

When Reasonable Adjustments Are Not Respected

Each Cut May Be Deniable. The Cumulative Harm Is Not.

A standalone workplace wellbeing article, reflection guide and practical action plan.

Why consistent adjustments matter

Reasonable adjustments are changes that remove or reduce disability-related barriers in the workplace. They may involve how instructions are delivered, where or when work takes place, equipment, communication methods, duties or support. Their purpose is to make work more accessible, not to grant special treatment.

An adjustment can be agreed during a meeting and still fail in everyday practice. Instructions promised in writing may continue to be given only verbally. A quiet space may regularly be interrupted. Agreed flexibility may be questioned every time it is used. When this happens repeatedly, the employee can spend substantial energy managing a barrier that the adjustment was intended to remove.

What being disregarded can look like

- Agreed written instructions are repeatedly replaced by last-minute verbal requests.
- A change in manager leads to previously agreed support being ignored or questioned.
- Assistive technology or support arrangements are delayed, unavailable or not maintained.
- An employee is pressured to abandon agreed breaks or working arrangements without discussing the effect on their disability.
- The employee must repeatedly disclose personal information to different colleagues to obtain the same support.

Not every disruption is deliberate or unlawful. The important questions include what was agreed, the disadvantage it was intended to address, what actually happened, whether the problem recurs and what steps were taken to resolve it.

The difference between an adjustment on paper and one that works

A document alone is not the outcome. Effective support requires clear implementation, ownership, communication, review and a way to raise problems. Different circumstances may justify changes to an arrangement, but that should ordinarily involve meaningful discussion and consideration of effective alternatives.

The cumulative impact of repeated failures

When the same barrier returns, a person may begin anticipating disruption rather than concentrating on their role. They might rehearse explanations before meetings, use additional time to compensate, avoid asking for help or feel anxious about whether support will be available on a particular day.

These demands can affect confidence, concentration, performance, attendance and wellbeing. For autistic people, people with ADHD, dyslexia and other disabilities, repeated barriers can interact with sensory, executive-function, communication and processing needs. The consequences differ between individuals; no diagnosis determines one fixed set of adjustments.

Common but overlooked costs

- Time lost re-explaining agreed needs or correcting information that was inaccessible.
- Increased cognitive and emotional load from unpredictable arrangements.
- Reduced trust when an agreement is repeatedly reversed or ignored.
- Fear of being considered difficult for asking for support already discussed.
- Greater fatigue after work, despite an outward appearance of coping.

How to recognise a pattern without assuming intent

Keep observations separate from interpretations. Record the date, what support was agreed, what occurred, who was involved, what barrier arose and what response followed. One incident may be an oversight; repeated unresolved failures may reveal a systemic issue. Clear records help both the employee and employer understand the practical problem.

Questions worth considering

- Is the adjustment described clearly enough for everyone responsible to implement it?
- Does it address the actual barrier, or has the work environment changed?
- Are the same expectations and review arrangements being applied consistently?
- Have reasonable alternatives been explored when an existing adjustment cannot work?
- Has the employee been consulted before changes are made?

UK rights and workplace responsibilities

In England, Scotland and Wales, the Equality Act 2010 places a duty on employers to make reasonable adjustments when the legal conditions apply. Whether a particular change is reasonable depends on the circumstances. A failure to make reasonable adjustments can amount to disability discrimination; however, a disagreement or operational disruption does not automatically establish a legal breach. ACAS recommends that adjustments be recorded and reviewed, particularly when work, management or needs change.

This is general information, not individual legal advice. Employment tribunal time limits can be short; seek prompt specialist advice if you are considering a legal claim.

What practical support can look like

An effective review focuses on reducing the actual disadvantage, with the employee involved in identifying workable options. Clear arrangements are often easier to sustain than informal understandings that depend on one person remembering them.

- Create an adjustment record or passport specifying what has been agreed.
- Identify a named person responsible for each action and a realistic implementation date.
- Agree how urgent requests, changes in priorities and unavoidable exceptions will be communicated.
- Provide clear written summaries after meetings when processing or memory support is needed.
- Schedule a follow-up to check whether the adjustment works in practice, not merely whether it was purchased or approved.
- Keep sensitive health information confidential and share it only where necessary and appropriate.

Preparing a constructive workplace conversation

Start with the barrier and its effect rather than trying to prove another person's intentions. Describe what was agreed, offer concrete examples of when it did not happen, and explain the difference a consistent arrangement would make. Ask for clear next steps, a named owner and a review date.

Suggested wording: "We agreed that I would receive instructions in writing because verbal-only changes are difficult for me to process reliably. On three occasions this month the changes were communicated only verbally. This has caused missed information and extra work. Could we agree how written instructions will be provided consistently and review this in two weeks?"

If your concerns remain unresolved

You may wish to seek support from a trusted representative, trade union, HR, occupational health or an adviser. ACAS provides free workplace guidance, including information on informal resolution, formal grievances and reasonable adjustments. Access to Work may sometimes help fund eligible practical support, but it does not replace an employer's Equality Act responsibilities.

Protect your wellbeing while addressing the issue

Repeatedly advocating for support can itself be tiring. Consider who can accompany you, help prepare information or take notes. Choose a manageable next step, ask for written outcomes and take opportunities to rest. If symptoms are affecting your health, seek appropriate clinical support. If you are in immediate danger, use emergency services.

Personal Action Plan

Use these pages privately or take selected information into a workplace meeting. Only share what you are comfortable sharing.

Step 1 — Identify the adjustment

What adjustment was requested or agreed, when, and with whom? What workplace barrier should it reduce?

Step 2 — Describe what is not happening

Use specific examples, dates and observable facts. Distinguish what was said or done from how you interpreted it.

Step 3 — Understand the impact

What has been the effect on your work, health, concentration, energy, confidence or access?

Step 4 — Decide what needs to change

What reliable arrangement, equipment, communication method or alternative would reduce the barrier?

Step 5 — Prepare the conversation

Who should be involved? What three points are most important to communicate?

Step 6 — Agree responsibilities

What is the agreed action, who owns it, when will it happen, and how will it be confirmed in writing?

Step 7 — Record the pattern

Keep a factual log. You can copy this table for additional entries. Avoid recording unnecessary sensitive details about colleagues.

Date	Adjustment expected	What happened	Impact / follow-up

Step 8 — Review the outcome

Review date: _____

What has improved? What remains difficult? What further action or support might help?

My next manageable action

I will: _____

By: _____ **Support person (optional):** _____

Further guidance and sources

The following public sources offer guidance for workplaces in Great Britain. This resource is educational and is not a substitute for advice on a particular employment dispute.

- ACAS — Reasonable adjustments at work: <https://www.acas.org.uk/reasonable-adjustments>
- ACAS — Reviewing and keeping a record: <https://www.acas.org.uk/reasonable-adjustments/reviewing-reasonable-adjustments-and-keeping-a-record>
- ACAS — If an employer does not make adjustments: <https://www.acas.org.uk/reasonable-adjustments/if-an-employer-does-not-make-reasonable-adjustments>
- Equality Act 2010, employment provisions: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/part/5>

A closing reflection

What is the smallest meaningful change that would make your working day more accessible? Who needs to be involved to make it happen consistently? Identifying the pattern is not about escalating conflict unnecessarily. It is about ensuring that support is effective in real life, not only in policy or correspondence.

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