

Self-Disclosure Reading 2025
Self-Disclosure, Self-Awareness, & Healthy Relationships
[Self-Awareness Module](#)

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The willingness and ability to self-disclose are essential to attaining emotional and interpersonal well-being. We can achieve full health only when we gain the courage to be ourselves with others. This means being able to share our feelings and thoughts with others. In teaching students to be self-aware, we will ask them to share who they are, what they feel and think, and why. In other words, we will ask them to self-disclose to others in class. Students need to understand the importance of being able to self-disclose with others as well as the potential risks. Not only is the willingness and ability to let ourselves be known to others essential in discovering who we are and how we wish to become, but it is also necessary in forming close relationships. A relationship between two people develops as they become more open about themselves — more self-disclosing. If individuals cannot reveal themselves, they cannot become close to others or be valued by others for who they are. To work through misunderstandings, impasses, and conflicts in relationships, we need to be able to share our feelings, why we feel that way, and our needs.

When self-disclosing, it is essential to remember that immediate, uncontrolled expression of feelings is inappropriate. There are effective and ineffective ways of sharing. In addition, there are some things we might not want to share, and people we don't trust enough to share parts of ourselves with. When sharing, it is important to consider the positive and negative consequences of self-disclosure.

Benefits of Self-Disclosure

Self-knowledge. It is a psychological truth that we cannot fully know ourselves until we self-disclose our true selves to others. There is something about sharing that makes us understand ourselves better.

The Development and Maintenance of Meaningful Relationships. A relationship between two individuals develops as they become more open with each other—more self-disclosing. Relationships are based on knowledge of the other person. How can someone like, accept, respect, and love you if they don't know you? Healthy relationships are built on knowledge and self-disclosure. They also require the willingness to trust and be trustworthy. We must trust others before we are willing to reveal our true selves, and we must act in trustworthy ways before others reveal themselves to us. Thus, the willingness to self-disclose is essential to developing and maintaining trust, and failing to reciprocate another's self-disclosure hinders its development.

People in close relationships will have misunderstandings and problems, and reach impasses, all of which are normal. Self-disclosure of feelings and needs is essential to work through misunderstandings, problems, and impasses. If you hide how you feel or react to the other person, your concealment can sicken the relationship. The energy you pour into hiding adds to the stress in the relationship and dulls your awareness of how you feel.

Risks in Self-Disclosing

Fear of Rejection. Many people are afraid to let themselves be known for fear of rejection—they worry people will laugh at them, ignore them, use the information against them, or leave or break up with them. As a result, people keep to themselves, hiding their real selves, or even creating false selves, trying to convince others that they feel differently or are different from who they really are. Creating a false self is usually lonely and dishonest. The person is not being genuine, and others usually know it. Often, when a person is rejected, it is not a rejection of the real person (which is hidden) but of the false self. People are unwilling to let their true selves be known because they have been conditioned to believe in impossible concepts of how we ought to be. These concepts make us ashamed of our true feelings and our true being. Thus, we often feel like we “should” be different. Because most people are at least a little insecure, and because all people need to be liked, loved, and respected by others, we often go along with what others say or want, keeping our feelings to ourselves for fear of rejection. Hiding from others because of fear of rejection and conflict, or through feelings of shame and guilt, leads to loneliness. Being silent is not being strong: strength is the willingness to take risks in relationships to disclose ourselves with the intention of building a better relationship.

Discovering things about ourselves that we do not like. Because self-disclosure increases self-knowledge, we may discover aspects of our lives and relationships that we don’t feel good about. Once known, we are confronted with either changing (which can be difficult) or not changing and remaining unhappy. One way to stay unaware is to avoid self-disclosing.

*I am afraid to tell you who I am,
because, if I tell you who I am,
you may not like who I am,
And it's all that I have*

John Powell

Trust & Self-Disclosure in Healthy Relationships

Healthy relationships require the willingness to trust and be trustworthy. We must trust others before we are willing to reveal ourselves (self-disclose) to them, and we must act in trustworthy ways before others reveal themselves to us. Getting to know others and for others to know us (who we really are) requires self-disclosure. The willingness and ability to self-disclose are essential to developing and maintaining trust, and failing to reciprocate another’s self-disclosure hinders its development. If we want to be liked, accepted, respected, and loved for who we are, we need to let others know our true selves. The ability and willingness to self-disclose is also essential in knowing who and how we are, and our ability to work through misunderstandings, conflicts, and impasses in relationships