

Disclosing Disability

Deciding whether or not to disclose your disability to a prospective employer is a decision most students with a disability have to make at some time. It is often difficult to know when and how this information should be conveyed. The decisions you make about these issues will be personal to you and there are likely to be positives and negatives connected with each choice.

Reasons for Disclosure

- Many employers are committed to employing disabled people. Look out for the Employment Service 'two ticks' symbol on job advertisements
- Employment is covered by the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). If you declare your disability and feel you have been discriminated against during the application process, you can take your case to an Industrial Tribunal.
- You can take the opportunity to describe your disability in a positive light and may be able to use it to provide evidence of the competencies employers seek eg. flexibility, creative problem solving, negotiation etc.
- Many application forms ask direct questions about disability and health. If you give false information and an employer finds out then you could risk losing your job.
- There are financial schemes available like the Employment Service 'Access to Work Scheme' that you can apply to for help with specialist equipment and extra transport costs if needed.
- You may feel more comfortable knowing that you have been open and not kept anything back from the employer.

Reasons against Disclosure

- You may feel that you will be discriminated against and rejected by employers with pre-set ideas about the effects of disability.
- You may feel you do not wish to discuss your disability with a stranger.
- You may feel your disability has nothing to do with your ability to do the job.
- You may feel that an employer will not view your application objectively and will focus on your disability rather than your abilities.
- You may feel an employer will be concerned about the implications of your disability in terms of requiring additional time off through illness, specialist equipment etc.

How and When to Disclose

If you do decide to tell an employer about your disability then the next important decision is how and when to do this. You need to decide if you are happy to disclose the fact you have a disability at the outset i.e. when you complete a CV or application form or whether you would prefer to see how your applications go and bring the subject up at or prior to the interview stage.

Employers will be very interested in the skills that you can offer them. Living with your health issue or disability may in fact have given you extremely well honed skills in areas which are highly rated by employers such as: flexibility, time management, communication and negotiation. You will have to decide whether you wish to use examples related to your disability in a positive way to highlight these skills or prefer to concentrate on non disability related areas.

There are several possible times to disclose your health or disability to a potential employer.

Covering Letter

You could mention your health or disability in the letter accompanying your CV. If so it should be done in a positive manner making sure you highlight any particular achievements eg. successful past employment or voluntary work.

Application

There may be a section on the form that asks about any serious health conditions or disabilities. As mentioned above you need to decide whether you are happy for your disability to feature here. Remember however that, for example, it is much more of an achievement to get a degree in three years if you have ME, than if you don't.

Pre-interview

If you are invited for an interview and need practical support, you will need to get in contact with the employer in advance to enable them to make suitable arrangements. This may be a good time to instigate a brief discussion around your disability.

Interview

It may be that you will not be able to conceal your disability at an interview. In any interview you need to be relaxed and present yourself in a positive manner and this is particularly important if you feel the interviewer has little experience of your particular disability and is feeling anxious because of this. You may need to take the initiative in acknowledging this and introduce what **you** feel are the relevant issues in this context.

Top Tips

Do

- Be very positive about your skills and abilities. Don't allow room for doubts in the mind of the interviewer.
- Try to anticipate the interviewer's anxieties and address these.
- Provide factual information that is related to your ability to do the job but do not use complicated medical terminology. Remember, **you** know what your health situation or disability means and how it affects you, others may not.
- Be prepared for the interviewer to ask you questions about your disability.
- Be prepared to make suggestions about what adjustments you would need in order to carry out the duties of the job effectively.
- Give positive examples of how you have met your challenges in the past.
- Demonstrate that your disability has not limited your personal achievements, study or work performance
- Take along any relevant literature about funding or sources of information an employer could follow up if you feel this would be useful.

Don't

- Let your health or disability become the focus of the interview.
- Assume that an employer will view you in a negative way.

Remember

Job seeking can be a frustrating business for everyone and sometimes it is tempting to use the interview as a chance to air past grievances. Employers will want you to be positive and enthusiastic so concentrate on achievement and skills. If **you** time the declaration of your disability this will give you more control over the way it is seen by the employer.

Remember if you want to discuss any of these issues in more detail then you can contact your Careers Adviser, Disability Officer or Interact Mentor for a more in depth chat.

Good luck with the job-hunting.