



Important life skills for kids with physical disabilities

Everyone at times feels different from other people – and sometimes when we feel different, it’s tough. All of us are different in our own way. Mum may have a puffer to help her breathe. Dad may have glasses to help him see. Different people have different needs. But the good thing is that there are a lot help available. Here are some points that may be useful for your needs. They will help you become more independent and responsible. They will also show you ways of gaining important life skills for high school and beyond.

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



Adaptation

- **Aids and modifications.** Ask your parents and therapists about what equipment and aids might suit you. There are writing aids, modified computer programs, cooking utensils; the list is endless.
- **There’s more than one way to communicate.** Some kids cannot talk. Others find it hard to get their message across, especially to people they don’t know well. You may be afraid at times that people can’t always understand what you say. Work with your speech therapists to find ways of communicating clearly. There are many things that can help, such as signing, communication books and voice output devices.
- **Search the ILC.** The Independent Living Centre is a great resource centre when looking for adapted equipment and aids.
- **Think outside the box!** If it takes you longer to do some things (like tying your shoe-laces) it doesn’t mean you can’t do it at all. Ask an occupational therapist to show you how to tie your shoes with one hand, or other ways to fasten your shoes.
- **It needn’t cost you.** The activities you do with your friends don’t have to be expensive. Instead of going to your local sport facilities, you could play footy at the park; or instead of going to the movies you could play video games. What other activities can you think of?
- **Safety first.** If it’s not safe for you or for other people, then don’t do it. But see if you can think of ways to adapt activities to make them safe for you to do.

Getting along with others

- **Speak up.** Tell your teachers or friends what things you can do by yourself and what things you need them to help with.
- **Teamwork in the home.** At home, do family chores and share the workload with your brothers and sisters so that you work together to get the job done. If you practise doing household chores, now they’ll be easier to do when you grow up.

- **Share it with your family.** Spend time having fun with your family. Talk to them and share your feelings with them. Talking to mum or dad nearly always helps.
- **Share it with other kids who understand.** Speak to other kids with the same challenges as you.
- **Consult your LAC.** Talk to your local area coordinator to find out what activities there are where you live. There are community groups that welcome kids with disabilities.

Perseverance

- **Be independent.** Find out how you can do things for yourself as much as possible. See how independent you can be. For example, a powered wheelchair or scooter might help you get around more by yourself and give you more energy for school tasks, sports etc.
- **Give it a go.** Sometimes you might get tired doing physical activities. Maybe you are scared to try something new. Make sure that you have the right equipment and footwear you need to join in activities safely.
- **Don't be rushed.** Give yourself extra time when you need it.
- **Don't get discouraged.** Never under-estimate what you can do and always give yourself credit for your achievements!
- **Find your own solutions.** If you think that you might need help, ask somebody. Most people are happy to lend a hand. But try to find your own solutions first. The more you can do for yourself, the better. That's the way to learn.
- **You don't know til you try!** Many activities and situations can be adapted to make things easier. But see if you can do things the usual way first. If it is too hard, try again with some help.
- **Be yourself.** Remember – you are a teenager before you are a teenager with a physical disability. Every kid has different strengths and weaknesses – some kids wear glasses, some don't; some kids like talking in front of the class, some don't. What things do you do well?

My name is Alex and I'm young adult with cerebral palsy. When I was younger I wore a splint on my leg. When growing up through Primary School I found people became more curious about my splint. Most of the students just wanted to know why I had to wear it and what it did. Most of the time I didn't exactly know why I had to where it but I explained to them that I was born with cerebral palsy and my left side was weaker then my right and the splint gave better support to my muscles.

Personally as I got older I did get embarrassed about wearing it because I noticed more and more people were looking at me and asking more questions. I knew I couldn't control what happened to me but I felt different so when I found out that I didn't need to wear a split anymore and wore Orthotics instead I was very happy.

In Year 8 there was a girl in my year that was wearing a splint for a similar reason to me so I found it ok that if I had to go back to wearing one it would be ok because I knew someone that was already wearing one. I didn't speak to this girl often but I did let her know that I used to wear a splint but recently changed over to Orthotics.

Overall I found in Primary School the teachers that worked with the physically disabled students where very passionate about their job and cared about us. I did enjoy the High School too but it need to improve its facilities and services to physically disabled students.

Where can I get help?

Your therapists

Cerebral Palsy Support Network (CPSN)

<http://www.cpsn.info/index.html>

CP Blogs

<http://www.cpblogs.org.au>

The Independent Living Centre

<http://www.ilc.com.au>

Your Local Area Coordinator

<http://www.disability.wa.gov.au/forindividulas/lacd.html>

Livewire

<http://www.livewire.org.au>

Mobile Accessibility

<http://www.mobileaccessibility.info/index.cfm?lang=eng>

Recreation and Sport Network

<http://www.rec.net.au>

WA Disabled Sports Association

<http://www.wadsa.org.au>

"What I'd Like You To Know About Me"

<http://www.aboutme.org.au>

You be the difference

<http://www.youbethedifference.com.au>

TCCP Youth Website

COMING SOON in July 2010! - accessible through <http://www.tccp.com.au>

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