

## Discussing Disability – if, when and how

You are under no legal obligation to mention your disability to an employer or prospective employer, and it's for you to choose if and when you disclose. There are a number of things to consider.

### Reasons for Disclosing:

You may wish to disclose if you need any adjustments to help accommodate your disability, either at the application stage or during your day-to-day work.

Once you have told an employer about your disability, you are protected by the Equality Act 2010. This means your employer must take all reasonable steps to provide the necessary adjustments and mustn't discriminate against you because of your disability. (Bear in mind that if you choose not to tell your employer and later underperform, you may not be covered by the Equality Act).

If you do mention your impairment, only talk about it in terms of its relevance to how it would affect the job. Don't go into personal detail. Always be positive about your disability and use it to provide evidence of the skills employers look for.

Emphasise positive achievements and give examples. You may have gained skills such as flexibility, determination, the ability to perform under pressure and creative problem solving as a result of your disability, and you shouldn't be afraid to use these as selling points.

Make a positive statement about your disability to remove any doubts an employer may have. Don't assume they'll have a negative attitude. Your experiences and skills may give you the edge over other candidates.

Avoid focusing the whole of your application or interview on the issue of your disability. Your main focus should be on showing the employer your suitability for the job.

### Reasons For Not Disclosing:

You may feel that you will be discriminated against and therefore rejected by an employer. You may not want to discuss your disability with a stranger or you may feel that your disability has no direct effect on your ability to do the job.

It may not be appropriate or necessary to divulge your disability if you feel that it does not affect your ability to do the job.

### Timing:

You may find it difficult to decide when is the best time to tell a prospective employer about your disability. There is no one right answer for everyone and you will have to consider how you want to approach it.

**Application stage** - there may be a section on the application form asking about any serious health conditions or disabilities the question may be phrased along the

lines of "Do you have any medical condition or disability that could affect your ability to do this job?" if you think that your disability does not affect your ability to do the job, then you could answer "No" to this question. Although you don't have to disclose your disability here, you mustn't lie. If you don't want to disclose, simply don't answer the question. You can also use the personal statement section of the form to tell an employer about your disability.

- **CV** - there may be a gap in your educational history due to a period of prolonged illness. You can use your covering letter to explain this, but always present it in a way that will show you in a positive light. You can also refer to your disability in your CV if you attended a specialist school or college for disabled people.
- **Covering letter** - if you choose to mention your disability here, emphasise how it has further developed the skills and experience mentioned in your CV. However, only raise this when it's relevant to your application. For example, point to how well you've achieved your goals despite any difficulties.
- **Pre-interview stage** - if your disability means that you need special arrangements for the interview such as an interview room that is wheelchair accessible, extended time on a psychometric test or the presence of a signer, then you will need to talk to the employer before your interview. If you haven't been asked about your needs, take the initiative and contact the employer in advance. They may need time to make arrangements.
- **Interview** - if there is no direct question on the application form or you are applying using a CV you may decide that you would prefer to leave talking about your disability until you are face to face with the employer so that you can explain your individual circumstances more fully. You may be concerned that if you reveal it too soon it might jeopardise your chances of an interview or people may not fully understand the implications and make judgements about you based on limited knowledge. You may feel more comfortable disclosing when you can discuss the implications face to face and more clearly demonstrate your skills. If you've previously mentioned your disability, the interview can be an opportunity to expand on any positive effects it's had on your life and how it's enhanced your employability. Some interviewers have little experience of disability and may feel unsure of workplace implications. Be prepared to make suggestions about what adjustments you would need in order to do the job effectively.

**In the job** - you may decide to disclose your disability once you've been offered the job or when you start work. You can decide who to tell, your manager or HR and you can also request that colleagues aren't told. If your condition affects the way you work, it may be helpful to be open with colleagues so they understand and can help you with anything you may need.