

Disclosing autism at work

The question of whether to disclose that you are autistic to your employer is complex, and there's no answer that will work for everybody. For some people, letting their employer and coworkers know that they are autistic leads to helpful accommodations and better understanding; for others, it can lead to increased stigma and prejudice. This resource outlines some of the factors to take into consideration when deciding whether to disclose that you are autistic in your workplace.

Benefits of disclosure

- Accommodations and adjustments. Many people find that being able to back up a request for accommodations with a specific diagnosis helps to get them the accommodations they need. If you are struggling with your work environment and think that specific accommodations (being able to wear noise-cancelling headphones, for example, or being able to work from home some days) would help, it may be worth disclosing that you are autistic to explain why accommodations are necessary.
- Being able to mask less. Letting your coworkers know that you are autistic, and providing some information about what that means for you around masking and communication, can reduce some of the pressure to constantly mask at work. (Our resources on [workplace communication](#) and [making meetings work for autistic employees](#) might be helpful to give out.)

- Helping others in your workplace disclose their need for accommodations. Having one openly autistic person in a workplace can be really encouraging for other autistic people who may be wondering whether they can be more open, or whether they can ask for their own accommodations. This doesn't just apply to autistic people, either – even if you are the only autistic person at your workplace, someone with ADHD, dyspraxia, or another neurodivergent condition, or even someone with a complex family life or other reasons to need accommodations, is likely to feel better about disclosing their situation if they see you getting the accommodations you need.

Risks of disclosure

- Stigma and prejudice. There are a lot of myths and stereotypes about autism around, and disclosing that you are autistic risks shifting the way your employer and coworkers see you. You may find that some people, even people who were previously friendly towards you, will infantilise you, treat you as if you're stupid or incompetent, or have hurtful ideas about autistic people lacking empathy and other stereotypes. (If you think that more information could help combat this in your work situation, these resources about [workplace communication](#) and [understanding autistic people](#) might help.)
- Discrimination. Some autistic people have found that they are blocked from promotions or shifted into less enjoyable tasks because managers and other senior staff have stereotypical or prejudicial ideas about autism. You may find that some coworkers, managers, or employers believe that autistic people can't be managers themselves, or can't work effectively with the public, or other negative stereotypes.

How to disclose

If you do decide to let your employer know that you are autistic, there are some things you can do to make the conversation easier.

Provide clear, concrete information. Depending on your area of employment, the person you are disclosing to may have no real idea what autism is, or how it affects adults. It can help to write out a few concise statements beforehand, to make sure you're clear on what you want to get across. A disclosure could be something like "I wanted to let you know that I am autistic. For me, this means that I'm very sensitive to sound and can't filter out background noise. I think that if I could wear noise-cancelling headphones sometimes, it would really help me focus and be more productive."

You can find more help deciding whether to disclose that you are autistic at these links:

<https://www.autismawareness.com.au/navigating-autism/navigating-the-workplace-for-autistic-individuals>

<https://www.thrivingautistic.org/workplace-disclosure-guide/>