

## Accommodating Employees Who Use Wheelchairs

Each individual has different needs and preferences. People who use wheelchairs may experience some of the limitations discussed below, but will experience them differently with varying degree of limitations. Wheelchairs differ in size and maneuverability. Be aware that not all people who use wheelchairs will need accommodations to perform their jobs and many others may only need a few accommodations. While the individual may explain any necessary accommodations, it is also up to the employer to ensure the workplace suits the individual's needs.

### Questions to Consider:

1. What limitations is the employee who uses a wheelchair 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 who uses a wheelchair been consulted regarding possible accommodations?
6. Once accommodations are in place, would it be useful to meet with the employee who uses a wheelchair to evaluate the effectiveness of the accommodations and to determine whether additional accommodations are needed?
7. Do supervisory personnel and employees need training regarding employees who use wheelchairs?

### Accommodation Ideas:

#### Activities of Daily Living:

People who use wheelchairs may need assistance with personal care while at work. Although an employer is not responsible for providing the personal care, an employer may be responsible for certain accommodations to enable an employee who uses a wheelchair to meet his/her personal care needs. The following are examples of some of these personal care needs and possible accommodations:

- Allow the person to have a personal attendant at work to assist with toileting, grooming, and eating

- Allow the person to take periodic rest breaks for repositioning, toileting, or grooming needs
- Provide flexible scheduling and allow use of sick leave for medical care
- Allow the person to bring a service animal into the workplace

#### Workstation Access:

People who use wheelchairs may encounter a variety of obstacles at their workstations depending on their limitations. The following are examples of these obstacles and possible accommodations:

- Height adjustable desk or table for a person who cannot work comfortably at an existing desk
- Accessible filing system for a person who cannot reach upper and lower file drawers in a vertical file cabinet
- Office supplies and frequently used materials on most accessible shelves or drawers for a person who cannot reach upper and lower shelves and drawers
- Page turners and book holders for a person who cannot manipulate paper
- Writing aids for a person who cannot grip a writing tool
- Accessible office machines, such as copiers and faxes, so a person using a wheelchair can access them from a seated position
- Voice activated speaker phone, large button phone, automatic dialing system, voice mail system, and/or headset, depending on the person's limitations and preferences
- Alternative access for computers such as speech recognition, Morse code entry, trackballs, key guards, alternative keyboards, and/or mouth sticks, depending on the person's limitations and preferences

#### Work-site Access:

People who use wheelchairs may encounter obstacles before reaching their workstations. The following are examples of these obstacles and possible accommodations:

- Flexible scheduling so a person who cannot drive can access public transportation
- Accessible parking for a person who does drive
- Accessible route of travel from the parking lot into the building
- Accessible restrooms, lunchroom, break room, etc.
- Accessible route of travel to the person's workstation
- Work from home if the person cannot get to the work-site

## Travel for Work:

People who use wheelchairs may encounter obstacles before reaching their work-site. The following are examples of possible accommodations:

- Accessible transportation
- Accessible lodging
- Accessible meeting/training site
- Medical supplies/wheelchair repair at travel destination
- Personal attendant care at travel destination

## Wheelchair Etiquette:

- When addressing a person who uses a wheelchair, do not lean on the wheelchair unless you have permission to do so. A wheelchair is part of an individual's personal space.
- Do not assume a person using a wheelchair needs assistance. Always ask before providing assistance. If your offer of assistance is accepted, ask for instructions and follow the instructions given.
- When talking to a person who uses a wheelchair, look at and speak directly to that person, rather than through a companion.
- Relax and speak naturally. Do not be embarrassed if you happen to use accepted common expressions such as "got to be running along" that seem to relate to the person's disability.
- When talking with a person in a wheelchair for more than a few minutes, use a chair, whenever possible. This can facilitate conversation.
- When giving directions to a person in a wheelchair, consider distance, weather conditions, and physical obstacles such as stairs, curbs, and steep hills.
- Use proper terminology when referring to a person who uses a wheelchair. Terms such as "wheelchair bound" or "confined to a wheelchair" are inappropriate. Using a wheelchair does not mean confinement.
- Do not assume that all people who use wheelchairs have the same limitations. People use wheelchairs for a variety of reasons and have different limitations and abilities.
- If a person who uses a wheelchair has a service animal, do not pet or try to play with it. A service animal is working and should not be interrupted.
- When greeting a person who uses a wheelchair, it is appropriate to offer to shake hands with that person even if he/she has upper extremity limitations.