

# Physical Disabilities



## Understanding Physical Disabilities

Many causes and conditions can impair mobility and movement. The inability to use legs, arms, or the body trunk effectively because of paralysis, stiffness, pain, or other impairments is common. It may be the result of birth defects, disease, age, or accidents. These disabilities may change from day to day. They may also contribute to other disabilities such as impaired speech, memory loss, short stature, and hearing loss.

People with mobility and movement impairments may find it difficult to participate when facing social and physical barriers. Quite often they are individuals of courage and independence who have a desire to contribute to the fullest level of their ability. Some are totally independent, while others may need part- or full-time assistance.

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## Ways to Help

- Build relationships of acceptance and equality by seeing beyond the disability.
- Learn about the disability and how you can help. Get to know the person and the caregiver.
- Show compassion, sensitivity, and sincerity by respecting the individual's wishes. Maintain a balance between helping and allowing the individual to grow by providing for himself or herself.

- Prepare to accommodate individuals with a physical disability before Church meetings and activities begin. This may include providing ramps, seating accommodations, access to all facilities (including the pulpit), and media equipment. Facilities should be accessible to those who use wheelchairs, braces, artificial limbs, other assistive devices, or assistive animals.
  - At least one restroom must be accessible for individuals with a variety of physical needs.
  - Sit or kneel, if necessary, to visit at a level that is comfortable for both.
  - Invite individuals with physical disabilities to participate and give service. Offer them opportunities to contribute spiritually.
  - It is OK to ask if someone would like help, but do not assist a person without his or her permission. Consider safety and liability issues.
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## **Teaching Tips**

- Talk to individuals with a physical disability just like you would talk to anyone else. Having a physical disability does not mean that an individual has an intellectual or hearing disability.
- Adapt situations to help individuals maintain self-respect. Avoid situations that may embarrass or frighten a person with a physical disability.
- Remember that participation in a classroom is important to all of God's children. People with physical disabilities can contribute as well as others.