

Accommodations and Disclosure in the Workplace

What you need to know

Disclosing a disability to an employer or admissions committee is an individual choice. Only you can decide when — and if — you want to share this information with a current or prospective employer or school.

“I wish for a world that views disability, mental or physical, not as a hindrance, but as unique attributes that can be seen as powerful assets if given the right opportunities.” — Oliver Sacks

Why ask for an accommodation?

You may want to consider accommodations if...

- You experience or anticipate challenges completing tasks, despite having the required skills and knowledge.
- The result is an equal opportunity for you to perform at the same level as others.
- It will result in access to equal opportunities in the workplace.
- It will help you meet the same level of benefits and privileges as others.

What to consider before disclosure

- Will your disclosure help you meet diversity recruitment practices?
- Will your disability impact your job performance or performance in the program?
- Deciding to disclose in one instance does not necessarily mean you have to disclose in every situation.
- Consider the nature of the work, your qualifications and the employer, school, policies and culture.
- Think about current trends in the environment, including the experiences of others who share a similar situation.
- Consider the impact on your overall health and wellness.

When to disclose

If you choose to disclose, think about your unique situation objectively. Consider the pros and cons of each of the following options for when to disclose:

- When applying to the job or program
- At the time of an interview offer
- During the interview
- At the time of a job or admission offer
- Once you begin a position/program
- After you encounter a problem or change (not recommended, but unpredictability may lead to this)
- Never — there may be informal adjustments you can make to your daily life that don't require formal accommodations.



Advantages of disclosing

- It prepares the employer or school for situations that may arise.
- It allows you access to formal accommodations.
- If there are any changes to your employment due to disability-related reasons, you may be protected by human rights laws.

Disadvantages of disclosing

- It may exclude you from opportunities in discriminatory environments.
- It may lead to discrimination from supervisors, co-workers or peers.
- Your employer or supervisor may focus more on potential issues than your actual work performance.

How to disclose

If you've decided to disclose or ask for accommodation, here are some tips.

1. Do your homework

- Understand the position requirements to assess your functional limitations within the job.
- Research some ideas on what adjustments may work for you (jan.org is helpful). Consult with your health professional (OT, MD, etc.).
- Set up a meeting or send an email (depending on when you disclose).
- Take a strengths-based approach instead of focusing on deficits; present solutions instead of problems.
- Use your support systems such as family, friends and medical professionals. You can also access support at McMaster: Student Accessibility Services (SAS), Student Wellness Centre (SWC) and Student Success Centre (SSC).

2. When you disclose

- Be positive — focus on your skills, qualifications and ability to do the job. Don't present your disability as a weakness, and practice or think about how you're disclosing.
- Identify any accommodations you may need. Include information about any necessary resources, expenses and procedures for accommodation.
- Encourage an open dialogue that includes questions and conversation.
- Follow up with the person to monitor the success of the accommodations and coordinate adjustments as needed.

Individual rights and responsibilities

- An employer or school must accommodate the needs of people with disabilities short of causing undue hardship.
- If you choose to disclose, schools and employers don't have the right to know what the disability is (i.e. your diagnosis). However, it's common to receive requests for supporting medical information that outlines your functional abilities, work impacts and suggested accommodations.
- If you request specific accommodations, it's your responsibility to inform the other party of your needs, cooperate in obtaining necessary information, participate in discussions about solutions and work with them on an ongoing basis to manage the accommodation process.
- If you choose not to disclose, and a situation arises, you may not be covered under the Ontario Human Rights Code.



Have questions?

Meet with a professional member of the SSC careers team. Career Access Professional Services (CAPS) provides a customized approach to skill-building and career development to help you overcome barriers you may experience during your career journey.

- **By appointment:** Book on OSCARplus > Student Success Centre > Appointments > Careers. Then, find the diversity/CAPS appointments.
- **By email:** Contact careeraccess@mcmaster.ca.

