



# THE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE TOOLKIT

**SUPPORTING DEAF EMPLOYEES  
AND INVISIBLE DISABILITIES**

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BY DEAF UMBRELLA LTD.

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# INTRODUCTION

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Creating an inclusive and supportive work environment for all employees is more than just a legal requirement—it's essential for fostering a culture of respect, collaboration, and productivity.

For employees who are Deaf or have invisible disabilities, the workplace can often present additional challenges. These challenges are compounded when employers and co-workers are unaware of the specific needs and accommodations that would enable them to succeed.

This toolkit is designed to help you, as an employer, understand the best practices for supporting Deaf and invisibly disabled employees.

Whether you're looking to make small changes in communication or larger adjustments to your workplace policies, this guide will provide you with actionable steps to create a truly inclusive work environment.

# CHAPTER I

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## UNDERSTANDING DEAFNESS IN THE WORKPLACE

### What Does It Mean to Be Deaf?

Deafness varies significantly from person to person. While some individuals may have profound hearing loss, others may have partial hearing.

Some Deaf employees rely on sign language as their primary means of communication, while others may use assistive devices such as hearing aids or cochlear implants.

### Common Misconceptions About Deaf Employees

- **Myth:** Deaf employees can always read lips.
- **Fact:** While some Deaf individuals may lipread, it is not a universal skill, and even those who lipread may only catch a portion of what is said.
- **Myth:** Deaf employees cannot perform in roles requiring communication.
- **Fact:** With the right accommodations, Deaf employees can excel in any role.

### Accommodations for Deaf Employees

Supporting Deaf employees in the workplace means providing the necessary accommodations, which can range from minor adjustments to more comprehensive solutions. Some key accommodations include:

- ✓ **Providing Visual Alerts:** Replace auditory signals like alarms with visual cues, such as flashing lights.
- ✓ **Offering Interpreting Services:** Ensure access to a sign language interpreter for meetings, presentations, and training sessions.
- ✓ **Captioning Software:** Implement live captioning during virtual meetings to ensure everyone has access to the conversation.

# CHAPTER II

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## INVISIBLE DISABILITIES: SUPPORTING EMPLOYEES YOU CANNOT SEE

### What Are Invisible Disabilities?

Invisible disabilities refer to conditions that are not immediately apparent. These can include chronic illnesses, mental health disorders, learning disabilities, and sensory processing disorders.

Employees with invisible disabilities may face unique challenges, particularly when their disability is misunderstood or dismissed because it isn't visible.

### Common Invisible Disabilities in the Workplace

- **Hearing Loss:** Employees may have partial hearing loss that isn't always obvious.
- **Chronic Pain:** Conditions like fibromyalgia or arthritis can limit mobility and stamina.
- **Mental Health Disorders:** Conditions such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD can impact concentration and overall well-being.
- **Learning Disabilities:** Dyslexia, ADHD, and similar conditions can affect how employees process information.

### Accommodations for Employees with Invisible Disabilities

It often involves flexibility and empathy. Here are some ways to ensure a supportive environment:

- ✓ **Flexible Work Schedules:** Allow for breaks or modified work hours to accommodate chronic conditions or mental health needs.
- ✓ **Quiet Workspaces:** Provide quiet areas for employees who may be overwhelmed by noise or sensory input.
- ✓ **Mental Health Resources:** Offer access to counseling services or mental health days.
- ✓ **Assistive Technology:** Tools like speech-to-text software or noise-cancelling headphones can make a big difference in productivity and comfort.

# CHAPTER III

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## COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES FOR INCLUSIVITY

### Creating a Culture of Openness

Inclusive workplaces don't just rely on physical accommodations. They foster a culture of open communication and respect. Here's how you can facilitate that:

- **Encourage Disclosure Without Pressure:** Employees should feel comfortable disclosing their disability if they choose to, without fear of judgment or reprisal.
- **Use Inclusive Language:** Be mindful of the language you use. Avoid phrases like "But you don't look deaf" or "You seem fine," as these can be dismissive.
- **Promote Accessibility for All:** Make sure meetings, emails, and other communications are accessible. This might mean using plain language, providing captions, or ensuring visual materials are clear and easy to understand.

### Implementing Accessibility in Meetings

Accessibility in meetings is crucial for ensuring everyone's voice is heard. Key strategies include:

- ✓ **Assigning a Note-Taker:** Designate someone to take comprehensive notes or provide minutes post-meeting.
- ✓ **Using Video Conferencing Tools with Captions:** Platforms like Zoom offer live captions for Deaf or hard-of-hearing employees.
- ✓ **Allowing Time for Questions and Clarification:** Not all employees process information at the same speed. Provide space for everyone to ask questions or seek further clarification.

# CHAPTER IV

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## LEGAL REQUIREMENTS AND BEST PRACTICES

### **The Equality Act 2010**

Under the Equality Act 2010, employers in the UK are required to make reasonable adjustments for disabled employees, including those with invisible or non-visible disabilities. Failure to do so could result in legal repercussions. Reasonable adjustments include anything from providing auxiliary aids to making structural changes to the workplace.

### **Creating a Written Policy on Disability Inclusion**

One way to ensure your workplace is supportive of all employees is by creating a written policy on disability inclusion. This policy should outline:

- The company's commitment to inclusivity.
- Procedures for requesting accommodations.
- The process for handling discrimination complaints.

### **Training and Education for Managers and Employees**

Training programs that focus on disability awareness and inclusivity should be mandatory for all employees, particularly those in leadership roles.

By educating staff on the unique challenges faced by Deaf and invisibly disabled employees, you'll create a more empathetic and supportive workplace.



# CHAPTER V

## REAL-LIFE CASE STUDY

Julie has been working with a large DIY store for 10 years, she is very happy in her work and has an excellent team around her.

Julie has a change of manager and the new manager wants to know more about how Julie copes on the shop floor, and why she has spent so long in the warehouse and not customer facing.

The manager struggles to communicate with Julie face to face and wonders why an interpreter is not provided. Julie has never had an interpreter provided for her employment, she has coped using pen and paper or text messages when needed all these years.

The manager speaks to us and we support them to set up Access to Work funding so that an interpreter can be provided going forward. Julie is excited by the changes and we work with her to find out what has been working for her and where she has struggled. This way we can all work together to improve the working environment.



Deaf Awareness training is provided for the team, this is so well received the manager books a British Sign Language (BSL) taster course for the team. Julie gains interpreter support for her identified daily needs, team meetings, training and supervision.

Within a few months Julie is offered a promotion, something she had been overlooked for for years. Communication is key, support is available and free to the employer and employee.



# CHAPTER VI

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## FOSTERING INCLUSIVITY WITH DEAF AWARENESS TRAINING

One of the most impactful ways to ensure inclusivity is through education. Employers who are serious about creating a supportive environment for Deaf and invisibly disabled employees should consider offering Deaf Awareness Training for their staff.

Deaf Umbrella offers a comprehensive Deaf Awareness course designed to educate your team on the needs of Deaf employees, effective communication strategies, and how to foster a workplace that embraces inclusivity.

### Our training covers:

- Key insights into Deaf culture.
- How to interact with Deaf colleagues respectfully.
- Best practices for accommodating Deaf employees in the workplace.

With our Deaf Awareness Training, you'll empower your team to better understand and support their Deaf colleagues, contributing to a more inclusive and productive work environment.



# CONCLUSION

## Building an Inclusive Future

Creating an inclusive workplace doesn't happen overnight. It requires commitment, education, and a willingness to adapt. By implementing the strategies and accommodations outlined in this toolkit, you're taking the first step toward a more inclusive, supportive workplace where all employees – Deaf, visibly disabled, or not – can thrive.

Ready to take your inclusivity efforts to the next level? Book our Deaf Awareness Training today and give your team the tools they need to make a real difference in your workplace.

Learn more and book here: [Deaf Awareness Training](#)

### DEAF AWARENESS TRAINING FOR COMPANIES

SUPPORT EQUALITY | POSITIVE IMPACT ON DEAF PEOPLE | REDUCE UNINTENTIONAL DISCRIMINATION



FACTS	AIMS	WHAT'S INCLUDED
<p>DEAFNESS IS THE 2<sup>nd</sup> LARGEST DISABILITY IN THE UK</p> <p>ABOUT 800,000 PEOPLE ARE SEVERELY OR PROFOUNDLY DEAF &amp; AROUND 2 million USE HEARING AIDS</p>   	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1 To increase awareness of Deaf culture</li><li>2 To develop a basic understanding of deafness</li><li>3 To be aware of how to communicate with your deaf colleague(s)</li></ol>	<p>AT THE END OF THE COURSE YOU WILL UNDERSTAND:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Technical equipment</li><li>• Basic British Sign Language</li><li>• Gesture &amp; Expression</li><li>• Communication Support and how to use it</li></ul> <p>AND MUCH MORE</p>

Excellent EXPERIENCES

★★★★★

“Very interesting course and useful to repeat regularly”  
“Really enjoyable and interesting. I learned a lot. Thank you”  
“Was good to get feedback from Phil (a deaf person) on how we communicate with him”  
“Really useful and enlightening presentation and resources. Thank you”