

Tip Sheet 5 Library Accessibility: What You Need to Know: Children with Disabilities

Background

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that 10% to 12% of American children have a disability. This figure does not include learning disabilities/learning differences. The inclusion of these disabilities results in a rise to 20%. As most disabilities are invisible, children with disabilities are likely already using your library.

Children with disabilities are entitled to a free, appropriate education from birth through age 21, 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 self-contained classrooms with other children with disabilities. Some children attend inclusion classes; others are mainstreamed into general education settings.

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.
- Support the choice of book.
- Offer books in all types of formats including audiobooks, pre-loaded MP3 players, electronic books, audio/print book sets, and large print and braille books.
- Be specific and concrete about behavioral expectations. Say, "Use a quiet voice like mine in the library," rather than, "Use your library voice."
- Allow the child or teen time to process information, count silently to 7 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.
- Apply the three principals of universal design for learning:
 - *Multiple Means of Representation*, to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge,
 - *Multiple Means of Expression*, to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know and want,
 - *Multiple Means of Engagement*, to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation (CAST).

Tips

- Observe and learn from those persons interacting with the child or teen.
- See all of the children at a school.
- Reach out to the homebound and to children in institutions.

Resources

CAST

Provides information about Universal Design for Learning, which is useful for planning inclusive programs.

www.cast.org

Mental Health America

Easy-to-navigate, this Web site is available in English and Spanish. Specifically addresses family needs, covering mental health issues for children and youth. Includes information about local affiliates.

www.mentalhealthamerica.org

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities

A comprehensive source of information in English and Spanish about children, youth, and disabilities. Addresses medical and educational issues and research-based practices.

www.nichcy.org

National Lekotek Center

Lekotek uses interactive play experiences, and the learning that results, to promote the inclusion of children with special needs into family and community life. Include information about adaptive toys.

www.lekotek.org

Wrightslaw *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* for your state. 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 also available in Spanish.

www.yellowpagesforkids.com