

What is Disability Disclosure?

Disability disclosure is sharing (telling of) personal information about your disability and informing someone about the type of disability you experience. It can also be much more about describing how certain supports help you learn best, work best, perform best, and succeed in life.

Disclosure is a personal decision and you may want to consider getting help or support from others such as parents, teachers, friends, or an advisor on how and when to disclose.

Why Disclose?

Disclosing is a personal decision you will make. Some reasons others have decided to disclose (tell about) their disabilities include the ability to receive an accommodation (support) for an interview, get a job, receive supports for school, and/or receive necessary services from an adult service agency. No matter if you are starting work or starting school, what is most important and can be helpful is if you provide information about how your disability might affect your capacity to learn and perform. It is also important to think about what supports and services you might need to access, participate in, and excel in regarding your job, school, and community.

Should I disclose my disability?



Many people with disabilities are unfamiliar with the term “disability disclosure” and their rights involved with disclosure.

Disclosure comes from the word “disclose,” which means, “to open up, to reveal, or to tell.” When you disclose your disability, you are intentionally releasing personal information about yourself for a specific purpose.

Disclosing is a personal decision and it is important to consider the reasons why you would choose to disclose information about your disability.

When to Disclose?

Just as with why to disclose, when to disclose is a personal choice, the right time can be important. For example, if you are applying for a job and know you will need an interpreter (accommodation) for the interview, you may want to disclose this prior to accepting an interview.

How to Disclose?

Again, this is a personal decision, however, you can practice effective communication (telling about) of your disability, needs, skills, and abilities with people whom you respect and trust and who know your strengths well.

If you are thinking about disclosing at work and asking for a work accommodation, keep in mind it is much more helpful to the employer if you describe your accommodation needs in terms of how to support you and not the disability “label.” For example, if someone tells an employer they have a learning disability, it does not tell the employer how to provide an accommodation or support. However, if someone tells the employer they need a picture checklist instead of written instructions, that gives the employer a better understanding of how to provide that accommodation or support.

As with any decision, disclosure has both advantages (positives) and disadvantages (negatives). At work, one advantage (positive) about disability disclosure could be that it might give you opportunities for success because reasonable accommodations (supports) can be provided. Disclosure may also help you find strong support systems (people who will help you). On the other hand, a disadvantage (negative) might be that it could be intimidating (scary) for you to share personal information about your disability because there are no assurances that the other person will positively react.

Advantages of Disclosing

- You will be able to receive reasonable accommodations (supports) to effectively pursue work, school, or community activities.
- It allows other professionals (educators, employment service providers, etc.) to assist you with learning new skills.
- It provides legal protection against discrimination (as specified in the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Rehabilitation Act).
- It can help you build confidence by developing self-advocacy skills.
- It can help you and others learn more about how you learn best.

Disadvantages of Disclosing

- It can lead to exclusion or being treated differently than others.
- It can lead to being viewed as needy, not self-sufficient, or unable to perform on par with peers.
- It can cause people to overlook you for a job opportunity, team membership, group activities, or organization involvement.
- It can be difficult and embarrassing.

Note: If you experience discrimination because of disclosing, you may have a right to file a complaint under the Americans with Disabilities Act or the Rehabilitation Act.

Helpful Resources

- 411 disability guide: <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure>
- Job Accommodation Network (JAN): <https://askjan.org>
- Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA): <https://www.ada.gov>
- Rehabilitation Act: <https://www.dol.gov/oasam/regs/statutes/sec504.htm>
- Missouri Parent Training & Information Center (MPACT): www.missouriparentsact.org

How to get in touch with us:

MPACT

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