

# DISCLOSURE

**DO I START THE  
CONVERSATION AND  
LET ON, SPEAK UP  
AND REVEAL?**

**Start Here!**

**Foundational Information**

**1**

# DECISION-AID TOOL TABLE OF CONTENTS

## PART 1

# Start Here! Foundation Information

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# What is Disclosure?

## Key Terms

### Disability disclosure:

The process of sharing information about a diagnosis, symptoms, or needs with someone at work.<sup>1</sup>

### Full disclosure:

When a person is open about their disability and would disclose to anyone.<sup>1,2</sup>

### Selective disclosure:

Disclosing a diagnosis to only a few people at work, or not disclosing your diagnosis and instead sharing your symptoms or needs.<sup>1</sup>

### Workplace accommodations:

A formal modification to the work environment to help an employee do their job (e.g., standing desk, new office space).<sup>3</sup>



### Workplace adjustments:

Informal, simple changes and supports to help employees do their job (e.g., flexible work hours, work-from-home options).<sup>3-4</sup>

Examples of accommodations and adjustments include:<sup>3-5</sup>

- checklists
- work-from-home options
- limited customer contact
- noise cancelling earbuds
- quiet office spaces
- office spaces with no windows
- electronic organizers
- ergonomic equipment (e.g., chairs, office desk, etc.)
- written instructions



## What are the potential benefits of disclosing?

- Getting workplace accommodations and adjustments<sup>6,7,8</sup>
- Feeling relief after disclosing<sup>9,10</sup>
- Improving friendships and relationships at work<sup>7,11</sup>
- Improving first impressions with coworkers<sup>12</sup>
- Less stress and anxiety at work after disclosing<sup>13</sup>
- Increasing understanding of autism at your job<sup>7,13</sup>

## What are the potential risks of disclosing?

- Bullying and discrimination<sup>7,8,13,14</sup>
- Not getting an interview or getting fired after disclosing<sup>11,15</sup>
- Your boss / manager gives you less work and has lower expectations of you<sup>9,16</sup>
- You feel like you have to prove that you're capable to do the job<sup>13</sup>
- Disclosing makes your workplace relationships harder<sup>13</sup>



## Disclosure goals - why might you decide to disclose?

- You want to increase understanding of autism at work and be an autism advocate<sup>8,13,18,19</sup>
- You want to be honest<sup>7,10,19</sup>
- You want to disclose so that you can connect with other autistic employees at your workplace<sup>8,13</sup>
- You want to explain some of your behaviours that are because of your autism<sup>8,13,18</sup>
- You need accommodations or adjustments<sup>4,7,8,13,18,19</sup>



### What are my workplace rights?

In Canada, under the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Employment Equity Act, and provincial and territorial accessibility and human rights laws,<sup>17</sup> employers must accommodate you unless it causes them undue hardship. Undue hardship is when an accommodation may cost too much money, affects how the business runs, or creates health and/or safety risks to yourself and/or others. Employers may also ask for more information about your accommodation request, but this does not mean that you have to disclose your autism diagnosis.<sup>17</sup> Remember that provinces and territories have different laws. You can also look into disability rights advocacy organizations available in your province or territory if you need support.

# The Workplace Environment

The biggest factor that may influence your disclosure choice(s) is your **workplace environment** and **job role**.<sup>7,8,13,18,20</sup>

**Some factors at work that might make someone more likely to disclose include:**

- The culture at work is inclusive and accepting<sup>7,8,18</sup>
- Your workplace has policies that support employees with disabilities<sup>13,18,19</sup>
- You need supports or accommodations to do your job tasks<sup>7,8,13,18</sup>
- People at work know about autism and are understanding of it<sup>7,13,14</sup>
- Your workplace teaches employees about invisible disabilities like autism<sup>13</sup>

**Some factors at work that might make someone less likely to disclose include:**

- The culture at work is not inclusive<sup>7,13,18</sup>
- Your workplace does not have policies to support employees with disabilities<sup>13,18,19</sup>
- People at work are not educated about autism<sup>7,8,13</sup>
- Your employer seems hesitant to provide workplace supports<sup>7</sup>
- You don't think your autism impacts your job, and so it is not important to disclose<sup>7,13,14</sup>



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**Let's hear from the autistic youth and young adult advisors who helped develop this tool about their workplace environments!**

My workplace has an employee resource group specifically dedicated to advocating and supporting disabled team members, as well as a sub-committee that focuses on neurodivergent team members. Additionally, my small team has regular diversity and inclusion conversations where people are free to express their experiences/thoughts regarding various marginalized experiences (we have a panel discussion with neurodivergent team members coming up which has really motivated me to disclose more proactively).  
**(Woman, age 24)**

I felt my workplace was a fairly accepting and open community, but I chose not to disclose out of self-consciousness. I find being candid and discussing my condition to be very stressful, and chose to prioritize my mental health in this matter.  
**(Man, age 19)**

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# The Person/People You Might Disclose to

When deciding whether to disclose, it is important to **consider the person or people you are thinking about disclosing to**. For example, you could disclose to your **direct manager, boss, coworkers, union representative, and/or human resources**.<sup>7,8,13,20</sup>

**Your goals of disclosure might influence who you decide to disclose to, for example:**

- If you need workplace accommodations, you might consider disclosing to your manager, boss, union representative, or human resources<sup>7,13,18</sup>
- If you wanted to explain how your autism affects the work you do, you might consider disclosing to the coworkers on your team who you work with every day<sup>13</sup>

It is also important to think about some of the qualities and characteristics of the person or people you might disclose to.<sup>7,8,13,14,21,22</sup>



**What qualities and characteristics might make you more likely to disclose to someone?**

- They are kind, compassionate, and understanding<sup>7,8,13,21</sup>
- You are friends with them<sup>13</sup>
- They are non-judgemental and reliable<sup>7,8,13,21</sup>
- They are also on the autism spectrum or have another disability<sup>13</sup>
- They are personable and talk about their own life<sup>13</sup>
- They are knowledgeable about disabilities like autism<sup>13</sup>



You might be wondering how to assess these qualities in a person / people. Unfortunately, there is no golden rule or one-size-fits-all answer. This is based on your own judgment and interactions with that person / people. It is important to take the time you need when deciding who to disclose to.



**Let's hear from the autistic youth and young adult advisors who helped develop this tool about how they assess qualities and characteristics of people!**

Before disclosing to others, I typically assess whether or not they are easy to work and collaborate with, if they are personable, and if they've indicated tolerance and acceptance generally or specifically around disability. Although it's not always a guarantee, I've found that disclosing to people who are part of other marginalized groups (LGBTQ+, women/non-binary people, BIPOC, etc.) results in a positive experience.

**(Woman, age 24)**

One of the things that makes me comfortable with disclosing to a person, whether in the workplace or not, is if they have experience with autism themselves; that is, if they, themselves, have a disability, or if they have a close relationship with someone else with autism. This characteristic can be assuring and make a person more approachable for me as it ensures some common ground/level that allows for empathy.

**(Man, age 19)**





# Key Takeaways

Use the space and prompts below to write down some of your main takeaways after going through this part of the tool.

**One thing that I learned that I didn't know before is:**

**One thing that is the most interesting to me is:**

**One thing that I still wonder about is:**



Please take a break before moving on to Part 2 of the tool if you need to.

When you're ready, download the PDF of Part 2 of the tool and watch the introductory video on the tool webpage.



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