Toll Free: (800)3AU-TISM

Phone: (301)657-0881

info@autism-society.org

<http://www.autism-society.org>

►Promotes lifelong access and opportunities for persons within the autism spectrum and their families to be fully included, participating members of their communities through advocacy, public awareness, education, and research related to autism.

Center for the Study of Autism

PO Box 4538

Salem, OR 97302

<http://www.autism.org>

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission

1801 L Street, N.W.

Washington, DC 20507

Toll Free: (800)669-4000

Direct: (800)669-EEOC

TTY: (800)669-6820

<http://www.eeoc.gov>

►The EEOC was established by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and began operating on July 2, 1965. The EEOC is the enforcing agency for several discrimination-related federal statutes, including Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), which prohibits employment discrimination against individuals with disabilities. The EEOC's 800-number routes individuals to their closest field office.

National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities

225 Reinekers Ln. Suite 650-B

Alexandria, VA 22314

Direct: (703)739-4400

Fax: (703)739-6030

info@nacdd.org

<http://www.nacdd.org/>

►Strives to provide support & assistance to member Councils in order to promote a consumer and family centered system of services and supports for those with Developmental Disability(s).

National Down Syndrome Society

666 Broadway

New York, NY 10012

Toll Free: (800)221-4602

Direct: (212)460-9330

Fax: (212)979-2873

info@ndss.org

<http://www.ndss.org>

►The NDSS' goal is to ensure that all people with Down syndrome have the opportunity to achieve their full potential in community life.

National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research

400 Maryland Ave. S.W.

Washington, DC 20202-2572

Direct: (202)245-7640

TTY: (202)245-7640

Fax: (202)245-7323

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/nidrr/index.html?src=mr>

► Provides support for a comprehensive program of national and international research into all aspects of the rehabilitation of people with disabilities and their successful integration into education, work, and community life.

National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

900 17th Street NW

Suite 910

Washington, DC 20006

Toll Free: (800)66N-OFAS

Direct: (202)785-4585

Fax: (202)466-6456

info@nofas.org

<http://www.nofas.org/>

► Dedicated to eliminating birth defects caused by alcohol consumption during pregnancy, and improving the quality of life for those individuals and families affected.

Office of Vocational and Adult Education

400 Maryland Avenue S.W

Washington, DC 20202

Toll Free: (800)872-5327

Direct: (202)205-5451

TTY: (800)437-0833

Fax: (202)401-0689

<http://www.ed.gov>

Social Security Administration

Windsor Park Building

6401 Security Blvd.

Baltimore, MD 21235

Toll Free: (800)772-1213

TTY: (800)325-0778

Fax: (410)966-0980

<http://www.ssa.gov>

► Dedicated to providing economic protection for Americans of all ages and disabilities.

U.S. Department of Education: Office of Civil Rights

550 12th Street, SW

Washington, DC 20202-1100

Toll Free: (800)421-3481

TTY: (877)521-2172

Fax: (202)245-6480

OCR@ed.gov

<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html?src=mr>

► Ensures equal access to education and to promote educational excellence

throughout the nation through vigorous enforcement of civil rights.

U.S. Department of Justice Disability Rights Section

Civil Rights Division Disability Rights Section - NYAVE

950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20530-0001

Toll Free: (800)514-0301

TTY: (800)514-0383

Fax: (202)307-1198

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/drs/drshome.htm>

► Focuses on all disabilities and is especially knowledgeable in how disabilities relate to the ADA of 1990.

United Cerebral Palsy

1660 L Street, NW, Suite 700

Washington, DC 20036

Toll Free: (800)872-5827

Direct: (202)776-0406

TTY: (202)973-7197

Fax: (202)776-0414

webmaster@ucp.org

<http://www.ucp.org>

► United Cerebral Palsy's mission is to advance the independence, productivity, and full citizenship of people with cerebral palsy and other disabilities through its commitment to the principles of independence, inclusion, and self-determination.