

Marketing yourself and disclosure

Deciding to disclose the nature of your disability to an employer is a matter of personal choice. You are under no legal obligation to disclose a disability unless you wish to do so, and it is for you to choose the stage at which you wish to disclose.

There are a number of factors you should take into consideration when deciding whether to disclose. One of these is whether your disability raises a health and safety issue, e.g., if you have epilepsy and may experience a seizure in the work place. Another factor is whether you would need any adjustments to help accommodate your disability either at the application stage or in the course of day to day work.

Once you have disclosed your disability, you are protected by the Equality Act, which means that your employer must take all reasonable steps to provide the necessary adjustments and must not discriminate against you because of your disability. However, if you choose not to disclose and subsequently underperform, you will not be covered by the Equality Act. It does not cover you in retrospect and an employer who was unaware of your condition cannot be judged to have discriminated against you.

If you choose to disclose your disability, always give it a positive perspective. You may be able to use it to provide evidence of many of the competencies employers look for, such as determination, subject knowledge, attention to detail and creative problem-solving.

Disclosure on the application form

You can use the personal statement section of the application form to disclose your disability. Although you do not have to disclose a disability, you must not lie and say you do not have a disability if you do. If you do not wish to disclose, simply do not answer the question. If false information is given and your employer finds out at a later date, you will not be protected by the Equality Act and the employer may take issue with the fact that you have been untruthful on the application form.

If you choose not to disclose your disability on the application form, you can still do so at a later stage. For example, you may not need adjustments during the early stages of your recruitment, but may find that you do in your day to day work.

If you disclose, you should consider what aspects of your disability are relevant to your job and work environment and are likely to have an impact on you personally and professionally. Emphasise positive achievements and give examples. You may have gained skills as a result of your disability and you should not be afraid to use these as selling points. Making a positive statement about your disability may help to remove any doubts an employer may have. Do not assume that they will be negative - your experiences may give you the edge over non-disabled applicants because they may have equipped you with skills that are highly valued by employers.

While it is important to present your disability positively, avoid focusing the whole application on the issue. Your main focus should be on showing the employer your suitability, so only mention your disability where it is appropriate and relevant.

Disclosure in a CV/covering letter

When applying for jobs using a CV, always include a supporting covering letter. You could mention your disability in the covering letter, emphasising how your disability may have further developed the skills and experience mentioned in your CV. As stated above you should only raise this when it is relevant to your application.

On your 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. For example, point to how well you have achieved your goals despite any difficulties your disability may have caused. Alternatively, you can refer to your disability in your CV, if, for example, you attended a specialist school or college for disabled people.

Disclosure at pre-interview stage

The Equality Act requires employers to ensure arrangements for interviews do not put disabled applicants at a disadvantage. You may not have disclosed that you have a disability up to this point, but this is a time when you may want to identify practical needs to ensure that you can compete on a level playing field with other applicants. If you have not been invited to discuss your needs, take the initiative and contact the employer in advance - they may need time to make appropriate arrangements. This may also provide a good opportunity to instigate a brief discussion around your disability.

Disclosure at interview

If you have not disclosed your disability up to this point, the interview presents an opportunity to do so. You may feel more comfortable disclosing when you can discuss the implications face to face and more clearly demonstrate your competencies. If you have previously mentioned your disability, the interview can be an opportunity to expand on the positive effects it has had on your life and how it has enhanced your employability. As with application forms, do not allow your disability to become the main focus. The purpose of the interview should be to focus on your ability not your disability, so ensure that appropriate time is devoted to discussing your skills and qualifications.

Some interviewers have little experience of disability and may feel anxious or unsure of workplace implications. This is an opportunity to deal with any concerns or misconceptions that an employer may have. Be prepared to make suggestions about what adjustments you would need to have made in order to do the job effectively. You could also take with you to the interview relevant information about funding or sources of information so that the employer can follow these up.

If you have not done so already, you may choose to disclose your disability once you have been offered the job or when you start work. You can decide who to tell - it may be your manager or HR - and you can also request that colleagues are not 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.

Further information

Individual requirements differ, even between people with the same disability so you may wish to discuss whether, when and how to disclose your disability with a careers consultant.