

**The
Advonet
Group**

Providing Independent Advocacy



**Mental Health
Equity Project**

Strategies and Resources

Disclosure and Autistic Wellbeing

Telling People You are Autistic

Navigating the decision to disclose your diagnosis is deeply personal and can feel both empowering and challenging. Whether you have just received your diagnosis or have known for a while, sharing this aspect of yourself is a big step that can shape relationships, environment and sense of self.



This guide aims to support you in understanding the why, when, how and to who you may disclose that you are autistic and share your experiences. Exploring strategies, reflect on wellbeing and respect your own boundaries.

Advantages of Disclosing Autism Diagnosis

There are many situations where you might consider disclosing your autism diagnosis, whether to friends and family, employers and colleagues, or professionals. While the decision can feel scary, sharing this aspect of yourself can bring significant benefits such as:

Access the Right Support

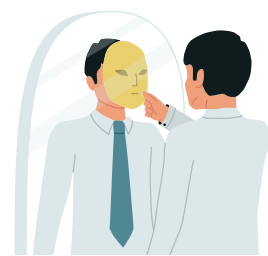


Disclosure can be the key to receiving help and accommodations. For example, at work, this might involve adjustments to your workspace. In social settings, it could mean creating environments where you feel more at ease.

Building connections with others



Sharing your diagnosis can help connect you with others who have similar experiences. This can lead to new friendships, shared insights, and a greater sense of belonging.



Facilitate the Unmasking Process

It can be a step in unmasking, making you feel more comfortable and authentic in yourself. It allows others to see the real you, reducing the need to mask.

Improving Mental Health



Keeping your diagnosis private can sometimes cause stress or anxiety. By disclosing it in a way that feels safe to you, you may feel a sense of relief, which can positively impact your mental and emotional wellbeing.

Reduce Misunderstandings



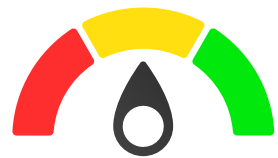
Disclosing your diagnosis can help others understand your communication, sensory and accommodation needs. It may help them to better support you to meet your needs in social, work, education or other settings.

Promoting Self-Acceptance



Telling others about your diagnosis can be a powerful act of self-acceptance. By openly acknowledging this part of yourself, you may find peace and pride in your identity.

Clarify Expectations



EXPECTATIONS

It can help set clearer expectations in relationships or workplaces, helping to create environments where you can thrive.

Disadvantages

It is important to consider the potential challenges of disclosing your diagnosis. Sharing information may leave you feeling vulnerable, as it involves placing trust in others to respond with understanding and respect.



Resistance to Change

There may be people who resist making adjustments or accommodations, either due to a lack of understanding or unwillingness to change established routines. This can feel disheartening and frustrating, especially when your needs are dismissed or ignored.



Stereotypes and Assumptions

If someone has little knowledge or experience of autism, it may mean they make assumptions about how autism impacts things for you.



Dismissive Attitudes

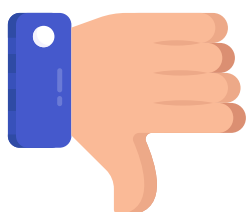
There may be situations where people are dismissive or minimise the significance and impact of your autism diagnosis and your needs. For example, comments like “we are all a little autistic” or “you don’t seem autistic” can feel invalidating and demeaning.

Challenges in the Workplace

Disclosing a diagnosis to employers or colleagues can come with risks, as some autistic people report concerns such as:

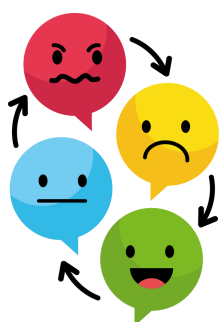


- Stigma and discrimination.
- Being perceived as less capable, less professional or unsuitable for certain roles.
- Experiencing bullying, exclusion, or exploitation in the workplace.
- Being overlooked for promotions, underpaid, or treated unequally.
- Rejection during recruitment or dismissal from a role after disclosure.



Fear of Negative Reactions

There is risk that disclosure may lead to negative reactions from others, such as discomfort, stigma, or exclusion.



Emotional Toll

Sharing your diagnosis can be emotionally taxing, especially if reactions are not what you hoped for. This can leave you feeling hurt, or regretful about your decision to disclose.

Impact of Not Disclosing

Not disclosing your autism diagnosis is a valid choice, but you should try to consider the potential impacts this decision can have on different aspects of your life. Choosing to keep your diagnosis private can allow you to maintain a sense of control over how others perceive you, but it can also lead to challenges within places like work, social settings or when accessing support.

Work and other professional settings

- They do not legally have to make reasonable adjustments, because they could not reasonably be expected to know that you, the employee, needs or is entitled to them.
- May be harder to access support schemes like Access to Work and Personal Independence Payment.
- Without adjustments or understanding from colleagues, it may become harder to manage workplace demands, leading to increased risk of burnout, especially if you are masking to meet expectations.
- May struggle to meet demands placed upon you due to lack of reasonable adjustments.
- May be increased misunderstandings of your needs. This can lead to unnecessary conflict, frustration, or being unfairly judged as less capable.
- Without disclosing your diagnosis, you may miss opportunities for roles or projects that could be adjusted to your strengths and interests.
- Explaining or advocating for your needs may be harder, leading to frustration for both you and others. This can make collaboration feel unnecessarily challenging.



Support networks

- People may struggle to understand your needs in certain settings, leading to unintentional insensitivity, exclusion, or lack of support during challenging times.
- It can make you feel as though you are hiding a significant part of yourself from others, which could lead to feelings of isolation.
- May increase amount of situations where masking is needed, increasing the risk of meltdowns, shutdowns and burnout.
- Friends and family may not fully understand when you are struggling or why certain situations are challenging for you.
- When others are not aware of your diagnosis, they might unknowingly create environments or interactions that are overwhelming for you. This may limit your ability to feel safe and relaxed in social settings.



Internal Impacts

- Not disclosing can lead to internalised feelings of isolation or feeling not understood. This can impact self-esteem and acceptance over time.
- You may miss opportunities to connect with other autistic people who share similar experiences.
- Balancing the decision to disclose or not, masking and navigating situations without the necessary understanding from others can lead to emotional and mental fatigue over time.



Deciding Who to Disclose To

You may decide to disclose to different people at different stages. For example, you may wish to tell close friends and family first, but wait before telling your employer.



Job Applications

You may want to tell an employer during the application process. This may also allow you to have adjustments for your interview that will help meet your needs. For example, having interview questions in advance or providing lighting changes in the room.

Healthcare Providers



Informing your GP about your diagnosis can help you access adjustments in healthcare settings. While your diagnosis may already be noted in your records, it's worth confirming this. You may want to create a health passport, outlining your needs and accommodations.



During Employment

You may wish to disclose your diagnosis once you are in work to someone like the line manager, HR department or your colleagues. Some people prefer to tell a few trusted colleagues, while others may disclose to everyone within the organisation. Be clear about who you agree the information being discussed or shared with if you are not comfortable with everyone knowing.

Social Circle



You might share your diagnosis with members of your social circle. Some people choose to disclose to those they feel closest to, while others may share more broadly. Being open with your social circle can help understanding and create a more supportive environment. As with workplace disclosure, it is important to set clear boundaries about how much you're comfortable sharing and with who.

Preparing to Tell People

Sharing your diagnosis can feel like a big step, so taking the time to prepare can make the experience smoother and less stressful. Below contains some tips to help you throughout this process.



What you want to share

- Think about what you want the other person to know about your diagnosis.
- Are there specific traits or experiences you want to explain?
- Focus on what is relevant for the person or the relationship. For example, how your diagnosis impacts your interactions, work, or social needs.
- Think about why you want to share with this person, do you want support from them? Adjustments? Understanding? This can help you prepare what you want to say and ask of the person.



Plan how to Communicate

- Scripting and practicing what you want to say can help you feel more prepared. You may want to write down key points or rehearse the conversation.
- If speaking face-to-face feels overwhelming, you could write a letter, send a text, or share an information sheet about autism alongside your message.
- Be honest and use language that feels natural to you. There is no “right” way to explain your diagnosis.
- Feel free to leave the conversation if it is becoming too overwhelming.



Choosing the Right Time

- Timing can make a big difference. Pick a time when the person is likely to be calm, focused, and receptive.
- Pick a time when you are able to communicate the best you can, for example, you may want to avoid telling someone after a meltdown, or when you are stressed.
- There is no rush to tell people, take your time and wait until you feel ready.
- If taking a safe person with you, then you may need to consider their availability too.



Bring Supporting Materials

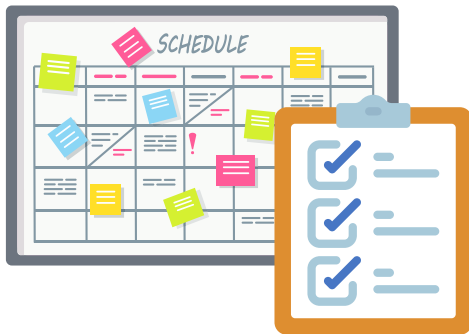
- If you think it will help you, bring along resources like pamphlets, articles, or website links to help the other person better understand autism.
- It can also be helpful to bullet point some key phrases you would like to say, you can bring this along to help you, or give it directly to the person.
- Having information and resources on hand can also make it easier for them to understand, as well as help you communicate certain points.

Be Kind to Yourself

- It is okay to feel nervous and unsure. Remember that you're in control of when and how you share your diagnosis, as well as who you share it to.
- It can be helpful to plan for any responses that are unwanted, you may have a safe sensory place at home you plan to go back to, or some time to take part in your special interest.
- Remember, people's reactions don't define your worth or the importance of your decision to disclose

Preparing to Tell People

Quick Tips



Plan & Practise what you want to say



Plan to do something nice after



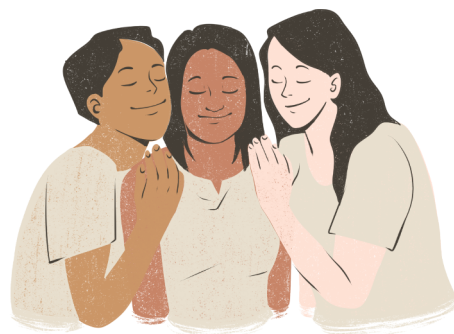
Plan how you want to communicate



Consider timings, for yourself and who you are telling



Bring resources and information



Bring a safe person with you

Partial or Full Disclosure

When deciding to share your diagnosis, one of the choices you will make is how much to disclose. Some people prefer to share everything about their diagnosis, while others may choose to reveal aspects depending on the situation or the person they're speaking with. What's most important is finding a level of disclosure that feels comfortable for you.

Partial Disclosure

- Reduces the risk of facing discrimination and prejudice.
- It can feel less overwhelming to start by sharing smaller pieces of information rather than disclosing the full diagnosis at once. This also helps you to gauge people's reactions before deciding whether to share more.
- Inclusive places, such as employers, education settings and healthcare, will be happy to accommodate reasonable adjustments, regardless of diagnosis or disability.
- Partially disclosing shifts the conversation to your personal needs and challenges rather than focusing on your diagnosis, encouraging people to understand and support you as an individual, rather than based on assumptions.

Full Disclosure

- Full disclosure provides legal protection in professional settings under employment and equality laws, preventing discrimination when they're aware of your diagnosis.
- Can lead to stereotypical views from those who have limited knowledge of autism or hold misconceptions. This can impact on how you're treated in both personal and professional settings.
- People may be more understanding, accepting, and accommodating to changes you ask for when they know the full diagnosis.

Managing Reactions to Disclosure

Disclosing your diagnosis can lead to a variety of reactions from others. How you manage these is crucial for maintaining your wellbeing. This section will look at strategies to handle positive, neutral, and negative reactions.

Meeting your Own Needs

When disclosing a diagnosis, it is important to look after your own needs and wellbeing. If you receive negative or uncomfortable reactions, take some time to check in with yourself. Step away from the conversation if needed. It is okay to take a break or seek support from a trusted person.



Negative Reactions

Unfortunately, not all reactions will be supportive or understanding. You may encounter dismissal, discrimination, or misunderstandings within environments such as work. If this happens, it's important to know your rights. You should not be made to feel uncomfortable at work or any other setting, so try to remember to take some time to self sooth and seek emotional support if needed.



Redirecting Conversations

If someone responds negatively to your disclosure or makes you feel uncomfortable, it's okay to redirect the conversation.

You might say something like “I appreciate your interest, but I'd prefer to focus on [topic] right now”. Setting a boundary can help to maintain control of the conversation while protecting your privacy. You may wish to use scripting in order to pre-prepare any responses in order to do this, or write them down beforehand.



Educating Others

Some reactions can be due to a lack of understanding or knowledge about autism. In these cases, offering to educate the person can help lead to more positive outcomes and further awareness for the person. You may wish to share resources, reading materials, podcasts, or offer a brief explanation about how autism affects you personally. Remember you are not obliged to educate anyone unless you want to and feel comfortable to, so do not feel that it is your job to educate everyone, especially those who make you feel uncomfortable.



Boundaries

If someone becomes overly inquisitive or asks questions that make you uncomfortable, you can redirect the conversation or let them know you would prefer not to discuss certain details.

You deserve control over your personal information, and it is okay to assert these boundaries to protect your wellbeing.

Advonet, AIM have a resource on assertiveness that you may find useful and can be found under resources on the website.



Peoples response and reactions to your diagnosis will vary. Some may need space to process the information, or might react in ways that leave you feeling upset or misunderstood. If someone is not supportive straight away, it doesn't mean that they don't want to support you, they may just need a chance to understand. Not everyone will get it, and that is okay. Over time, some people may come to be more supportive and understanding as they learn more about autism, and you might find yourself feeling more comfortable unmasking around them!

Legal Protections and Rights

Autism is a protected characteristic, defined in the Equality Act 2010, and obliges employers to provide reasonable adjustments.

Along with prohibiting discrimination based on these characteristics, the act also prohibits employers from asking about disabilities unless for certain specific purposes, such as health and safety, diversity monitoring, or preventing discrimination.

Employers may not ask about your health or disability status until a job has been offered, unless for these select purposes.

You have no obligation to disclose your diagnosis if you do not wish to, however if you choose not to your employer will not be obligated to provide reasonable adjustments, and it may be more difficult to get other support such as Access to Work.

The Equality Act covers education similarly, prohibiting discrimination and requiring reasonable adjustments, along with specific accommodations such as individualised support plans for SEND students, and protection from exclusion for behaviours linked to their disability without first exploring what support may be needed, which may involve assessing a pupil's needs for an Education, Health and Care plan.

Another act, the Autism Act 2009, put a legal duty on the government to develop an autism strategy and provide guidance for local authorities in order to improve services and accessibility.

This strategy includes supporting autistic people into work, part of which includes encouraging local authorities to engage with employers to promote understanding of autism, and to act as an example as an autism friendly employer.

Things to Consider

Overall, there are many factors to think about when disclosing your diagnosis. This guide is here to support you through the process and help you plan how you want to share your diagnosis. Below is a summary of key points discussed throughout the guide, giving you a chance to review everything in one place. You may even find it helpful to check off each point as you make decisions along the way.

- **Whether to disclose** - think about the pros and the cons, such as those listed in this guide.
- **When to disclose** - think about timing as this can impact how the person may respond. If for example, they are already stressed or tired, they may react negatively.
- **Who to disclose to** - does it need to be someone you know well and therefore have an idea of how they might react? Does it need to be someone you trust?
- **How to disclose** - consider what will be most comfortable for you. Face to face, email, message or over the phone? Full disclosure or partial?
- **Your own understanding and feeling of your autism** - if you are recently diagnosed you may not fully understand what it means to you. Maybe you feel apprehensive or negative about being autistic.
- **A support network** - would it be beneficial to have a trusted person to chat things through before or after disclosing?
- **How you may feel if you disclose and receive unhelpful responses** - Have you got something set up to sooth any negative emotions / responses that come up.



Things to Consider



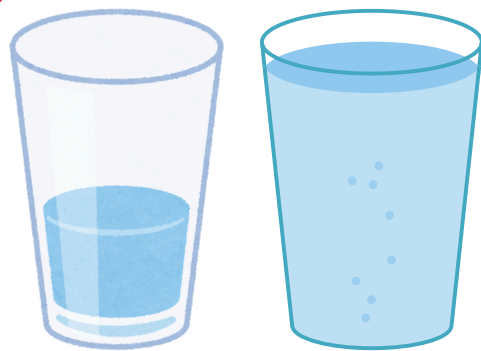
Whether you want to disclose



When and how you want to disclose



Who you want to disclose to



Partial or Full Disclosure?



Self Soothing Strategies



Your Support Network to utilise

Additional Resources

Local Organisations and Support

Leeds Mental Wellbeing Service – Offer a range of services and support for people struggling with mental health, such as anxiety.

Telling your employer your autistic - disclosure -

<https://employmentautism.org.uk/telling-an-employer-that-you-are-autistic/>

National Autistic Society Guide on Telling People You are Autistic -

<https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/topics/diagnosis/after-diagnosis/talking-about-and-disclosing-your-autism-diagnosis>

Further sources of support can be found in Leeds Autism AIM's Mental Health Guide: <https://leedsautismaim.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/7/2023/04/Leeds-Autism-AIM-Mental-Health-Guide-v6-April-2023.pdf>

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This guide was produced by the 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.