



# How to discuss workplace adjustments: a quick guide

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A guide developed by Social Ventures Australia (SVA) in partnership with [Children and Young People with Disability Australia \(CYDA\)](#) as part of the Young People with Disability (YPWD) [Employer Innovation Lab](#), a targeted program to increase workforce participation of young people with disability.



## A quick note before you begin

This guide is here to support inclusive workplace practice. **It's not a complete checklist – and it's not a substitute for expert advice.**

### Here's what to keep in mind:

- it's a starting point to help inform your approach, not a how-to manual
- it doesn't replace the role of Occupational Therapists or other qualified professionals
- some conversations may be sensitive; they should be handled with care, respect and privacy
- if your team needs more support, one idea is to share a list of trusted resources like mental health services or allied health professionals

When it comes to disability inclusion, what really matters is how an organisation's policies show up in practice – and whether they actually support your people.

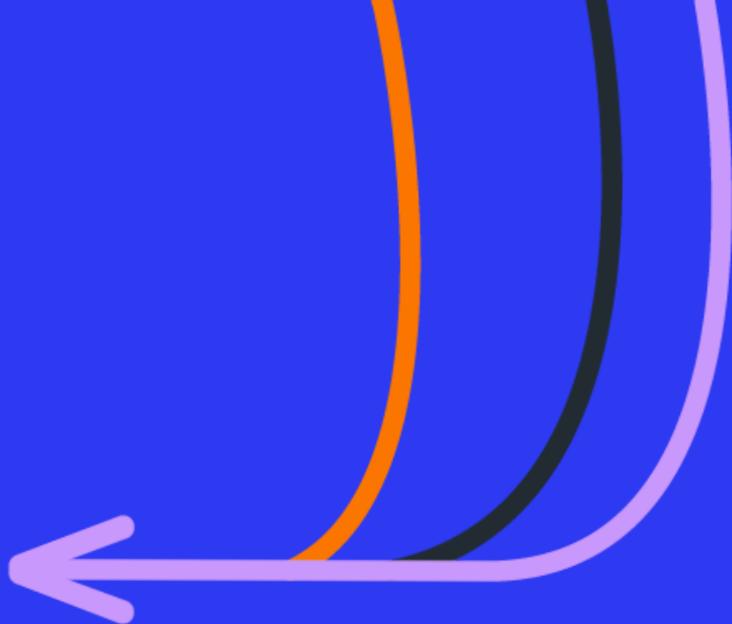
This guide is here to help you move beyond a 'problems and solutions' mindset.

It's about recognising individual needs, opening up conversations, and creating a workplace where inclusion is part of everyday work life.

### We'll walk you through:

- what disability means in a workplace context
- how to talk about adjustments in a way that builds trust
- the types of adjustments that can make a real difference and
- where to go for help when you need it

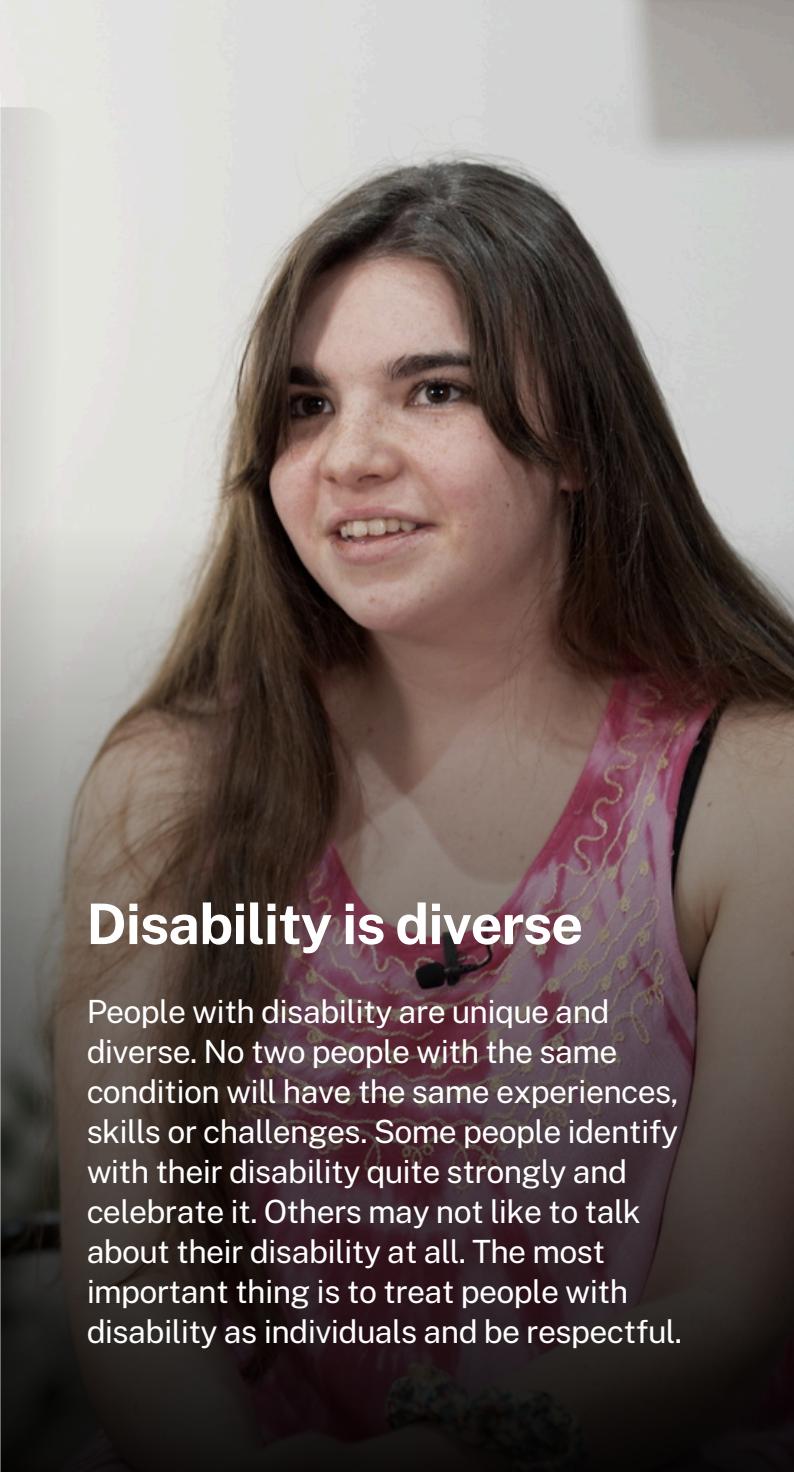
# Understanding Disability \*



## What is disability?

**There's no single definition on disability – and people experience it in different ways.**

The team at CYDA and SVA talk often about the social model of disability. This model says that disability doesn't come from a person's condition; it comes from the barriers they face in society. For example, someone with a physical, sensory, intellectual or neurological condition may face obstacles because of how the workplaces are designed or how people communicate. These barriers - not the condition itself – are what make participation harder.



## Disability is diverse

People with disability are unique and diverse. No two people with the same condition will have the same experiences, skills or challenges. Some people identify with their disability quite strongly and celebrate it. Others may not like to talk about their disability at all. The most important thing is to treat people with disability as individuals and be respectful.

# Language

The words you use matter. They can help people feel seen – or shut out. There's no 'right' way to talk about disability, but here are some principles to guide you.



## Disability or Disabilities?

In the social model, *disability* refers to the barriers created by society—not a condition or diagnosis. The same applies to individuals. We say a person with disability but not a person with a disability, because the latter suggests a focus on diagnosis rather than social experience.

**That's why we say *people with disability* (singular) rather than *people with disabilities* (plural).**

For more, [see the quick guide of respectful language](#).

This section on understanding disability is based on [Understanding Disabilities—An overview for employers Fact Sheet](#), developed for CYDA's [DREAM Employment Network](#). For more information, see CYDA's [Understanding Disability Fact Sheet](#).



## Person First or Identity First?

Some people prefer *person-first* language—like 'a person with disability'. Others prefer *identity-first* language—like 'disabled person.'

It's about personal choice.

**If you're unsure, ask the person how they'd like to be referred to, or follow the lead of your team or community.**



## Use strengths-based language

Everyone has things they're good at—and things they're still working on.

No one wants to be defined by what they can't do. A strengths-based approach to disability focuses on what someone brings to the table: their skills, capabilities, and potential—not their limitations. This is especially important in the workplace. You hired someone for their strengths.

**Language that centres impairment or deficit-based language is generally unhelpful.**

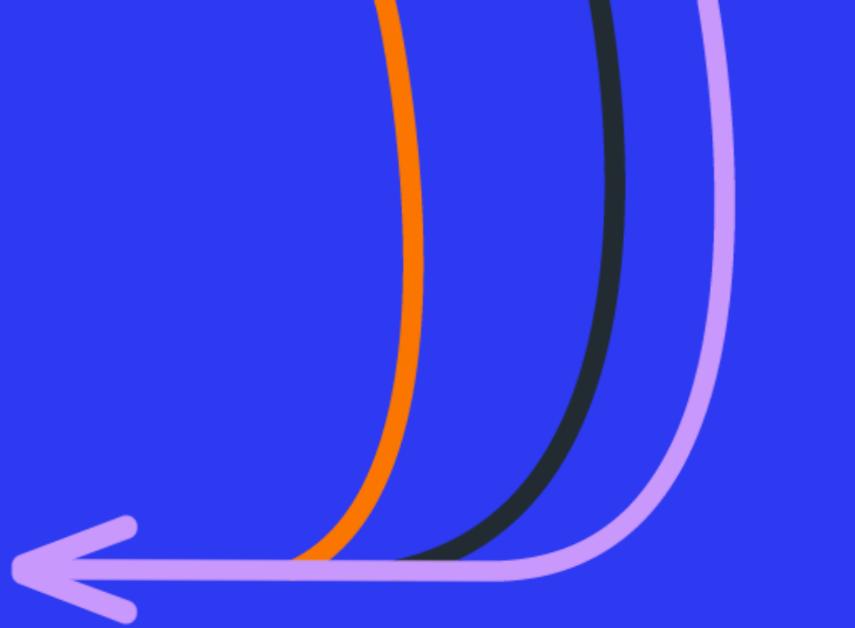


# What are workplace adjustments?

A **workplace adjustment** is a change to how work is done – whether it's a task, process, environment or expectation – that helps a job seeker or employee with disability do the essential parts of their role<sup>1</sup>.

It's not about lowering standards. It's about making sure people have what they need to meet them.

In employment law, essential or 'inherent requirements' refer to the core parts of the role. They're about *what* needs to be done, not how it gets done.



## What the law says

Victorian law recognises that someone can be a person with disability whether or not they have shared that information at work<sup>2</sup>. That's why, it's important to think about workplace adjustments in a way that supports *all* employees – not just those who disclose<sup>3</sup>.

When planning workplace adjustments, it helps to come prepared. Have a few examples ready and work with the jobseeker or employee to discuss and develop a plan that fits. Ideally, your organisation will have a consistent process in place, so adjustments are trackable and fair for everyone<sup>4</sup>.



<sup>1</sup>[https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Workplace\\_Adjustments\\_Research\\_Report\\_Accessible\\_PDF\\_Version.pdf](https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Workplace_Adjustments_Research_Report_Accessible_PDF_Version.pdf)

<sup>2</sup><https://vpsc.vic.gov.au/workforce-programs/disability-employment/workplace-or-reasonable-adjustments-in-the-public-sector/workplace-adjustments-advice-for-public-sector-organisations/>

<sup>3</sup>[https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Workplace\\_Adjustments\\_Research\\_Report\\_Accessible\\_PDF\\_Version.pdf](https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Workplace_Adjustments_Research_Report_Accessible_PDF_Version.pdf)

<sup>4</sup>[https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Workplace\\_Adjustments\\_Research\\_Report\\_Accessible\\_PDF\\_Version.pdf](https://australiandisabilitynetwork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Workplace_Adjustments_Research_Report_Accessible_PDF_Version.pdf)

# Planning for a workplace adjustment conversation

Before you sit down to talk about workplace adjustments, **it helps to be prepared.** That means being clear on:

- What a workplace adjustment is
- The language that builds trust and invites disclosure
- The kinds of adjustments that might come up at different stages of employment

This section walks through what to consider – starting with recruitment.



## During recruitment

It helps to include an inclusion statement in your job ads, along with contact details for a staff member who can discuss adjustments. This shows candidates that you take accessibility seriously and are ready to support individuals to succeed in the recruitment process.

Conversations about adjustments might happen during the interview process. Once a job offer is made and during the early stages of employment.

You can also plan ahead by reviewing what your workplace has already done. What adjustments have worked well before? Where are the limits? What else is possible?

Most importantly – don't assume. Always ask the candidate what they need and follow up as things evolve.



## During onboarding

Once a job offer is accepted and checks are complete, it's the right time to have a more direct conversation about what adjustments might be helpful.

Make sure the meeting is planned with care – give enough notice, choose a private space, and only involve the people who are needed there.

**To make things easier, we've included two templates you can use:**

### 1 **Workplace Adjustments Discussion**

for one-on-one chats during onboarding. Use this to better understand what support the new hire might need – and what your organisation can offer.

### 2 **Adjustment Areas Discussion**

for talking through specific support needs – like including equipment, work hours, communication preferences or physical environment.

A close-up, profile shot of a man with short, light brown hair and a beard, wearing a red and white checkered shirt. He is speaking into a black microphone on a stand. The background is dark and out of focus, showing some blurred lights and shapes.

# Discussion Templates

# Discussion Template: Workplace Adjustment



This discussion template can be used by HR and/or Hiring Managers during a one-on-one conversation with a staff member during onboarding or induction. See appendix for template.

| Name of selected candidate   |   |
|--|---|
| Placement Department   |   |
| Manager/Supervisor   | <i>The name and contact details of Manager or Supervisor that the staff member reports to</i>   |
| HR-DEI stakeholder/supporter<br>(if applicable)  | <i>The name and contact details of the HR or DEI staff member that will support the workplace adjustments</i>   |
| Employment Consultant<br>(if applicable)   | <i>If the candidate was referred by an employment service provider or other community partner, it could be helpful to include their contact details</i> |
| <b>Tell us about your goals for the future and what you hope to gain from working with us?</b>                       | <i>These can be broad life goals as well as career goals.</i>   |
| <b>What strengths do you think you have in meeting those goals?</b>  | <i>Make a note of strengths to leverage when discussing ways to adjust or accommodate or giving feedback in the future</i>                              |
| <b>So that we can support you at work, tell us about any challenges you think you'll face in meeting your goals?</b> | <i>Don't go straight to adjustments, discuss their broad life challenges first to get full context.</i>   |
| <b>So that we can support you at work, can you tell me about any circumstances that might affect you at work.</b>    | <i>You can begin to discuss the duties of the role here and their circumstances that may affect them at work.</i>                                       |

|   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>So that we can support you at work, how do you wish to be introduced to team members?</b>                                      | Some participants may prefer not to be introduced as a pilot participant for a program about young people with a disability and would like just to be seen as a new employee; others may not mind being part of an acknowledgement that the organisation is learning ways to be more inclusive. It's best to check before the candidate starts if possible. |
| <b>Are there any services that you're currently involved in that we should know about or are important for us to accommodate?</b> | <i>This is an optional question that should only be asked in context if appropriate/indicated – but clearing up how to take leave for critical services appointments can be important to avoid misunderstandings.</i>   |
| <b>Are there any effects from medication that could be relevant to how we support you to accomplish your work duties?</b>         | <i>This is an optional question that should only be asked in context if appropriate/indicated.</i>  |
| <b>Is there any other information that you would like to share that could help us work out ways to support you?</b>               | <i>This hopefully leads further into ideas for adjustments to feed into the table below</i>   |



# Discussion: Adjustment Areas



This discussion template can be used by HR and/or Hiring Managers to identify specific workplace adjustments or accommodations to support the employee in their role. See *appendix for template*.

| Adjustment area                            | Support or adjustment examples  |
|--|---|
| <b>Equipment</b>                           | <i>This could be digital e.g. screen-reader, or physical e.g. desk/footstool</i>  |
| <b>Work Environment</b>                    | <i>Chair at x level or the right amount of light in a space.<br/>Use of noise cancelling headsets.</i>  |
| <b>Workload</b>                            | <i>Need to be able to focus on one task area for at least 2 hours before tackling another one.<br/>Better at training in the morning – afternoon difficulty in focussing. New tasks always given in the morning</i> |
| <b>Working hours</b>                       | <i>Earlier start time 8am to finish work sooner at 4pm<br/>e.g. could be to accommodate medication, best time to work</i>   |
| <b>Communication</b>                       | <i>Understanding how the individual likes to receive information or instructions e.g. clear agenda with meeting purpose always included with invitations</i>  |
| <b>Job Task or<br/>Altered Deliverable</b> | <i>Normally presentations are delivered live, but this job task will be delivered by pre-recording instead.</i>   |
| <b>Other Considerations</b>                | <i>Training modules must be completed before commencing customer services over the phone.<br/>Altered evacuation procedures.</i>  |

Reminder: adjustment conversations should be revisited, not only conducted at the point of hire.

# Accessing support from the Community Sector

Some job seekers may apply directly to your organisation. Others may come through referrals from community partners – like employment consultants or support workers who are already helping them navigate work and life transitions.

These partners can continue supporting the young person once they've started the role. If someone was referred through an external agency, take the time to check in with the partner. They might offer post-placement support to ease the transition, especially for young people with little or no previous work experience. This support would typically be available to the individual and to you as the employer.

**The list below is not exhaustive but gives a few examples of how community partners can help.**

## Employability Skills



### Getting to new places

#### Support from community partner:

Work with the candidate on a travel plan and provide travel cards for the first two weeks



### Being on time

#### Support from community partner:

Plan for work routine

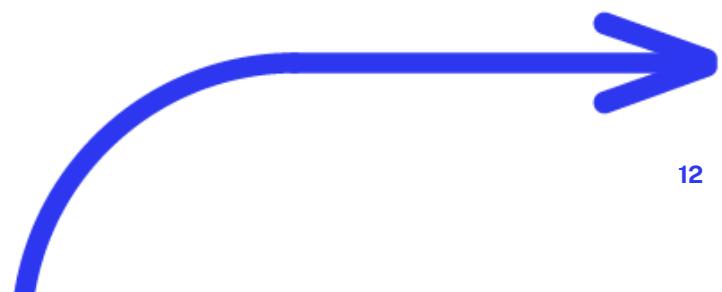
- Keeping a diary
- Setting reminders
- Family member(s) check in



### Managing income & financial

#### Support from community partner:

Need to be able to focus on one task area for at least 2 hours before tackling another one. Better at training in the morning – afternoon difficulty in focussing. New tasks always given in the morning



# Getting support from qualified professionals

Sometimes, workplace adjustments might need extra input from professionals to be effective and safe. If that's the case, it's worth bringing in external support – especially when the adjustment relates to specific health or capacity needs.

Here are a few options:



## Occupational Therapists

OTs can work on a plan which lists out all the key duties of the role and maps the candidates' capacities and reasonable adjustments in a more granular way. If you don't have an in-house OT, support can be accessed via Job Access for people with a diagnosed disability.



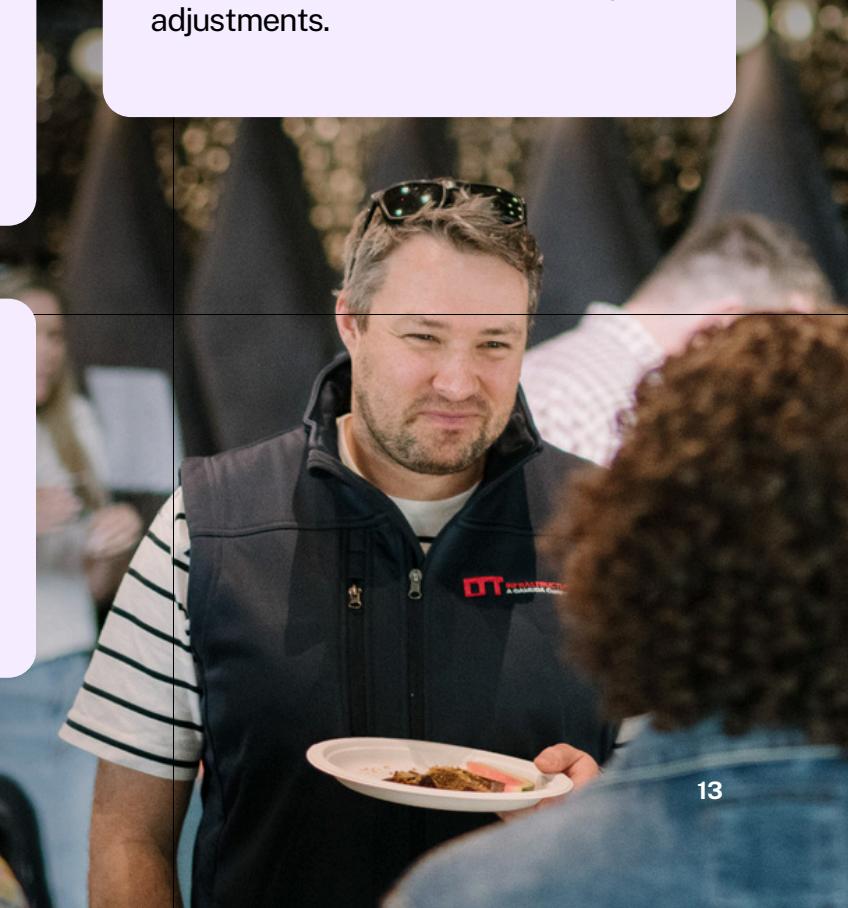
## Job Access

JobAccess gives employers free advice and resources, and can fund workplace adjustments.



## Psychologists

If a psychologist is already working with the candidate, they can help with things like managing stress, building confidence, practising mindfulness and creating strategies for positive connections.





# Workbook Discussions

# Discussion: Workplace Adjustments

| Name of selected candidate          |       |
|--|-------|
| Placement Department   | _____ |
| Manager/Supervisor   | _____ |
| HR-DEI stakeholder/supporter<br>(if applicable)  | _____ |
| Employment Consultant<br>(if applicable)   | _____ |
| <b>Tell us about your goals for the future and what you hope to gain from working with us?</b>                       | _____ |
| <b>What strengths do you think you have in meeting those goals?</b>  | _____ |
| <b>So that we can support you at work, tell us about any challenges you think you'll face in meeting your goals?</b> | _____ |
| <b>So that we can support you at work, can you tell me about any circumstances that might affect you at work.</b>    | _____ |

|  |                   |
|--|-------------------|
| <p><b>So that we can support you at work, how do you wish to be introduced to team members?</b></p>                                      | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| <p><b>Are there any services that you're currently involved in that we should know about or are important for us to accommodate?</b></p> | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| <p><b>Are there any effects from medication that could be relevant to how we support you to accomplish your work duties?</b></p>         | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |
| <p><b>Is there any other information that you would like to share that could help us work out ways to support you?</b></p>               | <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> |



# Discussion: Adjustment Areas

| Adjustment area                 |  Support or adjustment examples |
|---------------------------------|--|
| Equipment                       | _____  |
| Work Environment                | _____  |
| Workload                        | _____  |
| Working hours                   | _____  |
| Communication                   | _____  |
| Job Task or Altered Deliverable | _____  |
| Other Considerations            | _____  |

Reminder: adjustment conversations should be revisited, not only conducted at the point of hire.



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