

Why disclose your mental health status to your employer...

Various policies and legislation protect the rights of persons with disabilities;

Mental illness is considered a disability;

Persons with all disabilities are entitled to reasonable accommodation to enable them to enjoy their employment on an equal basis than others;

If your employer understands your disability, they are better equipped to provide assistance where possible and act appropriately in case of medical emergency;

Your disclosure will encourage others to disclose and reduce stigma;

Being differently-abled makes you unique!

Policies & Legislation

SA Constitution: CHAPTER 2, BILL OF RIGHTS

Equality ... may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language ...
Labour relations ... Everyone has the right to fair labour practices.

UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Article 5 - Equality and non-discrimination ... In order to promote equality and eliminate discrimination, States Parties shall take all appropriate steps to ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided.
Article 27 - Work and employment ... States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities. States Parties shall safeguard and promote the realization of the right to work, including for those who acquire a disability during the course of employment, by taking appropriate steps, including through legislation ...

RSA Employment Equity Act, No. 55 Of 1998

Prohibition of unfair discrimination ... No person may unfairly discriminate, directly or indirectly, against an employee, in any employment policy or practice, on one or more grounds, including disability ...

Psychosocial Disability in the Workplace

What is PSYCHOSOCIAL DISABILITY?

A clinically recognised condition or illness that affects a person's thought processes, judgement or emotions, e.g. bipolar mood disorder, schizophrenia

DEFINITION - DISABILITY : "A long term or recurring physical or mental impairment which substantially limits the prospects of entry into, or advancement in, employment"

Research indicates that people receiving treatment for a mental illness are **no more violent or dangerous than the general population.**

Cultural background **affects how people experience a mental illness and how they understand** and interpret symptoms.

Many people experiencing mental illness **delay seeking help because they are frightened** by the illness and fear stigma and discrimination.

Anyone can develop a mental illness and **no one is immune** to mental health problems.

Psychosocial disability **IS NOT**:

- **demon possession or bewitchment**
- **a result of past sins**
- **people with a diagnosis is not more prone to commit crimes**
- **untreatable**
- **everyone with a diagnosis is unable to be gainfully employed**
- **everyone with a diagnosis should be institutionalised and not live in society**
- **everyone with a diagnosis are dirty, unhygienic, unkempt**

Comparing the intensity of disability between psychosocial disability and physical disability:
BIPOLAR MOOD DISORDER = paraplegic
SCHIZOPHRENIA = quadriplegic

It is **IMPORTANT** to know that mental health conditions affect individuals differently, thus the degree in which such a condition places limitations on the person's functioning varies from person to person. Medication treating mental health conditions may also have side-effects that can also affect functioning.

Challenges that may be faced by a person with psychosocial disability in the workplace:

Screening out environmental stimuli - an inability to block out sounds, sights, or odors which interfere with focusing on tasks *Ex.* An employee may not be able to work next to a noisy printer or in a high traffic area.

Possible solutions: Move printer away from work area, allow employee to wear headphones playing soft music, install high partitions around desk.

Sustaining concentration - restlessness, shortened attention span, easily distracted, trouble remembering verbal directions *Ex.* An employee may have trouble focusing on one task for extended periods.

Possible solutions: Break large projects into smaller tasks, allow brief but more frequent breaks to stretch, walk around, get fresh air, assign tasks one at a time.

Maintaining stamina - having energy to work a full day, combating drowsiness due to medications *Ex.* An employee may not be able to work a full 8 hour day.

Possible solutions: Part time hours, rest breaks in middle of day, job sharing.

Responding to change - coping with unexpected changes in work, such as changes in the rules, job duties, supervisors or coworkers *Ex.* An employee may take longer to learn new routines, or feel stressed when new supervisors or coworkers start work.

Possible solutions: Prepare employee for changes that will be happening, explain new rules or duties, make a special effort to introduce new staff to employee and orient new supervisors to employee's needs.

Handling time pressures and multiple tasks - managing assignments & meeting deadlines, prioritizing tasks *Ex.* An employee may not know how to decide which tasks should be done first, or be able to complete tasks by the due date.

Possible solutions: Break larger projects down into manageable tasks, meet regularly to help the employee to prioritize tasks or to estimate time to complete project.

Interacting with others - getting along, fitting in, talking with coworkers, reading social cues *Ex.* An employee may not talk with coworkers at breaks, or may have trouble reading the subtle social cues of the workplace.

Possible solutions: Establish a mentor or coworker buddy relationship to introduce the employee to others or to show the employee "the ropes".

Responding to negative feedback - understanding and interpreting criticism, knowing what to do to improve, initiating changes because of low self esteem *Ex.* An employee may not seem to understand the feedback given, or becomes upset when criticism is delivered.

Possible solutions: Arrange a meeting with the job coach and employee to facilitate feedback, use a feedback loop (ask employee's perspective of performance, describe both strengths and weaknesses, suggest specific ways to improve), give employee the chance to read written feedback privately, and then discuss.

Reasonable accommodation for psychosocial disabilities vary from individual to individual, and may include:

- Time off for follow up visits to clinic/ psychiatrist/ psychologist
- Later starting time due to side-effects of medication causing drowsiness
- More frequent breaks
- Extended sick leave should a relapse occur
- Limited stress working environment
- Use of email for daily instructions
- Minimize distractions by enclosed office
- Allocation of parking close to entrance to limit anxiety/panic
- Need for job coach or mentor