

JAN

Job Accommodation Network

Practical Solutions • Workplace Success

Accommodation and Compliance Series

Employees with Auditory Processing Disorder

Job Accommodation Network
PO Box 6080
Morgantown, WV 26506-6080
(800)526-7234 (V)
(877)781-9403 (TTY)
jan@askjan.org
askjan.org



A service of the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy

Preface

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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 <http://AskJAN.org/soar>.

Information about Auditory Processing Disorder

What is an auditory processing disorder?

An auditory processing disorder is a type of learning disability. Learning disabilities refer to a number of disorders that may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding, or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning.

Learning disabilities result from impairments in one or more processes related to perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning. Learning disabilities range in severity and may interfere with the acquisition and use of oral language, reading, written language, and mathematics. Learning disabilities may also involve difficulties with organizational skills, social perception, social interaction and perspective taking. (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2015)

Auditory Processing Disorder is the term used to describe a weakness in the ability to understand and use auditory information. Individuals may have difficulties with auditory discrimination. This includes the ability to notice, compare and distinguish the distinct and separate sounds in words — a skill that is vital for reading. Auditory figure-ground discrimination includes the ability to pick out important sounds from a noisy background. Auditory memory involves the short-term and long-term abilities to recall information presented orally. Auditory sequencing incorporates the ability to understand and recall the order of sounds and words. All of these difficulties may be problematic for competency in spelling, reading, and written expression (NCLD, 2014).

What causes an auditory processing disorder?

As mentioned previously, an auditory processing disorder is a type of learning disability. Learning disabilities arise from neurological differences in brain structure and function and affect a person's ability to receive, store, process, retrieve, or communicate information. While the specific nature of these brain-based disorders is still not well understood, considerable progress has been made in mapping some of the characteristic difficulties of learning disabilities to specific brain regions and structures.

Progress has also been made in understanding the interface between genetics and learning disabilities, with documentation of learning disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and related disorders occurring with considerable frequency within members of the same families.

Learning disabilities may also be a consequence of insults to the developing brain before or during birth, involving such factors as significant maternal illness or injury, drug or alcohol use during pregnancy, maternal malnutrition, low birth weight, oxygen deprivation, and premature or prolonged labor. Postnatal events resulting in learning disabilities might include traumatic injuries, severe nutritional deprivation, or exposure to poisonous substances such as lead (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014).

Only qualified professionals who have been trained to identify learning disabilities can perform a formal evaluation to diagnose learning disabilities. Such professionals may be clinical or educational psychologists, school psychologists, neuro-psychologists, or learning disabilities specialists. Adults who suspect they have learning disabilities should seek out professionals who have training or direct experience working with and evaluating adults with learning disabilities. Local school districts can help with referrals to qualified professionals who can diagnose a learning disability, universities that have a doctoral psychology program will do testing as part of their training program, and clients of vocational rehabilitation may be evaluated as part of their assessment process.

Auditory Processing Disorder and the Americans with Disabilities Act

Is an auditory processing disorder a disability under the ADA?

The ADA does not contain a list of medical conditions that constitute disabilities. Instead, the ADA has a general definition of disability that each person must meet (EEOC Regulations . . . , 2011). Therefore, some people with an auditory processing disorder will have a disability under the ADA and some will not.

A person has a disability if he/she has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a record of such an impairment, or is regarded as having such an impairment (EEOC Regulations . . . , 2011). For more information about how to determine whether a person has a disability under the ADA, go to JAN's Accommodation and Compliance Series: The ADA Amendments Act of 2008 of 2008 at <http://AskJAN.org/bulletins/adaaa1.htm>. Also visit <http://AskJAN.org/corner/vol05iss04.htm>.

Accommodating Employees with Auditory Processing Disorders

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

Questions to Consider:

1. What limitations is the employee with the auditory processing disorder 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. Has the employee been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
6. 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?
7. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training regarding auditory processing disorders?

Accommodation Ideas:

Auditory Distractions:

- Provide space enclosures or a private office
- Hang sound absorption panels
- Relocate employee's office space away from audible distractions
- Redesign employee's office space to minimize audible distractions
- Encourage all employees to move non-work-related conversations out of work areas
- Allow telework

Meetings / Training:

- Consider the environment and what is going on in terms of background noises / voices

- Minimize auditory distractions
- Provide Assistive Listening Devices (ALD)
- Allow preferential seating
- Provide advanced organizers / agendas
- Provide materials in alternate formats
- Provide printed minutes
- Provide instructions, communications, etc., in writing as much as possible
- Follow up verbal communications in writing
- Allow the use of recorder / apps
- Allow ample time for response to oral communications / questions
- Encourage employee to question / repeat back information received
- Demonstrate and explain new information and tasks

Communication:

- Consider the environment and what is going on in terms of background noises / voices
- Minimize auditory distractions
- Slow the rate of speech
- Simplify or minimize verbal communication / instructions and follow up in writing
- Allow written communication such as e-mails, texts, etc.
- Allow ample time for response to verbal communication / questions
- Encourage employee to question / repeat back information received
- Be patient

For additional accommodations, particularly related to reading, writing and spelling, see *Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Learning Disabilities* publication at <http://askjan.org/media/LD.html>.

Situations and Solutions

An employee who worked in an open office area requested a more private work space as an accommodation. Since no offices were available, she was provided a cubicle on the outskirts of the room, with taller walls that faced the other employees. Sound absorption panels were added to further help reduce the sound.

A paralegal with auditory processing disorder staffed meetings with various attorneys where information was exchanged at a very rapid pace. Because he became overloaded and had difficulty processing the information completely, he asked to record the meetings. Because the information was confidential, the employee was required to follow a strict policy; the meetings could be taped, but within two days the notes were to be transcribed and the recordings destroyed. The device was kept in a locked drawer.

An IT troubleshooter was having difficulty quickly answering questions posed to him on the phone. He requested that inquiries be given to him via e-mail instead. The employer agreed for a trial period to see how effective the accommodations would be. After a brief time for his co-workers to adjust to writing the requests instead of picking up the phone, the accommodations were effective. The employer determined the written

requests worked well for recordkeeping purposes and required all requests be written from then on.

An administrative assistant who was required to take notes for departmental meetings wants to improve in her note-taking skills. She currently uses a smart pen that records as she writes. A JAN consultant suggested she ask for an agenda as early as possible before the meeting. Using a template/advanced organizer that would include topics to be discussed already listed, she would be able to jot notes in those sections. Using pre-printed names of people in the department in the organizer would allow her to simply put the notes next to the individuals who spoke. The pre-printed information/advanced organizer would allow her to write less, stay better organized, and allow more time to listen.

A college student with auditory processing disorder was trying to learn new languages for a career as an interpreter. She has not been successful in grasping the languages orally in order to learn to speak them. Accommodations discussed included extending the time frame for completion of her degree so that she can learn the languages one at a time instead of several at once. Also discussed were ways to improve her ability to “hear” the languages by recording all class sessions and using variable speed playback in order to process at a slower rate, allowing plenty of time for processing information in class and formulating a response after questions, allowing preferential seating, and looking at ways to minimize auditory distractions in the classroom.

Products:

There are numerous products that can be used to accommodate people with limitations. JAN's Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) at <http://AskJAN.org/soar/> is designed to let users explore various accommodation options. Many product vendor lists are accessible through this system; however, upon request JAN provides these lists and many more that are not available on the Web site. 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: (877)781-9403
Fax: (304)293-5407
jan@AskJAN.org
<http://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.

Office of Disability Employment Policy

200 Constitution Avenue, NW, Room S-1303
Washington, DC 20210
Toll Free: (866)633-7365
TTY: (877)889-5627
Fax: (202)693-7888
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/>

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. ODEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

2200 Research Blvd
Rockville, MD 20850
Toll Free: (800)638-8255
Direct: (301)296-5700
Fax: (301)296-8580
TTY: (301)296-5650
actioncenter@asha.org
<http://www.asha.org>

Promotes the interests of, and provide the highest quality services for, professions in audiology, speech-language pathology, and speech and hearing science; and an advocate for people with communication disabilities.

AudiologyOnline

538 W 21st St #79931
Houston, TX 77008-3642
Toll Free: (800)753-2160
Fax: (210)579-7010
<http://www.audiologyonline.com>

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Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)

4156 Library Road
Pittsburgh, PA 15234-1349
Direct: (412)341-1515
Fax: (412)344-0224
info@ldaamerica.org
<http://www.ldaamerica.org>

LDA is the largest non-profit volunteer organization advocating for individuals with learning disabilities. LDA publishes materials on issues of importance to adults with learning disabilities on adult literacy, parenting, and special populations. A special series of bulletins address civil rights and accommodations in various settings.

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)

381 Park Ave South
Suite 1401
New York, NY 10016
Toll Free: (888)575-7373
Direct: (212)545-7510
Fax: (212)545-9665
nclld@nclld.org
<http://www.nclld.org>

NCLD provides essential information to parents, professionals, and individuals with learning disabilities, promotes research and programs to foster effective learning and advocates for policies to protect and strengthen educational rights and opportunities.

The National Coalition on Auditory Processing Disorders (NCAPD)

http://www.ncapd.org/APD_Stories.html

The goal of the NCAPD is to become a national resource information network and to assist families and individuals affected by auditory processing disorders through education, support and public awareness.

References

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