Invisible Disabilities: What are they and how to create an environment of compassion.

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Presentation Goals
• Learn what invisible disabilities are in the mental health community.
• Learn what invisible disabilities are in the school community through students’ eyes.
• Tips on how to create an environment of compassion.
Deacon Lambert

- Deacon of Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, Chicago, IL
- Founder of the Chicago Archdiocese Commission on Mental Illness
- Co-Chair of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability's Council on Mental Illness, Washington, DC

Katie McConnell

- Director of Inclusive Education at Our Lady of Mount Carmel Academy, Chicago, IL
- Special Education Teacher for 17 years

What are Invisible Disabilities

Invisible Disabilities Association definition:
A physical, mental or neurological condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities that is invisible to the onlooker.
OLMCA: It’s not just a school, it’s a family

School Wide SEL Program

• Love and Logic

• Responsive Classroom

• PBIS (Positive Behavioral Intervention and Support)

Wildcat Way Meeting for Middle School Students

• Middle school students don’t want to feel different. So, they don’t want to be the one associated with someone who doesn’t seem to fit in is difficult.

• Started conversation with talking about that there was a kid with a disability coming to our school. (Kids assumed it would be a new child in a wheelchair.)

• Kids talked about how they would help the child in a wheelchair. (Kids are naturally good and want to do the right thing.)

• Surprised them with fact that there was more than one child and they were already in their class. But their disabilities were invisible.

• And then walked in Deacon Lambert (nothing like surprising the kids to attention with a member of the clergy)
Just One Person

The Tools Talk for Younger Kids

- It's not fair...
- Why does he/she get...
- I want that....

It's Easier Done than Said!

1. Increase schoolwide inclusion techniques
2. Open up the school to more service providers.
3. Identify the students with special needs (CPS and/or private evaluations)
Compassion/Inclusion Tip #1: Don't the Don'ts

Don't leave the classroom.
Don’t wipe your mouth on the pew.
Don’t use your sleeve to wipe your face.
Don’t put your trash on the floor.
Don’t plagiarize.
Don’t use a pencil.
Don’t talk.
Don’t rock back and forth in your seat.

Ex. Don’t kick your friend.

Vs. Feet are for walking; Be nice to your friend.

Don’t text and drive.
Don’t run in the halls.
Don’t hit your friend.
Don’t spill your milk.
Don’t lie.
Don’t yell.
Don’t lean back in your chair.
Don’t talk about others behind their backs.

Compassion/Inclusion Tip #2: Teach everything

• Students are too loud in the hall? Teach them how to be quiet.

• Students take too long to put their things away? Show them how to do it efficiently.

• Students don’t know how to include friends with disabilities? Teach them how to.

Compassion/Inclusion Tip #3: Meet and Greet

• Greet each student as they walk in school.

• Greet each student when they walk into the classroom.
Compassion/Inclusion Tip #4: Open up the School to Service Providers

- Have a point person at school who schedules service providers (with input from teachers).
- Insist that all on-site therapists are shared with teacher and point person.
- Insurance companies do cover services when provided in school setting.

Best Laid Plans

- What to do when the disability causes behaviors more than the school can handle.
- First, make sure you’ve documented how much you’ve tried (RTI, MTSS)