

# Disability Advocacy Resources for Apprenticeship Program Mentors

---

Mentors and other apprenticeship program personnel serve an outsized role in supporting apprentice participation and success. Program personnel can foster apprentice diversity through disability etiquette practices, ensuring that accommodations are available, and promoting a culture of inclusivity. Mentors and other apprenticeship practitioners may use the following universally applicable information as a starting point while they consider accessibility and inclusive practices for apprentices who may have disabilities.

## Language and Interaction

It may not be apparent when interacting with someone if s/he has a disability. Regardless, the same guidelines for respectful interactions apply to everyone—including people with disabilities. [Workplace etiquette tips](#) from the Job Accommodation Network may be useful. Additionally, the DC Office of Disability Rights produced an informative (and funny) [4-minute video](#). Generally, good practices recommend the following:

- Relax, be approachable, and speak with a normal tone of voice.
- Discuss the same topics you would with anyone; mention a disability only if it's crucial to the conversation.
- Speak directly with the person and not an attendant or interpreter (if present).
- Focus on abilities; expect that the person is capable.
- Ensure information, tools, and resources are accessible and available (for everyone).
- If you offer assistance, wait until the offer is accepted. Then listen to or ask for instructions.
- When unsure about something, just ask.

Local disability service providers or [Centers for Independent Living](#) may also provide disability etiquette training.

## Accommodation Requests

Supervisors and managers play a key role in ensuring a diverse and inclusive workforce. A person with a disability may need to request an accommodation related to either the physical environment or the technology they use. The Job Accommodation Network offers a [comprehensive online toolkit](#), as well as [free, confidential information](#) to both employers and jobseekers to guide them through this process.

A request for accommodation will arise from the following situation:

1. An employee has disclosed a medical condition, and
2. The medical condition is creating a challenge.

What will follow is an ongoing conversation between an employer and employee in order to discover or develop an effective accommodation. This conversation needs to accomplish two things:

1. Gathering of the information necessary to make an accommodation, and
2. Demonstrating engagement in a good faith effort to resolve the workplace challenge with the employee.

## Inclusive Culture

Promoting an inclusive culture involves efforts from individuals at all levels of an organization. The Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion developed the [Inclusion@Work Framework](#) to help organizations consider core components of inclusive workplaces, and strategies for achieving them.

For their part, mentors can help promote an inclusive culture by building a give-and-take relationship with the apprentice. All apprentices, including those with disabilities, benefit from relationships where mentors

- Make a (preferably long-term) commitment to working together
- Take time to build trust and respect through regular communication
- Set high, clear, and fair expectations
- Ensure that events, activities, and tasks are accessible and planned at times and locations that apprentices can reach.