

ADULT AUTISM IN DAILY LIFE · 9.3

Disclosure: When and How to Tell an Employer

Disclosure is one of the harder decisions newly-diagnosed autistic adults face. There is no right answer that applies to everyone. The legal position is reasonably clear; the real-world picture is more variable.

FOR

AUDIENCE AGE

Diagnosed autistic adults considering disclosure 18+

REVIEWED

PART OF

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IN SUMMARY

Disclosure: When and How to Tell an Employer

What the law protects

- **Autism is usually a disability under the Equality Act 2010.** The protection covers direct and indirect discrimination, harassment, victimisation and failure to make reasonable adjustments. Pre-employment health questions are restricted under section 60; most are unlawful before a job offer.
- **Disclosure is the trigger for the adjustments duty.** The duty kicks in the moment the employer knows or could reasonably be expected to know about the disability. Without disclosure, the duty is not engaged. With it, the duty applies regardless of whether the employee has formally requested specific adjustments.
- **The law is clearer than the workplace.** What the law protects on paper and what happens in practice can diverge significantly. Outcomes track the workplace, the manager and the sector more than they track the law.

The practical case for and against

- **For: access to adjustments, less masking, protection.** The Equality Act duty is the largest practical reason. Many autistic adults report substantial reduction in the daily cost of work after disclosure, even where specific adjustments are minor. Access to Work funding usually requires disclosure.
- **Against: real-world bias, stereotyping, one-way decision.** Workplace bias exists, ranges from subtle to overt and is not always actionable. Disclosure can narrow how performance is interpreted: an off day becomes evidence of the diagnosis. Once made, disclosure cannot be un-made. Specific contexts (probation, sales-driven environments, smaller employers without HR) raise the risk.
- **The evidence on outcomes is consistent.** Adults who disclosed to a supportive manager report mostly positive experiences. Those who disclosed without one report mixed-to-negative. The decision is rarely regretted by those who report being treated fairly. The Romualdez et al. 2021 qualitative study captured this directly.
- **When the decision is essentially made for you.** Access to Work applications, specific environmental adjustments that cannot be implemented without involving the workplace, regulated roles with fitness-to-work assessments, security-clearance roles, safety-critical roles with medical-fitness requirements. In these cases the question shifts from whether to how.

How to think it through

- **Map the specific risk, not the abstract risk.** The question is not 'is disclosure risky in general'. It is 'is disclosure risky in this specific role, with this specific manager, at this specific employer, at this specific time'. A trusted manager at a large mature employer is a different decision from a probation period in a small competitive sales team.
- **Control who you tell and what you share.** You do not have to tell everyone, and you do not have to tell HR first. You are not required to share the diagnosis itself, only that there is a disability for which adjustments are needed. Some disclose specific adjustments without naming a diagnosis.
- **Get it in writing.** After disclosure, ask for the agreed adjustments to be confirmed in writing with a review date. This is the document that matters if anything subsequently goes wrong. The route runs through grievance procedure, then ACAS early conciliation, then Employment Tribunal.

WHEN TO SPEAK TO A PROFESSIONAL

Speak to your GP if work is being affected and autism has not been formally assessed. Private adult autism assessment with a CQC-registered provider is a legitimate parallel route where the NHS wait is not workable. For employment-specific legal questions, ACAS, the National Autistic Society and Citizens Advice are the right routes. A disability rights solicitor is appropriate where the situation is genuinely contested. Seek urgent help via 111, 999 or A&E for any acute mental health crisis or significant safety concern.

SOURCES

Equality Act 2010; EHRC employment code; ACAS reasonable adjustments; Romualdez et al. 2021 (Autism Adulthood); National Autistic Society

NEXT STEPS**Speak to NeuroFX**

Private ADHD and autism assessment for adults and children aged 6 and upwards.
CQC-registered. Bedford Consulting Rooms, 4 Goldington Road, Bedford MK40 3NF.

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