



## Disability Awareness: Embracing Visible and Non-visible Disabilities February 2025

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### Introduction

Disability awareness is an essential aspect of fostering an inclusive and equitable society. People with disabilities, whether their disabilities are visible or non-visible, deserve respect, understanding, and support. In this brief, we will explore the importance of disability awareness, delve into the differences between visible and non-visible disabilities, and discuss ways to promote inclusivity and equality for individuals living with disabilities.

### Understanding Disability

Disability is a broad term that encompasses a wide range of conditions, impairments, and limitations that can affect an individual's physical, sensory, cognitive, or emotional functioning. Disabilities can be categorised into two main types:

- a. visible and
- b. non-visible disabilities.

### Visible Disabilities

Visible disabilities are those that are easily identifiable by others through physical characteristics, assistive devices, or behaviour. Visible disabilities include those with mobility impairments, such as the use of wheelchairs or mobility aids. It also includes sensory impairments, such as blindness or deafness. These disabilities are readily apparent to the outside observer, making it easier for others to recognise and acknowledge them.

One of the primary challenges faced by individuals with visible disabilities is the potential for stigma, discrimination, and social isolation. Society often holds preconceived notions about what people with disabilities can or cannot do, leading to stereotypes and misconceptions. Disability awareness plays a crucial role in dispelling these stereotypes and promoting inclusion and understanding for individuals with visible disabilities.

### Non-Visible Disabilities

Non-visible disabilities, on the other hand, are conditions that are not immediately apparent to others. These disabilities include mental health disorders, chronic illnesses, learning disabilities, and neurological conditions like autism spectrum disorder. Individuals with non-visible disabilities may appear "typical" on the surface, which can make it challenging for others to comprehend the challenges they face.



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The hidden nature of non-visible disabilities can lead to misconceptions and scepticism, making it harder for individuals with these conditions to seek support and accommodation. Raising awareness about non-visible disabilities is vital to reduce stigma, encourage empathy, and ensure that those affected receive the understanding and assistance they need.

### Promoting Disability Awareness

- Education:
  - o One of the most effective ways to promote disability awareness is through education. Schools, workplaces, and communities should offer training and workshops to increase understanding and empathy for people with disabilities.
  - o These programs should cover both visible and non-visible disabilities to ensure comprehensive awareness.
- Representation:
  - o Media, including television, film, and advertising, can influence societal perceptions.
  - o Promoting the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in these mediums can challenge stereotypes and showcase the diverse abilities and talents of people with disabilities.
- Accessibility:
  - o Creating accessible environments, both physical and digital, is essential.
  - o This includes ramps, elevators, and Braille signage for visible disabilities and providing alternative formats and digital accessibility for non-visible disabilities.
  - o Ensuring that everyone can participate equally in society is a fundamental aspect of disability awareness.
- Language and Communication:
  - o Encouraging the use of respectful and inclusive language is crucial.
  - o People-first language, which emphasises the person before their disability (e.g., "a person with autism" rather than "an autistic person"), promotes a more respectful and understanding attitude.
- Empathy and Listening:
  - o It's essential to actively listen to the experiences and needs of individuals with disabilities.
  - o Empathy and open-mindedness can go a long way in building positive relationships and fostering a supportive community.
- Workplace Inclusion:
  - o Employers should prioritise disability inclusion in the workplace by offering reasonable accommodations, supporting flexible work arrangements, and embracing diversity hiring initiatives.



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- o By doing so, they not only provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities but also benefit from a more diverse and innovative workforce.
- Mental Health Awareness:
  - o Non-visible disabilities often include mental health conditions.
  - o Promoting mental health awareness and reducing stigma around seeking mental health support is critical.
  - o Encouraging open conversations and offering mental health resources can make a significant difference.

### Conclusion

Disability awareness is not just a matter of acknowledging the existence of disabilities but also understanding and embracing the diverse needs and experiences of individuals with disabilities.

By recognising the differences between visible and non-visible disabilities and taking steps to promote awareness, education, and inclusion, we can work towards a more equitable society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their abilities or limitations.

Ultimately, disability awareness is about fostering a culture of empathy, respect, and support for all.

### Useful Links

<https://cpdonline.co.uk> (Online learning and courses)

<https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/> (Disability Rights UK is the UK's leading organisation led by, run by, and working for disabled people. We work with Disabled People's Organisations, public bodies, businesses, and Government across the UK to influence regional and national change for better rights, accessibility, benefits, quality of life and economic opportunities for Disabled people.)

<https://abilitynet.org.uk>. (AbilityNet is a pioneering UK charity with a global perspective. We believe the power of digital technology should be available to everyone, regardless of ability or age. Our free online resources and a network of over 300 community-based volunteers help individuals with any disability, of any age, to use all kinds of digital technology. Our vision is a digital world accessible to all.)

<https://www.drc.org.uk/> (The Disability Rights Commission. We want a society where all disabled people can participate fully as equal citizens.)