

Disclosing Your Disability to an Employer

[Home](#)

Only you can decide whether and how much to tell your employer about your psychiatric disability. Telling your employer about your diagnosis is the only way to protect your legal right to any accommodations you might need to get or keep a job. However, revealing your disability may subject you to discrimination which could limit your opportunities for employment and advancement.

Disclosure is a complex decision and should be made with care. Here's what you might want to think about:

Preparing to Disclose

1. Assess your employment skills to determine whether you need help from your therapist or mental health agency to:

- Initiate contact or arranging an interview with the employer Interview Describe your disability Negotiate the terms of employment
- Negotiate accommodations

2. Identify any potential accommodations you might need during the hiring process or on your first day of work

3. Explore your feelings about having a mental illness and about sharing that information with others - remember, no one can force you to disclose if you don't want to

4. Research potential employers' attitudes toward mental illness and screen out unsupportive employers

- Have they hired someone with a psychiatric disability before? Do they personally know someone with a mental illness? What positive or negative experiences have they had in employing someone with a mental illness? Do they show signs -- newsletters, posted notices, employee education programs about mental illness, etc. -- of encouraging a diverse workforce? Do they have a corporate culture that favors flex time, mentoring programs, telecommuting, flexible benefit plans, and other programs that help employees work efficiently and well?
- Does the job have certain requirements (e.g., child care, high security, some government positions) that would put you at a disadvantage if you disclosed your diagnosis?

5. Weigh the benefits and risks of disclosure

- Do you need to involve an outside agency to get or keep the job? Do you need accommodation or other employer support? When will you need this accommodation? Do other people in the company need similar accommodation?

- How stressful will it be for you to hide your disability?

6. If you decide not to disclose, find other ways to get the support you need

- Behind-the-scenes support from friends, therapists, etc.
- Research potential employers who provide these supports to all employees

7. If you decide to disclose, plan in advance how you'll handle it

- Who will say it (you, your therapist, your job coach, etc.) What to say (see below)

When to say it

Under the ADA, a person with a disability can choose to disclose at any time, and is not required to disclose at all unless s/he wants to request an accommodation or wants other protection under the law. Someone with a disability can disclose at any of these times:

- Before the hiring interview During the interview After the interview but before any job offer After a job offer but before starting a job
- Anytime after beginning a job

We recommend disclosing sometime before serious problems arise on the job. It is unlikely that you would be protected under the ADA if you disclosed right before you were about to get fired. Employers are most likely to be responsive to a disclosure if they think it is done in good faith, and not as a last-ditch effort to keep your job.

- Who to tell
 - Your supervisor or manager, if he or she must provide or approve an accommodation The EEO/Affirmative Action officer or Human Resources staff, if no immediate accommodation is needed, but you would like the protection of the ADA The person interviewing you or Human Resources staff, if you might need accommodation during the hiring process
 - The Employee Assistance Program staff, if you are already on the job, experiencing difficulties, and need help deciding how, how much, and to whom to disclose

When You Disclose

- 1. Decide how specific you will be in describing your psychiatric disability
 - General terms: a disability, a medical condition, an illness Vague but more specific terms: a biochemical imbalance, a neurological problem, a brain disorder, difficulty with stress Specifically referring to mental illness: a mental illness, psychiatric disorder, mental disability
 - Your exact diagnosis: schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, major depression, anxiety disorder

- 2. Describe the skills you have that make you able to perform the main duties of the job
 - qualifications technical skills
 - general work skills

3. Describe any functional limitations or behaviors caused by your disability which interfere with your performance (See Steps to Define Functional Limitations)4. Identify the accommodations you need to overcome those functional limitations or behaviors (See Steps to Identify Reasonable Accommodations) 5. Optional: You may choose to describe the behaviors or symptoms the employer might observe and tell the employer what steps to take as a result. 6. Point the employer to resources for further information

- Employment specialist, supported employment provider, rehabilitation counselor, job coach Doctor, psychiatrist Therapist, counselor, social worker
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [ADA Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers](#)
- Others listed in the [Resources Section](#)

You may find it helpful to prepare a script to read from. For example: "I have (preferred term for psychiatric disability) that I am recovering from. 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 that you might need about my ability to handle the job."

Note: The information contained in these pages is for educational purposes only, and is not legal advice. Individuals should contact the appropriate legal resources for specific legal advice regarding their particular situations.

