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Introduction

The Microsoft Global Workplace Services Supported Employment Program Empowering Managers Toolkit is a free and open-source document. It is freely available to organizations looking to start or support a similar program. We encourage you to use this toolkit to support managers of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Contact us at supportedemployment@microsoft.com. We're eager to share what we've learned with other corporations motivated to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce. This document will continue to be updated and refreshed over time.

Stay tuned at this link for updates to the [Empowering Managers Toolkit](#).

For more information, visit aka.ms/supportedemployment.

Prepare



Effective communication between a job coach, manager, and Supported Employee is crucial for aligning goals, expectations, and support strategies, ensuring the employee receives the necessary guidance and resources to succeed.

Purpose

This tool can be used to help establish strong communication between a Supported Employee's manager and job coach. It is not a requirement and can be customized to fit your team's needs.

This tool can help you identify:

- Key contacts.
- Frequency and schedule of check-ins and support from the job coach.
- Preferred communication methods.
- & more.

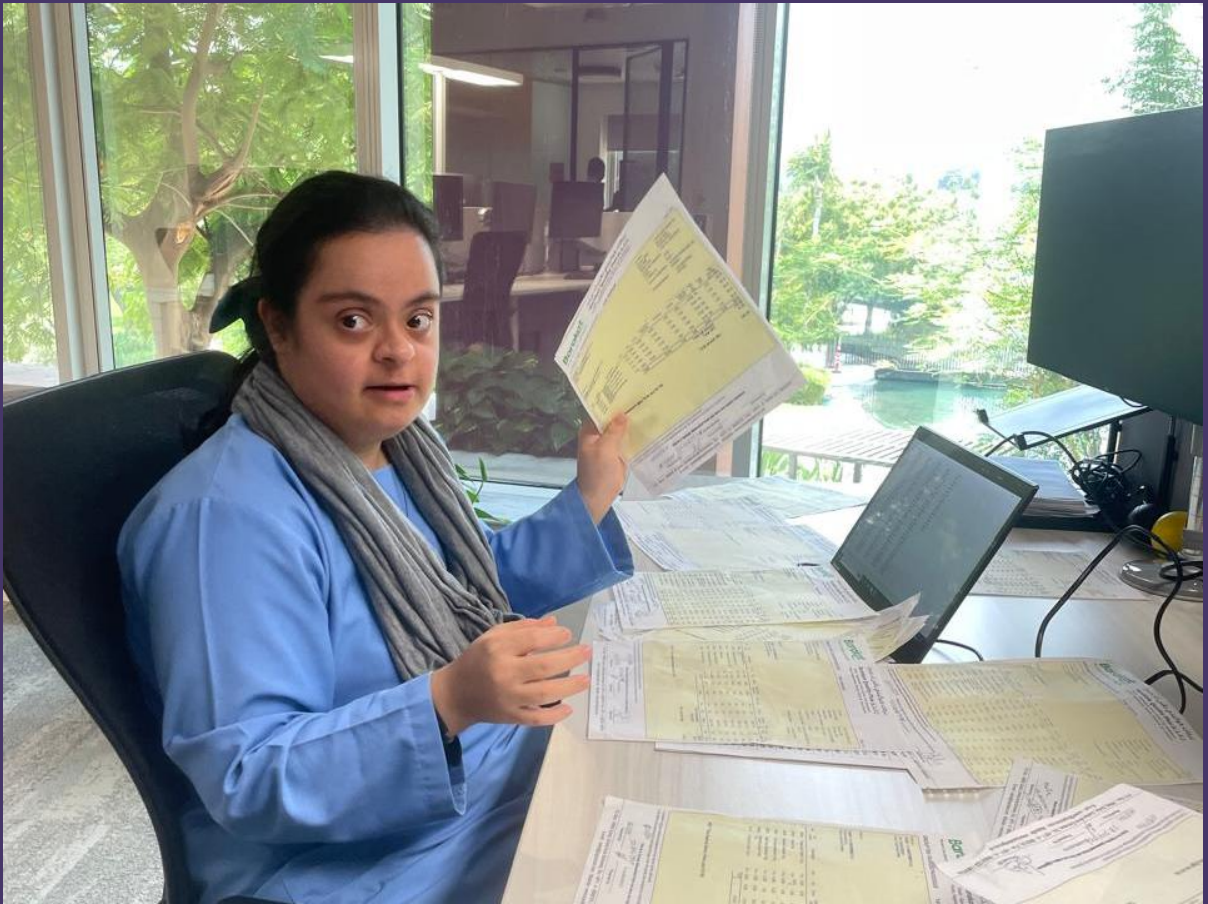
Opportunities to use this tool:

- When a Supported Employee is hired.
- When there is a change in management or job coach.
- If you have a Supported Employee on your team and do not have a communication plan.

Tips for using this tool

- Review and update the communication plan during annual reviews or as needed.
- Consider adding emergency contacts to the plan based on your organization's HR procedures.
- When there is a transition in managers, ensure this tool is passed along to the new manager.

Onboard



Onboarding is important for all employees because it helps them integrate into the company culture, understand their roles, and become productive more quickly, ultimately enhancing employee retention and engagement.

Support your team

- Include the job coach in the entire onboarding process
- Consider providing diversity and inclusion training to your team (examples: unconscious bias or disability etiquette)

Preparation for day one

Provide a list of what to expect during the first week and tell them what to bring.

- Be specific about clothing expectations
- Arrival procedures
 - Where do they go?
 - Do they need badge access?
 - Who will they meet?
- Employment documents*
- Share a visual schedule of onboarding tasks and training

*If an employee has a legally appointed representative, the employer may need to involve the representative in signing documents.

During the first week

- Discuss breaks - when and where they will be taken
- Explain expectations for socializing at work
- Identify support system of coworkers to ask questions
- Discuss Emergency preparedness
 - Identify who the leads are and who to report to in case of an emergency
 - Show where the first aid kit and emergency exits are
- Share Facility maps
 - The job coach can help create a tool for the employee to carry that will help them find their way
- Share benefit information, such as
 - Medical
 - Paid time off
 - Retirement
 - Life insurance
 - Food & transportation
- Discuss general communication and procedures, such as
 - Contact information and management structure
 - How to request time off, call out sick or notify of a late arrival
 - Setting up a signature block
 - IT information – think through password storage

Support



Natural support in the work environment is beneficial to all employees.

What are natural supports? Natural supports are methods of inclusion and assistance that exist within any workplace which all employees can utilize. These supports help individuals perform their roles effectively and feel socially included, which is crucial for high performance and job retention. Natural supports can include people, procedures, customs, tools, and benefits that are typically available in the workplace. If a job coach is present, they can help develop natural supports for a Supported Employee.

How can natural supports be used? While not all Supported Employees will need these strategies, natural supports can be integrated into the workplace in various ways to assist employees with disabilities. Here are some key strategies:

- **Inclusive training and onboarding:** Ensure that employees with disabilities participate in the same training and onboarding processes as other employees, with additional support as needed.
- **Social inclusion:** Encourage coworkers to include employees with disabilities in social activities, such as coffee hours or team lunches.
- **Routine check-ins:** Supervisors can regularly review tasks and progress with employees to provide guidance and support.
- **Reminders and assistance:** Coworkers can answer questions about work processes and tasks.

Examples of natural supports

- **Training and onboarding:** An employee with a disability takes part in the standard onboarding process, with extra help to complete forms and review the handbook.
- **Social activities:** Coworkers invite the employee to a weekly coffee hour, fostering social connections.
- **Task management:** A supervisor reviews the employee's to-do list daily to ensure tasks are on track.
- **Time management:** An office mate reminds the employee when there are changes in the workday such as, switching tasks, taking a break, or clocking out.

Benefits of natural supports

- **Enhanced social inclusion:** Being part of social rituals helps employees with disabilities feel like full members of the workplace.
- **Improved job performance:** Social inclusion and support can lead to better job performance and higher job satisfaction.

For more information visit:

aka.ms/supportedemployment

[The importance of natural supports](#)

Supported Employment Program
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Annual reviews are important because they provide a structured opportunity for employees to receive feedback, set goals, discuss career development, and align their objectives with the organizations needs. It is standard best practice to include all employees, including Supported Employees, in an annual review process. For a productive and effective annual review process, use the following tips.

- **Include the job coach.** The job coach can assist the employee understand feedback. The job coach can assist the employee to ask questions about tasks and expectations, and to express career development goals.
- **Plan.** Schedule the meeting in advance to give the Supported Employee and the coach time to fit this meeting into their schedule, and for them to have time to prepare.
- **Reasonable accommodations.** Note if any accommodations are in place that apply to the review process and follow those accommodations.
- **Share written information in advance.** Provide written information in advance to the employee and to the job coach.
- **Set clear expectations.** Be clear about the purpose of the meeting and give an outline of what you plan to accomplish. Give clear instructions about how an employee can complete their part of the review process.
- **Schedule extra time.** If needed, schedule more time to allow for an unhurried and clear conversation to happen.

For more information visit:

[Microsoft Supported Employment Program Knowledge Center - Support](#)

Tips for annual reviews, continued

- **No surprises.** Raise concerns or needs for improvement at regular connect meetings during the year. Don't raise new issues or concerns during the Annual Review process.
- **Be open to dialog.** Reinforce that it's ok to ask questions, sometimes more than once.
- **Coach and assist.** Be prepared to assist the employee in completing their part of the annual review.
- **Simplify.** Break complex ideas into smaller steps. Be as concrete as possible. Utilize graphics where possible.
- **Use concrete language.** Use clear, plain language. Avoid idioms, abbreviations, or jargon.
- **Use assistive tools.** Tools such as recording the meeting, and utilizing AI to summarize, can help to capture the employee's opinions and responses.
- **Ask for feedback.** Ask the Supported Employee what could be improved, what could be done to make their role clearer, more challenging, more interesting, etc.
- **Set career goals.** Remember to include career planning in the annual review process. The manager can assist the employee to identify goals, trainings, and stretch assignments to advance their career.

For more information visit:

[Microsoft Supported Employment Program Knowledge Center - Support](#)

Career growth is important because it allows individuals to continuously enhance their skills, knowledge, and abilities. This can result in greater job satisfaction, increased motivation, productivity, and retention. Ultimately, encouraging career growth leads to better business outcomes.

Indicators of growth can include:

- Added tasks and responsibilities
- Added hours
- A lateral move to a new role
- A promotion
- A pay increase

Encourage career growth

- Use the learning and development platform at your organization.
- Seek accessible information and trainings.
- Celebrate all growth. Every success is a success and can lead to more successes.

Support your team

- Include the job coach in the conversations about career growth.
- Utilize Career Growth platforms, tools and processes available at the employer organization, and online.
- Discuss career growth and goals in regular manager/employee meetings.
- Support the employee to dedicate time for working on career growth goals.

Career Growth tips, continued

Additional tips

- Set clear expectations to eliminate surprises.
- Reinforce that it's ok to ask questions.
- Provide clear information. Use pictures and lists.
- Share information with the Supported Employee, job coach, and circle of support.

For more information visit:

[Microsoft Supported Employment Program Knowledge Center - Support](#)

Sometimes, a Supported Employee requires more coaching support than is typically provided.

When to seek more hours of coaching support

Times of transition can be challenging. When there is a transition, it can be beneficial to ask for more hours of job coaching services. Transitions that can be disruptive include:

- Changing teams
- Changing managers
- Departing team members who provide friendship and support
- Being assigned new tasks
- Moving to a new job or a new location

What to expect when requesting more hours of support

- **Lead time.** Give everyone involved as much lead time as possible. The more time you give, the better the employee, the job coach, and the team can prepare for the changes.
- **Human Resources.** Ask your HR team to assist you to support the Supported Employee.
- **Involve the employee.** Speak with the Supported Employee about the transition and identify the specific changes where the employee may benefit from more hours of job coaching services.
- **Meet with the Coach and Employee.** Set up a meeting with the employee and the job coach or another contact person at the coaching agency. If you don't know the job coach, contact the Program Manager. When you meet, explore the transitions and what additional support is needed.

What to expect when requesting more hours, continued

- **Government funding sources.** The coach will understand which government offices fund the job coaching services, and the process to request more hours. Usually, the agency will have to explain to the funder why extra hours are needed. The request and approval process may be lengthy. Because of funding shortages, it will not always be possible to increase the number of hours of coaching.
- **Prompt response.** The coach may ask the employer to sign forms to request extra hours of support. To keep the process moving quickly, respond to the coach swiftly when asked to sign forms.
- **Build tools for success.**
 - Explore supports beyond coaching hours; e.g. clear instructions, time to adjust, trainings, 1:1 demonstrations, clear information for the manager and team. These tools can help employees succeed during transitions.
 - As a long-term strategy, develop skills and tools within the team to support to the employee. Collaborate with the job coach to identify and build these skills.

For more information visit:

aka.ms/supportedemployment

Learning conflict resolution skills is important because difficult conversations are bound to arise in the workplace, and these skills help maintain a productive environment by effectively managing disagreements and fostering better communication and collaboration among team members. We recognize that this topic is complicated and encourage you to follow your organization's HR procedures for conflict resolution.

Listen actively and impartially

- Ensure you understand all perspectives by listening without interrupting.
- Communicate the problem clearly.

Acknowledge emotions and perspectives

- Recognize and respect the feelings and viewpoints of everyone involved.
- Avoid dismissing or minimizing anyone's concerns.

Facilitate a constructive conversation

- Encourage open and honest communication.
- Set ground rules to ensure a respectful and productive dialogue.
- Seek assistance from the employee's job coach.

Establish clear goals and expectations

- Define the desired outcome of the conflict resolution process.
- Ensure all parties understand and agree on the goals.

Encourage open communication

- Create an environment where team members feel safe to express their thoughts and feelings.
- Promote transparency and honesty in all interactions.

Tips for having difficult conversations, continued

Create a culture of respect and collaboration

- Foster a workplace culture that values diversity and inclusivity.
- Encourage teamwork and collaboration to prevent conflicts from arising.

Address problems early and often

- Deal with conflicts as soon as they arise to prevent escalation.
- Continue to communicate about the problem as long as it persists so it stays top of mind.

Seek mediation if necessary

- If conflicts cannot be resolved internally, consider bringing in a neutral third party.
- Mediation can help facilitate a fair and unbiased resolution.

Follow-up and evaluate

- After resolving a conflict, follow-up with all parties to ensure the solution is working.
- Evaluate the process and make improvements for future conflict resolution.

For more information visit:

[Conflict Resolution Resources List](#)

LinkedIn Learning offers several trainings related to difficult conversations or conflict resolution. Examples include:

[Conflict Resolution for Beginners](#) Duration: 1 hour 34 minutes

Avoiding conflict in the workplace can lead to bigger problems. In this course, conflict resolution strategist Lynn Maureen Hurdle explains the importance of facing disputes head-on, understanding negative associations with conflict, and provides strategies for better listening, communication, and resolutions. You'll be prepared to prevent conflicts from disrupting your projects and team dynamics.

[Conflict is a Normal Part of Remote Work](#) Duration: 52 minutes

Navigating workplace conflicts is challenging, especially in virtual settings. In this course, workplace expert Amy Gallo teaches how to handle remote conflicts, avoid unnecessary ones, and effectively address them when they arise. She also covers planning responses and following up to mend and strengthen relationships.

[Managing conflict](#) Duration: 1 hour 50 minutes

Leadership is crucial for influencing and developing others to achieve their highest potential. In this course, Dr. Shirley Davis covers the basics of self and team leadership, critical competencies, and best practices for effective leadership, including building trust, fostering inclusivity, and leading change with agility and resilience.

Conflict resolution resources, continued

[Improving your conflict competence](#) Duration: 46 minutes

Workplace conflict is inevitable. But it doesn't have to end badly. In this course, author and conflict expert Craig Runde helps you manage workplace conflict more effectively. He first explains the dynamics that create conflict, and helps you become aware of what your conflict response is. Once you are aware of how conflict arises, learn some practical steps you can take to manage your emotions and engage with others constructively.

[Conflict resolution tipsheet](#)

Source: PDF

Looking for a quick guide to learn how to resolve conflict? In this tipsheet, you will find practical advice for effectively managing and resolving conflicts in the workplace.

For more information visit:

aka.ms/supportedemployment

Learn more



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