

KIM

My Background:

- B.Sc. in Psychology followed by S.S.W. (Social Service Worker)
- Currently working as a Disability Service Professional in an academic setting
- Type of disability: Mobility and Learning

How I disclose or have disclosed in the past:

In my first full time job, I disclosed at the interview my concerns about some aspects of the job. I felt comfortable doing so because I worked with this employer already through a placement.

In my current job, I disclosed during the interview and years later with my new boss. I disclosed during the interview because I felt my experience living with a disability, especially during my post-secondary education, was a beneficial experience to share. I disclose only when I feel comfortable with the individual, when there is time for discussion, when I am able to identify strengths and challenges, and when I am able to propose accommodations (when I have thought this out).

These are some of the things I considered before disclosing:

- Does my disability impact duties to be performed?
- Will disclosure benefit me?
- Can I suggest accommodations/assistive technology?
- What skills can I develop or utilize to compensate for my disability?
- Is non-disclosure causing me stress?

The barriers I've faced and how I've dealt with them:

When I was a student, the types of services available to students with disabilities now were not available. So I didn't have a note taker, though I needed one.

In my work, my mobility impacted my ability to do some essential components of my job. The way I've dealt with the situation is to always look at alternate ways of doing a task, and to research what supports may be useful (i.e., technology). I looked for another job that I thought would suit my abilities best when I found that my job did not fit my needs (I chose a job that required physical tasks I should not/could not do – but they were essential parts of the job).

In my experience, people have been open to my suggestions regarding accommodations – but, I ensure that the person I am disclosing to is comfortable – I try to assure them it is not a big deal, and that we can work around my disability because I have many strengths.

How I prepared for the world of work:

First, I did look closely at the physical environment of the school I attended to determine suitability – BUT to me the availability of my program was most important. When looking for jobs, I researched the job itself (tasks and environment I would work in).

During university, I worked part-time (on and off campus), I volunteered, and I joined an academic club. I am now working at my dream job – as a student I worked part time with my current employer. I gained valuable experience as a student that helped during the interview.

I also used my campus' Career Centre in my job search. Their books often outline jobs in a similar field, and outline the tasks and the environment one would work in. This information came in really handy to decide what positions I thought would best fit my strengths.

My advice:

Get work or volunteer experience. If you cannot work due to a disability, volunteering may work better since it can be more flexible (although it is still a commitment).

Do not wait to fail before you disclose – maintain a positive relationship with your employer and ask if you need accommodations.

I think it is important that students be realistic about balancing the challenges that may arise because of the disability, the job, and other responsibilities such as family.

Always remember the strengths you have, even when you are facing the challenges brought about by your disability. Your employer and colleagues will see the work and effort you put into your job and will forget that you are doing it while managing a disability.