



## Life with MS: Mastering Disclosure

Deciding to tell loved ones that you have MS is a highly personal decision. When the time comes to discuss your diagnosis, there is no right answer regarding who you should tell or how and when to broach the subject. Talking to the people closest to you – spouses, parents, children and friends – about MS is important. These are the people who can provide you with the greatest support.

Below are some tips to help make your conversations a positive, supportive experience.

### Telling Your Family

Family members are often the first people those with MS want to talk to about their diagnosis, and the first conversation may be stressful. These steps may help to make conversations easier:

- Find a quiet time to talk:** Set aside time when you will be away from distractions, such as work or children. Find a private place where you feel comfortable talking openly and honestly.
- Teach them about MS:** Alleviate potential concerns by sharing information about the disease. Researching information together – in a book or on the Internet – can spark a discussion. It's a great way to bond.
- Take your closest family members with you to the doctor:** Having a medical expert present when you tell your family members about your diagnosis can help answer any questions. A calm, knowledgeable doctor can relieve anxieties and offer guidance.
- Talk to a relationship counselor:** Outside support from a trained professional can help you talk about difficult topics. A relationship expert can help ensure each person feels supported while adjusting to life with MS.

### Approaching Children

Children look to their parents for strength and support. Telling them you have a chronic disease like MS may make them afraid. Here are some ways you can approach that conversation:

- Don't go it alone:** Involve another adult family member in the conversation. Whether it is your spouse, parent or even a sibling, it is comforting for a child to see that everyone is there for support.
- Be ready for questions:** Children ask a lot of questions – What is MS? How did you get it? Will I get it? What will happen to you? Do your research first so you can address their

questions calmly and confidently. Read a book or pamphlet with your child, or research information online together.

- ❑ **Use simple language:** Avoid any confusion by explaining things in terms children can understand. For example, tell them that taking medicine is something you will need to do to take care of yourself, just like brushing your teeth.
- ❑ **Let them know you are the same person:** Children need to be reassured that their parent or loved one will still be there for them. But it is also important to explain any changes the family may need to make to their normal routine. Help them understand that these changes are manageable.

### **Telling Friends and Co-workers**

The degree to which you are comfortable with your friends, coworkers and other people in your life may help guide your decision to tell them about your diagnosis. Examine your relationships and consider talking to those people with whom you have the closest bonds. Remember, these people care about you, and your relationships can be further sources of support.

For more tips to help manage your relationships and career after a MS diagnosis and information, visit [www.multiplesclerosis.com/MasteringMS](http://www.multiplesclerosis.com/MasteringMS) to download the educational and free brochures: ***Life with MS: Mastering Relationships with Family and Friends*** and ***Life with MS: Mastering Your Career***.

### **Contributors**



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