

related on a less personal level. Now you see a chance to grow closer, and disclosure may be the path toward developing that personal relationship.

Is the Risk of Disclosing Reasonable? Most people intuitively calculate the potential benefits of disclosing against the risks of doing so (Affifi & Steuber, 2009; Vangelisti et al., 2001). Even if the probable benefits are great, opening yourself up to almost certain rejection may be asking for trouble. For instance, it might be foolhardy to share your important feelings with someone you know is likely to betray your confidences or ridicule them. On the other hand, knowing that your partner will respect the information makes the prospect of speaking out more reasonable. This is true in both personal and professional relationships. See the At Work sidebar on page 81 for a discussion of the potential risks of revealing personal information on the job.

Is the Self-Disclosure Appropriate? Some people have trouble with what's popularly known as "TMI"—that is, sharing "too much information" (Alter & Oppenheimer, 2009). In general, it's wise not to divulge personal secrets with strangers, in classroom discussions, or on public Facebook postings, among other settings. Even students who appreciate self-disclosure from their teachers acknowledge that they don't want to hear too much, too often about their instructors' personal lives (Myers & Brann, 2009). Of course, it's also possible to *withhold* too much information—perhaps in a marital counseling session or at a doctor's appointment. The key is to recognize that there's a time and a place for engaging in, and refraining from, self-disclosure.

Is the Disclosure Reciprocated? There's nothing quite as disconcerting as talking your heart out to someone, only to discover that the other person has yet to say anything to you that is half as revealing. You think to yourself, "What am I doing?" Unequal self-disclosure creates an unbalanced relationship, one with potential problems. This

Dark Side of Communication

BATTLING ADDICTIONS THROUGH SELF-DISCLOSURE

Medical dictionaries define addiction as a habitual dependence on a substance or practice beyond one's voluntary control. There are two broad categories: substance addictions (e.g., alcoholism, drug abuse) and behavioral addictions (e.g., gambling, spending, sexual activity). Many addictive behaviors, such as eating disorders and self-harm, have both physical and psychological components.

Addictions are typically shrouded in secrecy. The people involved often mask or hide behaviors, sometimes with deception and lies. Self-disclosure, therefore, can play a key role in addiction recovery. Venerable organizations such as Alcoholics Anonymous have found that opening up with support groups, counselors, and loved ones is a vital part of the addiction healing process.

There are a variety of ways to disclose an addiction. One study found that it's easier for some to acknowledge addictions in same-sex groups. Another study showed that social media can help those with addictions disclose things they might not share in face-to-face interaction.

The battle to overcome an addiction is a tough one, and self-disclosure alone probably won't guarantee victory. Still, opening up to understanding and supportive others can be an important—and perhaps necessary—tool for achieving a healthier lifestyle.

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