### **Disclosure in Career Exploration**

As participants increase their engagement in career exploration, they will run into difficult-to- navigate situations that involve deciding whether they want to disclose their lived experience. It is helpful, therefore, for a participant to consider the benefits and costs of disclosure, and to decide ahead of time whether, to whom, when, and how they will disclose.

**AGENDA**

* 1. Warm Up
  2. Topic Presentation & Discussion
  3. Break
  4. ..................Column Break..................Activity Options
  5. Reflection
  6. Evaluations

**RECOMMENDED READING FOR FACILITATORS & PARTICIPANTS**

Facilitators should develop a working knowledge of the material covered in this session. To help prepare, facilitators may consider consulting the following references. In the past, Opening Doors staff have sent an email to participants before or after the session with links to these resources.

[**The 411 on Disability Disclosure: A Workbook for Youth with Disabilities**](http://www.ncwd-youth.info/411-on-disability-disclosure)**.** National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability.

[**Accommodation and Compliance Series: Employees with Mental Health Impairments.**](http://askjan.org/media/Psychiatric.html)(2014). Job Accommodation Network.

[**Fact Sheets and Scenarios for Employers: Job Accommodations for Employees with Mental**](http://cpr.bu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Job-Acc-Fact-andScenarios.pdf)[**Health Conditions.**](http://cpr.bu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/Job-Acc-Fact-andScenarios.pdf) Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

[**Disclosing Your Disability to an Employer.**](http://cpr.bu.edu/resources/reasonable-accommodations/disclosing-your-disability) Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation.

[**Do I Have to Tell My Employer that I’m Ill?**](http://mentalhealthworks.cmhaontario.ca/employees/faqs/rights-and-responsibilities/disclosure) (2015).

[**A Practical Guide for People with Mental Health Conditions Who Want to Work.**](http://namimass.org/wp-content/uploads/A_Practical_Guide_for_People_With_Mental_Health_Conditions_Who_Want_to_Work.pdf) Temple Collaborative on Community Inclusion for Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities.

**WARM UP**

Ask the group:

* + What is one word that you associate with “disability?”
  + What is your understanding of a disability? Do you identify as a person with a disability?
  + What might be some reasons why someone would reveal their disability status or mental health situation at work or school?
  + Can you picture yourself disclosing in the future? What most concerns you about that? What might make you want to disclose?

**TOPIC PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION: THE ADA & DISCLOSURE**

(Acknowledge that while this session is intended to orient participants to important concepts, you cannot provide legal advice or guidance. Offer to help locate resources if students need legal advice or guidance pertaining to this issue.)

Read through Disclosure & Accommodations handouts together. Use slides if desired. Key ADA protections to touch on:

* + You are never obligated to disclose that you have a disability, even if someone directly asks you
  + If you disclose to an employer that you have a disability, they are required to provide you with **reasonable** accommodations (provide definition of reasonable accommodation)

Key ADA limitations to acknowledge:

* + The ADA is an anti-discrimination law, not an anti-firing law
  + Discrimination still happens all the time and it is difficult to prove/find recourse

**ACTIVITY I: Tori’s Story of Disclosure**

Accommodations video:

<https://youtu.be/I5gpZ-HOoU4>

Discussion questions:

* *Why did Tori decide to disclose in her current position?*
* *What benefits did Tori gain from disclosing?*

**ACTIVITY II: Weighing the Cost and Benefits**

This activity can be done together as a group or in pairs.

What are some reasons why someone might disclose to an employer? Why someone might not?

Reasons to Disclose

* To get protections under the law
* To get accommodations at work or school
* It may feel good to disclose (not hide a less obvious disability
* To get support
* Honesty/feeling authentic

**ACTIVITY III: Disclosure Role Plays**

..................Column Break..................Reasons to NOT Disclose

* Fear of discrimination
* Fear of being let go or of not being hired
* Possible lack of acceptance
* Fear of scrutiny
* Uncertainty about whether to do it
* May want privacy

Have students break up into small groups and role play one or more of the following scenarios:

1. Meeting an old mentor for coffee
2. In a resume/cover letter
3. On a job application
4. When an employer calls for an interview
5. During an interview
6. After the job offer/before beginning work
7. After becoming established at work

**ACTIVITY IV: Disclosure Script**

See “What to include in a request for accommodations” handout.

### **A Note on Stigma and Disclosure**

As you explore the world of work, you will likely run into situations where you are confronted with whether and how to “disclose” - or tell someone that you have a psychiatric disability\* (ADA disclosure) or lived experience (informal disclosures). (We’ll discuss this later on in the session.) Considering how you might respond in these situations can help you to feel more confident when speaking to others about your past experience, present needs, and future goals and potentially empower you to contribute to dispelling mental health stigma.

Psychiatric disabilities are often referred to as “invisible disabilities.” The sense of lived experience being “invisible” or “hidden” belies the stigma that is associated with mental illnesses and mental health situations. **Stigma** is a term that has come to be used to describe the destructive ways the general public judges or stereotypes people with mental illness. **Self-stigma** also refers to the shame that people with mental illness feel about themselves. **Multiple stigmas** refers to the complex interplay of discrimination related to other social identities (e.g. race, gender, citizenship status) and the stigma of mental illness. In other words, a person of color, a transgender person, or an undocumented person, may experience mental health stigma and fear of discrimination differently than someone who is White, cisgender, and/or, in our context, a U.S. citizen.

Stigma is a critical topic. We encourage you to discuss it this session as the decision whether to disclose usually includes working through self-stigma and anticipating negative responses rooted in stigma.

To read more about stigma and ways to work through emotions related to stigma, see <https://cpr.bu.edu/resources/newsletter/photovoice-fight-stigma-mental-illness>

**\*** In most sessions, we make an effort to use the term “lived experience” to refer to people’s mental health situations; however, for the purposes of this session, we will be using the terms mental illness and psychiatric disability.

### **What is Disclosure?**

For our purposes, “disclosure” is telling someone that you have a disability or health condition. In some cases, you may choose to tell them you have a psychiatric disability or mental health condition. For those you know well and trust, you may also choose to tell them the nature of your situation and your symptoms. For purposes of inspiring others or becoming involved in anti-stigma activism, you might choose to disclose through sharing your **recovery story** – or your story of reclaiming a full life while also attending to a mental health situation.

**WHY disclose? Isn’t that risky?**

Disclosure is not just a “yes/no” decision. There are several factors involved including:

* + Whether to disclose at all
  + How much information to give (full vs. partial disclosure)
  + When to tell (up-front vs. delayed)
  + Who to tell (ex. HR, boss, coworkers, etc.)
  + How to tell (what to say)

*You don’t ever have to disclose if you don’t want to or need to, but if you found yourself needing formal accommodations at work or school, you would be required to disclose certain information.*

### **What is the Americans with Disabilities Act?**

The **ADA *prohibits discrimination*** on the basis of disability in employment, public entities, public accommodations, transportation, telecommunications, and recreation. The **goal of the ADA** is to provide equal opportunity for **qualified workers** by removing environmental and systemic barriers that get in the way of equality of opportunity, full participation and integration, independence, and economic self-sufficiency.

###### **Who is a Qualified Worker?**

A qualified worker is a person who can perform the **“essential functions”** of the job with or without **accommodations.**

**“Essential functions”** are the core, or main, tasks of the job.

In other words, you have to be able to do the job, even with a bit of help!

###### **What are Accommodations?**

* + Accommodations are supports that an employer provides
  + They are adjustments or modifications to the work environment to create a better fit for the worker
  + Employers are required to provide accommodations unless doing so would create undue hardship (ex. unreasonable cost) for the employer.

**Common accommodations for people with lived experience:**

* Flexible Schedule
* Work from home
* Quiet workspace
* Time to go to medical appointments during the day
* Extra training time
* Extra supervision
* Extra breaks (may be unpaid)

### **What to include in an in-person request for accommodations at work**

Straight Connector

Why you like/want the job: *“I want this job because…I like this job because...”*

Straight Connector

Start with what you’re good at: *“I’m good at…”*

Straight Connector

Disclosure of disability status (*avoid clinical jargon and unnecessary details)* and

work-related needs: “*I also have a medical condition that requires me to…”*

Straight Connector

Request the specific accommodation(s): *“I work best if I have….”*

### **Disclosure & Accommodations: Next Steps**

You may wish to do any or all of the following:

* Learn more about stigma and self-stigma. A good place to start is by looking to reputable online resources such as the Boston University Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation and the National Alliance for Mental Illness.
* Familiarize yourself with online resources like the Job Accommodation Network: [**https://askjan.org/disabilities/Mental-Health-Impairments.cfm.**](http://askjan.org/media/Psychiatric.html)
* Seek assistance from an employment counselor that is well-versed in the Americans with Disabilities Act.
* Once you have a particular job or school in mind, find out what you can about the environment. Consider whether you might need accommodations to meet certain requirements.
* Determine whether, why, how, when, how much, and to whom you might disclose your disability status.
* If you decide to disclose, prepare a script that emphasizes your strengths.
* Rehearse your disclosure script with a trusted person.