

Unit 8:

Disclosure in Social and Community Settings...

Why, When, What, to Whom, and How?

GOAL



The purpose of Unit 8 is to explore the need and the circumstances that surround disclosing your disability to community members and friends in social situations. In addition, this unit clearly answers the following specific disclosure questions: why, when, what, to whom, and how to disclose in social settings. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better answer these questions. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion section focusing on “why to disclose” on page 8-3.

TERMINOLOGY



You might know some of these words already, or you might just have 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 8:

Community

Trust

Role model

Frustration

Community _____

Role model _____

Trust _____

Frustration _____

NOTES



WHY TO DISCLOSE IN SOCIAL SETTINGS



Social and **community** environments have barriers that sometimes prevent people with disabilities from spending time outside their home, socializing and going out with friends, and participating in community or civic events. Speaking about your disability in social settings can be hard and sometimes frustrating, because many of the barriers you will face in social settings are people's attitudes, beliefs, and inexperience. It is important to understand how your disability and disability-related needs can influence your participation in your community and other social activities (such as recreation, leisure, civic, religious, and political activities).

It may be necessary for you to disclose your disability to friends or community members and in social situations in order to participate fully in everything your community has to offer. It will be important for you to be able to explain your disability in several different ways, and to change the way you talk about yourself in different situations. For example, talking about your disability to your soccer coach or Scout leader is very different from talking about yourself at a party or to someone you may want to date. The self-determination skills and informed decision-making skills discussed earlier in this workbook are important skills to have when deciding whether to disclose or not.

Again, this is where **informed decision-making** comes into play. You will need to understand your own feelings, and balance them out with the information you have about the specific situation you are in at the time. **The more questions you ask, the more you will know that the decisions you make are right for you.**

Some examples of why you may choose to disclose in a social or community setting include (but are not limited to) the following. You may wish to

- start new relationships with honesty;
- discuss specific needs in order to identify needed accommodations in the community; or
- receive any necessary assistance that may be needed while participating in community or social activities.

Remember that it is not essential to divulge specific personal information about your disability. What is most important and helpful is to provide information about how your disability affects your capacity to participate in social and community activities, and the supports that are needed to allow you to participate fully.

WHEN TO DISCLOSE IN SOCIAL SETTINGS



There may be times when you decide to disclose in social or community settings. The following list includes some possibilities:

- Going with your friends to a concert
- Planning a date with someone
- Meeting your mentor for lunch
- Meeting new people, or starting new relationships
- Joining community clubs or activities

WHAT INFORMATION TO DISCLOSE IN SOCIAL SETTINGS



Remember that what you disclose about yourself is a deeply personal issue and you don't have to share everything with everyone. You should think about what you want people to know and to think about you. It will be helpful if you describe your disability and related needs in honest and positive terms. You want people to feel good about interacting with you, not from a point of pity or helplessness but one of being included.

Preparation is essential when planning to disclose your disability. Think about the scripts you prepared in Unit 6 and Unit 7. Is your information presented in a clear and concise way, a way that is relevant to your social and community life? If it is, TERRIFIC! If not, make some changes and then practice the disclosure script. Don't forget that it is not necessary to disclose every detail of your medical or personal information even to your friends, but be open and honest in your discussion. Some people may feel uncomfortable with talking about your

disability, which may hurt or make you angry, but your positive presentation can help put them at ease. Be prepared, but be flexible in how you talk about your disability in different settings.

You may wish to present the following information about your disability to friends, acquaintances, or community members:

- General information about your disability
- Why you've chosen to disclose your disability to them, including its impact on your social life and community involvement
- The type of accommodations that have worked for you in the past, or that you may need in the future
- Positive examples of how you can become more involved in your community, and what community involvement means to you

TO WHOM TO DISCLOSE IN SOCIAL SETTINGS



As a person with a disability, you may choose to disclose your disability to a variety of other community members.

Oftentimes, disclosure may be made to the following individuals (among others):

- Friends and acquaintances
- Relatives
- Owners or staff members of various businesses (such as grocery stores, banks, or clothing stores)
- Public transportation staff
- Parks and recreation staff
- Events coordinator
- Mentors or **role models**

There are certain questions that you can ask yourself to help you decide which person or persons to share this information with, such as the following:

- Do I have respect for and **trust** in this person's keeping my disclosure confidential?
- Is disclosure essential to our relationship?
- Does this person have the power to determine how reasonable a request for an accommodation is?
- Can the person provide the required accommodation(s)?
- Is this person going to use information about my disability to support me or harm me?

Remember that it's 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) you are disclosing to might have questions, suggestions, or concerns that require additional 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. Something very important to remember is that, as a person with a disability, you also have significant responsibilities to yourself and to others in your community.

You have the right to	You have the responsibility to
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be treated fairly and in a non-discriminatory fashion. • Have information about your disability treated confidentially and respectfully. • Work collaboratively with others to identify necessary supports for your success. • Obtain information about disability support services as well as physical and programmatic access in community settings. • Be self-determined and proactive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate and fully understand your disability and disability-related needs as they pertain to community living and social activities. • Find out about options for accessing the community settings of your choice. • Advise community members and friends in a timely manner of your accommodation and support needs. • Understand that community members and friends may not be able to address your needs effectively if you do not present them in a timely manner. • Be self-determined and proactive.

ACTIVITY: COURSE FOR DISCLOSURE EXAMPLES



Read the following examples and determine each person's course for disclosure. First, determine whether or not it is necessary for the person to disclose his or her disability. Then think about the "why," "when," "what," "to whom," and "how" questions. Write your answers on the lines provided. If possible, share your answers with a group of your peers or classmates. **Remember that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, because choosing to disclose is a personal, individual decision!**

1. Yvonne wishes to join an after-school business club that meets at the public library two days per week. Most of the students walk to the library after school (the library is located within walking distance of the school). Yvonne has a mild form of cerebral palsy and can walk with the use of a cane. She is able to maneuver around the school, but is concerned about the walk on the sidewalk to the public library. She is very excited about joining the club but is concerned about the walking.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

2. Matthew and his friends from college have decided to attend a movie festival next weekend. Michael wears glasses, but his friends do not know that Michael has a severe visual impairment and must get preferred seating when he watches movies. In order to see the movies, he would need to sit very close to the screen.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

3. Denise has difficulty reading. She receives accommodations for classes but has trouble when reading restaurant menus, buying movie tickets, or grocery shopping. She is getting ready for her first date, which will be tomorrow night. Denise is nervous about her date's suggestion of dinner and a movie.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

4. Brian has epilepsy and takes medication to control his seizures. Lately, he has been having seizures more frequently because his doctors are adjusting his medication. He has never disclosed that he has epilepsy to most of his friends at school, but is now worried that he might have a seizure at the senior prom, which is in three weeks. He has a date and still wants to go, but he is concerned that his friends will discover that he has epilepsy.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

5. José has registered to vote in the next presidential election. He has received notification of his election location. Because of his paralysis, he will need assistance in the voting booth. On Election Day, he cannot find someone he trusts to accompany him to vote.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

6. Keri has ADHD. She has just moved to a new city and is making new friends. Keri tends to overbook her social activities and consequently is often late meeting her friends or forgets to come at all. Her friends are becoming frustrated with her.

Disclose? _____

Why? _____

When? _____

What? _____

To whom? _____

How? _____

ACTIVITY: MY PRACTICE SCRIPT



Research shows that having a disclosure “script” and practicing it with friends, teachers, relatives, and mentors can 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 than to offer a formal or clinical definition.



Someone with dietary restrictions as a result of diabetes is invited to celebrate a friend’s birthday with cake and ice cream.

She might say,

“Because of my diabetes I can’t eat sugary foods, so if you don’t mind I’ll bring some sugar-free snacks for myself and to share with everyone else.”

Since Tom uses a wheelchair, he has difficulty carrying objects in both hands. When he goes to a fast food restaurant with his friends, he might say to the cashier,

“Put my order in a bag.”



To help you practice explaining your disability, you might find that it helps you to write the explanation down. You might have to do this several times before the explanation really 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 practice disclosure script:

- Discuss how your **disability affects** your social or community life currently.
 - Discuss what you’d like your **social or community life** to include.
 - **Identify ways** in which community members or friends can best **accommodate** you in social settings.
 - **Explain** what your **greater participation** in the community can do for others.
- Discuss what your disability is all about (including both **strengths and limitations**).

Write your script on the following page.



