

CHECK THESE OUT...



The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is the leading source of free, expert, and confidential guidance on workplace accommodations and disability employment issues. [Job Accommodation Network](#)

The ADA National Network provides information, guidance and training on the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), tailored to meet the needs of business, government and individuals at local, regional and national levels. [ADA Disability and Business Technical Assistance Centers](#)

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focus

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TOPIC WATCH

Each month we will feature a different topic: expanding the knowledge, resources, and peer networking in targeted areas. These target areas will include workforce development, transition, supported education, leadership, organizational development, sustainability, and others as they are identified.

Disclosure in the Workplace

Although great strides have been made toward diminishing stigma and discrimination against people with mental health needs, many individuals remain hesitant and unsure about what to reveal in a professional environment. There have been significant national efforts to promote a better public understanding of mental illness, treatment services, and the impact of mental illness on the lives of those it touches. American society is certainly more aware of the realities of mental health challenges than it was decades ago. At the same time, unfortunately, misconceptions, stigma and fear persist, with media depictions of individuals with mental health needs as potentially violent and dangerous being commonplace.

These conflicting trends can make it hard for individuals to know how to talk about their mental health needs in a workplace environment. People with mental health needs want to contribute to society, support themselves and their loved ones and enjoy the sense of purpose that comes with meaningful work. At the same time, they may need accommodations to realize that desire. Even if they don't feel they need specific accommodations, they may want to be open about their mental health condition. Given the conflicting pressures between increased public understanding and ongoing stigma, how should someone with mental health needs go about disclosing them in the working world?

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Disclosing your disability in an employment setting is ultimately a personal decision, and can change depending upon the details of the situation, and whether or not there is a need for an accommodation. (An “accommodation” is any change to your work situation that will help you to succeed, including changes to scheduling, the work environment, or how you complete work-related tasks.) The Americans with Disabilities Act obligates employers to accommodate the needs of their workers with disabilities, including mental illnesses. However, disclosure is necessary to receive a reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you want to ask for an accommodation to complete the application process, or to do job-related tasks, you will need to disclose your mental health condition. Disclosure should occur 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. On the other hand, if you do not need an accommodation, disclosing your disability is your own decision.

Entering the World of Work: What Youth with Mental Health Needs Should Know about Accommodations

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/pubs/fact/transitioning.htm#UOrcnogo45s>



When deciding whether or not to disclose your mental illness to your employer, there are a number of pros and cons to take into account. Some reasons for disclosing a mental illness include:

- Disclosure can assist in developing a trusting relationship with your employer;
- Discussions around your mental health needs can allow you to strategize with your employer regarding the most effective workplace adjustment strategies;
- Misconceptions regarding your employment can be minimized;
- Work related adjustments can be made quickly if you become ill;
- Disclosure can assist your employer in understanding that impacts on your job are usually temporary;
- Disclosure is required if you feel that you could benefit from ADA accommodations within the workplace; and
- Disclosure can assist the staff and management in better understanding and accepting those with a mental illness in the future.

There can also be many reasons for not disclosing. These might include:

- You are confident that your mental illness will have no effect on your ability to do the job;
- The fear of stigma overrides your desire to receive accommodations and support in the workplace;
- The time is not right within your work environment due to obvious stigma and a general lack of education regarding mental illness; and
- You feel that disclosure may provoke unnecessary curiosity, concern and insensitive questions.

Should you tell your employer and co-workers about your mental illness?



http://jobaccess.gov.au/Jobseekers/Getting_work/How_to_disclose_disability_to_an_employer/Pages/Should_you_tell_your_employer.aspx

Tips on How to Best Handle Disclosure in the Work Place



Only you can decide whether, how much and when to tell your employer about your mental illness. 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, and can also have positive benefits. However, revealing your disability can open the door to negative effects like stigma and discrimination too.

Disclosure should be made with care. When disclosing your mental health needs to your employer or within your workplace, consider these suggestions:

1. Determine if you need help from your therapist or mental health provider to:
 - a. Describe your disability or,
 - b. Negotiate accommodations.
2. Identify all potential accommodations you might need during the hiring process or on your first day of work.
3. Research potential employers' attitudes toward mental illness. For example:
 - a. Have they hired others that are open regarding their mental illness or needs?
 - b. Are there newsletters, posted notices, or employee education programs about mental illness in the workplace?
 - c. Do they have a flexible and supportive corporate culture that favors flex time, mentoring programs, telecommuting, flexible benefit plans, and other programs that help employees work efficiently and well?
4. Weigh the benefits and risks of disclosure.
 - a. How stressful will it be for you to hide your disability?
 - b. How concerned are you about the stigma that might result from disclosure?
 - c. Does your workplace welcome people with diverse needs and experiences?
5. If you decide to disclose, plan in advance by:
 - a. Deciding who you want to tell;
 - b. Determining if there is someone you feel you need to take with you;
 - c. Considering who you must tell if you are in need of accommodations; and
 - d. Developing an outline of what you want to say.
6. When you disclose, decide how specific you will be in describing your psychiatric disability or mental health needs. This may depend upon whether you are requesting ADA accommodations. These require specifics and a diagnosis to ensure eligibility.
7. Be prepared to accurately describe the skills you have that make you able to perform the main duties of the job despite your mental health challenges.
8. Describe any functional limitations or behaviors caused by your disability which could interfere with your performance, when these are most likely, and the average response and duration.
9. Identify the accommodations you need to overcome those functional limitations or behaviors.
10. You may also choose to describe the behaviors or symptoms the employer might observe and explain to them what steps to take as a result.
11. Point the employer to resources for further information and offer information on programs such as Mental Health First Aid.



If, in the end, you decide not to formally disclose your mental health needs, you can still find other ways to get the support you need. Your mental health service network, family and friends can be there to support you as you participate in the working world. Even if you feel that full disclosure in the workplace isn't the best choice for you, you may still be able to find a trusted peer or co-worker within the workplace that can help to support you on a daily basis. It may help to have someone you can turn to when in need of support or intervention that works with you and is comfortable with your mental health condition and needs.

Finally, remember that when it comes to deciding how, what and when to disclose information about your mental health needs, YOU have the power! It's ultimately up to you to decide whether or not you need accommodations, what and how much to tell your superiors and co-workers, and what balance to strike between avoiding the stress of stigma and having the supportive work environment you desire. By thinking through the options and deciding what is best for you, you can find the path forward to workplace success.