

Next Steps

A series of resource guides for neurodivergent youth



On the Job

In this guide, we'll explore what you can expect when starting a new job, how to advocate for yourself and feel more confident.

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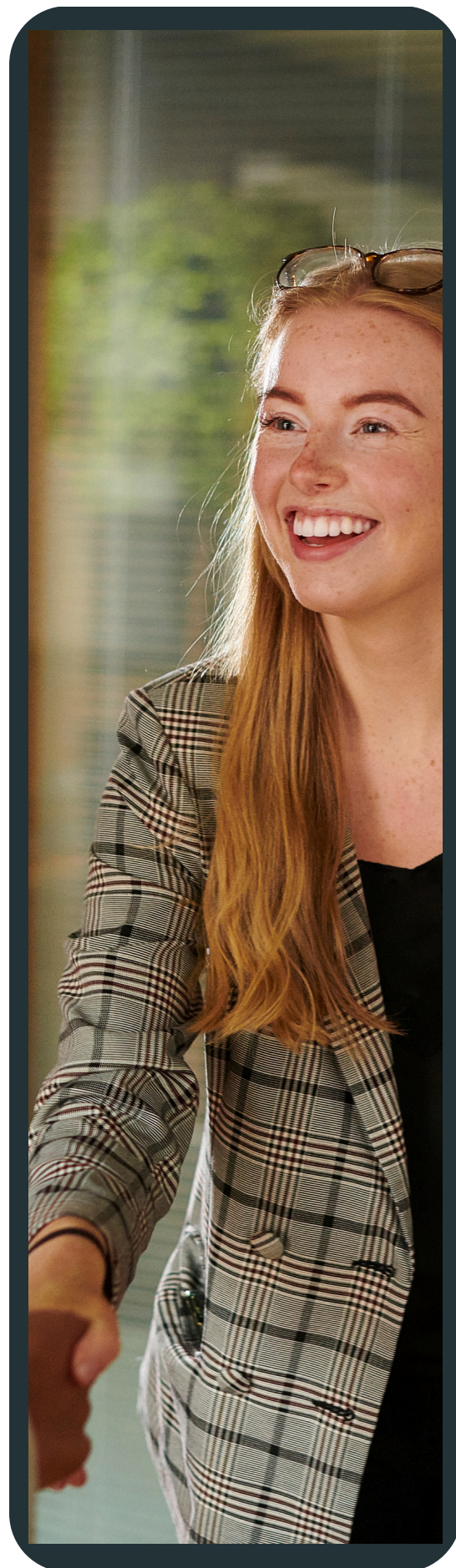
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Starting a new job can be exciting, but it can also come with questions and challenges. This guide will help you feel more confident as you prepare to begin your job. Before starting, it's essential to understand your rights, learn how to advocate for yourself and know what to expect in the workplace.

What is Self-Advocacy?

This refers to communicating your wants and needs to those around you. Self-advocacy also entails being aware of your rights and responsibilities. In Ontario, provincial laws require employers to make changes, known as accommodations, when a rule or setup poses a barrier to individuals with particular needs. This helps ensure that everyone has a fair chance to do their job, feels included, and succeeds at work. These laws can support you when advocating for yourself, especially if you're facing or anticipate barriers to performing your job. To learn more about this topic, please consult the following pages:



🖱️ [Ontarians with Disabilities Actontario.ca](https://ontarianswithdisabilities.ca)

🖱️ [Accessibility in Ontario | ontario.ca](https://accessibilityinontario.onario.ca)

Accommodations in the Workplace

Accommodations can vary depending on the person and the workplace.

- Organizational accommodations:

- Maintaining a consistent schedule and responsibilities
- Using organizers to structure the job, such as written outlines of tasks or step-by-step instructions
- Visual checklists or task trackers
- Reducing unstructured time
- Giving plenty of notice of upcoming work tasks
- Consistent meetings and/or moments that allow for extra feedback or clarification
- Receiving notice in advance of meetings and performance reviews



- Environmental accommodations (Helpful with sensory sensitivities):

- Avoid the use of fluorescent lights (perhaps an office or workspace with desk lamps or fluorescent light covers can be provided)
- Provide the option of using dimmer lighting
- Permit the use of noise-cancelling headphones or earbuds to manage auditory stimulation
- Create a work environment free from obtrusive sounds. For example, work in a location further away from staff rooms, or provide an alternative workspace in case of disruptions (construction, loud events, etc.)
- Allow for temperature adjustments



- When a work uniform is required, allow for alternative fabrics and fittings to avoid sensory discomfort
- Provide a scent-free workspace

- Physical accommodations

- Allow for the use of sunglasses, blue-light-blocking glasses, hats and other similar accessories
- Allow wearing music headphones on both ears, as the asymmetrical sensory input and sensation of an earphone with a single ear can be obtrusive
- Allow time and space to engage in regulating strategies, including [stimming](#), soothing by rocking, the use of fidgets, etc
- Allow alternative desk and seating accommodations
- Allow for smaller/more breaks spread out across the day

- Other work conditions-related accommodations

- Record work meetings or have someone take meeting notes
- Option to work from home
- Flexible hours and/or a flexible schedule, including longer or more frequent breaks
- Exemption from customer-facing situations
- Having a different space to eat

What accommodations might you need? It could be helpful to identify your strengths, challenges and what makes you more comfortable. To help guide you in your reflection, [here is a chart with possible considerations](#).

General Work Expectations and Tips for Success

1 Respecting a schedule

Employees follow some type of schedule. This can mean working a specific number of hours a day (ex., 4 hours), starting and finishing work at the same time every workday (ex., from 9 am to 1 pm), and being on time.

Whatever your schedule is, it's important to try to respect it. Every team member is necessary for the workplace to function well! When you're on time and prepared, it helps the whole team stay on track and makes the day run more smoothly for everyone — most importantly, you.

Helpful Tips to Arrive On Time

a) Know how long it takes to get to work

- Use Google Maps or a bus schedule to plan your travel time. Add 10-15 extra minutes to be on the safe side.



Here are examples of public transport travel planners: [Travel Planner](#) (OC Transpo, Ottawa), [HASTINFO Web](#) (STO, Gatineau), [Trip planner](#) (TTC, GTA & Hamilton).

b) Use a visual schedule or checklist

Have a step-by-step routine with pictures or words that shows what to do before leaving the house:

- Wake up
- Brush teeth
- Eat breakfast
- Get dressed
- Grab lunch and personal things
- Leave the house

c) Set alarms and timers

You can try setting:

- A wake-up alarm
- A "get ready" reminder
- A "leave in 5 minutes" and "leave the house" alert



d) Plan the night before

- Keep your schedule somewhere easy to see (on your phone, wall calendar or planner)
- Lay out your clothes
- Pack your lunch or snacks
- Double-check your shift time and location
- Charge your phone

If you're running late or can't make it to work due to illness or another reason, be sure to let your supervisor know as soon as possible, whether by phone call, email or text. It's a good idea to ask your supervisor in advance about the proper steps to follow in these situations, so you know exactly what to do.

2 Dress code

Your dress code at work depends on the job. Some places require uniforms, while others simply require clean and appropriate attire. As a general guideline, you should:

- Ask about the dress code before your first day, including whether safety attire is required (e.g., closed-toe and closed-heel shoes, steel-toe shoes etc.)
- Avoid clothing with strong scents, distracting/inappropriate content (ex., swear words or graphic images), ripped or dirty clothing
- Wear what helps you feel comfortable

3 Hygiene and self-care

Hygiene means taking care of your body, clothes and space to stay clean and healthy. In the workplace, good hygiene helps you and your coworkers feel good and shows respect for your job. It also helps control the spread of illnesses!

Examples of good hygiene include:

- Showering regularly. This can be showering the day before or the morning of your workday, and roughly every 1-2 days during the work week
- Brushing your teeth daily
- Wearing deodorant (including unscented options)
- Wearing clean clothes
- Washing your hands after using the restroom

Maintaining good hygiene can sometimes be challenging, but using tools like a visual schedule can make it easier to follow each step of a personal care routine.

Mental Health at Work

Managing one's mental health and self-regulation in a workplace setting is extremely important in order to have success at work. There are many things that can impact mental health at work, including sensory inputs, meetings, social expectations and learning to communicate with colleagues and supervisors.

The goal of these resources is for you to explore tools and resources to stay calm, ground yourself and advocate for what you need.

Remember some important keys to stay mentally healthy:

- Talk to someone: A friend, family member, trusted colleague or mental health provider
- Set up healthy daily routines that include exercise, breathing techniques and doing things that help you self-regulate (walking outside, exercise, hanging out with friends, art, music, cooking etc)



Resource Guides and Support

- [Toolkit for Professionals, Service Providers and Businesses](#)
- [Career Services Guide](#)
- [Workplace Mental Health Toolkit](#)

Additional Work Resources and Supports

Ontario Disability Support Program employment supports	Ontario	
Causeway	Ottawa	613-725-3494
CVE inc. Career & Vocational Evaluation	Ottawa and Toronto	613-237-7368
Distinct Programmes	Ottawa	613-260-9059
LiveWorkPlay	Ottawa	613-235-9550
Employment Services I March of Dimes Canada	Canada	1-833-612-6632

References

- [Workplace accommodations for autism & AuDHD | Embrace Autism](#)