

ACCOMMODATIONS & WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITIES

Supervisor/manager overview

Employees in your unit may have concerns about returning to work on-site due to a COVID-19 related issue. The safety and well-being of everyone in the UW–Madison community will continue to be a top priority. Supervisors play an important role in supporting employee well-being especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This information will help you to assist employees if they express concerns about returning to work on-site due to the following situations:

- **Age**
- **Underlying medical condition/disability**
- **Pregnancy or breastfeeding**
- **Caring for a child** – child’s school is closed for in-person instruction or child’s daycare provider is unavailable
- **Caring for a family member** – who is in a high-risk population, as defined by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)
- **Feeling unsafe in the workplace**

Disability accommodation: If an employee raises a concern related to their own medical condition or disability it could be a possible request for a reasonable accommodation.

Workplace flexibilities: If an employee raises a non-medical concern, they may qualify for a workplace modification.

What to do: practice empathy, determine what the concern is

- **Ask:** In a non-accusatory manner, ask the employee to explain their concern in as general terms as possible.
- **Listen:** Listen carefully to the employee’s answer.
- **Respond:** Depending on the answer the employee provides.

What not to discuss with employees:

- Supervisors/managers should avoid discussing medical information with employees.
- If an employee raises their own medical issues, supervisors/managers should let the employee know that they cannot discuss their medical information with them. Supervisors are to refer employees to their [Divisional Disability Representative \(DDR\)](#).
- Supervisors cannot ask or discuss information about an employee’s family member’s health.

If the concern is medical or disability related:

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- Provide the employee with contact information for their DDR.
- Inform the employee that they need to contact their DDR.
- Tell the employee that you, as a supervisor, will also notify the DDR.
- Contact the DDR. To find your DDR, visit employee disabilities.wisc.edu/divisional-disability-representatives-ddr/.

Reasonable Accommodations: Making Changes to Support Employees

A reasonable accommodation is any change or modification to a job, the work environment, or the way things are usually done. It enables a qualified individual with a disability to apply for a job, perform the duties of a job, and enjoy benefits and privileges of employment equal to those without disabilities. It does not cause significant difficulty or disruption in the workplace or pose a health or safety threat.

Accommodations are provided on an individualized, case-by-case basis and considered in collaboration with the requesting employee, the DDR, supervisor, and the Employee Disability Resource (EDR) Office as needed.

Employees are not required to disclose their medical need for an accommodation to their immediate supervisor or hiring manager. Medical information is kept separate from the personnel file.

If the concern is due to feeling unsafe in the workplace or for another reason:

- Tell the employee to contact your divisional HR contact.
- Your HR contact may consult with experts such as the Office of Human Resources-Workforce Relations (OHR-WR) to determine how to best help the employee.
- Your HR department will work with you, as a supervisor, to help find a solution for the employee.
- Collaborate with the employee and your HR contact to address the employee's concerns and provide solutions based on duties and the work environment.
- The employee may qualify for a workplace flexibility. These modifications or changes are made for non-medical reasons.

How DDRs help with medical and disability concerns:

- The DDR will work directly with the employee to identify if there are any practical changes that can be made to support the employee.
- The goal for DDRs is to consult with both you and the employee. They are to complete their analysis as soon as possible and without delay.
- Due to the complexity and expected increase in requests, please note that the process may take some time.
- The DDR will consult with the manager/supervisor on what to do if a potential modification or accommodation is approved for the employee.
- DDRs are authorized to request and receive confidential medical information on behalf of divisions. They have been designated by their deans or directors to manage accommodation requests.

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Accommodations and workplace flexibilities: all requests

Examples of modifications may include:

- **Telecommuting** – Allow employee to work remotely.
- **Health and safety measures** – Move workspaces, increase distance, create a barrier, adjust time of day when activities are performed, modify work schedules, use gloves or gowns.
- **Reassignment** – Reassign to different work duties.
- **Use leave** - Vacation leave, Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), emergency leave. For more information, visit hr.wisc.edu/covid19/emergency-leave.

For more information contact smartrestartHR@ohr.wisc.edu

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