

Module 4 Self-Advocacy and Disclosure: video 2: When to Disclose a Disability

Video 2: Managing your career strategies for graduates with disabilities module for self-advocacy and disclosure video -when to disclose a disability

Welcome to Module 4 on self-advocacy and disclosure in our career in disability series brought to you by the University of Toronto Scarborough Accessibility services and the Academic Advising and Career Centre.

This video will be about the what, the why and the when to disclose your disability in the context of disability and work.

What is disclosure? Disclosure is a conversation with your employer about your disability and what you need to be an effective employee. It is a discussion which should highlight your strengths your skills and what it will take for you to be successful in the job. You've had practice disclosing information about your disability here at the university. You most probably have disclosed information to faculty or to staff members about your disability related needs and how it affects you in an academic setting. You may have done this so you could gain accommodation and perform optimally in your courses.

The information in this video is intended to help you make an informed choice about whether or not to disclose. It's important to note that you only need to disclose an employer if you require accommodation and you only need to share information related to your accommodation needs to help you decide. If disclosure is appropriate, you need to understand your disability related needs and the tasks of your job, more specifically, you need to determine if there are systemic barriers that can be removed such as policy or process. Alternatively, there may be job tasks which are directly related to your disability and can be resolved by accommodations. For example, as a result of an accident you may experience muscle stiffness if you're required to sit for long periods of time depending on the nature of the job tasks, when possible accommodation is to give you short more frequent breaks to stretch. Another possible accommodation is to assign you to standing desks so you may sit or stand while you continue to work as usual.

Why do people choose to disclose? There are a range of reasons why people choose to disclose. These may include an individual who identifies the need for accommodations. During the interview process or while they're already employed a person wants to break down stereotypes and take the opportunity to educate people and to change their assumptions about people with disabilities. The person discloses as a way to highlight a strength or demonstrate how they already succeeded at school or at work during the interview process.

One of the reasons that may prevent people from disclosing that they have a disability a major concern about disclosure is a negative reaction from future employers and colleagues or the fear that it will impact hiring decisions. Some people fear that if they disclose it will stay in a permanent file and follow them from job to job or be shared with their managers. Others are not ready or do not feel equipped to have an effective conversation about their disability. Another reason is that the company they have applied to or are working for does

not have a clear policy on disability and accommodations so the person does not know how the employer will react if they disclose their disability. Lastly, there may be no need to disclose as the disability does not impact job performance. This is a good time to take out and look through our exercise on disclosure.

When should you disclose? There's really no right or wrong time to disclose, it all depends on if and when you require accommodations based on your disability related needs. There are roughly seven different times in the process of seeking obtaining and maintaining employment during which you could disclose information about your disability related needs to an employer.

You can disclose during the application process on the application on the cover letter or if you're applying through an agency for people with disabilities you want to make sure that the company has an Employment Equity program in place. If you plan to disclose at this point in the hiring process because your application may be considered ahead of other applications. At this stage you need to consider why you would need to disclose in a cover letter, you may determine the disclosure is not required at this point you may decide to disclose about your disability when you're offered an interview but this may only be needed if you require accommodations to participate in the interview process. For example, if you're in need of an accessible test site or interview room this will provide the employer sufficient time to put the accommodations in place for you to be able to participate in the interview.

The next point at which you could disclose that you have a disability is during the actual interview. Disclosing at this time allows you to highlight your strengths and accomplishments and to explain in person why the employer should hire you. You can also let the employer know if you require on-job accommodations to perform the work-related tasks. If you plan to disclose that you have a disability during the interview it should be done earlier rather than later in the interview leaving it to the end of the interview may not allow you the opportunity to address any concerns or questions that the employer may have. Most interviews start with a question like why you are interested in this position and a strong answer will discuss skills and strengths disclosing a disability here in the context of strengths that you have developed because of it would make a lot of sense.

The best time to disclose that you have a disability and require an accommodation may be when you've accepted the job offer and know for certain that you require an accommodation to perform job tasks. Disclosing at this time provides the employer time to put accommodations in place, it also lets the employer know that they decide to hire you because of your skills and abilities it's important to reassure the employer that you are qualified and you're capable of performing the job. It will be helpful if you identified accommodations ready to discuss with the employer when disclosing at this point. Communicate in a way that allows you the opportunity to express your needs and address any concerns that the employer may have such as through it in person or over the phone dialog.

Another opportunity for you to disclose that you have a disability and require an accommodation is after you begin work keep in mind that at this point the reason to disclose is because you have first-hand experience of job tasks and you realize that you need accommodations to perform them effectively. Asking for accommodations will help you to

perform the tasks better you may also need to disclose disability at this time if your disability related symptoms are increasing or your needs are changing. Also, you may feel more comfortable in the position and more comfortable with your colleagues to disclose this information you may have decided that you didn't need accommodations to perform the job tasks when you first started the job but if new job tasks are added or if you move into a new position within the company you may find that the accommodations are required due to the new job tasks. At this point you've likely proven to the employer that you have excellent skills and excellent abilities so hopefully it will be easier for you to ask for accommodations. It's important that you speak up if the change on the job creates a need for accommodations so that you perform the new tasks well, performing well will help reduce your stress. The best way to disclose is in person to the appropriate person such as your direct supervisor or your human resources officer if the job is a big fit with your strengths and the disability does not impact your ability to complete the work. You may never need to disclose that you have a disability if you decide not to disclose that you have a disability. Be sure to obtain regular feedback about your job performance so that if problems do arise you can request accommodations in a timely manner to help you perform the job. All employers want their employees to be successful and frequent feedback as a way to coach for success.

Up until now we've talked about the times when you can choose to disclose to an employer that you have a disability and that you require accommodations. However, there are times when you must disclose to an employer that you have a disability. The Ontario Human Rights Commission or OHRC has stated that you must disclose that you have a disability if it threatens the safety or property of others or if the disability prevents you from safe and adequate job performance even when reasonable efforts are made to accommodate the disability. If you find yourself in either of these situations you must tell the employer about your disability related needs. This is a good time to work through our exercise on disclosure.

If you would like to provide feedback on these videos or if you have questions or concerns. Please contact the Academic Advising and Career Centre at aacc.utsc@utoronto.ca or the AccessAbility Services at ability.utsc@utoronto.ca