

Disability Campaign.org

Disclosing Your Disability to an Employer



You've volunteered and networked, diligently searching for a job. Perhaps you've even applied to a position and now have an interview. But there's a caveat: you have a disability and you're uncertain as to whether you should disclose your disability to a prospective employer. Or maybe you already have the job, but are unsure of when to mention to your employer that you have a disabling health condition. If so, you're not alone. Many people with disabilities who are seeking employment or currently employed have wrestled with this very issue.

Coming to a decision on if, to what extent, and/or when to disclose a disability to an employer is a very personal choice — one that only YOU can make. It's a decision that ought to be made carefully and thoughtfully to best protect your legal rights, your health, and employment opportunities.

Should I disclose my disability?

Legally, you are NOT obligated to disclose your disability to your employer. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) allows you to disclose if you wish and at any point in time. If you have a disability that is visibly noticeable, such as if you're in a wheelchair or use a white cane, you may not feel like you have much of an option.

But you can still decide how much detail you provide to your employer about the cause of your disability and the extent of your disability. To help you decide, below are some common concerns regarding the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing a disability to an employer.



Advantages

- ✓ Obtain accommodations protected under the ADA.
- ✓ Protection under the ADA if you were to be fired due to disability discrimination.
- ✓ Stand out as an applicant by making your disability an asset. Show your employer how you can increase workplace diversity, help them better target the disability market, or how your need for accessible computer apps has made you tech savvy.
- ✓ Promote disability awareness.
- ✓ Safety — if your employer knows you have a disability that may require medical treatment, you'll likely be helped in a timelier manner in the case of an emergency.

Disadvantages

- ✗ Discrimination — even with the ADA and anti-discrimination laws, people with disabilities can be discriminated in workplaces. This is particularly troublesome for people whose disabilities carry social stigmas, such as mental illness or intellectual disabilities.
- ✗ Resentment from employer or coworkers for the lack of openness, such as if you were to later need to take time off.
- ✗ Your employer or coworkers may have pre- or misconceptions about disability and people with disabilities.
- ✗ The risk of perhaps not obtaining the job.

If YES, how much information do I disclose?

You don't have to give the employer all the details of your disability. You can provide them with general or specific details. Examples of broad descriptions include: "I have a medical condition that makes it difficult for me to sit for long periods" or "I have a mental illness." If you wish to be



more specific you can say, "I suffer from sciatic pain and will likely need a standup desk," or "I am looking for a job that involves routine, as I have an anxiety disorder that is well-managed but is triggered sometimes with high stress or sudden changes." If you're unsure of how much information to disclose, begin by sharing general information about your disability and then provide more details as needed. Also, consider talking to your doctor, therapist, or job coach about what information you will disclose to your employer.

If YES, when do I tell the employer?

To be protected under the ADA, you have the options to disclose your disability:

- before the hiring interview,
- during the interview,
- after the interview, but before a job offer,
- after a job offer, but before starting the job,
- or any time after beginning the job.



At whatever point you choose to disclose your disability, make sure that you do so before any serious problems arise on the job. Your disability may also dictate at what point you disclose this information. For example, if you have a noticeable disability, you will likely have to discuss your disability to some extent with your employer at the time of the interview or before then. Also, if you have a disability that may require emergency medical treatment — for example, diabetes or epilepsy — for your own safety, you should disclose this information sooner than later.

Preparing to disclose your disability

1. Research the prospective employer's attitude on disability. Are they a disability-friendly workplace? Do they have experience with employees who have disabilities?
2. With the job description in front of you, assess your employment skills and identify any accommodations you may need during the hiring process or at work. For more information on your legal rights to accommodations in the workplace, [visit the United States Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy \(ODEP\) website](#).
3. If the accommodation requested is not obvious, an employer can ask you for reasonable supporting documentation. Determine what type of documentation you need. This may be a note from your physician, physical therapist, psychiatrist, etc.
4. Figure out who you need to tell. This may be a supervisor or manager who must approve an accommodation. It could also be a human resources staff member. To prevent miscommunication or problems at the workplace, avoid disclosing details about your disability to a coworker if you have yet to communicate that information to your supervisor.
5. Plan what you are going to say. If it helps, write it down and practice communicating your need with confidence. Topics to discuss can include the type of disability, symptoms that indicate a medical emergency, accommodations, and helpful resources for your employer, such as your [regional Americans With Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Center](#).

If NO, what are my next steps?

If you choose not to disclose your disability to your prospective or current employer, stay connected to local and online resources on disability topics and your rights as an employee — including those listed on the next page and those available through our website, DisabilityCampaign.org.

References and Helpful Websites

“Contact Your Region/ADA Center.” The National Network of Information, Guidance, and Training on the Americans with Disabilities Act. Retrieved December 1, 2017 from <https://adata.org/find-your-region>

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