

NON-APPARENT DISABILITIES - How They Differ

Areas of Difference	Traumatic Brain Injury	Learning Disability	Mental Health Disability	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
Onset	Sudden.	Across the lifespan. Also called dyslexia (reading disorder) or dyscalculia (math disorder).	Slow, varies but reactive to environment. Typically appears in adolescence or adulthood.	Across the lifespan. Begins in childhood and can continue into adulthood. (Symptoms noticeable before the age of seven.)
Causes	One or more blows to the head accompanied by altered mental status, often including loss of consciousness.	Neurological disorder. Significant information processing deficit. Can be hereditary.	Genetic or environmental.	Neuro-biological. Caused by genetic, metabolic or other biological factors.
Functional Changes	Marked contrast between pre- and post-onset capacities: memory loss, reduced processing speed, impaired executive functions, shortened attention span.	No before-after contrasts in capacities, but deficits may be more noticeable as academics become more difficult.	Noticeable change in ability to function well on a daily basis.	Trouble filtering important from unimportant information.
Physical Symptoms	Mobility, fine motor skills, vision, hearing.	Tires easily. Slow processing and/or difficulty retaining information.	Variable, but may include changes in appetite, changes in sleep patterns, headaches, etc.	Restlessness and/or impulsivity, distractibility, disorganized.
Emotional /Behavioral Symptoms	Impaired ability to perceive, evaluate or use social cues or context appropriately; impaired ability to cope with over-stimulating environments, low frustration tolerance; mood swings; impaired self-control.	Frustration related to situation, lowered self worth. May feel shame and embarrassment. May over compensate/have good coping strategies.	Variable, depending on diagnosis. May include sensitivity to stressors. Trouble focusing, concentration, loss of motivation, depressed or anxious mood.	Shortened attention span. Highly distractible.
Difficulties with Learning	Attention and concentration challenges. Impaired ability to retain new information. Impaired ability to process information.	Typically, smart and well spoken. Has academic strengths along with weaknesses, i.e. reads poorly but has good math skills or vice versa.	May be distractible or suddenly have inconsistent attendance. Noticeable change in students' mood or participation.	Trouble attending, listening, organizing.
Classroom Strategies	Old information is easier to recall than new. Break down information into small pieces. Repetition is key. Give frequent breaks.	Learns differently than others. May need more creative, hands on, multi-sensory instruction.	Express care and concern. Ask student what you can do for them.	Break down information. Allow frequent breaks. Limit number of instructions. Provide oral and written instructions.

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