

Who Needs to Know?:

When and How to Disclose Vision Impairment

Job seekers and employees with vision loss need to consider whether to disclose their disability to their employer, or, if their vision loss is apparent (for example, by the use of a white cane or guide dog), when and how to disclose. This document provides information on the benefits and implications of disclosure.

Benefits of Disclosing in the Workplace

Disclosure can be beneficial in the workplace as it can increase an individual's access to support and accommodations. There are several benefits to disclosing:

- You can request and receive accommodations.
- You will have protection from disability discrimination.
- Provides an explanation for things about you that may appear different, such as looking at items closely, or not picking up on gestures or responding to facial expressions.
- Peers and supervisors can appreciate your honesty and be willing to help when you need it. This can increase open communication and put others at ease.
- When you ask others for assistance, they may also be able to learn tips to increase their efficiency while watching you interact with a specific software.

Not Disclosing in the Workplace

Individuals who do not require accommodation in the workplace may choose not to disclose. It is important to remember that each situation is unique. As an individual navigates the choice of disclosure, here are several potential pros and cons to consider:

- Pros for not disclosing:
 - No need to explain your disability
 - No reason to feel your treatment and expectations for you are different than other employees
 - If the disability is “manageable,” one may avoid potential disability bias
- Cons for not disclosing:
 - No protection from discrimination
 - No accommodations provided

- No explanation for altered performance or perceived differences in performance, such as not responding to nonverbal cues or taking longer to orient to the workspace
- Increased anxiety that disability could be revealed in an uncomfortable way
- Potential to put self and others at risk for safety

Disclosure Protections

Individuals with a disability have protection under the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#).

- The law assures equal access to employment for individuals with disabilities. It covers employers with 15 or more employees.
- The disability must be disclosed before an individual can request accommodations.
- Accommodations requested must be reasonable. Examples of reasonable accommodations:
 - Larger computer monitor, screen magnification software, or screen reading software
 - Providing a driver, reader, or exchanging specific work tasks among employees
 - Providing materials in large print, braille, or electronic formats

Preparing to Disclose Your Vision Impairment

Preparation is essential for disclosing your disability. Effective disclosure requires you to consider:

- When to disclose – you have several options, each with potential advantages and disadvantages:
 - In your cover letter or application (this could hurt or help your chances of getting an interview, depending on the employer)
 - After an interview is offered
 - During the interview (employers will be unprepared and may not react well to this)
 - After the job is obtained
- Finding a concise way to describe your vision impairment
- Being prepared to explain your needed accommodations
- Providing information or examples of what accommodations have worked for you in similar situations
 - An example is letting your employer know that you experience light sensitivity, and that setting your computer away from a window or being provided with blinds that can close will solve this.

- Determining who to tell (HR, your immediate supervisor, your coworkers)
- Practicing disclosing with a trusted individual

Disclosing to Coworkers

Disclosure to coworkers may be just as important as disclosure to employers.

Advantages to disclosing directly to your coworkers are:

- Coworkers will show understanding for any recognized differences.
- Coworkers will be more willing to assist and help you problem solve when challenges arise.
- Coworkers will feel more comfortable discussing work tasks, for example finding the best way for you to contribute to the project, if they know you are open to talking about your vision impairment.
- May create stronger teamwork with coworkers

Recommendations from Employed People with Vision Impairment

- Being self-confident and believing that you have a lot to offer the employer is important when disclosing your disability.
- During the interview, demonstrating your AT skills can be powerful. One person (a software developer) shows a project that he has worked on to the employer, which allows him to also demonstrate using his AT.
- At the end of the interview, one person recommended asking “Do you have any questions for me about my vision?” Employers are not legally allowed to ask these types of questions, but offering them the opportunity may make them more comfortable and clear up any concerns they have.
- If you’re concerned about disclosing, try to talk to other people with vision impairment to learn about their strategies.
- On the job, open communication with coworkers is valuable. It is important to make them feel comfortable, and being open and willing to talk about your vision loss helps.
- Before joining a new team at work, meet separately with subgroups to have a meet and greet discussing family, hobbies, career background, and visual disability. This will put people at ease. Be sure to continue this practice as new members join your team.
- Take the opportunity to point out to supervisors and peers how the accommodations, tools, and training have assisted you in completing your work objectives.

Resources

- [Career Advantage for V.I.P.S: Free course available from the NRTC](#)
 - [This course is an employment preparation primer for individuals who are blind or have low vision. One module of this course discusses disclosure and how to prepare to disclose in an interview.](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network](#)
- [Department of Labor](#)
- [The ADA: Your Employment Rights as an Individual With a Disability](#)

View our webinar

The NRTC hosted a webinar on disclosure. “Who Needs to Know?: When and How to Disclose Vision Impairment,” that shared insight from a group of panelists on the implications and benefits of disclosure. Visit our [webinars and podcasts page](#) to view the archived webinar.



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