



# ***TALKING THE TALK ABOUT AUTISM: SHARING, ADVOCATING, AND TELLING***

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## WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH DISCLOSURE?

**Disclosure** refers to a variety of **processes and tools** that a person uses to **share their disability status** with others in order to receive **support, accommodations, and acceptance.**

Autistics and allies all have different perspectives and roles to play when it comes to disclosing.

# SOME GOALS OF DISCLOSURE AND STORYTELLING



## IS THERE ANY POINT WHERE IT IS ACTUALLY MANDATORY?

**If you need accommodations or services to be successful at work or school, **you must disclose** in order to receive them.**

**These processes are typically covered by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).**

## EACH SITUATION IS DIFFERENT

- How (and when) to disclose looks different with different people!



# PARENTS: WHO (AND WHAT) DO I SHARE ABOUT MY KID'S DISABILITY?

- Consider balancing your interests with your child's interests
- Relationship with the person
- Potential support for your child
- Purpose of sharing
- Can your child consent to sharing information?



## PARENTS: WHY SHOULD I TELL MY KID?

- Creation of a **disability self-identity** and **pride**
- Self-awareness and self-esteem building
- Building **self-advocacy** skills
  - Open doors for new self-advocacy opportunities
- Your kid **already knows** they're different
- Continue building a **loving and trusting relationship** with your kids

## HOW TO TALK TO YOUR KID ABOUT AUTISM

- Don't hide this information from them!
- Use **developmentally appropriate** language and concepts to explain
- Share **accurate information** and **presume competence**
- Normalize disability in your household
- Be **affirming** – you love them and nothing is “broken”
- Allow them space to be **curious** and answer their questions



## ADDITIONAL TOOLS TO USE

- Media is a great way to introduce people who share your child's neurotype or disability
- People they know from your life are helpful too!



## 9-YEAR-OLD ME



WIZARDING  
WORLD

Harry Potter

# THE SELF-ADVOCATE'S DISCLOSURE ROADMAP

- Personal self-acceptance and identity
- Workplace
- Friends/family/relationships
- School



## DISPARITIES IN DISCLOSURE

- **Disclosure** is a personal decision
- Why wouldn't you disclose?
  - Fear of being perceived as weak
  - Avoid perception of receiving special treatment
  - Internalized ableism
  - Preexisting stereotypes
  - Potential discrimination
  - Concerns with professionalism and licensing



## SHAPING YOUR NARRATIVE

- Figure out the reasoning behind your disclosure
- How you do it might influence how others react



## CONTEXT DEPENDENT: REACTIONS

- Most people (should) be supportive and accepting – or curious
- If someone is mean or unreceptive...



# WORKPLACE DISCLOSURE STRATEGIES

- **Soft disclosure**

- When the person might hint at having a disability – but you might not be able to confirm or deny it
- Mentioning they are members of an allyship or affinity group
- Asking for support in a vague way

- **Hard disclosure**

- When someone precisely mentions they have a disability
- They describe it in a cover letter, resume, or other application materials
- They request an accommodation under the ADA



## ENCOURAGING AUTHENTICITY

- People **feel they must disclose** when:
  - They need an accommodation under the **Americans with Disabilities Act**
  - They are unable to keep adapting and self-accommodating
  - There are breakdowns in **communication or performance**
  - There is a change in life circumstances
- Others choose to **disclosure voluntarily**:
  - They want to bring their full selves to work and take **pride in their identities**
  - They want to be proactive and limit misunderstandings
  - They view neurodiversity and/or disability as a **strength**



## THE ROLE OF THE ALLY: CREATING SPACE

- **Figure out why** someone is sharing this information with you
  - Accommodation request?
  - Fun fact?
  - Spirit of transparency?
- Find out who else knows so you don't end up "outing" someone
- Listen and respond with **empathy** – it takes trust!

**“How can I support you?”**

# SAY HELLO!



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