Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Bipolar Disorder

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Preface

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JAN does not endorse or recommend any products or services mentioned in this publication. Although every effort is made to update resources, JAN encourages contacting product manufacturers/vendors and service providers directly to ensure that they meet the intended purposes. This guarantees that the most up-to-date information is obtained.

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**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 Bipolar Disorder**

Bipolar disorder is a brain disorder marked by periods of elevated mood (mania), and prolonged periods of sadness and hopelessness (depression). These shifts in mood are severe as compared to the average person. Signs and symptoms of mania include distinct periods of:

- Inflated self-esteem or grandiosity
- Decreased need for sleep
- More talkative than usual
- Distractibility
- Increase in goal-directed activity
- Excessive involvement in activities that have a high potential for painful consequences (spending sprees, sexual indiscretions, other risky behaviors)

Signs and symptoms of depression include distinct periods of:

- Feelings of hopelessness or pessimism for most of the day
- Diminished interest or pleasure in more, or all, activities
- Significant weight loss
- Insomnia or hypersomnia
- Fatigue or loss of energy
- Feelings of worthlessness and guilt
- Loss of appetite and weight or weight gain
- Diminished ability to think or concentrate
- Recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal ideation

**Bipolar Disorder and the Americans with Disabilities Act**

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. 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 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 Bipolar Disorder**

People with bipolar disorder 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 bipolar disorder 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. 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?
Accommodation Ideas:

Limitations

Attentiveness/Concentration

• Alternative Lighting
• Applications (apps)
• Apps for Memory
• Behavior Modification Techniques
• Cubicle Doors, Shields, and Shades
• Electronic Organizers
• Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
• Flexible Schedule
• Full Spectrum or Natural Lighting Products
• Job Coaches
• Job Restructuring
• Marginal Functions
• Modified Break Schedule
• Noise Canceling Headsets
• Sound Absorption and Sound Proof Panels
• Task Separation
• Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
• Timers and Watches
• Uninterrupted "Off" Work Time
• Verbal Cues
• Wall Calendars and Planners
• Worksite Redesign / Modified Workspace
• Written Instructions

Decreased Stamina/Fatigue

• Aide/Assistant/Attendant
• Job Restructuring
• Periodic Rest Breaks
• Stand-lean Stools
• Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
• Worksite Redesign / Modified Workspace

Organizing/Planning/Prioritizing
• Applications (apps)
• Apps for Organization/ Time Management
• Color-coded Manuals, Outlines, and Maps
• Electronic Organizers
• Ergonomic Equipment
• Job Coaches
• Job Restructuring
• On-site Mentoring
• Organization Software
• Professional Organizers
• Reminders
• Supervisory Methods
• Task Identification
• Task Separation
• Timers and Watches
• Wall Calendars and Planners
• Written Instructions

Stress Intolerance
• Apps for Anxiety and Stress
• Behavior Modification Techniques
• Counseling/Therapy
• Environmental Sound Machines / Tinnitus Maskers / White Noise Machines
• Flexible Schedule
• Job Restructuring
• Marginal Functions
• Modified Break Schedule
• Supervisory Methods
• Support Animal
• Support Person

Work-Related Functions

Policies
• Additional Training Time / Training Refreshers
• Aide/Assistant/Attendant
• Flexible Schedule
• Marginal Functions
• Modified Break Schedule
• Periodic Rest Breaks
• Policy Modification
• Reassignment
• Service Animal
• Supervisory Methods
• Support Animal
• Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely

Stress
• Apps for Anxiety and Stress
• Behavior Modification Techniques
• Counseling/Therapy
• Flexible Schedule
• Job Restructuring
• Marginal Functions
• Modified Break Schedule
• Monitor Mirrors
• On-site Mentoring
• Service Animal
• Simulated Skylights and Windows
• Supervisory Methods
• Support Animal
• Support Person
• Telework, Work from Home, Working Remotely
• Uninterrupted Work Time
Situations and Solutions:

A supervisor of a printing company requested information on how to accommodate an employee who has reduced concentration and memory loss due to mental illness. His duties included operating copy machines, maintaining the paper supply, filling orders, and checking the orders for accuracy. He was having difficulty staying on task and remembering what tasks he had completed. A JAN consultant suggested laminating a copy of his daily job tasks and checking items off with an erasable marker. Another suggestion was to use a watch with an alarm set for every hour as a reminder to check on his other job responsibilities.

A JAN consultant spoke with an employee with bipolar disorder who had difficulty with short-term memory and concentration. The employee worked as a secretary in a busy office. The JAN consultant discussed requesting additional training time, written job tasks instructions, daily checklists, and allowing one hour each day to be off the phones to complete job tasks.

An employee with major depression and bipolar disorder was having difficulties working in a busy central banking office. He needed to manage a large staff of workers, provide customer service, and oversee the daily office management. As an accommodation he requested and received a transfer to a smaller and less busy branch office. The employee maintained his salary and the responsibilities of his leadership role.

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
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
odep@dol.gov
http://dol.gov/odep

The Office of Disability Employment Policy (O'DEP) is an agency within the U.S. Department of Labor. O'DEP provides national leadership to increase employment opportunities for adults and youth with disabilities while striving to eliminate barriers to employment.
The American Psychiatric Association is an organization of psychiatrists working together to ensure humane care and effective treatment for all persons with mental illness, including substance use disorders. It is the voice and conscience of modern psychiatry. Its vision is a society that has available, accessible quality psychiatric diagnosis and treatment.

Our mission is to advance the creation, communication and application of psychological knowledge to benefit society and improve people’s lives.

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.
The Brain & Behavior Research Foundation is committed to alleviating the suffering caused by mental illness by awarding grants that will lead to advances and breakthroughs in scientific research.

The Center is a research, training, and service organization dedicated to improving the lives of persons who have psychiatric disabilities. Our work is guided by the most basic of rehabilitation values, that first and foremost, persons with psychiatric disabilities have the same goals and dreams as any other person. Our mission is to increase the likelihood that they can achieve these goals by improving the effectiveness of people, programs, and service systems using strategies based on the core values of recovery and rehabilitation.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention are dedicated to protecting the health and safety of people - at home and abroad, providing credible information to enhance health decisions, and promoting health through strong partnerships.
Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance
55 E. Jackson Blvd,
Suite 490
Chicago, IL 60604
Toll Free: (800) 826-3632
Fax: (312) 642-7243
http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=me

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance (DBSA) is the leading peer-directed national organization focusing on the two most prevalent mental health conditions, depression and bipolar disorder, which affect more than 21 million Americans, account for 90% of the nation’s suicides every year, and cost $23 billion in lost workdays and other workplace losses.

Families for Depression Awareness
395 Totten Pond Road,
Suite 404
Waltham, MA 02451
Direct: (781) 890-0220
Fax: (781) 890-2411
http://familyaware.org/

Families for Depression Awareness is a national nonprofit organization helping families recognize and cope with depression and bipolar disorder to get people well and prevent suicides.

International Bipolar Foundation
8895 Town Centre Drive
Suite 105-360
San Diego, CA 92122
Direct: (858) 764-2496
Fax: (858) 764-2491
http://ibpf.org/
The mission of International Bipolar Foundation is to improve understanding and treatment of bipolar disorder through research; to promote care and support resources for individuals and caregivers; and to erase stigma through education.

**Mayo Clinic**
13400 E. Shea Blvd.
Scottsdale, AZ 85259
Direct: (480) 301-8000

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

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.

Created by the U.S. National Library of Medicine

**Mental Health America**
500 Montgomery Street
Suite 820
Alexandria, VA 22314
Toll Free: (800) 969-6642
Direct: (703) 684-7722
Fax: (703) 684-5968
[http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/)
Mental Health America (MHA) – 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. Our work is driven by our 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](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)

MISSION: IMS brings together an international community of health care professionals, researchers, educators, and others to improve care and transform delivery of treatment to those suffering from soft tissue pain through the promotion and exchange of globally recognized research, education, and innovation in patient care.
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 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.

Tourette Syndrome "Plus"
940 Lincoln Place
North Bellmore, NY 11701-1016
Direct: (516) 785-2653
admin@tourettesyndrome.net
http://www.tourettesyndrome.net/
The Agency is responsible for providing employment, training, educational and reemployment rights information and assistance to veterans, and other military personnel who are preparing to transition from the military. Also provide hearing aids. All World War I veterans are eligible to receive free hearing aids. Other veterans can receive free hearing aids if their hearing loss is at least 50% service-related.

World Health Organization
525 Twenty-third Street
N.W.
Washington, DC 20037
Direct: (202) 974-3000
Fax: (202) 974-3663
http://www.who.int/en/

We are the directing and coordinating authority on international health within the United Nations’ system.
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