

Strategies and Resources: **Disclosure and Wellbeing**

Choosing when, whether and how to disclose an Autism diagnosis may be a significant decision and can potentially have a number of positive or negative impacts on your wellbeing.

Several factors may be worth considering, from who you might want to disclose to and when, to what impacts this may have upon yourself, and what self-care may help you during and after.

Employment:

If you are already in employment, you may have concerns about how those you work with may react, or if they may change how they view you if you disclose diagnosis.

You may wish to consider starting by disclosing to someone you trust first and requesting confidentiality.

If you choose to disclose to HR or managers, you may also wish to request confidentiality, however this should not prevent you from requesting reasonable adjustments that you are entitled to.

Please remember that autism is a protected characteristic under The Equality's Act 2010, alongside other service provisions outlined in The Autism Act 2009, as such your employer must respect your needs as an autistic employee and ensure that you have equitable access to work.

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You may also be entitled to additional support from the Access to Work Scheme and can ask for additional guidance from HR on how to implement your reasonable adjustments, or equipment. Employers may require further Autism Training, or an update for staff if training is out of date.

Personal:

Disclosure to family may also be a cause of anxiety, with questions of how your parents for example may take this, along with whether this may lead to your friends viewing you differently, or how it may impact your relationships.

You may also be concerned that choosing not to disclose, or delaying disclosure may seem dishonest. It is not dishonest, and disclosure should be your decision without pressure from external parties. Your disclosure of a diagnosis should be based on what you are comfortable sharing and when.

How to Disclose:




Disclosure may be, or seem to be, a risk, and as such you may benefit from preparing yourself and ensuring you are in a good position to advocate for yourself and be ready for possible pushback or questions, which may be distressing at times.

By starting from a position of preparedness you may find it easier to remain assertive and ensure that you, and your needs, are understood and you are able to seek acceptance.

When to disclose:

There is no perfect timing for disclosure. It is ultimately a personal choice when you disclose, if you choose to disclose at all. You may choose to disclose at different



times with different people. For example, you may tell your family that you are autistic before you tell your employers.

Pre-emptive Disclosure:

Many autistic people do not want to be in environments where they cannot bring their whole self, so choose to disclose immediately or even pre-emptively. This has the benefit of essentially screening whether a person/group/organisation will be supportive and neurodivergent-friendly. You might choose to introduce yourself as autistic to new people or during the interview stage of applying for a new job.

However, there is a chance of myths, stereotypes and stigma to impact peoples' views before getting to know you personally. These myths can be combatted by proper autism training for employers, or families, offering resources, seeking autistic community and compiling self-advocacy resources (some of which Autism AIM can provide).

Delayed Disclosure:

For some people and situations, it can be helpful to delay disclosure until someone knows you better or trust has been built. This can help diffuse the impact of stereotypes and build mutual understanding that can aid self-advocacy.

For example, you may choose to wait until being hired before telling HR that you are autistic. This slower approach may also be helpful if you are anxious about disclosing, as it allows you to pace yourself to avoid emotional and mental overwhelm.

However, for some people, this may lead to anxiety building over time and the avoidance of something they want. There is also the potential of delays in implementing support and access barriers leading to unaddressed needs.

There is also the potential of partial disclosure. This is where you disclose what support you need or specific things you struggle with without disclosing an identity label. For example, you may tell someone that you struggle with loud noises and need to wear noise-cancelling headphones.

Disclosure and Unmasking:

Disclosure can be an important step in the process of unmasking, which can have a positive impact on wellbeing and self-acceptance. Non-disclosure of your autistic identity can lead to you hiding yourself in different parts of your life. Although some

masking can be a protective measure in an ableist society, long-term masking can lead to autistic burnout.

Non-disclosure and masking are often connected to a feeling of being unsafe.

Dealing with stigma:

Autism disclosure can still face stigma and misunderstanding, which may be of particular concern in workplace settings, however, is not limited to this area, with some people finding issues with family or friends arising too.

In cases of workplace stigma this may come in the form of implicit bias or discrimination, in form of lowered expectations in work or potential discrimination during hiring process, or more explicit discrimination through denial of reasonable adjustments or workplace bullying.

In either case, Autism is a protected characteristic as a disability under the Equality Act, and employers are obligated to provide reasonable adjustments; this may also cover interviews, so disclosure and request of adjustments may help you in both the interview itself and gauging workplace acceptance, along with starting on a basis of self-advocacy.

Self-Care After Disclosure:



You may find that disclosure can be a relief, it may also be stressful, and self-care remains an important priority afterwards.

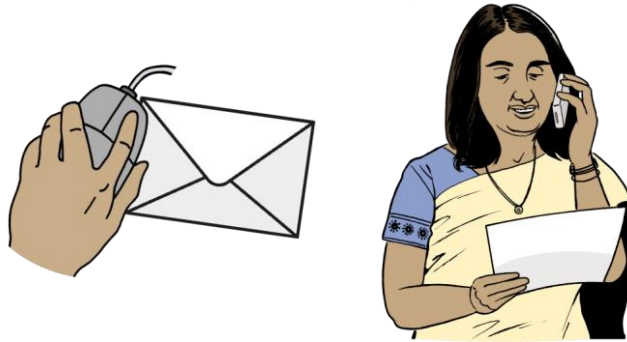
Finding methods of self-acceptance may be of particular value, whether this comes in the form of focusing more on self-discovery and engaging in your interests, exploring your sensory needs, or seeking support with mental wellbeing through counselling.

Peer support groups can help with mental wellbeing and providing strategies and support for issues you may face, along with providing a connection to local community in a manner that may be more comfortable for you.

A potentially valuable but less often considered act of self-care after disclosure may be rethinking and setting boundaries for what you are comfortable with, which may cover a variety of factors, such as social boundaries and managing energy, or sensory considerations, all of which may be interlinked.

Contact Us

This guide was produced by the **Autism AIM – Mental Health Equity Project**, part of The Advonet Group. We are a free service co-led by and run for autistic adults (aged 18+) in the West Yorkshire area.



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- Follow us on Facebook at [@mhequityproject](https://www.facebook.com/mhequityproject)
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