

Unit 7:

Disclosure on the Job... Why, When, What, to Whom, and How?

GOAL



The purpose of Unit 7 is to reiterate the need to disclose in order to receive a reasonable accommodation in a work setting (on the job). In addition, this unit clearly answers the specific disclosure questions: why, when, what, to whom, and how to disclose in employment settings. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand these questions. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion on page 7-3.

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 7:

Essential functions

Job accommodations

Mentor

One-Stop Career Center

Self-accommodate

Essential functions _____

Job accommodations _____

WHY TO DISCLOSE ON THE JOB



Every job seeker with a disability is faced with the same decision: “Should I or shouldn’t I disclose information about my disability?” Ultimately, the decision of whether or not to disclose is entirely personal. It is a decision to make only after weighing the personal advantages and disadvantages of disclosure (see Unit 3).

If you have a disability, you must consider the supports and services that you may need to be successful in the job of your choice. Are these supports and services available to you if you require an accommodation? Remember that accommodations in the workplace are only provided when a worker discloses his or her disability and requests job accommodations. Employers and co-workers are not required to provide accommodations to workers who have chosen not to disclose their disabilities.

The process of learning how to disclose your disability-related needs effectively and to develop an accommodation plan is extremely valuable. Effective disclosure skills require that you share information regarding your disability-related needs and that you provide creative, practical suggestions for job accommodations. Open communication with your employer, work mentor, and co-workers can help to evaluate the effectiveness of your accommodations and make changes when efforts are not working.

Some job seekers choose not to disclose their disabilities because they believe that they can manage their careers in the same way as any other job seekers, or because they have become skilled at developing compensatory

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strategies and have the ability to **self-accommodate** without assistance. Others decide not to disclose at work because they fear being treated differently or being denied the same opportunities as job seekers without disabilities.

On the other hand, many job seekers choose to disclose disability-specific information for a variety of important reasons and to a variety of different people (employer, work mentor, co-workers). The following list includes some (but definitely not all) of the reasons you might choose to disclose your disability;

- obtain information to assist you in developing a career plan that addresses possible barriers and accommodations;
- identify disability-specific employment services and support networks;
- discuss employment requirements with recruiters or other professionals;
- discuss disability issues with prospective employers to determine whether the requirements of the position can be met, with or without reasonable accommodation;

- investigate the supports available at the workplace;
- develop mentoring and peer support structures with employees and employers with disabilities.

Remember that it is not essential to divulge specific personal information about your disability. Your disability is only important if it affects (or can potentially affect) your ability

to perform the **essential functions** of a job. What is most important and helpful is to provide information about how your disability affects your ability to perform the essential functions of the job, what supports you need in order to provide a most favorable environment for your career, and your own accommodation ideas for your particular situation.

WHEN TO DISCLOSE ON THE JOB



Though there is certainly no one “right” time and place to practice disclosure (it will depend on your individual situation), being proactive is strongly encouraged. Being proactive puts you in better control of your life.

When you decide to disclose your disability to your employer, there may be settings and circumstances in which disclosure is more appropriate than others. Consider the following possibilities:

Circumstance	Example
<p>In a third-party phone call or reference</p>	<p>Employment counselors at the local One-Stop Career Centers have strong connections with local employers and may be willing to serve as a reference for you. Be sure to make clear with the counselor whether you would like him or her to disclose your disability and how you would like your disability to be represented.</p>
<p>In your letter of application or résumé</p>	<p>Many individuals choose to disclose their disabilities in their résumé or letter of application. Having a disability may be viewed as a positive trait in some professions or even as a requirement for some positions. For example, the Workforce Recruitment Program has been established specifically for young adults with disabilities.</p>

Circumstance	Example
In your cover letter	Some individuals disclose their disabilities in their cover letters. As a rule, attach the cover letter to the back of your résumé so that your skills can be the focal point. Again, having a disability is not always a strike against you. Some companies actively recruit people with disabilities to meet Affirmative Action goals.
Pre-interview	Disclosure prior to the interview is encouraged only when an accommodation is needed for the actual interview. For example, if you use a wheelchair and the office where the interview is to be scheduled is on the second floor of a building without an elevator, you need to make the interviewer aware of your need for accommodations (for example, by suggesting that the interview be moved to a first floor location).
On the employment application	<p>You may have several options if the employment application form asks something like, “Do you have any mental or physical limitations that may impact your performance on the job?”</p> <p>You might believe that your disability is not a limitation on your work performance and would therefore respond by answering, “no.” On the other hand, you might decide to use this as an opportunity to indicate that you have a disability that will not limit your performance if you are properly accommodated. Finally, you might just want to indicate that you would prefer to answer this question when you are called for an interview.</p>

Circumstance	Example
<p>At the interview</p>	<p>You might or might not choose to disclose your disability during an interview. If your disability is visible, you might wish to discuss your disability and how it will not get in the way of doing a good job, especially if you have proper accommodations. At this time, you could give examples of how you would perform the job. If your disability is not apparent (invisible), you will need to decide whether or not to disclose your disability based on your comfort and trust levels. You do not have to disclose your disability at this stage. However, it might be helpful to do so in order to show that you can do the job with the right accommodation. At this time, you might want to give examples. Be positive and upbeat; show your confidence in yourself. Don't be apologetic, defensive, or cocky.</p>
<p>After you've been offered a job</p>	<p>Many individuals choose to disclose their disabilities after they have been offered the job. They want to be selected for the position because of their skills, and worry that disclosure prior to the point may influence the interviewer's decision. However, once hired, you might need accommodations to do the essential functions of the job. Also, if the job requires medical testing and you take medications that will show up in a screening, you may choose to disclose this to the employer at this time.</p>

Circumstance	Example
<p>During your course of employment</p>	<p>Sometimes, individuals with disabilities do not recognize that their disabilities can negatively affect their job performance. This is especially true for youth getting their first full-time job. Sometimes, you may feel confident when you begin a job, but become concerned that you may have underestimated your need for an accommodation.</p> <p>Remember that it is your responsibility to ask for an accommodation if you need one. It is always better to ask for it before your job performance is questioned. Your employer cannot force an accommodation on you, but has the final word in what accommodation you will receive (after consulting with you, of course).</p>
<p>Never</p>	<p>If you are able to perform the essential functions of the job without reasonable accommodation, you need not disclose your disability.</p>

Remember that employers can't meet your needs if they don't know what those needs are!

WHAT INFORMATION TO DISCLOSE ON THE JOB



Remember that preparation is essential when planning to disclose your disability to your employer. Think about the disclosure script you prepared in Unit 6. Is your information presented in a clear and concise way that is relevant to your job? If it is, TERRIFIC! If not, make some changes and practice rehearsing your disclosure conversation. Don't forget that it is unnecessary to disclose very detailed medical or personal information. Get to the point. And keep it positive!

You might wish to present the following information to your employer, supervisor, work mentor, or co-workers:

- General information about your disability;

- Why you've chosen to disclose your disability, including its impact on your job performance;
- The types of job accommodations that have worked for you in the past (in previous jobs and in training situations);
- The types of job accommodations you anticipate needing in the workplace; and
- How your disability and other life experiences can positively affect your work performance.

Most importantly, keep the disclosure conversation focused on your abilities, not your disability.

TO WHOM TO DISCLOSE ON THE JOB



As a job seeker with a disability, you might choose to disclose information when developing your career plan and searching for employment. You might disclose information to the following individuals:

- Career counselors
- Disability-specific adult employment services personnel
- One-Stop Career Center personnel
- Prospective employers or human resources personnel
- Workplace mentors

When selecting the person to disclose to, reflect on the following questions first:

- Does this person have the power to determine how reasonable the request is for the accommodation?
- Can the person provide the required accommodation(s)?
- Is the person responsible for hiring, promoting, or firing?
- Is the person in a supervisory role and will he or she support me?
- What experiences does this person have with similar disclosure situations?

- Do I have respect for and trust in this person’s keeping my disclosure confidential?

Remember that it is important to select a private, confidential, comfortable place to

disclose and to allow enough time to discuss the impact of your disability. The person(s) to whom you are disclosing might have questions, suggestions, or concerns that require more time for discussion.

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Adapted from <<http://sites.uws.edu.au/rdlo/disclosure/education/prior.htm>>.



We’ve talked a great deal about the rights afforded to you as a person with a disability. It is important to understand that, as a person with a disability, you also have significant responsibilities to yourself and to your employers, supervisors, mentors, and co-workers. Some of these rights and responsibilities are outlined in the chart below:

You have the right to	You have the responsibility to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have information about your disability treated confidentially and respectfully. • Seek information about hiring practices from any organization. • Choose to disclose your disability at any time during the employment process. • Receive appropriate accommodations in an interview so you may demonstrate your skills and abilities. • Be considered for a position based on your skill and merit. • Have respectful questioning about your disability for the purpose of reasonable accommodation. • Be self-determined and proactive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclose your need for accommodation if you desire any work-related adjustments. • Search for jobs that address your skills and abilities. • Inform the manager or interview panel about your need for appropriate interview accommodations in a timely manner. • Identify appropriate and reasonable accommodations for an interview. • Negotiate reasonable accommodation(s) with an employer at the point of job offer and beyond. • Bring your skills and merits to the table. • Be truthful, self-determined, and proactive.

ACTIVITY:

COURSE FOR DISCLOSURE EXAMPLES



Read the following examples and determine a course of disclosure for each potential job seeker. First determine whether or not it is necessary for the job seeker to disclose his or her disability. Then think about the “why,” “when,” “what,” “to whom,” and “how” questions discussed earlier in this unit. Write your responses on the lines provided. If possible, share your answers with a group of your friends or classmates.

1. Linda’s emotional disability has recently worsened and it has become difficult for her to perform some aspects of her job. Her psychiatrist has made some recommendations to her regarding changes in her work schedule.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

2. Jamal’s schizophrenia has been well controlled by medication for the past three years. He recently graduated from college with a 3.5 grade point average (GPA) and is ready to apply for a job in the graphic design field, but he’s a bit nervous.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

3. Carl uses a guide dog. He was recently called for an interview at a local IT firm.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

4. Andrea has been offered a part-time job as a bank teller. She has a hearing aid, is able to read lips, and speaks well.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

5. Josephina has arranged an interview with the supervisor of a large department store to discuss a position as a sales clerk. She wonders how much her learning disability in math will affect her ability to run the cash register and give correct change.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

6. Francisco has scheduled an interview at a small non-profit organization. He wonders if the building will be accessible for his wheelchair.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

NOTES





ACTIVITY: MY PRACTICE SCRIPT



Research shows that having a disclosure “**script**” and practicing it with friends, teachers, relatives, and mentors will be of great benefit to you when the time actually comes to tell. Most people find that it is easier to talk about the impact of having a disability rather than offering a formal or clinical definition.



When arranging for a job interview, a young man who uses a wheelchair might say,
“I’m really looking forward to this interview and I am checking to make sure that the interview room can accommodate my wheelchair.”

During the interview, a person with a hearing impairment, who can lip-read, is concerned about communicating on the job. She might say,
“I can lip-read in face-to-face interaction, but will need TTY services and devices when using the phone.”

An employer expresses concern about a worker’s productivity.
The worker might say,
“I am having more difficulty than I anticipated keeping up with my co-workers because of my learning disability. In the past, it has helped to work alongside an experienced mentor.”



To help you practice explaining your disability, write your explanation down. You may have to do this several times before it truly says what you want to say, in a way that someone who knows very little about disabilities will understand. Use additional paper if needed.

Here are some questions and hints to think about while preparing your disclosure practice script:

- Write about your **positive attributes or strengths** first.

- **Identify the limitations** or challenges you face at work because of your disability.
- **Identify which accommodations** have worked best for you in the past and why.
- **Consider how your disclosing can help the business employer and your co-workers** (try to put yourself in their shoes).
- **End the script with positive points.**



Write your script on the following page.

ACTIVITY: VISIT YOUR LOCAL ONE-STOP CAREER CENTER



You may not have heard of **One-Stop Career Centers**. They are Centers designed to provide a full range of assistance to job seekers under one roof. One-Stop Career Centers offer training, career counseling, job search opportunities, job

placement services, and other employment-related services. If you go to a One-Stop for some free training offered, you may work on your interviewing skills, résumé writing, or learn about the resources available in your community, among other things.

Complete the steps listed below:

1. Log on to <<http://www.servicelocator.org>>. Click on "Find a One-Stop Career Center" and enter your zip code. Record the One-Stop Career Center closest to your home:

2. Make travel arrangements to visit the One-Stop Career Center to see which services are available to you. Check one:

_____ I can get there independently

_____ I will ask _____ for a ride

_____ I will take public transportation

3. Meet with the resource room counselor to discuss the services available to you at the Center.

I met with _____

His/her contact information (telephone/email) is: _____

4. Ask for a tour of the resource room. When I toured the resource room, I noticed three things that may help me in my job search. They were:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

5. Find out about the classes and programs available to you at the One-Stop. Depending on your age, your disability, and your financial situation, different options may be available.

I might be able to take advantage of these generic classes, which are available to everyone:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

The following additional services are offered to me because I am a person with a disability:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

I can take advantage of the following services because of my age:

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____

NOTES 
