

## Definitions of Types of Disabilities

---

A list and description of common disabilities quoted and adapted from the BSA Publication "A Scoutmaster's Guide to Working with Scouts with Disabilities"

### **Definitions of Types of Disabilities**

*The following list describes some disabilities that are common. This list is by no means a complete one, and the descriptions are by no means comprehensive. For more information about specific disabilities, call the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities toll free 1-800-695-0285. This organization provides fact sheets to aid parents and Scout leaders who work with children with disabilities.*

**Attention Deficit with or without Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD).** A syndrome of learning and behavioral problems that affects concentration, impulse control, and attention. The overactive behavior is often called hyperactivity. Children with ADD often have learning disabilities and/or are highly intelligent.

**Autism.** A group of developmental disabilities (also called Pervasive Developmental Disorder, PDD) originating in infancy, characterized by impaired social interaction, impaired communication (does not initiate or respond normally to communication), and a set of characteristic behavior patterns (including fascination with objects or facts, tantrums thrown for no apparent reason, and self-injurious behaviors such as head banging). Children with autism often do not understand common dangers, such as busy streets, yet some show above-normal skill in isolated areas of mathematics or music.

**Cerebral Palsy (CP).** A group of disorders resulting from brain damage. Cerebral refers to the brain and palsy to a lack of control over muscles. Any combination of physical and mental status is possible. Symptoms range from slight awkwardness of gait to more uncontrolled movements and an inability to see, speak, or lean as people without disabilities do. Cerebral palsy is not always associated with mental retardation.

**Developmentally Disabled (formerly called Mental Retardation).** People with developmental disabilities are limited in their ability to learn and are generally socially immature. It is a condition, not a disease, manifested before age 21. It is important to realize that people with this condition have the same hopes and emotions as people without it. They learn, but at a slower pace.

1. Mild Delays. About 90 percent of the people with developmental disabilities are only mildly affected. They are capable of being educated and, as adults, given proper training, can work in competitive jobs, live independently, and be a part of daily community life.
2. Moderate Delays. People with moderate delays are sometimes known as trainable mentally retarded people. They can learn to care for their personal needs and perform many useful tasks in the home or, as adults, in a sheltered-workshop situation.
3. Profound Delays. People with physical disabilities and severe impairment in coordination and sensory development, making constant care necessary, have profound retardation. With special techniques, some can be taught useful simple tasks and can participate in some limited social activities.

**Down syndrome.** A chromosomal abnormality causing slow physical and intellectual development. They will frequently have health-related disorders such as heart defects and respiratory, vision, hearing, and speech problems. People with Down's syndrome are often known to be stubborn.

**Emotional Disturbance.** An inability or unwillingness to adjust to the problems and stresses of daily life. Such disabilities can cause people to react aggressively to, or withdraw from situations, rather than attempt to adjust to them.

**Learning Disability.** A disorder in one or more of the basic physiological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written. The disorder can manifest itself in, for example, the ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, do mathematical calculations, etc. Even though their progress in these skills might be limited, people with learning disabilities may have average to above intelligence.

**Multiple Sclerosis (MS).** This chronic, progressive disease of the neurological system affects important functions of daily living such as walking, talking, seeing, eating, tying a shoe, opening a door, etc. There is no known cure, and the cause has yet to be found.

**Muscular Dystrophies.** A general designation for a group of chronic diseases; the most prominent characteristic is the progressive degeneration of the muscles.

**Physical Disability.** An impairment that hampers physical, vocational, or community activities.

**Post-lingual Hearing Impairment.** A loss of hearing after having developed speech (usually after reaching 6 years of age). People with these disabilities have some understandable speech or at least can make speech-like sounds, might "sign," have a hearing aid, etc.

**Pre-lingual Hearing Impairment.** An impairment caused by being born deaf or losing hearing before acquiring speech or syntax. People with these disabilities make up 95 percent of the school-age deaf population.

**Seizure Disorders.** Not a disease, but a malfunction of the manner in which the cells of the brain release energy, characterized by sudden seizures involving muscle convulsions and partial or total loss of consciousness. It can sometimes be controlled through use of medication. Includes epilepsy.

**Speech/Language Disorders.** A communication disorder, such as stuttering, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. A person with a speech language disorder may have trouble retrieving words from memory or may not speak at all. Hearing and receptive language may not be impaired.

**Spinal Cord Injury.** Paralysis of parts of the body, usually the result of an accident.

**Traumatic Brain Injury.** An injury to the brain by an external physical force, resulting in the impairment of one or more of the following areas: speech, memory, attention, reasoning, judgment, problem solving, motor abilities, and psychosocial behavior. Impairments may be temporary or permanent.

**Visual Impairment.** An inability to see. An individual who is legally blind can see no more at a distance of 20 feet than a person without visual impairments can see at a distance of 200 feet. Functional blindness is generally defined as the inability to read newspaper type even with the best possible corrective lenses, or to perform ordinary tasks necessary to daily living.