

Diversity Works: Accommodations in the Workplace for People with Mental Illness

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Introduction

If you have hired, or are considering hiring an employee with a mental illness, they may need accommodation to maintain their employment. The aim of this guidebook is to provide employers with information about accommodating people with psychiatric disabilities in the workplace.

Among the population of people with psychiatric disabilities, chronic unemployment and underemployment are serious problems. Competitive employment has rarely been considered an option for them. Any person without work and sufficient financial resources undergoes greater stress and difficulties maintaining self-esteem and an identity in our culture than people who are gainfully employed. The situation of people with mental illness is no different in this respect than that of other members of the community. Their potential productive energy has often been overlooked at an enormous cost to the individual as well as a significant social and economic cost to the community.

Our research indicates that, in general, employers want to accommodate employees with psychiatric disabilities, but lack information on how to start. Initially, it is important to be comfortable with the notion of talking about mental illness. That is the subject of the first chapter of this book. The remaining chapters will explore specific strategies and issues from recruitment through to the termination of employment. This guidebook provides a starting point for your workplace to benefit from the enormous potential of people with psychiatric disabilities, and to provide them with the dignity and gratification of work.

Mental Illness:

Some Questions, Some Answers

You use the terms mental illness and psychiatric disability. What do you mean by them?

We mean people who have serious mental health problems that may limit their major life activities during periods of illness. Major life activities include caring for yourself, working, and learning. Depression, bipolar disorder (also known as manic depression) and schizophrenia are mental illnesses. There are many others.

How does having a mental illness affect a person's ability to work?

Having a mental illness does not always affect a person's ability to work or it may affect the ability to work only for a certain period of time. When mental illness does have an effect on the ability to work, limitations may include getting to work on time, concentrating on specific tasks or getting along with others. Mental illness covers a wide range of symptoms, and symptoms may overlap. It is difficult to say how any particular illness will affect a person's ability to work, if indeed it does at all.

How many people does this affect?

The numbers vary, depending on the type of survey used, but the general consensus is that one in six Canadians is likely to seek help for a mental health problem in their lifetime. The number of people whose ability to work is actually impaired is difficult to determine, but the number of people with mental illness who are chronically disabled comprises 3% to 5% of the general population.

***I'm never clear on what language to use.
It seems to be changing all the time.***

Here are some guidelines to use when talking about people with mental illnesses:

Avoid using abnormality or difference to describe someone as if it is the full description of the person.

"She's a schizophrenic."
"He's psychotic."

Avoid terms that suggest pity or fear.

"He suffers from chronic depression."
"She's a victim of schizophrenia."

Don't use slang or common terms that are demeaning.

"Insane, crazy, lunatic, psycho, psychotic, neurotic, mad, maniac, demented, mental..."

More appropriate statements would be:

"Person with a psychiatric disability."
"Person who has schizophrenia."
"Person who has a mental illness."

To be honest, I don't know how comfortable I would feel working with someone who has a psychiatric disability. Aren't they potentially violent?

People with psychiatric disabilities are more likely to be the victims of violence than the perpetrators. As a group, they are no more violent than other members of the general population. For a variety of reasons, our culture equates mental illness with violent, uncontrolled, or dangerous behaviour. The media often reinforce this negative stereotype by providing extensive coverage of rare and sensational events.

What about other mental problems, like lower intellectual abilities?

People with mental illness usually have average or above average intelligence. Their abilities vary just as they do for any member of the general population. Mental illness should not be confused with intellectual or cognitive disabilities.

If they don't have intellectual disabilities, then why can't they overcome their illness?

Having a mental illness has nothing to do with being weak or lacking willpower, and people with psychiatric disabilities cannot “snap out of it” or “pull themselves together”. Like people with any illness, people with mental illness can play an important part in their own recovery, but they do not choose to be ill.

Is recovery Likely

People with mental illnesses are rarely continuously ill. People with long-term psychiatric disabilities do not move in a continuous line from sick to well. Their progression is sometimes cyclical, through periods of ability and disability, and there are many effective treatments. Many people who have experienced mental illnesses can go back to work, and develop strategies for periods of disability if they are given support. The success of their return and reintegration into the workplace derives from preplanned accommodation which provides for supportive strategies.

Another concern would be their ability to tolerate pressure.

Stress is a very individual response to specific situations. It is not true that people with mental illness cannot handle any stress. We all know that some stress has positive effects and that what is stressful for you may not necessarily be stressful for your neighbour. Any one employee may work well on their own, or at a computer terminal, but may not be able to handle interpersonal relationships, group assignments, or the team approach very well. On the other hand, many people thrive on knowing that they are members of a team, and flounder when they are left to work on their own. The situation is the same for people with psychiatric disabilities.

If all these things are true, then why do they have such high rates of unemployment and underemployment?

There are many answers to this question. The stigma of having a mental illness, the failure to obtain accommodations in the workplace, thereby limiting access to work, the failure to conceptualize work as a real possibility by people who provide services to individuals with mental illness, these are but a few of the reasons for the high rates of unemployment and underemployment. However, the major factor in many situations is stigma.

What do you mean by stigma?

In our culture, there is a strong social stigma attached to having a mental illness. Stigma manifests itself in incorrect, negative stereotypes and discriminating behaviour. To illustrate how stigma affects the person who is stigmatized, we can consider how some people with psychiatric disabilities may come to view themselves as “crazy” and therefore “no good”. They may see themselves as “good” only when they are being passive. This response compensates for the common misconception of them being violent and out of control. The tendency to be passive may result in an unwillingness to try for jobs or promotions or to be timid and restrained when attacking job tasks. The antidote to stigma in the workplace is for the environment to be positive, encouraging and welcoming.

Are there barriers to employment that are due to the nature of the disability?

Yes. The complex nature of psychiatric disabilities is often a barrier in itself. Mental illnesses can be characterized by multiple impairments. These may include cognitive, perceptual and affective difficulties. In the absence of accommodation, these impairments may result in poor job-finding and job retention skills. In addition, the episodic nature of psychiatric disabilities, with their remissions and relapses, may result in a poor work history. The medications used to treat mental illnesses often have side effects that do not directly affect the ability to work, but that may need accommodation, for example, excessive thirst, itching or restlessness, or increased frequency of urination.

What I'm really anxious about is strange behaviour.

People with mental illness who are at the point of returning to or entering the workforce are usually acutely aware of the stigma of mental illness and try to draw as little attention to themselves as possible. It is true, though, that during periods of illness some people with psychiatric disabilities may respond inappropriately. Some people may tic or hum, talk to themselves, or engage in other behaviour considered to be strange. This is not deliberate. The important point to consider is whether this behaviour interferes with their ability to perform the job. Or is it simply irritating like some of the other habits we tolerate such as gum-snapping or slurping one's coffee?

What will make people who are already working feel comfortable disclosing a, psychiatric disability so that they may be accommodated and be able to work more effectively?

Establish an atmosphere where differences are not punished. Provide a workplace where every employee is treated as an individual. The goal is a flexible, humane workplace. Accommodating the needs of every individual builds healthy work relationships between all employees.

Accommodation - The Basics

Accommodation is any modification of the workplace, or in workplace procedures, that makes it possible for a person with special needs to do a job.

Many progressive employers are increasingly realizing the importance of establishing a workplace that welcomes the diversity of their workforce and recognizes the productive potential of all members of their community. This means accommodating not only the special needs of people with disabilities, but accommodating all their employees.

Maria and William have been with the engineering department for several years. They have both been considering going back to school for further certification. At the same time, the department wants to downsize by cutting one position. Maria and William are now sharing one position and both attending school. Maria will return to the position full-time once her course of study is finished, and William will use his new qualifications to move to the expanding quality control department.

After working at his job as a bench technician in an electronics company for several years, Yusef was diagnosed with chronic depression. He was prescribed an anti-depressant, but one of the side effects was a severe thirst and a constant need for fluids. Although food and beverages are generally not allowed on the technician's bench, Yusef's employer agreed to allow him access to liquids by providing a spill-proof cup to keep under his workbench. This has eliminated the need for Yusef to make frequent trips away from his work station for water.

Karl is a single father. Adjusting his work hours to coincide with his daughter's daycare schedule has meant no more tearing out of the office at 5 o'clock on the dot and driving at questionable speeds to make the pick-up time.

Sylvia has an anxiety disorder that makes it very difficult to tolerate crowds. She has made arrangements with her supervisor to begin and end her day 15 minutes early to avoid the crowds on the subway.

Minh's elderly father recently moved into her home because he was no longer able to care for himself in his own apartment. Using her home computer and a fax-modem, Minh has been working at home on Tuesdays and Thursdays. She no longer has to worry about leaving her father alone for a five day stretch and he appreciates knowing someone will be in the house with him every couple of days.

Aaron has schizophrenia. Once labelled "unemployable", he now works for a manufacturing firm doing Statistical Process Control. The nature of his work is that he maintains a database of information about production and

provides that information in different formats to a variety of departments in the company. Aaron has always had great difficulty waking up in the morning due to his medication. Since his work requires mainly data maintenance and little interaction with co-workers, Aaron works a flexible shift, starting around 3 pm.

Andre's wife had major surgery. Andre is using overtime banked over a busy summer to provide her with two weeks of post-operative care. He has saved the expense of a private nurse, and he feels much better about his wife's recovery.

What links these examples is a workplace that adapts to the special needs of all its employees. Reducing the stressors in their lives has made them more productive employees.

Principles of Accommodation

- Create an environment where accommodations are accepted by addressing the individual needs of each employee.
- Respect the employee's desire for confidentiality and identify specifically the form and the degree of confidentiality.
- Be willing to engage in joint problem solving.
- Make all accommodations voluntary for the employee.
- Be prepared to review accommodations periodically to meet changing needs, and keep in mind that needs will change.
- Be flexible in enforcing traditional policies.
- Be concrete and specific when identifying accommodations. Putting them in writing is a good idea.
- Set up an easy and accessible mechanism for reviewing accommodations.

"I worry that my employer will assume I can't do something before he even lets me give it a try."

Keep these principles in mind when any employee asks to be accommodated in the workplace. They will help you to create a positive, and therefore more productive, environment.

Accommodation is one of the key points of access to real work for people with psychiatric disabilities.

“Be open-minded and understanding and have a policy of hiring people with mental illness. Often their work will not be affected.”

Whereas many people with physical disabilities may require physical aids or structural changes to the workplace, people with psychiatric disabilities most often require social and organizational accommodations. These social and organizational modifications are generally changes in the way things have been traditionally been done in any particular workplace. Permitting someone with a mental illness to work flexible hours, for example provides access to employment just as a ramp does for an individual who uses a wheelchair.

Accommodation is not preferential treatment.

The fact that some of your employees may see accommodation as preferential treatment represents a major challenge for employers. Education and discussion are the keys to eliminating wrong assumptions about people with special needs. Strive to create a humane environment that addresses everyone’s individual needs and you will also eliminate feelings that one employee is getting preferential treatment over another.

Accommodation means equitable treatment for people with disabilities.

“The only accommodation I want is to be treated like everyone else.”

As a society, we are beginning to rethink some of our basic attitudes toward people with disabilities. In the past, we have tended to view them as recipients of health and social services, rather than as potential contributors to Canada’s economy. The belief that hiring people with disabilities means that they are given special privileges not available to other employees is missing the point. This implies that people with disabilities are not able to carry their own weight. In fact, they are not receiving privileges, but rather entitlements, and the goal is not to provide advantage, but

equitable access. With appropriate accommodations, people with disabilities are as capable and as valuable as anyone else as contributors to our community.

Accommodation is most often legally defined as the extent to which an employer, provider of goods, services, or housing available to the general public is required to make modifications that would assist the integration of people with disabilities, and other disadvantaged groups, short of undue hardship.

In one form or another, this definition of accommodation is generally qualified by some phrase such as “short of undue hardship.” Although this phrase allows that there are exceptional circumstances where accommodation is not required, the law makes a strong demand for accommodation. Each of the provinces and territories enacts and administers their own human rights law. The Canadian Human Rights Act and all provincial/territorial human rights acts explicitly prohibit discrimination in employment on the basis of any disability. Call your provincial/territorial human rights office to get the facts (See Appendix 1). Be prepared by being informed.

Recruitment, Hiring, and Disclosure

Accommodation includes recruitment and hiring procedures.

“I have real problems once I get into the interview. My confidence is affected by my illness.”

If you are interested specifically in recruiting people with psychiatric disabilities, there are many positive steps you can take to let potential employees with mental illness know that you have employment available. Start by contacting your local office of the Canadian Mental Health Association (see Appendix 1). They can direct you to the resources in your area.

In some cases you will know before setting up the interview, that the applicant has a psychiatric disability. They may have disclosed to you or you may have been recruiting specifically from this group. When this is the case, give the person an idea of what to expect in the interview and ask if they need accommodation.

Here are a few recruitment ideas that may pertain directly to people with a psychiatric disability:

- Some people prefer to be interviewed individually rather than in a group, especially if they want to disclose a need for accommodation.
- Applicants may appear to be overqualified on their resume. They may have a reason for what appears to be changing or backtracking in their career path.
- Work experience may be gained not only in paid employment, but also with volunteer work, or in a rehabilitation program.

- Gaps in work history may indicate periods of inability to work.
- When describing the duties of the job, give a clear, precise description including information about the physical and social environment, workload, priorities, and the amount of supervision.
- When checking references with previous employers, ask specific questions about performance.
- If proficiency tests are required, find out if any accommodation is needed to take them. The individual may need more time, or may need to take a written test orally. They may need to take the test in a quiet, isolated setting, rather than with a group.

"I used to be molly nervous about discussing the blanks in my work history. I hated the anxiety that went with lying to my interviewer about my hospitalizations."

Accommodations for an "invisible" disability like mental illness require disclosure by the employee.

"I'm not employed now, but I'm worried about informing a potential employer."

There are several reasons why people with mental illness choose not to disclose their disability. They may have had negative experiences disclosing to family or friends. They may be stigmatized and have been made to feel ashamed of having a mental illness. Some people with psychiatric disabilities have worked very hard toward their recovery and do not want to be seen as disabled. In other cases, where the illness is undetectable, the individual may feel they have nothing to gain by disclosing, and much to lose, considering the stereotypes that exist about mental illness.

Depending on the size of your workplace, you may already employ someone with a mental illness and be unaware of it. They may never disclose and may never need accommodation.

“My employer knows, but I don’t want any accommodations because I feel I earn my day’s pay. I do just as good a job as anyone else.”

When a psychiatric disability is disclosed, respect the individual’s desire for confidentiality. Provide information to supervisors and co-workers on a need-to-know basis. Benefits administration should always be strictly confidential. If in doubt about medically-related information and the workplace, contact your provincial territorial human rights commission (see Appendix 1). They have specific guidelines.

Getting The Job Done – *Performance, Productivity and Accommodation*

Accommodation requires defining the essential functions of the job.

Before accommodation strategies can be initiated, it is necessary to define the essential functions of the job. Essential functions are the specific duties necessary to do that particular job. Defining essential functions calls for analyzing the purpose or goal of the job rather than just listing the tasks the job has usually entailed. This means looking at what you are trying to accomplish, not the way you have always done it. Here are some questions to consider:

- If a task an employee is sometimes asked to perform is not essential to the job, can you trade it with or reassign it to another employee?
- Can the way this task is performed be changed?
- Is this task essential?
- Is there any equipment or technical device that would aid in the performance of the task?
- Is there a use of equipment that is absolutely necessary for the economic and safe performance of the task or can it be eliminated ?

- If you are accustomed to the performance of a certain task at a certain time, is that schedule important?
- Is it imperative that this position be full-time, or can the duties be pared down to accommodate a part-time worker?
- Must all the tasks be performed at your place of business during your regular business hours?

You should also determine whether the employee can fulfill the job's requirements in practice, rather than assuming the worst.

"I started with my employer doing only four hours of filing a week. Now I work full-time."

"Because of my medication, it's really difficult for me to keep to a schedule.... I mean to get up on time. My employer is happy with my work and as long as I put in my eight hours, she doesn't mind if I don't make it on time every day. This is the first job I've been able to keep without being fired for lateness."

Accommodation requires needs assessment.

Here are four steps to take with your employee to assess the need for accommodation:

1. Determine the purpose and the essential functions of the job.
2. Establish what kinds of job-related limitations are caused by the disability.
3. In consultation with the employee, determine what possible accommodations could be considered and how effective each one would be in helping the employee to perform the essential functions of the job.
4. Determine which accommodations the employee would prefer.

Accommodation involves rethinking the way you have always done things.

The following are some examples of potential accommodations for people with psychiatric disabilities that cover three key areas of the workplace: training, policy and attitudes.

TRAINING

Training strategies that respond to the specific needs of the individual employee are the most effective.

- Assign the employee to a supervisor who is supportive.
- Designate a co-worker to act as a peer support and/or advocate.
- Provide individualized training for specific tasks.
- Provide detailed explanations of job duties, responsibilities, and expectations. Explanations may need to be both oral and written.
- Make written agreements for evaluations, short-term performance reviews, time management, and/or handling problems.
- Be open to the possibility of using a job coach. In the case of people with psychiatric disabilities, a job coach is a professional who comes to work with the employee for a short term at the beginning of their employment, usually to help the employee establish interpersonal relationships and ease their integration into a new environment.

"My employer gives me assignments which she knows I can handle. She answers any questions I might have. Very understanding."

"My supervisor gives me changes in procedures in writing so I can refer back to them in case I forget."

POLICIES

Human resource principles that are positive and constructive provide a strong foundation for accommodation.

- Permit telephone calls during work hours to supportive individuals.
- Provide a private work area for individuals who are easily distracted.
- Permit a self-paced workload.
- Allow the use of sick leave for emotional as well as physical illness.
- Allow people to work at home when possible.
- Allow workers to shift work hours for medical appointments, particularly recurring appointments such as those for a psychiatrist or therapist.
- Allow overtime to be banked for use in case of illness.
- Advance additional paid or unpaid leave during hospitalization.
- Create a job-sharing policy.
- Keep a position open and provide back-up coverage during an extended leave.

“Have somewhere you could go to talk to someone about your feelings so they can help you rationalize your thoughts and therefore help you remain at your job instead of fleeing because of a wrong assumption.”

“I have difficulty concentrating if there’s any noise around me. I explained it to my manager and now, even though I’m only a junior member of our department, I have my own private work area. It means a lot to me to be able to work without distractions.”

ATTITUDES

An accepting organizational climate also provides support for accommodations.

- Offer management training to supervisors to reinforce or improve their ability to provide clear direction and constructive feedback.
- Educate managers about legislation so that they can have frank discussions with employees about known disabilities and desirable accommodations.
- Encourage supervisors to offer praise and positive reinforcement.
- Provide sensitivity training for co-workers about disabilities and why people with disabilities need accommodation.
- Dispel myths by educating staff about the causes, treatment, and the personal experience of mental illness.

“Accommodating me would just be being able to explain my depression in the open.”

A WORD ABOUT PSYCHIATRIC DISABILITIES AND PHYSICAL AIDS

Certain medications that are now used or have been used to treat serious mental illnesses have side effects that sometimes produce conditions known as pseudoparkinsonism, dystonia, dyskinesia, hyperreflexia. These conditions generally all result in the same symptom: tremors. Trembling can affect the individual's fine motor control. In practical terms it means they may find it difficult to thread a needle or dial a telephone. They may require a technical aid, or a simple modification of the job. With a little ingenuity there may be a variety of technical aids that would eliminate other work-related inconveniences for people with psychiatric disabilities.

If you have an employee who needs a technical aid, call the Job Accommodation Network (JANCANA). The number is toll free (see Appendix 1). They will provide you with

suggestions on what type of aid is required and how much it will cost. Some technical aids for people with psychiatric disabilities may be everyday appliances we all use. For example, an individual who has problems remembering dates, appointments and phone numbers can use an electronic daytimer with an alarm to remind him or her of an upcoming appointment.

“Be patient with my lack of motor skills and give me a chance to demonstrate what I can do.”

Accommodation involves setting Limits and defining roles.

Maintaining the employer/employee roles in the workplace is vital to successful accommodation. As an employer, it is important to maintain accommodations that assist the employee to do a particular job. Your role is not to provide treatment or therapy.

The best way to handle a problem is to have a plan of action in place before it occurs. When assessing accommodation needs with an employee with a psychiatric disability, you should establish guidelines as to where the boundaries of accommodations end. For example, you can set limits on deadline extensions. Setting clear and precise limits to accommodation strategies leaves no room for misunderstandings. However, don't make assumptions about the employee's behaviour if something goes wrong. Communication is the key.

A WORD ABOUT EMERGENCIES

All employees should provide information for employers in case of emergency. People with psychiatric disabilities may want to make arrangements for crisis intervention. This should be part of your accommodation negotiations.

If you have not made prior crisis intervention arrangements, or if someone in your employ has not disclosed a psychiatric disability, but is in need of assistance, there are strategies listed in Appendix 2 of this guidebook that provide for a general approach to crisis intervention.

Providing Notification of Unacceptable Conduct or Termination

If you feel the employee is abusing the right to accommodation, be prepared to discuss the matter and refer back to the boundaries that were set the last time accommodation was discussed. As with all agreements, having them in writing avoids misunderstanding.

People with psychiatric disabilities are usually aware of areas that are problematic for them. The employee can identify potentially difficult situations and signs of responses to stress. If a problem arises, the individual may need additional accommodation for a short period of time, or may have run into an aspect of the job that wasn't anticipated. Evaluate the essential functions of the job and decide on exactly what, when and how it should be done. If the requirements are not being met, notify the employee and address the problem before it gets out of hand. Be as specific as possible and work through your expectations of the employee. You and the employee may ultimately decide they are not fulfilling the essential functions of the position.

Terminating an individual's employment is always an unpleasant task. If you feel unsure as to whether or not you have fulfilled your legal duty to accommodate, contact your provincial/territorial human rights commission before making a decision.

Clear constructive criticism on job-related issues and specific reasons as to why an individual is not meeting the requirements of the position are important to any employee, not only people with mental illness.

"I felt intimidated when my supervisor spoke to others around me but did not speak to me about my illness. I would have liked to have been spoken to directly and not singled out like an 'odd ball'....Honesty, openness, directness, understanding would help."

Afterword

Assessing the potential for accommodation in your workplace may bring some surprising results. You may find re-evaluating job descriptions, task management and time management beneficial to all your employees. You may create a more cost effective workplace. There may be other individuals in your employ who are interested in changing their work patterns. Doing so could provide more access to your workplace for someone with a psychiatric disability while improving the morale of all your employees.

Several studies have indicated that many Canadians would like to modify their work week to improve their overall quality of life. Job-sharing, phased retirement, leave options, voluntary time/income trade-off programs and permanent part-time are among the modifications now in practice. Creating the option to work a reduced work week will improve the general mental health of your employees and provide a means of entry for people with psychiatric disabilities into the competitive workforce at a time when they may not be ready for full-time employment. In a recent publication of the National Mental Health Fund, a corporate fundraising partnership of the Canadian Mental Health Association and the Canadian Psychiatric Research Foundation, it was estimated that emotional distress and mental illness account for twenty to thirty per cent of employee absenteeism and industrial accidents, and that we spend six million dollars per day on mental health care in Canada, not including the expense of lost productivity. When business begins to address mental health issues in the workplace, the upward spiral of mental health costs will reverse itself.

APPENDIX 1

WHERE TO GET HELP

National Organizations

Canadian Council on Rehabilitation
and Work
410-167 Lombard Street
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 0T6
Phone: 204-942-4862
Fax: 204-944-0753

Canadian Disability Rights Council
926-294 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB
R3C 0B9
Phone: 204-943-4787
Fax: 204-942-4625

Canadian Mental Health Association
National Office
2130 Yonge Street
Toronto, ON
M4S 2Z3
Phone: 416-484-7750
Fax: 416-484-4617

Coalition of Provincial Organizations
of the Handicapped
926-294 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB
R3C 0B9
Phone: 204-947-0303
Fax: 204-942-4625

The Job Accommodation Network in
Canada
(JAN CANA) Free Council on Job
Accommodation
Voice ST TDD: 1-800-526-2262

Canadian Mental Health Association Division Offices

See www.cmha.ca for a complete and updated list of
CMHA Division offices

Provincial Human Rights Commissions

ONTARIO 400 University Avenue
Toronto, ON
M7A 2R9
Phone: 416-314-4500

QUEBEC
360 St. Jaques West
Montreal, PQ
H3Y 1P5
Phone: 514-873-5146

NOVA SCOTIA
5675 Spring Garden Road
Halifax, NS
B3J 3C4
Phone: 902-424-4111

NEWFOUNDLAND
P.O. Box 4750
St. John's, NF
A1B 4J6
Phone: 709-729-2326

NEW BRUNSWICK
103 Church Street
Fredericton, NB
E2A 1J8
Phone: 506-453-2301

MANITOBA
259 Portage Avenue
Winnipeg, MB
R3B 2A9
Phone: 204-945-3007

SASKATCHEWAN
Sturdy Stone Bldg.
122 3rd Avenue North
Saskatoon, SK
S7K 2H6
Phone: 306-933-5952

ALBERTA
902-10808 99th Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 0G5 Phone: 403-427-3116

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND
3 Queen Street
Charlottetown, PE
C1A 7N8
Phone: 902-368-4180

B.C. Council of Human Rights
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC
V8V 1X9
Phone: 604-387-3710

YUKON
205 Rogers Street
Whitehorse, YT
Y1A 1X1
Phone: 403-667-6226

APPENDIX 2

WHAT TO DO IN A CRISIS

Employers are not expected to ignore truly disruptive behaviour. Although a rare occurrence, a disruptive episode may be related to a psychiatric crisis. Some companies have programs, such as Employee Assistance Programs, directed to employees who are experiencing problems of an emotional nature that are interfering with their work. If an emergency arises, this is a natural place to turn. Some communities also have psychiatric crisis intervention programs. If you have someone in your employ who has disclosed a psychiatric disability, make crisis intervention part of your assessment of accommodation needs. Get specifics as to what the employee sees as appropriate intervention strategies and conditions for their return to work if time off is required.

If you have not made prior crisis intervention arrangements or if someone in your employ has not disclosed a mental illness but is in need of assistance, the following information may be helpful:

- Try to remain calm and refrain from shouting or other confrontational behaviour.
- If someone or something is the focus of the crisis, remove the offending object or person.
- Ask the individual what they would like to do or what would help them. Ask them if they agree that intervention is needed.
- Be aware that symptoms may worsen and that it is important that the individual get help.
- If they agree, suggest that they see their family doctor, mental health professional, or self help group. Offer assistance in looking for resources if they seem overwhelmed about where to turn for help or about making the actual contact.
- If the individual refuses to visit a doctor or hospital emergency room, try to enlist the aid of someone close to them. Do they have a co-worker they trust?

- Check the personnel files to see who is listed as a contact in case of emergency. Contact them if necessary.
- Call the specialized crisis service in your community if you have one.
- As a last resort, and only if you think this person is dangerous to anyone including him or herself, call the police, explain the situation, and ask that they take him or her to the hospital.
- Try your best not to permit the individual to leave the worksite in a severe state of crisis without notifying someone.