

Self-Identifying Disability in the Workplace

To disclose or not to disclose? Disclosing a disability involves telling an employer that you have a disability and explaining what, if any, impact the disability has on the job. Disclosure is a personal decision. It is important to note that you do not need to disclose your disability if you do not require accommodations in the workplace. Deciding to identify your disability is like giving out private information; similar to revealing your credit card information, you should only do so if you have a reason. If you decide that you will need workplace accommodations, the first consideration is to understand your disability-related needs in the context of the job. You are not obligated to explain what the exact 'diagnosis' is, but you need to articulate what your functional abilities are and what workplace accommodations you need.

Things to consider before deciding if, when and how to disclose your disability:

Be an expert about your disability: Have a strong understanding of your needs and learn what type of accommodations work for you at school and at work. It's helpful to provide examples to an employer about what has worked well in the past. It may be helpful to be prepared with potential ideas for accommodations, including availability and cost (if any). It is advisable to inform your employer before you have any problems on the job. Keep in mind that "2/3 of accommodations cost under \$500; many cost nothing at all" (Ontario Human Rights Commission).

Practice disclosure: Self-identifying disability can be uncomfortable, but with practice, you can try out the best approach that works for you. Good disclosure focuses on strengths and being clear about what you need. Anticipate questions that the employer may have and practice answering them with a trusted friend, family member or career consultant. When you disclose your disability in an employment context, you do not need to name the type of disability, but you will need to explain how the disability may impact you and your performance of the job tasks.

Be positive: Always stay positive and focus on your skills and qualifications. Never present your disability as a weakness. Focus on your competencies and qualifications as the reason why the employer should hire you.

Research the employer: Learn about the employer's policies and experiences regarding people with disabilities. Employment equity employers often make efforts to diversify their workforce, including people with disabilities, which may be advantageous to your application.

Know your rights and responsibilities: If you disclose your disability, ensure that you are aware of your rights and responsibilities. In some cases, disclosure may be necessary according to the Ontario Human Rights Commission if it threatens the safety or property of others or if the disability prevents you from safe job performance. This is true even when reasonable efforts are made to accommodate the disability.

Timing of disclosure: Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of identifying your disability at different times in the job search process. Generally identifying on your application is not recommended, unless you are applying to a program or employer that is specifically recruiting people with disabilities. Review the following chart for further information.

When	Advantages	Disadvantages	Recommendations and Issues to Consider
1. Never	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer will not assume performance issues (if any) are related to disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If serious problems have arisen, you run the risk of being dismissed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you do not need workplace accommodations, disclosure is your choice!
2. At the time of job application	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organization may be recruiting for diversity (employment equity employer, or disability-specific employment program) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Might disqualify you with no opportunity to present yourself and your qualifications • Limited space to describe abilities • Does not allow you to address employer's concerns (if any) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you are not selected, you may question if the disclosure played a role • May have fewer disability-related problems when you become employed
3. When Offered an Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer is already interested in you • If accommodations are needed for the interview, you may request them now 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May predispose employer to develop preconceived notions about disability before you have a chance to discuss your abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talk to interviewer directly to arrange interview accommodations if needed • Focus may be on potential issues (real or perceived)
4. During the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer is already interested in you • Opportunity to respond positively and in-person about why you should be hired 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer may react negatively • Timing to discuss may be limited in this setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the focus of the interview remains on your ability to do the job well • Interview may focus too much on potential issues • Be prepared to explain needs
5. At the time of job offer - acceptance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer has chosen you for the role • Gives the employer time to put accommodations in place • If the disclosure changes the hiring decision and you can do the essential functions of the job, there may be legal recourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer may think they should have been informed before the hiring decision and trust may be hampered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You need to evaluate disability and explain that it will not impact ability to perform the job • Discuss your accommodation needs in person or over the phone to address any issues
6. After you start work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to prove yourself and develop a good understanding of job tasks and what you may need (if any) • If disclosure affects employment status, you may have legal recourse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employer may think they should have been informed earlier and trust may be hampered 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disclose to the appropriate person (direct supervisor, HR) • Be aware if any problems arise on the job related to disability
7. After a problem or change in the job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to prove yourself on the job first 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could impact your relationships with your manager and co-workers and perpetuate disability myths and misunderstandings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware if job problems are actually related to disability. If so, address your concerns as soon as possible

When	How	What Circumstances and Why
At the time of job application	a. In the cover letter	a. Perhaps beneficial for a position that is targeting recruiting efforts for applicants with a disability
What could you say?	In your cover letter, you could include a line in the closing paragraph which briefly mentions your disability, for information purposes only. For example, you could say “I wanted to mention that I am very interested in this opportunity and am confident that I can do this job successfully. I do have a _____, which may require some accommodation (or, which I wanted to tell you about prior to an interview). I would be happy to provide you with relevant information to assist you in understanding my needs.”	
When you are offered an interview	a. When you arrange the interview b. In a follow-up call, after interview has been arranged, you may call the interviewer (not always who made the arrangements)	a. May be more beneficial for a visible disability, as employer will not be ‘caught off guard’ b. If you require accommodation during the interview
What could you say?	At the time when you are arranging the interview you might mention the disability, but do not make an issue of it. For example, “I was wondering if the interview was being held in an accessible building?” Or, “I wanted to mention that I have a _____. I have information related to accommodation in the workplace and was wondering if you already knew this information or would you like me to supply it at the interview?”	
During the interview	a. You may mention it in the context of an answer.	a. If you have a concern that the employer may notice that is a disability-related issue, consider addressing their potentially unspoken concerns.
What could you say?	Incorporate relevant information into one of your answers. The key is to be prepared to answer potentially unspoken concerns by being up front and having prepared thoughtful answers. “I have always been interested in _____. I wanted to mention that I have a _____. While in university, I found that my disability was not really an issue and I was able to educate myself about what strategies work best for me, which will also apply in the workplace.”	
When you receive the job offer	a. Prior to accepting the job offer or during negotiation of the job offer b. After you accept the job offer c. Prior to references being provided*	a. If you have concerns about issues which may arise after you start and you want to discuss with employer b. If you need to arrange or discuss accommodation that may be needed on the job c. Employer may contact your references and information may be shared.

When	How	What Circumstances and Why
<p>What could you say?</p>	<p>Once you are offered the job, you are in a better position to discuss any potential issues. Once the offer is made you could say, "Thank you for the offer. I am very interested in this opportunity and am pleased to receive your offer. I did want to mention one thing as we finalize any arrangements. Although I do not anticipate any problems, I did want to mention that I have a _____ which from time to time may require _____. I wanted to let you know so we could make arrangements to address any potential concerns at this time."</p> <p>If possible, try to arrange to have this discussion in person. If you would like to accept the job first, then mention any potential issues, try to make arrangements to meet in person to discuss some questions you have about the job. You could arrange to do this at the meeting where you are signing the contract.</p> <p>* Ensure that you talk to your references and have a clear understanding of what they will be telling a prospective employer in terms of your abilities and experience.</p>	
<p>After you begin work</p>	<p>a. Early in your employment b. End of probation period</p>	<p>a. You may need to begin to put accommodations in place b. You may be asked by HR to complete forms, such as insurance forms, which may put you in a situation to disclose information</p>
<p>What could you say?</p>	<p>Request a meeting with your supervisor (and possibly HR) to discuss issues you want the employer to know. For example, perhaps you need time off for medical appointments. When speaking with the supervisor, you should be prepared to answer questions related to the potential impact of your issue on the employer and the organization. You do not need to provide a lot of information and detail; simply mention the possibility of requiring some accommodation at some time in the future. The goal is to lay the groundwork for future consideration.</p>	
<p>After, or in anticipation of a problem or change on the job</p>	<p>a. If you require assistance to succeed in specific areas b. A change in job tasks has led to a potential issue</p>	<p>a. Request a meeting as soon as you become aware of your need for accommodation</p>
<p>What could you say?</p>	<p>Approach your employer (and possibly HR or a Union) in a professional manner and ask to set up a time to meet. Ensure that you have all your information and what type of accommodation is required. Focus on the options and potential solutions to present to the employer.</p>	