

SBH SCHOOL TIPS

Physical Disabilities – Learning

Physical disability affects a range of students. They and their associated complications affect how students can function at school in many ways. Physical disabilities can be described as

- Neuromotor Impairments – including Cerebral Palsy, Spinal Cord Injuries and Spina Bifida.
- Degenerative Diseases – including Muscular Dystrophy.
- Orthopaedic and Musculoskeletal Disorders – including limb deficiency and Arthroprosis.

Difficulties being part of the Classroom:

Students with physical disabilities may have more difficulties being part of the classroom due to the following:

- Poor motor skills – students may not be able to use standard writing pencils and implements, have more difficulty turning pages. Mobility issues can reduce movement around campus and decrease participation.
- Lack of experience – students may lack knowledge of common places due to problems with mobility and experience with common objects (grass, ants etc) due to motor difficulties.
- Individual factors – students can experience more pain, discomfort, fatigue and endurance issues, as well as increased absenteeism.
- Psychological factors – students may have issues with motivational issues such as learned helplessness and depression, poor self-concept and self-advocacy skills.
- Expectations – some school personnel can have low expectations on students with physical disability. Students can not be provided with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge.

Role of the Speech Pathologist:

Speech pathologists are trained to assess and treat children and adults who have a communication disability. We work with children and adults to support them being able to be understood, to understand and to read (literacy). We also support children and adults who have difficulty eating and drinking.

Speech pathologists work in a number of ways to support students. They can provide individual therapy, group therapy, assessments, working within the classroom, home or school based education programs and supporting teachers and carers and other professionals.

Communication difficulties in the classroom

Children who experience physical disability can have limited oral communication, which leads to significant difficulties in the classroom – mainly due to the highly verbal nature of classroom activities. Classrooms and the way that children learn has evolved and they vary greatly depending on each individual teacher. Children are expected to learn in environments that are buzzing with students who are working collaboratively, have significant background noise, or are silent. Children are expected to adapt their behaviour to all of these different environments. Students with communication and physical difficulties may find it hard to:

- Block out unnecessary noise and focus on the teacher's instructions.
- Not be able to project voice loudly enough to get support.
- Appear as though they are participating, however when closely inspected are passive in involvement.
- Need longer periods of time to process and respond to questions.
- Work avoidance.
- Become frustrated easily.



Who is involved in the support team?

- Speech Pathologists
- Social Workers
- Physiotherapists
- Occupational Therapists
- Psychologists
- Paediatricians
- Neurologists/Neurosurgeons
- Other Medical Specialists

