

Psychiatric Disabilities

Symptoms, Limitations and Reasonable Accommodations

Psychiatric or mental health disabilities are disabilities that effect psychological functioning and include eating disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, depression, and a wide range of other mental and emotional conditions. Psychiatric disabilities can be acquired through trauma, caused by biochemical imbalances or differences in brain structure, and/or can be the result of other genetic, biological, and/or social factors. They are characterized by significant disorders in an individual's cognition, emotion regulation, or behavior that impact the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying mental functioning. Psychiatric disabilities are usually associated with significant distress in social, occupational, or other major life activities and often result in a diminished capacity for coping with the ordinary demands of life, according to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness \(NAMI\)](#). One in five adults in the United States will experience a diagnosable mental health condition in any given year.

Individuals with mental health disabilities may be reluctant to disclose their need for accommodations due to social stigma or uncertainty about whether workplace accommodations exist. These individuals may require only one reasonable accommodation, while others may need more than one accommodation to perform the essential functions of their position. It is important for managers to recognize the impact that their words and actions have on an employee's mental health. As part of an accommodation for individuals with psychiatric disabilities, supervisors will need to modify their engagement and communication techniques to create a supportive and safe environment. For more information, visit the [Job Accommodation Network](#) and the Employer Assistance and Resource Network on Disability Inclusion ([EARN](#)), which contains valuable information on [mental health accommodations](#). The following table lists symptoms and common accommodations for mental health disabilities:

Disability	Limitation	Accommodation
Anxiety Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• anxious/avoidant behavior• excessive/pervasive worry• reoccurring/sudden/unexpected panic attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- advance planning/preparation- identifying/reducing triggers- job coach/support person- emotional support animal
Panic Disorder		

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • difficulty concentrating/multi-tasking/completing tasks • shortened attention span/easily distracted/restlessness • memory deficits • stress intolerance • difficulty with change/new situations • limited tolerance for noise/crowds • difficulty engaging/working effectively with others • difficulty understanding/remembering verbal directions • lightheadedness/chest pain/sweats/chills • stomach discomfort • sleep disturbances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - private workspace/rest area - advance notice of meetings/changes - frequent breaks to regroup - flexible work schedule - telework
Bipolar Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • disruptive/noncompliant behavior • time management • organization and prioritization • stress intolerance • easily distracted/irritated/agitated • extreme mood swings • speaking quickly • illogical thinking • hallucinations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - daily job task instructions/checklist - timer/alarm - additional training - scheduled time for specific tasks - frequent breaks to regroup - flexible work/break schedule - telework - job coach
Borderline Personality Disorder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pervasive mood instability • emotional dysregulation • stress intolerance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - flexible schedule - job coach - hybrid schedule/telework - soft relaxing music

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • erratic/inconsistent thinking and/or behavior • time management • tardiness/absenteeism • stamina • difficulty interacting with coworkers/supervisors • inappropriate responses to work/social situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - private/quiet workspace - reinforcement/praise/feedback - written instructions/checklists/to do lists/ - calendars/organizers - sensitivity training for coworkers - modified supervisory strategies (additional support/alternate methods of communication/extra individualized meetings) - clear, written procedures/expectations
Major depression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fatigue/decreased stamina • attentiveness • concentration • difficulty controlling anger/emotions • time management • memory loss • organization/planning/prioritizing • stress intolerance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - uninterrupted work time - flexible work schedule - modified break schedule - private workspace/break area/worksit redesign - natural/alternative lighting/sunbox - telework - extended deadlines - job coach/support person - emotional support animal - employee assistance program
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • organization • concentration • time management • managing distractions • tardiness/absenteeism • avoidance of tasks/people • disruptive/non-compliant behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - checklists/timers - calendars/planners/organizers - private workspace - allow extra time for cleaning workspace - flexible schedule - clear, written/verbal procedures and expectations

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> difficulty working with others ritual/compulsive behavior feelings of self-doubt intrusive thoughts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> recorded directives/messages/materials job coach
Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> difficulty with social interactions violent outbursts control of anger/emotions organization/planning/prioritization disruptive/erratic behavior mental confusion social/communication skills stress intolerance sensitivity to loud sounds/sudden changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify/reduce triggers flexible schedule frequent breaks alternative supervisory/communication methods (meeting more/less frequently, text/email vs. phone/in-person/virtual on-screen) written instructions/goals/ work agreements/expectations positive reinforcement job coach/mentor/support person support animal