

Helpful Resources

American Association on Intellectual
and Developmental Disabilities
444 North Capitol Street, NW
Suite 846
Washington, D.C. 20001-1512
Telephone: 202/387-1968 or
800/424-3688
Fax: 202/387-2193
<http://www.aaid.org>

National Association of the Deaf
8630 Fenton Street, Suite 820
Silver Spring, MD 20910-3819
301-587-1789 TTY
301-587-1788 Voice
301-587-1791 FAX
<http://www.nad.org>

Autism Society of America
7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 300
Bethesda, Maryland 20814-3067
Phone: 301-657-0881 or 1-800-3AUTISM
<http://www.autism-society.org>

The ARC of the United States
1010 Wayne Avenue, Suite 650
Silver Spring, MD 20910
301-565-3842
Email: info@thearc.org

National Council for Support of Disability Issues
Haymarket, VA 20169
tfink@ncsd.org
Learning Disability OnLine
WETA Public Television
2775 S. Quincy St.
Arlington, VA 22206
Fax: 703-998-2060
<http://www.ldonline.org>

National Federation of the Blind
1800 Johnson Street
Baltimore, MD 21230
Phone: 410-659-9314
Fax: 410-685-5653
<http://www.nfb.org>

Epilepsy Foundation
8301 Professional Place
Landover, MD 20785
Phone: (800) 332-1000
<http://www.epilepsyfoundation.org>

United Cerebral Palsy
1660 L Street, NW, Suite 700
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (800) 872-5827 (202) 776-0406
Fax: (202) 776-0414
Email: info@ucp.org
<http://www.ucp.org>



RHA Howell, Inc.
1007 Slater Road, Suite 120
Durham, NC 27703
Voice: (919) 941-0530

Interacting with People Who Have Disabilities



RHA Howell, Inc.

Celebrating our Differences and Abilities

www.rhahowell.org

Introduction

At RHA Howell Care Centers, Inc. our mission is to provide a safe and healthy environment, while creating opportunities for personal outcomes. The people we support are the center of everything we do. At work, at home or in the community no obstacle is too great, no accomplishment too small.

At RHA Howell, we celebrate our differences and our abilities! We created this booklet to help you understand the importance of doing the same. Many people are uncomfortable interacting with individuals who have developmental disabilities as they are fearful of doing or saying the wrong thing. As you continue reading, you will find information that may be helpful in overcoming this fear, putting you on the path towards building new relationships. We want you to be able to celebrate, appreciate and respect everyone's differences and abilities.



When you are with a person using a wheelchair:



1. Speak directly to the person.
2. If possible, sit so you are at eye-level with the person.
3. Ask the person if they need assistance before pushing their wheelchair.
4. Do not move crutches, walkers, canes or wheelchairs without the person's permission.
5. Do not ignore the person or act embarrassed by the person's disability.
6. Do not talk about being "confined" to a wheelchair. Wheels give the person freedom.

At RHA Howell, we celebrate our differences and abilities every day!

We are always working to educate people on the importance of embracing individuals with developmental disabilities as friends, employees and volunteers. So, we would like to extend you an invitation to assist us in educating your community. If your school, organization or civic group would like to join us in educating others OR if you would like members of the RHA Howell family to visit you and speak for a group you have organized, please feel free to contact us at:

RHA Howell, Inc.

1007 Slater Road, Suite 120

Durham, NC 27703

Voice: (919) 941-0530

For more information, visit the Learning Disabilities Online information website at: <http://www.ldonline.org>

When in contact with someone who has a learning disability:

1. Offer encouragement and acceptance.
2. Take note of the things they do correctly and praise them.
3. When giving instructions, keep them simple and involve as many different senses as possible.
4. Recognize the person's limitations. Be patient, realistic and flexible.
5. Learn what they are interested in and provide opportunities for involvement and sharing.

Physical Disabilities/Mobility Impairments



There are many types of orthopedic or neuromuscular impairments that can impact mobility. These include but are not limited to amputation, paralysis, Cerebral Palsy, Stroke, Multiple Sclerosis, Muscular Dystrophy, Arthritis, and spinal cord injury. Mobility impairments range from lower body impairments, which may require use of canes, walkers, or wheelchairs, to upper body impairments which may include limited or no use of the upper extremities and hands. It is impossible to generalize about functional abilities due to the wide variety of disabilities and specific diagnoses.

Mobility impairments can be permanent or temporary. A broken bone, an injury, or a surgical procedure can temporarily impact a person's ability to walk independently and travel between buildings in a timely manner. Likewise, some people may be ambulatory with a walker for short distances within a classroom, but may need a wheelchair or scooter for longer distances.

Unfortunately, many people still think of individuals who have developmental disabilities as lesser people to be feared, avoided or pitied. These attitudes stem from lack of knowledge about disabilities. So, let's start by learning what developmental disabilities are and how they may impact the person affected.



What are Developmental Disabilities?

Developmental disabilities are a diverse group of chronic conditions that are due to mental and/or physical impairments. For people with developmental disabilities, life activities such as language, mobility, learning, self-help, and independent living can be major obstacles. Developmental disabilities begin anytime during development up to 22 years of age and usually last throughout a person's lifetime. In this booklet, we will discuss various types of disabilities. There are several types of developmental disabilities. For more information, you may want to visit the Department of Health and Human Services Center for Disease Control and Prevention website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd>.

Cerebral Palsy

Cerebral palsy refers to a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and to maintain balance and posture. It is due to a non-progressive brain abnormality, which means that it does not get worse over time, though the exact symptoms can change over a person's lifetime.

People with cerebral palsy have damage to the part of the brain that controls muscle tone.

There are four types of Cerebral Palsy:

- Spastic
- Athetoid or dyskinetic
- Ataxic
- Mixed

The symptoms of cerebral palsy vary depending on the person and symptoms may change over time. A person with severe cerebral palsy might need lifelong care. A person with mild cerebral palsy might not need any special help.

Epilepsy

According to the Epilepsy Foundation, epilepsy is a neurological condition that from time to time produces brief disturbances in the normal electrical functions of the brain. Normal brain function is made possible by millions of tiny electrical charges passing between nerve cells in the brain and to all parts of the body. When someone has epilepsy, this normal pattern may be interrupted by intermittent bursts of electrical energy that are much more intense than usual. They may affect a person's consciousness, bodily movements or sensations for a short time.

These physical changes are called epileptic seizures. That is why epilepsy is sometimes called a seizure disorder. The unusual bursts of energy may occur in just one area of the brain (partial seizures), or may affect nerve cells throughout the brain (generalized seizures). Normal brain function cannot return until the electrical bursts subside. Conditions in the brain that produce these episodes may have been present since birth, or they may develop later in life due to injury, infections, structural abnormalities in the brain, exposure to toxic agents, or for reasons that are still not well understood. Many illnesses or severe injuries can affect the brain enough to produce a single seizure. When seizures continue to occur for unknown reasons or because of an underlying problem that cannot be corrected, the condition is known as epilepsy. Epilepsy affects people of all ages, all nations, and all races.

If an individual has seizure:



1. Keep calm and encourage others to do so as well. Keep crowds away.
2. Help the person lie down comfortably. Turn the person on his/her side to prevent choking.
3. Loosen tight clothing especially around the neck.
4. Do not force anything between the teeth. It is not true that a person who is having a seizure can swallow his/her tongue.
5. Call for medical help. Don't attempt CPR unless the person does not resume breathing after the seizure.

Learning Disabilities



A learning disability is a neurological disorder. In simple terms, a learning disability results from a difference in the way a person's brain processes information. Children with learning disabilities are just as intelligent as their peers. And they may have difficulty reading, writing, spelling, reasoning, recalling and/or organizing information if left to figure things out on their own or if taught in conventional ways.

A learning disability can't be cured or fixed; it is a lifelong issue. With the right support and intervention, however, children with learning disabilities can succeed in school and go on to successful, often distinguished careers later in life.

Parents can help children with learning disabilities achieve such success by encouraging their strengths, knowing their weaknesses, understanding the educational system, working with professionals and learning about strategies for dealing with specific difficulties.

Common Learning Disabilities

Dyslexia – a language-based disability in which a person has trouble understanding written words. It may also be referred to as reading disability or reading disorder.

Dyscalculia – a mathematical disability in which a person has a difficult time solving arithmetic problems and grasping math concepts.

Dysgraphia – a writing disability in which a person finds it hard to form letters or write within a defined space.

Auditory and Visual Processing Disorders – sensory disabilities that cause difficulty understanding language despite normal hearing and vision.

Nonverbal Learning Disabilities – a neurological disorder which originates in the right hemisphere of the brain, causing problems with visual-spatial, intuitive, organizational, evaluative and holistic processing functions.

Blindness/Visual Impairments



People who are blind or have visual impairments rely on their other senses to perceive the world around them. People who are blind have no vision or minimal vision.

Blindness is a disability that affects a person's eyesight. Normal vision is 20/20. Someone who is legally blind might have 20/200 vision. Eighty percent of blind people have some vision, such as light perception. People who have some useful vision, but who cannot achieve clear vision by wearing glasses or contact lenses, are considered to have low vision. Low vision refers to limited distance vision. People with low vision are able to see items close to them. They use a combination of vision and other senses to learn or read, although they may need special lighting, larger print, magnifiers or special glasses.

Visual Impairments can also result in blurred or hazy vision and loss of peripheral (side) vision.

Tips on how to communicate with a person who is blind or has visual impairment:

1. Speak directly to the person using a normal tone of voice.
2. Say the person's name before speaking.
3. Identify yourself the first time you speak.
4. Be specific when giving directions.
5. Never hold the person's arm while walking. Let him/her hold your arm allowing them to walk slightly behind you. This way, the person can rely on your body movements for guidance.



Intellectual Disabilities



An Intellectual Disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations in the ability to function in areas of daily life, such as communication, self-care, and getting along in social situations and school activities. An intellectual disability is sometimes referred to as a cognitive disability, and was formally known as Mental retardation.

People with intellectual disabilities can and do learn new skills, but it takes a little longer than individuals with average intelligence and adaptive skills. There are different degrees of intellectual disabilities, ranging from mild to profound. A person's level of intellectual disabilities can be defined by their intelligence quotient (IQ), or by the types and amount of support they need.

Where can I go to learn more about intellectual disabilities?

The National Information Center on Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) provides information on disabilities and disability-related issues for families, teachers, and other professionals. NICHCY has a fact sheet about intellectual disabilities that includes general information on topics such as diagnosis and causes as well as tips for parents and teachers. NICHCY staff will also give information and referrals over the phone (800-695-0285) or by email (nichcy@aed.org).

Tips for communicating with a person who has an intellectual disability (mental retardation):

1. Don't be condescending. Treat the person the way you wish to be treated.
2. Speak naturally and talk directly to the person – don't speak through others.
3. Talk about things you think will interest the person.
4. Talk with the person even though he/she may not be able to respond verbally.



Autism

According to the Autism Society of America, Autism is a complex developmental disability that typically appears during the first three years of life and is the result of a neurological disorder that affects the normal functioning of the brain, impacting development in the areas of social interaction and communication skills. Both children and adults with autism typically show difficulties in verbal and non-verbal communication, social interactions, and leisure or play activities. One should keep in mind however, that autism is a spectrum disorder and it affects each individual differently and at varying degrees - this is why early diagnosis is so crucial. By learning the signs, a child can begin benefiting from one of the many specialized intervention programs.

Autism is one of five disorders that falls under the umbrella of Pervasive Developmental Disorders (PDD), a category of neurological disorders characterized by “severe and pervasive impairment in several areas of development.” The five disorders under PDD are:

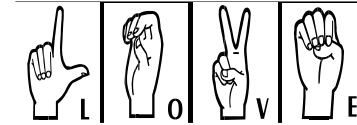
- Autistic Disorder • Asperger’s Disorder • Rett’s Disorder
- PDD-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) • Childhood Disintegrative Disorder (CDD)

Ways to communicate effectively with people who have autism:



1. Limit the amount of words you use. Convey relevant information in a simple way.
2. Pause in between spoken words and phrases to give the person time to process what has been said to them and to give them time to think of a response.
3. Use gestures to accompany language to help the person understand the action related to what you are saying.
4. Use visual aids if possible. For example, cue cards, picture time-tables and line drawings may be helpful.

Hearing Impairment/Deafness



Deafness is a disability that affects a person’s ability to hear. Deafness is a severe to profound hearing disability, with little or no residual hearing. Many deaf people communicate using sign language. People with hearing loss, often called “hard of hearing,” generally use their residual hearing and speech to communicate. Many people with hearing loss can understand some speech sounds with or without a hearing aid.

Deafness and hearing impairment can be caused by damage to various parts of the ear or can occur if the ear does not properly develop. Diseases like measles or mumps, head injuries and loud noises can also injure the ear causing hearing loss.

Deafness can be inherited or people can experience hearing loss as they grow older. All hearing impairments are different. Sometimes loss of hearing is temporary; other times it is permanent. Each has very different effects on a person’s ability to process sound and understand speech.



Tips on communicating with a person who has a hearing impairment:

1. Before speaking, politely engage the person by tapping his/her shoulder or forearm or by waving your hands slightly.
2. Look directly at the person to whom you are speaking.
3. You may have to repeat yourself. Be patient if the person does not understand you the first time.
4. Even if a sign language interpreter is present, talk directly to the deaf individual.
5. Use of sign language or gestures is encouraged to help with lip reading abilities.