Understanding disability at work

A practical guide to recognising barriers, identifying support and building accessible working conditions.

Disability is not always visible

Disability can involve physical, sensory, cognitive, neurological or mental health conditions. Experiences and support needs vary between individuals and may change over time.

Workplace accessibility is not only about a person's condition. It is also about how environments, systems and expectations affect their ability to participate.

The person Strengths, skills, preferences and individual access needs.	**The environment** Physical spaces, digital systems, sensory demands and social expectations.
Access Practical changes that reduce avoidable barriers.	**Participation** Opportunities to contribute, communicate and work effectively.

A useful principle

A person can be capable of doing their job while facing barriers in how work is organised, communicated or accessed.

A simple way to approach accessibility

Notice the barrier → Understand its impact → Adjust the conditions → Review what works.

Reflection

What helps me do my work well?

Recognising workplace barriers

Identify situations that create difficulty, and consider what could make them easier.

Physical access Entrances, furniture, movement between spaces or inaccessible equipment.	**Sensory environment** Noise, lighting, temperature, crowded spaces or interruptions.
Communication Unclear instructions, inaccessible formats or rapid verbal updates.	**Organisation and culture** Unpredictable changes, inflexible processes or assumptions about needs.

Barrier to adjustment map

Choose one or two real situations. Describe what happens without judging yourself. Then consider a practical change that might reduce the barrier.

Situation or barrier

Impact on my work or wellbeing

A possible adjustment or support

Example

Barrier: Verbal-only instructions. Impact: Details are missed. Possible adjustment: Written steps or a short follow-up summary.

Understanding your workplace needs

A strengths-based reflection on what supports you at work.

Start with what helps you work comfortably and effectively. You can use keywords, examples or short sentences. You do not need to disclose a diagnosis to complete this page.

My strengths: skills, knowledge and approaches I bring

What works well: environments, routines and communication

My access needs: what helps me participate and work effectively

Early signs: how I notice that demands are becoming too much

One priority

Which support need would make the biggest positive difference right now?

Adjustments and available support

Practical options can be tailored to the person, task and workplace.

A reasonable adjustment is a change that reduces a disadvantage related to disability. What is appropriate depends on individual circumstances; the examples below are starting points for discussion.

Communication Written instructions, agendas, summaries or additional processing time.	**Environment** Lighting changes, noise reduction, accessible layouts or quiet space.
Organisation Clear priorities, predictable updates, flexible scheduling or adjusted breaks.	**Equipment** Accessible furniture, specialist software or assistive technology.
Human support Communication assistance, task-related support or additional guidance.	**Review** Trial an adjustment, collect feedback and adapt when needs change.

UK rights and support

Reasonable adjustments

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers have duties to make reasonable adjustments for disabled workers where the legal requirements apply.

Access to Work

This UK government scheme may help with additional disability-related support at work. Eligibility and funding depend on circumstances. It does not replace an employer’s legal responsibilities.

My top three options

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Communicating your needs

Prepare for a clear, constructive conversation about workplace access.

You can speak with a manager, HR, occupational health or another relevant support person. Share the information you feel comfortable sharing and focus on the barrier and the change that could help.

Describe the situation Use a specific example of when a barrier arises.	**Explain the impact** Say how it affects access, work or wellbeing.
Suggest a change Offer an adjustment or ask to explore options together.	**Agree a review** Decide how and when to check whether it helps.

My conversation planner

The situation I want to discuss

How it affects my work or wellbeing

The support or adjustment I would like to try

Questions I want to ask

A possible opening

“I would like to discuss a barrier I am experiencing at work and explore an adjustment that could help me do my job effectively.”

My workplace accessibility plan

Bring your reflections together into manageable next steps.

This plan belongs to you. You can revise it whenever your work, circumstances or support needs change.

My strengths and what already works well

The main barrier I want to address

An adjustment or support option I would like to explore

Who I might speak with, and what I want to ask

My next small step

When and how I will review what is working

Gentle reminder

Support needs are individual and can change. A useful adjustment is one that works in practice, not one that looks right on paper.