



How to include students with a disability

Adolescents with physical disabilities are no different from other adolescents. They have the same behaviours, the same ambitions, dreams and wishes, and the same challenges. But they also have extra challenges because their bodies don't work the same way as other kid's bodies. Here are some practical ways that schools can help them. The aim is to support them as much as possible to develop independence, responsibility and important life skills.

These tips are based on evidence from extensive research on young people with and without physical disabilities.



Adapt the school environment

- Identify things in the environment that stop students with physical disabilities from joining in activities. Get your class to help. Have a brainstorming/problem solving session about ways to overcome them. (Hint: Think about surfaces, width of passages, arrangement of furniture).
- Make sure that the workstation of students with physical disabilities is set up to cater to their needs. Ensure that the items they use regularly are within reach.
- Find out about adapted equipment for students with physical disabilities. The Independent Living Centre has thousands of pieces of adapted equipment for people with disabilities. See the list at the bottom of this tip sheet.

Adapt the curriculum

- Ask visiting teachers from the Centre of Inclusive Schooling or Catholic Education Office for help to modify the curriculum for students with physical disabilities.

Maximise the potential of students with physical disabilities in the classroom

- It's a big jump from Primary School to High School for any student, but especially for those with disabilities, because they get less support and assistance in high school than Primary School. Schools need a process of continual consultation with students with disabilities to keep in touch with their needs. Set up a consultative committee of students with disabilities and meet with them once a term, to find out how things are going and what can be done to assist them. This will also give them practice at advocating for their needs, an important skill in adult life for people with disabilities.
- Identify ways to increase the independence of students with disabilities, so that they don't have to ask other people to do things for them as much. (This can also improve their social skills and confidence). Think outside the box! Just because someone can't do things in the conventional way, doesn't mean they can't do them at all.
- Students with physical disabilities use a lot of energy getting around. This makes them tired, and it may be harder for them to concentrate on school tasks. Identify energy-saving strategies. Get the other students in your class to help identify these strategies.

Plan activities beforehand

- Plan ahead of time for activities and events. What equipment will you need? How much time should you allow for each activity? What responsibilities will you give to the students?
- Students with physical disabilities can often take longer than other students to do the same tasks. Allow enough time for them to complete tasks.

Consider expense

- Families of children with disabilities often have lower incomes than other families (because of heavier carer responsibilities), and higher expenses (because of medical, therapy and equipment costs). Lack of money may influence the activities that these students are able to do. Aim for low cost activities and outings.
- It costs more to do the same activities if you have a physical disability because equipment is so expensive. Work with the student's family and other key stakeholders in the student's life to organise fundraising activities.
- Work out a sustainable arrangement for transportation to and from off-site activities so that students with physical disabilities can reliably access the activity rather than depending on transport availability.

Learn about the disability and factors that might affect the student's behaviour

- Learn what you can about your students' physical disabilities from the students themselves. There is a lot they can teach you. This will help you to understand them, their challenges and needs.
- Become familiar with what each student with a physical disability is capable of. Encourage them, and give them experiences of success. But don't let them get away with less than they can really do! Encourage independence.
- Spend time understanding why a student with a physical disability is having difficulties.
- Many students with obvious physical disabilities have non-obvious secondary impairments (e.g. epilepsy, visual/perceptual difficulties) which interfere with their ability to do activities. Be aware of these as well.
- Find out what medications and treatments the student is having. What effects do they have? Will the student be more receptive to learning at certain times of day?

Give only as much help is needed

- If you think that a student with a physical disability might need help, ask them. But let them decide how much help, if any, they need. Do not give unnecessary assistance. Let them try to find their own solutions to challenging situations by themselves and with their peers. They are developing important life skills in learning to do this.
- Adapt tasks so that targets are realistic for students with physical disabilities. This is better than giving them tasks that are too difficult and assigning someone to help them.

Promote positive social behaviours in all students

- Reinforce all students (including those with physical disabilities) for sharing, helping and cooperating. These behaviours are closely associated with a positive social status among peers.
- If a student cannot talk, they will be using some other form of communication, such as communication books, signing, or voice output devices. Make sure that everyone in the class knows how to use these.
- In classroom activities and discussions, emphasise social and behavioural similarities between students with and without disabilities. This will reduce the effect of physical differences which cannot be modified.
- Students with disabilities have fewer opportunities to learn social behaviours than their peers, but they also have to deal with more bullying. Teach them how to manage their own emotions and interpret the intentions of others through non-verbal cues, so that they can cope more effectively in social situations.
- Ensure that there are anti-bullying strategies in place at the school.

Where can I get help?

The child's contact person and therapists

Association of Independent Schools of Western Australia

Ph: 9441 1600 <http://www.ais.wa.edu.au/>

Catholic Education Office WA

Ph: 6380 5200 <http://www.ceo.wa.edu.au/>

The Centre for Inclusive Schooling

Ph: 9426 7111 <http://www.cis.perthwa.net/>

The Independent Living Centre

Ph: 1300 885 886 <http://www.ilc.com.au/>

Your Local Area Coordinator at the Disability Services Commission

Ph: 1800 998 214
<http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/forindividuals/lacd.html>

To view results from a recent Perth study on activities of young adolescents with and without physical disabilities, see:
www.tccp.com.au/docs/documents/Information%20sheet%20to%20Participants.pdf