

# Children with Disabilities

## Overview

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 10 to 12 percent of American children have a disability. This figure does not include learning disabilities or learning differences. The inclusion of these disabilities would result in a twenty percent increase in the number of American children with a disability. Because most disabilities are not immediately apparent, children with disabilities are likely already using your library.

Children with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate education from birth through age twenty-one, by the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act, Improved (IDEA-I). In keeping with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, children may receive reasonable accommodation at school, such as elevator access, increased test-taking time, and the right to carry an asthma inhaler. Many children attend schools in self-contained classrooms with other children with disabilities. Some children attend inclusion classes; others are mainstreamed into general education settings. Some children may be home-schooled.

## Tips

- Expect every child to learn to read.
- Approach each child and teen with an open mind. Treat each patron as an individual.
- Communicate directly with the patron, rather than the caregiver or interpreter.
- Defer to the patron's preferred communication method.
- Ask, "What was the last book that you read and liked?" Don't rely on the child or teen's age, or grade, to determine reading level.
- Offer books in all types of formats, including audiobooks, pre-loaded MP3 players, electronic books, audiobook-print book sets, and large-print and Braille books. Support the choice of book.
- Be specific and concrete about behavioral expectations. Say, "Use a quiet voice like mine in the library," rather than, "Use your library voice."
- To allow the child or teen time to process information, count silently to seven before expecting a response. This works well for developing preschoolers too.
- Allow the child or teen to finish thoughts. Do not interrupt.
- Demonstrate and tell.
- Respect the patron's feelings. Do not talk about the child in front of the child without including him or her.
- Encourage attendees to feel comfortable at programs. Allow participants to hold toys, walk around, slump in a chair, or have a parent present.
- Encourage teens with disabilities to volunteer.
- Assess the child's needs, but do not inquire about the name of the specific disability.

- Remember that parents, caregivers, and siblings also have informational and emotional needs.
- Observe and learn from those persons interacting with the child or teen.
- See all of the children at any given school.
- Reach out to children who are homebound and to children in institutions.

## Resources

- [Center for Applied Special Technology \(CAST\)](#) provides information about Universal Design for Learning, which is useful for planning inclusive programs.
- [Mental Health America](#) is easy to navigate, this web site is available in English and Spanish. It specifically addresses family needs, covering mental health issues for children and youth. Includes information about local affiliates.
- [Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights \(PACER\)](#) is an advocacy group for parents and families of children with disabilities.
- The [Center for Parent Information and Resources \(CPIR\)](#) serves as a central resource of information and products to the community of Parent Training Information (PTI) Centers and the Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs), so that they can focus their efforts on serving families of children with disabilities. CPIR includes resources developed by NICHCY, the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. Information is available in English and Spanish.
- [National Lekotek Center](#) uses interactive play experiences, and the learning that results, to promote the inclusion of children with special needs into family and community life. Includes information about adaptive toys.
- [Yellow Pages for Kids](#). Find educational consultants and diagnosticians, psychologists, health-care providers, tutors, speech-language therapists, academic and occupational therapists, coaches, advocates, and attorneys for children with disabilities in the Yellow Pages for Kids. Also provides information regarding special-education schools, learning centers, treatment programs, parent groups, respite care, community centers, grassroots organizations, and government programs for children with disabilities. Information is also available in Spanish.