

DISCLOSING A DISABILITY TO EMPLOYERS

It is ultimately *your* decision whether or not to disclose information about your disability to an employer. Many factors can play into whether or not to disclose such as the visibility of the disability, your comfort level, and whether or not your disability might impact your job performance. However, the decision to disclose shouldn't be made until you have given it a good amount of thought and developed an action plan.

Things to think about before deciding whether to disclose

- How do you feel about your disability? Is it something that you are comfortable talking about? Would it be more stressful to hide your disability than it would be disclosing information?
- Have you reviewed the Americans with Disabilities Act to determine your rights and responsibilities of being an employee with a disability?
- Do you know the expectations of the job you are applying for and what limitations your disability might present?
- Do you know what accommodations (if any) you may need to go through the hiring process or to perform the job successfully?
- If you choose not to disclose, can you perform the job expectations successfully?
- What are the benefits and risks of disclosing your disability?
- If you decide to disclose, who will you tell, when will you tell them and what will you say?

Who might you tell?

- Human Resources Officer
- EEO/Affirmative Action Officer
- Your interviewer
- Your supervisor or manager

When might you tell them?

- Before your interview
- During your interview
- After the interview
- Before a job offer
- After a job offer but before you start working
- After you start working

What might you say?

- It may be helpful to create a script of what you want to say and practice going over the script with someone you trust and are comfortable with. Remember to focus on your strengths and qualifications for the position.
- Decide how specific you will be. Will you provide information in very general but informative terms or will you provide your exact diagnosis and other details about your disability?
- Describe the skills you have that make you able to perform the main job expectations. What qualifications, strengths and skills do you possess that will allow you to be successful in this position?
- Describe why you are disclosing your disability and how your disability might affect your ability to meet the job expectations. Are you disclosing because certain behaviors/symptoms may be seen, because you will need accommodations, etc.
- Describe any accommodations that have allowed you to be successful in the past as well as any accommodations you would need to meet the current job expectations.
- Be ready to answer any questions the employer may ask you. Review the Handling Illegal Questions handout (<http://www.longwood.edu/career/Handouts.htm>).

There is no “right” time or way to disclose your disability. However, be sure to focus on your ability to perform the job expectations, not on your limitations. Try to avoid being too clinical or detailed. Employers only want to know whether you can perform the job as well as or better than other candidates and whether you will be valuable to their organization.

Additional Disability Disclosure Information

- **“The Americans with Disabilities Act: A Brief Overview”** Job Accommodation Network
<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/links/adasummary.htm>
- **“The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities”** National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability,
http://www.ncwd-youth.info/resources_&_Publications/411.html
- **“Youth, Disclosure, and the Workplace: Why, When, What, and How”** Office of Disability Employment Policy
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/ydw.htm>

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