



Disability disclosure and workplace accommodations:

A toolkit to support youth with disabilities



About this toolkit

This toolkit is a resource for youth and young adults with disabilities who are considering disclosing their disability at work or volunteer position and requesting accommodations. It can help youth with disabilities consider their options about disclosure and accommodations, and can also help build self-advocacy skills to support them in this process.

This toolkit offers information and guidance; however, it is not intended as medical or professional advice or opinion. Individuals are required to exercise their own judgment in using this toolkit and application of any information contained in this toolkit should be based on individual needs, the relevant circumstances, and the local context. Neither Holland Bloorview nor any of the authors or contributors of this toolkit, partners or funders affiliated with this project, nor the research team associated with it are providing medical, diagnostic or treatment services through the information contained in this toolkit.

Who can benefit from this toolkit:

This toolkit is designed to support youth with disabilities who are looking for work, thinking about employment, or are currently employed. This toolkit may also be beneficial for parents of youth with disabilities to initiate conversations regarding workplace rights, disclosure, and accommodations.

Conflict of interest declaration

Some members of the development team authored some of the publications cited in this toolkit. The other team members have no conflicts of interest to declare.

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- 1 | Disability disclosure
- 2 | Things to consider
- 3 | Workplace accommodations
- 4 | Self-advocate
- 5 | Know your rights
- 6 | Words of advice
- 7 | Tools

Project Partners



Healthy And Productive Paid work for Youth with disabilities

Holland Bloorview
Kids Rehabilitation Hospital



- 1 Disability disclosure
- 2 Things to consider
- 3 Workplace accommodations
- 4 Self-advocate
- 5 Know your rights
- 6 Words of advice
- 7 Tools

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How to use this toolkit

Download and save the interactive pdf to access all media links. The **blue** text in this document indicates a link that you can click on for additional information. Click on terms in **green** or **purple** to be redirected to a definition in the Glossary or Tools section.



Navigate through the pages by clicking on arrows at the bottom of the page.

Navigate through sections by clicking on tool bar located on the right side of the page.

This PDF version is accessible for screen readers and other accessible technologies.





2 | What is disability disclosure, and why is it important?

In this section we will discuss:

- What disability disclosure is
- Why it is important to disclose
- The importance of workplace accommodations



What is disability disclosure?

Disability disclosure means telling someone about your disability.⁷ In this toolkit, we are focusing on disability disclosure at work and throughout the application and interview process.

Why is disability disclosure important at work?

If you need workplace accommodations to perform the duties of your job, you will first need to disclose to your employer that you have a disability.^{8,9}

Workplace accommodations are changes to your role or environment to support you in doing your job, like modified workspaces and equipment, and flexible work schedules.¹⁰

Workplace Disability Disclosure:

Telling your employer that you have a disability.

Workplace Accommodations:

Changes to your role or environment to support you in doing your job. For more on accommodations see [Section 3](#).

The importance of workplace accommodations

Receiving accommodations is important because these supports can improve your productivity, quality of life, social inclusion, and psychological and physical health.^{1,2,10-13} Workplace accommodations can also extend job retention and can lead to improved disability awareness in the workplace.^{10,14}

“

There's no point of hiding [your disability] because if you make employers aware of it, they'll at least accommodate you...If you don't make them aware of it...It's going to impact your performance.” (male, aged 30, visual impairment, full time employment)¹⁸

It can be a complex process disclosing your disability. Disclosing your disability and asking for accommodations can improve your work experience, but it can also have negative consequences depending on your health condition and where you work.¹⁵ Employers may not be aware of how to have conversations about disability disclosure, and how to provide accommodations to people with disabilities.^{16,17}

Before deciding whether or not to disclose your disability, there are a few things you might want to consider.

For more resources on disability disclosure in the workplace, visit the [AODA](#) (Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act).

While the majority of resources in this toolkit are Ontario specific, we have included tools from other provinces or the United States. Please note that any laws described in these tools may not apply in Ontario.





2 | Should I disclose? Things to consider before disclosing

In this section we will discuss:

- Potential benefits and drawbacks of disclosing your disability
- What can help with disclosure
- What to disclose
- How and when to disclose your disability



Potential benefits and drawbacks of disclosing your disability

When deciding whether or not to disclose your disability, you might want to consider some of the potential benefits or drawbacks of disclosure. It can be difficult to predict whether your experience of disclosure will be positive or negative because this will depend on your specific situation, your employer, and the context in which you are working.

Potential benefits to disclosing your disability are that you can:

- Help your employer to understand your need for accommodations^{8,15}
- Help to create an atmosphere of acceptance^{8,15} and improve social inclusion^{8,15}
- Improve company morale, retention, and productivity²
- Get a chance to show your employer how you can do the job¹⁸

“

It all comes down to me being forthright about what I need so that they can support me...So, the onus is out there to provide that accommodation to me.”
(female, aged 28, hearing impairment, full time employment)¹⁸

Potential drawbacks to disclosing your disability are that you may:

- Experience [stigma](#) or workplace [discrimination](#),^{13,19,20} isolation,⁵ or negative attitudes from employers²¹ or co-workers⁵
- Feel embarrassed about disclosing a disability²¹
- Feel vulnerable to an employer if you disclose your disability²¹
- Fear of possibly losing your job¹⁰

“

I just didn't feel comfortable telling [work] that I had a disability. So, they didn't really know... I don't know if that sounds cheesy but I guess I didn't feel comfortable to say anything. I didn't want to say something and then not meet those requirements and then something would happen.”
(female, aged 24, brain injury, employment status unknown)²²



When disclosure is beyond your control

In some cases, the decision of whether or not to disclose your disability might be out of your control. For instance, if you have a visible disability, this might be evident during the interview stage. Similarly, if you have applied for a job through an employment agency or disability-friendly company that actively recruits individuals with disabilities, your employer/potential employer may already be aware that you have a disability.

In these instances, you may not need to disclose your disability. However, if you require accommodations in the workplace, you may still need to have a discussion with your employer about your accommodation needs.

For a list of questions to consider when deciding whether or not to disclose check out page 20 of this resource: [Disclosing your disability](#) (from the Disability Alliance BC), or this [disclosure tip sheet](#) (from the University of Massachusetts).

What can help with disclosure?

If you decide that you want to disclose your disability to your employer, there are a few things that might help you:

1. Job preparation and education²¹

It is often helpful to be prepared before you disclose your disability. For instance, employment training programs, or job coaching could help you learn valuable job skills, [self-advocacy](#) skills, and confidence in the workplace, which are facilitators to disclosing.^{5,10,21,22} Research has also found that youth who attend employment training or mentorship programs are more likely to disclose than youth who do not attend any job training.²¹

Knowing your rights in the workplace (such as your employer’s [duty to accommodate](#)) could help boost your confidence when having this discussion with your employer.²¹ For more information on workplace rights, see [section 5](#).

2. Self-confidence and self-advocacy skills²¹

When disclosing your disability to your employer, it is important that you are confident and that you speak up for yourself, especially when requesting accommodations.²¹ Do not be afraid to ask for what you need to be successful in your job. When speaking to your employer, thoughtfully and respectfully highlight the things that you need, and avoid oversharing medical details about your disability. Focus on your skills, strengths, and how these modifications you are requesting could help you succeed in your role.



3. Having an inclusive work environment²¹

If your employer is inclusive, this might help you to feel more comfortable when having a conversation about disclosure. Some ways that employers create inclusive environments that can facilitate disclosure include:

- Having an open and positive attitude
- Being understanding and accepting of everyone’s strengths
- Indicating an openness to accommodations or having an accommodations staff to assist with the process.²¹



Certain people are going to be very open and seem pretty positive. So, that makes me feel like I can disclose...my disability, or not even my disability but the limitations it’s going to bring out, without it impacting my chances of getting a job.”
(female, aged 18, cerebral palsy, unemployed)¹⁸

4. Mentoring²¹

Mentoring is a relationship with someone who acts like a role model or has more experience and who shares their experience or helpful tools and information with a less experienced person.²³⁻²⁷ Mentoring can promote self-advocacy, confidence, and job skills, which could help facilitate disclosure conversations.^{21,23} Mentorship can be external, through a mentorship or leadership program, or it can be internal, within your workplace. In addition, connecting with other individuals with disabilities who have experience with disclosure and accommodations might also be helpful. They may be able to share advice and suggestions based on their experiences.

5. Understanding the benefits of disclosing²¹

Knowing the benefits of disclosing your disability can also help to facilitate these conversations. Benefits of disclosure include making your employer aware of your strengths and limitations and what to expect of you, receiving accommodations that help you to successfully carry out your role, and helping to increase the diversity of your workplace.²¹ Research shows that diverse workplaces can improve productivity, innovation, work ethic, and customer loyalty.²⁸

6. Knowing that an employer has had previous experience working with people who have a disability²¹

Employers who have experience working with people with disabilities often have more knowledge of workplace accommodations and disability confidence (i.e., knowledge and understanding of how to work effectively with and include people with disabilities).²⁹ For these reasons, it might be easier to disclose your disability and ask for accommodations if your employer is already familiar with this process.



7. Feeling comfortable with your supervisor or employer³⁰

If you have a trusting and comfortable relationship with your employer or supervisor, this can help to facilitate conversations about disclosure and accommodations.



When I was first hired, or even in the interview process, I made a conscious decision not to [disclose]...but then in the lunchroom one day [my] manager started talking about her son who has Asperger's; So, I [shared] then that I had it too.”
(female, aged 27, autism, full-time employment)²⁴

What to disclose to an employer?

If you decide to disclose your disability, you do not necessarily have to tell your employer any private or confidential matters or the nature of your condition. You only need to tell your employer what is relevant to your accommodation needs, so your employer knows what they can do to support you in doing your work.³¹

The details you choose to disclose depend on your own situation, what you are comfortable with, and the requirements and policies of your employer. Some employers may request a medical note.

You can choose what to disclose to your employer, including:

1. That you need accommodations in the workplace
2. That you have a disability (but not specify what type)
3. The limitations or symptoms that you have

Disclosure: Disability versus Accommodations



There is a difference between disclosing a disability (i.e., telling an employer about your condition) and disclosing specific accommodations that you need (i.e., more space around your desk) to do your job.⁵

The details you choose to disclose depends on your situation and the policies of your workplace.

How and when to disclose your disability

There is no right time to disclose your disability; it really depends on your situation and your employer. Often times disclosure is discussed when the need for accommodations arises.²¹ Also, disclosure is typically not a one-time event, but instead tends to be an ongoing or continuous process.²¹

Strategies and reasons for youth disclosing to an employer included advocating for their needs, understanding workplace rights, and having accommodation solutions.²¹

*See [section 7](#) for a sample disclosure script.



“

I don't think there's really any situation where I would disclose before the interview, at least not in my resume or my cover letter. I'd rather be called in based on my achievements...Although in some situations I might put it in my cover letter, but I've never done that so far.” (female, aged 18, cerebral palsy, unemployed)¹⁸

For youth with disabilities, the type and severity of their disability, their comfort level with disclosing, and the type of job and industry sector they were in, impacted their decision of when to disclose.²¹ For example:

- Youth with **autism spectrum disorder (ASD)** had no consensus on the best time to disclose, and shared that their decision to disclose depended on their past experiences, comfort level with their employer, and their own self-advocacy skills.³²
- Young adults with **chronic illnesses including cystic fibrosis, rheumatologic disorders, chronic heart conditions, renal transplant, or spina bifida** chose to disclose in the workplace to explain frequent or extended absences at work, the need for or use of medications, physical limitations, or as a warning in case anything happens at work due to their illness.³³
- For youth with **Acquired Brain Injury (ABI)**, the decision to disclose was often difficult and uncomfortable because not disclosing meant not receiving accommodations. Some youth with ABI chose not to disclose due to fear of discrimination and judgement.³⁴

“

For me, disclosure comes up when I have a need that I have to ask for otherwise, it's maybe not relevant at that time.” (female, aged 29, visual impairment, part time employment)¹⁸

For more resources on how and when to disclose, see this [disclosure guide](#) (from Disability Alliance BC), [Disclosing your Disability](#) (from the University of Guelph), and the following [disclosure tip sheet](#) (from the University of Massachusetts).



3 | How and when should I ask for workplace accommodations?

In this section we will discuss:

- Types of accommodations
- When to request accommodations



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Types of accommodations

If you decide to disclose your disability, or your need for accommodations, it is important to think about what types of accommodations you might need before approaching your employer. This could be unique to you, depending on what supports you need to carry out your role, and the job role or industry you are in.³⁵

There are many different types of accommodations. Some are formal, while others are informal.

Contrary to what many employers believe, most workplace accommodations are fairly straight forward to arrange and most can be provided at little to no cost.^{1,2}

Formal accommodations

Formal accommodations are provided by employers, and typically involve personal assistance, technology or changes in physical environment.³⁶ This includes working from home or having flexible hours, accessible software, accessible workspaces, visual aids, and accommodations for the interview or job training.²¹ Formal accommodations are sometimes facilitated through an accessibility team or department.²¹

“

[Working from home] was different to what my manager was used to in the past; so, there was a little bit of resistance at first... Luckily, I had the support of the accommodations team and the occupational therapist to help me explain and provided support to something that is very normal.” (female, aged 26, muscular dystrophy, full time employment)¹⁸

Informal accommodations

Informal accommodations include accommodations that are self-provided by youth, or simple, temporary solutions put in place by employers).²¹ Examples include getting written versus verbal instruction, carrying a book to aid memory, and more frequent check-ins with a supervisor or coworkers.^{21,36} Some youth self-accommodate in the workplace by using their own tools or equipment, getting help from others, and finding alternate solutions to job tasks.

Youth usually self-accommodate because they do not wish to disclose their disability and/or ask for accommodations, as a temporary solution before getting formal accommodations, or because their employer cannot provide them with the accommodations they need to do their job.²¹



Some Apps that might help with self-accommodations:


- [Seeing AI](#) (designed for those with vision impairments. This app uses the device camera to identify people and objects, scan documents and short text and then audibly describe those objects and texts).
- [Speechify](#) (This is a text-to-speech app)
- [Voice Dream Reader](#) (This is a text-to-speech app)
- [AVA- 24/7 Accessible Life](#) (This is an app to help people who are deaf or hard of hearing by allowing to follow conversations in real time)
- [Stop, Breathe & Think, Headspace, Calm](#) (meditation app that is designed to help with stress, anxiety and mood tracking)

Common workplace accommodations include:

- Modifying job tasks^{35,37}
- Job bundling (taking various tasks from existing positions and creating a new job that supports the employer’s needs)³⁷
- Flexible work schedules^{21,28,37}
- Extra breaks^{35,37-39}
- Physical alterations to the building (to be more accessible)^{21,37}
- Ergonomic redesign of workstations³⁷
- Sensory accommodations (e.g. adjusted lighting and noise)³²
- Job coaching (someone to help the employee adjust to the workplace)³⁷
- Alternative supervision arrangements (e.g. more frequent meetings)^{35,37}
- Different ways of communicating (e.g. written instructions)^{32,37}
- Additional training^{35,37}
- Transportation accommodations⁴¹
- Short-term and long-term disability leave^{37,38}
- [Telecommuting](#)^{37,41}
- Attendant services or personal assistance services^{3,6}

For more workplace accommodation suggestions, see this resource from the [Job Accommodation Network](#), [workplace accommodations](#) (from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind), or the following strategies and accommodations on the job (from the [Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario](#)).

An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a short term counselling or support service for employees to help resolve problems that are affecting work.³⁴




Note on attendant services and personal assistant services:

Attendant Services in the workplace include support with toileting, eating and drinking, essential communications, physical assistance (lifting or moving objects), and help performing work-related tasks.^{3,4}

Research shows the benefits of attendant services accommodations in the workplace include:

- Increased productivity^{3,6}
- Improved interactions with co-workers³
- Increased retention of employee^{3,6}
- Higher confidence and self-esteem⁶

Funding for attendant services in the workplace in Ontario is through Direct Funding (<https://www.dfontario.ca>) or Attendant outreach services (www.cilt.ca).⁴

When to Request Accommodations

Just as there is no ‘right’ way to ask for accommodations, there is no ‘right’ time to ask either. It all depends on your individual needs and situation. It is important to consider the pros and cons of disclosing at different stages, and whether or not you require accommodations at that particular stage.

Youth with various disabilities described the process of requesting accommodations as changing over time, mainly due to changes in health, job roles and responsibilities, or adjustments needed to original accommodations.⁸ They emphasized the importance of having open communication with employers. Some youth also mentioned that revisiting accommodations is important, especially within a new job.²¹

Accommodations are often an ongoing and continuous process, that can occur at multiple stages (see **Figure 1** on next page):

- **Before your interview:**
To receive accommodations needed for the interview process
- **During your interview:**
To let your employer know about your accommodation needs if you are hired
- **After you are hired:**
To receive the accommodations you need to carry out your role
- **Ongoing:**
After you are hired and you receive accommodations, your needs may change over time. It is important to revisit your accommodations if your needs change, or you change roles or duties.

For more tips on timing and how to ask for accommodations, see this [resource](#) from ConnectABILITY.



“

It's really important to have that [accommodations] conversation ongoing or to be open to it because everyone's needs are so unique and even for me, when I'm in new situations, things will come up and that patience is really important.”
 (female, aged 29, visual impairment, part time employment)¹⁸



Figure 1: The process of requesting accommodations (developed from Lindsay et al.)²¹



2 | Learning to self-advocate

In this section we will cover:

- What is self-advocacy?
- How to build self-advocacy skills



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What is self-advocacy?

Self-advocacy is an act that a person with a disability engages in to get the supports that they need.⁴² This involves:

- a) Understanding your disability and how you work best^{43,44}
- b) Knowing your rights and responsibilities as a person with a disability^{43,44}
- c) Being able to communicate, assert and negotiate your needs^{43,44}

Over the past two decades, educational research has established self-advocacy as an important skill for students with disabilities to achieve successful outcomes.⁴² Research shows that:

- Students who develop their knowledge of self-advocacy and build their self-advocacy skills are better able to make informed decisions and to get the supports and services that they need to achieve their goals in school and in the workplace.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶
- Being aware of your needs and having self-advocacy skills are important for requesting accommodations.¹⁰

For more resources on self-advocacy in employment, see the following [toolkit](#) from Autism Speaks.




You have to practice your advocacy skills and describe your accommodations and your needs... You have to advocate for yourself. It's easy to have someone else do it at the time, but you should learn how to do it because you're going to need to do it a lot." (female, 26 years old, cerebral palsy, full-time employment)²⁰

How to build self-advocacy skills

To build your self-advocacy skills, it is important to understand your rights and responsibilities as a person with a disability; your disability and related needs; and how to communicate and negotiate your needs.⁴⁴

[Section 5](#) provides a look at the rights and responsibilities of people with disabilities in Canada, within the context of workplace accommodations. Understanding your rights and responsibilities could help you advocate for yourself, particularly when disclosing your disability to an employer and requesting accommodations.

[Section 6 'words of advice'](#) provides advice about disability disclosure, advocacy, and accommodations from youth with disabilities, employers and researchers.



TIP



In this section we focus on understanding your disability and related needs, and learning how to communicate and negotiate these needs to improve your advocacy skills.

When requesting accommodations, you will need to tell your employer about your disability-related needs affecting your job duties, and take part in conversations about potential accommodation solutions.⁴⁷ This means that it is important for you to understand your own job-related strengths and skills, and your needs, including job-specific tasks you may need support with, before talking to your employer. Take some time to consider what your strengths are, particularly in relation to the job you are interested in.

For resources on identifying your strengths, check out page 20 of this [disclosure guide](#) (from Disability Alliance BC), or this [self-assessment](#) from the Ontario Ministry of Education.

In addition to your strengths and skills, it is important to identify your needs and the supports that you might require. [Section 3](#) provides information and resources about various types of accommodations. You can use this as a starting point to consider some of the modifications you might require. More useful resources on self-advocating can be found here: [Self-advocacy Online Training](#) (developed by George Washington University), and [Lessons for Self-awareness and Self-advocacy](#) (developed by University of South Carolina).

Once you have an understanding of your strengths and the areas you need support with, you can start to think about how you might communicate these to your employer. It is helpful to plan ahead and to practice how you might have this conversation.

Section 7 'Tools' contains a number of tools to help you with this:

1. [Disclosure tool](#)

This template helps you develop a script for when you decide to disclose or request accommodations. The script includes important information about your disability, your strengths, and the types of supports you need to effectively carry out your role.

2. [Simulated disclosure conversation: Online learning tool](#)

This interactive online learning tool simulates a conversation between an employer and a youth with disabilities. This tool will help you to practice how you might have this conversation by taking on the role of the youth, and gaining feedback on your approach.



3. [Simulation videos](#)

These videos contain two different simulation scenarios that our team created with the help of youth with disabilities to highlight how youth can advocate for themselves, disclose their disability, and request accommodations in a job interview or to an employer. The two scenarios include:

- 1) Youth with a **visible** disability disclosing during interview, focusing on their strengths, and addressing accommodations.
- 2) Youth with an **invisible** disability requesting accommodations after being hired, addressing employer doubt, advocating for themselves.



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A-Z



5 | Know your rights

In this section we will discuss:

- The laws in Canada and Ontario that protect the rights of people with disabilities
- What employers are required to do when it comes to providing accommodations
- What a person with disabilities is required to do when requesting accommodations
- The Role of Unions and Professional Associations



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Laws in Canada and Ontario regarding employment and disability

Within Canada and Ontario, there are a number of laws that protect the rights of people with disabilities. An overview of these laws is provided below.

Employment Standards Act

- An act that provides the minimum standards and rights and responsibilities of employees and employers in Ontario.
- The Employment Standards Act covers employee rights such as minimum wage, leaves of absence, termination, vacation pay and time, etc.

For a breakdown on the Employment Standards Act, see this [fact sheet](#) from the Ontario Ministry of Labour.

Canadian Human Rights Act

- A Canadian law that protects people who are employed from discrimination based on disability, race, sex, age and sexual orientation.⁴⁸
- **Duty to Accommodate:** Employers have a duty to accommodate an employee's needs, which could include treating them differently than other employees or changing rules or policies to prevent discrimination and allow them to work and participate fully.⁴⁹

For more information, visit [Understanding the Canadian Human Rights Act](#) or read the full [Canadian Human Rights Act](#).

Examples of duty to accommodate:

- Having adjustable desks and accessible work stations for employees with disabilities.
- Letting employees work flexible hours or work from home.

Ontario Human Rights Code

- A law in Ontario that gives everyone equal rights and opportunities in employment and services without discrimination based on disability, gender, race, etc.
- Employers must ensure the workplace is inclusive and healthy, and must legally accommodate their employees unless it would cause **undue hardship**.⁵⁰
- Accommodation need not be provided if it causes undue or excessive hardship to the employer. However, some degree of hardship is acceptable.⁵¹ The Code outlines three considerations when assessing whether an accommodation would cause undue hardship:
 - Cost⁵¹
 - Outside sources of funding, if any⁵¹
 - Health and safety requirements, if any⁵¹

For more information on the Code, visit [Ontario Human Rights Code](#).



Workplace rights video: [This video](#) takes you through the different laws in Canada that protect employee rights and promote inclusion and equal opportunity for individuals with disabilities. The video discusses the shared responsibility between employers and employees with disabilities when it comes to accommodations. Knowing your rights can help you when it comes to advocating for your needs.



Employment Equity Act

- Any organization or business that is regulated by the government has to provide equal job opportunities to disadvantaged groups including people with disabilities, women, and visible minority groups. The Employment Equity Act was introduced to help achieve equality in the workplace and to provide employment opportunities to disadvantaged groups.⁵²

For more details on the [Employment Equity Act](#) visit the following resource from the Government of Canada.

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) 2005

- [AODA](#) is a law in Ontario that companies and organizations must follow to become more accessible to people with disabilities. The goal of the AODA is to have all Ontarians benefit from accessible services, programs, employment, and spaces.⁵³

For more information on the AODA visit this [resource](#).

What is discrimination and how can you address it?

According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, discrimination is “an action or a decision that treats a person or a group badly for reasons such as their race, age or disability.”⁴² These reasons are called ‘grounds’ and are protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act.⁴²

Discrimination in employment might happen when someone experiences negative treatment or impact because of their disability.³ For people with disabilities, discrimination is often connected to [ableism](#). Ableism refers to attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of people with disabilities.⁴³ It can take the form of negative stereotypes, stigma, and prejudicial attitudes.

To address discrimination, it is important to know your rights and to understand the policies that your workplace has about [harassment](#) and discrimination. If you feel comfortable doing so, you can talk to the person you believe discriminated against you or your manager, [Human Resources](#) personnel, or your union representative. You can also make a complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal.

For more resources on discrimination and human rights, see: [Ableism](#), [Human Rights](#), and the [Human Rights Legal Support Centre](#).





What employers are required to do when it comes to providing accommodations

In addition to knowing your rights, it is important to understand the responsibilities of employers and workers with disabilities when it comes to requesting accommodations.

In Canada, **employers** are required to:³¹

- Accept your request for accommodation
- Ask you only for information that is needed to make the accommodation
- Ask for expert advice or opinions if they need help making accommodations
- Take an active role to ensure that possible solutions are explored
- Maintain your confidentiality
- Respond to your request for accommodation as soon as possible
- Pay for any medical information or documentation that they need from you³¹

What a person with a disability is required to do when requesting accommodations

If you are requesting workplace accommodations, it is **your responsibility** to:³¹

- Tell your employer what your needs are
- Give your employer the information that they need. This might be medical information or other expert opinions.
- Participate in conversations about solutions.
- Work with your employer and [union](#) (if applicable) to manage the process of accommodation.³¹



Employers have a legal duty to accommodate you, and...most people want to accommodate you, but importantly, someone won't just know your needs... It's definitely best in my experience to be as up front as possible."
(male aged 26, cerebral palsy, full time employment)¹⁸



The role of unions

If you work in a unionized environment, and you would like support in talking to your employer about your accommodation needs, you can reach out to your union representative.⁵⁴ Your union can support you by:

- Taking an active role as partners in the process of accommodation
- Sharing responsibility with your employer for promoting accommodation
- Supporting accommodations regardless of the [collective agreement](#).³¹ A collective agreement is a written contract of employment covering a group of employees who are represented by a union. This agreement contains provisions governing the terms and conditions of employment. It also contains the rights, privileges and duties of the employer, the trade union and the employees.⁵⁵

What is a Union?

Some workplaces have unions, which help to give employees a voice in their workplace regarding wages, benefits and working conditions.⁴³

Unions help to advance and protect the rights and livelihoods of their members and advocate for fairness, equality and justice in the workplace.⁴³

Under Ontario's Labour Relations Act, you have the right to join a trade union and participate in legal union activities.⁴⁴

Note: You do not need the permission of your employer to join or form a union in the workplace. It is also illegal for employers to intervene in any union activities.





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Advice from a youth with a non-visible disability

What advice would you give to youth with disabilities who are deciding whether or not to disclose their disability to their employer?

When it comes to disability disclosure, a trick I often use is I imagine myself in the role three months from now, and consider what it would look like if I did or did not disclose. It is not always easy to be honest with yourself, but it will help you think about how you can best succeed in the job in the long run. So, if you feel like you might not perform your best without disclosing, it is best to disclose. In my experience, I found that I've felt more comfortable and supported when I disclosed.

Of course it also depends on the type of job. I've had jobs that were either flexible, short-term or casual positions where I worked independently and made my own schedule; So, I did not feel the need to disclose. I've also had positions where I did not disclose and thought I could "swing it", and sometimes that ended up working against me. Since my condition is non-visible, it may have appeared to the employer that I was not meeting my work requirements or being lazy, while it was actually because I didn't have an accommodation in place.

Lastly, it is ok to take some time to orient yourself in the new role so you can figure out if accommodations may be needed. That said, with a non-visible disability I recommend not waiting too long because the employer may wonder about why you haven't said anything all this time.

What advice would you give to youth with disabilities about asking their employer for accommodations in the workplace?

First step, assess the environment! It will go a long way if you identify some possible accommodation solutions to suggest to your employer. No one knows what's best for you better than you, so the more options you provide to your employer, the easier their job will be in accommodating you.

Second, be specific about your needs. Since the employer cannot see your condition (and may not know much about it), make sure you are able to clearly explain what your accommodation needs are. For example, instead of saying something vague like "I have environmental sensitivities", state your specific needs (e.g. working in an environment with reduced noise and taking 5 minute breaks every two hours). It can sometimes feel like you're the first person in this world to ask for accommodations, but what I learned from my experiences is that having accommodations is actually quite common in workplaces!



Polina Kosareva, Research clerk and Outreach Co-ordinator at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital



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Do you have any tips or advice for youth with disabilities when it comes to self-advocacy in the workplace?

Like with everything else in the employment process, it is how you market yourself! I found that having a positive perspective and showing that you're confident that you can do the job helps the employer feel confident about you too. When discussing your disability, highlight the strengths you've gained from it, and how these strengths will be useful in the job.

From my experience, employers will respect you for the challenges you face and the resilience it takes to overcome them. Last but not least, do not be apologetic!!! When disclosing your disability and asking for accommodations, don't ever feel like you're a burden to the employer. You are not! Instead, I like to think of the process as taking a step to set myself up for success in the job, and that's beneficial to both myself AND my employer.



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A vertical sidebar on the right side of the page containing navigation icons: a list icon, an 'A-Z' icon, and a search icon.

Advice from a youth with a visible disability

What advice would you give to youth with disabilities who are deciding whether or not to disclose their disability to their employer?

I have always told myself that a company that does not treat me fairly when I disclose is not a company that I want to work for. This has led me to always disclose early in the hiring process. Think of disclosure as a way for YOU to interview the employer. It can be difficult to put yourself out there. Disclosing personally makes me feel quite vulnerable. Imagine the hiring process as going shoe shopping and disclosing as telling the store clerk your shoe size. Letting them know what shoes fit you makes sure you do not receive improper shoes that hurt your feet. Best case scenario, the employer will know more about you and can potentially become a strong ally for workplace accommodations. Worst case scenario, you were able to avoid an unfavorable work environment. At the end of the day you have to pick if disclosure is best for you or not. There is no wrong answer.



Zak Priest, Outreach Facilitator at Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital

What advice would you give to youth with disabilities about asking their employer for accommodations in the workplace?

Accommodations are there to ensure that you can be the best employee you can be. It is important for you and your employer to realize that. It is easy to think that your requested accommodations are potentially too big and complicated that there is no point asking for them. I'm here to say from personal experience that accommodations are a lot easier to implement than you think.

Many companies even have small funds dedicated just for employee accommodations. A small tip I could give is to be flexible and communicate. One accommodation may unfortunately not be able to be implemented but in many cases there may be an alternative that is just as good (maybe even better) that you never thought of before!

Do you have any tips or advice for youth with disabilities when it comes to self-advocacy in the workplace?

Number one thing to remember, three words: You. Are. Awesome. You got hired, called to an interview, or got called to a phone interview for a reason. You have strengths that massively outweigh any of your perceived weaknesses. You are worth advocating for and no one is going to do a better job at that than you.



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Advice from an employer of youth with disabilities

What advice would you give to youth with disabilities who are deciding whether or not to disclose their disability to their employer?

It is a personal choice. Everyone has a different reason to disclose or not to disclose but they are all based on personal perspectives. Don't let anyone persuade your decision. It is critical to know enough about the company and position you are applying for, that you can present what you bring to the job opportunity and what you offer to the company. Remember, it is a competition, so know how to present why you should be the choice and be able to pitch yourself, which can certainly include what you need to succeed. You do not have to mention anything about a 'defined disability' (i.e., I have Asperger's therefore I need; Or, I have a hearing impairment, therefore I need), but you can if you want.

If you do disclose, do not apologize. Do not change how you are talking to the interviewer, and do not assume anything about how they are going to respond. Often, we dictate people's reactions to us by how we say or do something. We do not talk about our hair colour or height during an interview, unless our height impacts our ability to do the job. So, find a way to share this information in a way that is relevant to how you work, why you want this job, or why you want to work for the company.

For example, "I want to work for company A because as a person with epilepsy, I appreciate an employer which offers varying lighting, has signs about no fragrance, and has accessible doors etc. As someone with a disease which changes over time, my needs may change and I like the idea of working somewhere where this is already taken into consideration."

Do NOT get clinical. Sometimes our nerves take over and we think we need to share everything about our disability. Too much information may make people uncomfortable because they are not medical and they typically do not know enough to be able to respond comfortably. Keep statements simple and ensure their relevancy and personal connection as to why you want to work there.



Jamie Burton, Vice President,
Dolphin Digital Technologies Inc.,





What advice would you give to youth with disabilities about asking their employer for accommodations in the workplace?

As an employer, I want to know what everyone needs to do their best. I do not see this as a negative thing, but rather a way of knowing how to help someone feel great about what they do and get the best results for my business. Look for businesses which offer accommodations from the start, on every job ad, not just ads identifying they are looking to attract persons with disabilities. Everyone has difficulty asking for something, no matter what it is, or what the reason. Just remember that your focus is on doing a great job and this is how you can do your best.

Knowing your rights can help give you confidence to ask for an accommodation, but it is not a good idea to lead with the law or tell someone what they have to do. This can often sound like a challenge and when people are challenged, they tend to respond negatively. Present your accommodation needs, share experiences where someone has accommodated you well, and keep it real. Do not demand. Make positive suggestions and stay focused on the fact that you have been hired or will be hired because you can do the job. Everyone needs tools to be successful and fulfill job requirements. Accommodations are the tools you need to succeed.

Do you have any tips or advice for youth with disabilities when it comes to self-advocacy in the workplace?

Everyone can learn something about self-advocacy. I have yet to meet someone who has mastered this. So do not think or believe that there is one way that suits everyone. What works with your personality? Here are some tips to consider:

- Timing is everything. Figure out when it is suitable to practice.
- Be consistently helpful - others will notice this is a habit or when it is a one off.
- Be productive. It will be noticed and will likely open conversations where you can 'market' how you were able to accomplish something.
- Stay positive and offer insight when you have the opportunity and confidence to do so.
- Evaluate how you do the job and be able to give specific examples of where you have been of value, whether anticipated or not.
- Always focus on the opportunity, and do not get dragged down by negativity.
- Think of ways to make any request a reality. Have the ability to add to the conversation, not just expect someone to know what a response should be.
- Try not to lead with emotion. While we can all get emotional, emotions tend to have us respond automatically, or unthinkingly. Business is about expectations, outcomes, improvement, innovation and potential so always lead with positive input.



Advice from a professor who focuses on disability and workplace stigma

How should job applicants talk about their disability in a job interview?

In recent research, we found that the ways in which job applicants disclose a disability in job interviews impacts the extent to which hiring managers will see them as suitable for hiring.

We compared two types of disclosure: Disclosure that focuses on the strengths of a disability (e.g., “using a wheelchair has helped me become better at problem-solving”) versus disclosure that downplays the importance of the disability (e.g., “even though I am in a wheelchair, it does not impact my work”).

We found that playing up the strengths of a disability leads to better hiring outcomes because it makes the job applicant look more competent and admirable. We replicated this finding across two types of disabilities, including job applicants who use wheelchairs and job applicants who are deaf and hard of hearing.

We also wondered if the type of job matters. We found that playing up the strengths of the disability was particularly beneficial for jobs that involve higher levels of people contact (e.g., retail sales) than for jobs requiring lower levels of people contact (e.g., machine assembly).

To learn more, please explore the research studies listed below:

Lyons, B. J., Martinez, L., Ruggs, E., Hebl, M., Ryan, A. M., Bachman, K., & Roebuck, A. (2018). [To say or not to say: Different strategies of acknowledging a visible disability.](#) *Journal of Management*, 44, 1980-2007.

Lyons, B. J., Volpone, S., Wessel, J. L., & Alonso, N. (2017). [Disclosing a disability: Do strategy type and onset controllability make a difference?](#) *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 102, 1375-1383.



Brent J. Lyons, Ph.D. Assistant Professor in Organization Studies
York Research Chair in Stigmatization and Social Identity
Schulich School of Business
York University



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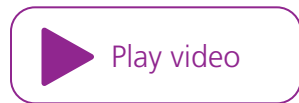
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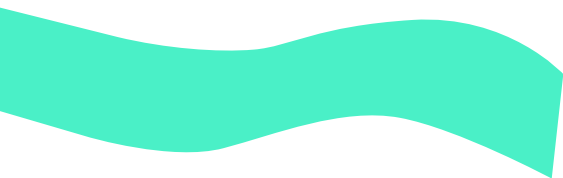
b) Youth simulation scenario

The youth simulation scenario shows two different simulated interactions between youth with disabilities and an employer. The learning objectives of the simulations include: how to disclose your disability in an interview, how to request accommodations to an employer, how to address employer doubts, and how to demonstrate confidence and self-advocacy skills in the workplace or a job interview.



c) Simulated disclosure conversation: Online learning tool

[This online learning tool](#) enables youth to simulate a conversation with an employer to practice how they might disclose/request accommodations. Feedback provided can help youth prepare themselves for this conversation.



Glossary

Ableism

Ableism refers to “attitudes in society that devalue and limit the potential of people with disabilities. People with disabilities describe ongoing negative experiences as a result of societal structures and negative attitudes based on ableism.”⁵⁶

The Law Commission of Ontario has said:

[Ableism] may be defined as “a belief system, analogous to racism, sexism or ageism, that sees persons with disabilities as being less worthy of respect and consideration, less able to contribute and participate, or of less inherent value than others. Ableism may be conscious or unconscious, and may be embedded in institutions, systems or the broader culture of a society. It can limit the opportunities of persons with disabilities and reduce their inclusion in the life of their communities.”⁵⁶

“Ableist attitudes are often based on the idea that disability is an “anomaly to normalcy,” rather than a variation in the human condition which is inherent and expected. Ableism may also be expressed in ongoing paternalistic and patronizing behaviour toward people with disabilities.”⁵⁶

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)

AODA is a law in Ontario that companies and organizations must follow to become more accessible to people with disabilities. The goal of the AODA is to have all Ontarians benefit from accessible services, programs, employment, and spaces.⁵⁷

“Recognizing the history of discrimination against persons with disabilities in Ontario, the purpose of this Act is to benefit all Ontarians by:

- (a) developing, implementing and enforcing accessibility standards to achieve accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities with respect to goods, services, facilities, accommodation, employment, buildings, structures and premises on or before January 1, 2025; and
- (b) providing for the involvement of persons with disabilities, of the Government of Ontario and of representatives of industries and of various sectors of the economy in the development of the accessibility standards.”⁵⁷

Collective Agreement

A collective agreement is a written contract of employment covering a group of employees who are represented by a trade union. This agreement contains provisions governing the terms and conditions of employment. It also contains the rights, privileges and duties of the employer, the trade union and the employees.⁵⁵



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Disability

“Section 10 of the Code 58 defines ‘disability’ as:

1. Any degree of physical disability, infirmity, malformation or disfigurement that is caused by bodily injury, birth defect or illness and, without limiting the generality of the foregoing, includes diabetes mellitus, epilepsy, a brain injury, any degree of paralysis, amputation, lack of physical co-ordination, blindness or visual impediment, deafness or hearing impediment, muteness or speech impediment, or physical reliance on a guide dog or other animal or on a wheelchair or other remedial appliance or device,
2. A condition of mental impairment or a developmental disability,
3. A learning disability, or a dysfunction in one or more of the processes involved in understanding or using symbols or spoken language,
4. A mental disorder, or
5. An injury or disability for which benefits were claimed or received under the insurance plan established under the Workplace Safety and Insurance Act, 1997.”⁵⁸

The Code also states that disability should be interpreted in broad terms because it covers a large range and degree of conditions. Defining disability is a complex and evolving matter. “A disability may have been present at birth, caused by an accident, or can develop over time.”⁵⁸

Disability Disclosure

“Disclosure of disability in the workplace is the process in which workers reveal their disabilities to employers.”⁷

Discrimination

According to the Canadian Human Rights Commission, discrimination is “an action or a decision that treats a person or a group badly for reasons such as their race, age or disability.”⁵⁹ These reasons are called ‘grounds’, and are protected under the Canadian Human Rights Act.⁵⁹

Discrimination in employment might happen when someone experiences negative treatment or impact because of their disability.⁵⁹

Duty to Accommodate

“The duty to accommodate means that sometimes it is necessary to treat someone differently in order to prevent or reduce discrimination. Employers and service providers have an obligation to adjust rules, policies or practices to enable you to participate fully.” This applies to needs that are related to the protected grounds. This is called the duty to accommodate.⁴⁹





Employment Equity Act

The purpose of the Employment Equity Act is to ensure that no one is denied employment opportunities or benefits for reasons that are not related to ability, and to correct the conditions of disadvantage that certain groups have historically experienced. These groups include women, Aboriginal peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of racialized or marginalized groups. Employment equity means more than treating people the same way, it requires special measures and the accommodation of differences.⁵²

Harassment

“Harassment is a form of discrimination. It includes any unwanted physical or verbal behaviour that offends or humiliates you. Generally, harassment is a behaviour that persists over time. Serious one-time incidents can also sometimes be considered harassment.”⁶⁰

“‘Harassment’ refers to comments or actions that are unwelcome or should be known to be unwelcome.”⁶¹

Human resources

The human resources department is responsible for all matters involving employees, including hiring, training, benefits, workplace safety, and employment equity and human rights obligations.

Human resources staff are often involved in supporting workplace accommodations.

Non-visible disability

“A person with a non-visible disability is someone who has a disability that is not immediately apparent.”⁶²

A non-visible disability can be “a cognitive, developmental, intellectual, mental, or sensory condition that limits a person’s behaviours, senses, or activities.”⁶³

This includes physical, mental or neurological conditions that limit a person’s movements, senses, or activities and are not visible to others.⁶⁴

Self-advocacy

Self-advocacy is “the ability to speak-up for yourself and the things that are important to you.”⁶⁵ Self-advocacy means asking for what you need and want and telling people about your thoughts and feelings.⁶⁵

It is important to know and understand your rights and responsibilities to help you advocate for yourself. That way you can “speak-up for your rights, and you are able to make choices and decisions that affect your life.”⁶⁵

“The goal of self-advocacy is for you to decide what you want, and then develop and carry out a plan to help you get it. It does not mean you cannot get help if you need or want it, it just means that you are responsible for the choices you make.”⁶⁵



Stigma

“Stigma is a negative stereotype.”⁶⁶ It is different from discrimination. Discrimination is unfair treatment due to a person’s identity, which includes race, sex, gender expression, age, marital status, or disability, including mental disorder.⁶⁶ “Stigma is the negative stereotype and discrimination is the behaviour that results from this negative stereotype.”⁶⁶

Telecommuting

Telecommuting is an arrangement where an employee works from home, or another location. This way the employee does not have to travel to work, and instead communicates with their employer and colleagues via the phone or the Internet. Telecommuters may sometimes come in to the office for meetings, or to connect with their employer, if needed. This is a type of workplace accommodation that some employers offer to support employees who are better able to perform the duties of their role from home, without having to travel to the office.⁶⁷

Undue hardship

“Organizations covered by the Code have a duty to accommodate to the point of undue hardship. Accommodation need not be provided if it causes undue or excessive hardship. However, some degree of hardship is acceptable.”⁵¹

“The Code prescribes only three considerations when assessing whether an accommodation would cause undue hardship:

- Cost
- Outside sources of funding, if any
- Health and safety requirements, if any.⁵¹

Union

Some workplaces have unions, which help to give employees “a voice in their workplace regarding wages, benefits and working conditions.”⁵⁴

Unions help to advance and protect the rights and livelihoods of their members and advocate for fairness, equality and justice in the workplace.⁵⁴

“Under Ontario’s Labour Relations Act, you have the right to join a trade union and participate in legal union activities.”⁶⁸

Workplace accommodations

Workplace accommodations are modifications to your environment or role to support you in doing your job. Examples of workplace accommodations include modified workspaces and equipment, flexible work schedules and working from home.¹⁰



Resources

Canadian

- [Canadian Human Rights Commission: Your Guide to Understanding the Canadian Human Rights Act](#)
- [Canadian Human Rights Act](#)
- [Canadian Human Rights Commission: What Are Human Rights?](#)
- [Employment Equity Act](#)
- [CNIB: Workplace Accommodations](#)
- [Workplace Strategies for Mental Health](#)

Ontario

- [Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act: Disclosure of Disability in the Workplace](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario: Disclosure in the Workplace](#)
- [University of Guelph: Disclosing your Disability](#)
- [AODA \(Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act 2005\)](#)
- [Ontario Human Rights Code](#)
- [Ontario Ministry of Education Self-assessments](#)
- [ConnectABILITY: A job coach's tips on disclosure in the workplace](#)
- [Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario: Strategies and Accommodations on the Job](#)
- [Ableism and discrimination based on disability](#)
- [Human Rights Legal Support Centre](#)

British Columbia

- [Disclosing Your Disability: A Legal Guide for People with Disabilities in BC](#)

United States

- [Transition Alliance of South Carolina: ME! Lessons for Teaching Self-awareness and Self-advocacy](#)
- [Do I tell my Boss? Disclosing my Mental Health Condition at Work](#)
- [Job Accommodation Network: A to Z of Disabilities and Accommodations](#)
- [Autism Speaks: Family Services Employment Tool Kit](#)
- [Instruction in Self-Advocacy](#)



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Icons: Document, A-Z, Search

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