



Tips on Non-Visible Disabilities

Disability is not always obvious:

- The 10 disability types identified in the latest Canadian Survey on Disability study conducted by Statistics Canada are: vision, hearing, mobility, flexibility, dexterity, pain, learning, developmental, mental/psychological, and memory.
- Many disabilities that are "hidden or non-visible disabilities" still affect many Canadians.

Types of Non-Visible Disabilities:

1. **Mental health disabilities** – Mental health disabilities impair thinking, feeling, and behaviour. They may interfere with a person's capacity to enjoy relationships or to be productive. Examples include bipolar disorder, periods of alternating euphoria and depression; major depression, a serious illness affecting a person's sleep, appetite, mood, concentration, and social behaviour; schizophrenia, which impairs a person's thinking, management of emotions, decision-making, and his or her relationship to others.
2. **Physical disabilities** - People with a physical disability may find it difficult to sit, stand or move about freely. Physical disabilities can be caused by spinal cord injuries, muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, arthritis, cerebral palsy or through the amputation of a limb. People with physical disabilities may use wheelchairs, crutches, canes, walkers, scooters, or may need elevators to move between floors of a building.
3. **Intellectual or developmental disabilities** - People with intellectual or developmental disabilities may experience problems communicating, looking after themselves, or being socially adept. Examples of intellectual or developmental disabilities include Down's Syndrome and can be caused by a serious head injury or an infection such as Meningitis. People with intellectual or developmental disabilities sometimes make use of assistive devices such as large display calculators, alarm watches, support persons or service animals, and voice-actuated recorders.
4. **Learning disabilities.** - Learning disabilities affect a person's ability to understand verbal or non-verbal forms of communication. Non-verbal information can be written, aural (podcasts, for example), or in arithmetic (handling or receiving change, for example). Examples of learning disabilities include Dyslexia which interferes with a person's ability to read or understand written words, Dyscalculia, a difficulty with numbers, or Dysgraphia, a difficulty writing words by hand. People with learning difficulties sometimes make use of assistive devices such as Optical Character Recognition readers (which read aloud written information), digital dictionaries, calculators that speak the results out loud, and voice-actuated recorders.
5. **Speech or language disabilities.** - People with speech or language disabilities may have difficulty articulating, may speak softly, or may lack a range of expression. Examples of speech and language disorders include stuttering; repeating groups of letter; an inability to say specific words; and Aphasia, which impairs a person's ability to comprehend written or spoken language.

Tips on Assisting Individuals with Non-Visible Disabilities:

- Treat people in the same way that you like to be treated. Communicate in a relaxed manner and always be courteous – it is perfectly acceptable to ask people to repeat statements or for you to do the same if a misunderstanding arises.
- Make the meeting rooms accessible to all, not just those with physical barriers. Lighting must be considered for those with reduced visibility and acquired brain injuries. (Poor lighting or lighting that is flashing).
- Respect an individual's personal space and do not touch, handle, or manipulate any assistive device unless asked to do so by the owner.
- Smell and odors in the room or mustiness and mildew will affect those with allergies and not make the meetings comfortable for those individuals. Should be Fragrance Free.
- Offer assistance when you feel it is needed but allow the person with a disability the option of refusing your help or requesting that you provide it in a different manner. Asking, "How may I help you" is the simplest way to offer the correct kind of assistance.
- Accommodate those individuals with chronic fatigue, arthritis etc. by having shorter meetings, not expecting them to put in long hours at fundraisers on bad days.
- Most of all be understanding of the needs of all members.

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