

FACT SHEET: RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATIONS IN THE WORKPLACE



Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 requires employers to make reasonable accommodations for an applicant or employee whose sincerely held religious belief, practice, or observance conflicts with a work requirement, unless providing the accommodation would create an undue hardship for the employer. The law aims to prevent individuals from being forced to choose between their religious convictions and practices and their job.

WHAT IS A RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION?

A religious accommodation is an adjustment to a work requirement that will allow the employee to comply with their religious beliefs, which need not be confined to traditional concepts of religion. The employer's duty to accommodate will usually entail making a special exception from, or adjustment to, a particular work requirement so that an employee or applicant will be able to observe or practice their religion.

CAN EMPLOYERS DISCRIMINATE AGAINST SOMEONE WHO NEEDS A RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION?

No, employers cannot refuse to hire, terminate, or otherwise discriminate as to any term or condition of employment because someone may need a religious accommodation that could be provided without undue hardship. The EEOC has taken the position that employers also may not retaliate against any applicant or employee for seeking a religious accommodation.

WHAT KINDS OF ACCOMMODATIONS ARE AVAILABLE?

A wide variety of changes potentially can be reasonable religious accommodations. Common examples include:

- **Schedule changes:** Scheduling around religious observances and providing flexible work and break schedules to accommodate religious obligations such as daily prayers or Sabbath observance.
- **Religious expression in the workplace:** Permitting employees to pray or engage in other forms of religious expression at work. For example, permitting the use of workstations or employer facilities for individual or voluntary group prayer or meditation.
- **Dress and grooming:** Allowing exceptions to dress and grooming policies. For example, allowing employees to wear a cross necklace, hijab, turban, yarmulke or kippah, abaya, or ash mark, or to have facial hair, or to carry a kirpan.

WHAT IS AN UNDUE HARDSHIP?

An undue hardship arises when the burden of granting an accommodation would be substantial in the overall context of an employer's business. An undue hardship could include increased costs; reduced productivity; or infringements on other employees' job rights, such as accommodations that reasonably threaten to create a hostile work environment or create a substantial risk to workplace safety, health, or security. However, coworker objections based on hostility to religion or customer fears or prejudices are not an undue hardship. Whether an accommodation creates an undue hardship depends on the particular facts. For example, if wearing pants when working near a particular type of machine is necessary for safety reasons, an accommodation to allow an employee to wear a loose-fitting skirt for religious reasons while working near that machine may cause undue hardship. While an employer can refuse to provide a particular accommodation if it would pose an undue hardship, employers and employees should confer fully and promptly to explore other available accommodation options.

HOW CAN AN EMPLOYEE REQUEST A RELIGIOUS ACCOMMODATION?

An employee seeking a religious accommodation should make their employer aware of their need for an accommodation for a religious reason. The request need not be in writing, and so long as the employer knows the employee needs a religious accommodation, no "magic words" are required.

You can find more information on religious discrimination at www.eeoc.gov/religious-discrimination.



If you suspect discrimination, contact the EEOC promptly because there are [strict time limits](#) for filing a charge.

