

What is Disability Disclosure?

Disability disclosure is when a person shares information about their disability with other people. Disclosing information about a disability is a voluntary and very personal decision. A person may disclose to receive accommodations at work or school, to receive appropriate healthcare, or because it feels like the right thing to do in a relationship.

Why is Disability Disclosure Important?

If you need accommodations or services to be successful at work or school, you must disclose in order to receive them. As a person with disabilities, you are guaranteed equal access to work, school, and your community by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition, the ADA, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) require employers, schools, and healthcare professionals to keep disability-related and medical information confidential.

People with disabilities sometimes decide not to disclose their disabilities, because they are worried how other people will react. In your personal life, or at work or school, you can choose to disclose, and you can choose not to disclose. The decision is completely up to you.

Disability Disclosure from High School into Adulthood

Rights and responsibilities change when students move from high school into adult life. When students with disabilities leave high school, they no longer receive special education services. Instead, students who get a job or who attend college or training after high school must advocate for themselves to receive accommodations and supports they need to be successful. Middle and high school are good times to learn how to disclose, to be prepared for the next steps.

Resources

The LINK Center, a transition project of the Federation for Children with Special Needs
www.fcsn.org/linkcenter

The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities
<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/publications/the-411-on-disability-disclosure-a-workbook-for-youth-with-disabilities/>

United States Department of Labor: Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)
<https://www.dol.gov/odep/>

Job Accommodation Network
<https://askjan.org/>



**Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education**
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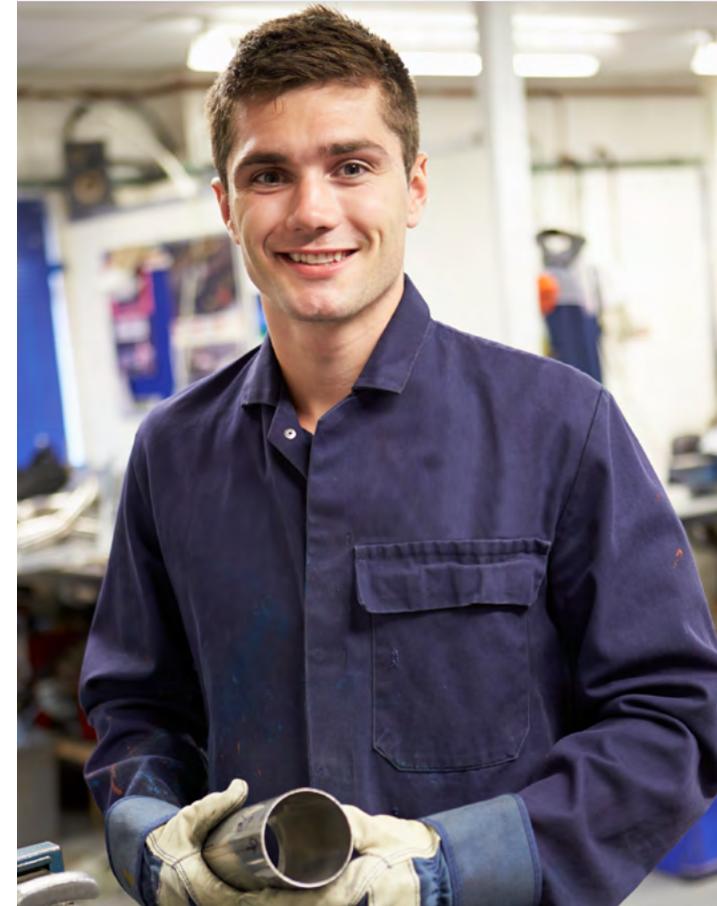


FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

**Federation for Children
with Special Needs**
The Schrafft Center
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Boston, MA 02129
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TIPS: Transition Information for Parents and Students with IEPs

(Ages 14-22)



Disability Disclosure

A series of brochures produced by
The LINK Center - a project of the
Federation for Children with Special Needs,
and the Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE)

Disability Disclosure: What you need to know....

TIP 1: Questions students and families should discuss before disclosing might include:

- Should I disclose?
- If I decide to disclose, who is an appropriate person to tell?
- When should I disclose?
- How much information should I disclose?
- How does my disability affect my ability to succeed at school or in a job?
- What accommodations or supports have worked for me in the past?
- What types of accommodations or supports will I need now?

TIP 2: Disclosing disability information is a personal decision.

Here are some of the pros:

- Disclosing can help you feel less stressed about keeping disability information secret
- If you disclose, your employer or school can provide reasonable accommodations and/or modifications, and you can receive appropriate healthcare
- Getting needed supports and communicating openly can increase your happiness and self-confidence, and can help others to better understand who you are
- Disclosing gives you legal protection against unfair treatment

Here are some of the cons:

- Disclosing may be difficult and may feel embarrassing
- People might overlook you for a job, team, group, or project
- After disclosing people might treat you differently

Accommodations allow persons with disabilities to access work, education, and physical environments. Examples include job coaching, screen reading software, and modified work schedules.

TIP 3: Prepare for disclosing disability information by:

- Understanding your strengths, skills, and abilities
- Understanding your disability-related challenges
- Deciding what information is necessary to disclose about your disability
- Understanding who needs to know about your disability to help you get services or accommodations
- Learning about the laws that protect you, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)
- Getting the contact information for the human resources department or the disability support center
- Collecting information or documents that describe your disability or diagnosis and how it affects your ability to perform a job task or complete your schoolwork
- Researching accommodations to provide your employer/school with suggestions or a plan that will meet your needs
- Writing down a script or an outline of what you want to say
 - Practicing what you want to say with your family, counselor, or friend

To get needed accommodations, you do not need to reveal detailed information about your disability. Disclose only essential information.



Examples of Disability Disclosure

Louisa graduated from high school with an IEP and is now a freshman in college. She has trouble with written exams due to her learning disability and received a D on her first test. With support from her family, Louisa met with a counselor at the Student Disability Office and disclosed her disability and accommodation needs.

Information she gave the disability office:

- Any relevant evaluations conducted within the last 3 years
- A copy of her last IEP
- Specific information on the accommodations she needs for academic success
 - Extended testing time
 - Separate and quiet room for testing
 - Prepared notes or copy of the PowerPoint from the instructor

Information she gave her professors:

- Documentation from Disability Office regarding disability and need for accommodations
- Specific information on the accommodations needed for academic success

Malcolm was promoted to receiving clerk in a warehouse. He wasn't completing all of the job tasks and was concerned that he would be demoted or fired. Malcolm practiced what he needed to tell his employer, collected documentation of his disability, and made a list of needed accommodations.

Information he gave his employer:

- Documentation from his doctor verifying his disability
- Specific information on the accommodations he needs to improve his work performance
 - Checklist of all duties (in sequential order)
 - 20-minute break every 2 hours instead of a 60-minute lunch break
 - Check-in with the supervisor on duty at the beginning of each shift to allow him to ask questions and go over the work load for the day

If you choose to disclose, don't over-emphasize the negatives of your disability. Highlight your strengths!