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# Practical tips for people managers

A guide to working effectively with disabled employees



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**“The best expert  
on what is required  
is the disabled  
person. Talk to them  
and don’t make  
assumptions about  
what they need.”**

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# Introduction

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Creating a positive workplace is about good management. There isn't any magic to it. It's about the things you'd expect from managers who have common sense, a degree of empathy, and who recognise that individuals want to be part of something – all those straightforward things.

You don't create a positive workplace culture by saying so – you have to nurture it by treating people well, promoting their health and wellbeing and also by being there to support people when things aren't going so well. Helping people to deal with the pressure in their lives is one of the best investments an employer can make.

The crucial thing to remember is that everyone's experience of a disability and health condition is different – two people with the same condition may have entirely different symptoms, impacts on their work capacity and coping mechanisms.

**Therefore ask the person and don't make assumptions.**

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# What can you do to help?

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- Provide a good induction
- Have good people management
- Put supports in place
- Have an effective handover

## **A good induction**

An effective induction for all employees should include:

- one-to-one meeting(s) between the new employee and their line manager
- orientation (physical) – describing where the facilities are
- orientation (organisational) – showing how the employee fits into the team and how their role fits with the organisation’s strategy and goals
- an awareness of other functions within the organisation and how the employee fits within that
- meeting with senior employees (either face-to-face or through the use of technology).
- health and safety information – this is a legal requirement
- explanation of terms and conditions
- details of the organisation’s history, its services, its culture and values
- a clear outline of the job/role requirements and expectations
- details of any health and well-being initiatives provided by the employer
- information about ways of working, for example flexitime, flexi workplaces; work place adjustments (reasonable accommodations).

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## Good people management

Good people management is crucial in supporting wellbeing, spotting early signs of problems relating to a disability or health condition and initiating early action.

### Someone you know has a disability or health condition. Are you ready to start your conversation?

It's time to talk, it's time to think about your practice and what you might do differently.

You don't have to be an expert to talk about disability or a health condition.

- **Talk, but listen more** – simply being there will mean a lot.
- **Keep in touch** – meet up, phone, email or text
- **Don't just talk about the person's disability or condition** – chat about everyday things as well.
- **Remind them you care** – small things can make a big difference.
- **Be patient** – ups and downs can happen

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## **Supports in place**

Have you had a conversation with the person about what support and workplace adjustments they may need to do the job.

The most common reasonable accommodation is flexible working hours. Support funds, accessed by the individual through Workbridge, can be used for workplace adjustments and may include specialised equipment. It may also include Disability Responsiveness training for colleagues working with a disabled employee or employee with a health condition, eg support from the Foundation of the Blind or NZ Sign Language interpreters.

Workplace supports should be reviewed on a regular basis. Those reviews can be planned or initiated by you or your employee.

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## Effective handover during periods of change

Change affects people differently. Have a conversation with the person at the time of change about what they will need to feel confident to manage the change. This may require extra support.

If you are no longer going to be the person's manager it is important to work with the person to determine what they would like to share and with whom. Remember this is personal information. Make sure that anything you agree to do to make the transition smooth is completed.

### In summary

- Ask the person
- Don't make assumptions
- Start talking

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