

# JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

## Accommodation and Compliance Series

# Accommodation and Compliance Series: Phobias

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**ODEP**  
Office of Disability  
Employment Policy

Funded by a contract with the Office of Disability  
Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor

## Preface

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is funded by a grant from the Office of Disability Employment Policy, U.S. Department of Labor. JAN makes documents available with the understanding that the information be used solely for educational purposes. The information is not intended to be legal or medical advice. If legal or medical advice is needed, appropriate legal or medical services should be contacted.

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Updated 02/07/2024.

## **JAN'S Accommodation and Compliance Series**

### **Introduction**

JAN's Accommodation and Compliance Series is designed to help employers determine effective accommodations and comply with Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Each publication in the series addresses a specific medical condition and provides information about the condition, ADA information, accommodation ideas, and resources for additional information.

The Accommodation and Compliance Series is a starting point in the accommodation process and may not address every situation. Accommodations should be made on a case by case basis, considering each employee's individual limitations and accommodation needs. Employers are encouraged to contact JAN to discuss specific situations in more detail.

For information on assistive technology and other accommodation ideas, visit JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <https://AskJAN.org/soar>.

### **Information about Phobias**

Phobias are irrational, involuntary, and inappropriate fears of (or responses to) ordinary situations or things. The fear is persistent and out of proportion to the actual danger the object or situation poses. People who have phobias can experience panic attacks when confronted with the situation or object about which they feel phobic. A category of symptoms called phobic disorder falls within the broader field of anxiety disorders. Phobias are usually long-term, distressing disorders that keep people from ordinary activities and places. They can lead to other serious problems, such as social isolation and depression.

### **Phobias and the Americans with Disabilities Act**

The ADA does not contain a definitive list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA defines a person with a disability as someone who (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more "major life activities," (2) has a record of such an impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment. For more information about how to determine whether a person has a disability under the ADA, see [How to Determine Whether a Person Has a Disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act \(ADAAA\)](#).

## **Accommodating Employees with Phobias**

People with phobias may develop some of the limitations discussed below, but seldom develop all of them. Also, the degree of limitation will vary among individuals. Be aware that not all people with phobias will need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. The following is only a sample of the possibilities available. Numerous other accommodation solutions may exist.

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What limitations is the employee experiencing?
2. How do these limitations affect the employee and the employee's job performance?
3. What specific job tasks are problematic as a result of these limitations?
4. What accommodations are available to reduce or eliminate these problems? Are all possible resources being used to determine possible accommodations?
5. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
6. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training?

### **Accommodation Ideas:**

#### **Limitations**

##### Attentiveness/Concentration

- Products
  - Alternative Lighting
  - Applications (apps)
  - Apps for Concentration
  - Cubicle Doors, Shields, and Shades
  - Desk Organizers
  - Desk Pedal Exercisers
  - Electronic Organizers
  - Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
  - Fidget Devices

- Focus Enhancement
- Full Spectrum or Natural Lighting Products
- Noise Abatement
- Noise Canceling Earbuds
- Noise Canceling Headsets
- Simulated Skylights and Windows
- Sound Absorption and Sound Proof Panels
- Sun Boxes and Lights
- Sun Simulating Desk Lamps
- Timers and Watches
- Calendars and Planners
- Services
  - Job Coaches
- Strategies
  - Behavior Modification Techniques
  - Color Coded System
  - Flexible Schedule
  - Job Restructuring
  - Marginal Functions
  - Modified Break Schedule
  - Task Flow Chart
  - Task Separation
  - Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
  - Uninterrupted "Off" Work Time
  - Verbal Cues
  - Worksite Redesign / Modified Workspace
  - Written Instructions

#### Control of Anger/Emotions

- Products
  - Apps for Miscellaneous Mental Health / Control of Anger & Emotions

- Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
- Simulated Skylights and Windows
- Sun Boxes and Lights
- Services
  - Counseling/Therapy
  - Disability Awareness/Etiquette Training
  - Employee Assistance Program
  - Job Coaches
- Strategies
  - Behavior Modification Techniques
  - Communicate Another Way
  - Complying with Behavior and Conduct Rules
  - Flexible Schedule
  - Job Restructuring
  - Modified Break Schedule
  - Positive Feedback
  - Reassignment
  - Supervisory Methods
  - Support Animal
  - Support Person
  - Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely

#### Stress Intolerance

- Products
  - Apps for Anxiety and Stress
  - Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
  - Fitness Trackers
  - Simulated Skylights and Windows
  - Sun Boxes and Lights
  - Sun Simulating Desk Lamps

- Services
  - Counseling/Therapy
  - Employee Assistance Program
- Strategies
  - Behavior Modification Techniques
  - Communicate Another Way
  - Complying with Behavior and Conduct Rules
  - Flexible Schedule
  - Instant Messaging and Texting Solutions for Businesses
  - Job Restructuring
  - Marginal Functions
  - Modified Break Schedule
  - On-site Mentoring
  - One-on-One Communication
  - Policy Modification
  - Positive Feedback
  - Supervisory Feedback
  - Supervisory Methods
  - Support Animal
  - Support Person
  - Telepresence
  - Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely

## **Work-Related Functions**

### Stress

- Apps for Anxiety and Stress
- Behavior Modification Techniques
- Counseling/Therapy
- Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
- Flexible Schedule

- Job Coaches
- Job Restructuring
- Marginal Functions
- Modified Break Schedule
- Monitor Mirrors
- Odor Control
- On-site Mentoring
- Service Animal
- Simulated Skylights and Windows
- Strobe Lights
- Supervisory Methods
- Support Animal
- Support Person
- Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
- Uninterrupted Work Time

## Situations and Solutions:

The following situations and solutions are real-life examples of accommodations that were made by JAN customers. Because accommodations are made on a case-by-case basis, these examples may not be effective for every workplace but give you an idea about the types of accommodations that are possible.

### **An employee with agoraphobia works from home full-time as a benefit of employment.**

When new management comes on board, the whole telework program is scrapped and everyone is required to return to the office. The employee, who never had to disclose and ask for an accommodation, now asks for a policy modification that would allow him to continue to work from home. The new management considers his request and finds no hardship in allowing him to remain at home to complete his job tasks.

### **A paramedic was finding it increasingly difficult to go out on runs because of a phobia that involved roaches.**

He asked that enough personnel be dispatched to each scene that would enable him to remain in the vehicle. The employer could not guarantee that it would always be possible, so they agreed to look into reassignment. He was successfully reassigned to a 911 dispatch position that was vacant, where he wouldn't be required to go on the problematic runs.

### **An adjuster for an insurance company developed a fear of heights and using ladders after a recent fall from a roof.**

The employer looked at the options of providing safety gear to the employee as well as reassigning him to a position without the height / use of ladders requirement. The adjuster truly wanted to stay in his job, and since the use of ladders for heights isn't something he does every day, they decided to obtain safety gear so that he wouldn't fall again.

### **An employer was notified that the only supervisor he had in a particular department had a phobia towards a specific group of people.**

The supervisor asked to be excused from supervising a new employee from this people group. Since she was the only supervisor in that area, the employer could not remove the duty or give it to another. By attending the meetings himself with the supervisor and this particular employee, the employer was able to reduce the anxiety the supervisor was feeling and eventually enable her to meet with the person (and others) without the extra support.

### **An administrative assistant who worked in a small office was reassigned to another position when her position was eliminated due to a reduction in the work flow.**

Her new environment was an open area that didn't allow her to sit with her back to the wall, escalating her fear of being in open spaces. She was accommodated by a move to the outskirts of the large area. Her workspace was reoriented so she was able to sit with her back to a partition that was near a wall.

### **An employee with anxiety and a driving phobia takes public transportation to work.**

After a company restructure, the employee was moved to work in a new location that would necessitate a lengthy commute involving two buses and a train. She disclosed her disability and asked for accommodations. She was accommodated by remaining at her current location, with a change in supervisor to the one who would oversee the employees in that location. Although her current supervisor was going to the new location, her job would remain the same.

## **Products**

There are numerous products that can be used to accommodate people with limitations. JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource at <https://AskJAN.org/soar> is designed to let users explore various accommodation options. Many product vendor lists are accessible through this system; however, JAN provides these lists and many more that are not available on the Web site upon request. Contact JAN directly if you have specific accommodation situations, are looking for products, need vendor information, or are seeking a referral.

## Resources

### **Job Accommodation Network**

West Virginia University  
PO Box 6080  
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080  
Toll Free: (800) 526-7234  
TTY: (304) 293-7186  
Fax: (304) 293-5407  
[jan@askjan.org](mailto:jan@askjan.org)  
<https://askjan.org>

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.

### **Anxiety and Depression Association of America**

8701 Georgia Ave.  
Suite #412  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
Direct: (240) 485-1001  
Fax: (240) 485-1035  
<https://adaa.org/>

ADAA is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to the prevention, treatment, and cure of anxiety and mood disorders, OCD, and PTSD and to improving the lives of all people who suffer from them through education, practice, and research.

### **Mayo Clinic**

13400 E. Shea Blvd.  
Scottsdale, AZ 85259  
Direct: (480) 301-8000  
<http://www.mayoclinic.org/>

The Mayo Clinic's mission to inspire hope and contribute to health and well-being by providing the best care to every patient through integrated clinical practice, education and research.

**MedlinePlus**

8600 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20894  
[custserv@nlm.nih.gov](mailto:custserv@nlm.nih.gov)  
<https://medlineplus.gov>

MedlinePlus is the National Institutes of Health's Web site for patients and their families and friends. Produced by the National Library of Medicine, the world's largest medical library, it brings you information about diseases, conditions, and wellness issues in language you can understand. MedlinePlus offers reliable, up-to-date health information, anytime, anywhere, for free.

**Mental Health America**

500 Montgomery Street  
Suite 820  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
Toll Free: (800) 969-6642  
Direct: (703) 684-7722  
Fax: (703) 684-5968  
<https://www.mhanational.org>

Mental Health America – founded in 1909 – is the nation's leading community-based nonprofit dedicated to addressing the needs of those living with mental illness and to promoting the overall mental health of all Americans. Their work is driven by their commitment to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness, including prevention services for all, early identification and intervention for those at risk, and integrated care and treatment for those who need it, with recovery as the goal.

**National Alliance on Mental Illness**

3803 N. Fairfax Dr.,  
Ste. 100  
Arlington, VA 22203  
Toll Free: (800) 950-6264  
Direct: (703) 524-7600  
<http://www.nami.org>

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is the nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. NAMI advocates for access to services, treatment, supports and research and is steadfast in its commitment to raise awareness and build a community for hope for all those in need.

### **National Center for Biotechnology Information**

8600 Rockville Pike  
Bethesda, MD 20894  
[pubmedcentral@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](mailto:pubmedcentral@ncbi.nlm.nih.gov)  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/>

The National Center for Biotechnology Information advances science and health by providing access to biomedical and genomic information.

### **National Institute of Mental Health**

6001 Executive Boulevard  
Rockville, MD 20852  
Toll Free: (866) 615-6464  
Direct: (301) 443-4513  
Fax: (301) 443-4279  
[nimhinfo@nih.gov](mailto:nimhinfo@nih.gov)  
<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

NIMH offers a variety of publications and other educational resources to help people with mental disorders, the general public, mental health and health care practitioners, and researchers gain a better understanding of mental illnesses and the research programs of the NIMH. All publications and educational materials are written by science writers, in collaboration with NIMH scientists and outside reviewers.

### **Remedy's Health Communities**

<http://www.healthcommunities.com>

Remedy Health Media is America's fastest growing health information and technology company. We are a leading provider of clinical resources and wellness tools that help millions of patients and caregivers live healthier, more fulfilled lives.

Our mission is to empower patients and caregivers with the information and applications needed to efficiently navigate the healthcare landscape and as a result, to permit better health outcomes through use of our products and services.

This document was developed by the Job Accommodation Network (JAN), funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (#OD-38028-22-75-4-54). The opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Labor. Nor does mention of tradenames, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Department of Labor.