

People with Disabilities at Work: Conversation and Resources

Background

People with disabilities have the skills, talents, and determination to work in nearly any job. Whether it's in education, public service, healthcare, technology, the arts, customer service, or construction, individuals with disabilities bring valuable perspectives and abilities to the workplace. Some may use mobility aids, communication devices, or other tools or strategies to help them do their jobs, but those don't limit their potential—instead, they help unlock it. With the right accommodations and inclusive attitudes in the workplace, people with disabilities can thrive in any field.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), passed in 1990, is a law that protects the rights of people with disabilities in many areas of life, including employment. The ADA makes it illegal for employers to discriminate against someone because of a disability. This means employers cannot refuse to hire someone just because they have a disability, and they must treat all employees equally. The ADA also requires employers to provide reasonable accommodations.

According to the ADA, an accommodation is *any change in the work environment, or in the way things are customarily done, to help a person with a disability apply for a job, perform the duties of a job, or enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment.*

Examples of reasonable accommodations might include things like an adjustable desk, a screen reader, a sign language interpreter, or a modified work schedule. These supports allow individuals with disabilities to fully participate and succeed in the workplace. As long as the person is qualified to do the job, the employer must work with them to find accommodations that are effective and that do not cause an undue hardship on the employer.

By ensuring equal rights and access, the ADA has helped open the doors to employment for millions of people with disabilities. It sends a clear message that disability does not limit a person's ability to contribute, create, and lead. The law encourages businesses to focus on what a person *can* do, not what they can't.

To learn more about the employment of people with disabilities, visit:

The Northeast ADA's [Employment Overview](#)

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's [Your Employment Rights as an Individual with a Disability](#)

The [Job Accommodation Network](#) (JAN)

Conversation Guide

When speaking to children about the employment of people with disabilities, it is important to convey the key concepts to them in language or terminology that is meaningful to them. Here is a sample suggestion of how this might be done.

People with disabilities can work in all kinds of jobs, just like anyone else! Some may use wheelchairs, others might be blind or have trouble with their vision, some might be Deaf or hard-of-hearing, and some might think or learn in different ways—but that doesn't stop them from doing great work. You might see someone with a disability working as a teacher, a doctor, a chef, an artist, or even a scientist. Everyone has unique talents and strengths, and there are jobs for all kinds of people with all different abilities.

Sometimes, people with disabilities use special tools or change how they might need to do their job; this is called an accommodation. For example, someone who can't hear well might use sign language or a device that turns sounds into text. A person who has trouble walking might use a ramp to get into a building. Someone with a learning disability might need a computer that helps them do their work more easily. Another person who has to take medicine at set times of the day might need to take short breaks so they can get and take their medicine. These accommodations make sure everyone has a fair chance to succeed at work.

It's important to remember that having a disability doesn't mean someone can't do a job—it just means they might do it a little differently. What matters most is that they work hard, use their skills, and are included as part of the team. When we give everyone the chance to work and share their talents, we make our schools, neighborhoods, and workplaces better for everyone.