

Autism disclosure

A guide for Autistic people

Autism disclosure is when you consider telling someone that you are Autistic.

Every situation is different, and you can choose what feels right for you every time.

Disclosure is complex and can be hard. We encourage you to talk to someone you trust as you reflect on your experiences, or contact one of these organisations for further support:

- **Beyond Blue**, phone: 1300 22 46 36
- **Lifeline**, phone: 13 11 14
- **Headspace**

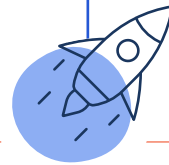
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home screen.



When considering disclosure:



Do I feel safe to disclose?



Do I have a motivation
or reason to disclose?



Do I have the time, energy
and emotional capacity
to disclose?



Am I prepared if others have
a negative response?

If the answer to any question is
"no" – it is okay not to disclose.
Remember: the choice is yours
whether you disclose or not.

After a disclosure opportunity:



What can I learn from
this experience?



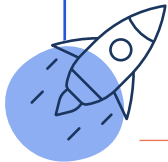
Do I feel safe to disclose?

When considering disclosing:

If you are considering disclosure, think about how safe and included you feel in the current environment and with the people (e.g. friends, family, partner, co-workers, boss) around you. We know society needs to come a long way in understanding and accepting Autistic people, and some people may not respond well to your disclosure.

If you feel safe, disclosure might be the right choice and could result in some really positive affirmations from others. If you do not feel safe (trust yourself), non-disclosure (or choosing not to tell someone that you are Autistic) is okay!

You may like to help create a safe environment by sharing [A guide for people on supporting autism disclosure](#).



Do I have a motivation or reason to disclose?

Some people may disclose being Autistic for various reasons, this could include:

- To gain accommodations and support (e.g. at schools, at work, at the hospital)
- To advocate for the Autistic community
- To help other people better understand them (e.g. friends, colleagues)
- To become braver and more authentic in who they are

Telling someone that you are Autistic can bring a sense of belonging, can help you feel heard, and can lead to shared experiences with others. Many people find it means that you can **mask** less and be your authentic self. Disclosure can also be about getting support, helping people understand who you are, and what accommodations you need to thrive. Autism self-advocate and social justice influencer, [Autiennele](#) shares her [thoughts on autism advocacy](#).

You might disclose for another reason, and that is okay too. If you don't have a motivation or reason to disclose, it is okay not to disclose as well.



Do I have the time, energy and emotional capacity to disclose?

Consider if you feel well and have enough time, energy, and emotional strength to talk about being Autistic. It's okay if you're too tired or emotionally drained to do so.

Have you read about the [spoon theory](#)? It is a really great way to think about your own resources!



Am I prepared if others have a negative response?

Disclosing to a trusted person in a safe environment can be a really positive experience. While many people know of autism, research suggests that much of society does not actually understand what autism is or what it is like to be an Autistic person. Unfortunately, many Autistic people have shared their negative disclosure experiences such as a loss of job, end of relationships and poor interactions with healthcare professionals.

This isn't meant to scare you, but it is important to know what the worst outcomes could look like to help you make an informed decision. To prepare for a range of reactions, you could practise writing a script or role play the situation with someone you trust. It can also help to talk to someone who has already navigated this process! Or, look at the examples on page 3 for ideas on how you might respond in different disclosure situations.



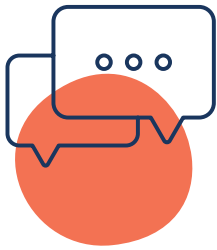
What can I learn from this experience?

After a disclosure opportunity:

Participants in our research shared how reflection led to learning. Often individuals would reflect and think about how disclosure could have led to support – like one participant who said they wish they had disclosed at the airport to avoid crowds and discomfort.

While others did disclose, and reflected on their negative experience and how they would be more careful in the future. Every situation is different, and sometimes you have to trust yourself as to whether the possible benefits outweigh the possible risks.

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Here are some real-life disclosure scenarios that Autistic people shared with us. We asked our Autistic researchers and Autistic advisors to offer their suggestions for what they might say or do. These examples may help you prepare or give you ideas on how you can respond.

Possible scenarios	Possible responses
The other person was shocked and asked how could I be a hairdresser if I was Autistic?	"Well actually, Autistic people can bring a range of strengths to any workplace or role."
They gave me an odd look and didn't respond.	I don't have to do anything in this situation. It would take more resources than I have to continue a conversation with this stranger – its best if I just finish my shopping and leave them.
They were shocked, they didn't believe me.	I would take a breath to calm myself (if I become emotional, they will become emotional) before responding with what autism is and what it means to me. "Autism is a lot different from how it is portrayed in TV and movies. The original diagnostic criteria were based off young boys. If you do some research I think you will find many people are discovering they are Autistic later in life now, especially women and non-binary people."
I disclosed to my work colleague via text and they didn't really acknowledge it and just kind of ended the text exchange.	Maybe this isn't the workplace or co-worker I need in my life if they can't accept me.
A customer complimented me and said I should be proud that I have a job.	As this is my workplace, I would need to pause before responding professionally and challenging their assumptions about autism.
They asked, "Isn't everybody a little Autistic?"	"Well actually, implying that everybody is Autistic is harmful to the experiences of Autistic people ... it would be like comparing my headaches to somebody's experiences of chronic cluster migraines."
They challenged me, "But HOW are you Autistic? You can't be Autistic, you are so outgoing."	I would need to think what to say next, but first I would challenge them by asking why they thought I was not Autistic. That is to learn their concept of autism and what autism looks like to them.
Positive, expressed thanks for sharing, advised it was 'good to know', gives better insight for accommodations I might need.	"Thank you, having accommodations and my needs met will allow me to give my best work in this role."
They wished that I disclosed to them earlier.	"Disclosing being Autistic is a private and personal decision. I disclosed when I felt ready to do so."
They nodded and thanked me for telling them.	"Thank you for accepting me."
They took it well and had some questions, one person said they wouldn't have guessed I was Autistic.	"Thank you for your interest – as an invisible disability, you can't simply spot an Autistic person or know their story by looking at them."

This guide is informed by autism disclosure **research**:

- ['Most people have no idea what autism is': Unpacking autism disclosure using social media analysis](#). Autism. 2023.
- [Using Experience Sampling Methodology to Capture Disclosure Opportunities for Autistic Adults](#). Autism in Adulthood. 2023.

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Understanding, engaging
and celebrating the strengths,
interests and aspirations of people
on the autism spectrum.

Aspect Research Centre for Autism Practice (ARCAP)

Level 5, Tower B, The Zenith
821 Pacific Highway, Chatswood NSW 2067
PO Box 697, Chatswood NSW 2057

T 1800 ASPECT (1800 277 328)

E research@aspect.org.au

W aspect.org.au/arcap



Research Centre
for Autism Practice