INVISIBLE DISABILITIES IN THE CLASSROOM

Providing Targeted Instruction

Center for Accessible Resources
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Who does CAR serve?
2. What is a disability? An “invisible disability?”
3. What types of hidden disabilities exist? Examples? Symptoms?
4. What functions may be limited?
LEARNING OBJECTIVES

5. How common are invisible disabilities?
6. What are some impacts on students?
7. How can we erase stigma & discrimination?
8. How can you refine your service or instruction?
9. Where will you turn for more assistance?
WHO DOES CAR SERVE?

CAR serves all qualified students with disabilities including medical and psychological conditions, mobility and neurological impairments, hearing and vision loss, and learning disabilities.
QUALIFIED STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Must be determined to:

1. Have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or

2. Have a record of such an impairment; or

3. Be regarded as having such an impairment.
WHAT IS A HIDDEN OR INVISIBLE DISABILITY?

Hidden disabilities are physical or mental impairments that are not readily apparent to others.
WHAT TYPES OF HIDDEN DISABILITIES EXIST?

• Physical
• Mobility related
• Psychiatric
• Social
• Neurological
• Autoimmune disease
WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF HIDDEN DISABILITIES?

• Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)
• Seizure disorder
• Brain injury
• Asperger syndrome
• Tourette syndrome

• Chronic pain
• Learning disability
• Psychiatric condition
• Mobility issue
• Repetitive stress injury
• Sleep disorder
QUESTION

• Do you think any of the conditions listed should NOT be considered a disability? Why?

• Can you think of any that could be added to these lists?
WHAT SYMPTOMS MAY BE EXPERIENCED?

- Debilitating pain
- Fatigue
- Dizziness
- Cognitive dysfunctions
- Learning differences
- Hearing and vision impairments
- Mobility impairments
WHAT FUNCTIONS MAY BE LIMITED?

• Vision, hearing, listening, speaking
• Thinking, remembering, learning
• Movement, sitting, walking
• Lifting, carrying, grasping
WHAT FUNCTIONS MAY BE LIMITED? (CONTINUED)

• Mental health
• Physical, mental or social fatigue
• Numbness, feeling temperature, partial paralysis
HOW COMMON ARE HIDDEN DISABILITIES?

• Up to 80% of all disabilities are invisible

• About 10% of Americans have an invisible disability

• Many hidden disabilities are learning disabilities

• Roughly 1/3 of adults with mental health conditions feel they have been treated unfairly
HOW COMMON ARE HIDDEN DISABILITIES?

• About 96% of people with chronic medical conditions show no outward signs
• They don’t use assistive devices or act disabled
• Invisible disabilities are the most common type of disability among college students
HOW COMMON ARE HIDDEN DISABILITIES AT LANE?

• More than 70% of CAR students have invisible disabilities

• Learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorder & psychiatric conditions are common
QUESTION

• Do you know anyone with an invisible disability?

• How did/does it impact their life?
WHAT ARE SOME IMPACTS ON STUDENTS?

May hinder ability to:
• Go to school
• Work, commute
• Socialize
• Take care of self/others
• Access services

May lead to:
• Discrimination
• Assumptions
• Stigmatization, judgment or hostility
• Diminished self-esteem
WHAT ARE SOME IMPACTS ON STUDENTS?

• Stigmatization is the primary difference between visible and invisible disabilities

• The appearance of healthy or able-bodied often leads to scrutiny about disability status
WHAT ARE SOME IMPACTS ON STUDENTS?

Other people may:

• Have a disbelief that someone who “looks normal” has a disability
• Expect they can function like everyone else
• Make negative judgments
• Harass, calls names or bully
WHAT ARE SOME IMPACTS ON STUDENTS?

The fear of stigma means that people often prefer not to talk about their disabilities.
IMPACTS: A STUDENT’S PERSPECTIVE

• Students may:
  • Not know or think they have a disability*
  • Not have been diagnosed
  • Not know what they need
  • Know what they need, but are unable to articulate it

• Students may feel:
  • Misunderstood, ignored or invalidated
  • That something is wrong, but not know what or how to fix it
Question

• How can you help students w/ these disabilities learn?

• What methods have you used to successfully work with others who have invisible disabilities?
HOW CAN WE ERASE STIGMA & DISCRIMINATION?

- Focus on what people with disabilities can do
- Look beyond labels to positive characteristics
- Be supportive, compassionate
- Make services known
HOW TO REFINE YOUR SERVICE/INSTRUCTION?

• Ask what they are able to do and what they cannot
• Assume someone in your group has an invisible disability
• Accept as truth the things a person with disabilities says
• Ask if/how you may help
• Do not offer assistance unless they want it
WHAT ARE SOME TEACHING TECHNIQUES IN THE CLASSROOM?

• Assign a note taker / provide notes
• Create syllabus with clear expectations
• Provide a supportive environment

• See what works for others
• Be familiar w/ the student’s Letter of Accommodation
• Be flexible with missed classes & make up work
TIPS FOR CREATING ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS

• Avoid green or red text
• Use Arial font, <12 point
• Avoid ALL CAPS or *italics*
• Use consistent text
• Caption videos

• Use auditory descriptions during videos
• Include alt text for all images
• Add accessibility statements
• Use headings
SEE CAR WEBSITE TO CREATE ACCESSIBLE MATERIALS

• Accessibility statements for syllabi
• Information about video captioning
• How to incorporate accessibility into course material
• Guidelines to create material for students with disabilities
• The Lane CC Accessibility Quick Guide
RESOURCES

Invisible Disabilities Association and IDA Support Community

Americans with Disabilities Act and Helpline: (800) 949-4232

Book titled, But You LOOK Good Invisible No More Campaign support group and discussion community
CONTACT US!

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