Physical and Health Disabilities

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**Definition:**

Physical and health disabilities are two separate types of disabilities. Physical disabilities are circumstances where an individual has a physical deformity or impairment of the skeletal system and associated motor function. This type of impairment can limit the fine and gross motor skills of the individual. Types of physical disabilities include hearing loss, visual loss, missing appendages, or skeletal impairments. Other examples also include Cerebral Palsy, Epilepsy, Juvenile Arthritis, Muscular Dystrophy, Polio, etc.

Physical disabilities are also called Orthopedic Impairments. According to the federal government, orthopedic impairment means severe orthopedic impairments that adversely affect a child’s educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

Health disabilities include chronic or acute health problems that in some cases cause limited strength, vitality, or alertness. These health conditions range from mild to severe. Health disabilities can result in an individual having to take medications, have treatments, repeated hospitalizations, and can affect a student’s ability to learn and function at school. Some examples of health disabilities are Asthma, Diabetes, Cystic fibrosis, etc.

Health disabilities are also called other health impairments. According to the federal government, other health impairment means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that –

1. Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickly cell anemia; and
2. Adversely affects a child’s educational performance.
**Characteristics:**

- Neuromotor impairments
- Limited muscular control
- Limited muscular movement
- Muscular/skeletal conditions
- Seizures
- Limb deficiencies
- Prosthetics
- Wheelchairs
- Getting sick often
- Missing school
- Blurred vision
- Confusion
- Inattention
- Headaches
- Fatigue
- Walker
- Glasses
- Walking belt
- Braces
- Use of high tech devices or low tech devices
- Jerky movements
- Spasms
- Involuntary movements
- Lack of muscle tone
- Trouble with oral speech
- Speech impairments
- Stiffness
- Wear helmets
- Wear glasses
Strategies:

1) Help other students understand the disability, and how to react if an incident occurs.
2) Allowing students to participate in all activities, field trips, etc. in order to help them feel more involved with the class.
3) A simple strategy is to develop personal relationships with the student.
4) Once personal relationships are established, the teacher can learn the individual student’s habits and capabilities.
5) Make sure students have full access to the classroom, free of obstacles.
6) Pairing students up with a buddy who can take notes for them or help with activities can insure that students stay caught up with the class.
7) Allow students to use any assistive technology that is available to them.
8) Some students may need to record lessons in order to study or keep track of material.
9) Providing audio books for students with visual impairments is extremely beneficial as well.
10) For students with health disabilities, be aware of any signs of an “episode” and what do to if something happens.
11) The teacher should make him/herself available for home visits in order to keep students caught up, if they are out for extended periods of time.
12) Allow extended due dates for assignments.
13) Allow students who need assistance, such as an ASL interpreter, service animals, etc. to have full use of them during the day.
14) The most beneficial strategy a teacher can use when teaching students with ANY disability is to follow the students IEP or 504.
15) Allow adaptive equipment, such as booster seats, arm rests, wheel chairs, walkers, etc.
In the past, children with physical disabilities used to be taught in different classrooms. Now, students with these disabilities are being taught in inclusive classroom settings and, as teachers, it is our responsibility to know how to teach and address these students. This website breaks the method down into two steps. The first step is setting up the classroom in a manner that is adjusted for the child with the disabilities to be able to move safely. The second step involves employing the actual strategies. These can involve buddy systems, alternate presentation strategies, or by simply having one on one interaction with the student. Sometimes simply talking to a student can help them achieve their full potential.

One thing that most educators overlook when dealing with students with physical disabilities is not just how they are taught, but how they are treated. As this website points out, many physically disabled people are very aware of their disability and are aware that they function and operate differently. With that said, they don't wish to be treated as objects or as targets for teasing. The last thing they want to be is a social outcast.

This website discusses several different strategies about how to help the student with physical disabilities to better adapt and fit into the classroom. Such as helping them feel like a normal student rather than another object in the room. After all, no student wants to be treated differently than the others.

This article breaks down dealing with physically disabled children into three different parts. Each part plays a role in aiding the child, no matter what kind of disability they have. The first is the classroom environment, which can be vital to how a child gets around as well as how they learn, since some children learn better depending on their distancing from teachers, peers, or the door. The second part is classroom aids which concerns different items or people in the class.
who assist the student, such as adults, councilors, and peers. The final part involves scheduling which concerns the timing of when children are allowed to do certain things...like a child with a physical disability maybe allowed to leave earlier than the rest of the students so they can safely navigate the hallways and classrooms in order to get out of the school.


This article actually goes the extra mile in what it is trying to get across. Each physical disability is unique and each one requires a different strategy to address it, so this article actually addresses a large majority of the most common, including blindness, palsy, and specific learning disabilities. Each one that it addresses has a very different and very unique form of treatment and strategy. Not only does it address the strategy in mind, but it also discusses what the disability in question can involve and how it affects the child.


This website is a great article full of strategies and tips for teachers when it comes to teaching students with hearing impairments. Hearing impairments are quite common, and it is important for teachers to have access to resources that are positive and helpful. This article reminds teachers that it is important to be sensitive to these students and their needs. It is difficult for teachers, when we are responsible for 20 other student’s education to give individualized attention to certain students, and this website gives plenty of ways to differentiate instruction and give equal attention to students.
**Conclusion:**

After participating in research regarding students with physical or health disabilities, we now have a better understanding of how to teach these students to the best of our abilities. There are several resources to help teachers be the best teachers they can be to these students. Since each disability is different, the strategies for teaching and accommodating these students range from assistive physical equipment to home or hospital visits.

Students with physical and health disabilities will need different accommodations than students with emotional or learning disabilities. Students with physical and health disabilities may be able to keep up with the content just like the other students, and be able to participate in all of the instruction, but cannot move around like the other students, or need hearing aids or braille to listen to and read material.

As general education teachers, we are going to have students who have very diverse disabilities and students with no disabilities at all, all meshed into the same class. We have to be able to teach all of our students the same material, at the same time. This will be difficult, and seem impossible at times, but it is our responsibility as teachers to give each student equal opportunities to learn. We must be able to accommodate to all of our students.