

Positive Disclosure

DISABILITY SERVICES

RESOURCE CARD #1

Disclosure is the sharing of information. In the university environment disability disclosure is being able to confidently explain your impairment to someone else in order to reduce the barriers that arise during your academic study.

Why Positive Disclosure Helps You

Disclosure of your impairment is a personal choice; if you have an invisible impairment you may feel that you do not need to share your impairment with others, opting to handle any necessary adaptations on your own. This avoids the challenge of disclosing, which can be tiring and result in being exposed to negative responses. Not disclosing can reduce the opportunities available for support and can result in others making assumptions about your needs.

Conversely you may prefer to disclose, which allows you to communicate your experience of impairment and individual needs. Doing this in a confident and positive way takes practise. It can create

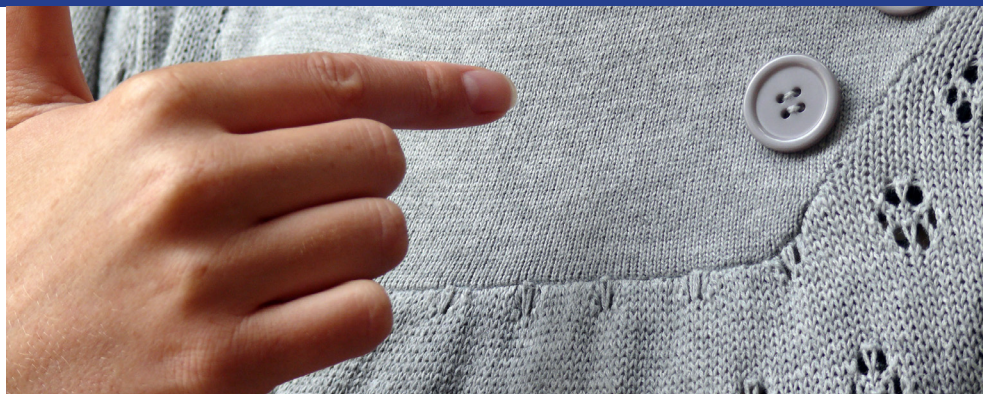
opportunities for supporting your goals that you may not have thought possible. It can help you take ownership of your needs, which in turn helps you to feel proud. Sometimes you can feel unnecessary tension if you don't disclose and create negative assumptions about how others will react. This can be stressful and sometimes it's a relief to disclose.

We encourage disclosure as it supports independence and self reliance, two important life skills. You can practise these skills with us in a supportive and safe environment.

Why Positive Disclosure Helps Others

Letting someone else know what your needs are, is the fastest way to start working together to meet them. The best way to gain support from others is to be honest and appeal for people to understand you in a very human way. Most people appreciate this and are open to working with you, though you may find some people difficult to negotiate with. If you experience this it is important to remember that there will be obstacles like this in life outside of university so stepping outside of your comfort zone and working through these tensions is a good life skill to develop.

DS encourage you to disclose positively, though we respect that it is your right to choose. You may choose to disclose in some situations and not others – it is entirely up to you.



Disability and Education

Disability can be unknown to some people which can make it uncomfortable for them to respond to. You will find that most people are well intentioned and that awkwardness can result from people not knowing how to react. We encourage you not to be put off by these interactions and appreciate that many people have not been exposed to the affects of disability.

It is important to recognise that most prejudice in society is because of a lack of understanding. Informing others of your needs creates an opportunity to improve disability awareness. This doesn't mean you're obliged to answer questions you don't want to, just simply that the opportunity is there if you want it. E.g. If you disclose to a lecturer that can help them be more aware of the needs of their audience. Victoria is quite a connected community so the person you tell may be able to link you with others who can assist.

Things I need to do to disclose effectively:

- + Focus on discussing my reasons for disclosing; what the positive aspects of having a disability are; the type of education needs I have and an example of what works for me.
- + Develop awareness of the barriers that I can face due to my impairment but don't let these rule me. Take control of my life by anticipating these barriers and planning ahead.
- + If it doesn't go well debrief with someone I trust, record my learning's and try again. The more I disclose the more experienced I will become and the better the result.
- + Record the times I disclose and receive a positive response. Recording my reflections on what worked will help me to prepare for next time.
- + Recognise there might be a surprise element in people's reactions, particularly if my impairment is invisible .
- + Practise developing effective interpersonal and social skills that assist me to disclose.
- + Learn from others. Talk to other people with disabilities about their positive experiences of disclosure and what works for them.
- + Be aware of staff and student responsibilities in the Victoria policy on Meeting the Needs of Students with Impairments.
- + Be prepared to produce verification of my impairment if it is required of me.
- + Recognise that university is meant to be challenging and be prepared to tackle obstacles that may come my way.
- + Communicate regularly about any changes to my needs.

Further information on disclosure strategies can be found here:

<http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/rdlo/disclosure>

Keep in mind this is an Australian site so the legislation doesn't apply.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

This resource was produced by Disability Services at Victoria University of Wellington to provide self-help information and guidance for tertiary students.

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