

Unseen Disabilities in Mainstream Classrooms: Implications for All Educators

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Objectives

- Explore the definition and basic understanding of Invisible Disabilities (ID)
- Hear the perspective(s) of those with ID; have an interactive experience with ID
- Leave with strategies and recommendations for teaching and learning related to ID



In one minute, list as many disabilities you can think of...



Classify which of the disabilities that you listed are “visible” or “hidden”.

How do you know that someone has a disability?

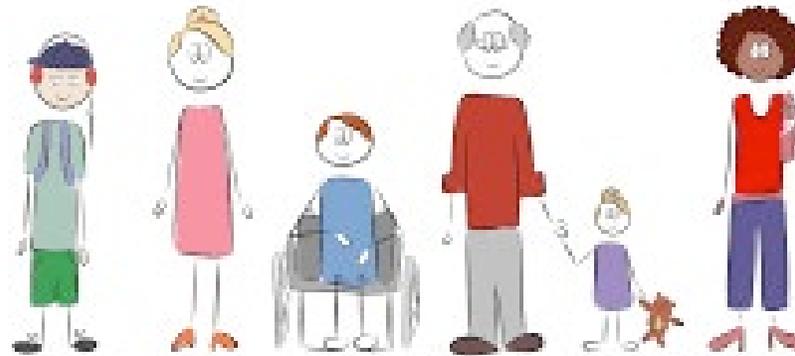
Invisible Disabilities Defined

An “invisible,” “non-visible,” “hidden,” “non-apparent,” or “unseen” disability is any physical, mental, or emotional impairment that goes largely unnoticed. An invisible disability can include, but is not limited to: cognitive impairment and brain injury; the autism spectrum; chronic illnesses like multiple sclerosis, chronic fatigue, chronic pain, and fibromyalgia; d/Deaf and/or hard of hearing; blindness and/or low vision; anxiety, depression, PTSD, and many more. The body is understood to be always changing, so disability and chronic illness may be unstable or periodic throughout one’s life.

<https://www.invisibledisabilityproject.org/>



- Did you know that children with disabilities are 2-3 times more likely to be bullied than other children: especially those with hidden disabilities such as dyslexia, hearing loss, allergies, anxiety, ADHD, speech impairments, and autism spectrum disorder?
- 54 million Americans (about 20% of the population) live with some form of disability & about 96% of this part of the population have an invisible disability.



Common Unseen Disabilities

- Psychiatric Disabilities— Examples include major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Epilepsy
- HIV/AIDS
- Diabetes
- Chronic Fatigue Syndrome
- Cystic Fibrosis
- Attention Deficit-Disrder or Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder(ADD/ADHD)
- Learning Disabilities (LD)
- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Medical conditions associated with hidden disabilities. Examples include short or long term, stable or progress, constant or unpredictable and fluctuating, controlled by medication and untreatable.

Celebrities living with ID

Celebrity	Disability
Nick Jonas	Diabetes
Selena Gomez	Lupus
Bella Hadid	Lyme Disease
Avril Lavigne	Lyme Disease
Carrie Ann Inaba	Osteoarthritis & Spinal Stenosis
Lil Wayne	Epilepsy
Nick Cannon	Lupus disorder
Morgan Freeman	Fibromyalgia
Anderson Cooper	Dyslexia

What do they have in common?

- One is unable to “see” the disability.
- There are no “visible” supports to indicate a disability such as canes, wheelchairs, use or sign language used.
- It is a permanent disability that they cope with on a daily basis.
- The disability may be managed through medication or behavior such as in the case of diabetes, asthma, epilepsy or psychiatric disorders.
- It needs to be a documented disability in order to receive reasonable accommodations under the ADA.
- The person is in some kind of physical or emotional pain.

Living with Unseen Disability

Living with an invisible disability: <https://youtu.be/Uh7ki3IbnRI>

What it's like being dyslexic?: <https://youtu.be/IEpBujdee8M>

What is wrong with me? An ADHD Story: https://youtu.be/cz5Mt9_ZpyU



Challenges for those who have ID

- They may not know they have a disability or regard themselves as such.
- They may not have been diagnosed.
- They may not know what they need.
- They may know what they need, but are unable to articulate it.
- They may often feel misunderstood or may feel ignored or feel invalidated.
- They may suspect something is wrong, but not know what it is or how to fix it.

Educational Barriers

- Stereotypes and stigma
- Complex nature of psychiatric disabilities
- Access to information and services
- Coordination and communication

Common Accommodations

- Extended time on tests.

Instead of testing how fast a student can process information, extended time (twice the usual amount of time for examinations—100% or 50% extra time) provides a more representative outcome of the student's knowledge, thinking ability, and expression.

- Quiet room for testing.

Many students may need a quiet room, free of distractions in which to take their examinations.

- Notetakers in class.

Many students cannot process information while taking notes at the same time and require an in-class note taker.

More Accommodations

- Access to a Computer to Take Exams

Students with difficulties in spelling, grammar, graphic-motor integration (dysgraphia) may need computer access.

- Multi-Modality Instruction

Provide information in oral and written form.

Use visual aids during lectures.

- Flexible Assignments

Give students a range of ways to show their knowledge.

- Flexible Deadlines

Or, receive assignments ahead of time.

Strategies for Educators & School Counselors

- Know school (Pk-12), tertiary campus and community mental health resources.
- Encourage students to ask for help from the DSS office.
- Work cooperatively with students.
- Connect students with disabilities to each other (maintain confidentiality).
- Be open to and aware of problems and solutions related to disability and mental health.

Strategies for Administrators

- Encourage the campus community to be accepting and aware of psychiatric disabilities.
- Provide mental health services to all students.
- Ensure mental health professionals and academic counselors are sensitive to the needs of students with disabilities.
- Provide training and support to Disability Support Services (DSS) offices for the provision of services to students with psychiatric disabilities.

What more can you do?

- Understand that when the learner is frustrated, confused or agitated, it may not be a “teachable” moment.
- Remain calm since your agitation will likely make a challenging situation worse.
- Allow the student with the disability to learn their own way.
- Allow them to show you what they know.
- Ask them to repeat back your instructions.
- Be patient and non-judgmental!
- Help them get diagnosed by making a referral.
- If at all possible, help them develop a plan of action.

Adapted from:
http://www.ist.hawaii.edu/training/hiddendisabilities/12_educational_barriersandsupports.php

Disabilities & Bullying

When researching for this presentation and about how to best teach others about disabilities (seen and unseen), it's not a surprise that we saw many experts suggest teaching about "kindness, empathy, tolerance, compassion, and community". It seems that there is a lack of these vital qualities in how we view and interact with those who have disabilities.

10 Tips for Teaching About ID & Bullying

- Highlight students' uniqueness.
- Explain the spectrum of disabilities.
- Be open and comfortable.
- Discuss appropriate language.
- Create clear ground rules.
- Address bullying directly.
- Work on community.
- Invite students and parents to share.
- Look for opportunities for socializing.
- Expose kids to adults with disabilities.

Adapted from: <https://www.weareteachers.com/10-tips-teaching-invisible-disabilities-bullying/>



Kids Who Are Different

Here's to the kids who are different,
The kids who don't always get A's,
The kids who have ears twice the size of their peers',
And noses that go on for days . . .

Here's to the kids who are different,
The kids they call crazy or dumb,
The kids who don't fit, with the guts and the grit,
Who dance to a different drum . . .

Here's to the kids who are different,
The kids with the mischievous streak,
For when they have grown, as history's shown,
It's their difference that makes them unique.

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Questions?

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