

Unit 3:

Weighing the Advantages & Disadvantages of Disclosure

PURPOSE



The purpose of Unit 3 is to help you determine the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing your disability. It is only after considering all of the options that you can make an informed decision. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand this topic. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion section on page 3-3.

TERMINOLOGY



You may know some of these words already, or you may have just heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary that is located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used in Unit 3:

Advantages	Impact
Disadvantages	Self-advocacy
Self-image	

Advantages _____

Disadvantages _____

Impact _____

Self-image _____

Self-advocacy _____

NOTES



DISCUSSION



Only **you** can decide whether or not you will want to disclose your disability (or any other sensitive information) to others. Read what one high school student had to say about the issue of disclosing a disability:

“I used to be ashamed about my disability and the fact that I couldn’t read very well or very fast, but as I have gotten older, I know that I need to explain how I work and learn best to my boss. Now, I feel like I am a good employee.”

As with most important informed decisions you will make during your lifetime, there are both **advantages** and **disadvantages** associated with the decision to disclose. On the one hand, disability disclosure can open up opportunities for you to participate in activities that you may have avoided (or in which you have been unable to participate), and help you put into place a strong support system. On the other hand, it’s downright scary to tell someone something personal when there are no assurances that they will react positively to your news.

What follows is a summary of advantages and disadvantages to disclosure. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it may give you some good information to think about. Remember, what may seem a disadvantage in one setting or situation may be an advantage in another.

Advantages of disclosure:

- It allows you to receive reasonable accommodations so that you can pursue work, school, or community activities more effectively.
- It provides legal protection against discrimination (as specified in the Americans with Disabilities Act).
- It reduces stress, since protecting a “secret” can take a lot of energy.
- It gives you a clearer impression of what kinds of expectations people may have of you and your abilities.
- It ensures that you are getting what you need in order to be successful (for example, through an accommodation or medication).
- It provides full freedom to examine and question health insurance and other benefits.
- It provides greater freedom to communicate should you face changes in your particular situation.
- It improves your **self-image** through **self-advocacy**.
- It allows you to involve other professionals (for example, educators and employment service providers) in the learning of skills and the development of accommodations.
- It increases your comfort level.

Disadvantages of disclosure:

- It can cause you to relive bad past experiences that resulted in the loss of a job or negative responses from your peers.

- It can lead to the experience of exclusion.
- It can cause you to become an object of curiosity.
- It can lead to your being blamed if something doesn't go right.
- It can lead to your being treated differently than others.
- It can bring up conflicting feelings about your self-image.
- It can lead to your being viewed as needy, not self-sufficient, or unable to perform on par with peers.
- It could cause you to be overlooked for a job, team, group, or organization.
- Disclosing personal and sensitive information can be extremely difficult and embarrassing.

Consider the list above and talk to people close to you, such as friends (both with and without disabilities), teachers, mentors, coaches, parents, and others. First, decide whether or not you will need reasonable accommodation(s) in the classroom, on the job, or elsewhere in your community. If you do, or if you think you might, consider the personal advantages of disclosure.

Next, consider developing a personal philosophy about disclosure. What does it really mean to be a person with a disability? How does it affect your life? Only **you** can answer that question, because even people with the **same** disability feel differently and experience things differently. Read below about one student's philosophy on disclosure.

In the next unit, you will learn about how the law protects you if you choose to disclose.



"My work mentor really convinced me that having a learning disability is nothing to be ashamed of. He made me realize that I'm not dumb, and I'm not stupid. I've learned that you must be an advocate for yourself, otherwise you get trampled. So, I go full force. It's something I've always done in my life; just get behind everything 110%. A cliché, but it's because with my disability I've always had to work harder, it seems, than everyone else."



ACTIVITY



Read each scenario carefully. Discuss and list some of the advantages and disadvantages to disclosing the sensitive information in each scenario.

Scenario 1 (Employment): Liz is 16 years old and eager to get her first real job. She has applied for a position working with five- and six-year-old children in an after-school day care program. The director of the program calls to tell Liz that she has the job and she wants Liz to come in and see her the next day. Liz wonders if she should tell the director that she was hospitalized after a seizure when she was 10 years old, but has not had one since then. Liz participates in several in- and out-of-school activities, and gets regular check-ups with her doctor. Think about the **impact** of Liz disclosing her seizure to her potential employer. What are the advantages or disadvantages of disclosing?

Advantages: _____

Disadvantages: _____

Scenario 2 (Postsecondary education): Calvin is extremely shy but excited about starting college. He is registering for his first semester of classes and realizes that all freshmen are required to take public speaking. Calvin stutters severely when he speaks, especially around new people. Consider Calvin's self-image and his concern about his stuttering. Would it be to Calvin's advantage or disadvantage to disclose his disability to his potential professors, classmates, and roommates?

Advantages: _____

Disadvantages: _____

Scenario 3 (Social setting): Brandy has cerebral palsy and requires the use of a wheelchair. Brandy has been invited to a pool party by one of her classmates on the weekend. Brandy cannot swim without help. If she goes to the pool party, someone will have to accompany her in the water, and all her friends will see. Think about the impact of Brandy's disclosing her disability to her friends. What are some of the advantages or disadvantages of disclosure?

Advantages: _____

Disadvantages: _____

ACTIVITY: FAMOUS PEOPLE MATCHING



Complete the matching activity below and reflect on how these famous people have surpassed the expectations of others to become leaders in their fields. The following famous people are individuals diagnosed with specific learning and other disabilities. Match each paragraph to the person it best describes. Write the letter of the correct person's name in the blank to the left of the paragraph. The answers are provided at the end.

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| a. Thomas Edison | f. Cher | k. Harriet Tubman |
| b. Agatha Christie | g. Tom Cruise | l. Marlee Matlin |
| c. Albert Einstein | h. Ann Bancroft | m. Chris Burke |
| d. Whoopi Goldberg | i. Walt Disney | n. Lucille Ball |
| e. James Earl Jones | j. Leonardo Da Vinci | o. Carrie Fisher |

- _____ I am currently a very popular movie star. Some of the movies I have starred in are "Jerry Maguire," "Top Gun," and "The Last Samurai." I learn my lines by listening to a tape because I have dyslexia.
- _____ Fans remember me best for my performance in the movies "The Color Purple" and "Sister Act," but I am also a comedian. I have struggled with a learning disability all my life.
- _____ I was slow in school and had a hard time doing my work. I didn't do anything well until I realized a real strength of mine was drawing. I became a well-known cartoonist and movie producer. Some famous amusement parks have my name.
- _____ I have always had to deal with my disability. My weakest area has always been math. However, even though I cannot balance a checkbook, I have become a movie star and won an Oscar for my lead in "Moonstruck." My daughter, Chastity, has learning disabilities, too.
- _____ When I was a child, an overseer struck me. The blow fractured my skull causing me to have narcolepsy for the rest of my life. I rescued hundreds of slaves through the Underground Railroad.
- _____ As a boy, I had such a severe stutter that, for eight years, I refused to talk and was functionally mute. Today, I am the voice of CNN and Bell Atlantic. I am also known for being the voice of Darth Vader in the original "Star Wars" movie.
- _____ I love to write mystery stories and plays. One of my favorite plays is "The Mousetrap." My learning disability is in the area of writing. My disability is so severe that I dictate my stories for others to type for me.
- _____ I am the first hearing-impaired actress to win an Oscar. I won a 1987 Academy Award for Best Actress in "Children of a Lesser God."

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|----------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
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| d. Whoopi Goldberg | i. Walt Disney | n. Lucille Ball |
| e. James Earl Jones | j. Leonardo Da Vinci | o. Carrie Fisher |

9. ____ I always had trouble learning. My teachers said I was “obnoxious” and had “artistic talent.” During my lifetime, my artistic talent was expressed through architecture, painting, sculpture, and engineering. One of my best-known paintings is the Mona Lisa.
10. ____ I had to struggle in school with dyslexia. I was part of a polar expedition in 1986 and was the first woman to reach the North Pole.
11. ____ My teachers thought I was slow and a dreamer. I didn’t learn to read until I was nine. I couldn’t get into college until I spent an extra year in preparation. After many failed jobs, I developed the theory of relativity.
12. ____ Because my head was very large at birth, people thought I was abnormal. My mother took me out of school and taught me. As an adult, I created the electric light bulb and the phonograph.
13. ____ I was known as the “Queen” of physical comedy. I had severe rheumatoid arthritis as a young woman while working as a model. I went on to star and produce a hit comedy on television with my husband Desi Arnaz.
14. ____ I was born with Downs Syndrome and the doctors told my parents that I should be placed in an institution. My parents ignored the doctor’s advice and I grew up to be a television star and public speaker on disabilities. I played Corky on “Life Goes On.”
15. ____ I was known for playing Princess Leia in the Star Wars series. I have a mental illness called manic depression and now take daily medication to help me.

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Answers:

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------|--------------|
| 1. g | 6. e | 11. c |
| 2. d | 7. b | 12. a |
| 3. i | 8. l | 13. n |
| 4. f | 9. j | 14. m |
| 5. k | 10. h | 15. o |