



# Disclosure for Employers

If you're an employer looking to hire someone who is on the autism spectrum or has an intellectual disability, you should know about disclosure.

Your organization may have a diversity, equity & inclusion policy. As you'll find out in this document, creating a safe space for disclosure is just one step in an organization's DEI strategy.

## What is disclosure?

When an interviewee, candidate, or employee tells you they have a disability, or that they need specific supports to meet the expectations of their job, this is called **disclosure**.

A person may choose to disclose for many reasons, such as:

- They do not want to hide their disability.
- They would like to ask for an **accommodation** or discuss options related to accommodations to help them succeed in the interview or on the job.

Some examples of accommodations are:

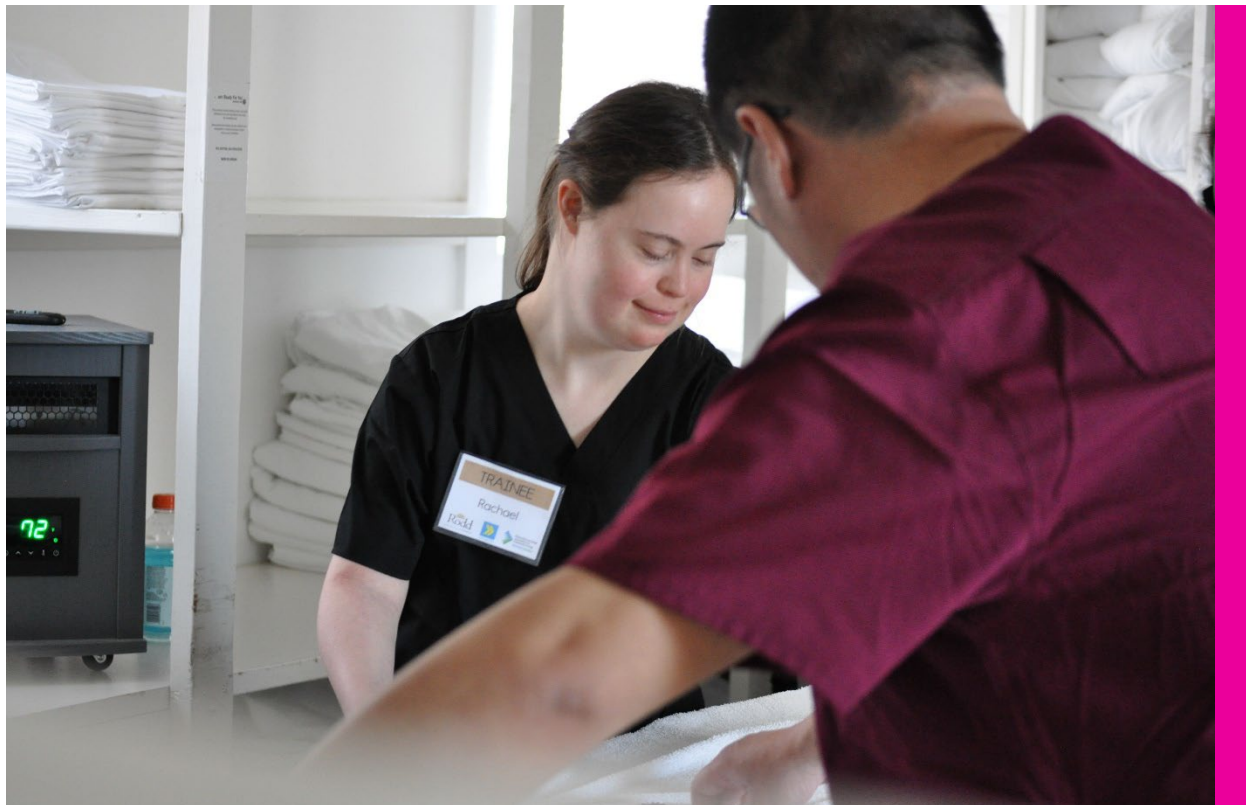
- An assistive device, such as noise-cancelling headphones
- Adjustments to their workstation or environment
- Particular ways of communicating instructions for job tasks
- Modified hours
- A work-from-home arrangement
- Assistance from a job coach or other support professional



## Disclosure can enable accommodations

Disclosure is often one of the steps toward a candidate or employee asking for and receiving an accommodation. Here's how this may happen:

- The employer creates a welcoming environment for disclosure.
- The candidate or employee feels comfortable and discloses.
- The candidate or employee then requests an accommodation if they feel it would help them succeed at work.
- The employer grants the accommodation.
- The candidate or employee feels empowered to succeed, whether this means feeling comfortable and doing well in an interview, or feeling they have the tools and support they need to do well at work.



## Prepare for disclosure

As an employer, you can support disclosure by being prepared for it. This means providing opportunities for people to share information about themselves. For example:



**On your website and in your job posting** – An accessibility & inclusion statement communicates that you are ready to hire people with disabilities and that you will offer them what they need to be successful. For example: “Company X is committed to inclusive hiring. We succeed when you succeed, and we are there to help you do it.”



**On the job application** – You may wish to add a field on your application form that gives people an opportunity to self-identify and therefore disclose that they have a disability. However, you cannot ask about specific diagnoses or medical information. Instead, think about following up with open-ended questions such as: “Are there specific accommodations you might require for your interview/to succeed in this job?” If they are comfortable, they may share this information with you.



**Before the job interview** – When setting up a job interview, share with the candidate what the interview process will be like, including interview questions, or consider having a “working interview” with task testing. Ask if they have any accommodation needs to aid them in succeeding in that process. For example, they may want to have a job coach accompany them to the interview. Let them know this is okay.



**During the job interview** – A job interview is as much about an applicant getting to know you, as an employer, as it is about you assessing their skills and fit. Some candidates may not disclose a disability before an interview because they are not sure if it will impact their performance and are not sure what to disclose, or if it is relevant to their application. Others may worry that disclosing could actually work against them. This makes the interview an important place to demonstrate to candidates that you are a safe workplace for people with disabilities and for anyone who may require reasonable accommodations. Build questions into your interviews or think about adopting interview processes (such as working or walk-through interviews) where you can demonstrate that your workplace is flexible and adaptable, and that you know that finding the best-fitted employees requires a supportive team and environment.



**Upon hiring** – Invite the new hire to share any information they feel comfortable with.

If you have an HR department, introduce the new hire to your HR representative.

You should also introduce ALL your new employees to representatives of any equity and diversity committees or working groups. This is an important way to show employees that your organization and their colleagues are working on inclusivity.

Your ultimate goal with any new employee is to make them feel comfortable so they can disclose if it feels right for them. Disclosure, whatever its form, will follow from feelings of comfort and safety in any environment.



These are best practices to use with **every** applicant, candidate, and employee. Offering the opportunity to disclose to everyone is a way of normalizing the way your company handles disclosure. It comes across as no big deal—because you do it with everyone. It's just one of the ways your organization delivers on the goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion and ensures it is hiring and supporting the best employees for the job.



Employers are **not** allowed to ask about a person's diagnosis or treatment. Questions must focus on the job function and whether the person can perform their duties and tasks. If you suspect someone has a disability but they have not disclosed, you **cannot** ask them the nature of the disability.

Even if you provide space on a job application to request an accommodation, applicants still may not do so. Many people may be unsure of what the job requires, or they may be new to the work, so it is difficult to anticipate what they might need to succeed.

- Different environments and different tasks may require different accommodations.
- Disclosure and requests for accommodation will develop as you build trust and rapport with an applicant or new employee—and the surest way to do that is provide ample opportunities to request accommodations and to build a reputation as an inclusive business that is a safe place to disclose.

There are several ways that disclosure can occur. All of them are important and valid ways to have a conversation about helping an applicant, interviewee, or employee succeed.

- Sometimes people will tell you about specific symptoms that impact their performance in that job.
- Other times people may choose to share their needs by focusing on a problem or offering a specific solution they know will help them.
- In some cases, people will choose to share that their diagnosis. But it is important to note that **no one is required to share medical or diagnostic information with you as an employer.**

Here are some examples of each way that disclosure may occur:

#### DIAGNOSTIC DISCLOSURE

- "I have an intellectual disability."
- "I am autistic."
- "I have autism."
- "I'm on the autism spectrum."
- "I have Down syndrome."

#### SYMPTOMATIC DISCLOSURE

- "I experience sensory overload in crowded work areas."
- "I get overwhelmed by large amounts of reading material."

#### NEEDS DISCLOSURE

- "I find the overhead lights are overwhelming. I would like to use lamps in my office."
- "I do best when I can work from home or in a place with few distractions."



## Create a safe space for disclosure

You can support employees to disclose by taking actions to make sure your workplace is comfortable.

Here are some things you can do:



### Pay attention to your work culture

Observe how staff interact with each other, and listen carefully. If you observe people saying discriminatory things or acting on bias, speak to them about it. Let them know this is not part of your employer brand.



### Foster a culture of inclusion

Enable and encourage employees to start employee resource groups or other networks where they can share their experiences and support each other.

Share your workplace guidelines on inclusion and anti-discrimination.



### Provide training and resources

There are many resources available to help you train your workforce to be more inclusive. Host a workshop, share links to videos, or have one-on-one trainings with employees to share the benefits of being an inclusive workplace. Be clear that all employees have a right to decide whether they will disclose a disability, and that you will maintain their confidentiality if they prefer.



### Communicate that your workplace is inclusive

When people see themselves reflected in your communications, they will recognize that your workplace is receptive to disclosure.

A company newsletter, intranet, or website is a great place to share stories of where you worked with an employee to adapt the workplace or implement an accommodation to help the employee succeed in their work.

Seeing other employees' experiences of inclusion and successful supports can help your new hire feel comfortable disclosing too.

## Disclosure is part of doing business



When an employee says they need to leave work early to pick up a child from school, that's a disclosure. They're telling you they have a need for an adjustment to their schedule because they're a parent.



When an employee asks you for a special chair because they're having trouble sitting for long periods, that's a disclosure. They're telling you they have a sore back and they need that tool to be productive and comfortable in their work.



When an employee asks to come in early and leave early so they can avoid traffic, that's a disclosure. They might be telling you they get anxious in rush hour.

In other words, as an employer **you respond to disclosure all the time!** And you're probably pretty good at it. So you'll be great at responding to a disclosure from someone who has an intellectual disability or is on the autism spectrum.

## Be aware of your power

As an employer, you are in a position of power. Many people who are on the autism spectrum or have an intellectual disability have to think very carefully about whether to disclose and how. In some cases, they may have had negative experiences disclosing in the past. People's comfort in disclosing will depend on how you welcome them and show you're a supportive employer who is interested in ensuring a positive experience for everyone in the workplace.



## Learn more about disclosure

There are plenty of resources available to you as an employer. Visit these links to learn more about creating a safe space for disclosure. And visit [theinclusiveworkplace.ca](https://theinclusiveworkplace.ca) to learn more.



[Mental Health Commission of Canada – A Practical Toolkit to Help Employers Build an Inclusive Workforce](#)



[The Inclusive Workplace Podcast – Episode #1](#)



[Disability Alliance BC. Disclosing Your Disability: A Legal Guide for People with Disabilities in BC](#)



[The Inclusive Workplace. Disclosure + Accommodations at Work: Advice from an Autistic Advocate](#)