

## Disability, Disclosure, & Communication

### Lesson Plan for BC Curriculum

#### Materials

- Copies of the attached reflection worksheet (large print version included)
- Copies of the suggested pre-reading article OR access for students to devices to read it on
- Access to a screen/projector, and the appropriate laptop hardware to screen a short film
- Copies of the film transcript for those who prefer to read along
- Patience and a willingness to get curious with the class

#### Background Information

This lesson plan draws on ideas of disability justice, oral storytelling, and communication to have students evaluate their own communication, disclosure, and access needs. Working to move past the idea of access needs as something exclusively had by disabled people, this lesson aims to get students to consider who gets access to different types of communication, who is excluded, when disclosure is made safe, and reconsider what relationality, disclosure, and communication *should* look like.

#### Curricular Competencies

##### PHE 9/10

- Explore and describe factors that shape **personal identities**, including social and cultural factors
- Propose strategies for **avoiding and responding** to potentially unsafe, abusive, or exploitative situations
- Develop **skills** for maintaining healthy relationships and responding to interpersonal conflict

##### English Language Arts 9/10/11 OR ELA Spoken Word 10/11 OR English First Peoples (EFP) 12

- Recognize **how language constructs and reflects personal and cultural identities**
- Explore the impact of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in oral texts
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- Respectfully **exchange ideas and viewpoints** from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking
- Recognize and appreciate the role of story, narrative, and oral tradition in expressing First Peoples perspectives, values, beliefs, and points of view

##### Social Justice 12

- Explain different perspectives on past and present people, places, issues, and events, and distinguish between worldviews of the past or present (perspective)
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups and individuals at different times and places (continuity and change)

### Rationale

In this lesson, students will explore what disclosure is what social factors play a role in someone's ability to disclose or communicate more broadly. Students will further engage with the idea of communication as mediated by access needs and reflect critically on their own communication preferences and access needs. Students will ultimately consider who gets to communicate, when, how, and why and how these can reflect systems of power and privilege.

This lesson can be used in a more traditional sex-ed/relationship health context in PHE curriculum, or can be used to explore language, power, and communication in an ELA or Social Justice context. In particular, this lesson can be used to explore communication and access needs in relation to text, narrative, and oral storytelling.

Further resources on disability and sexuality can be found at:

<https://www.actioncanadashr.org/resources/sexual-health-info/hub/sex-sexual-health-and-disability> OR <http://meloukhia.net/2016/11/wheres-the-sex-ed-for-disabled-kids/>

### Lesson Plan

1. Have the students read the following article  
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2012/05/08/feeling-the-weight-some-beginning-notes-on-disability-access-and-love/> &  
<https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2011/05/05/access-intimacy-the-missing-link/>
2. Watch the film **Disability, Disclosure, & Communication**.
3. Have students complete question one of the attached worksheet. Once students have decided their preferred communication method, allow them to reflect in their chosen way. Depending on how many students choose to engage in verbal reflection, this may require facilitating the creation of discussion groups or allowing for performance time.
4. Allow for discussion of the film and reflection experience as a class as time allows. You may opt to forgo class discussion in favour of other communication methods based on your particular students' needs. Optional guiding questions (adapt as needed based on the subject):
  - a. What was the message of the film?
  - b. How was the experience of reflecting in your chosen communication method?
  - c. What do verbal interviews and oral storytelling offer us here that a written narrative might miss?
    - i. Can we make connections between the interview process and disclosure?
    - ii. What connections can we draw between disability access needs and cultural access needs related to oral tradition?

- d. What are some challenges that the individuals experienced around disclosure and communication?
  - i. Are any of these similar to challenges that non-disabled, other LGBTQ+, or other groups face?
  - ii. What challenges are specific to disabled, or disabled LGBTQ+ people?
- e. What kinds of privilege, protective factors, or social contexts make it safe for disclosure to happen?
  - i. Who might be excluded from safe disclosure processes?
  - ii. Who is excluded when we consider what “proper” or “normal” communication looks like?
  - iii. What are supportive actions we can take when someone discloses an identity to us?
- f. What steps can we take to respect our own access needs and communication preferences while also making space for others to communicate? What might resolving that conflict look like?

Ultimately, students should leave this lesson understanding that everyone communicates differently, including those with disabilities, which means that conversations and identity disclosure will never look one specific way. Communication is also a crucial element in understanding oneself in the world and different people may have different access needs where they require more or less verbalization, body language, etc. Learning how to resolve conflicting access needs is crucial to healthy relationships with people of all abilities and walks of life.

Connections should begin or continue to be built across the ideas of communication and language as culturally situated, identity forming, and crucial to accessibility.

# Accessing Communication

## *Disability, Disclosure, & Communication film reflection sheet*

### **IDENTITY DISCLOSURE**

Refers to making part of one's identity that was previously unknown to another person, known. This can include telling someone or an organization about one's disability status, sexuality, gender, race, or many other identities. Disclosure is a personal choice that some can find stressful or unsafe.

*Complete question one, then, with your instructor's guidance reflect on questions 2-5 in your chosen method.*

1. How would you prefer to communicate your thoughts about this film and lesson? Consider how you prefer to communicate or reflect in your day-to-day life (via text, phone call, in person, journaling):
  - a. Personal written reflection
  - b. Creative written reflection
  - c. Verbal discussion with others (conversation)
  - d. Oral storytelling
  - e. Visual reflection (collage, drawing, etc.)
  - f. Other (i.e., dance, song, etc.): \_\_\_\_\_
2. Why did you choose the reflection method you did? What access needs of your own are you meeting right now (i.e., need for quiet, visual stimuli, minimal verbalization, increased communication, etc.).
3. What does disclosure mean to you? What factors of your identity, environment, safety, etc. do you consider when deciding to disclose part of your identity?
4. Have you experienced conflicting communication or access needs with someone before (i.e., you communicating verbally and them via body language)? How did you resolve the conflict? Has the video helped you reflect on this in a new way?

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## Disability, Disclosure, and Communication Documentary Transcript

### **Em (They/She) 0:00**

First thing I would disclose is my sexuality because I-I've been out for a long time. So it's not something I'm you usually kind of worried about. Those conversations will come at like, I guess, times where it just makes sense? Where like, okay, an issue with a disability or like with my autism will arise. I'm having uh, on the brink of having a shutdown or a meltdown and I'm like, "Hey, by the way, I'm autistic."

### **Sonny (They/Them) 0:27**

I mean, like when you're reading a dating app, and you're like, okay, like, what do I put in my bio? Like, do I just list my many identities like... [Laughing] am I just disclosing this information to new random people? But like... there's information like I'm very comfortable with people knowing publicly, um and there's information that like, I do want to gauge whether this is a safe person to share information with.

### **Tia (She/Her) 0:51**

What I've learned to do over time, is that whenever I kind of am meeting a new person, I'm like, if I'm, if I expect that I'm going to be like, in that person's contact for any sort of prolonged period of time, I usually just say, like, hey, like, when I like when I can, hey, by the way, some days, I can't do this, or like, or just like, really generally, like, oh, like, like, I can't do that I have an injury, like, and I might either say I have an injury or I'm disabled, depending on who the person is.

### **Sonny (They/Them) 1:24**

I've found with people who have similar challenges, there's a lot more like, just being there. Like just understanding that, being in that moment, listening to you... like, maybe you can make a suggestion or two, but it's difficult when you're in a situation with someone who's used to being able to solve these kinds of problems... um, and these are things that like, obviously, if it's something that I struggle with, I'm very intimately aware of, and conscious of all the things that I should be doing to fix it.

### **Tia (She/Her) 2:02**

People tend to respond to injury, a lot better than disability because I think there's a temporality aspect to it, that injury is temporary, disability is permanent. Injury, you can say, "Oh, I hope you get better soon," disability, you can't always say that, especially like for people who have terminal illnesses, like some of my friends do, or who are chronically in pain, it's not going to get better.

### **Em (They/She) 2:24**

The best way to kind of react to disclosure, if you're somebody, like any type of disclosure, like sexuality, gender, disability would be to obviously be accepting and especially if you're talking to

somebody who is autistic, it's like, again, saying it verbally rather than just giving nonverbal cues.

#### **Tia (She/Her) 2:46**

Like when w-we say disclosure, it often sounds like oh, it's like a one and done kind of thing. But like, it's so... like people I don't know, if people forget, or they just don't listen the first time, or like, what it is, or if it's just that like they don't believe me, because I look so able bodied and sometimes, I'm like, pain free on some days, which is like, really awesome. That's like only happened in the last like, year.

#### **Sonny (They/Them) 3:07**

For me disclosure in like, a, telling someone I have a disability or telling someone I'm non binary, um, is very comfortable... um, because I like I can rehearse that in my head, I can, you know, like, I-I have, you know, if they say something mean, I can just leave like, it works out well that way. I think the disclosure part that's difficult for me is like letting someone into what the day to day lived experience of that is, for me.

#### **Tia (She/Her) 3:36**

What I have found is that I find that more intimidating to disclose to someone who I'm like, romantically interested in than someone who's just like, platonic friendship.

#### **Sonny (They/Them) 3:44**

Having someone be in those vulnerable moments with you, is like the kind of disclosure I find difficult because that's, that's disclosure that is not that I'm not in total control of. I've just had a lot of people be surprised when I talk about autism. Because in a so- first date, dynamic, I am masking and I know that social scripts and I'm I get along really well with people. So I don't fit into the like stereotype of the socially awkward, young boy idea.

#### **Em (They/She) 4:20**

I-I can actually do the very typical, like stereotypical version of flirting that you see in movies and stuff if I try to mask... like if I mask, but you can tell it's an act. And you can tell I'm like pretending. And I have very specific, like social scripts that I can say... but they don't mean anything to me and they're just repeats and once I run out of them, like that's it, it's gone.

#### **Sonny (They/Them) 4:43**

In dating experiences or like dating situations that I'm experienced in. I have social scripts that are very comfortable and I feel good at them. But then it becomes very scary when you go into a situation you're not used to... um, so like you know the first time meeting your partner's parents or like the first time your friends become friends with your partner or your partner's friends. And having these new social dynamics and scripts that I-I'm not used to can be very difficult to navigate. And it doesn't mean that I like don't want to do them or that uh, they're bad or that my, like the- the anxieties I have about it, are any indication that this is a thing I shouldn't be doing. It's just anxieties about new and unknown things.



**Tia (She/Her) 5:24**

So usually if I'm going on a date with someone, I've met them in person before or like I've met them in some sort of social situation before. And so, chances are, like, I've like, before the date came up, I've mentioned it to them as someone who's like, in my periphery or something, right? Like I've mentioned, the injury, you know? But then so then when it comes to the dating context, I had to say, so like, remember, I talked about injury, it's actually like a chronic, like pain that I deal with, you know? And sometimes I have to get into like, the details of what that actually means for like, how I experience like how I like you know, how I experience the world and life and stuff.

**Em (They/She) 6:04**

If you are yourself that really allows the autistic person to be themselves as well, which is so much more easier, especially for a long term relationship, because there's no way somebody could be masking for such a long time. A lot of the relationships that have going better, like in the recent years is because I've gotten to know myself and I've gotten better at putting boundaries in place.

**Tia (She/Her) 6:26**

It's like, I think it's challenging for people to understand that it's an ongoing thing. But not only is it ongoing but it's also changeable.

**Sonny (They/Them) 6:35**

Having conversations around disability, kind of forces you to be able to have that level of communication, as well as like, reflect on those things for yourself, and reflect on how those things are navigated in your relationship beyond just disability. So, if I'm talking about like, I need to know how to communicate what I need to you, when I'm in a state where my emotional regulation is really bad... that's really important to know if you're someone with a disability, um but it's also really important to know in a relationship in general, because you need to be able to communicate to your partner when communicating is hard.

**Em (They/She) 7:11**

Often what I struggle with the most, and what I've noticed I struggle with the most in relationship is nonverbal cues. If I don't really get them, or I really struggle to get them. So, if something is said, like, okay, this is what's happening... it's so much easier to for me to know what to expect.

**Tia (She/Her) 7:31**

I use body language so much like I... like and facial expressions, and maybe more than I should perhaps like, and I like, but I'm usually pretty good at like reading other people's body language and expressions, and um... so I rely on that a lot. And that maybe comes from martial arts, like being very aware of my body and like also disability and pain, being very aware of my body and being aware of other people's bodies and how they react. I would run into

**Em (They/She) 7:59**

I would run into the issue of they would try to like, kiss me or hold my hand. And I would be like, I just wouldn't want to have that interaction, like I would just be disgusted by it um... and I never really understood why until I got my diagnosis, because that helped me understand that it was actually me being overstimulated by them wanting to constantly hold hands.

**Sonny (They/Them) 8:20**

I think there's also like an interesting discussion around like, what happens when my needs don't align with my partner's needs or their capacity to provide something and navigating like, okay, so how do we navigate a situation where we are, we're both facing challenges or our you know, particular needs in that situation are not aligning. Um, and that can be really challenging, um... for a relationship, uh it can be challenging emotionally, but it also like, kind of forces you to address like, how you navigate when things are not good.

When I have dated other people with disabilities or um, neurodivergent, um, ADHD or autism, there's a lot more of like a willingness and, a like, independently taking initiative to address and think about and challenge like societal norms or like socially constructed ideas. And that's something that's like, important to me... I mean, even just with like my gender, um and so that's something that I've noticed like because you've been forced to question the way that the world is set up, um, I think that there's a tendency to be more primed for those discussions in other wider arenas.