

Mental health disclosure in the workplace - how to influence a good outcome?

Mental health issues are common and people who experience them do not have to feel ashamed. However, whether it is wise to disclose them in the work environment is a dilemma for many. Disclosure can yield positive effects (e.g. support and work adjustments) but also negative effects (stigma and discrimination). Whether or not to disclose is a highly individual decision. The six tips below may help in making decisions that are important if you want to find or maintain employment.

1 If your health issues do not influence your work, you may want to be reluctant to disclose, to avoid **stigma and discrimination**

2 **Timing:** Preferably do not disclose during the hiring period. To avoid premature rejection, it often is best to build up a relationship with the employer first

3 **Be selective:** Disclose only to people you trust and who can help you realize what your need, e.g. your manager or occupational physician

4 **Think carefully about the content** of the disclosure message: use little medical information (e.g. diagnosis); instead put the focus on what you need to do the job well

Timing
Prejudice
Preparation
Content
Success
Communication

5 **Communication style:** Show that you understand the employer's position as well. Try to communicate what you need but also what you can do yourself, to make things work.

6 **Prepare well:** think it through, and discuss and practice it with people who you trust (e.g. a coach, or friend).

The disclosure tips result from a study by researchers from Tilburg University, in The Netherlands, together with 'Samen sterk zonder Stigma' and Maastricht University. For more info: click on logos ►

The paper was entitled *To disclose or not to disclose mental health issues in the work environment* and was published in the Journal of Occupational Rehabilitation (authors: Brouwers E.P.M., Joosen M.C.W., Van Zelst C. & Van Weeghel J., 2019).



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