**Self-Advocacy Activity:**

**Disability Disclosure in the Workplace Transcript**

**Disability Disclosure in the Workplace**: Welcome to our activity on Disability Disclosure in the Workplace. During the transition from high school to adulthood, all students should have opportunities to pursue their career interests, meaningfully contribute to the community, and increase their independence. For students with disabilities, this increase in independence includes making an informed decision on whether or not to share disability-related information with others. Sharing information about a disability, also referred to as ‘disability disclosure’, can have a significant impact on a student’s vocational success. In this activity video, we’ll respond to frequently asked questions about disclosure, discuss strategies for instruction on disclosure, and consider the potential outcomes of disclosing a disability in the workplace.

**Transition to the Workplace**: As students transition into the workplace, they need to be aware of the changes that happen with their rights and responsibilities. In high school, the teachers, parents, and other providers that support them ensure that they are getting the services and accommodations they need based on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or 504 plan. When students enter the workplace, they are now an employee, and are responsible for communicating about any needed supports and accommodations.

**Americans with Disabilities Act:**

It is important for students to know that the rights of individuals with disabilities in the workplace and the community are protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Among other rights, the ADA ensures that all people have—

* appropriate accommodations in the workplace
* access to the same employment opportunities and benefits
* freedom from discrimination in the workplace

See the supplemental materials tab for a chart detailing the changes of rights and responsibilities as students transition into employment and postsecondary education.

**Disclosure Questions**: While the ADA puts protections in place, it is the responsibility of the employee to decide whether or not to disclose information about their disability. It is important to teach students how to identify job requirements that their disability may impact and any accommodations needed to fulfill the job requirements. In order to make an informed decision about disclosure, students benefit from learning about and practicing making these decisions. Instruction on disability disclosure helps students answer the following questions:

* What is disability disclosure?
* Do I need to disclose?
* When do I disclose?
* How do I disclose?
* What information should I disclose?

**FAQ’s of Disability Disclosure:** To help you prepare for instruction on disability disclosure in the workplace, let’s take a moment to discuss each question.

**What is disability disclosure?** Disability disclosure in the workplace is sharing personal information about one’s disability in order to be able to receive reasonable accommodations to ensure equal employment opportunities.

**Do I need to disclose?** Employees are not required to disclose in the workplace. Disclosure is a personal and voluntary choice and should be based on an employee’s preferences and needs. If an employee can meet all expectations at work safely and without accommodations, disclosure might not be necessary. On the other hand, if accommodations are needed in order for an employee to perform a job safely and to the best of their ability, disclosure is an important option to consider.

**When should I disclose?** A person can disclose at any time during the application and hiring process, after an offer of employment, or anytime while employed. If choosing to disclose, it can be beneficial to both the employee and employer to discuss necessary accommodations early in employment. It is important to weigh the pros and cons of the timing of disclosure. It also may be that disclosure is never necessary, in this case, the employee would not need any supports or accommodations.

**How do I disclose?** If choosing to disclose in-person, employees should request to meet in a private area. They should use positive and professional language and be prepared to emphasize their strengths and abilities. When highlighting potential barriers, they should also highlight the solutions to those barriers.

**What information should I disclose?** When disclosing a disability in the workplace, it’s important to include information on how a disability affects a person’s performance on specific job requirements, as well as suggestions for the needed accommodations. When highlighting potential barriers, they should also highlight the solutions to those barriers.

**Workplace Accommodations**:

[B-Roll video footage begins playing. Video cuts to young employee putting mail in office mailboxes. Video cuts to two young employees putting stickers on cups. Video cuts to a young employee pushing a cart through a store. Video cuts to a young employee hanging up clothes in a retail store. Video cuts to a young employee using an iPhone at work. Video cuts to a young employee sitting at a work desk organizing a binder. Video cuts to a young employee cleaning a table at a restaurant. Video cuts to a young employee playing with a baby in a nursery. Video cuts to a young employee folding and putting sheets on a shelf. Video cuts to three young employees stocking shelves. Video cuts to young employee pushing a cart of boxes.]

Through instruction in self-advocacy, students benefit from engaging in authentic work-related experiences. Visiting a job site is an example of an experience where students can identify common job-related accommodations such as:

* Worksite accessibility, such as parking lots and restrooms
* Job restructuring, which can adjust when or how a job is done
* Flexible scheduling
* Modified equipment or workstation
* and customized workspace (like customized phones, adjustable desks and tables, tailored computer systems)

[Video of Meghan Grenda, Self-Advocate, begins playing]

“I’m Meghan. I’m a second-year master’s student at Vanderbilt. I’m getting my master’s in teaching the visually impaired and I am also visually impaired myself.”

[Text on screen reads: What are some challenges when disclosing your disability in the workplace?]

“I wanted to be prepared going in, but I had no clue where to start. I think that was really difficult was just finding the information and knowing um like where to start with employers and like when should I disclose, do I have to disclose. I kind of have to because I have sort of an obvious disability.”

[Text on screen reads: Why did you choose to disclose?]

“I have gone into interviews and used my cane. Also, you can’t really hide that either. Um and so I don’t really have a choice but to disclose that I have a disability. Um and so, because I can’t hide it, I have to be as knowledgeable as possible going in about what my rights are.”

[Text on screen reads: How do you prepare to disclose your disability?]

“I didn’t know – do I tell them ahead of time that I’m bringing a guide dog with me? Do I just show up to an interview with a guide dog? Um, so that was a really hard decision for me to make. It’s interesting – I didn’t know this until I did all of my research – was that going into a job interview, and if you need accommodations, like you still have to ask for those accommodations for the interview. It’s not just you can show up to an interview and need accommodations and they have to give them to you on the spot.”

[Text on screen reads: Why is it important to know about your rights during an interview?]

“So I wish I would have known a little bit more about my rights in an interview. Sometimes I felt a like a little bit put on the spot in the interviews when they’re asking like ‘well, you’re visually impaired – can you do this job?’ um ‘because you’re visually impaired, are you able to do this?’. And so, now I know, that you’re not really supposed to ask those questions. So I kind of wish I would’ve known, going in, about that.”

[Text on screen reads: What is your advice on disclosure?]

“What your rights are and how to appropriately respond.”

**Advocating in the Classroom**:

[B-Roll video footage playing of students in a classroom.]

As Meghan said, it’s important for providers and teachers to expose students to different situations they could encounter when applying for a job.

Students can also think about the accommodations they already receive in the school environment and how they might be transferred to the workplace. Give them opportunities to advocate for themselves and the accommodations they need while still in the classroom setting. This can serve as good practice for when they enter the workplace. For example, if they receive typed notes for their history class, challenge the student to be proactive about reminding the teacher that he needs the notes the day before so he has time to review them. As an employee, the student can transfer this skill to a situation where he requests written instructions for a new task at their job.

**Learning about Disability Disclosure**: While visiting an actual workplace can be especially engaging for students, instruction on disability disclosure does not have to take place at a job site. It is important for students to know that disclosure is a personal decision and their decision can vary depending on the worksite they are in. In a school setting, Students can-

* Practice the decision-making process by exploring various job types and coming to a conclusion about if they would want or need to disclose their disability in that setting.
* Engage in role-play. For example, you can work one-to-one with a student. You can play the role of their boss, allowing the student to practice explaining their workplace needs and identify the accommodations that will help them to be successful.
* Write a sample disclosure letter. For example, students can use fill-in-the-blank-style letters or create their own letter for disclosure.
* Online and print resources such as the 411 on Disability Disclosure Workbook
* Go online to the Job Accommodation Network to learn about different types of accommodations that can be available in a workplace

**Leadership Opportunities:** When completing self-advocacy activities, it is important to provide students with multiple opportunities to take on leadership roles. This will help them to build confidence with problem-solving, communication, and collaboration. Give them a framework, but students should lead the process. When instructing students on disability disclosure, help students to understand that in these situations they are in charge. Give students various jobs within the school building and let them decide if they need to request accommodations in order to complete these jobs.

Students need to understand their rights, know who to talk to, determine what they are going to say, prepare accommodation options, and lead the conversation with their supervisor. Schedule some time to regularly meet with the student so that they can self-reflect on what leadership skills they have demonstrated and if they are in need of any coaching or support

**Conclusion:** We hope you enjoyed this activity on disability disclosure in the workplace. Discover additional activities and supplemental materials found in our self-advocacy course.