



# DISABILITY DISCLOSURE PROCESS

## Step 1: Preparing to Disclose

- Explore your feelings about your disability. How comfortable are you talking about your disability?
- Identify (by yourself or with the help of others) what accommodations you may need during the hiring process or on the job.
- Weigh the benefits, risks, and timing of disclosure.
- If you decide not to disclose, make sure you can perform the essential functions of the position before accepting it.
- If you decide to disclose, plan in advance how you will handle it:
  - Whom to tell (interviewer, Human Resources representative, etc.)
  - What you will say

## Step 2: When You Disclose

- Decide how specific you will be in describing your disability
  - General terms: a medical condition, a disability, etc.
  - Specifically refer to your disability
  - Exact diagnosis
  - Remember: Try to use language that is informative, yet non-threatening. Be concise in your explanation and prepare brief answers for anticipated questions.
- Describe the skills that you have that make you able to perform the essential functions of the job.
  - Qualifications
  - Technical skills
  - General work skills
- Describe any functional limitations caused by your disability that may interfere with your performance and identify the accommodations you may need to overcome those limitations.

## Step 3: Prepare Script (if necessary)

- “I have (*name of disability*). Currently, I have (*the skills required*) to do the essential functions of the job. Sometimes, (*functional limitations*) may interfere with my ability to (*duties you have trouble performing*). It helps if I have (*name the specific accommodations you need*). I work best when (*other accommodations*).”

## Rules for a Good Disclosure

1. Script your disclosure. Write it down and have it critiqued. Run through it with friends who are employers/people in the working world.
2. Rehearse your disclosure script until you feel comfortable and good about it, not only with your words, but also with your body language.
3. When you prepare your script, avoid being too clinical or too detailed. It may be of great interest to you, but the interviewer wants to know only three things:
  - Will you be there?
  - Can you do the job as well or better than anyone else?
  - Will you be of value to the company?

- Remember your script and be positive about your skills and abilities. The more positive you are, the more you will convey that you are you and you just happen to have a disability. Conversely, the more you discuss your disability, the more important it will become in the employer's mind.

**The Bottom Line: You and the employer must both feel comfortable.**

### **Suggestions for Scripts**

*"I have (preferred term for disability). Currently, I can/have the skills required to do (the main duties) of the job, but sometimes (functional limitations) interfere with my ability to (duties you may have trouble performing). It helps if I have (name the specific accommodations you need). I work best when (other accommodations)."*

You could also add the following information:

*"Sometimes you might see (symptoms or behaviors associated with symptoms). When you see that, you can (name the action steps for the employer). Here is the number of my (employment specialist, doctor, therapist, previous employer, JAN, etc.) for any information you might need about my ability to handle the job."*

### **Elements of the Disclosure Process**

This activity is designed to help you understand the thought process needed when deciding whether or not to disclose your disability to an employer. Based on your career goals, think about your understanding of your career of choice, such as the job responsibilities, essential functions of the job, qualifications, etc. Once you understand the requirements of a specific career, you can begin to think about appropriate job accommodations that you will need. All of these steps are involved in the decision of whether or not to disclose your disability.

State the job duties you describe as potentially difficult for you to perform:

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Now, think about the possible accommodations. Are there accommodations you have used in the past that will enable you to perform the above task(s)? If so, please list them below:

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Are there still job duties which you may be unable to perform? Research an accommodation which might enable you to perform the task. In addition to listing additional job duties below, list as many resources as possible which will enable you to research possible accommodations.

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Finally, imagine that you are meeting with a potential employer. You need to disclose your disability to ensure that you will receive the necessary accommodations on the job. In complete sentences, describe your disability and what strategies or accommodations you will need to perform the job successfully (Peterson & Sherman, 1997).

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