

Job Coach Disclosure Guidelines

As human service professionals, we usually know a lot about the people we work with. Some of this information is fairly personal in nature. We often need this information to properly serve the individuals we work with. However, we need to be very careful about who we share this information with. Here are some basic guidelines.

- The Americans with Disabilities Act is very clear that employers have no right to information about a person's disability, or even need to know whether or not a person has a disability. One of the roles of a job coach is to be an advocate for the consumer, and the job coach should share information with supervisors and co-workers about what a wonderful person the consumer is, about their skills, abilities, interests, and also about what type of assistance and support they need. However, the job coach should never share information about the person's disability, except when given specific permission by the individual.
- While the law is clear that employer's do not a right to information about a person's disability, there may be cases where the individual wishes to disclose some information about their disability, in order that co-workers and supervisors better understand why the individual does certain things or acts in a certain way. There also may be times where some level of disclosure would be helpful in order for the person with a disability to get necessary accommodations or assistance that will help them succeed on the job. However, the job coach must get the consumer's permission before disclosing any disability related information to an employer. The job coach should never presume that is okay to reveal disability related information, without getting the consumer's permission. And whether the you agree or disagree with the consumer's decision concerning disclosure, the job coach must abide by that decision.
- If there is going to be some type of disclosure to an employer, it should be done with discretion. The employer doesn't need to know everything about the person's disability; you should only disclose what the employer needs to know in order to support the person with a disability to succeed on the job.
- Also, if some type of disclosure is going to occur, it may not be necessary for everyone in the workplace to know about the person's disability. Possibly only the human resources representative needs to be aware of the information, or the supervisor. Be discreet.
- Beyond information that is specific about a person's disability, we also usually know a lot about a person's life history, incidents in their life, and other personal information. As a job coach, we should not be revealing or discussing this information in the workplace. If the person with a disability wishes to reveal such information, that is their privilege (although the job coach should consul an individual, if the person is revealing inappropriate information to co-workers). We should also be discreet and cautious about discussing such information with our own co-workers and other agency staff, particularly in public settings.
- Finally, if there are issues concerning an individual's performance or job, it can be helpful to discuss and brainstorm such issues with our co-workers and others. Such issues though, should be discussed behind closed doors, not in public areas, and involve only those individuals who the situation impacts and or/can provide constructive feedback on the situation. Avoid the temptation to "vent" or "chit chat" about issues with consumers in public areas, or with people who have no need to know about the situation.

Summary of disclosure guidelines:

1. Disclose disability related information only as necessary
2. Disclose to as few people as necessary
3. Always get permission from the consumer, prior to disclosing
4. Always abide by consumer's decision about disclosure
5. Don't share personal information about consumer with supervisor's and co-workers
6. Within your agency, don't discuss consumer information and issues in public areas, and with people who don't "need to know".