



## **“TO TELL OR NOT TO TELL?”**

Disclosing mental health problems in an educational setting

Manual for educational- and mental health professionals



Jacomijn Hofstra & Lies Korevaar



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# Foreword

Many young adults with mental health problems struggle with the question of whether or not they want to disclose these problems at school (community colleges or higher education) or at their internship. They are often afraid of stigmatization by fellow students, teachers or supervisors. Mental health and educational professionals indicate that they often do not know how to support the young adults in making a choice about whether or not to disclose their mental health problems at school or internship.

In response to the identified problems, the Research and Innovation Center for Rehabilitation of the Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen has developed the Disclosure-tool 'To tell or not to tell?'.

## **Examples of what the support brought the students:**

'Although I did not succeed the first time (because I had agreed on a deadline to tell it) I finally succeeded, after receiving a lot of support. Now a whole load has fallen off my shoulders. I am very happy that this tool made this possible!'

'Clear and concrete, where you have to think yourself, but where you also get the necessary support'

'I thought about disclosure in a structured way and looked at how I can best communicate about everything'

This manual describes the tool and explains how you can use this tool as an education or mental health professional to support young adults in making a well informed choice about whether or not to disclose their mental health problems at school or internship. Furthermore, this tool is also useful for young adults with other non-visible problems that they doubt to disclose. We hope that many young adults who struggle with the dilemma of disclosing their (mental health) problems are able to make a well-informed decision with the help of this tool and therefore experience less disclosure-stress.

Groningen, August 2019  
Jacomijn Hofstra & Lies Korevaar

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# 1. Practical information

## General

The disclosure tool has been developed for young adults with mental health problems who seriously struggle with the dilemma about whether or not to disclose these problems at school or internship.

"Disclosing your mental health problems" means that you tell someone about your past or present problems"

To support the young adults in making a decision whether to tell about his mental health problems or not, you can discuss the following five steps with him or her:

- 1 **Whether** to tell: *consider the benefits and the risks, what is most important for you?*
- 2 **What** to tell: *are you going to tell everything or just a selection?*
- 3 **Who** to tell; *are you going to tell everybody or just a few people and why?*
- 4 **When** to tell: *what is an appropriate moment/ situation and circumstances?*
- 5 **How** to tell: *are you going to send an e-mail and what will be your tone of voice?*

For every aspect there is a worksheet available that you discuss and complete with the young adult. These worksheets are described in detail later in this manual.

## Meetings

In order to be able to go through the five aspects in the right way with the young adults, on average four meetings of one hour are needed (for example, one for getting to know each other and **whether**; one for **who** and **when**; one for **what**; and one for **how** and summary). This number can of course vary depending on the needs of the young adult: perhaps there are fewer meetings needed because the young adult already has a clear picture of a number of aspects; or there can be more meetings needed because the young adult has difficulty with certain aspects. Do try to make the meetings last a maximum of one hour and limit the content of the conversation to the discussion of the aspects of disclosure. If a young adult wants to talk about a certain (emotional) experience, schedule time for that at a later moment. You could also ask the young adult to complete a worksheet before the next meeting.

For a good and clear structure in the meetings, it is advisable to organize the meetings using the ROPES structure:

Review: look back at the previous meeting and ask if there are any questions left. Discuss the home assignment.

Overview: give an overview of the five aspects and indicate which aspect will be discussed in the coming hour and what you will get started with.

Presentation: explain the aspect that central to this meeting.

Exercise: let the young adult complete the worksheet by himself or complete the worksheet together.

Summary: conclude with a concise summary of the meeting and make arrangements for the next meeting.

Try to create a **safe atmosphere** and **bond** with the young adult so that he feels heard. You can do this, for example, by connecting with the young adult: respond to emotional statements of the young adult with corresponding remarks/ questions: 'So you feel...' and to rational statements with 'So you think that...'.

Further on, for each of the five aspects we have written out how you can discuss the specific aspect with the young adult and which questions you can ask. Also, you will find the corresponding worksheet for each aspect and an example of a completed worksheet of a fictional young person. You can use these examples to help the young adults at the moment that he or she gets stuck in answering the questions on the worksheets.

It is important to note here that the aspects **do not have to be followed in a specific order**. You can start with whatever aspect the young adult prefers. However, we do recommend that you and the young adult do think about all five aspects, so that the young adults can make a well-considered decision.

The decision whether or not to disclose is a **strictly personal choice** that only the young adult can make. We cannot make this decision for the young adult.

If the young adult decides to disclose, let the young adult practice (during the last meeting) with disclosing, with telling his "message". You can give feedback on that the message, so that the message can be adjusted and the young adult experiences how the message comes across. Also discuss possible -negative- reactions of the person to whom the young adult has disclosed, and how the young adult can deal with these negative reactions.

## 2. Whether to tell

### Review (Introduction)

Every meeting starts with a short review of the previous meeting. In case of the first appointment, use this moment to get acquainted. Discuss here, among other things, whether the young adult previously has been open about his mental health problems and how that went. It may also be that the young adult has never before disclosed his mental health problems and that this meeting is a first step in considering whether or not to tell. Then keep in mind that the young adult is telling his 'secret' for the first time and that you give him enough time to disclose his story.

### Overview

Briefly indicate what the coming hour will look like and what aspect of the skill Disclosing you will discuss. If it is your first appointment, you can mention shortly the five aspects that are going to be discussed in the coming meetings. You can also mention that the meetings will always be structured according to the ROPES method (Review, Overview, Presentation, Exercise and Summary).

### Presentation

Discuss the following (of course in your own words) with the young adult:

The decision to disclose or not is a difficult one. The choice will be different for everyone because everyone has different experiences and different needs. Disclosing is a personal decision—you are the only one who can make it. Don't give in to pressure to disclose for the sake of other people, you are the one who has to live with the positive and negative consequences.

There are positives and negatives to disclosing your mental health problems. The decision to disclose or not is often not a final decision but one that can be re-evaluated over time, based on your circumstances. It is important that the factors that determine whether disclosure occurs or not be explored before a decision is made.

### Exercise

Ask the young adult to think about possible advantages and disadvantages that he might experience when disclosing his mental health problems. Indicate that he must have a good idea of why he wants to disclose, of what the goal is. Let the young adult complete the worksheet 'Whether to tell'. When the young adult has filled out the advantages and disadvantages, ask him to rank these advantages and disadvantages in order from most to least important. Which weighs the heaviest for the young adult? Finally, you ask the young adult whether he has already been able to make a (first) choice. If the young adult indicates that he does not want to disclose his mental health problems, it is still advisable to (probably in a shorter way) go through the other aspects and the accompanying worksheets. Perhaps the choice of the young adult might change, as he gets a more complete view of disclosing. It is also possible that in the future the young adult might find himself in a situation in which he does want to disclose. Then it is good to be prepared for that.

If you notice that the young adult finds it difficult to come up with possible advantages and disadvantages, you could discuss the following (dis-)advantages with him:

### Benefits of disclosing

- That you receive better support
- That you can ask for accommodations and that they can be implemented
- That you may feel more confident if staff members react positively.
- That you might meet other people with similar experiences as yours
- you may have better relationships with them
- That you might have better relationships with the people you disclose to
- That school/university is more responsive to the needs of other students with mental health problems because you have been open about it
- That you receive more interest, care and support from staff members
- That you can have access to the same rights and entitlements as everybody else
- That you will be seen as a 'difficult' student
- That you are able to receive support and advice

### Disadvantages of disclosing

- That others may feel threatened, due to ignorance and personal experience
- That you have to discuss your mental health problems
- That you might get discriminated by others
- That you might be rejected by others
- That you might get singled out in class
- That others might misunderstand the impact of the mental health problems
- That you might get the feeling that you are denied some opportunities, such as a place in the course you wish to undertake
- That your mental health problems might provoke curiosity or unnecessary concern in others
- That people focus possibly more on your mental health problems than on your the academic capacity
- That you might be treated differently than other students

### You may also choose NOT to disclose your mental health problems

You may have several reasons for not disclosing, including:

- You may not require any additional support or services, because your mental health problems do not influence your ability to study
- You may be uncertain about contacting 'disability support services' at this time
- You may not know who will have access to your personal information
- You may have developed strategies for managing your mental health problems and would not benefit from disclosing these problems
- You have the expectation that equity and access are in place, which eliminates the need to seek education related accommodations

### **Summary**

Conclude with a brief summary of today's meeting. Again mention the five aspects (whether, who, what, when and how). If there was not enough time during the meeting to complete the worksheet (completely), then the young adults can further fill in the worksheet at home and take it to the next meeting. Do not forget to make an appointment for the next meeting.

# Worksheet 'Whether to tell'

Instructions: Determine whether you want to tell about your mental health problems

- Remember to:
- a. Identify benefits
  - b. Identify disadvantages
  - c. Compare the benefits and the disadvantages
  - d. Make a choice

<b>To tell or not to tell?</b>	
<b>A. What are the benefits of disclosing?</b>	<b>B. What are the disadvantages of disclosing?</b>
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
<b>C. Compare the benefits and the disadvantages. Which are most important to you? Rank the benefits and disadvantages of disclosing from most important to least important.</b>	
<b>D. Have you been able to make a (provisional) choice? Do you tell or not? Explain why you've made this choice.</b>	

# Worksheet 'Whether to tell'

Instructions: Determine whether you want to tell about your mental health problems

Remember to:

- a. Identify benefits
- b. Identify disadvantages
- c. Compare the benefits and the disadvantages
- d. Make a choice

<b>To tell or not to tell?</b>	
<b>A. What are the benefits of disclosing?</b>	<b>B. What are the disadvantages of disclosing?</b>
1. Getting help and advice	1. That others might discriminate against me
2. Finding peace by finally telling my 'secret'	2. That others reject me
3. Obtain possible accommodation (support; other ways of examination etc.)	3. That the emphasis will be more on my problems than on my academic capacity
4. Getting empathy and understanding of the person to whom I disclose	4. Being treated differently in class
5. Possible contact with 'peers' who experience the same as I do	5. That the message does not come across well and that I leave a wrong impression
6. Staff members might react appropriately and understanding in difficult situations	6. Ignorance of others
7.	7. That I am seen as a problem, stigma
8.	8.
<b>C. Compare the benefits and the disadvantages. Which are most important to you? Rank the benefits and disadvantages of disclosing from most important to least important.</b>	
1. Finding peace by finally telling my 'secret'	
2. That I am seen as a problem, stigma	
3. Getting help and advice	
4. That the emphasis will be more on my problems than on my academic capacity	
5. Staff members might react appropriately and understanding in difficult situations	
<b>D. Have you been able to make a (provisional) choice? Do you tell or not? Explain why you've made this choice.</b>	
Yes, I think I want to tell. I see that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages that I have written down.	

## 3. Who to tell?

### Review

Discuss what you talked about during the previous meeting and ask if there are any remarks or questions left. If applicable, ask for the worksheet that has been completed at home.

### Overview

Indicate that the aspect of 'Who am I going to tell?' is central during this meeting. Mention that you first will tell something about this aspect, and that you will then work together on the worksheet. If there is time left, you can discuss the next aspect, for instance 'When will I tell?'

### Presentation

Discuss the following (of course in your own words) with the young adult:

Besides the decision whether or not to tell, it is also important to think about who to tell. Below you'll find a list of persons to whom you possibly want to disclose your mental health problems.

- *Academic advisor or counsellor*. He or she is there to help you to arrange things or refer you to the right services.
- *Teaching staff*, because the accommodation or support you need is directly related to their course.
- *Fellow students*, so they understand why you are receiving accommodations or extra support and they can support you.
- *Faculty administrative staff*, because they can assist you with processing information or applications
- *Supervisor at your internship*, because you may need support or accommodations to be able to perform your tasks properly at your internship
- *Housemates*, so they understand for example why you use medication, why you go to bed so early or why you are sometimes not feeling so well.

Before you decide to disclose, probably you want to know if the person to whom you disclose, treats your information as confidential. Important in this decision are your previous experiences with disclosing your mental health problems. If your trust has been abused in the past, you will think twice before you disclose again. Before you disclose your problems, you might say to the other that you assume that he will not discuss the things you are going to tell him with anyone else without your explicit consent.

### Exercise

Ask the young adult to think about possible persons to whom he would like to disclose. Also ask for each person mentioned what the purpose is to disclose to this particular person. Why would he go to this person? Why do you choose this particular person? Maybe the one person you like best? Or you are most familiar with? What is the advantage and /or disadvantage of this person (you can refer to the worksheet 'Whether to tell?'). Which consideration is most important? Let the young adult fill in the worksheet 'Who to tell?'

### Summary

Conclude with a brief summary of today's meeting. Again mention the five aspects (whether, who, what, when and how) and ask whether the young adult sticks to his previous choice concerning disclosing his mental health problems or not.

If there was not enough time during the meeting to complete the worksheet (completely), then the young adults can further fill in the worksheet at home and take it to the next meeting. Do not forget to make an appointment for the next meeting.

# Worksheet 'Who to tell?'

Instructions: Think about your own situation and identify who to tell.

- Remember to:
- a. Brainstorm relevant people
  - b. Select the best choice

<b>Identify Who to tell</b>
<b>a. Write down relevant people and also write down why you want to tell them:</b>
<b>b. Select best choice (and explain why):</b>

# Worksheet 'Who to tell?'

Instructions: Think about your own situation and identify who to tell.

Remember to:

- a. Brainstorm relevant people
- b. Select the best choice

<b>Identify Who to tell</b>
<b>a. Write down relevant people and also write down why you want to tell them:</b>
Academic counselor: inform about my situation and possibly get help and advice
Classmate A: explain why I am sometimes absent / for emotional support
Teacher of the course 'Conversation Skills' : so that he can take into account my presentation anxiety
Academic advisor: for help and advice with practical matters, such as an extra year of student finance
<b>b. Select best choice (and explain why):</b>
Academic counselor: I like to know that my academic counselor is aware of my mental health problems. If something goes wrong in the future, I hope I can turn to her for help or advice. In addition, she could possibly inform my teachers.

## 4. When to tell

### Review

Look back at the previous meeting. If applicable, ask for the worksheet that has been completed at home. Were there any difficulties with completing the worksheet that the young adult ran into?

### Overview

Indicate that the aspect of 'When am I going to tell?' is central during this meeting. Mention that you first will tell something about this aspect, and that you will then work together on the worksheet.

### Presentation

Discuss the following (of course in your own words) with the young adult:

Most educational programs have a time span of several years. In those years many changes can occur. You'll find yourself in new situations, meet new people, there are changes in your personal circumstances, but also your study load at school or college could increase. In any new situation, especially when your functioning at school is being affected by it, you might need to consider whether or not you want to disclose your mental health problems.

Most studies require *internship or fieldwork*. Being an intern or working in the field, often requires other skills, knowledge and attitudes than being a student at college. Most of the time you are seen as employee and colleague, instead of student. It is possible that this new role asks for other accommodations and support. Also in this situation you will have to decide whether you want to disclose your mental health problems in order, for example, to get the needed accommodations and support.

So, there are many moments and situations during your study in which you have to decide to disclose or not.

It is also wise to consider the specific circumstances (such as location, presence of others and the time the other person has available for you) in which you want to disclose. Things to think about are for instance: Does the other person have time to listen to your message? Are there others present or is the 'recipient' alone?

### Exercise

Ask the young adult to think about 'when' he would like to tell. What are possible moments or situations during the educational program or internship and what are specific circumstances (in terms of location/ presence of others and available time of the recipient? Have the young adult complete the worksheet. Then let the young adult choose the best moment and the most appropriate circumstances. Why did he choose this? What is the advantage and are there any disadvantages?

You can help the young adult get started by giving (some of the) moments/circumstances as examples:

During your education or internship you can choose to be open about your mental health problems because:

- Your personal circumstances may change, for example you have mental health problems for the first time
- Your mental health problems may progress and its impact on your daily living may also increase
- You have an interview for an internship
- You may have identified specific support that will enable you to participate in the course/ educational program, on an equal basis with other students
- You have to make an exam for which you need specific accommodations
- You have to participate in a course in which a specific didactic method, for example a role-play or working together in subgroups, is used
- You meet new fellow students at the beginning of a new course
- You become a member of a students' corps or students' sports club
- You make new friends
- You need accommodations (for instance adjustments to your work schedule) to be able to complete your internship

Examples of specific circumstances in which you could disclose your mental health problems are:

- If the person you want to disclose to is alone
- If the person you want to disclose to has enough time available for you
- In your class room
- In the office of the teacher/ supervisor/ counselor etc.
- In the hallway on your way to a class

### Summary

Conclude with a brief summary of today's meeting. Again mention the five aspects (whether, who, what, when and how). Do not forget to make an appointment for the next meeting and discuss if the worksheet has to be completed at home.

# Worksheet 'When to tell?'

Instructions: Think about your own situation and decide When to Tell.

- Remember to:
- a. Identify appropriate moments
  - b. Identify specific circumstances
  - c. Choose the best moment and most appropriate circumstances

<b>Decide When to Tell</b>	
<b>A. Identify appropriate moments or situations during your study or internship:</b>	
<b>B. Write down in which specific circumstances (e.g. the presence of others/location etc.) you could disclose</b>	
<b>C. Choose the best moment and the most appropriate circumstances (and explain your choices)</b>	

## Worksheet 'When to tell?'

Instructions: Think about your own situation and decide When to Tell.

Remember to:

- a. Identify appropriate moments
- b. Identify specific circumstances
- c. Choose the best moment and most appropriate circumstances

<b>Decide When to Tell</b>
<b>A. Identify appropriate moments or situations during your study or internship:</b>
At the start of new school year
When I notice that my mental health problems worsen
At the start of a new project group
<b>B. Write down in which specific circumstances (e.g. the presence of others/location etc.) you could disclose</b>
At the office of my study advisor
In the class room, before class starts
When my study advisor has time available for me
<b>C. Choose the best moment and the most appropriate circumstances (and explain your choices)</b>
Moments: When I notice that my mental health problems are worsening. I do not think it is necessary to say anything about it sooner. Only at the moment that I run into something, I want to disclose.
Specific circumstances: In the office of my study advisor, because we can talk there quietly and my study advisor has the time to discuss the situation with me.

## 5. What to tell

### Review

Discuss what you talked about during the previous meeting and ask if there are any remarks or questions left. If applicable, ask for the worksheet that has been completed at home.

### Overview

Indicate that the aspect of 'What am I going to tell?' is central during this meeting. Mention that you first will tell something about this aspect, and that you will then work together on the worksheet.

### Presentation

Discuss the following (in your own words of course) with the young adult:

In every situation, with every person and at every moment you have to ask yourself what you want to tell. You could have a “fixed” story that you tell every time again, but that story may not always be adequate.

Per situation you have to decide whether you want to tell about:

- which mental health problems you have (your diagnosis)
- aspects of your mental health problems and which barriers you face during studying or at your internship

What you exactly tell can also vary depending on the person to whom you disclose. It could be that:

- you want to educate that person about your mental health problems;
- you want to tell how your mental health problems impact your functioning at school;
- you need support;
- you want to provide the other person with information about your mental health problems;
- you like to talk with a fellow student about your mental health problems.

It is also possible that someone asks questions about your mental health problems, for example a professor who asks what your diagnosis is when you ask her for support. What to do? Also in this situation you are the one who decides what and how much you tell about your mental health problems. It is not always necessary to give specific personal information about your mental health problems. Most important is to give information about the effect of your problems on your ability to study and the support you need to study in an optimal environment.

### Exercise

Ask the young adult to think about 'what' he would like to tell. Run through the worksheet together. The worksheet is a means for the young adult to make a good 'story'. Does the young adult want to disclose his diagnosis or just some aspects of his mental health problems? Also consider the knowledge of the young adult about his mental health problems. What do the mental health problems mean for the young adult, how do they manifest itself? How do the symptoms affect the school performance of the young adult? With this aspect it is very important to keep in mind what the young adult wants to achieve with telling his story. What is the purpose? Ask the young adult for instance what he needs from the other: help, advice, accommodations?

After completing the first part, the young adult checks his story in the second part (Part B) of the worksheet. Is everything written in part A relevant to the other? Does the young adult want to tell everything or only a part of it?

Finally, the young adult writes down the complete story or uses another way to remember what he wants to tell. If there is still a lot of time left, then the young adult can do this on the spot. You can also give it as an assignment for home. Then the young adult can think again in peace about his message.

If the young adult finds it difficult to determine ' what ' he wants to tell and does not want to tell more than necessary, you could give the example below:

'The academic counsellor has all the information. I would rather not discuss the details of my problems with you (alternative: I prefer to keep the details of my problems to myself), but my mental health problems means that I have problems with (mention the study activity).Regarding this activity, the accommodation or support that would help me a lot is (mention the accommodation and/or support). I like to consult you about how to realize this'.

If there is enough time, it is advisable to have the young adult practice telling his ' message ' in a role-play. You can give feedback on this so that the message is tightened and the young adult experiences how the message comes across. If the young adult does not want this, then you can read a fictional 'disclosure message' to the young person where he can react to. Furthermore, it can be good to think together about an appropriate response if the receiver of the disclosure message of the young adult reacts negatively to it.

### **Summary**

Conclude with a brief summary of today's meeting. Again mention the five aspects (whether, who, what, when and how). Do not forget to make an appointment for the next meeting and discuss if the worksheet has to be completed at home.

# Worksheet 'What to tell?'

Instructions: Think about your situation and decide what you want to tell.

Remember to:

- a. Assess your situation
- b. Determine What you want to tell

<b>Formulate What to Tell</b>	
<b>a. Assess your situation:</b>	
I have the following mental health problem(s):	
This manifests itself in the following way:	
I have difficulty with (concerning academic achievements):	
But I am successful in/ with:	
I tell you this because:	
This would be helpful for me:	

>>> Continue on the next page

## Formulate What to Tell

### **b. Determine What you want to tell:**

Is everything that you wrote down under A relevant for the person to whom you want to disclose?

Do you want to tell everything or just a selection?

Write down exactly what you want to tell:

# Worksheet 'What to tell?'

Instructions: Think about your situation and decide what you want to tell.

Remember to:

- a. Assess your situation
- b. Determine What you want to tell

<b>Formulate What to Say</b>
<b>a. Assess your situation:</b>
I have the following mental health problem(s):
<i>ADHD</i>
This manifests itself in the following way:
<i>I am rather sensitive to stimuli, therefore I get distracted rather quickly. I often don't get to finish the tasks that I have to do. I'm also doing very badly in the household, my house is a mess again at the moment. Sometimes I talk a lot and don't listen, at least that is what my friends say.</i>
I have difficulty with (concerning academic achievements):
<i>Concentrating during lectures (sometimes I do not hear the important information) Taking written exams in the exam halls (often the time available is too short) Planning (I often forget appointments and schedule too little time for certain tasks) Keeping the overview (sometimes I do not know where to start anymore, chaotic)</i>
But I am successful in/ with:
<i>Coming up with ideas for projects/ reports</i>
I tell you this because:
<i>I've noticed that my ADHD affects my school performance in a negative way and I am afraid that I will not pass all the exams</i>
This would be helpful for me:
<i>To discuss with you possible solutions for the difficulties that I experience</i>

>>> Continue on the next page

## Formulate What to Say

### **b. Determine What you want to tell:**

Is everything that you wrote down under A relevant for the person to whom you want to disclose?

*In general, I think that what I wrote down paints a good picture of what it is like. Maybe that bit about the household and my friends is less relevant.*

Do you want to tell everything or just a selection?

*I think I'll skip the part about the household and my friends, but I do want to tell the rest that I've written down. I think it is relevant for the other.*

Write down exactly what you want to tell:

*I have mental health problems and therefore I get distracted rather quickly. I cannot concentrate well at school (for instance during lectures) and I often have too little time to take exams. Because of my problems I find it difficult to maintain the overview (I don't know when to start studying for a subject) and plan things well so that I can finish everything on time. This affects my school performance and therefore I would like to discuss with you whether it is possible for me to get support.*

## 6. How to tell

### Review

Look back at the previous meeting. Were there any particularities as a result of the last time about which the young adult would like to talk?

### Overview

Indicate that the aspect "how am I going to tell" is central during this meeting. Mention that you first will tell something about this aspect, and that you will then work together with the worksheet.

### Presentation

Discuss the following (in your own words of course) with the young person:

To ensure that your "disclosure message" ("what to tell") comes across well, it is good to reflect on how you tell the message. Even if the message is really clear, when you don't communicate it well to the other, the message will not have the desired effect. Therefore, think carefully about which means of communication you want to use; what words you use; what the tone will be of your message and how you structure your message.

#### *Means of communication*

There are a number of ways to convey a message. For example, you can send an email, call, or speak to someone personally. One likes to write an email, the other prefers to have face-to-face contact. Every means of communication has its advantages and disadvantages. Consider thoroughly what suits you and the situation the best.

#### *Wording*

Choose the correct words. Sometimes certain statements can make your conversation partner feel uncomfortable or even put off. For example, if you have mental health problems due to a traumatic experience from the past, you don't have to tell in detail what happened to you. You can talk about the effects that you are currently experiencing, in the here and now. Also think about how you possibly state what is going on and what kind of effect that can have on the recipient, for instance: "I am an autistic" versus "I have autism".

#### *Tone*

It is also important to consider how you enter the conversation, what the tone of the message will be. For example, you can be serious, cheerful or emotional. This has an effect on the receiver of the message. If you deliver your message in a very businesslike way, it can create distance; if you bring the message very emotional, then the message may not come across well or not as you intended. So remember: how are you inclined to talk about this?

#### *Structure*

The structure of your message also has a certain effect on your conversation partner. It is good to think about how you will introduce your story and what you will then tell. Do you immediately tell your message or do you give a short introduction to your story? Do you leave room for questions or do you tell in one piece? Do you finish your story with your request for support or do you start with it? How you are going to tell it (again) depends on the other four aspects of disclosing. So take into account who you are facing, but also when you tell it, what you tell and why you tell it. So keep in mind again what the purpose of the message is.

### **Exercise**

Ask the young person to think about how he wants to convey his message. What suits the young person best? Can the young person write well or should he better tell his story? What will the tone of the conversation be? How do you structure build the conversation? Have the young person complete the worksheet. If this is the last meeting you have with the young adult, have him practice his message so that you are able to give feedback.

### **Summary**

Conclude with a brief summary of today's meeting. Again mention the five aspects (whether, who, what, when and how). If it is the last meeting then it is good to (briefly) evaluate how the meetings were experienced by the both of you. What were the results of the meetings? What should be improved? Also mention the checklist (see last page) that the young person could use with practicing with disclosing or with finding out what could be improved if disclosing did not go well.

# Worksheet 'How to tell?'

Instructions: Think about your own situation and formulate how to tell.

- Remember to:
- a. Determine the means of communication (face to face, email, phone call)
  - b. Determine your tone of voice
  - c. Determine the structure of your message

<b>Formulate How to Tell</b>	
<b>A. How are you going to communicate (e.g. by phone, email or face to face) your message and why?</b>	
<b>B. What is going to be your tone of voice (e.g. (in)formal, neutral, happy etc.) ? Take the goal of your message into consideration.</b>	
<b>C. What will be the structure of your message?</b>	

# Worksheet 'How to tell?'

Instructions: Think about your own situation and formulate how to tell.

Remember to:

- a. Determine the means of communication (face to face, email, phone call)
- b. Determine your tone of voice
- c. Determine the structure of your message

<b>Formulate How to Tell</b>
<b>A. How are you going to communicate (e.g. by phone, email or face to face) your message and why?</b>
<i>I prefer personal contact. I think this is the best way for me to get my message across to come.</i>
<b>B. What is going to be your tone of voice (e.g. (in)formal, neutral, happy etc.) ? Take the goal of your message into consideration.</b>
<i>I can sometimes be quite emotional when I talk about my mental health problems, which can be a pitfall during the conversation. It may be that the message does not come across as I would like. I would therefore like that I could start the conversation in a calm and controlled way.</i>
<b>C. What will be the structure of your message?</b>
<i>I start the conversation by explaining why I would like to talk to him / her. I will then briefly tell something about my mental health problems and the burden that I experience because of these problems, and then ask for help and advice regarding extra support at school.</i>

## 7. Checklist: Disclosing your mental health problems

Instructions: You could use this checklist when you are practicing with disclosing, or when disclosing your mental health problems did not went well, in order to identify what went wrong or could go better. You can indicate which steps and behaviours you have performed, and you can reflect on this in the right column (comments).

<b>Disclosing your mental health problems</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Partial</b>	<b>Comments</b>
1. Choose Whether to Tell				
a. Identify benefits b. Identify disadvantages c. Compare and rank benefits and disadvantages d. Make a choice				
2. Identify What you want to Tell				
a. Assess your situation b. Determine What you want to tell				
3. Identify Who to Tell				
a. Brainstorm relevant people b. Select best choice				
4. Identify When to Tell.				
a. Identify possible moments/ specific situations and circumstances b. Choose best moment/ situation and circumstances				
5. Formulate How to Tell				
a. Means of communication b. Tone of voice c. Structure of the message				

## 8. More information

Interesting information about studying with mental health problems can be found at the following website of the Innovation and Research Centre for Rehabilitation of the Hanze University of Applied Sciences Groningen:

[www.supportededucation.eu](http://www.supportededucation.eu)  
[www.begeleiden.nl](http://www.begeleiden.nl) (in Dutch)

One of the research and innovation themes of the Research and Innovation Centre for Rehabilitation is Supported Education. The Centre develops products and provides information to young people, clients, family members, teachers and practitioners about studying with mental health problems.

