



## CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

### THE IDEA

Some children cannot walk, or run, or see, or hear, or talk as well as other children. These children have disabilities. There are many reasons for this. Even if they cannot do certain things very well, they may be able to do other things as well as or better than other children. By learning more about disabilities, children who do not have disabilities can understand some of the practical problems children with disabilities have. They can help children with disabilities by being friendly and playing with them.

There are many kinds of disability, some so slight that they are hardly noticed, whereas others are very severe and prevent many activities. Sometimes a child, or adult, with one disability develops another due to a lack of suitable treatment. A child who cannot move a leg may be left in one position for a long time, and, as a result, may eventually not be able to move the leg at all. Sometimes children have more than one disability, and are said to have multiple disabilities.

With most disabilities, simple or multiple, some help is needed. The most valuable help is that given by the family so that they will not only accept and love their disabled child, but will encourage the child and praise his or her achievements. Sometimes a family is shocked when they discover that their child has a disability. Sometimes they feel ashamed, believing that people will think that they have done something wrong

and that this is a punishment. No one is to blame for a child's disability, and nobody should feel ashamed, except those who are unkind to people with disabilities.

If there is a child with a disability in the group, explain to the child what you are doing and why. This child has a lot of practical experience of disability. Involve him or her as much as possible in giving information and in decision making. Your respect for his knowledge and opinion can do a great deal to build his confidence and self-esteem.

Although children who do not have disabilities usually behave well with a child with a disability, they can sometimes be unkind and tease or bully a child who is different in some way. They may be left out of games and other activities, making them feel lonely and miserable. Children may be cruel because they are afraid of something different that they don't understand. Instead they can see what they have in common,

### Where and how these activities have been used

Many countries have recognised that children themselves can help their friends with disabilities in ways that adults cannot. For this reason, special projects to rehabilitate those with disabilities, e.g. in **India, Mexico, Kenya**, have emphasised the Child-to-Child approach.

Two important books, *Disabled Village Children* and *Nothing About Us Without Us*, by David Werner, give detailed suggestions of what can be done, and equipment which can be made for and with children with disabilities. Both of them include sections on Child-to-Child, with many excellent suggestions for activities. These books draw from practical experience in a long-running community-based project for the rehabilitation of children with disabilities in **Mexico, Project Projimo**. The children learn to deal with disability, work together to overcome their problems, and learn skills which will enable them to become as independent as possible.

be friends with them and share their play activities. In this way, they can help to make the life of children with disabilities better and enrich their own. Each of them may gain a good friend!

Children who do not have disabilities can be helped to understand children with disabilities and to include them in their activities. They can learn that children with disabilities are like other children in every way except for their disability. For some children the disability is slight, for others it is severe, and they have difficulty doing the same things as other children of the same age. They often can do other things as well or better.

Children with disabilities like to laugh, they like to play, they like to have friends, and they want to learn just like other children. In fact they need to learn even more than others as their disability may prevent them from taking certain types of jobs when they are older.



## Different kinds of disability

Children can have different kinds of disability. Children with physical disabilities often have difficulty moving about. If their legs are weak, they may have trouble walking or sitting, and may need help. Others whose arms and hands are weak may find it difficult to hold things like a cup or a pencil.

Some children with disabilities may be deaf or blind or have difficulty in seeing clearly or hearing well. Because deaf children cannot hear well they may also have difficulty in learning to speak. They are not 'dumb' or stupid. They will learn to communicate with

hearing children in many ways if hearing children make the effort to understand them. It is very important for their intellectual development that a means of communication is developed. Sign language is a very good way, but every possible means of communication including gestures, speech, lip reading, body language and pictures can help.

Some children may find it difficult to learn and understand things. It may take longer for them to learn. They can learn in small steps, but may need a lot of repetition.

Some children may have fits and fall to the ground and shake or appear to stare into space without seeing anything. It can be frightening to see someone with a fit, but the fit will soon end. The child is not in pain and will not die. Keep calm, and make sure that the person having the fit is safe and does not harm themselves. Make sure that they cannot bang against anything that might hurt them. Do not put anything in their mouth. There is no need to be afraid; the condition cannot spread from one person to another. These fits can often be reduced or stopped if the child takes regular medication.

Children with physical disabilities cannot do everything like other children. But often there are certain things that they can do better, or at least as well, as the others. For example, a child who uses crutches or a wheelchair may have very strong arms and hands. A child who is blind may be very good at hearing and identifying different sounds. A child who learns very slowly may be very kind and helpful, and a good friend. If we work together we can achieve more than by ourselves. People with disabilities are usually very happy to help if we ask them.

Not all disabilities prevent people doing what they want to do, living a full life and accomplishing great things. There are many people – teachers, politicians, religious leaders, scientists, writers and many others – who have disabilities. Some artists cannot paint with their hands, but use their feet or mouths instead. Some people with disabilities have very happy family lives and make good parents.

The children can do a role-play to illustrate the following drawing, and give other similar examples.



### Did you know?

- There are Olympic Games for people with disabilities.
- An Irish boy who cannot speak has won international prizes for writing books and poetry.
- Franklin Roosevelt, who was President of the USA, had polio and could not stand without help.
- Stevie Wonder, the famous pop singer, is blind.

### Causes of disability

Some people are superstitious about disabilities and think that they are caused by some kind of magic. This is not true. They are not caused by witchcraft, and are not a punishment for wrongdoing.

There are several main causes of disability:

- A child can be born with hearing or sight impairments, or have physical or learning disabilities because they did not develop properly before birth. This was not their mother's fault.
- Sometimes the birth of a baby is difficult and an injury may occur during the birth.
- A child's disability can be caused by

disease, e.g. polio, measles, whooping cough. Polio can cause paralysis, and measles can cause sight and hearing impairments, and learning difficulties. Most diseases which cause disability can be prevented (Activity Sheet 6.4 **Immunisation**).

- Children's disabilities are sometimes caused by accidents. They may burn themselves, fall out of trees or injure their eyes. Road accidents can damage a child's body for ever.
- A poor diet and lack of enough food, or the right kind of food, may cause disabilities in young children. In severe cases, they may cause blindness, or the brain may not develop properly, so the child has learning difficulties.

**Where possible let's prevent disability!**

### Helping children with disabilities

If we understand the different kinds of disability, and know how they are caused, it may be easier to mix with children who have a disability and learn how to work and play with them and live better together.

#### Some important things to remember:

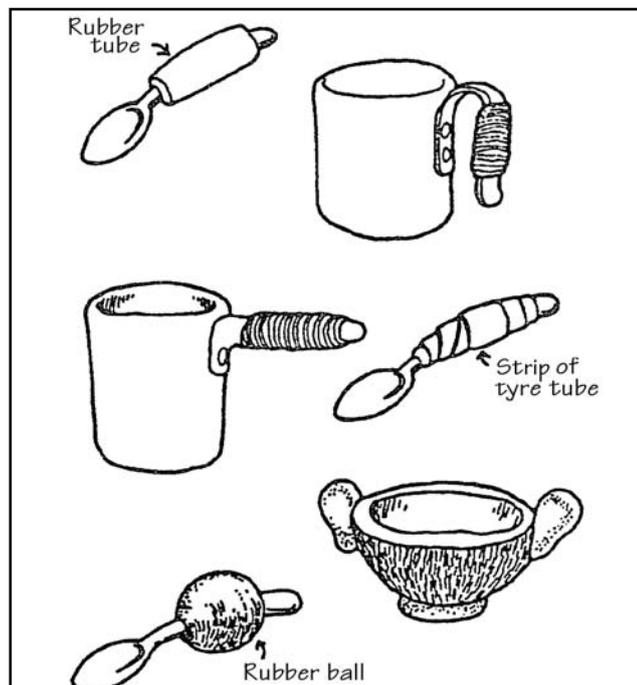
- **Give them equal chances.** Treat them as you treat any other child, being as nice or as 'nasty' as you are with others. Help them to have the same chances at school and in play. Children together can discover that life is exciting and fun.
- **Help them gain confidence.** Let them take risks like other children. If they are too protected they will always be afraid.
- **Make them feel wanted.** Concentrate on what the child can do, not on what they cannot. For example, a child with sight impairment may be very good at singing, and a child with a physical disability may be very good at maths.
- **When help is needed,** let the child with a disability help with things that they can

do and feel proud to have achieved. Children with disabilities should also have obligations just like any other children.

- **Help them to help themselves and be as independent as possible.** Don't help them with a certain job unless help is really needed. Let them do the things they can do, even if they do them slowly or not very well.
- **Include them in play activities.** Children always learn faster if they are helped by the group and if their exercises are made into games. All children learn and develop through play.



Children with weak hands may find it difficult to feed themselves because the cups and spoons they use are only made to suit ordinary gripping hands. But they might be able to feed themselves with a straw or a spoon or cup that suits their hands. The children may be able to make a suitable cup or spoon.



## Identifying the difficulties of attending schools

While some children with disabilities enter regular schools, there are many who have difficulties attending. This is often a result of poverty and family breakdown. Some children are kept at home to earn income for their family because the family sees little value or potential in education. Some who attend school may be the first generation in their families to be educated and these children tend to have high drop-out rates. Girls with disabilities are especially unlikely to start or stay in school. Integration and retention of students are issues that must be faced to ensure the rights of all. Through home visits, teachers and children can identify some of the difficulties faced and offer solutions. Here are some ways used by teachers involved with a project in Zambia:

I identified the child without a helper (someone who could walk with him to school). I went to his house, together with some pupils who had volunteered to go with me. Children volunteered to accompany the child to school and go back with him after knocking off. They agreed to do this every day.

With some of my pupils I visited the parents of a child who had difficulty walking. I advised the parents to take their child to the physiotherapist. We also visited a carpenter who made some crutches. The physiotherapist explained to the parents how to use the crutches. In the meantime, the pupils have arranged to play together with the child twice a week.

Pupils identified a child in the community who could not walk the long distance to school. I paid her a home visit with the children. After that, some of the children started working with the child at home. They wrote progress reports on their visits. I then made periodic visits to the child to check her progress.

The parents were anxious that their child with learning difficulties would be laughed at in school. We arranged for the parents of the child to visit a music teacher. The music teacher encouraged the child and then convinced the parents that the child should go to school. The children in class presented songs and artwork, which also encouraged the child and his parents. Two pupils volunteered to help the child walk to and from school.

The above, and the section on the previous page, from the inclusive education project, Mpika, Zambia, booklet on their CTC website, plus other ideas from e-net.

### **Discussing disability**

Discussions could include some of the following:

- Who runs fastest in the class? Who jumps furthest? Why can the others not run as fast or jump as far? Everyone has limitations but sometimes they are more serious, and some children can only walk with difficulty or not at all. Let the children work together to find some other limitations that they have, and perhaps find ways of overcoming them together. They will see that everyone is good at some things and less good at others.
- Do you know someone who cannot run or walk like you? Why can't they run or walk properly? Or perhaps you know someone else with another kind of disability. What kind?
- Do other children play with this child? If not, why not? Do you? Is the child able to play some of the games, or not? Why not?
- Do other children laugh at this child? Why? What is it like when other children laugh at you?
- Do you like having friends? Do you like playing with other children? How would you feel if you had a disability and had no friends? Or if you were alone at home all day by yourself?
- What can children with disabilities do better than you can? Can you think of a person with disabilities with very strong arms, or very good hearing, or a very good memory, or who can write, read or draw very well?

- How can you make life better for children with disabilities? Make a list of things you can do.
- Do you know of any people with disabilities who make a valuable contribution to your community?
- Do you know of any people with disabilities who have become famous?
- What do you think it feels like to have a disability?

## **Taking action**

### **Making a plan**

Sometimes there is a community member with a disability, or a community worker interested in disability, who would be willing to speak to the children. Adults and children with disabilities can plan an important role in raising awareness of disability.

Children can discuss ways to help children with disabilities to be happier and to do more things for themselves. They can list the children they know who have a disability, and think of ways in which they could help each one of those children. They can make a plan and then form action groups. Whenever possible, children with disabilities should be members, and parents and teachers can help to guide these groups.

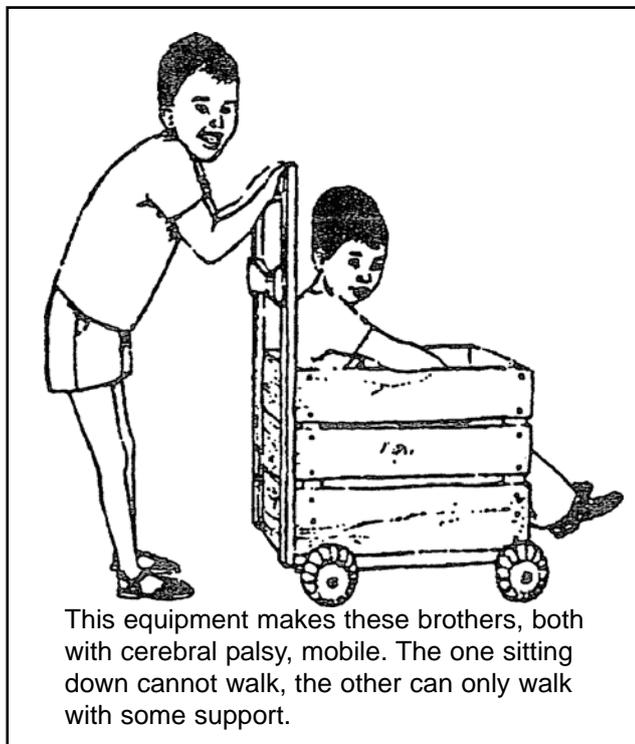
**It is important not to forget the child with a disability after a little time, or they will feel very abandoned. If a friend develops a disability your friendship is even more important to both of you.**

### **Here are some ideas for plans:**

- One or more children can make friends with a child with disabilities, and visit him or her regularly at home, to talk and play with him or her. They can get to know the family and find ways of helping.
- At school children can find out who has a disability and what kind, and they can all work and play together.
- Children with disabilities need play and adventure like all children. Children who cannot walk can still play guessing games, cards, or singing and clapping games. There are many exciting group

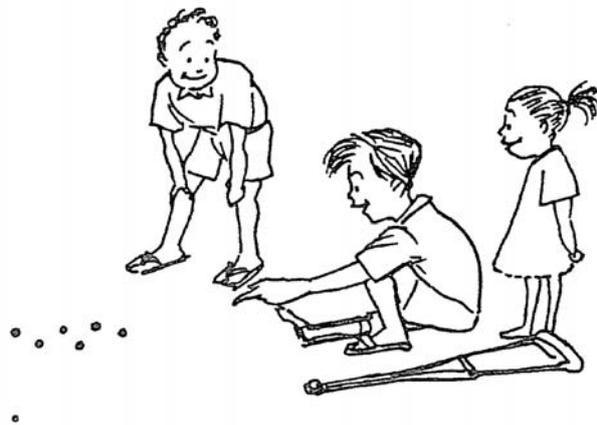
games, e.g. marbles, dominoes, card and board games, which can be played sitting down. Children who do not see well can easily play dominoes, as the numbers can be felt with the fingers. Marbles can be played on the ground. In this way, children with disabilities will not be at a disadvantage. Sighted children can read to children who do not see well. They may also enjoy creating a puppet theatre and think of many other things they can do together.

- Find a way of getting children with disabilities to school and home again, if they cannot walk or cannot see well.



This equipment makes these brothers, both with cerebral palsy, mobile. The one sitting down cannot walk, the other can only walk with some support.

- Find ways of making exercises to strengthen muscles, to improve hearing, to improve learning and memory into games. Play and doing are the best ways of learning, and children with disabilities will learn faster if the exercises they must do are made into games, or useful tasks which can be done at home.
- Make toys or equipment which children with disabilities can use, and play with them to help them get stronger. A tyre and rope, tied to a strong branch, makes a good swing. Some ideas for making a back rest, a floor seat, and a trolley can be found in Activity Sheet 6.5 about **Polio**.



- Many children with disabilities enjoy swimming. Often they can swim as well and as fast as other children, but it may be difficult for them to get in and out of the water. Children whose legs are weak or who cannot walk can be taken swimming by stronger children. They can help their friends in and out of the water.



- Give children with disabilities plenty of encouragement. Listen to them. Give them time to do things. Like all children, they must learn to help themselves. The more independent we become, the happier we are.

## Helping children with severe disabilities

Some children have very severe disabilities. They cannot move around or take part in all games. They may like to hear stories, or just have someone touch them and hold their hands. Remember that when children cannot speak or think well, it can be difficult to know what they are feeling. They may be

lonely and unhappy, and need friends who will visit, laugh with them, talk and play. Children with severe disabilities may be very intelligent, but their intelligence will not develop unless they are stimulated and given the opportunity from an early age. Ways of enabling them to go to school can completely change their lives.

Many children who cannot talk or move well are very intelligent and can think, feel and understand as well or better than other children. Try and find out what they want by looking at them, listening to them and taking notice of them.

### ***Young children with problems***

A young child may have a weak back or legs and find it difficult to sit, walk or crawl. Older children can help them to learn through play. For example, if a child cannot crawl, two children can help support the child's weight, while he or she crawls, by putting a cloth under them.



## **Follow-up**

If children have started a project with a child who has a disability, plenty of time is needed. Once each month, or every two months, the children can discuss together with the child who has the disability:

- what they have been doing
- what things have worked well
- what difficulties they have found
- how they are trying to solve those difficulties.

If they are not doing a special project, they can discuss how they are trying to change the way they think and act towards children with disabilities, both at school and in the community. Children with disabilities can join in or lead the group discussions.

## **USING THIS SHEET**

**Teachers** can:

- help by giving **all** children an equal chance of learning.
- help children to make a list of those who have disabilities and think of the ways to include them in their activities so that they can overcome their difficulties and play together. They could play all the games from the Child-to-Child Activity Sheets together.
- supervise the play activities of children, to make sure that they include children with disabilities and that they are sensitive to their feelings.
- work with parents and health and community workers to help older children to carry out an 'action plan' to include those with disabilities in all their activities.
- set up groups for parents, teachers, health workers and community workers.

**People with disabilities** themselves can help. They will have their own ideas about what should be done.

**Community workers** and **teachers** should find out where there are children with disabilities who are left alone or ignored at home. The other children can contact them and find ways of playing with them and including them in their activities.

This Activity Sheet can be used together with 1.3 **Understanding Children's Feelings**, 1.5 **A Place to Play**, 6.5 **Polio** and 5.2 **Helping Children Who Do Not See or Hear Well**.