

# MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

## Mental Health & Wellbeing

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# Disclosing a mental health condition to others

There is no right or wrong answer when it comes to telling employers, friends, family members or partners about your mental health condition or difficulties that you are experiencing. You may have concerns about what will happen if you let others know, but being open about what support you need has the potential to make your life easier. It's important to realise that people might not understand what you're going through, but that doesn't mean they don't want to be supportive.

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## What is disclosure?

'To disclose' or 'disclosure' means to make something known or provide information to someone about something private or hidden- so to disclose a mental health condition to someone means to tell them about your mental health condition when they didn't previously know.

Just thinking about how to start a conversation about your mental health concern can be overwhelming. The conversation might be a bit awkward – you may not know what to say and they might know how to react – but you may feel a sense of relief afterwards.

The benefits and downsides of telling someone are different for everyone and thinking them through can help you decide what's right for you.

If you do decide you'd like to tell someone about your mental health, it's your choice who you want to tell, and what you'd like to tell them.

## Talking to friends, family or partners

Your mental health can impact your relationship with others, particularly if they don't know what's going on for you, and you might find it stressful feeling like you're 'hiding' something from them.

It's your choice who to tell- you might find it helpful to tell lots of family or friends, or you might pick a few close, trusted people. Have a think about who you think will be able to be supportive.

Reasons you might choose to disclose include:

- You find it stressful that they don't know
- Friends and family can provide a lot of support
- It can help you accept and become more comfortable with your mental health condition

Reasons you might choose not to disclose include:

- You're concerned about how the person might react
- You don't feel like the person will be able to keep the information you share private, even if you ask them to
- The person isn't someone you would like to receive support from

## Disclosure at work

[In NSW](#), if you choose to tell your employer you are living with or have a mental illness, they cannot disclose this to anyone else without your consent. You do not have a legal obligation to tell your employer about your mental health if it is not affecting the way you do your job.

Disclosing your mental illness at work can help your employer support you better. Some examples of reasons you might choose to tell your employer include:

- It can allow you to access support or changes you might need in the workplace
- It can help others understand why your performance at work might have changed
- Your mental health might be impacting your ability to do your job safely, and you might need to work with your employer to make changes

Reasons you might choose not to disclose include:

- Your mental health condition might not impact your work
- You might be concerned about stigma or discrimination
- You might not want or need any supports at work

Heads Up has a ['pros and cons'](#) tool which you can use to help you decide whether you should disclose your condition to your employer and how to talk about it if you do.

## Strategies for disclosing

Thinking about what you're going to say before you have the conversation about your mental health can help you say what you want to say and make sure you get the best support possible.

The American National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) has a [helpful guide](#) for how to disclose, including some helpful example phrases to use. The guide suggests that the conversation should have three things:

- ▶ **"Process talk"**: this is where you talk about talking and prepare the other person for an important conversation- for instance, telling them that you have something you'd like to talk about, and you'd like their help or advice.
- ▶ **Concrete examples** of what you mean by 'mental illness'- because every person is different and experiences mental illness differently, giving one or two specific examples of what's going on for you can help them better understand and be able to provide better support.
- ▶ **Suggest ways to support you**: Other people might not know what they can do to help, so going into the conversation with an idea of what support you'd like from them can make things easier. For instance, you

might want to ask if you can work from home one day per week, or to ask a friend if they can check in on how you're doing if they notice you're not coming to uni classes.

### Tips for disclosing:

- ▶ **You don't have to disclose:** the pros and cons of disclosing will be different for every person and every situation. It's your choice who you want to tell, and how much you tell them. Think about who the right people to tell are, and if you're asked a question you'd prefer not to answer, it's perfectly fine to say you'd rather not answer that question right now.
- ▶ **Think about when you'd like to disclose:** It's best to pick a time when you're feeling okay. If you find you need to tell others at a time when you're not doing so well, consider asking someone who you know is supportive to help you tell others.
- ▶ **Think about how you'd like to disclose:** If you're disclosing at work, consider sending an email to the person ahead of time asking to meet somewhere private, or you might find you feel more comfortable communicating via phone call or email with a friend.
- ▶ **Set boundaries:** Some people might have their own ideas of how to support you, but it's ok to tell them what support you want, or to let them know whether you'd like suggestions or you'd just like them to listen. Make sure to let people know which information you'd like them to keep private.
- ▶ **People's reactions:** Even if you think carefully about who you're going to tell, people might react in different ways to the conversation. Some people might need some time, and others might want some more information- consider directing them to reliable resources such as pages on [Headspace](#), [Beyond Blue](#), or [Healthdirect](#) which talk about what's going on for you.

## Disclosing a mental health condition at university

There are different people you can talk to about your mental health at university. You might choose to tell your friends, university staff such as the tutor leading your classes or your course advisor, or you might choose to make an appointment with a disability advisor.

If you choose to talk to a Disability Advisor, they may be able to create an Academic Integration Plan (AIP), and/or a Placement Integration Plan (PIP) which outline any adjustments you need to help you succeed at university or on placement. These are documents that can be adjusted throughout your time at university to best meet your needs and support you at uni. To receive either an AIP or PIP, you'll need to provide medical documentation that gives details about your mental health condition and how it impacts you. An AIP or PIP can help you get support at university without having to disclose details of your mental health more than once- these documents only show what supports you'll receive, not any information about your mental health condition.

You may also find it helpful to talk to your course coordinator. They can provide useful information about your course and help you make decisions about how best to make your studies work for you, such as helping you decide between full and part-time study.

## University support

If you want support with jobs, career planning or thinking about your future then the WSU [Careers Service](#), [Counselling Service](#), [Disability Service](#), or [Welfare Service](#) may be able to help.

- ▶ **WSU [Careers Service](#).**

The Careers Service can help you plan your career, provide feedback on your resume, help with your job hunt, and prepare for interviews. They can also help you to explore the pros and cons of disclosure of a mental health condition to an employer.

- ▶ **WSU [Counselling Service](#).**

Students can access free, short term, confidential counselling services. Face to face, Zoom or phone appointments can be made by telephoning 1300 668 370. Our office hours are Monday to Friday 9.00am - 4:30pm. Alternatively, or email [counselling@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:counselling@westernsydney.edu.au)

- ▶ **WSU [Disability Service](#).**

The Disability Service is free to access with Disability Advisors assisting students to meet their full potential. If you have a diagnosed physical, psychological or medical condition that impacts on your studies, you may be eligible for an [Academic Integration Plan \(AIP\)](#), developed by the Disability Service. Contact the Disability Service on 1300 668 370, email [disability@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:disability@westernsydney.edu.au) or make contact via [WesternNow](#).

- ▶ **WSU [Welfare Service](#).**

Academic, Personal and Financial Hardship, International Support and Accommodation: 1300 668 370 or via [WesternNow](#).

- ▶ **Multifaith [Chaplaincy](#)**

Multifaith Chaplaincy can provide confidential conversation and care, support for stress management and anxiety with links to religious groups and faith communities. For more information, please call Daniel Jantos on 0402 771 543 or email [d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:d.jantos@westernsydney.edu.au).

- ▶ **WesternLife**

[WesternLife](#) - Join thousands of students at Your Virtual Community to share experiences, learn new things, connect with new friends, and engage with events or discussions that interest you!

- ▶ **Disruption to Studies**

Consider applying for [Disruption to Studies](#) and [Requests for Extension](#) if you feel as though your studies have been significantly impacted.

- ▶ **Deferred Exams**

[Deferred Exam](#) – You can apply for a Deferred Exam no later than 5.00 pm on the second working day after your scheduled exam if you are unable to attend a final exam due to serious illness, misadventure or other exceptional circumstances beyond your control. Submit a [Student Form](#) and attach supporting documents online for application.

- ▶ **Withdraw Without Academic Penalty**

[Withdrawal Without Academic Penalty](#) is an option available after the Census Date of the teaching term provided that you meet eligibility.

- ▶ **Leave of absence**

A [Leave of Absence](#) is a temporary break from studying. Once you have completed one or more subjects in your enrolled program, you can apply for a Leave of Absence. A Leave of Absence can be taken as either six or twelve months. The maximum amount of leave you can take during your program is twelve months. Please note, you must submit your application before the relevant census date

If you are considering any of these options, please reach out to the counselling service for support and guidance. If you are an international student, please make sure you seek advice particularly if you are considering withdrawing without penalty or taking a leave of absence as these may have [implications for your visa conditions](#).

## Community support

▶ **Lifeline**

Lifeline (24 hours crisis counselling) - **13 11 14**

Lifeline SMS Counselling Service - between 6pm- Midnight you can text **0477 13 11 14** and somebody will text you back! You can find more information [here](#).

▶ **Mental Health Telephone Access Line**

Available 24/7 to everyone in NSW on **1800 011 511**. Provides professional help and advice and referrals to local mental health services.

▶ [Headspace: Managing your mental health in the workplace](#) – This provides you with supportive information on your rights and responsibilities as an employee as well as tips for maintaining your mental health at work.

▶ [Black Dog Institute: Workplace mental health tool kit](#) - This mental health toolkit has been developed by the Black Dog Institute as a practical guide for Australian workers to assist them in understanding common mental health issues in the workplace, and to provide strategies and resources to support those who may be experiencing a mental health condition.

▶ [Heads up](#) - Provides information on how to talk about mental health to a trusted person as well as a plan for you to follow.

▶ [Disability Discrimination Act](#) - The Disability Discrimination Act makes it illegal for a worker to be discriminated against at work due to a mental illness. The Privacy Act means that employers must keep workers' personal information private and confidential

▶ [Beyond Blue](#) - is a 24/7 service that provides information and support to everyone. You can call them on 1300 22 4636 or chat online.

▶ [Headspace](#) - Headspace is a support and counselling service for those aged 12-25 that provide support to manage mental health. You can contact them on **1800 650 890** or through online chats.

▶ [QLife](#) - Provides LGBTI peer support and referral. Contact them on **1800 184 527** (6pm-10pm daily) or you can chat online (online chat 3pm-12am daily)

▶ [Mensline](#) - is a 24/7 counselling service for men. You can contact them on **1300 78 99 78**

## Resources

- [Websites](#)
- [Podcasts](#)
- [Videos](#)
- [Apps](#)

## Websites

[Talking about depression in Asian families](#) - An ABC News article with one person's story of disclosing their mental health condition to their family.

[Centre for Psychiatric Rehabilitation: Disclosing your disability to an employer](#) - Provides information to think about before disclosing a mental health condition or disability to an employer.

[NAMI: Disclosing to others](#) - Provides information about disclosing your mental health condition to people you trust, who to tell and when to tell.

[Mental health works: How can I explain my mental health problem to co-workers?](#) - Information on privacy rights and scenarios of what to say when disclosing this information

[Human rights commission: Managing mental illness in the workplace](#) - Discusses your rights regarding how your employer should meet your mental health needs in the workplace.

[SANE Forums](#) - Seek help, make connections, and share your experience. The SANE Forums are an online community for people affected by mental illness. It's a safe, stigma-free, supportive, and anonymous peer support community, moderated 24/7 by mental health professionals.

## Videos

[How to disclose your mental illness to your employer](#)

## Apps

[Smiling mind](#): A free, evidence-based mindfulness and meditation app designed to help you fit mindfulness activities into your day. Mindfulness meditation has been shown to help manage stress, resilience, anxiety, depression and improve general health and wellbeing.



[Check-in:](#) This app was created by Beyond Blue and is designed for anyone wanting to check in with a friend and is easy and quick to use.

## Still struggling?

If you are still struggling, reach out to the WSU counselling team for support and advice. If you prefer to seek support from a service outside of the university, it may be helpful to speak to your General Practitioner regarding a [Mental Health Care Plan](#) and referral to a psychologist, or you can speak to a counsellor or other health professional.

**Please find the attached PDF document [here](#).**

References:

[Interpersonal Skills Module- Priorities in Relationship](#)

[New South Wales Government- Mental health at work: legal obligations and rights](#)

[Heads Up: Better Mental Health in the Workplace- Disclosure pros and cons tool](#)

[National Alliance on Mental Illness- Disclosing to others](#)

[Headspace](#)

[Beyond Blue](#)

[Health Direct](#)

[Embrace Multicultural Mental Health- Multilingual information](#)

[Western Sydney University- Disability service](#)

[Western Sydney University- Deferred exams](#)

[Western Sydney University- Applying for leave or resigning from your program](#)

[Western Sydney University- Special consideration: disruption to studies](#)

[Western Sydney University- Disruption to Studies Policy](#)

[Western Sydney University- Withdrawing without academic penalty](#)

[Western Sydney University- Counselling Service](#)

[Western Sydney University- Student Welfare Service](#)

[Western Sydney University- WesternNow](#)

[Western Sydney University- Chaplaincy](#)

[Western Sydney University- TalkCampus](#)

[Headspace- Managing your mental health in the workplace](#)

[Black Dog Institute- Workplace mental health tool kit](#)

[Heads up- How to talk about a mental health condition at work](#)

[NSW Government- Disability discrimination act](#)

[QLife](#)

[Mensline](#)

[Lifeline 24/7 crisis counselling](#)

[ABC News- Talking about depression in Asian families](#)

[Centre for Psychiatric Rehabilitation: Disclosing your disability to an employer](#)

[Mental health works- How can I explain my mental health problem to co-workers?](#)

[Human rights commission- Managing mental illness in the workplace](#)

[SANE Forums](#)

[Youtube- How to disclose your mental illness to your employer](#)

[Smiling mind app](#)

[Beyond Blue- Check-in app](#)