



## **AN INTRODUCTION TO SOME COMMON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES**

A developmental disability is a disabling condition that occurred at or before birth, in childhood or before the age of 22.

Autism is one of a group of disorders known as Autism Spectrum Disorders or ASDs. Autism is caused by a problem with the brain, and there are 3 major development differences:

- Communication
- Socialization
- Unusual Interests or Behaviors

Autism occurs in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups and is four times more likely to occur in boys than in girls.

The thinking and learning abilities of a person with autism varies. Some are gifted and some are severely challenged.

The sooner Autism is diagnosed and treatment has begun, the better the chances of the individual having a more normal life.

A child or adult with Autism might:

- Not play "pretend" games
- Not point at objects to show interest
- Not look at objects when another person points at them
- Avoid eye contact
- Prefer to be alone
- Have trouble understanding the feelings of others
- Have trouble talking about their own feelings or needs
- Prefer not to be held or cuddled
- Appear to be unaware when other people talk to them
- Not know how to talk, play, or relate to other people
- Echo or repeat words or phrases said to them
- Repeat actions over and over again
- Have trouble adapting when routine changes

- Have unusual reactions to the way things smell, taste, look, feel or sound
- Lose skills they once had

Some of the earliest written descriptions of behavior that sounds like autism dates back to the 18th century, but it was not given a name until 1943.

Causes of autism are still underdetermined. Scientists think that both genes and the environment play a role. Others believe that vaccines can be a cause.

Asperger Syndrome is another of the Autism Spectrum Disorders and is commonly known as "high-functioning" autism. This Syndrome is characterized by a higher intellectual capacity but a lower socialization capacity.

Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) is one of the most common neurobehavioral disorders of childhood and can persist through adolescence and into adulthood. Currently the causes are unknown, but genetics can be a factor.

A person with ADHD has a chronic level of inattention and impulsive hyperactivity and may struggle in important areas of life, such as peer and family relationships, and school or work performance. Some symptoms that cause impairment appear before the age of seven years.

Some of the signs of ADHD include:

- Often does not give close attention to details or makes careless mistakes in schoolwork, work, or other activities.
- Often has trouble keeping attention on tasks or play activities.
- Often does not seem to listen when spoken to directly.
- Often does not follow instructions and fails to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace.
- Often has trouble organizing activities.
- Often avoids, dislikes, or doesn't want to do things that take a lot of mental effort for a long period of time.
- Often loses things needed for tasks and activities.
- Is often easily distracted.

- Is often forgetful in daily activities.
- Often fidgets with hands or feet or squirms in seat.
- Often gets up from seat when remaining in seat is expected.
- Often runs about or climbs when and where it is not appropriate.
- Often has trouble playing or enjoying leisure activities quietly.
- Is often "on the go".
- Often talks excessively.
- Can be very impulsive (doesn't think before acting).
- Can be attracted by risky behaviors.

Cerebral Palsy is 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.

People with cerebral palsy have damage to the part of the brain that controls muscle tone, which lets you keep your body in a certain posture or position. A person with severe cerebral palsy might not be able to walk and might need lifelong care. A person with mild cerebral palsy might walk a little awkwardly, but might not need any special help.

One in every 733 babies is born with Down Syndrome, which is a chromosomal abnormality. The most common form involves an extra copy of the 21st chromosome. Down Syndrome affects people of all races and economic levels.

Women age 35 and older have a significantly increased risk of having a child with Down syndrome. Most people with Down syndrome have IQs in the mild to moderate range of mental retardation. People with Down Syndrome are at higher risk for heart disease, Alzheimer's Disease, and leukemia

A Learning Disability is a neurological disorder that has no cure and can be passed along in families. People with learning disabilities may be as intelligent or even more intelligent than others. But they may have difficulty reading, writing, spelling, reasoning, remembering, or organizing information. Dyslexia is a common form of a reading disability, where an individual may see printed words and numbers "backwards."

Mental Retardation or Intellectual Disability is a term for a person with limitations in mental functioning. People with mental retardation may take longer to learn how to communicate, develop social skills, and care for their personal needs. Mental retardation can be caused by problems during pregnancy, problems during birth, certain diseases, extreme malnutrition, or lead/mercury exposure. It is the most common developmental disability.

The muscular dystrophies (MD) are a group of more than 30 genetic diseases characterized by progressive weakness and degeneration of the skeletal muscles that control movement. Some forms of MD are seen in infancy or childhood, while others may not appear until middle age or later.

Spina Bifida a disorder involving incomplete development of the brain, spinal cord, and/or their protective coverings, caused by the failure of the fetus's spine to close properly during the first month of pregnancy. Although spinal openings can be surgically repaired, the nerve damage is permanent, resulting in varying degrees of paralysis of the lower limbs. Most individuals with spina bifida have some form of learning disability.

There are other forms of developmental disabilities, but these are some of the most common today.

*(Resources primarily include information from the Center for Disease Control and the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities. September 2008)*