

# TIP SHEET

April 2020

## Accommodating Employees in a Time of Crisis - COVID-19

### Tips for Employers Suddenly Managing Remote Workers

#### Employer Challenge

In this time of lightning-speed change in the ways we work, sudden interruption to our normal routines, and uncertainty combined with the stress of impending risk to our wellbeing and that of our loved ones, most employers find themselves in an unfamiliar position, in terms of how to provide the accommodations necessary to ensure that all of their employees are able to engage and contribute to their organizations to the best of their ability.

#### Employer Tips

Here are some tips related to accommodation that will help you manage your employee's needs during this period of adjustment.

1. Connect personally with each employee on your team. Ask them how they are doing, what challenges they may be experiencing, what recommendations they might make if they could fulfil a wish list to make working in these new circumstances as easy as possible
2. Mitigate the potential for a sense of isolation. Create a space for your employees to brainstorm how best to ensure they continue to feel connected and engaged with their colleagues – not only professionally, but informally as well. Note that some individuals will appreciate opportunities to connect more than others, so flexibility and the ability to opt-in or out of some activities is important.
3. Review existing accommodation plans and determine with the impacted employee(s) how their needs can be met while working remotely.
4. Ensure your colleagues have the proper equipment they need to effectively perform their duties (do your best to ensure your employees are not incurring costs on your behalf in terms of having necessary hardware, software, and connectivity).
5. Ask your employees if they are properly set-up to be able to effectively perform (space, furniture, etc.). If not, crowd-source from your team ideas for how to mitigate those challenges.
6. Offer flexible hours and communicate those options clearly. People will have varying needs related to care giving and managing relationships with loved ones remotely, for some this may be across time zones.
7. Offer and communicate how to access mental health supports – the current uncertainty and sense of risk may exacerbate or lead to new mental health issues for some employees.
8. Be mindful of intersecting challenges/barriers that your employees may be dealing with at this time. Engaging them is key to effectively supporting them deal with these challenges.

9. To the degree that is practical, even more than usual, work to adjust your management style for each of your direct reports. Be aware that some people thrive under pressure, others will be feeling the ill-effects of a lack of or change in routine.
10. Review your workplace benefit and Employment Assistance Plan (EAP) resources. Remind your employees about what is available for them to leverage, and be familiar with the resources you can access as a people manager.
11. Use plain language when communicating with your teams – we are all being bombarded with information; it is important to be clear and precise with your teams.
12. Don't forget yourself! Managers must ensure they are addressing their own needs as well as that of their director reports and their leaders – ensure that you, too, are being appropriately accommodated to manage effectively!

## The following are additional resources related to COVID-19 and Accommodation.

- The Ontario Human Rights Commission has issued a policy statement and questions and answers on the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - Policy Statement: [www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news\\_centre/ohrc-policy-statement-covid-19-pandemic](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-policy-statement-covid-19-pandemic)
  - COVID-19 and Ontario's Human Rights Code – Questions and Answers: [www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news\\_centre/covid-19-and-ontario-human-rights-code--questions-and-answers-0](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/covid-19-and-ontario-human-rights-code--questions-and-answers-0)
  - The Ontario Human Rights Commission also has guidance and templates related to accommodation in the workplace in general, along with an e-learning guide: [www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/duty-accommodate](http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/duty-accommodate)
- Vey Willets LLP (labour lawyers) provide guidance to employees and employers that includes information about accommodation and obligations related to COVID-19: [www.vwlawyers.ca/blog/covid-19-and-the-workplace-answers-to-common-ontario-employment-questions](http://www.vwlawyers.ca/blog/covid-19-and-the-workplace-answers-to-common-ontario-employment-questions)
- Padraig Consulting provide some basic tips on How to Reassure Your Team in Uncertain Times: [www.padraig.ca/6357/reassure-your-team/](http://www.padraig.ca/6357/reassure-your-team/)
- The Conference Board of Canada has a number of free resources to help employers and employees during COVID – 19. Find webinars, blogs and short videos: [www.conferenceboard.ca/insights/covid-19](http://www.conferenceboard.ca/insights/covid-19)

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