

Self-Disclosure Resources

This tool provides sample language that can be shared with apprentices, employees and managers regarding the self-identification and disclosure process surrounding disability. This resource is intended to provide language and information about self-disclosure. Feel free to copy and paste relevant information presented here into company handbooks or staff resources.

Commitment to advocating for people with disabilities (PWD)

To start, for employees to feel comfortable with requesting accommodation and disclosing disabilities, employers should affirmatively state their commitment to advocacy for employees with disability.

Sample language:

[COMPANY] is helping employers weave disability into their diversity and inclusion efforts. Recruiting, hiring, retaining, and advancing workers with disabilities is simply good for business. Progressive employers everywhere are learning that businesses inclusive of people with disabilities, including veterans with disabilities, benefit from a wider pool of talent, skills, and creative business solutions.

Individuals with disabilities may also offer employers a competitive edge, helping diversify and strengthen their workplaces through varied perspectives on how to confront challenges and get the job done. They bring creativity, innovation, problem solving, and commitment to the workplace. Studies have shown that employees with disabilities stay at jobs longer, thus reducing the time and cost involved in retraining and replacing personnel. Other benefits reported by businesses include improvement in productivity and morale and more diversity in the workplace.

These benefits can have a real impact on a company's bottom line. In October 2018, Accenture, in partnership with the [American Association of People with Disabilities](#) (AAPD) and [Disability:IN](#), released "[Getting to Equal: The Disability Inclusion Advantage](#)," a report that revealed that companies who embrace best practices for employing and supporting PWD in their workforces consistently outperform their peers, including having, on average, 28 percent higher revenue, double the net income, and 30 percent higher economic profit margins.

Encouraging Self-Identification

The choice to self-identify as a person with a disability is entirely up to the individual. While it can be scary, voluntarily self-identifying is something that can benefit not just the individual,

but other employees with disabilities. It allows companies to ensure they are fostering an inclusive workplace, which means equal employment opportunities for all people with disabilities. Many firms are increasingly interested in fostering an environment that encourages self-identification in order to:

- Increase hiring and retention of qualified individuals with disabilities to capitalize on their unique skillset, talents, experiences, and perspectives.
- Ensure they are creating and sustaining diverse and inclusive workplaces.
- Achieve compliance with federal regulations requiring affirmative action in disability hiring, such as [Sections 501 and 503 of the Rehabilitation Act](#) (Section 503 covers any federal contractors).

In order to measure their success in meeting each of these objectives, it is critical that employers create an environment in which employees and applicants are comfortable self-identifying, including when a disability may be non-apparent. However, the research has shown that many individuals with disabilities experience fear about disclosing their disability at work. This fear can be based on previous negative experiences and may include concerns that the employer will:

- Choose not to hire them.
- Focus on their disability rather than actual work performance.
- Limit opportunities for advancement.
- Terminate them.

If your organization is interested creating an environment where employees are comfortable self-identifying, it can help to offer proactive, written assurances that their disclosure will not that jeopardize their employment status or career trajectory. To back up these assertions, companies should have a confidential, clear procedure for requesting accommodation that is detailed in an employee handbook or other employee-accessible source. If, applicable, add text to underscore that employees have the option to speak about accommodation with their direct supervisor.

Self-Disclosure Tips from the Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

Note: Following text has been adapted from a resource available on the JAN Website. This and other resources from JAN and can be accessed [here](#).

Disclosing a disability may be a consideration when starting a new job; transitioning from school, another job, or unemployment; or retaining a job after acquiring a disability. For individuals who may still be struggling with accepting their medical condition, making the

decision to disclose can be overwhelming. For individuals with impairments that are not visible, they may be concerned that that management and colleagues may not understand their disability. As with any new experience, preparation is vital. The following tips are for employees and provide an overview of the “dos and don'ts” of disclosure. Note that disclosing is a very personal decision, but some of the following tips may be helpful in making that decision.

JAN Do's and Don'ts

Do disclose when you need an accommodation

If you have a hidden disability such as brain injury or post-traumatic stress disorder, knowing when to disclose your condition can be a real dilemma.

Under the ADA you can request an accommodation at any time during the application process or while you are employed. You can request an accommodation even if you did not ask for one when applying for a job or after receiving a job offer. So when should you disclose that you have disability? In general, you should disclose your disability when you need to request a reasonable accommodation - when you know that there is a workplace barrier that is preventing you, due to a disability, from competing for a job, performing a job, or gaining equal access to a benefit of employment.

Do know who to disclose to

Note: see previous section on Encouraging Self-Identification

Many employers have their own in-house procedures that detail how they handle accommodation requests. Check your employee handbook or your company's intranet for this information. Also, if you have an EEO office or a human resources department, they can assist you. The other option is to talk to your manager or supervisor directly.

Do know how to disclose

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 can use "plain English" to make your request and you do not have to mention the ADA or use the phrase "reasonable accommodation." Once you disclose, then the interactive process should begin. At this point, your employer can ask for limited information about your disability and your need for accommodations.

Don't disclose too soon

Many people with hidden disabilities may feel that they are not being completely honest with an employer if they do not tell everything about their disability up front at the time of their interview. Just remember that you are not obligated to do so. When you disclose, just provide

basic information about your condition, your limitations, and what accommodations you may need.

Don't disclose too late

Don't wait to disclose until after you begin to experience work performance problems. It is better to disclose your disability and request accommodations before job performance suffers or conduct problems occur. Employers do not have to rescind discipline that occurred before they knew about the disability nor do they have to lower performance standards as a reasonable accommodation. Remember, the purpose of an accommodation is to enable a qualified person with a disability to perform the essential functions of the job. So, disclose when you first realize you are having difficulties.

Don't disclose to everyone

Remember that you have a right to keep information about your disability private. It is not necessary to inform coworkers and colleagues about your disability or your need for accommodations. While they may be aware of the accommodations, especially if you are allowed to take extra breaks or you have a flexible starting time, they are not entitled to know why. Your employer is required by the ADA to keep your disability and medical information confidential and to give it to managers and supervisors only on a need-to-know basis.

Most importantly, do your homework!

No one knows more about your disability than you do, so tell your employer what you think you need, but also research other accommodations options such as a flexible start time or working from home part of the time.

Companies may wish to download and post [this video](#) on their Intranet or company websites to share with their employees and job applicants who may be reluctant to self-identify, or who may not understand why they are being asked to self-identify.