

# Supporting Hidden Disabilities Tip Sheet

Hidden disabilities are disabilities that you cannot visibly tell a person has. Hidden disabilities may present in a variety of ways like: psychological, neurological, mental, visual and/or chronic illnesses. This guide describes common hidden disabilities and their accommodations that you may encounter in an educational setting.

## Common Accommodations for Hidden Disabilities

Accommodations are meant to help students with disabilities be successful in their education. Accommodations are not intended to give a disabled student an advantage. These are some typical accommodations you may be asked to provide in an educational setting or may want to consider trying if you suspect a student has a disability and is struggling.

**Disabilities Key:** dyslexia (DYS), ADHD, anxiety (A) depression (D), vision impairment (V), language processing (LP), sensory processing (SP), hearing impairments (H), memory issues (M), autism (AUT)

### Print Adjustments

Used to assist students with vision impairments and processing issues. By allowing them to change or receive print materials in easier to read formats.

#### **Typical Accommodations Offered**

- Large Print Font (Typically 16-18pt)
- Color Contrast Support
- Alternate Fonts (Dyslexia Font, Sans-Serif Fonts)
- Extra White Space (Double spaced)

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

- V, DYS

### Assistive Technology

Device or program used to improve independence by supporting a disability with a technology based tool or automation.

#### **Typical Accommodations Offered**

- Screen Readers
- Speech to Text
- Closed captioning
- Spell Check
- Video Recording
- Audio Support

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

- DYS, V, LP, SP, H, AUT

### Physical Support

Direct support provided to a student with disabilities to help them overcome or adjust to the learning environment.

- Scribe
- Interpreter (ASL or 2nd Language)
- Paraprofessional
- Therapists (OT, Speech, PT)

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

- V, DYS, LP, H, M, AUT, SP

### Scheduling

Adjustments or alterations to expected attendance norms, schedule requirements or graduation tracks

#### **Typical Accommodations Offered**

- Movement Breaks
- Change of assignments or tasks on a different schedule (slower or faster)
- Task Breaks
- Change of location
- Change of course pace
- Substitution of classes

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

ADHD, AUT

### Environment Modifications

Adjustments made to the learning environment to reduce the impact of over stimulation from environment situations.

#### **Typical Accommodations Offered**

- Alternate test taking locations with fewer distractions (noise, students, traffic, decorations)
- Preferential Seating (Closer to board, near teacher)
- Quiet Space Support (Noise Canceling Headphones, earplugs)
- Right of Refusal of Tasks (Not being forced or volunteered to do tasks like reading or writing in front of class)
- Use of Fidget Items

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

- DYS, ADHD, SP, A, AUT, H, V

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### Grading Adjustments

Adjusting grading to only consider the things being measured and not counting their disabilities against them.

#### **Typical Accommodations Offered**

- More Time for Tests or Assignments
- Grading only for work completed
- Not grading against things not tested for (spelling, grammar, handwriting)

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

- DYS, ADHD, LP, AUT, A, D, M

### Testing Adjustments

Adjusting testing conditions to reduce or eliminate impacts from disabilities on the test.

#### **Typical Accommodations Offered**

- Alternate testing sites (quiet space, small group, distraction free)
- Alternate testing format (i.e. oral test versus written or digital versus written)
- Reader (Physical or Electronic)
- Breaks
- Use of study guides, memory aids or open book
- Vocabulary Word Banks

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

- ALL

### Executive Planning

Students in need of this support need help breaking down tasks, simplified instructions, visual reminder queues and tools to help reduce mental load.

#### **Typical Accommodations Offered**

- Graphic Organizers
- Simplified Instructions
- Class notes provided prior to lectures
- Fill in the blank sheets for note taking

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

- DYS, ADHD, AUT, M, LP

### Visual Aids/Tools/Memory Support

These help students visually assist students complete tasks and provide reminders to jog memory or brain functions.

#### **Typical Accommodations Offered**

- Use of Calculators
- Math Tables (Multiplication, Division, Addition & Subtraction Facts)
- Manipulatives
- Memory aids
- Study Guides
- Vision Support (glasses, braille, raised graphics & magnification)

#### **Typical Disabilities Supported**

- DYS, ADHD, AUT, M, LP, V

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## Common Hidden Disabilities

Hidden Disabilities are disabilities you cannot easily tell by looking at a person and do require a formal diagnosis. While getting accommodations formally documented is always best, you may still want to consider adopting some of these accommodations to your classroom if you notice students struggling with some of the symptoms. These are some typical hidden disabilities you may encounter in an educational setting and signs that a student may be struggling with a hidden or under treated disability.

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### Dyslexia (DYS)

Dyslexia is a disability in interpreting and processing written text. Students often have trouble learning to read, write, spell and sound out words with this disability. This does not impair their intelligence.

#### **• Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Reading avoidance or frustration
- Slower reading pace
- Letter switching when writing, especially similar letters like b and d or p and q
- Having trouble with spelling

- Having trouble with math word problems
- Missing or late assignments
- **Typical Accommodations**
  - Print Adjustments, Assistive Technology, Environment Modifications, Grading Adjustments, Testing Adjustments, Physical Support, Executive Planning, Visual Aids/Tools

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## ADHD

ADHD is a neurological disability that impairs focus, impulse control and energy level control. ADHD has a range of severity and can be different between people and genders.

- **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Inability to focus for long periods of time on a task
- Organization issues
- Not able to sit still for long
- Missing Assignments
- Losing items
- Task overwhelm & shutdown
- Behavior outbursts

- **Typical Accommodations**

- Environment Modifications, Grading Adjustments, Testing Adjustments, Scheduling, Physical Support, Executive Planning, Visual Aids/Tools

## Autism (AUT)

Autism is a brain development condition that impacts social interactions and communication. Can cause limited and repetitive behaviors and issues with sensory processing. It is a spectrum disorder and can differ in severity person to person

- **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Repetitive and limited social behaviors
- Difficulties with communication
- Resistance to change task or routine
- Sensory over or under stimulation

- **Typical Accommodations**

Print Adjustments, Assistive Technology, Environment Modifications, Grading Adjustments, Testing Adjustments, Physical Support, Executive Planning, Visual Aids/Tools

## Anxiety (A)

Anxiety is a mental health condition defined by extreme worry, fear or nervousness about a situation, event or potential outcome. It's a normal response to stress, but problems from anxiety happen when someone has persistent, overwhelming or inappropriate responses to a situation or scenario.

- **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Physical responses: increased heart rate, shortness of breath, sweating, dizziness
- Consistent Worry or Feeling of Impending Doom
- Difficulties concentrating or zoning out
- Over analyzing situations
- Withdrawal from friends
- Excessively requiring validation or comfort
- Increased Irritability

- **Typical Accommodations**

- Environment Modifications, Grading Adjustments, Testing Adjustments, Executive Planning

## Depression (D)

Depression is a mental health condition defined by persistent feelings of sadness, hopelessness, or lack of interest or pleasure in daily activities. It is not a typical period of sadness or grief. If symptoms persist longer than two weeks, students should probably be referred to a mental health provider.

- **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Persistent sadness
- Overly sleepy in class
- Excessive absences or tardies
- Missing Assignments
- Sudden changes in weight (up or down)
- Lower standards of hygiene or dress
- Suicidal thoughts or talk
- Slow talking or movement
- Difficult making decisions or remembering details
- Unable to concentrate
- Negative Self Talk
- Excessive Irritability or Frustration

- **Typical Accommodations**

- Environment Modifications, Grading Adjustments, Testing Adjustments, Executive Planning

## Vision Impairment (V)

Visual impairments are not always easy to tell by looking at someone unless they are wearing corrective lenses.

### ● **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Holding reading materials too close or too far away
- Struggling to read the board from seat
- Misinterpreting written materials or instructions
- Frequent rubbing of eyes
- Headaches
- Unusual eye contact or movements
- Depth perception issues
- Avoiding glare
- Frustration on vision tasks
- Squinting or frowning

### ● **Typical Accommodations**

- Print Adjustments, Assistive Technology, Environment Modifications, Testing Adjustments, Physical Support, Visual Aids/Tools

## Language Processing (LP)

Language processing impacts how the brain understands, interprets and processes spoken or written language.

### ● **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Inappropriate responses to written or spoken instructions
- Difficulty following or misunderstanding instructions
- Taking longer to respond
- Misinterpreting the meaning of spoken or written communication
- Having trouble finding the right words for things
- Difficulty organizing thoughts
- Grammar Issues
- Excessive use of filler words (i.e um, like and you know...)
- Limited vocabulary or grammar choice
- Trouble differentiating between similar sounding words

### ● **Typical Accommodations**

- Assistive Technology, Grading Adjustments, Testing Adjustments, Physical Support, Executive Planning, Visual Aids/Tools

## Sensory Processing (SP)

Sensory processing is a neurological disorder impacting how the body receives, interprets, organizes and processes inputs from the environment from the five senses.

### ● **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Balance issues
- Lack of Appropriate Body Awareness
- Over or under response to environmental stimuli
- Behavior meltdowns
- Situational or contact avoidance
- Excessive physical discomfort or reaction to stimuli (light, sound, odor, smell or tastes)

### ● **Typical Accommodations**

- Assistive Technology, Environment Modifications, Testing Adjustments, Physical Support

## Hearing Impairment (H)

Students can either be deaf or hard of hearing or unable to differentiate tones.

### ● **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- No response or response takes longer than normal to normal speech
- Misunderstanding directions

### ● **Typical Accommodations**

- Assistive Technology, Environment Modifications, Testing Adjustments, Physical Support, Visual Aids/Tools

## Memory/Brain Injury (M)

Damage to the brain can affect various cognitive functions like learning, attention, problem solving or functioning. May or may not be permanent. Can be caused by a variety of things. Typically caused by accidents/concussions, tremors or neurological disease in children and teens.

### ● **Possible signs of this hidden disability**

- Inability to remember instructions or details
- Difficulty with concentration
- Difficulty with movement
- Light or sound sensitivity
- Headaches
- Issues with focus or attention
- Recent serious fall or accident

### ● **Typical Accommodations**

- Print Adjustments, Assistive Technology, Grading Adjustments, Testing Adjustments, Physical Support, Executive Planning, Visual Aids/Tools

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