



# THE **GREEN LANYARD** PROJECT

Quick Guide for Businesses and Frontline Staff

PRESENTED BY THE BURLINGTON DOWNTOWN BUSINESS ASSOCIATION



BURLINGTON DOWNTOWN

Meet  
Your  
Presenter

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BURLINGTON DOWNTOWN





# Neurodivergence and Invisible Disabilities in Canada



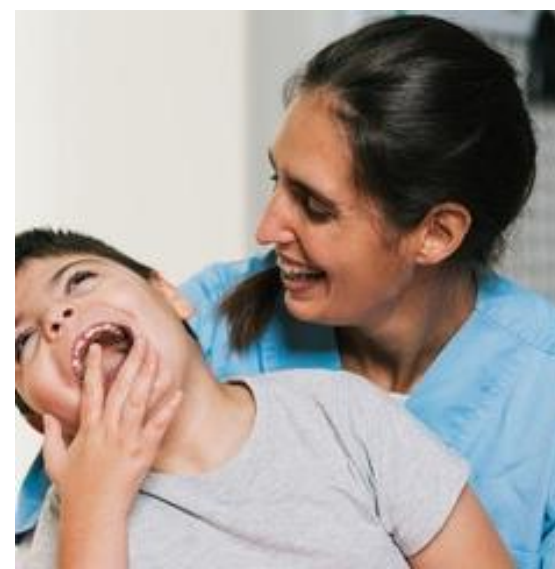
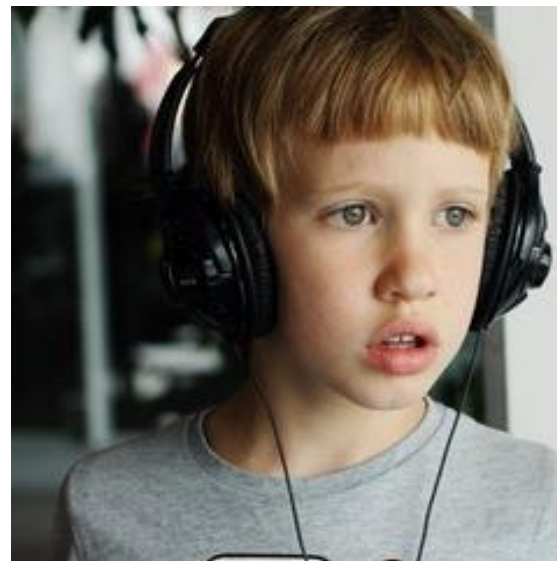
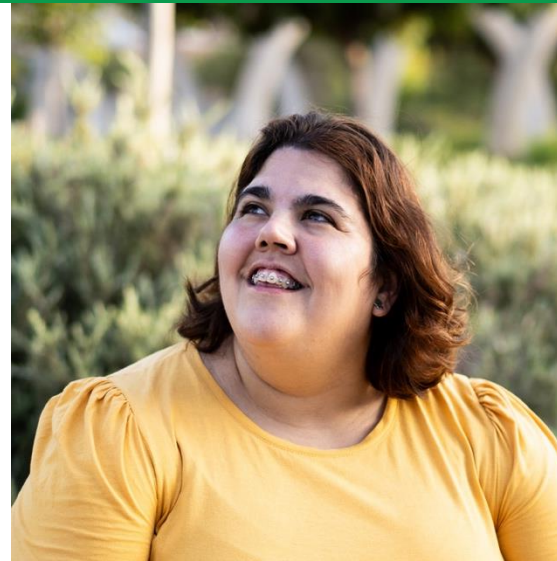
# Neurodivergence and Invisible Disabilities in Canada

## Did you know?

Approximately 5.1% of Canadians aged 15 and over **live with a disability** and a **diagnosed developmental disorder**.

Around 1% of Canadians aged 15 and over have a disability where **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)** is among the two medical conditions causing them the most difficulty.

**SOURCE:** [Statistics Canada](#)





## Among individuals with ASD:



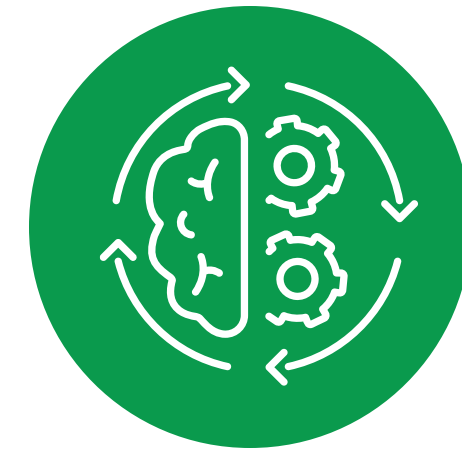
87% report a co-occurring disability, with **learning disabilities** being the most common (72%), followed by **mental health-related disabilities** (55%).



55% report having a **"severe"** or **"very severe"** disability.



74% receive help with at least one type of **everyday activity**, such as managing finances or preparing meals.



53% use at least one **aid or assistive device**, with cognitive aids like specialized software being the most common.

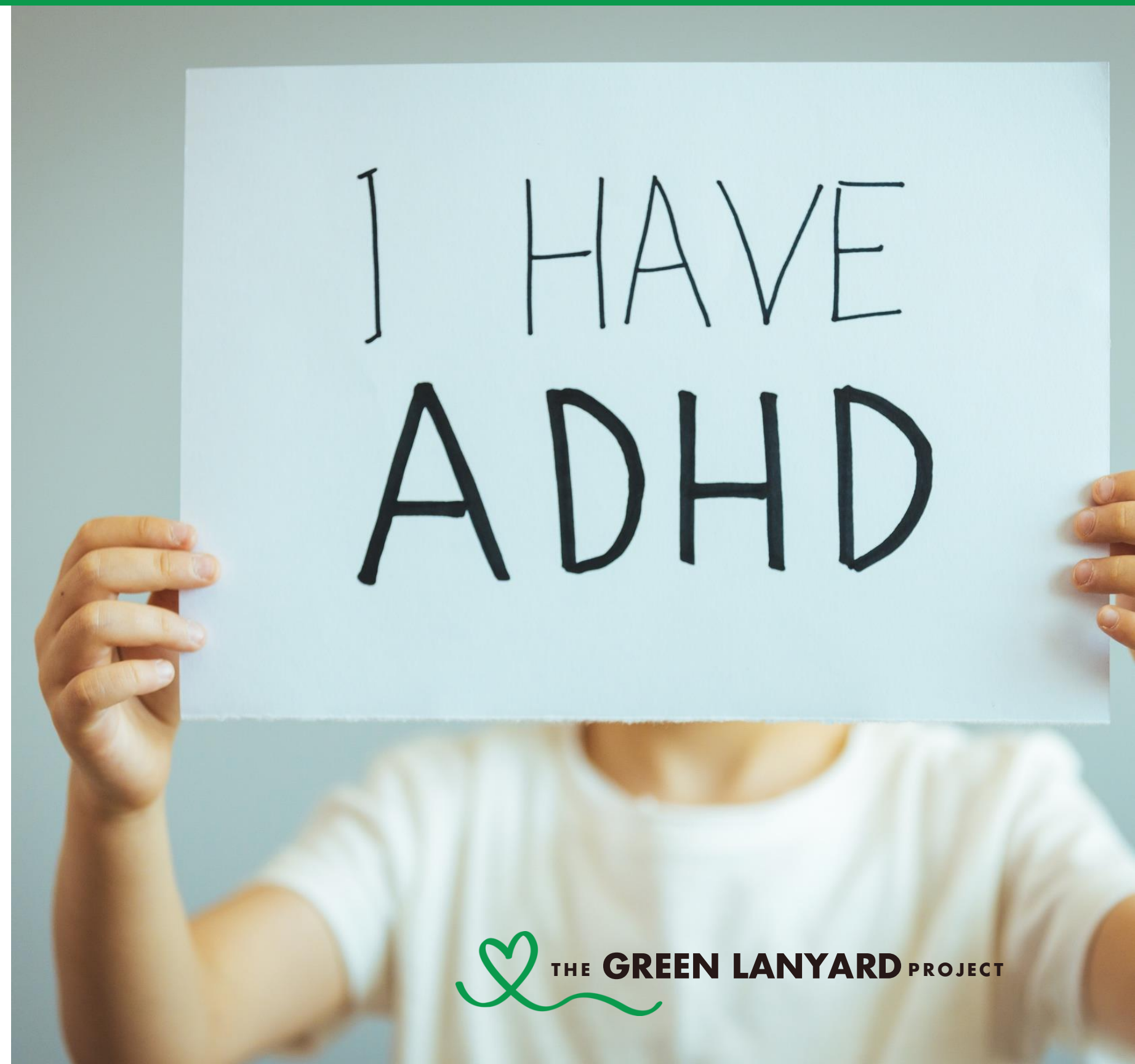
## Invisible Disabilities

Invisible disabilities, which are not immediately apparent, include conditions like **ADHD, anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and learning disabilities.**

In 2022, mental health-related disabilities were reported by **39% of persons with disabilities**, marking a 6% increase from 2017.

Among youth aged 15–24 with disabilities, **68% reported mental health-related disabilities, and 46% reported learning disabilities.**

SOURCE: [Statistics Canada](#)





# What is The Green Lanyard Project?



## What is The Green Lanyard Project?

**The Green Lanyard Project** is a community initiative designed to support people living with non-visible conditions like:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
- Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)
- Sensory processing differences
- PTSD or trauma-related needs
- Anxiety or panic disorders
- Chronic illness

Wearing a lanyard lets someone discreetly signal they may need a bit more understanding or support in public places, without having to explain.



What is  
The Green Lanyard  
Project?

## Why this project matters:

Invisible challenges can make everyday activities—like shopping, ordering food, or asking for help—more stressful.

By recognizing the lanyard, your business shows:

- Compassion for people of all abilities
- Commitment to accessibility
- Leadership in inclusive service

Even small acts of kindness can create a safe and welcoming space.







# Examples of Invisible Disabilities

# Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

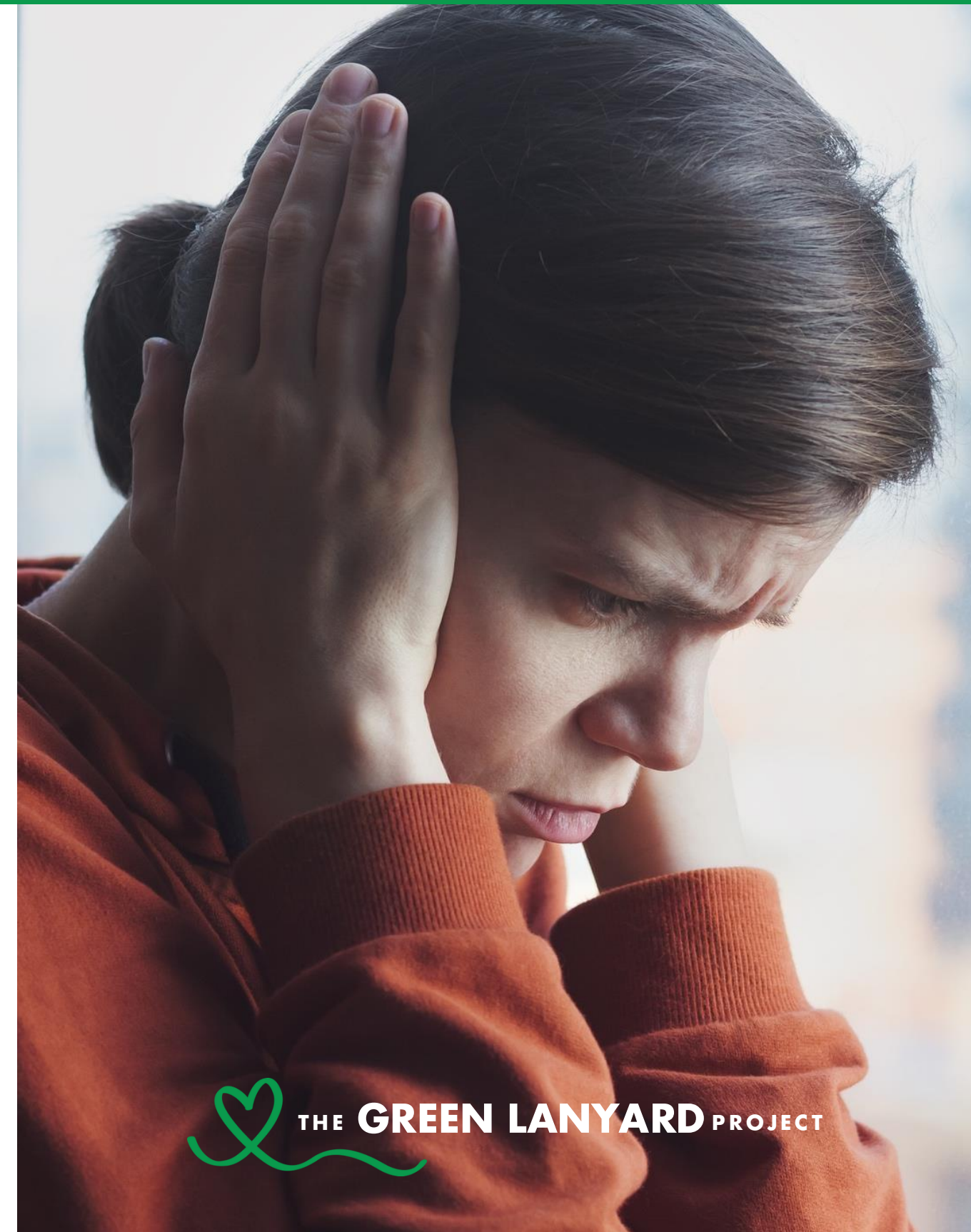
**What it is:**

**A neurodevelopmental condition that affects how a person communicates, processes sensory input, and relates to others.**

**What you might see:**

- Someone needing quiet space
- Difficulty with small talk, eye contact, or social cues
- Overwhelmed by lights, sounds, or crowds

“I need things to be predictable and might not respond the way you expect.”





# Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

What it is:

A condition where unwanted thoughts (obsessions) lead to repetitive behaviors (compulsions) that relieve anxiety.

What you might see:

- Re-checking items multiple times
- Avoiding touching things
- Needing extra time to complete a task

“I’m trying to manage strong internal anxiety by doing things in a specific way.”





## Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD)

What it is:

The brain has trouble filtering and responding to sensory information like sound, light, or touch.

What you might see:

- Covering ears in noisy places
- Flinching at bright lights or certain textures
- Needing physical space or movement

“Everyday things can feel too loud, too bright, or too overwhelming.”





## Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

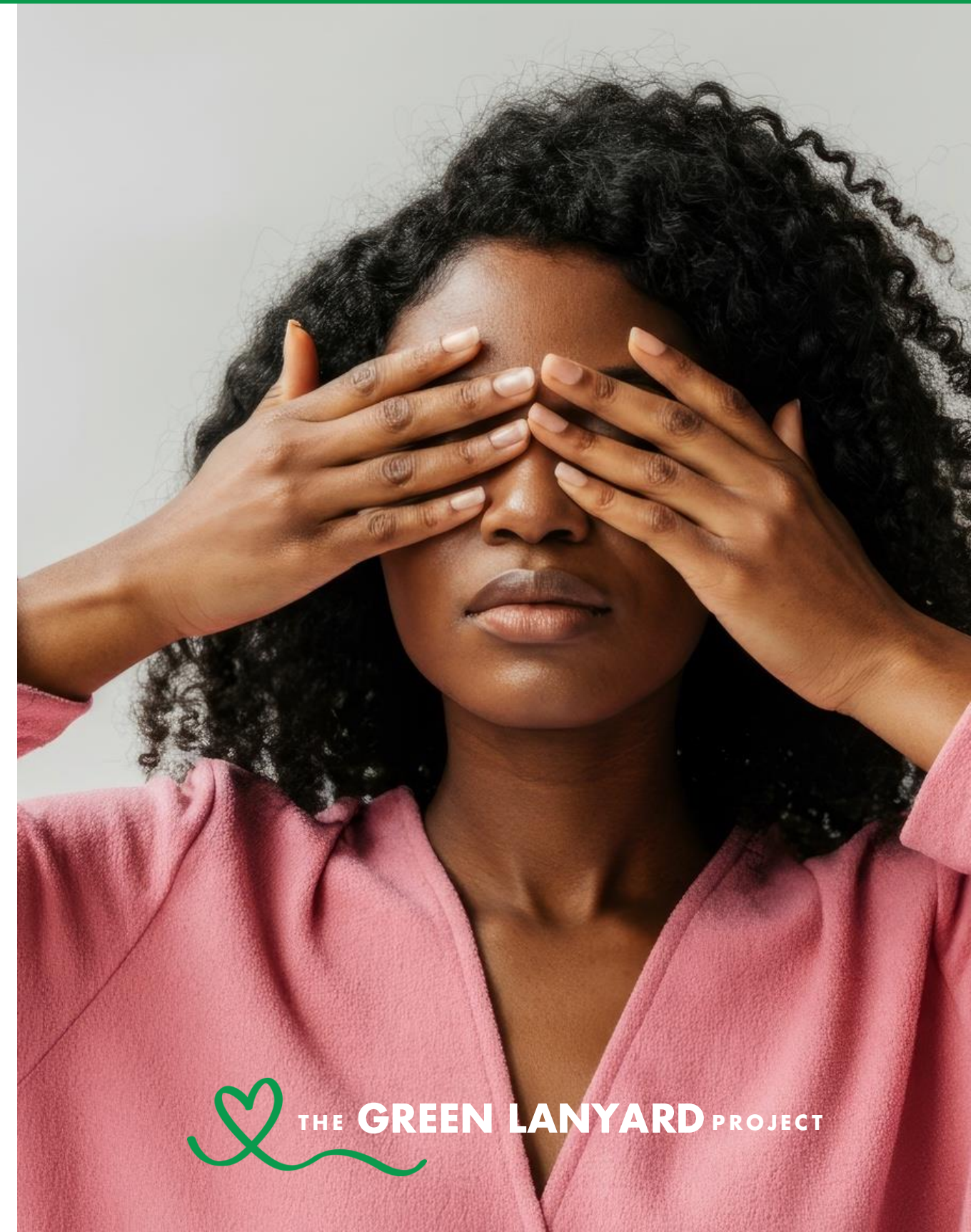
What it is:

A mental health condition that can develop after experiencing trauma, affecting emotions, memory, and sense of safety.

What you might see:

- Avoiding eye contact or certain topics
- Startling easily or seeming on edge
- Needing to sit with their back to a wall

“My brain sometimes reacts like I’m still in danger, even when I’m not.”





## Anxiety Disorders

What it is:

Conditions that cause frequent, intense worry or fear—even in everyday situations.

What you might see:

- Trouble speaking in public or to strangers
- Panic if rushed or pressured
- Avoiding crowded or unfamiliar places

**“I may look fine, but inside I’m struggling to stay calm.”**





# ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder)

What it is:

A condition affecting focus, organization, and impulse control.

What you might see:

- Trouble following instructions or staying on task
- Seeming disorganized or distracted
- Speaking quickly or interrupting

“My brain moves fast, but it’s not always easy to keep track of everything.”



## Learning Disabilities (e.g., Dyslexia, Dyscalculia)

What it is:

Conditions that affect how people process certain types of information, like reading, writing, or math.

What you might see:

- Struggling with forms, instructions, or signs
- Taking longer to read or complete paperwork
- Asking for things to be repeated or explained differently

**"I may learn differently, but I'm just as capable with the right support."**





## Mental Health Conditions (e.g., Depression, Bipolar Disorder, Eating Disorders)

What it is:

Conditions that affect mood, thoughts, and energy levels—often with invisible symptoms.

What you might see:

- Fatigue, flat affect, or seeming withdrawn
- Needing breaks or quiet time
- Struggling with motivation or interaction

“Some days are harder than others, even if you can’t see why.”





# How to Support Someone Wearing a Lanyard



# You don't have to be an expert.

These 5 principles are enough:



PATIENCE



CALM AND CLEAR  
COMMUNICATION



GENTLE SUPPORT



DON'T ASK



RESPECT  
BOUNDARIES



## Try a little tenderness and be patient.

### They might:

- Take longer to speak or respond
- Move or act differently
- Need extra time to count money, decide, or process information

**"Patience is not the ability to wait, but the ability to keep a good attitude while waiting."**

**Your calm presence helps reduce pressure.**





## Use calm and clear communication.

### Remember to:

- ✓ Speak clearly and respectfully
- ✓ Avoid rushing or interrupting
- ✓ Use simple language and avoid jargon or complex phrasing
- ✓ Actively listen by paying close attention and show you are engaged by nodding and asking clarifying questions

**" Before you speak, let your words pass through three gates:  
Is it true? Is it necessary? Is it kind? "**

**Use a calm tone of voice, and maintain open, confident body language.**



## Offer support... but do so gently.

### Try:

"Would you like a hand with anything?"

Then follow their lead—some will say yes, others no.

### Avoid:

✗ Over-helping

✗ Speaking to a support person instead of the person wearing the lanyard

**" Nothing is so strong as gentleness. Nothing is so gentle as real strength."**

**Follow their lead.**





## Don't ask why they're wearing it.

### Never ask:

- X "What's wrong with you?"
- X "What condition do you have?"
- X "Are you allowed to wear that?"

Even well-meaning questions can feel intrusive or shaming. While we provided explanations of the various invisible disorders, it's not important for you to identify what your client/customer is managing.

**" It's no secret. It's just not your business."**

**The lanyard is a private signal.**



## Respect their pace and boundaries.

### If the person:

- Seems overwhelmed
- Avoids eye contact
- Pauses or repeats themselves

✓ Slow down, give space, and stay kind.

✗ Don't touch them or their belongings without consent.

**" Boundaries are, in simple terms, the recognition of personal space."**

You're doing enough.



# Quick FAQs

## Have a question?

**Q: Do I have to make accommodations?**

**No special arrangements are required—just awareness and empathy.**

**Q: What if they ask for something I can't do?**

**Kindly let them know what you can do. It's okay to say: "I'm not sure, but I'll check for you."**

**Q: Can staff wear lanyards too?**

**Yes. Staff can wear them if they have invisible challenges. This supports inclusion among your team as well.**





Ready to Join  
Our Community  
Project?

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## Want to join?

Here's what to do:



Display a  
“We Recognize the  
Lanyard” poster in  
your window



Include this guide  
in onboarding  
packages for new  
staff.



Ask your BIA about  
brief videos or  
printable cards.

Thank You!

Your kindness makes our  
community more inclusive for  
everyone.

By supporting The Green Lanyard  
Project, you are:

- ✓ Empowering individuals
- ✓ Reducing stigma
- ✓ Creating safer spaces for all



Please contact us  
with any questions  
or comments.



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