

Disclosing Your Learning Disability

What is disclosure?

In a disability context, "disclosure" is the act of revealing personal information about a disability for the specific purpose of receiving accommodations in postsecondary school, job training, or the workplace. An accommodation is an adjustment to an environment which makes it possible for people with disabilities to participate equally.

There is no standardized form or set of requirements regarding what people must share about their disabilities, and the choice to disclose is a personal decision that individuals with disabilities must make for themselves. They should decide to whom they choose to disclose and how much information to provide.

When should you disclose?

Disclosing a disability may be a consideration when transitioning to postsecondary education, starting a new job, or keeping a job.



Generally, adults with learning disabilities find it best to disclose information **only if accommodations will be required in that setting.**

In postsecondary schools, students with disabilities should disclose their disabilities during the enrollment period.

In the workplace, employees can request an accommodation any time during the application process or after being hired. Usually, employees with learning disabilities should disclose the disability at work when there is a job-related barrier that is preventing them from doing a job or competing for a better job unless they receive job accommodations.

Who do you disclose to?

To receive accommodations at work or in postsecondary school, information about the disability must be shared with the appropriate authorities.

In postsecondary education settings, there are disability service offices that oversee accommodation requests for students with disabilities. The school's administration office can direct you to the office for disability services.

In the workplace, many employers have specific procedures to handle accommodation requests. Check the employee handbook or the company's intranet for this information. If there is an EEO office or a human resources department, they can handle the request.

The other option at work is to talk to a manager or supervisor directly. According to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), you only have to let your employer know that you need an adjustment or change at work for a reason related to a medical condition. You do not have to mention the ADA or use the phrase "reasonable accommodation." Just give basic information about your challenges and what accommodations would help you to be more effective in your job.

Also, it is not necessary to tell co-workers about your disability or your need for accommodations. Your employer is required by law to keep your disability information confidential and to give it to managers and supervisors only on a need-to-know basis.

What should you know before you disclose your disability?

- Your areas of strengths and challenges.
- The accommodations and strategies that will work best for you in your school or job.
- How to effectively communicate information about your learning disability, including your strengths and needed accommodations.
- It is most important to provide information about:
 - how your disability impacts your ability to learn and work effectively; and
 - what accommodations, supports, and services you will need in order to access, participate, and excel in your school or job, and

how they have helped you in past, similar situations.

How do you disclose most effectively?

Arrange a meeting with the person in charge of handling accommodation requests. Verify that the conversation is confidential. Tell the person that you have a documented condition that may require some job or school adjustments that will allow you to complete your tasks successfully. First discuss the strengths you have that pertain to your learning or job, then suggest accommodations that allow you to use your strengths to compensate for your areas of difficulties. For example, "I do a great job following written directions. However, when someone gives me verbal instructions, I need a written copy to ensure that I don't miss any steps along the way."

Additional Resources

Rights and Responsibilities of College Students with Learning Disabilities (LD), <http://ldaamerica.org/rights-and-responsibilities-of-college-students-with-learning-disabilities-ld/>

Self-Advocacy in the Workplace: Requesting Job Accommodations, <http://ldaamerica.org/self-advocacy-in-the-workplace-requesting-job-accommodations/>

Job Accommodation Network, <http://askjan.org/topics/discl.htm>

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