

Peer Information Sheet: Physical Disability

All young people are unique. We all have strengths, and we all have areas where we are still learning. We are all born with our own unique combination of hair, eyes, personality, and our own very unique fingerprints.

*Some people have a physical disability. Just like hair or eyes or fingerprints, this is a **part** of them, but not **who they are**. When you take the time to get to know them, you'll find there are lots of things you have in common.*

About Physical Disability

Physical disability is when someone has challenges with physical strength or mobility that impacts their life. Teenagers with physical disability might find movement, balancing, writing, or communication difficult, depending which part of their body is affected. They might use a wheelchair or other walking aide.

Lip reading

Some teens might use words to talk to others, they might have a hearing aid to help them hear, or they might lip read to understand what you are saying. You can help them by talking clearly and making sure they can see your lips when you talk. If they miss what is said or have trouble understanding, just carefully and clearly repeat, or use different words.

Friendship tips

Being a teenager is often a time when friendships become really important to us. We often want to spend more time with people our age who share similar interests. We might worry more about what other people think, because we want to fit in.

Feeling part of a group and feeling like you belong, is important for all young people. This includes teenagers with physical disability. Teens with physical disability like to hang out with friends and join in the activities that their friends are involved in. Activities that involve lots of running or movement might be challenging for them. You can help by choosing activities that include everybody, or by thinking of ways to change the activity to include everyone.

Moving around at school

Some teens with physical disability might get tired at school. They might walk a little differently, or they might use a wheelchair or walking aide to move around. Some might find motor actions like drawing, tying up shoelaces or other activities where they need to use their fingers difficult. You can help by staying with them when walking somewhere instead of rushing ahead or by carrying their books for them if they would like your help. It may also be important to keep the classroom, locker area and other shared spaces free of obstacles.

Communication

Teens with physical disability may communicate in different ways to you and your friends. Some teens might not use words to talk. They might use pictures, hand or head signals, or a computer to talk.

Teacher Aides

Some teens with physical disability might have a teacher's aide or other support staff in the classroom. You can still talk and work with them when their aide is there – their aide is there to support their learning, but they cannot replace the value of working and interacting with other students of the same age.

Stop bullying!

Bullying and exclusion can have a devastating impact on a young person's life. This can be particularly difficult for a young person with a disability if they are excluded, picked on, laughed at and bullied because of their disability. If you see a young person with a disability being excluded or bullied, you can make a big difference in that moment. In fact, your help and support may make a difference or be remembered long after YOU have forgotten all about it!

If you see a young person being bullied at school, and it is safe for you to speak out, speak up and tell those who are bullying to stop. Tell them that it isn't okay and it isn't cool. Standing up for someone else stops bullying more than half of the time! If you are still worried about exclusion or bullying, ask a teacher or another adult for help, or help the young person seek help and support. Speaking up and reaching out can help keep them safe, and can have a lasting impact on their life.

Just like you

Teenagers with physical disability have lots of ways in which they're just like you. They have their own interests, preferences and hopes and dreams, just like you do. They want to feel like their ideas, views and input is valued, just like you do. And they want to feel connected – like they belong – through having friends, going to parties, hanging out, and being included... just like you do.

**So remember, you probably have more things in
common than you have differences!**