

The 411 on Disability Disclosure

A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities

The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) is composed of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, and workforce development issues. NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, DC. The Collaborative is charged with assisting state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies.

Funded under a grant supported by the Office of Disability Employment Policy of the US Department of Labor, grant # E-9-4-1-0070. The opinions contained in this publication are those of the grantee/contractor and do not necessarily reflect those of the US Department of Labor.

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The suggested citation for this guide is as follows: *National Collaborative for Workforce and Disability for Youth (2005). Disclosure Workbook. Washington, DC: Institute for Educational Leadership.*

Information on the Collaborative can be found at

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>.

Information about the Office of Disability Employment Policy can be found at

<http://www.dol.gov/odep/>.

Information is also available at

<http://www.disabilityinfo.gov/>,

the comprehensive federal website

of disability-related government resources

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INTRODUCTION

When you opened this workbook, you made an important decision! You made a decision to learn about disability disclosure and what it can mean for you. This workbook provides the expertise about disclosing a disability, and you provide the expertise about yourself. This workbook does not tell you what to do. Rather, it helps you make informed decisions about disclosing your disability, decisions that will affect your educational, employment, and social lives. In fact, making the personal decision to disclose your disability can lead to greater confidence in yourself and your choices. Disclosure is a very personal decision, a decision that takes thought and practice. Both young people with visible disabilities and those with hidden (not readily apparent to others) disabilities can benefit from using this workbook.

This workbook is for you if

- you want to understand yourself better;
- you want to understand your disability better;
- you want to explain your disability better to others;
- you are deciding whether or not to disclose your disability;
- you have decided to disclose your disability but feel unprepared or uncomfortable with this challenge;
- you wonder if disclosing your disability could improve your educational, employment, and social lives.

The ultimate goal is for you to make an informed choice about disclosing your disability. Remember, this decision may change based on the particular person, situation or setting, and need for accommodations. Trust your instincts! The workbook introduces numerous examples of other young people struggling with the question of “to disclose” or “not to disclose.” If you decide to disclose your disability, we believe this “how to” workbook offers you the information and practice opportunities you will need to learn how to disclose most effectively. ENJOY!

SUGGESTIONS FOR USE

Each unit contains a general statement of purpose, useful terminology, a discussion section, and activities to allow you to understand and practice the ideas presented throughout the unit. As you move through each unit, you will gain the information necessary to make an informed decision about disclosure. We encourage you to complete the units in order, as the information in each unit is dependent on the information in previous units.

There is a sizeable amount of information to process and it may take several weeks to get through all of the units. It is important to become comfortable with many of the concepts, especially self-determination and informed choice, before moving on to other units concerning issues such as rights and responsibilities and accommodations. While most of the activities can be completed individually, some of the activities are meant to be completed in a small group. Make sure you surround yourself with people you trust and who know you and your strengths.

The following units provide activities to help you make some very important disclosure decisions such as the following:

- Should I disclose?
- If I decide to disclose, who is an appropriate person to tell?
- When should I disclose?
- How much should I disclose?
- What should I disclose?

UNIT 1

Self-Determination- the BIG Picture

Purpose

The purpose of Unit 1 is to introduce you to the process and the value of self-determination: making informed decisions through reflecting on and building on your strengths. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand the topic of self-determination. A questionnaire will help you examine your strengths in the area of self-determination and to consider some skills you would like to enhance. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion section on page 1-3.

Terminology

You may know some of these words already, or you may have just heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then, check your definitions against the glossary located in the back of this workbook. Here are the terms used in Unit 1:

Accommodation

Goals (long-term and short-term)

Informed choice

Respect

Self-determination

Values

Notes

Discussion

One of the key ways that adults define themselves and develop a sense of identity is through the many choices they have made throughout their lives. Young people as well as adults often struggle with the responsibility of making good decisions, oftentimes without accurate and complete information.

Teenagers make important choices such as choosing a part-time job, deciding which classes to take, selecting someone to date, and deciding what to do in their free time. These decisions aren't always easy. Although some of these decisions may only have short-term effects, other decisions will affect your life in the long term. You will make some of these decisions on your own, while you'll make other decisions in partnership with parents, friends, teachers, or advisors. Remember that some decisions must be made without having all of the necessary information available. Not all decisions can be well supported, but it's important to try to make the most informed decision.

Youth are rarely taught about informed choice while in high school. Informed choice is the process of making a decision after considering relevant facts and weighing the pros and cons (positives and negatives) of the decision. Making informed choices is a skill that must be practiced, encouraged, reflected upon (or thought about), and then practiced some more in order to be acquired. This process requires you to collect information before making a decision. You may be given information or you may research information on your own (perhaps by going online or talking to people). Informed decision-making is a skill that you will benefit from many times in your life when you are required to make crucial decisions.

INSERT

Self-determination is the desire, ability, and practice of directing one's own life. It is often referred to as "The BIG Picture" because it has so much to do with the person you are and the person you want to be.

END INSERT

Self-determination is the desire, ability, and practice of directing one's own life. It is often referred to as "The BIG Picture" because it has so much to do with the person you are and the person you want to be. You can think of it as an umbrella that covers the very important and personal matters that make up you. A self-determined person can set goals, make decisions, see options, solve problems, speak for him or herself, understand required supports, and evaluate outcomes (Martin & Marshall, 1996). Being a self-determined person helps you to make important choices and informed decisions in your life based on your abilities, interests, and attitudes. Self-determined people accept themselves, respect themselves, and value themselves for who they are and what they have to offer to others.

When people are self-determined, they can more easily identify their short-term and long-term personal goals. Sometimes short-term goals are steps you take to get to your long-term goal. In addition, self-determined individuals understand that some personal goals (whether short-term or long-term) can be reached independently, while also recognizing that all people seek out others to help them achieve all their goals. Self-determination empowers people to seek assistance when needed.

One important decision that many young people face is whether or not to disclose their disability. The decision to disclose a disability belongs solely to the person with the disability. Disability disclosure is a very personal choice and should definitely be an informed choice. If you have a disability, there are no requirements that you disclose your disability to anyone at any time, but in order to receive accommodations at work or in school, you must disclose.

If you do not require accommodations, it is generally not necessary to disclose. A self-determined person with skills in making informed choices will be better equipped to make this important decision about disclosure after trying some of the strategies like weighing the pros and cons and considering all the facts. If you decide to disclose your disability after thoughtful reflection on the subject, it is important to practice disclosing effectively with people whom you respect and trust, and who know you and your strengths well.

It's not easy to share information about your disability with others. This workbook was created to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to disclose information about your disability and to prepare you to disclose information about yourself and your disability in an effective manner if necessary. Complete the questionnaire on the following page to see just how much you know about yourself and your disability. Your answers can lead to an interesting discussion about your strengths and limitations, and how to accentuate and improve your skills in certain areas.

Umbrella – self determination graph

ACTIVITY:

Just what do you know about yourself and your disability?

Complete the questionnaire below. For each question, answer Yes, Sometimes, or No) that best describes yourself

1. Do you know what you do well in school?
2. Do you know what you do well outside of school?
3. Can you easily explain your skills and strengths to other people?
4. Do you know how you learn best?
5. Do you inform your teacher how you learn best?
6. Do you inform your employer how you learn best?
7. Do you ask for help when you need it?
8. Do you take responsibility for your own behavior?
9. Do you feel proud of yourself?
10. Do you set long-term and short-term goals for yourself?
11. Do you create lists for yourself to help you achieve your goals?
12. Are you present at your own IEP or 504 meetings?
13. Do you participate in your own IEP or 504 meetings?
14. Do you disclose your disability to others?
15. Do you like the reaction you get when you inform someone about your disability?
16. Do you practice disclosing your disability to others?
17. Do you describe your disability differently depending on the setting or the people?
18. Are there times you choose not to tell someone about your disability?
19. Do you know what “reasonable accommodation” means?
20. Do you know what accommodations you need in school in order to be successful?
21. Do you know what accommodations you need on the job in order to be successful?
22. Do you practice asking for the accommodations you need in school?
23. Do you practice asking for the accommodations you need on the job?

If you answered Yes to many of the questions, you should be very proud of yourself! You definitely have a good sense of yourself and your disability. This means you’re on the road to being a very self-determined individual! Of course you realize that there will always be room for improvement. Reflect on the questions you answered with a NO, and create some short-term goals designed to strengthen your areas of limitations.

If you answered Sometimes to many of the questions, you possess some very good skills in understanding yourself and your disability, but you have some specific areas that need to be developed. Once you have identified your strengths (the questions you answered with a YES), list the other areas that need work (the questions you answered with a NO) and prioritize them. Decide which areas of need are most important to focus on right now, and create some short-term goals to begin to strengthen your weaker spots.

If you answered No to many of the questions, you are at the beginning stage of understanding yourself and your disability. Take the next step and seek out others whom you trust and who know you well; ask them to help you sort out your areas of strengths and needs (you probably have more strengths than you realize). Share the results of the questionnaire with these individuals and ask them for assistance in developing some short-term goals for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of yourself.

Activity:

Self-Determined Short-Term Goals

Areas of need can be turned into areas of strength if you make a conscious effort and understand that this transformation won't happen overnight. Look over the results on the questionnaire and determine the areas you need to work on. Then develop three short-term goals that address these areas of need. Read the example below before completing the activity.

Remember, the only goal you can't achieve is the one you don't attempt!

Example:

If you answered NO to Question #1 ("Do you know what you do well (what your strengths are) in school?"), you may need to reflect on your areas of strengths and get input about your strengths from others who are familiar with you, such as your friends, parents, coaches, teachers, and employers. Make a list of the strengths they mention and select three of these strengths to develop goals around.

For example, Mira has identified her strengths in the areas of math, computers, and art. She has also identified her area of need as explaining her disability.

Now, keeping these strengths in mind (for example, math, computers, and art) answer the following questions:

Question 1: How can I use my strengths to improve my areas of need?

Answer #1: Mira has difficulty describing her disability in writing or words (area of need), but she can use her artistic abilities to explain her disability through images. This would also show people that while she has a disability in some areas, she still excels in other areas such as art.

Question #2: What short-term goals can I develop to highlight these strengths?

Answer #2: Mira can join an extracurricular activity, such as the school newspaper or volunteer to maintain the school website, or design sets for school plays.

Question #3: How can I use these strengths to reach my employment goals?

Answer #3: She can research which careers need people with strong skills in math, computers, and art. She may look into the graphic arts career field that interests her and highlights her skills. Maybe she can find a part-time job or internship in an art store or information technology firm.

Question #4: How can I use these strengths to reach my social goals?

Answer #4: Mira would like to broaden her circle of friends, but she finds it difficult to meet new people. She will try to meet a few new people in her

extracurricular activities and at her part-time job who have similar interests. She could also invite someone to an art exhibit.

Question #5: How can I use these strengths to reach my academic/educational goals?

Answer #5: Mira wants to improve her grades in English class this semester. She could improve her grade by talking to her teacher about using her artistic or technical skills to supplement her writing assignments or using these skills to aid in writing her final assignment.

Now, you try:

List your strengths noted on the questionnaire and any other strength you have identified.

Talk with others and list the strengths that they mention.

Select three of these strengths to focus on in this activity.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Focusing on these three strengths, answer the following questions:

Question 1: How can I use my strengths to improve my areas of need?

Question #2: What short-term goals can I develop to highlight these strengths?

Question #3: How can I use these strengths to reach my employment goals?

Question #4: How can I use these strengths to reach my social goals?

Question #5: How can I use these strengths to reach my academic and educational goals?

Unit 2:

Disclosure... what is it and why is it so important?

Purpose

The purpose of Unit 2 is to introduce you to the concept of disclosure.

Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand this topic. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion section on page 2-2.

Terminology

You may know some of these words already, or you may have just heard them in passing. First, define these words, as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used in Unit 2:

Disclosure

Sensitive information

Confidential

Discussion

When you tell someone something that was previously unknown, you are practicing disclosure. Disclosure comes from the word “disclose,” which means to open up, to reveal, or to tell. The term “disclosure” is used in different ways by different groups of people. For example, if you want to buy a house and need a loan, or if you need a loan for your college education, you must disclose, or share, your personal financial information with a loan officer at the bank. This information might include your income, savings and checking account information, any property you own, any debt you have, and any other relevant financial information.

When you disclose, you are intentionally releasing personal information about yourself for a specific purpose. Some personal information, such as your Social Security number, banking records, or medical records may be important to keep confidential. It is important to keep in mind that your decision to disclose, is personal and should be helpful to you. Remember that it is not essential to divulge specific personal information about your disability. What is most important and helpful is to provide information about 1) how your disability affects your capacity to learn and perform effectively, and 2) the environment, supports, and services you’ll need in order to access, participate in, and excel in your job, studies, and community. You must decide what and how much of this sensitive information is necessary to reveal in order to obtain the needed accommodations.

Here are some examples of disclosure. First, you might disclose your disability to a potential employer in order to receive needed job accommodations. Second, you might disclose your disability to new friends who have invited you to a concert because you need accessible seating close to the stage in order to see. Third, you might disclose your disability to your track coach because your math tutoring sessions overlap with track practice after school. Fourth, if you are applying for Social Security benefits, it is crucial for you to have your personal information related to your disability in order and ready to share with your benefits counselor. This may mean having your medical records, educational records, and recommendation letters organized. On the other hand, if you are applying for a disabled parking permit, you do not need to disclose all your medical and disability-related paperwork, but you only need to have a verification form completed by your medical doctor.

Let’s look at some examples in which an individual made the informed decision to disclose his or her disability in order to receive needed accommodations:

- Joe is deaf and will need an interpreter for a college interview.

- Joan, who is on the track team, has insulin-dependent diabetes and might need the help of her teammates if her blood sugar is low.
- Carlo, who has attention deficit disorder (ADD), needs directions in written form because he misses steps when they are presented orally.
- Stephanie uses a wheelchair and has a personal assistant, who helps her with filing paperwork in vertical filing cabinets, to facilitate her job as a chief financial officer.
- Colleen has schizophrenia (which is currently controlled with medication) and needs a private workspace or dividers in her work area to limit distractions and make her time at work more productive.
- Justin is autistic and needs a highly structured learning environment that focuses on his individual needs, which include development of social skills, language, and self-help.
- Melanie has dwarfism and needs a lower locker at school.

Activity

Effective disclosure occurs when you are knowledgeable about your disability and are able to describe both your disability-related needs and your skills and abilities clearly. Answering the questions below will help you effectively disclose your disability should the time come when you've decided disclosure is the best action.

Describe your disability-related needs: What needs related to your disability must be accommodated in order for you to be successful? For example, Sally needs all the written material at school and work to be in large print to accommodate her visual disability.

Describe your skills and abilities (think about what you do well at school, at home, at work, and in the community):

Scenario: Jesse has chosen to share information about his disability with his mentor at the manufacturing plant. He has decided to tell his mentor, Joe, about his poor reading skills and difficulty comprehending the new equipment training manuals. Jesse believes it is essential he tell Joe because he will need to miss work to attend training sessions that demonstrate use of the new equipment and verbally present the new information.

Now, think about what it is about yourself or your disability that may need to be revealed to the following people AND why it would be important to reveal information to this person about your disability:

College professor:

Potential employer:

New friend:

Community member (store owner, bank teller, police officer, etc.):

Family member:

Disability support service worker or coordinator:

Unit 3: Weighing the Advantages and Disadvantages of Disclosure

Purpose

The purpose of Unit 3 is to help you determine the advantages and disadvantages of disclosing your disability. It is only after considering all of the options that you can make an informed decision. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand this topic. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion section on page 3-3.

Terminology

You may know some of these words already, or you may have just heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary that is located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used in Unit 3:

Advantages

Disadvantages

Impact

Self-image

Self-advocacy

Discussion

Only you can decide whether or not you will want to disclose your disability (or any other sensitive information) to others. Read what one high school student had to say about the issue of disclosing a disability:

“I used to be ashamed about my disability and the fact that I couldn’t read very well or very fast ,but as I have gotten older, I know that I need to explain how I work and learn best to my boss. Now, I feel like I am a good employee.”

As with most important informed decisions you will make during your lifetime, there are both advantages and disadvantages associated with the decision to disclose. On the one hand, disability disclosure can open up opportunities for you to participate in activities that you may have avoided (or in which you have been unable to participate), and help you put into place a strong support system. On the other hand, it’s downright scary to tell someone something personal when there are no assurances that they will react positively to your news.

What follows is a summary of advantages and disadvantages to disclosure. This list is by no means exhaustive, but it may give you some good information to think about. Remember, what may seem a disadvantage in one setting or situation may be an advantage in another.

Advantages of disclosure:

- It allows you to receive reasonable accommodations so that you can pursue work, school, or community activities more effectively.
- It provides legal protection against discrimination (as specified in the Americans with Disabilities Act).
- It reduces stress, since protecting a “secret” can take a lot of energy.
- It gives you a clearer impression of what kinds of expectations people may have of you and your abilities.
- It ensures that you are getting what you need in order to be successful (for example, through an accommodation or medication).
- It provides full freedom to examine and question health insurance and other benefits.
- It provides greater freedom to communicate should you face changes in your particular situation.
- It improves your self-image through self-advocacy.
- It allows you to involve other professionals (for example, educators and employment service providers) in the learning of skills and the development of accommodations.

- It increases your comfort level.

Disadvantages of disclosure:

- It can cause you to relive bad past experiences that resulted in the loss of a job or negative responses from your peers.
- It can lead to the experience of exclusion.
- It can cause you to become an object of curiosity.
- It can lead to your being blamed if something doesn't go right.
- It can lead to your being treated differently than others.
- It can bring up conflicting feelings about your self-image.
- It can lead to your being viewed as needy, not self-sufficient, or unable to perform on par with peers.
- It could cause you to be overlooked for a job, team, group, or organization.
- Disclosing personal and sensitive information can be extremely difficult and embarrassing.

Consider the list above and talk to people close to you, such as friends (both with and without disabilities), teachers, mentors, coaches, parents, and others. First, decide whether or not you will need reasonable accommodation(s) in the classroom, on the job, or elsewhere in your community. If you do, or if you think you might, consider the personal advantages of disclosure.

Next, consider developing a personal philosophy about disclosure. What does it really mean to be a person with a disability? How does it affect your life? Only you can answer that question, because even people with the same disability feel differently and experience things differently. Read below about one student's philosophy on disclosure.

In the next unit, you will learn about how the law protects you if you choose to disclose.

Activity

Read each scenario carefully. Discuss and list some of the advantages and disadvantages to disclosing the sensitive information in each scenario.

Scenario 1 (Employment): Liz is 16 years old and eager to get her first real job. She has applied for a position working with five- and six-year-old children in an after-school day care program. The director of the program calls to tell Liz that she has the job and she wants Liz to come in and see her the next day. Liz wonders if she should tell the director that she was hospitalized after a seizure when she was 10 years old, but has not had one since then. Liz participates in several in- and out-of-school activities, and gets regular check-ups with her doctor. Think about the impact of Liz disclosing her seizure to her potential employer. What are the advantages or disadvantages of disclosing?

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

Scenario 2 (Postsecondary education): Calvin is extremely shy but excited about starting college. He is registering for his first semester of classes and realizes that all freshmen are required to take public speaking. Calvin stutters severely when he speaks, especially around new people. Consider Calvin's self-image and his concern about his stuttering. Would it be to Calvin's advantage or disadvantage to disclose his disability to his potential professors, classmates, and roommates?

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

Scenario 3 (Social setting): Brandy has cerebral palsy and requires the use of a wheelchair. Brandy has been invited to a pool party by one of her classmates on the weekend. Brandy cannot swim without help. If she goes to the pool party, someone will have to accompany her in the water, and all her friends will see.

Think about the impact of Brandy's disclosing her disability to her friends. What are some of the advantages or disadvantages of disclosure?

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

Activity:
Famous People Matching

Complete the matching activity below and reflect on how these famous people have surpassed the expectations of others to become leaders in their fields. The following famous people are individuals diagnosed with specific learning and other disabilities. Match each paragraph to the person it best describes. Write the letter of the correct person's name in the blank to the left of the paragraph. The answers are provided at the end.

- a. Thomas Edison
- b. Agatha Christie
- c. Albert Einstein
- d. Whoopi Goldberg
- e. James Earl Jones
- f. Cher
- g. Tom Cruise
- h. Ann Bancroft
- i. Walt Disney
- j. Leonardo Da Vinci
- k. Harriet Tubman
- l. Marlee Matlin
- m. Chris Burke
- n. Lucille Ball
- o. Carrie Fisher

1. _____ I am currently a very popular movie star. Some of the movies I have starred in are "Jerry Maguire," "Top Gun," and "The Last Samurai." I learn my lines by listening to a tape because I have dyslexia.
2. _____ Fans remember me best for my performance in the movies "The Color Purple" and "Sister Act," but I am also a comedian. I have struggled with a learning disability all my life.
3. _____ I was slow in school and had a hard time doing my work. I didn't do anything well until I realized a real strength of mine was drawing. I became a well-known cartoonist and movie producer. Some famous amusement parks have my name.
4. _____ I have always had to deal with my disability. My weakest area has always been math. However, even though I cannot balance a checkbook, I have become a movie star and won an Oscar for my lead in "Moonstruck." My daughter, Chastity, has learning disabilities, too.

5. _____ When I was a child, an overseer struck me. The blow fractured my skull causing me to have narcolepsy for the rest of my life. I rescued hundreds of slaves through the Underground Railroad.
 6. _____ As a boy, I had such a severe stutter that, for eight years, I refused to talk and was functionally mute. Today, I am the voice of CNN and Bell Atlantic. I am also known for being the voice of Darth Vader in the original “Star Wars” movie.
 7. _____ I love to write mystery stories and plays. One of my favorite plays is “The Mousetrap.” My learning disability is in the area of writing. My disability is so severe that I dictate my stories for others to type for me.
 8. _____ I am the first hearing-impaired actress to win an Oscar. I won a 1987 Academy Award for Best Actress in “Children of a Lesser God.”
 9. _____ I always had trouble learning. My teachers said I was “obnoxious” and had “artistic talent.” During my lifetime, my artistic talent was expressed through architecture, painting, sculpture, and engineering. One of my best-known paintings is the Mona Lisa.
 10. _____ I had to struggle in school with dyslexia. I was part of a polar expedition in 1986 and was the first woman to reach the North Pole.
 11. _____ My teachers thought I was slow and a dreamer. I didn’t learn to read until I was nine. I couldn’t get into college until I spent an extra year in preparation. After many failed jobs, I developed the theory of relativity.
 12. _____ Because my head was very large at birth, people thought I was abnormal. My mother took me out of school and taught me. As an adult, I created the electric light bulb and the phonograph.
 13. _____ I was known as the “Queen” of physical comedy. I had severe rheumatoid arthritis as a young woman while working as a model. I went on to star and produce a hit comedy on television with my husband Desi Arnaz.
 14. _____ I was born with Downs Syndrome and the doctors told my parents that I should be placed in an institution. My parents ignored the doctor’s advice and I grew up to be a television star and public speaker on disabilities. I played Corky on “Life Goes On.”
 15. _____ I was known for playing Princess Leia in the Star Wars series. I have a mental illness called manic depression and now take daily medication to help me.
- Adapted from Tools for Transition (1991). AGS American Guidance Service, Inc. Circle Pines, Minnesota 55014-1796.
- Permission to reproduce this form is hereby granted by the publisher.

Answers:

1. g
2. d
3. i

4. f
5. k
6. e
7. b
8. l
9. j
10. h
11. c
12. a
13. n
14. m
15. o

Unit 4: Rights and Responsibilities Under the Law

Purpose

The purpose of Unit 4 is twofold: first, to provide you with an overview of how systems and protective laws change when you leave high school and enter the “adult world;” and second, to provide you with a basic overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act and how this law pertains to your life as a person with a disability. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand these topics. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion on page 4-3

Terminology

You may know some of these words already, or you may have just heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary that is located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used in Unit 4:

Accessible

Adult services

Compensatory Strategies

Disability (under the ADA)

Discrimination

Eligibility

Entitlement

Free appropriate public education (FAPE)

Hidden disabilities

Visible disabilities

Discussion

Have you ever broken a bone, had a cast, or needed to use crutches, a brace, or a sling? What was it like for you? What kind of help did you receive from friends, family, and teachers? Maybe people opened doors for you, helped you copy down your homework, or provided extra time to complete assignments. Temporary conditions such as broken bones are short term and generally heal over time. A disability, on the other hand, is constant and life-long.

Some disabilities are visible which means they can be seen by others (for example, if you use a wheelchair or the service of a guide dog), while some disabilities are hidden (such as learning disabilities, ADD/ADHD, epilepsy, depression, or bipolar disorder). Some people are born with disabilities while others acquire their disabilities later in life.

Believe it or not, the term “disability” is not easily defined. Disability is defined one way for students up through twelfth grade, and in a different way for individuals in postsecondary education and the work world.

IDEA Definition of Disability:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA defines “disability” for young people up through twelfth grade. Further, the IDEA identifies 13 categories of disability. These federal categories help states to determine who is eligible for special education supports and services in public schools.

The IDEA recognizes these 13 categories of disability:

Autism, Deaf-blindness, Deafness, Emotional disturbance, Hearing impairment, Mental retardation, Multiple disabilities, Orthopedic impairment, Other health impairment*, Specific learning disability, Traumatic brain injury, Speech or language impairment, Visual impairment including blindness

* Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) as a primary disability is often placed in this category of Other Health Impairment.

For more detail on the definition of each category, see <http://ericec.org/digests/e560.html>.

In addition, the IDEA mandates that young people with disabilities are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). This means that if you are receiving special education services the services, supports, and accommodations you need will be provided at no cost to you.

While you are in elementary or secondary school, a team of people works on your behalf to make sure that you receive the most appropriate education. At least once a year, this team (including you and your parents) meets to make sure that you are showing progress and receiving the needed accommodations to be successful in your classes. An Individualized Education Program (IEP), a set of personal goals and objectives, is developed for the next school year based on the meeting's conversation and your plans for the future. While you are in school, there is no need for you to ASK for accommodations because the IDEA says they must be arranged and provided for by the team of people working on your behalf. In other words, you are not required to self-disclose your disability in order to qualify for the supports and services available.

However, after high school, the only way you will receive the accommodations you might need is to ask for them yourself. This is why we're making such a big deal about being self-determined. Remember, if you received supports in high school, it is probably due to family members and professionals making decisions (with and for you) based on the laws surrounding IDEA (the law that created the special education system that exists today) and you didn't need to request the supports. The laws protecting you while you are in elementary and secondary school are laws around an entitlement system. The focus remains on your disability and what the best educational program should be based on your strengths and needs. The services provided to you may change over time depending on a lot of factors, including your progress and new federal policy initiatives. Essentially, the process remains the same from year to year and you meet every year with your family and professionals to establish a plan for the next year.

ADA Definition of Disability:

When you graduate or exit from the public school system, the way you are defined as a person with a disability changes as do the laws that protect you and provide for the accommodations you may need to be successful in postsecondary institutions or in the workplace. While IDEA is the law that seemed to protect you while you were in school, other laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Workforce Investment Act, and the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act protect you when you exit school and enter college, adult education, and work world.

A person qualifies as having a disability under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) if they meet at least one of the following three conditions:

1. A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities (such as walking, talking, seeing, reading, learning, working, etc.);

2. A record of such impairment (for example, people with a history of cancer or mental illness); or
3. A perception by others as having an impairment (such as a person with a disfiguring facial scar, or a person rumored to be HIV positive).

When you exit school and enter college, adult education, or the world of work, the only way you can receive the accommodations you need is to ask for them yourself. That is why it's important to understand yourself, your disability, and your accommodation needs for both postsecondary settings and work. It is also important to understand the laws that protect you in case you decide to disclose your disability. The purpose of the ADA is to extend to people with disabilities civil rights protections similar to those already available to people on the basis of race, color, national origin, and religion through the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Basically, the ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in five general areas:

- Private sector employment
- Activities of states and local governments
- Places of public accommodation
- Transportation
- Telecommunication services

Prior to the passage of the ADA in 1990, it was legal for businesses to discriminate against people with disabilities in these situations. The ADA was enacted because people felt there needed to be a law that prohibits (or makes illegal) discrimination against people with disabilities.

Now fast forward to high school graduation or exit. The adult world is a very different place than high school. It is at this time that you will be entering a system of eligibility; this means that you must meet certain requirements to participate in this system. This system is quite different from a system of entitlement (one in which certain benefits, services, or programs are expected to be provided because it is written as law). It is at this time that you and your family are faced with an array of adult service providers, postsecondary institutions, and others who are all asking one question: Do you meet the eligibility requirements of this program? Of course, various programs may offer different services and have different eligibility requirements. You are left to try to determine which will be the most beneficial to you, and whether you are eligible for those programs. Once you graduate or exit high school, you are no longer entitled to services and supports; rather, you

become eligible for adult services and supports based on your particular situation, your disability, and your ability to disclose necessary information.

Remember that graduation or exit from high school doesn't mean that the services and accommodations you needed while in high school aren't needed anymore. Lots of young people think that once they leave school their disability is unimportant or disappears. They haven't figured out that the academic services and accommodations they received while in high school will be needed for life (although, of course, in different ways).

On the other hand, some of you may have developed compensatory strategies (things that you did to help you balance for certain troubles you were having) while you were in high school, and have a good handle on what you need to be successful in college or on the job. For example, perhaps you tend to forget information that is presented visually, but can remember information when it is presented orally. A compensatory strategy would be to use a tape recorder during classes and to rely on verbal instructions to relay information.

Keep in mind that although there are laws in place that entitle you to services and supports while you are in high school, once you leave school and are in the system of eligibility, you still can receive protections against discrimination due to your disability. You have certain rights that allow you to challenge decisions made concerning your eligibility.

One example is the non-discrimination clause of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). The non-discrimination clause, which is in place to protect individuals from discrimination, states that "no individual shall be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, subjected to discrimination under, or denied employment in the administration of or in connection with, any such program or activity because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, or political affiliation or belief."

Another example is the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). This act was made into law in 1996, and it protects you and your family by allowing your health insurance to continue despite changes in employment status or transition periods between jobs. In addition, HIPAA addresses the security and privacy of your health records. There are now rules and limits on who can look at and receive your health information. Some of the information that is protected includes the following:

- Information your doctors, nurses, or other health care professionals put in your medical record;
- Conversations your doctor has about your care or treatment with nurses and others;
- Information about you in your health insurer's computer system; and
- Billing information about you at a health care facility.

Another example is the Client Assistance Program (CAP). This service can assist and advocate for you if you are having concerns or problems with Vocational Rehabilitation or the Commission for the Blind or Independent Living Centers.

CAP can provide assistance in several ways:

- Informing and advising you of benefits available under the Rehabilitation Act;
- Helping you communicate your concerns to your counselor;
- Helping you resolve your concerns if you disagree with a decision;
- Helping you understand the rules, regulations, and procedures of an agency; and
- Protecting your rights under the Federal Rehabilitation Act.

Additional information summarizing some of the pieces of legislation that we talked about in Unit 4 as well as information summarizing pieces of legislation that may potentially affect you in the future, is available in Appendix B in the back of this unit beginning from page 4-16 to 4-18.

Activity:

Defining Your Disability

The following activity is designed to help you define your disability in order to understand yourself better and begin to identify some of the accommodations you may need after leaving high school. Use these questions and prompts to begin thinking about these important issues.

1. In your own words, describe what the term “disability” means to you.
2. Describe your disability in clear, concise terms.
3. Describe how your disability may affect your postsecondary education efforts.
4. What accommodations, if any, will you need in college? (Think about what structures or services were put in place for you at school to help you perform on the same level as the rest of your classmates.)
5. Describe how your disability may affect your work performance.
6. What accommodations, if any, will you need at work? (Remember that many of the skills necessary in school are also necessary at work.)

Activity:
Recognizing Discrimination

Recognizing discrimination when it occurs is an important first step in confronting and eliminating it. Read the following examples and identify who is being discriminated against and in what way. Reflect on how you would feel if you were the person with the disability in each example. How would you handle the situation?

Laura goes to a restaurant.

Laura goes with her friends to a pizza parlor. There are stairs to the entrance but no ramp. When Laura and her friends request assistance to get into the building, the manager refuses, citing liability risk.

Your reaction:

John applies for a job.

John wants a job after school to earn money to buy his first car. He goes to a local sub shop and asks for an application. He has trouble completing the job application because of his learning disability in reading. He asks if the application could be read to him. The personnel director says, "No, you must complete the application on your own."

Your reaction:

Tyrell enrolls in a class.

Tyrell has a learning disability. He is a freshman in college and is required to take a writing course. His disability makes it very difficult to complete his writing assignments on time. When he discloses his disability to the professor, the professor suggests he withdraw from the class.

Your reaction:

Activity:

Small Group Poster Activity

Using the basic facts about the ADA on pages 4-14 to 4-15 in Appendix A at the back of this unit, form a small group and develop a collage poster on one of the five Titles of the ADA using pictures and words from magazines, newspapers, the Internet, or other sources. Remember that the collage is meant to communicate information about the selected Title to its viewers. Here are some suggestions for getting started.

- **Employment Group (Title I):** Think about all of the different steps it takes to get a job (that is, everything from the application to the interview). Think about the employers who have responsibilities under the ADA and the individuals who are protected.
- **State and Local Government Group (Title II):** Think about all the activities in your community that are funded by the state or local government. Consider the rights and responsibilities of both individuals with disabilities and government entities (including schools and transportation).
- **Public Accommodations Group (Title III):** Read through the description of public accommodations and find pictures and words reflecting these supports and services.
- **Telecommunications Group (Title IV):** Think about the groups of people with disabilities that use telecommunication tools and assistive technology most often at school and in the workplace. Include information about a relay center.
- **Miscellaneous Provisions Group (Title V):** Think about requirements relating to the conditions surrounding insurance, construction, and design regulations by the U.S. Access Board.

Activity:

Identifying Adult Service Providers & Eligibility Criteria

In the beginning of this unit, we presented the different legal definitions of disability. Believe it or not, there are even more ways to define disability in the adult-services world. The definitions reflect “eligibility criteria” such as your financial situation, the severity of your disability, and your age, among other characteristics. In order to be eligible for adult services, you need to meet the eligibility criteria established for each specific service you are requesting. In this activity, you will explore your own eligibility and the services you might benefit from. First, create a list of adult service providers in your community (there are lines to identify 10 providers in your community — you might or might not fill in all 10 lines). Second, choose three services you are most likely to need as an adult and research their specific eligibility criteria. You should use the following resources (and any others you think of) to obtain this information: websites, telephone calls, letters, and email. Keep this information for future reference.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

Agency #1:

Contact person:

Telephone and email:

Eligibility criteria:

How to apply for services:

Agency #2:

Contact person:

Telephone and email:

Eligibility criteria:

How to apply for services:

Agency #3:

Contact person:

Telephone and email:
Eligibility criteria:
How to apply for services:

Unit 4:

Appendix A

Basic Facts about the Americans with Disabilities Act

Title I – Employment

- Employers may not discriminate against an individual with a disability in hiring or promotion if the person is otherwise qualified for the job.
- Employers can ask about one’s ability to perform a job, but prior to offering a job they cannot inquire if someone has a disability or requires medical examinations.
- Employers cannot use tests that tend to screen out people with disabilities unless the tests measure job-related skills.
- Employers need to provide “reasonable accommodation” to individuals with disabilities. This includes steps such as job restructuring and modification of equipment.
- Employers do not need to provide accommodations that impose an “undue hardship” on business operations.
- Who needs to comply:
 - Private employers with 15 or more employees.
 - State and local government employers, regardless of how many employees they have.

Title II – State and Local Governments

- State and local governments may not discriminate against qualified individuals with disabilities.
- State and local government agencies must make reasonable modifications to their policies and procedures to allow equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate.
- All government facilities, services, and communications must be accessible consistent with the requirements of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- All new construction must be accessible.
- New public transit buses must be accessible to individuals with disabilities.
- Transit authorities must provide comparable paratransit or other special transportation services to individuals with disabilities who cannot use fixed route bus services, unless an undue burden would result.
- Existing rail systems must have one accessible car per train.
- New rail cars must be accessible.
- New bus and train stations must be accessible.
- Key stations in rapid light and commuter rail systems must be made accessible by July 26, 1993, with extensions up to 20 years for commuter rail (30 years for rapid and light rail).

- All existing Amtrak stations must be accessible by July 26, 2010.

Title III – Public Accommodations

- Private businesses such as restaurants, hotels, banks, and retail stores may not discriminate against individuals with disabilities.
- Auxiliary aids and services must be provided to ensure effective communications with individuals with vision or hearing impairments, unless an undue burden would result.
- Physical barriers in existing facilities must be removed, if removal is readily achievable. If removal is not readily achievable, alternative methods of providing the services must be offered, if they are readily achievable.
- All new construction and alterations of facilities must be accessible.

Title IV – Telecommunications

- Companies offering telephone service to the general public must offer telephone relay services to individuals who use telecommunications devices for the deaf (TDDs) or similar devices.
- All television public service announcements produced or funded in whole or in part by the federal government include closed captioning.

Title V – Miscellaneous Provisions

- Title V includes information regarding the ADA's relationship with other federal and state laws such as the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- Retaliation and coercion are prohibited.
- The U.S. Congress and the agencies of the federal legislative branch are covered; discrimination against individuals with disabilities is prohibited in employment and other programs.

Unit 4: Appendix B Summary of Legislation

Legislation

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in employment, public entities, public accommodations, transportation, telecommunications, and recreation.

Resource

<http://www.ada.gov>

Legislation

Assistive Technology (AT) Act

The Assistive Technology Act requires states and territories to conduct activities related to public awareness, interagency coordination, technical assistance, and training and outreach to promote information about and access to assistive technology devices and services.

The AT Act also authorizes the Assistive Technology Alternate Financing Program to assist people with disabilities in accessing the technology that they need.

Resource

AT Act: <http://www.section508.gov/docs/AT1998.html>

Assistive Technology Alternate Financing Program: <http://www.resna.org/AFTAP/state/index.html>

Legislation

Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act

The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act requires that people with developmental disabilities and their families receive the services and supports they need and participate in the planning and designing of those services.

Resource

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/add/DDACT2.html>

Legislation

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Summary

The IDEA guarantees youth with disabilities FAPE. Individuals are entitled to an education and related services.

Services detailed in IDEA include transition services and planning, individualized education programs, early intervention services, due process provisions, disciplinary services, and alternative education programs.

Resource

http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/Policy/IDEA/the_law.html

Legislation

Social Security

Summary

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) is a federal income supplement program designed to help aged, blind, and disabled people with limited income.

There are a number of work incentives designed to help people on SSI and SSDI transition to work, including the following:

The Student-Earned Income Exclusion supports the ability of transition-aged youth to work and have earnings through work-based learning programs that are integrated into educational programs.

A Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) allows a person with a disability to set aside income for a given period of time to achieve an employment goal.

Resource

<http://www.ssa.gov>

Additional information on work incentives can be found at

<http://www.ssa.gov/work>

Legislation

Ticket to Work and Workforce Investment Improvement Act (TWWIIA)

Summary

The TWWIIA program offers SSA disability beneficiaries greater choice in obtaining the services they need to help them go to work and attain their employment goals.

Resource

http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/Ticket/ticket_info.html

Legislation

Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and the Vocational Rehabilitation Act

Summary

The Workforce Investment Act provides coordinated, effective, and customer-focused workforce development and employment services to be delivered through One-Stop Career Centers.

Title I of WIA provides for services to youth, adults, and dislocated workers. The youth provisions of Title I of WIA require states and localities to provide a comprehensive workforce preparation system that reflects the developmental needs of youth.

Section 188 of Title I makes it illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities in employment and training programs, services, and activities receiving funds under WIA.

Title IV of WIA contains the entire Rehabilitation Act, comprised of the vocational rehabilitation program as well as the supported employment and independent living programs.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination based on disability in federally funded and federally conducted programs or activities in the United States.

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires federal agencies to assure the accessibility and usability of their electronic and information technology. Vocational Rehabilitation assists individuals with disabilities who are pursuing meaningful careers through local job searches and awareness of self-employment and telecommuting opportunities.

Independent Living Centers are community-based organizations run by and for people with disabilities, which offer systems advocacy, individual advocacy, peer counseling, information and referral, and independent living skills training.

Resource

Section 508:

<http://www.Section508.gov>

Rehabilitation Services Agency: <http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/rsa/index.html>

Independent Living Centers: <http://www.ilusa.com/links/ilcenters.htm>

Legislation

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

Summary

HIPAA gives you information about your rights regarding your personal health information and sets limits as to who can access this information.

Resource

<http://www.hhs.gov/ocr/hipaa/>

Unit 5: Accommodations

The purpose of Unit 5 is to introduce you to the concept of accommodations and to help you identify the accommodations you may need. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand this topic. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion on page 5-2.

You may know some of these words already, or you may just have heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary that is located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used in Unit 5:

Accommodation

Barrier

Modification

Discussion

What is an accommodation? An accommodation is essentially any strategy that gets rid of or lessens the effect of a specific barrier. A barrier is an obstacle which may exist in school, at the workplace, in the community, or in your own home. An accommodation is any change or adjustment to an environment that makes it possible for an individual with a disability to enjoy an equal opportunity. Accommodations are used to help individuals with disabilities learn or demonstrate what they have learned; work as independently and efficiently as possible; and live comfortably within their communities and home, among other things. Sometimes accommodations can be modifications to existing equipment or materials to make them usable for people with disabilities (such as lowering a countertop for a register at a store, or changing the software on a computer to read school assignments aloud.) Reasonable accommodations like these allow a person with a disability to participate in the application process (job or college, for example), perform the essential functions of a particular job (yes, being a college student is considered a job!), and enjoy the benefits and privileges of employment and education equal to those enjoyed by those individuals without disabilities.

Accommodations are NOT intended to justify or compensate for a lack of knowledge, skills, or abilities necessary to succeed. Whenever possible, accommodations should be based on the use and further development of existing skills and capabilities.

One easy way to think about reasonable accommodations is to think of them in three basic categories:

1. Changes to facilities and equipment (such as putting in ramps and parking spaces, making materials available in large print, or providing low- and high-tech assistive technology);
2. The provision of special services (such as sign language interpreters or qualified readers); and
3. Creative thinking and problem solving!

There are many types of accommodations, including but not limited to the following:

- Educational accommodations;
- Workplace accommodations; and
- Community accessibility that serves to accommodate.

Some common examples of these various types of accommodations available to people with disabilities are listed below:

Educational Accommodations

- Accessible classrooms.
- Modified instruction (for example, use of small groups).
- Modified curricula (for example, different learning outcomes or different materials from those for other students).
- Modified class schedules (for example, block schedules).
- Providing supervised breaks or allowing extra response and processing time during testing sessions, and administering the test at best time for the individual.
- Providing special seating in a general education classroom (for example, seating in the front of the room or in a study carrel), a small group setting, or special education support.
- Providing large print materials, Braille materials, calculators, computers with spelling and grammar checkers, and electronic dictionaries.
- Providing written copies of orally presented materials found in examiner's manual, closed-caption of video materials, or sign language interpreters.
- Allowing individuals to answer by pointing rather than marking in a test booklet, by dictating responses to examiners for verbatim transcription, or by responding to an interpreter for transcription.

Workplace Accommodations

- Changing an employee's workstation arrangement.
- Modifying equipment or devices (for example, computer software).
- Reassigning non-essential functions through job restructuring.
- Providing qualified readers and interpreters.
- Providing part-time or modified work schedules.
- Telecommuting options.
- Personal assistance services.
- Adjusting or modifying examinations, training materials, and policies.

Community Accessibility

- Providing ramps and reserved parking spaces (increasing physical accessibility).
- Providing assistive technology (for example, readers, calculators, spell checkers, or communication devices).
- Providing interpreters.
- Providing accessible bathrooms.
- Providing accessible drinking fountains.
- Providing accessible equipment (for example, computers, desks, or copiers).
- Providing wide aisles and doorways.

Activity:

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN)

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is a free service of the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), in the US Department of Labor. JAN provides information about disability and accommodation and receives questions concerning students with disabilities in classroom environments such as public schools, colleges, technical schools, continuing education, internships, and employment, and about adults with disabilities.

To begin this activity, log on to the JAN website (<http://www.jan.wvu.edu/>). Click “Individuals with Disabilities” on the left-hand toolbar. Take some time to explore what information and resources JAN has to offer. Make a list of those that you find particularly useful. If you do not have access to the World Wide Web, there is a toll-free phone number that you can call. Someone will be able to answer your questions and send you information. The phone number for JAN is 1-800-JAN-7234 V/TTY.

Next, use the Searchable Online Accommodation Resource (SOAR) to research ideas about accommodations both on the job and in school. Make a list of those accommodations that you currently use, and those accommodations that you might try.

Accommodations I use

Accommodations to try

Group Activity:

Situations and Solutions at School and at Work

Review the accommodation examples below. Your job is to figure out the obstacle (or barrier) for each young person. Use your creativity, the JAN website, and the broad categories of accommodations presented previously to create a list of possible accommodation solutions. Be prepared to discuss your solutions with the group.

Situation #1: A student with Muscular Dystrophy is taking an SAT prep class at night. He has trouble filling in the bubbles on the answer sheets during practice drills.

Potential accommodation solutions:

Situation #2: A teenager could not shop with her friends at the local mall because her wheelchair did not fit between many of the clothes aisles in the major department stores.

Potential accommodation solutions:

Situation#3: A student with dyslexia is taking a literature class. He reads more slowly and with more difficulty than the other students. Every student is required to read aloud from the texts in class.

Potential accommodation solutions:

Situation #4: A graphic artist for a small employer is deaf and needs to be alerted to the employer's audible emergency alarm system.

Potential accommodation solutions:

Situation #5: A student with depression writes for her school newspaper. When she has a depressive episode she misses article deadlines.

Potential accommodation solutions:

Situation #6: A chef with dyscalculia (a math learning disability) is having trouble measuring the ingredients for recipes.

Potential accommodation solutions:

Situation #7: A corporate businessman with social anxiety is overcome with anxiety about speaking in front of his co-workers at business meetings.

Potential accommodation solutions:

Situation#8: A student in medical school who has a reading disability is also a poor speller. She has difficulty reading and spelling the medical terminology and prescription names.

Potential accommodation solutions:

Unit 6:

Postsecondary Disclosure...

Why, When, What,
to Whom, and How?

Goal

The purpose of Unit 6 is to reiterate the need to disclose in order to get reasonable accommodations in college, at a university, in a career and technical school, or in an adult education center. In addition, this unit clearly answers five specific disclosure questions: Why, when, what, to whom, and how to disclose a disability in postsecondary settings. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand these questions. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion focusing on “why to disclose” on page 6-3.

You may know some of these words already, or you may just have heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary that is located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used in Unit 6:

Access

Assistive technology

Disability Support Services (DSS)

Disclosure script

Postsecondary

Responsibility

Rights

WHY to disclose in postsecondary education

The process of choosing a postsecondary institution of learning is quite challenging. There are many decisions you will need to make: where to study, what to study, how to study, whether to attend full-time or part-time, whether to live at home or on campus, and whether to commute from a distance or enroll in online study are just a few.

If you have a disability, you must also consider the supports and services that you may need to be successful in the postsecondary setting of your choice. Are these supports and services available to you if you require an accommodation? Remember, accommodations at the postsecondary level (after you exit high school) are provided only when a student discloses his or her disability and requests accommodations. Faculty and staff are not required to provide accommodations to students who have chosen not to disclose their disabilities.

Learning to disclose your disability-related needs effectively and developing an accommodation plan are extremely valuable skills. Effective disclosure skills require that you share information regarding your disability-related needs and also provide creative, practical suggestions for accommodations. Open communication with your professors and the disability services staff can facilitate the process of evaluating the effectiveness of your accommodations, and of making changes when efforts are not working.

Insert

Good planning is always important, but early planning is essential.

End Insert

Again, this is where informed decision-making is critical. The more enlightened you are before you graduate from high school, the more questions you ask, and the more you talk with people in the post-secondary world, the more likely it is that you will be confident that the decisions you make are right for you.

Some reasons why you may choose to disclose your disability in a postsecondary setting include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Obtaining information about available supports and services;
- Discussing specific needs in order to identify adjustments necessary to the study environment;
- Discussing academic requirements and practical components of your chosen course of study, in addition to possible professional requirements;

- Receiving any necessary assistance with the transition from high school to postsecondary education;
- Ensuring that Disability Support Service professionals provide any needed training or awareness for faculty members and other staff to help you receive the best accommodations; and
- Ensuring that faculty members are familiar with and implement the accommodations you require to be successful in their classes.

Remember that it is not essential to divulge specific personal information about your disability. What is most important and helpful is to provide information about 1) how your disability affects your capacity to learn and study effectively, and 2) the environment, supports, and services you'll need in order to access, participate in, and excel in your area of study. Although confidentiality is protected under both the ADA and Section 504, as a student with a disability you must determine your own personal privacy boundaries. You must decide what and how much information it is necessary to reveal in order to obtain the needed accommodations.

WHEN to disclose in postsecondary education

It is important to think about the most appropriate time and place in which to disclose your disability in the post-secondary setting. The timing of your disclosure is important and can potentially have an impact on how you are perceived by others and what accommodations can be provided. There are four options for “when” you choose to disclose:

- **Prior to enrollment**

Usually you will meet with your instructors or disability support services coordinators prior to enrolling in class. At this time, be prepared to disclose your disability as well as plan for needed accommodations or begin to explore strategies for accommodations that will work for them and the instructors.

- **At the time of enrollment**

It is usually recommended that you inform your instructors of your needed accommodations at the beginning of a semester, or as soon as your disability is interfering with your progress in class.

- **During your course of study**

If you wait to disclose your disability until after classes have started, there may be additional considerations. For example, if you decide to disclose your disability and make a request for accommodations the day before an exam (an example of

poor timing), the disclosure is stressful and accommodations are more difficult to arrange. If, on the other hand, you approach the instructor before the first class session to voice your concerns and propose potential accommodation strategies, then accommodations can be arranged in an organized, thorough manner with sufficient time to implement them. Everyone is more comfortable with this arrangement.

- Never

It is important to remember that if no accommodations are needed, or if you have made a decision to accommodate your potential needs personally (for example, by using a spell-check feature for English papers), then there is no need to disclose your disability.

WHAT information to disclose in postsecondary education

Remember that preparation is essential when planning to disclose your disability. Don't forget that it is unnecessary to disclose very detailed medical or personal information.

You may wish to present the following information to the disability services professionals, faculty members, and staff:

- General information about your disability;
- Why you've chosen to disclose your disability (i.e., its impact on your academic performance);
- The type of academic accommodations that have worked for you in the past (in high school);
- The type of academic accommodations you anticipate needing in the postsecondary setting;
- How your disability and other life experiences can affect your course of study positively.

Most importantly, keep the disclosure conversation focused on your abilities, not on your disability.

To WHOM to disclose in postsecondary education

It is essential that you disclose your disability only to those individuals who need to know. Sometimes, the person you choose to disclose your disability to, is determined by when you choose to disclose. The following list gives you examples of the people you might disclose your disability to at different times.

- Prior to enrollment, you might choose to disclose to the Disability Support Services staff, directly to faculty, or to an admissions officer.
- At the time of enrollment, you might choose to disclose directly on your application form or contact the Disability Support Services office.
- During your course of study, you might choose to contact your academic advisor or counselor, your professor, other teaching staff, or the Disability Support Services office.
- When in doubt, contact the trained professionals in the Disability Support Services office for guidance.

Throughout the process of disclosure and accommodation development, it is very important that you work closely and cooperatively with those individuals (such as faculty, counselors, Disability Support Service staff, and higher education

administration) who can provide the supports and services. When requesting accommodations, try to be assertive rather than aggressive and forthright rather than confrontational.

There are differences between assertive and aggressive communication and behavior. Assertive communication and behavior is preferable. Being assertive means that you (a) stand up for your personal rights; (b) express your thoughts, feelings, and beliefs in a direct, honest, and appropriate way; (c) show respect for yourself and others; and (d) leave room for compromise. It is important for you to maintain good eye contact, express yourself clearly, stay on topic, and avoid apologizing or losing your temper.

Remember that it's important to select a private, confidential, comfortable place to disclose and to allow enough time to discuss the impact of your disability. The person(s) you are disclosing to may have questions, suggestions, or concerns that may require extra time for discussion.

Rights and Responsibilities

Adapted from <<http://sites.uws.edu.au/rdlo/disclosure/education/prior.htm>>.

We've talked a great deal about the rights afforded to you as a person with a disability. It is also important to understand that, as a person with a disability, you have significant responsibilities to yourself, your instructors, and the Disability Support Services staff. Some of these rights and responsibilities are outlined in the chart below:

You have the right to

- Be treated fairly and in a non-discriminatory fashion.
- Discuss your academic needs, supports, and accommodations in a non-judgmental setting.
- Have information about your disability treated confidentially and respectfully.
- Know what happens to personal information you choose to share with counselors, faculty, or staff.
- Work collaboratively with staff to identify necessary supports for your success.
- Obtain information about disability support services as well as physical and programmatic access at the institution of your choosing.
- Be self-determined and practical.

You have the responsibility to

- Investigate and fully understand the academic and practical requirements of your chosen course of study, including determining that this option matches your skills and abilities.
- Recognize that disclosing on an application form or prior to enrollment does not eliminate your responsibility to contact Disability Support Services after you are enrolled or contact your professors for any needed accommodations.
- Find out about options for accessing the institution of your choice.
- Advise faculty and staff in a timely manner of your needs in relation to your disability, including accommodation, support, and information.
- Understand that Disability Support Services staff or faculty may not be able to address your needs effectively if you do not disclose them in a timely manner.
- Be self-determined and practical.

Activity:

Course for Disclosure Examples

Read the following examples and determine each student's course for disclosure. First determine whether or not it is necessary for the student to disclose his or her disability. Then think about the "why," "when," "what," "to whom," and "how" questions. Write your answers on the lines provided. If possible, share your answers with a group of your peers or classmates. Remember: there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, because choosing to disclose is a personal and individual decision!

1. Yvonne is considering a course of study in elementary education at a university in her city. She is sure it is the right course for her, and now needs to find out about the accessibility of the buildings on the campus she would like to attend.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

2. Matthew has decided to study part-time for the first year of his coursework because he has found it very demanding to manage both his ongoing medical condition and full-time study at the same time.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

3. Denise has been attending college for three weeks, and is already beginning to feel stressed. She has been unable to attend all of her lectures or labs due to difficulties with her medication. She has three large projects due in the next month and is fearful she won't be able to complete them.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

4. Antonio uses CART (a word-for-word speech-to-text interpreting service). He's been accepted to a small university with limited knowledge of assistive technology.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

Activity:

Exploring Disability Support Services

Visit your local community college or university and make an appointment with the counseling support services (or Disability Support Services) office to find out what supports and services are available to students with and without disabilities.

Be prepared to discuss what your accommodation needs are, including what supports have typically helped you in the past. There are counselors available to discuss specific issues with you, answer your questions, and offer support. In addition, tutoring and assistive technology supports might be available.

What supports and services are available at this location? Remember to make a note of the name of the person you met with and his or her contact information (address, telephone number, and email). You might want to contact this person again or send a thank-you note.

Activity:

My Practice script

Research shows that having a disclosure “script” and practicing it with friends, teachers, relatives, and mentors can be of great benefit to you when the time actually comes to disclose. Most people find that it is easier to talk about the impact of having a disability rather than offering a formal or clinical definition.

For example, someone explaining that they have cerebral palsy could say,

“I have difficulty with fine motor skills. I write more slowly and with more difficulty than other people and become fatigued more easily. Consequently, I will need to use a computer to type essay tests or any other written assignments.”

It is also helpful to include some information relating to areas of strength. Here is one example:

“I am able to use my strong verbal skills to contribute and share my ideas during class while I tape record the entire lecture. If I took notes during the lecture instead of participating in discussion, I would find it difficult to keep up with the discussion.”

To help you practice explaining your disability, write your explanation down. You may have to do this several times before it truly describes what you want to say, in a way that someone who knows very little about disabilities will understand. Use additional paper if needed.

Here are some questions and hints to think about while preparing your disclosure practice script:

- Write about your positive attributes or strengths first.
- Identify the limitations or challenges you face in school because of your disability.
- Identify which accommodations have worked best for you in the past and why.
- Consider how your disclosing can help the faculty or staff member help you (that is, try to put yourself in their shoes).
- End the script with positive points.

Write your script on the following page.

My script:

Unit 7:
Disclosure on the Job...
Why, When, What,
to Whom, and How?

Goal

The purpose of Unit 7 is to reiterate the need to disclose in order to receive a reasonable accommodation in a work setting (on the job). In addition, this unit clearly answers the specific disclosure questions: why, when, what, to whom, and how to disclose in employment settings. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better understand these questions. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion on page 7-3.

You may know some of these words already, or you may have just heard them in passing. First, define these words, as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary that is located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used

in Unit 7:

Essential functions

Job accommodations

Mentor

One-Stop Career Center

Self-accommodate

WHY to disclose on the job

Every job seeker with a disability is faced with the same decision: “Should I or shouldn’t I disclose information about my disability?” Ultimately, the decision of whether or not to disclose is entirely personal. It is a decision to make only after weighing the personal advantages and disadvantages of disclosure (see Unit 3).

If you have a disability, you must consider the supports and services that you may need to be successful in the job of your choice. Are these supports and services available to you if you require an accommodation? Remember that accommodations in the workplace are only provided when a worker discloses his or her disability and requests job accommodations. Employers and co-workers are not required to provide accommodations to workers who have chosen not to disclose their disabilities.

The process of learning how to disclose your disability-related needs effectively and to develop an accommodation plan is extremely valuable. Effective disclosure skills require that you share information regarding your disability-related needs and that you provide creative, practical suggestions for job accommodations. Open communication with your employer, work mentor, and co-workers can help to evaluate the effectiveness of your accommodations and make changes when efforts are not working.

Some job seekers choose not to disclose their disabilities because they believe that they can manage their careers in the same way as any other job seekers, or because they have become skilled at developing compensatory strategies and have the ability to self-accommodate without assistance. Others decide not to disclose at work because they fear being treated differently or being denied the same opportunities as job seekers without disabilities.

On the other hand, many job seekers choose to disclose disability-specific information for a variety of important reasons and to a variety of different people (employer, work mentor, co-workers). The following list includes some (but definitely not all) of the reasons you might choose to disclose your disability;

- obtain information to assist you in developing a career plan that addresses possible barriers and accommodations;
- identify disability-specific employment services and support networks;
- discuss employment requirements with recruiters or other professionals;
- discuss disability issues with prospective employers to determine whether the requirements of the position can be met, with or without reasonable accommodation;

- investigate the supports available at the workplace;
- develop mentoring and peer support structures with employees and employers with disabilities.

Remember that it is not essential to divulge specific personal information about your disability. Your disability is only important if it affects (or can potentially affect) your ability to perform the essential functions of a job. What is most important and helpful is to provide information about how your disability affects your ability to perform the essential functions of the job, what supports you need in order to provide a most favorable environment for your career, and your own accommodation ideas for your particular situation.

WHEN to disclose on the job

Though there is certainly no one “right” time and place to practice disclosure (it will depend on your individual situation), being proactive is strongly encouraged. Being proactive puts you in better control of your life.

When you decide to disclose your disability to your employer, there may be settings and circumstances in which disclosure is more appropriate than others.

Consider the following possibilities:

Circumstance

In a third-party phone call or reference

Example

Employment counselors at the local One-Stop Career Centers have strong connections with local employers and may be willing to serve as a reference for you. Be sure to make clear with the counselor whether you would like him or her to disclose your disability and how you would like your disability to be represented.

Circumstance

In your letter of application or résumé

Example

Many individuals choose to disclose their disabilities in their résumé or letter of application. Having a disability may be viewed as a positive trait in some professions or even as a requirement for some positions. For example, the Workforce Recruitment Program has been established specifically for young adults with disabilities.

Circumstance

In your cover letter

Example

Some individuals disclose their disabilities in their cover letters. As a rule, attach the cover letter to the back of your résumé so that your skills can be the focal point. Again, having a disability is not always a strike against you. Some companies actively recruit people with disabilities to meet Affirmative Action goals.

Circumstance

Pre-interview

Example

Disclosure prior to the interview is encouraged only when an accommodation is needed for the actual interview. For example, if you use a wheelchair and the office where the interview is to be scheduled is on the second floor of a building without an elevator, you need to make the interviewer aware of your need for accommodations (for example, by suggesting that the interview be moved to a first floor location).

Circumstance

On the employment application

Example

You may have several options if the employment application form asks something like, “Do you have any mental or physical limitations that may impact your performance on the job?”

You might believe that your disability is not a limitation on your work performance and would therefore respond by answering, “no.” On the other hand, you might decide to use this as an opportunity to indicate that you have a disability that will not limit your performance if you are properly accommodated. Finally, you might just want to indicate that you would prefer to answer this question when you are called for an interview.

Circumstance

At the interview

Example

You might or might not choose to disclose your disability during an interview. If your disability is visible, you might wish to discuss your disability and how it will not get in the way of doing a good job, especially if you have proper accommodations. At this time, you could give examples of how you would perform the job. If your disability is not apparent (invisible), you will need to decide whether or not to disclose your disability based on your comfort and trust levels. You do not have to disclose your disability at this stage. However, it might be helpful to do so in order to show that you can do the job with the right

accommodation. At this time, you might want to give examples. Be positive and upbeat; show your confidence in yourself. Don't be apologetic, defensive, or cocky.

Circumstance

After you've been offered a job

Example

Many individuals choose to disclose their disabilities after they have been offered the job. They want to be selected for the position because of their skills, and worry that disclosure prior to the point may influence the interviewer's decision. However, once hired, you might need accommodations to do the essential functions of the job. Also, if the job requires medical testing and you take medications that will show up in a screening, you may choose to disclose this to the employer at this time.

Circumstance

During your course of employment

Example

Sometimes, individuals with disabilities do not recognize that their disabilities can negatively affect their job performance. This is especially true for youth getting their first full-time job. Sometimes, you may feel confident when you begin a job, but become concerned that you may have underestimated your need for an accommodation.

Remember that it is your responsibility to ask for an accommodation if you need one. It is always better to ask for it before your job performance is questioned. Your employer cannot force an accommodation on you, but has the final word in what accommodation you will receive (after consulting with you, of course).

Circumstance

Never

Example

If you are able to perform the essential functions of the job without reasonable accommodation, you need not disclose your disability.

Remember that employers can't meet your needs if they don't know what those needs are!

WHAT information to disclose on the job

Remember that preparation is essential when planning to disclose your disability to your employer. Think about the disclosure script you prepared in Unit 6. Is your information presented in a clear and concise way that is relevant to your job? If it is, TERRIFIC! If not, make some changes and practice rehearsing your disclosure conversation. Don't forget that it is unnecessary to disclose very detailed medical or personal information. Get to the point. And keep it positive!

You might wish to present the following information to your employer, supervisor, work mentor, or co-workers:

- General information about your disability;
- Why you've chosen to disclose your disability, including its impact on your job performance;
- The types of job accommodations that have worked for you in the past (in previous jobs and in training situations);
- The types of job accommodations you anticipate needing in the workplace; and
- How your disability and other life experiences can positively affect your work performance.

Most importantly, keep the disclosure conversation focused on your abilities, not your disability.

To WHOM to disclose on the job

As a job seeker with a disability, you might choose to disclose information when developing your career plan and searching for employment. You might disclose information to the following individuals:

- Career counselors
- Disability-specific adult employment services personnel
- One-Stop Career Center personnel
- Prospective employers or human resources personnel
- Workplace mentors

When selecting the person to disclose to, reflect on the following questions first:

- Does this person have the power to determine how reasonable the request is for the accommodation?
- Can the person provide the required accommodation(s)?
- Is the person responsible for hiring, promoting, or firing?
- Is the person in a supervisory role and will he or she support me?
- What experiences does this person have with similar disclosure situations?
- Do I have respect for and trust in this person's keeping my disclosure confidential?

Remember that it is important to select a private, confidential, comfortable place to disclose and to allow enough time to discuss the impact of your disability. The person(s) to whom you are disclosing might have questions, suggestions, or concerns that require more time for discussion.

Rights and Responsibilities

Adapted from <<http://sites.uws.edu.au/rdlo/disclosure/education/prior.htm>>.

We've talked a great deal about the rights afforded to you as a person with a disability. It is important to understand that, as a person with a disability, you also have significant responsibilities to yourself and to your employers, supervisors, mentors, and co-workers. Some of these rights and responsibilities are outlined in the chart below:

You have the right to

- Have information about your disability treated confidentially and respectfully.
- Seek information about hiring practices from any organization.
- Choose to disclose your disability at any time during the employment process.
- Receive appropriate accommodations in an interview so you may demonstrate your skills and abilities.
- Be considered for a position based on your skill and merit.
- Have respectful questioning about your disability for the purpose of reasonable accommodation.
- Be self-determined and proactive.

You have the responsibility to

- Disclose your need for accommodation if you desire any work-related adjustments.
- Search for jobs that address your skills and abilities.
- Inform the manager or interview panel about your need for appropriate interview accommodations in a timely manner.
- Identify appropriate and reasonable accommodations for an interview.
- Negotiate reasonable accommodation(s) with an employer at the point of job offer and beyond.
- Bring your skills and merits to the table.
- Be truthful, self-determined, and proactive.

Activity:

Course for Disclosure Examples

Read the following examples and determine a course of disclosure for each potential job seeker. First determine whether or not it is necessary for the job seeker to disclose his or her disability. Then think about the “why,” “when,” “what,” “to whom,” and “how” questions discussed earlier in this unit. Write your responses on the lines provided. If possible, share your answers with a group of your friends or classmates.

1. Linda’s emotional disability has recently worsened and it has become difficult for her to perform some aspects of her job. Her psychiatrist has made some recommendations to her regarding changes in her work schedule.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

2. Jamal’s schizophrenia has been well controlled by medication for the past three years. He recently graduated from college with a 3.5 grade point average (GPA) and is ready to apply for a job in the graphic design field, but he’s a bit nervous.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

3. Carl uses a guide dog. He was recently called for an interview at a local IT firm.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

4. Andrea has been offered a part-time job as a bank teller. She has a hearing aid, is able to read lips, and speaks well.

Disclose?

Why?

When?
What?
To whom?
How?

5. Josephina has arranged an interview with the supervisor of a large department store to discuss a position as a sales clerk. She wonders how much her learning disability in math will affect her ability to run the cash register and give correct change.

Disclose?
Why?
When?
What?
To whom?
How?

6. Francisco has scheduled an interview at a small non-profit organization. He wonders if the building will be accessible for his wheelchair.

Disclose?
Why?
When?
What?
To whom?
How?

Activity:

My Practice Script

Research shows that having a disclosure “script” and practicing it with friends, teachers, relatives, and mentors will be of great benefit to you when the time actually comes to tell. Most people find that it is easier to talk about the impact of having a disability rather than offering a formal or clinical definition.

Insert

When arranging for a job interview, a young man who uses a wheelchair might say,

“I’m really looking forward to this interview and I am checking to make sure that the interview room can accommodate my wheelchair.”

During the interview, a person with a hearing impairment, who can lip-read, is concerned about communicating on the job. She might say, “I can lip-read in face-to-face interaction, but will need TTY services and devices when using the phone.”

An employer expresses concern about a worker’s productivity. The worker might say,

“I am having more difficulty than I anticipated keeping up with my co-workers because of my learning disability. In the past, it has helped to work alongside an experienced mentor.”

End Insert

To help you practice explaining your disability, write your explanation down. You may have to do this several times before it truly says what you want to say, in a way that someone who knows very little about disabilities will understand. Use additional paper if needed.

Here are some questions and hints to think about while preparing your disclosure practice script:

- Write about your positive attributes or strengths first.
- Identify the limitations or challenges you face at work because of your disability.
- Identify which accommodations have worked best for you in the past and why.
- Consider how your disclosing can help the business employer and your co-workers (try to put yourself in their shoes).
- End the script with positive points.

Write your script on the following page.

My script:

Activity:

Visit your local One-Stop Career Center

You may not have heard of One-Stop Career Centers. They are Centers designed to provide a full range of assistance to job seekers under one roof. One-Stop Career Centers offer training, career counseling, job search opportunities, job placement services, and other employment-related services. If you go to a One-Stop for some free training offered, you may work on your interviewing skills, résumé writing, or learn about the resources available in your community, among other things.

Complete the steps listed below:

1. Log on to <<http://www.servicelocator.org>>. Click on “Find a One-Stop Career Center” and enter your zip code. Record the One-Stop Career Center closest to your home:

2. Make travel arrangements to visit the One-Stop Career Center to see which services are available to you. Check one:

_____ I can get there independently

_____ I will ask _____ for a ride

_____ I will take public transportation

3. Meet with the resource room counselor to discuss the services available to you at the Center.

I met with

His/her contact information (telephone/email) is:

4. Ask for a tour of the resource room. When I toured the resource room, I noticed three things that may help me in my job search. They were:

1.

2.

3.

5. Find out about the classes and programs available to you at the One-Stop. Depending on your age, your disability, and your financial situation, different options may be available.

I might be able to take advantage of these generic classes, which are available to everyone:

1.

2.

3.

The following additional services are offered to me because I am a person with a disability:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

I can take advantage of the following services because of my age:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Unit 8:
Disclosure in Social and Community Setting...
Why, When, What,
to Whom, and How?

Goal

The purpose of Unit 8 is to explore the need and the circumstances that surround disclosing your disability to community members and friends in social situations. In addition, this unit clearly answers the following specific disclosure questions: why, when, what, to whom, and how to disclose in social settings. Terminology provided in this unit will help you better answer these questions. We strongly suggest that you read the discussion section focusing on “why to disclose.”

You might know some of these words already, or you might just have heard them in passing. First, define these words as you understand them. Then check your definitions against the glossary that is located in the back of this workbook. The following terms are used in Unit 8:

Community

Role model

Trust

Frustration

WHY to disclose in social settings

Social and community environments have barriers that sometimes prevent people with disabilities from spending time outside their home, socializing and going out with friends, and participating in community or civic events. Speaking about your disability in social settings can be hard and sometimes frustrating, because many of the barriers you will face in social settings are people's attitudes, beliefs, and inexperience. It is important to understand how your disability and disability-related needs can influence your participation in your community and other social activities (such as recreation, leisure, civic, religious, and political activities).

It may be necessary for you to disclose your disability to friends or community members and in social situations in order to participate fully in everything your community has to offer. It will be important for you to be able to explain your disability in several different ways, and to change the way you talk about yourself in different situations. For example, talking about your disability to your soccer coach or Scout leader is very different from talking about yourself at a party or to someone you may want to date. The self-determination skills and informed decision-making skills discussed earlier in this workbook are important skills to have when deciding whether to disclose or not.

Again, this is where informed decision-making comes into play. You will need to understand your own feelings, and balance them out with the information you have about the specific situation you are in at the time. The more questions you ask, the more you will know that the decisions you make are right for you.

Some examples of why you may choose to disclose in a social or community setting include (but are not limited to) the following. You may wish to

- start new relationships with honesty;
- discuss specific needs in order to identify needed accommodations in the community; or
- receive any necessary assistance that may be needed while participating in community or social activities.

Remember that it is not essential to divulge specific personal information about your disability. What is most important and helpful is to provide information about how your disability affects your capacity to participate in social and community activities, and the supports that are needed to allow you to participate fully.

WHEN to disclose in social settings

There may be times when you decide to disclose in social or community settings. The following list includes some possibilities:

- Going with your friends to a concert
- Planning a date with someone
- Meeting your mentor for lunch
- Meeting new people, or starting new relationships
- Joining community clubs or activities

WHAT information to disclose in social settings

Remember that what you disclose about yourself is a deeply personal issue and you don't have to share everything with everyone. You should think about what you want people to know and to think about you. It will be helpful if you describe your disability and related needs in honest and positive terms. You want people to feel good about interacting with you, not from a point of pity or helplessness but one of being included.

Preparation is essential when planning to disclose your disability. Think about the scripts you prepared in Unit 6 and Unit 7. Is your information presented in a clear and concise way, a way that is relevant to your social and community life? If it is, TERRIFIC! If not, make some changes and then practice the disclosure script. Don't forget that it is not necessary to disclose every detail of your medical or personal information even to your friends, but be open and honest in your discussion. Some people may feel uncomfortable with talking about your disability, which may hurt or make you angry, but your positive presentation can help put them at ease. Be prepared, but be flexible in how you talk about your disability in different settings.

You may wish to present the following information about your disability to friends, acquaintances, or community members:

- General information about your disability
- Why you've chosen to disclose your disability to them, including its impact on your social life and community involvement
- The type of accommodations that have worked for you in the past, or that you may need in the future
- Positive examples of how you can become more involved in your community, and what community involvement means to you

To WHOM to disclose in social settings

As a person with a disability, you may choose to disclose your disability to a variety of other community members. Oftentimes, disclosure may be made to the following individuals (among others):

- Friends and acquaintances
- Relatives
- Owners or staff members of various businesses (such as grocery stores, banks, or clothing stores)
- Public transportation staff
- Parks and recreation staff
- Events coordinator
- Mentors or role models

There are certain questions that you can ask yourself to help you decide which person or persons to share this information with, such as the following:

- Do I have respect for and trust in this person's keeping my disclosure confidential?
- Is disclosure essential to our relationship?
- Does this person have the power to determine how reasonable a request for an accommodation is?
- Can the person provide the required accommodation(s)?
- Is this person going to use information about my disability to support me or harm me?

Remember that it's important to select a private, confidential, comfortable place to disclose, and to allow enough time to discuss the impact of your disability. The person(s) you are disclosing to might have questions, suggestions, or concerns that require additional discussion.

Rights and Responsibilities

Adapted from <<http://sites.uws.edu.au/rdlo/disclosure/education/prior.htm>>.

We've talked a great deal about the rights afforded to you as a person with a disability. Something very important to remember is that, as a person with a disability, you also have significant responsibilities to yourself and to others in your community.

You have the right to

- Be treated fairly and in a non-discriminatory fashion.
- Have information about your disability treated confidentially and respectfully.
- Work collaboratively with others to identify necessary supports for your success.
- Obtain information about disability support services as well as physical and programmatic access in community settings.
- Be self-determined and proactive.

You have the responsibility to

- Investigate and fully understand your disability and disability-related needs as they pertain to community living and social activities.
- Find out about options for accessing the community settings of your choice.
- Advise community members and friends in a timely manner of your accommodation and support needs.
- Understand that community members and friends may not be able to address your needs effectively if you do not present them in a timely manner.
- Be self-determined and proactive.

Activity:

Course for Disclosure Examples

Read the following examples and determine each person's course for disclosure. First, determine whether or not it is necessary for the person to disclose his or her disability. Then think about the "why," "when," "what," "to whom," and "how" questions. Write your answers on the lines provided. If possible, share your answers with a group of your peers or classmates. Remember that there are no "right" or "wrong" answers, because choosing to disclose is a personal, individual decision!

1. Yvonne wishes to join an after-school business club that meets at the public library two days per week. Most of the students walk to the library after school (the library is located within walking distance of the school). Yvonne has a mild form of cerebral palsy and can walk with the use of a cane. She is able to maneuver around the school, but is concerned about the walk on the sidewalk to the public library. She is very excited about joining the club but is concerned about the walking.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

2. Matthew and his friends from college have decided to attend a movie festival next weekend. Michael wears glasses, but his friends do not know that Michael has a severe visual impairment and must get preferred seating when he watches movies. In order to see the movies, he would need to sit very close to the screen.

Disclose?

Why?

When?

What?

To whom?

How?

3. Denise has difficulty reading. She receives accommodations for classes but has trouble when reading restaurant menus, buying movie tickets, or grocery shopping. She is getting ready for her first date, which will be tomorrow night. Denise is nervous about her date's suggestion of dinner and a movie.

Disclose?

Why?
When?
What?
To whom?
How?

4. Brian has epilepsy and takes medication to control his seizures. Lately, he has been having seizures more frequently because his doctors are adjusting his medication. He has never disclosed that he has epilepsy to most of his friends at school, but is now worried that he might have a seizure at the senior prom, which is in three weeks. He has a date and still wants to go, but he is concerned that his friends will discover that he has epilepsy.

Disclose?
Why?
When?
What?
To whom?
How?

5. José has registered to vote in the next presidential election. He has received notification of his election location. Because of his paralysis, he will need assistance in the voting booth. On Election Day, he cannot find someone he trusts to accompany him to vote.

Disclose?
Why?
When?
What?
To whom?
How?

6. Keri has ADHD. She has just moved to a new city and is making new friends. Keri tends to overbook her social activities and consequently is often late meeting her friends or forgets to come at all. Her friends are becoming frustrated with her.

Disclose?
Why?
When?
What?
To whom?
How?

Activity:

My Practice Script

Research shows that having a disclosure “script” and practicing it with friends, teachers, relatives, and mentors can be of great benefit to you when the time actually comes to tell. Most people find that it is easier to talk about the impact of having a disability than to offer a formal or clinical definition.

Someone with dietary restrictions as a result of diabetes is invited to celebrate a friend’s birthday with cake and ice cream.

She might say,

“Because of my diabetes I can’t eat sugary foods, so if you don’t mind I’ll bring some sugar-free snacks for myself and to share with everyone else.”

Since Tom uses a wheelchair, he has difficulty carrying objects in both hands.

When he goes to a fast food restaurant with his friends, he might say to the cashier, “Put my order in a bag.”

To help you practice explaining your disability, you might find that it helps you to write the explanation down. You might have to do this several times before the explanation really says what you want to say, in a way that someone who knows very little about disabilities will understand. Use additional paper if needed.

Here are some questions and hints to think about while preparing your practice disclosure script:

- Discuss what your disability is all about (including both strengths and limitations).
- Discuss how your disability affects your social or community life currently.
- Discuss what you’d like your social or community life to include.
- Identify ways in which community members or friends can best accommodate you in social settings.
- Explain what your greater participation in the community can do for others.

Write your script on the following page.

My script:

Disclosure Glossary

Unit 1

Accommodation — Modifications or adjustments to the work environment or to the circumstances under which a particular task is customarily performed that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of that position (including jobs, education, and community involvement).

Goals (short-term and long-term) — The end toward which effort is directed; oftentimes, goals are constructed for short-term time periods or long-term time periods.

Informed choice — The process by which an individual arrives at a decision. It is a process that is based upon access to, and full understanding of, all necessary information from the individual's perspective. The process should result in a free and informed decision by the individual about what he or she needs.

Respect — A feeling of high regard, felt toward people, ideas or things that are important to you; this includes a proper respect for oneself as a human being.

Self-determination — The right and ability of all persons to direct their own lives, as well as the responsibility to accept the consequences of their own choices. Some of the skills that make someone self-determined or a successful self-advocate are the following:

- knowledge of one's strengths and limitations
- belief in one's ability to achieve goals
- ability to start and complete tasks
- ability to assertively assert one's wants, needs, and concerns
- ability to make decisions and see other options.

Values — Those items we highly regard or rate in usefulness, importance, or general worth.

Unit 2

Confidential — Information that is private or secret to oneself.

Disclosure — The act of opening up, revealing or telling.

Sensitive information — Information that may be sensitive or confidential to someone. Often, sensitive information may concern your personal business (for example, finances, family, health, or work).

Unit 3

Advantages — Benefits resulting from a particular course of action.

Disadvantages — Unfavorable, inferior, or prejudicial conditions that result from a particular course of action.

Impact — To impinge upon or have consequences because of involvement or release.

Self-image — One's conception of oneself or of one's role; self-image may be positive or negative.

Self-advocacy— The process by which someone supports his or her ideals, beliefs or oneself.

Unit 4

Accessible — Providing access to or capable of being reached or used; may also be used to describe architecture that can be reached or utilized by everyone, including those who use a wheelchair, a walker, or a cane.

Adult services — Services needed for people when they reach adulthood; these services often include (but are not limited to) assistance in finding a job, assistance in the home, assistance at work, and provision of various therapies or medications.

Compensatory Strategies — Actions one may take in order to offset difficulties a person may experience.

Disability (under the ADA) — A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, including (but not limited to) walking, eating, speaking, breathing, working, standing, or thinking.

Discrimination — Prejudiced or prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment against other persons, ideas, or ethics.

Eligibility — Criteria or requirements which determine a right to participate in a particular activity, service or program.

Entitlement — A right to benefits specified especially by law or contract; a government program providing benefits to members of a specified group; funds supporting or distributed by such a program.

Free appropriate public education (FAPE) — The services to which every person ages three to 21 who is receiving special education services is entitled during their years in school.

Hidden disabilities — Disabilities that are invisible on the outside but that may limit an individual's ability to function effectively.

Visible disabilities — Disabilities that are more apparent to someone else because of exterior appearance.

Unit 5

Accommodation — Any strategy that gets rid of or lessens the effect of a specific barrier.

Barriers — Something immaterial that impedes or separates; could be described as an obstacle.

Modification — An alteration in an object, environment, or activity that results in increased usability. The making of a limited change in something; the result of such a change.

Unit 6

Access — Access implies the ability to find, manipulate, and use information, an object, a place, a service or a program in an efficient and comprehensive manner. Access can be programmatic or physical.

Assistive technology — According to the Americans with Disabilities Act, assistive technology is “any item, piece of equipment, or system, whether acquired commercially, modified, or customized, that is commonly used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of individuals with disabilities.”

Assistive technology helps people with disabilities to complete daily living tasks independently, assists them in communicating with other individuals, and provides access to education, employment, and recreation.

Disability support services — An office in a postsecondary institution that provides necessary information to students who need accommodations. In addition, these offices provide training to faculty and staff on disability issues.

Disclosure script — Something that is followed or read from that will outline the sensitive information you are revealing.

Postsecondary — Term used to describe settings that follow high school (such as trade school, college, or employment).

Responsibility — Moral, legal, or mental accountability; may also be reliability or trustworthiness.

Rights — The power or privilege to which one is justly entitled.

Unit 7

Essential functions — Tasks that are fundamental and necessary to the performance of a given job.

Job accommodations — Modification or adjustments specific to the work environment, or to the manner of circumstances under which the position held or desired is customarily performed, that enable a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of that job.

Mentor — Someone whom you trust, and who can serve as an advocate or guide.

One-Stop Career Center — Centers designed to provide a full range of assistance to job seekers under one roof. One-Stops were created under the Workforce Investment Act and offer training referrals, career counseling, job listings, and similar employment-related services.

Self-accommodate — To provide accommodations for oneself rather than requesting accommodations from employers, professors, or other persons in the community.

Unit 8

Community — A group of people living together within a larger society; often described in terms of particular environments (such as stores, banks, parks, or churches).

Frustration — Sense of insecurity and dissatisfaction brought about by problems that are not fixed or needs that are not met.

Role model — A person whose behavior in a particular position (for example, a student or an employee) is regarded highly or is imitated or looked up to by others.

Trust — Assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something.