

SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE WITH INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

ADD/ADHD

Inattention

- Fails to give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in work or other activities
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly
- Often does not follow through on instructions and fails to finish chores or duties in the workplace (not due to oppositional behavior or failure to understand instructions)
- Often has difficulty organizing tasks and activities
- Often avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to engage in tasks that require sustained mental effort
- Often loses things necessary for tasks or activities
- Is often easily distracted by extraneous stimuli
- Is often forgetful in daily activities

Hyperactivity

- Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat
- Often leaves seat at work or in other situations in which remaining seated is expected
- Is often “on the go” or often acts as if “driven by a motor”
- Often talks excessively
- Impulsivity
- Often blurts out answers before questions have been completed
- Often has difficulty awaiting turn
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations)

LEARNING DISABILITIES

- Mistakes not usual for level of education
- Unusual amount of time taken to complete assignments, reluctance to turn in assignments to supervisor
- An overall feeling of lack of self-worth, low self-esteem, and a poor self-concept
- Sense of frustration and exasperation, sense of being a “fraud”

AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

- Difficulty making eye contact
- Repetitive speech
- Difficulties expressing themselves, especially when talking about emotions
- Anxiety in social situations and resultant nervous tics
- Difficulties in group situations, such as going out with a group of friends
- Finding small talk and chatting very difficult
- Problems understanding double meanings, for example not knowing when people are teasing you
- Not choosing appropriate topics to talk about
- Taking what people say very literally
- Difficulty interpreting what others are thinking or feeling
- Trouble interpreting facial expressions, body language, or social cues
- Difficulty regulating emotion
- Trouble keeping up a conversation
- Inflection that does not reflect feelings



INVISIBLE DISABILITIES: RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

ADD/ADHD

CHADD: Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder
<http://www.chadd.org/Understanding-ADHD/For-Adults.aspx>

ADDA - Attention Deficit Disorder Association: <https://www.add.org/>

Your Life Can Be Better, Using Strategies for Adult ADD/ADHD, Douglas A. Puryear

Driven to Distraction (Revised): Recognizing and Coping with Attention Deficit Disorder, Edward M. Hallowell M.D., John J. Ratey M.D.

More Attention, Less Deficit: Success Strategies for Adults with ADHD, Ari Tuckman

ADD-Friendly Ways to Organize Your Life, Judith Kolberg

Taking Charge of Adult ADHD, Russell A. Barkley

The Disorganized Mind: Coaching Your ADHD Brain to Take Control of Your Time, Tasks, & Talents, Nancy A. Ratey

Autism

Autism Speaks: <https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/adults-autism>

ASPERGER'S ON THE JOB: Must-Have Advice for People with Asperger's or High Functioning Autism and their Employers, Educators and Advocates, Foreword by Temple Grandin

The Complete Guide to Asperger's Syndrome, Tony Attwood

Pretending to be Normal – Living with Asperger's Syndrome (Autism Spectrum Disorder) Expanded Edition, Liane Holliday Willey

Asperger Syndrome & Employment: Adults Speak Out about Asperger Syndrome, G. Beardon and L. Beardon

Developing Talents: Careers for Individuals with Asperger Syndrome & High-functioning Autism, Temple Grandin

How to Find Work that Works for People with Asperger Syndrome: The Ultimate Guide for Getting People with Asperger Syndrome into the Workplace (and keeping them there!), Gail Hawkins

Asperger Syndrome Employment Workbook: An Employment Workbook for Adults with Asperger Syndrome, R.N. Meyer

Learning Disabilities

Learning Disabilities Association of America - Resources for Adults: <https://ldaamerica.org/adults/>

International Dyslexia Association: <https://dyslexiaida.org/>

Facing Learning Disabilities in the Adult Years: Understanding Dyslexia, ADHD, Assessment, Intervention, and Research, Joan Shapiro, Rebecca Rich

The Dyslexic Advantage: Unlocking the Hidden Potential of the Dyslexic Brain, Brock L. Eide M.D. M.A., Fernet F. Eide M.D.



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INFORMATION ON LEARNING DISABILITIES

What are learning disabilities?

According to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (2006), learning disabilities are disorders that affect the ability to understand or use spoken or written language, do mathematical calculations, coordinate movements, or direct attention. Although learning disabilities occur in very young children, the disorders are usually not recognized until the child reaches school age. Learning disabilities are a lifelong condition; they are not outgrown or cured, though many people develop coping techniques through special education, tutoring, medication, therapy, personal development, or adaptation of learning skills. Approximately 15 million children, adolescents, and adults have learning disabilities in the United States (*National Center for Learning, 2006b*).

What types of learning disabilities are there?

Learning disabilities can be divided into three broad categories: developmental speech and language disorders, academic skills disorders, and other (such as coordination disorders). Each category includes more specific disorders, which are described below.

Specific Learning Disability: A disorder in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. Included in this category are expressive writing disorders and other expressive language disorders.

Dyslexia

A person with dyslexia has average to above average intelligence, but has deficits in visual, auditory, or motor process, which interfere with reading and reading comprehension. The individual may also have difficulties with learning to translate printed words into spoken words with ease.

Dyscalculia

A person with dyscalculia has average to above average intelligence, but has difficulty with numbers or remembering facts over a long period of time. Some persons have spatial problems and difficulty aligning numbers into proper columns. Some persons may reverse numbers, and have difficulty in mathematical operations.

Dyspraxia

A person with dyspraxia has problems with messages from the brain being properly transmitted to the body. Though the muscles are not paralyzed or weak, they have problems working well together. Dyspraxia might also cause speech problems, poor posture, poor sense of directions, and/or difficulty with actions such as throwing and catching.

Auditory Perceptual Deficit

A person with auditory perceptual deficit has difficulty receiving accurate information from the sense of hearing (there is no problem with the individual's hearing, just in how the brain interprets what is heard) and might have problems understanding and remembering oral instructions, differentiating between similar sounds, or hearing one sound over a background noise.

Visual Perceptual Deficit

The individual has difficulties receiving and/or processing accurate information from their sense of sight; might have a problem picking out an object from a background of other objects or seeing things in correct order.



TIPS FOR ASSISTING PEOPLE WITH INVISIBLE DISABILITIES

Distractions

To reduce auditory distractions:

- Purchase a noise canceling headset
- Hang sound absorption panels
- Provide a white noise machine
- Relocate employee's office space away from audible distractions

To reduce visual distractions:

- Reduce clutter in the employee's work environment
- Redesign employee's office space to minimize visual distractions
- Relocate employee's office space away from visual distractions

Organization

- Develop color-coded system for files, projects, or activities
- Use the services of a professional organizer
- Use a job coach to teach/reinforce organization skills
- Assign a mentor to help employee

Anxiety

- Provide advance notice of topics to be discussed in meetings to help facilitate communication
- Provide advance notice of date of meeting when employee is required to speak to reduce or eliminate anxiety
- Allow employee to provide written response in lieu of verbal response

Memory

- Provide a "cheat sheet" of high-priority activities, projects, people, etc.
- Provide written instructions
- Provide employee directory with pictures or use nametags and door/cubicle name markers to help employee remember coworkers' faces and names
- Give assignments verbally, in writing, or both, depending on what would be most beneficial to the employee (e.g., use of visual charts)

Stress/Social Situations

- Recognize that a change in the office environment, job tasks, or of supervisors may be difficult for a person with an invisible disability
- Provide sensitivity and leadership/management training for workforce
- Provide a job coach to help understand different social cues
- Use training videos to help demonstrate appropriate social skills in the workplace
- Allow alternative forms of communication between coworkers, such as e-mail, instant messaging, or text messaging

Working with Supervisors

- Assist employees in prioritizing assignments
- Assign projects in a systematic and predictable manner
- Establish long term and short term goals for employee
- Make employee attendance at social functions optional
- Explain corporate structure to employee, using visual charts and clear descriptions of positions and reporting structure. Do not assume that employee will understand structure from a simple chart of job titles

