Objective 11.5: Discuss characteristics of physical disabilities and health impairments.

It is almost impossible to describe these characteristics because there is so much variation

- Knowing underlying cause of student’s physical impairment or health condition provides limited guidance in the planning needed for special education and related services
- Some children with health conditions have chronic but relatively mild health conditions while others have extremely limited endurance and vitality requiring sophisticated medical technology
  - A given physical and health condition may take markedly different paths in the same child

  **EXAMPLE**  Treatment of cancer may prolong and enhance life of a child, lead to complete remission of disease, or have little or no positive effects on a child’s life
  - Treatment itself and its outcome will both have significant impact on when and what type of special education and related services the child needs
• As a group students with physical disabilities and health impairments perform below average on measures of social-behavioral skills

• Coping emotionally with a physical disability or a chronic health impairment presents a major problem for some children
  - Maintaining peer relationships and a sense of belonging to the group can be difficult
  - Anxiety about fitting in may be created by prolonged absences from school

• Variables
  - A physical impairment or medical condition can limit a child’s ability to engage in age-appropriate activities
  - Age of Onset
    - Some conditions are congenital while others are acquired during the child’s development as a result of illness, accident, or unknown cause
    - Teachers need to be aware of the child’s age at the time he or she acquired the physical or health impairment
      ✗ EXAMPLE A child who has not had the used of his or her legs since birth may have missed out on some important developmental experiences
Visibility

- Physical impairments and health conditions range from highly visible and conspicuous to not visible
- How children think about themselves and the degree to which others accept them often are affected by the visibility of a condition
- Visibility of some physical disabilities may cause other children and adults to underestimate child’s abilities and limit opportunities for participation
Objective 11.6: Explain educational approaches for students with physical disabilities and health impairments.

• While some students can benefit from access and benefit from education with minimal accommodations or environmental modification, the intensive health and learning needs of other students require a complex and coordinated array of specialized instruction

• **Teaming and Related services**
  - Transdisciplinary team approach has special relevance for students with physical disabilities
  - Physical therapists
    - Are involved in development and maintenance of motor skills, movement, & posture
  - Occupational therapists
    - Concerned with child’s participation in activities, especially those that will be useful in self-help, employment, recreation, communication, & aspects of daily living
  - Speech-language pathologists
    - Specialists who evaluates and treats communication disorders and swallowing problems.
Adapted physical educators

- Specialists who assist students with “gross motor delays or other disability-related difficulties that make them unable to participate productively in a regular physical education class” [http://specialchildren.about.com/od/specialeducation/g/APE.htm]

Recreation therapists

- Specialists who “use treatment, education and recreation services to help people with illnesses, disabilities and other conditions to develop and use their leisure in ways that enhance their health, functional abilities, independence and quality of life.” [http://www.recreationtherapy.com/define.html]

School nurses

Prosthetists

- Experts in the production and application of artificial body parts

Orthotists

- Specialists in the use of specialized mechanical devices to support or supplement weakened or abnormal joints or limbs

Orientation and mobility specialists

- Specialists who teach the concepts and skills necessary for students to travel safely and efficiently in their environments
Biomedical engineers
- Specialists who develop and manufacture prostheses, medical devices, diagnostic devices, drugs & other therapies

Health aides [assists with care]

Counselors and medical social workers

**Environment modifications**
- Frequently necessary to enable a student with physical and health impairments to participate more fully and independently in school
- Although barrier-free architecture is most publicly visible type of environmental modification for making community buildings and services more accessible, some of the most functional adaptations require little or no cost such as:
  - Install paper-cup dispensers near water fountains
  - Move class or activity to accessible part of school building
  - Provide soft-tip pens that require less pressure for writing
  - Provide head-mounted pointer stick and keyboard guard that enable student with limited fine-motor control to strike one computer key at a time
**Assistive technology**

- IDEA defines as both assistive technology devices and the services needed to help a child obtain and effectively use the devices
  - Individuals with physical disabilities use both low-tech assistive devices *EXAMPLE adapted eating utensils* and high-tech devices *EXAMPLE computerized synthetic speech devices*
  - Some students cannot move freely from place to place without the assistance of a mobility device
    - Adapted bicycles enable children with disabilities to enjoy riding a bicycle & also reap the health benefits
    - Advances in wheelchair design have made manual chairs lighter & stronger
  - Before purchasing and training a child to use any assistive technology device, the IEP team should carefully consider certain characteristics of the child and the potential technologies that might be selected as well as the impact of using those technologies on the child’s family
    - By performing an assessment of child’s academic skills, social skills, and physical capabilities, the IEP team can identify the goals and objectives for the technology and narrow down the kinds of devices that may be effective
    - The team should also determine the child’s preferences for certain types of technology
    - The team should consider the characteristics of potentially appropriate technologies, including availability, simplicity of operation, initial and ongoing cost, adaptability to meet the child’s changing needs, plus the device’s reliability & repair record
• **Animal Assistance**
  
  o Monkeys have been trained to serve as personal care attendants for people with disabilities
  o Guide dogs help people who are blind travel independently while service dogs assist those in wheelchairs with daily living and work-related tasks
  o Animals also have social value as companions.
  o People frequently report that their helper animals serve as ice breakers in opening up conversations

![Guide dog](image)

• **Special health care routines**
  
  o Many students with physical disabilities have health care needs that require specialized procedures such as taking prescribed medication or self-administering insulin shots, **CIC**, tracheotomy care, ventilator/respirator care, and managing special nutrition and dietary needs
    
    ▪ These special needs are prescribed in an *individualized health care plan* (**IHCP**)
- Often well-meaning teachers, classmates, and parents tend to do too much for a child with a physical or health impairment
  - It is important for them to be as independent as possible in order that have confidence and gain the skills needed
- Proper positioning, seating, and regular movement are critically important for children with physical disabilities
  - Encourages the development of muscles and bones and help maintain health skin
    - Skin care is a major concern for many children with physical disabilities
    - Caregivers should check the skin underneath braces or splints daily to identify persistent red spots that indicate an improper fit
  - To prevent the development of pressure sores and help students maintain proper seating and positioning, teachers must know how to move and transfer students with physical disabilities
- Teachers should follow routines for lifting and transferring for each child that entail standard procedures for:
  - Making contact with the child
  - Communicating what is going to happen in a manner the child can understand
  - Preparing the child physically for the transfer
  - Requiring the child to participate in the routine as much as possible
Independence and self-esteem

- All children, whether or not they face the challenges presented by a physical disability or a chronic health condition, need to develop respect for themselves and feel that they have a rightful place in their families, schools, and communities
  - Many people with disabilities report that their hardware creates a great deal of curiosity and leads to frequent, repetitive questions from strangers
    - Learning how to explain their physical disabilities or health condition and to respond to questions can be an appropriate component of the educational programs for some children
- Some self-advocacy groups operate centers for independent living, which emphasize adaptive devices, financial benefits, access to jobs, and provision of personal care attendants