



SOCIAL NARRATIVE FOR

# **Navigating Ableism in the Work Place**

**ausm**<sup>®</sup>  
autism society of minnesota

# Difficulty at Work

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With any type of job, there will come a time where things become stressful and/or challenging. That is ok. If there is a time where I'm experiencing more stress at work than I can handle, I can make a plan with my supervisors, boss and/or Human Resources (HR) on how to navigate a challenging work experience.

Human Resources (HR) can help me. They are people in the workforce at my organization/business that is there to help support all employees through work related situations and accommodations. All HR personnel are trained and equipped to help me navigate the work place.

It is not ok if my job is consistently difficult due to my colleagues' and/or supervisors' lack of understanding and unwillingness to make accommodations for my disability. If I'm experiencing this at work, then I am experiencing ableism.

Ableism is beliefs, actions, and systems that favor non-disabled people over disabled people. It doesn't have to be intentional: in fact most of the time ableist behaviors are well-intentioned, or subconscious. Sometimes it's difficult to know if a challenge is because of ableism or something else. I can use this guide to help me figure it out.

# How do I know I'm Experiencing Ableism?

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01

My job has unrealistic expectations that exclude me due to my autism.

02

My colleagues do not take my needs seriously, act like I'm overreacting, or say misinformed things about autism or invisible disabilities.

03

My job is unwilling to accommodate my needs because my disability is 'invisible'.

04

My job makes it difficult to impossible for me to complete my work.

05

I feel ashamed, embarrassed, confused, or unwelcome at my job because of my autism.

# What can I do about Ableism in the Workplace?

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**01**

I can speak to my manager and/or HR.

**02**

I can ask for accommodations at work to make it easier for me.

**03**

I can suggest DEI (diversity, equity and inclusion) training. AuSM also provides customized trainings for employers on autism and ableism.

**04**

I can speak up and call out ableist comments and behaviors at work.

**05**

I can take legal action if my employer is continuously acting in ableist ways and/or unwilling to accommodate my needs.



# Disclosure

If I want formal accommodations in my workplace, I will need to disclose my disability. I do not have to disclose my disability if I do not want to. I can decide what I disclose about my autism and/or other disabilities. By telling my employer about my disability it will help them to provide the accommodations that I need. What I disclose with my employer is confidential and protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Employers are only required to provide accommodations in the workplace if the individual is experiencing problems that are related to their disability that they have disclosed.

Things that I may disclose to my employer:

- General information about my disability
- Why I'm disclosing my disability
- How my disability may or currently affects my ability to perform key job tasks
- Types of accommodations that have worked for me in the past
- Types of accommodations I anticipate needing in the workplace



# Navigating Ableism

## Email Script for HR

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If I'm navigating **microaggressions**\*, ableism, and/or other challenging situations at the workplace, I can email my employer and/or HR to discuss them. If I feel comfortable talking directly with my supervisor/direct manager/boss, they can help me address these situations in the workplace and be a helpful ally. This is an example of an email I could send to start the process.

"Greetings [Employers/HR Name],

I would like to find a time to discuss a situation at work with you. My goal is to process this situation, discuss how to successfully navigate future situations and talk about possible accommodations. My preference is to meet [fill in your preference], when would be a good time to talk?

Sincerely,  
[My Name]"

It is important to keep a record of what I have communicated, to whom, and when. After a conversation with HR or my employer, I can send an email following up with the points that we discussed together. This will help me keep a record and ensure that everyone is on the same page about the situation we discussed and accommodations discussed.



\* A microaggression is "indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group." -Oxford Dictionary

# Scripts for Opening Conversations with HR & Employers

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"I've noticed some people in the office seem unfamiliar with ableism and have said negative and hurtful things. I was wondering if you could help me set the tone for anti-ableism? I have some resources you could read that might give you ideas on how to move forward."

"I think my work is being impacted by the way some of my coworkers are acting. When I ask for help, they tell me it's easy. Sometimes I need things repeated more than other people might, but once I learn something I'll know it deeply. Can you help me get more support?"

"I know our office is committed to diversity and inclusion, but I'm worried we're overlooking one element that's really important: disability. I have some resources I could send you if you're interested in how we can start incorporating disability into our inclusion conversations."

# Requesting Accommodations

## Email Scripts for HR

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If I'm needing accommodations in the workplace, I can request them from my HR department and supervisor.

"Greetings [Employers/HR Name],

I have been having difficulties with [List Difficulties]. I am requesting a reasonable accommodation so that I am better able to perform my job effectively before my performance begins to suffer. Accommodations that would benefit me are [wearing noise canceling headphones while I work/working during hours that the office is quieter/giving me written instructions to help me remember the steps in tasks/providing support to help me prioritize tasks/etc].

I'm curious what possible ideas that you may have. When would be a good time to meet and discuss this further.

Sincerely,  
[My Name]"

Other examples of accommodation requests can be found at:  
<https://askjan.org/articles/Sample-Language-for-Accommodation-Request-Letters.cfm>





# Script Examples for Requesting Accommodations

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For HR:

"I'm finding myself struggling with some of the expectations due to a disability. Could you tell me more about our policy for accommodations?"

For a manager:

"I find it really challenging to work in the office when it's very busy. Would it be possible for me to adjust my working hours to a quieter time?"



# Reasonable Accommodations I Can Request

Here are some examples of reasonable accommodations that I could request:

- Making existing facilities accessible
- Job restructuring
- Part-time or modified work schedules
- Acquiring or modifying equipment
- Changing tests, training materials, or policies
- Providing qualified readers or interpreters
- Reassignment to a vacant position
- Medical leave
- Work at home

For more information on accommodation requests visit:

<https://askjan.org/publications/individuals/employee-guide.cfm>

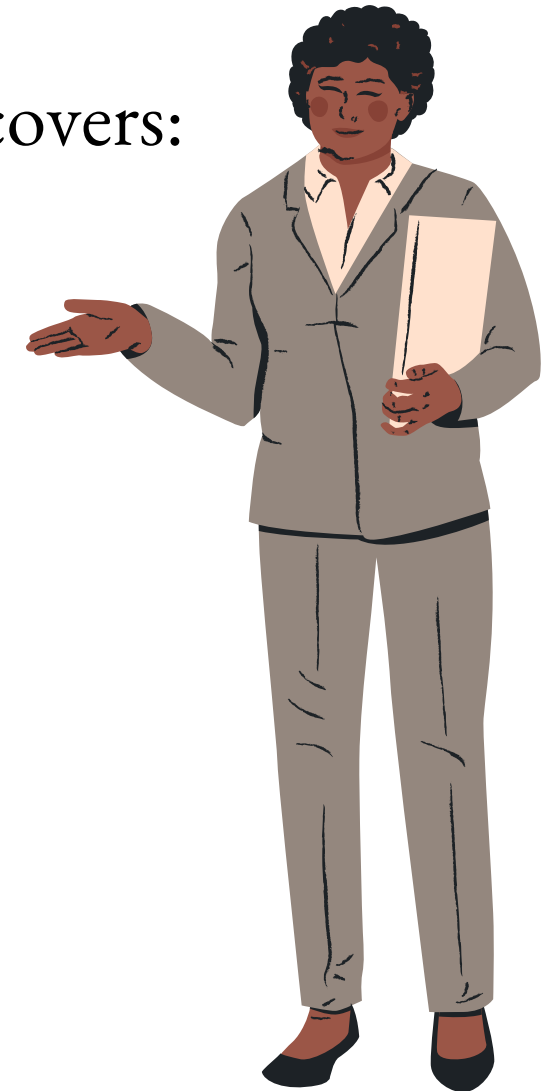
<https://www.dol.gov/general/topic/disability/jobaccommodations>



# DEI Training

I can suggest Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) training for my employer. DEI training covers:

- Define diversity, equity and inclusion
- Unconscious and implicit bias
- Stereotyping
- Reducing prejudice
- Cultural awareness and belonging
- Addressing microaggressions
- Anti-harrassment



"Our company does a good job of discussing inclusivity. However, I think we are missing a vital discussion on invisible disabilities in the work place. It would be beneficial to have a DEI training that discusses diversity, equity and inclusion surrounding invisible disabilities. Is this something our company can request in the near future?"

# Helpful Scripts



If I hear or notice people saying ableist things or acting in ableist ways, I can point it out for what it is. If I don't feel comfortable speaking up in the moment, that is ok. I can find someone later and discuss it with them. Here are some scripts below that I can use:

"Actually, most people in the autism community prefer 'autistic person' instead of 'person with autism.' If you're interested in why, I have some good articles I could share with you."

"A lot of people have health conditions you can't see. It can be really hurtful to assume someone is faking being sick."

"There's nothing wrong with being disabled. We can talk about it."

"I don't see why it's inspiring for someone who's disabled to do things that are normal for anyone else. It's kind of infantilizing."

"Have we thought about accessibility at this event?"



# I can do hard things

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There can be a lot anxiety around talking about disclosure and having hard conversations with supervisors. That is ok. Having these hard conversations is difficult, but they are also worth having. I deserve to work in a place where I don't feel bad for being autistic or having a disability.

I can talk with my support system in coming up with solutions and how to begin these difficult conversations. I can choose whether to disclose my disability to my employer. I can ask for accommodations from my employer to make my work experience more successful and manageable. My employer may understand the accommodations that I need better if I disclose my disability.

I can do hard things. It will be ok. I will be kind and gentle with myself. Even if I don't get the response I want, I can speak up and ask for what I need.