

DISABILITY DISCLOSURE & ACCOMMODATIONS

Disability Disclosure & Accommodations

Who needs to know what and when?

This tip sheet will teach you why, when, and how to disclose areas, including disability, religion, and age. You will learn what is required from you and what you can expect from an employer. The information below provides you with a starting place—decisions about disclosure are very personal, and each individual needs to build their own approach. For further support with your specific situation, you can speak to a Career Counsellor, or Career Advisor by booking an appointment [Student Experience Portal](#) or by stopping by the Careerspace office at Trent Student Centre, room 320.

What is Disclosure?

Disclosure is a complex topic, often associated with disclosing a disability. However, disclosure can pertain to any piece of sensitive personal information you may decide to share or not share with a potential or current employer. This may include self-identification with an equity seeking group (LGBTQ+, person of colour, women, Indigenous persons, person with a disability), religion, ethnicity and/or culture.

Why disclose?

Thinking about how and when to disclose before it happens can help remove some potential stress in future situations. You may want to disclose some aspects of your identity for the following reasons:

To identify as part of an equity-deserving group. If an employer is recruiting candidates from equity-deserving groups, disclosure may help your application and increase the likelihood that you receive an interview. Employment equity legislation does not require them to give you an interview or the job—they are still required to hire the most qualified candidate. However, this is often a sign that the organization is open and supportive of disclosures.

To demonstrate relevant knowledge and experience. If the position involves working within a specific community, you may want to disclose that you are a member of that community, and any experiences you have from living, volunteering, or working in that community.

You can choose to disclose at any time (including not at all), so how do you decide when is the right time? It might occur as direct communication with the employer, or as part of your response to an interview question. However, you may also decide to disclose information prior to or after the interview. The below section provides considerations for disclosure when requesting accommodation:

In the Resume or Cover Letter Be sure to focus on your strengths and experience, and why you are a strong candidate for the role. However, consider how disclosure at this point may further highlight your suitability as a candidate if the information you share is relevant to the position you are applying for. Be aware of how including details such as organization and club names, extracurricular affiliations, etc. may lead to unintentional disclosure. Also consider further researching the values, practices, and work culture of the organization you are applying for.

Space on a resume & cover letter is limited, so you may prefer to disclose during a conversation, where you can attend to any concerns or questions that arise. Before, during, or after the Interview.

When you receive an interview offer, it is helpful to know what will happen during the interview process. If details are not provided, ask about the length of the interview, interview type, and whether there will be any assessments, tours, or other components. This information can help you assess whether disclosure and/or accommodation is needed.

Many people prefer to disclose their need for accommodations at this stage because they can have a conversation with the recruiter before the interview, the hiring team at the interview, and /or in the follow-up after the interview. For accommodations related to disability, it may be important to consider whether your disability will be visible when you attend the interview. Will disclosing beforehand raise or lower your stress level? See the below section on “How to Disclose” for further guidance about having this conversation.

References

You can speak with your references before they are contacted if you are concerned, they may inadvertently disclose personal information you are not ready to share.

After job offer and before first day of work

When you receive a job offer, the employer has shown that they believe you are the best candidate to do the job. Many people are concerned that disclosing a need for accommodations at this point may lead the employer to rescind the job offer; however, this is very unlikely as there can be legal ramifications through the Ontario Human Rights Code if this happens.

If you have not required accommodation during the application and interview process but do require them to fulfil the job, you may decide this is the best time to disclose. Disclosing before you start the job can be beneficial; it can help ensure that all required accommodation is set up before you arrive for another on-boarding experience. It gives the manager time to familiarize themselves with any relevant information or policies, and to gather other resources as needed.

After you begin work some people like to wait until they have been in the role for a while to disclose personal information. They feel that this allows them to establish themselves and to develop trusting relationships before disclosing. For requests for accommodations, consider requesting a meeting with your supervisor to discuss issues you want the employer to know. You should be prepared to answer questions related to the potential impact on the team and the organization, but do not need to necessarily include every detail.

Bringing up the possibility of requiring some accommodation in the future opens the door for open communication. Being open and honest at the start of your role, even if you do not require accommodation, or do not know what accommodation you will require yet, can make it easier to have these conversations later.

In the role, when need for accommodations arises If you wait to disclose information until a challenge arises, this may be a high stress scenario, and you may not be able to best speak to what you need, why you need it, and how you will be able to do the required tasks of the job. Also, waiting until a challenge arises to disclose may affect your relationship with your manager. On the other hand, if up to that point you have seen no need to disclose, you may prefer to just address the situation when a challenge arises. It is important to consider what to disclose to enable your employer to best support you and for you to fulfil your role. It is recommended that you have a formal meeting with your employer (and HR) to discuss what kind of accommodation is required. Reflection and present the assorted options and workable solutions for the situation.

The below section provides considerations for disclosure of personal information not related to accommodations:

In the Resume or Cover Letter

While your resume and cover letter should focus on your relevant strengths and experiences for the role you are applying for, you may consider disclosing personal information that supports your suitability as a candidate. At the same time, though the role may connect strongly with a dimension of your identity, that does not mean you need to explain that to the employer. Be aware of how details such as organization and club names, extra-curricular affiliations, etc. May lead to unintentional disclosure. Also explore when the r and how the organization’s practices are aligned with their espoused values and values and priorities. If you are less comfortable disclosing at this stage, you can also disclose during a conversation, where you can attend to any concerns or questions that arise.

References

You can speak with your references before they are contacted if you are concerned, they may inadvertently disclose personal information you are not ready to share.

After job offer and before first day of work

When you receive a job offer, the employer has shown that they believe you are the best candidate to do the job. Many people are concerned that certain kinds of disclosure at this point may lead the employer to rescind the job offer; however, this is very unlikely as there can be legal ramifications through the Ontario Human Rights Code if this happens. Disclosing aspects of your identity is your choice and you are not obliged to do so.

After you begin work

Some people like to wait until they have been in the role for a while to disclose personal information. They feel that this allows them to establish themselves and to develop trusting relationships before disclosing.

How to disclose and/or ask for accommodation?

When you disclose, you want to keep in mind the following things:

- Focus on what you need, not your diagnosis or why –When disclosing the need for accommodations, focus on the functional limitations, not the diagnosis. What do you need from the employer/supervisor (e.g. time, equipment, flexibility, etc.) to do your job in the most efficient and effective way.
- Focus on your strengths-provide examples of how you have managed or how accommodations have facilitated your success in the past. Show how these experiences have led to success and what strengths you have developed as a result.
- Be aware of employer requests –employers may ask you to demonstrate specific Bonafide job requirements, to ensure you can meet the requirements of your role. Employers may also request medical or other documentation if you are requesting accommodation. Check with HR around which forms to use. Forms should focus on an assessment of your functional ability/limitations rather than focusing on diagnostic information.
- Keep an open mind –be ready to consider a variety of options for meeting your needs, and review these with your manager and/or Human Resources to determine what will work best for all parties while meeting your accommodation needs.
- When disclosing a need for accommodation due to non-disability related factors (ex. Accommodated schedule for childcare, time/space for religious activities), focus on how you will still meet workflow or deadlines and priorities.
- Consider writing a script:
 - “Hi, my name is (blank). And I am a student at Brock University in the (blank) program. I feel that I am the best candidate for this job because of my (skills required to complete the essential functions of this job) which relate to the skills as mentioned in the posting. However, sometimes I have difficulties (concentrating, seeing plain text on the screen, difficulties with memory). I have learned to overcome these obstacles by (taking detailed notes, using Zoom software to magnify the screen, etc.) which has allowed me to be successful in my studies and previous work experiences. I can use this accommodation successfully and know that these differences will not affect my ability to do this job. And in fact, I can bring a new perspective to this role. I am happy to answer any questions that you may have”.

Can an employer deny me accommodation?

- Employers in Ontario are required to provide reasonable accommodations to the point of undue hardship. Undue hardship is evaluated by cost, funding, and health and safety requirements. For more information, see the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#).
- An employer may dismiss your application or deny accommodation if the requirement in question is a **Bonafide requirement** of the job. A **Bonafide job requirement** is a task/qualification that is required in the context of the job (although it may be seen as discriminatory in other contexts).

Example: in Ontario, to be legally allowed to serve alcohol you must be over 18 years of age. Employers are allowed to reject applications from people who are under 18, although they are legally allowed to work. In other contexts, this would be seen as age discrimination.

- An employer may ask you to demonstrate your ability to meet a Bonafide requirement of the job. Bonafide means “good faith” or “genuine,” and in this case, a requirement is evaluated to see if it is possible to accommodate, without causing undue hardship to the employer to accommodate for.

Example: At an interview to be a heavy lifting warehouse worker, the interviewer may ask you to lift 75 pounds, as outlined in the job description, to ensure you are able to carry out the responsibilities of the role.

- For more information about your protections, see the [Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) page on Policies & Resources related to disability.
- Additionally, [Policy on preventing discrimination based on mental health disabilities and addictions | Ontario Human Rights Commission \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#)

Additional Helpful Websites & Resources

[Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) (OHRC). The OHRC works to build respect for human rights in all aspects of life in Ontario. It looks at the roots of discrimination, develops policy for preventing different forms of discrimination, and works to raise awareness of human rights issues. The OHRC intervenes, as needed, at tribunals and all levels of court on human rights issues with broad public interest or concern, with different sectors and groups, to promote organizational change and to break down barriers to equity and success.

Lime Connect [Lime Connect](#) A global not for profit organization that works to connect high potential university students and professionals with disabilities with scholarships, internships, and careers. Lime Connect works with several corporate partners to help educate them and develop opportunities for persons with disabilities. Check out their opportunities and programs on their website.

Career Wise [Career Wise](#) for articles using key words such as disclosure, diversity, accommodations, inclusivity Career Wise is produced by CERIC, a charitable organization that advances education and research in career counselling and career development.

Elements of the Disclosure Process

This activity is designed to help you understand the thought process needed when deciding whether or not to disclose your disability to an employer. Based on your career goals, think about your understanding of your career of choice, such as the job responsibilities, essential functions of the job, qualifications, etc. Once you understand the requirements of a specific career, you can begin to think about appropriate job accommodations that you will need. All of these steps are involved in the decision of whether or not to disclose your disability. Let us move systematically through the process...

State the job duties you describe as potentially difficult for you to perform.

Now, think about possible accommodations. Are there accommodations you have used in the past that will enable you to perform the above task(s)? If so, please list them below:

Are there still job duties, which you may be unable to perform? Research an accommodation, which might enable you to perform the task. In addition to listing additional job duties below, list as many resources as possible which will enable you to research possible accommodations.

Finally, imagine that you are meeting with a potential employer. You need to disclose your disability to assure that you will receive the necessary accommodations on the job. In complete sentences, describe your disability and what strategies or accommodations you will need to perform the job successfully (Peterson & Sherman, 1997).
