

DE&I Coffee Break

Briefing notes – November 2023

For the sake of privacy, no names will be present on this briefing.

This month saw the [Disabilities and Allies Network](#) opening a discussion on [Hidden Disabilities](#):

The session started with an introduction to The Sunflower...



What is the Sunflower? The Sunflower is connected to you all around the world... it is there for you as you work, shop, travel, learn and at leisure.

Businesses all around the world have joined the global Sunflower network to support you when you wear the Sunflower - anywhere you choose to be discreetly seen.

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower is a simple tool for you to voluntarily share that you have a disability or condition that may not be immediately apparent – and that you may need a helping hand, understanding, or more time in shops, at work, on transport, or in public spaces.

Some disabilities, conditions or chronic illnesses are not immediately obvious to others. For some people, this can make it hard to understand and believe that someone, with a “non-visible” condition genuinely needs support. Some people question whether you have a disability because you “don’t look like you have a disability”.

We asked the audience: “What are examples of a hidden disability?”

Examples are listed below.

ADHD/Autism	Long Covid	COPD	Tourette Syndrome
Peri/menopause	Diabetes Type 1 & 2	Epilepsy	Asthma
Endometriosis	Alzheimer’s	Scleroderma	Migraine
Coeliac Disease	Multiple Sclerosis	Narcolepsy	Lupus
Parkinson’s	Ulcerative Colitis	Aphasia	Dysautonomia
Haemophilia	Myalgic Encephalopathy/Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (ME/CFS)		
Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)		Functional Neurological Disorders (FND)	



Some of the questions raised in the conversation:

Do you think DSS provide information/support for people with hidden disabilities?

What advice would you give to people to increase support the business can do to support individuals?

How do you find having a conversation with your line manager about the potential support you might need for your hidden disability/a loved ones disability?

How can we support our colleagues if we know they have a hidden disability or are supporting someone with a hidden disability?

The conversation developed further around the possible support/guidance that could be provided to managers, enabling them to support their staff when being told about a hidden disability.

A few additional points raised included:

How does culture impact policies/values? Different countries have differing legislation and guidance around supporting those with hidden disabilities.

Connectivity impacts support and knowledge sharing too - translations for example, or reaching all employees, not just those 'wired' employees. How do we ensure we reach all members of staff and support them with the relevant information.

And finally, one of the main issues why people often don't disclose their hidden disabilities... due to the stigma. Many of the hidden disabilities have stigma associated with them. Either due to miss-information or lack of knowledge/awareness and this can make people uncomfortable to share their disability with others. We discussed how we as colleagues, as people, as **friends** can create a safe space in which people feel comfortable enough to be open and be their full authentic selves without fear of judgement.