

Skills for Independent Living: Is it “Public” or “Private?”

Discussing “public” or “private” information

After finishing high school, your son or daughter may assume more responsibility for communicating with employers or postsecondary educational programs, making new friends, living in an apartment or a dormitory, and becoming the primary source for disclosing personal and disability information. This means that your youth may have challenges when establishing boundaries in disclosing personal information. Setting boundaries ahead of time about how much information to disclose and to whom is important.

a. Discuss whether each of the following is “private” or “public.”

- Disability information
- Hopes and dreams
- Financial information
- Passwords
- How old you are
- What gender you are
- Where you shopped for a coat
- Types of medical procedures
- Medications you take
- Social Security Number
- Bank account number
- Address
- School grades
- Color of your hair or eyes

b. Develop a list with your son or daughter of people they might interact with now that they are out of high school. Determine what the boundaries for “private” and “public” information might be. For example, would it be okay to disclose information about your dating life or personal problems to an admissions counselor? Will your landlord care about your specific learning challenges? Discuss how much to disclose (including email addresses and passwords) to the following individuals.

- Admissions counselor
- Office for Students with Disabilities staff
- Financial aid officer
- Residential advisor in the dormitory

- Landlord
- New friends
- Co-workers
- Supervisor
- People you meet at a company or sports event
- Members of a club
- Members of a disability support group
- Instructor or professors
- Parents or siblings

c. At the postsecondary level, your son or daughter may have to disclose specific information related to his or her disability in order to receive needed accommodations. Your youth should be prepared to discuss the following information with the disability support service staff.

- Information about the disability, including assessments and, if requested, documentation of the disability
- Types of accommodations needed in the postsecondary setting
- Types of accommodations that have worked in the past
- How the disability affects your youth's capacity to learn and study effectively
- How your son or daughter's disability and other life experiences contribute to his or her success

Role play with your son or daughter, creating scenarios where others may ask for private information. Encourage your youth to have the information with him or herself at all times. Brainstorm about other concerns or questions that might come up in a meeting or interview.

CAUTION: *Disclosing personal information online can affect your youth's life for years. There are particular websites where your son or daughter may be especially vulnerable, such as chat rooms, social media sites, and when unexpectedly rerouted to another site. You might want to demonstrate to your youth how pop-ups and ads draw the viewer in and then request personal information.*

Changes in conversational tone and content of those online (i.e., becoming more personal, intense, or suggestive) can be red flags for your son or daughter, indicating that they should sign off. Logging out, clicking away, signing off, or texting "bye" are ways to take charge online. Here are some other actions your son or daughter can take to control the online environment: implement privacy settings, use stop-and-think techniques before entering any personal information, and indicate their boundaries for specific content by stating "stop," and leaving the site. Talk to your parents or siblings about the situation.