



# Managing Personal Information in Employment

## *The Disclosure Decision*

We all have to manage personal information in our professional lives and make decisions about what, when, how, and with whom to share. It's important for providers to assist job seekers with decisions about managing their personal information and disclosure related to their mental health condition. Managing personal information in employment is most effective when the job seeker:

1

**Is clear about the purpose of disclosure and their desired outcome**

*What is the job seeker's ultimate goal in disclosing? Do they need an accommodation? Is there another reason for disclosing? It's important to review with the job seeker their decision and to discuss the pros and cons of disclosure. Remember, it is ultimately the job seeker's decision but as a practitioner you can provide helpful information and support throughout the process.*

2

**Discloses to the correct person**

*Who in the organization should the job seeker disclose to and request accommodations from? Assist the job seeker in identifying this person. It may be a human resources professional, the hiring manager, or their direct supervisor. It's also important to support the job seeker in assessing how much and the type of information they want their co-workers to know about their mental health condition.*

3

**Discloses in a timely and appropriate manner**

*When is the best time to disclose? Be sure to review with the job seeker early on any potential challenges or limitations, based on previous work or education experiences, that might influence their decision of when to disclose. Discuss past jobs, school settings, volunteer positions, or other experiences to help the job seeker identify any limitations that may be addressed with an accommodation. Ideally, the job seeker will want to make a request for an accommodation before their job is in jeopardy. For more detailed information about when to disclose, refer to the [Job Accommodation Network](#).*

4

**Is able to identify and articulate their strengths, skills, and disability-related needs**

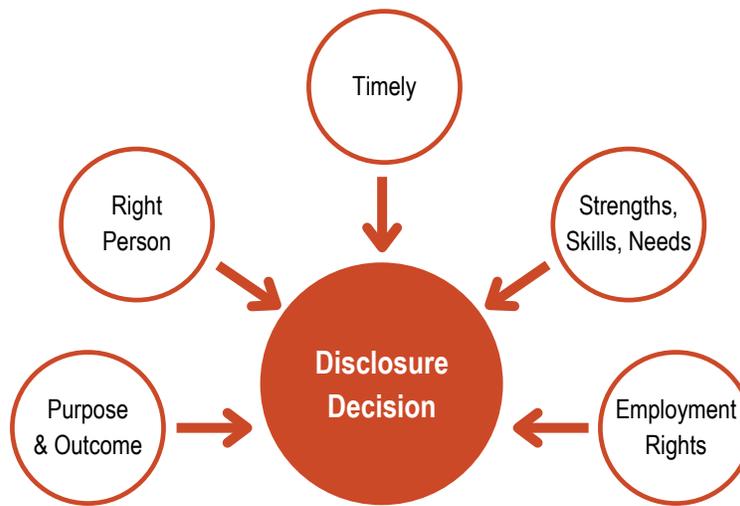
*What are the job seeker's strengths, skills, and disability-related needs? Help the job seeker identify these. Once the job seeker has identified their strengths, skills, and any support or accommodation needs, assist them in developing and practicing how to confidently convey this information to an employer.*

5

**Is knowledgeable about their rights, especially those related to receiving accommodations**

*Does the job seeker know their employment rights? Review with the job seeker the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and any other state specific disability and employment laws. Title I of the ADA provides guidance on employment related rights and employer responsibilities. The [Job Accommodation Network](#) is a free resource that provides information and guidance on reasonable accommodations.*

Munroven & Quigley, 2013



**Here's an example of how to assist job seekers in managing personal information in employment. Note how each of the areas above was considered in Paulo's disclosure decision.**

Paulo was offered a job as a sous chef in a large chain restaurant. He recently completed his training at the local community college and is excited to begin his job search. Due to his mental health condition, he gets distracted by outside ambient noises from the restaurant and the kitchen. While in school, he received very high grades and won awards for his excellent food preparation and aesthetically pleasing presentation of food. He was also praised for his cooperation and flexibility.

Paulo is concerned that the kitchen he will be working in will be very loud and distracting. He knows that he has had difficulties in the past with the noisy background based on his experiences in culinary arts school. He requested to meet with his employment specialist (ES) to talk about how to proceed with this new position and what supports he might need to be successful (**Purpose and Expected Outcome**). Paulo and the ES talked about what helped him in the past to maintain focus. When Paulo is focused he's able to prepare wonderful food. While in school, he was assigned the last work station farthest from the hallway, where there was minimal noise. This helped considerably (**Skills, Strengths, Needs**). Paulo feels uncomfortable speaking with his new employer because he doesn't want his co-workers to know about his mental health condition.

The ES provides Paulo with information about his state's laws that protect individuals with disabilities and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (**Employment Rights**). Paulo asks the ES, "Who do I talk to? What do I say?" The ES encourages Paulo to think about what he will say and how much he is comfortable sharing. Paulo doesn't want to disclose his mental health diagnosis to his new employer. His ES suggests describing the limitation he is experiencing along with the accommodations that have worked in the past. The ES says "It sounds like you have a need for an accommodation, what information would you like to tell your employer?" Paulo says "I don't want to disclose my specific diagnosis, but I'm ok with saying that I have a medical condition that makes it difficult for me to concentrate in noisy areas. And, that I've had success in the past with working farthest from the noisy areas. This has really helped me to be more focused and stay on task." Paulo says that he would like to discuss this before starting his job because he wants to start off on the right foot with an accommodation and supports in place (**Timely**).

The ES helps Paulo research the company and finds out that they have an HR department and that all accommodation requests go through them. Together, Paulo and the ES develop and practice what he will say when he speaks to HR (**Right Person**).

References:

1. Job Accommodation Network's publication "Employee's Practical Guide to Negotiating and Requesting Reasonable Accommodations Under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)." Retrieved from: <https://askjan.org/publications/individuals/employee-guide.cfm>
2. Mungovan, A. & Quigley, F. (2013). *Regional Disability Liaison Officers: Choosing Your Path, Disclosure: It's a Personal Decision*, University of Western Sydney, University of Ballarat
3. Hielscher, E. Waghorn, G. (2016). *The thematic congruence of a plan for helping people with severe mental illness manage their personal information in supported employment*. *Journal of Rehabilitation*, 82(1), 12-26.
4. McGahey, E., Wagnon, G., Lloyd, C., Morrissey, & Williams, P. L. (2014). *Formal plan for self-disclosure enhances supported employment outcomes among young people with severe mental illness*. *Early Intervention in Psychiatry*, 10, 178-185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/eip.12196>
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