

## DISABILITY-RELATED DEFINITIONS

1. The **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** of 1990 is a civil rights law, which makes it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of disability. It covers employment in the private and public sector, state and local governments, public accommodations, transportation and telecommunications. Although religious organizations are exempt from some requirements of the law, the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) calls upon all Catholics, at all levels, by their example and by direct advocacy, to work for the full implementation of the ADA.
2. **Angelman Syndrome** – Little known genetic disorder that results from a small deletion on chromosome 15. Early signs may include a small head size, seizures and significant delays in motor and cognitive development. The most significant characteristic is the lack of spoken language. Other traits include an awkward gait, light colored hair and eyes and a happy demeanor with frequent laughter.
3. **Asperger's Disorder (Syndrome)** – one diagnosis under the category Pervasive Developmental and the subcategory Autism Spectrum Disorder. Characterized by a lack of social skills; difficulty with social relationships; poor coordination and poor concentration; and a restricted range of interests, but normal intelligence and adequate language skills in the areas of vocabulary and grammar.
4. **Autism** – an umbrella term for a wide spectrum of disorders referred to as Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) or Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). They are a group of neurobiological disorders that affect a child's ability to interact, communicate, relate, play, imagine, and learn, and are often accompanied by extreme behavioral challenges. Individuals with autism may:
  - have a hard time communicating
  - exhibit repeated body movements (hand flapping, rocking)
  - have unusual responses to people
  - form attachments to objects
  - have resistance to change in routine
  - in some cases, exhibit aggressive and/or self injurious behavior
5. **Autism Spectrum Disorder** – refers to three diagnoses within Pervasive Developmental Disabilities: Autism, Asperger's Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). For accuracy, it is better to use the term "autism spectrum disorder," because the term autism is often used interchangeably for the three diagnoses in this group. For more specific information, see the definition of each individual diagnosis and Pervasive Developmental Disability.
6. **Blindness** refers to a visual impairment of varying degrees and conditions up to complete loss of eyesight. Legal blindness is defined as central visual acuity of 20/200 or less with corrective lenses or a visual field of 20 degrees or less. Therefore, a person with partial sight may be legally blind. For non-medical purposes, it is more important to consider the functional loss caused by blindness and what alternate ways a person can receive information not attainable through the sense of sight.
7. **Cerebral Palsy** – a group of developmental disorders of movement and posture in children and adults, causing activity restriction or disability attributed to disturbances that occurred in the fetal or infant brain. Cerebral palsy may be accompanied by a seizure disorder and by impairment of sensation, cognition, communication and/or behavior.

- 8. Childhood Disintegrative Disorder** is a rare form of Pervasive Developmental Disorder that is more prevalent in males. Three criteria for this diagnosis are:
- It begins after normal development of at least two years between 2 and 10 years old.
  - Significant loss of previously acquired skills in at least two areas: expressive or receptive language, social skills or adaptive behavior, bowel or bladder control, play, motor skills.
  - Abnormalities in at least two of these areas:
    - Social interaction
    - Communication
    - Restricted, repetitive, and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities
- 9. Chromosome 18q Syndrome** – A rare chromosomal disorder in which there is a deletion of part of the long arm (q) of chromosome 18. Disorder causes dysmyelination, a failure of the myelin sheath to form completely, thereby affecting the brain’s circuitry and impacting information transfer between nerve cells. Characteristic features include cognitive limitations; short stature; abnormalities of the skull and facial region (microcephaly, deep set eyes, prominent ears and underdeveloped midfacial regions); poor muscle tone; visual abnormalities; hearing impairment; structural heart defects; and other physical abnormalities.
- 10. Cornelia deLange Syndrome** – A rare syndrome that causes profound cognitive limitations, epilepsy, cerebral palsy and heart and respiratory complications.
- 11. Deafness** is the loss of hearing to a degree in which assistance is needed for communication. Audiologists measure deafness in terms of decibels. With normal hearing, one can hear sounds as low as 20 decibels. If one is profoundly deaf, sounds below 90 decibels cannot be heard.
- 12. Deaf** – (Capital D Deaf) refers to a deafness as a culture rather than a disability. Those who belong to this culture are prelingually deaf (deafness is present at birth or occurs before language is learned) or hard-of-hearing and use ASL as their primary mode of communication. Their visual language shapes the way they communicate, socialize and worship. The Deaf community may include hearing persons such as family members, friends and trained interpreters.
- 13. Deafblindness** is simultaneous hearing and visual impairments. The significance of this disability is affected by the severity of each sensory impairment and the time of onset of each.
- 14. Developmental Disability** is a mental and/or physical impairment, which occurs before or during birth, or is acquired before age 22; and is likely to be lifelong. Examples include: Cerebral Palsy, Spina Bifida, Down Syndrome, Autism Spectrum Disorder and Muscular Dystrophy. Note: The term *developmental disability* is not a synonym for *mental retardation* or *intellectual disability*.
- 15. Developmental Dyspraxia** – Developmental dyspraxia is a disorder characterized by an impairment in the ability to plan and carry out sensory and motor tasks. Generally, individuals with the disorder appear “out of sync” with their environment. Symptoms vary and may include poor balance and coordination, clumsiness, vision problems, perception difficulties, emotional and behavioral problems, difficulty with reading, writing, and speaking, poor social skills, poor posture, and poor short-term memory.

Although individuals with the disorder may be of average or above average intelligence, they may behave immaturely.

- 16. Down Syndrome** – chromosome disorder due to an extra chromosome (number 21). Down Syndrome causes cognitive limitations and characteristic face and multiple malformations. The chromosome abnormality affects both the physical and intellectual development of the individual. There are risks of heart malformations, duodenal atresia (part of small intestine not developed) and leukemia.
- 17. Epilepsy** is a seizure disorder in which there is a sudden, brief change in how the brain works, which may cause a physical convulsion, minor physical signs, thought disturbances, or a combination of symptoms.
- 18. Fragile X** – A family of genetic conditions which can impact individuals and families in various ways. The genetic conditions are related in that they are all caused by gene changes in the same gene called the FMR1 gene. Fragile X syndrome (FXS) is the most common cause of inherited mental impairment. This impairment can range from learning disabilities to more severe cognitive or intellectual disabilities. FXS is the most common known cause of autism or “autistic-like” behaviors. Symptoms can include characteristic physical and behavioral features and delays in speech and language development.
- 19. Hard-of-Hearing** is the term used to describe a degree of hearing loss ranging from mild to profound for which a person usually receives some benefit from amplification.
- 20. Intellectual Disability (formerly known as Mental Retardation)** is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning and in adaptive behavior as expressed in conceptual, social, and practical adaptive skills; and originates before age 18 (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities). Note: *Mental retardation* is still used as a diagnostic legal term by psychologists influencing effects like public education services and death penalty sentences.
- 21. Klinefelter Syndrome or XXY Males** – Males having extra chromosome. Symptoms include occasional breast enlargement, lack of facial and body hair, rounded body type, tend to be overweight and may be infertile. Although they are not cognitively limited, most XXY males have some degree of language impairment. They often learn to speak much later than other children and have difficulty learning to read and write. The majority tend to have some degree of difficulty with language throughout their lives.
- 22. Lissencephaly** – A brain malformation characterized by microcephaly and the lack of normal convolutions (folds) in the brain. The term means “smooth brain.” Caused by a defect in the process in which nerve cells move from their place of origin to their permanent location. Children with lissencephaly may have unusual facial appearance, difficulty swallowing and severe psychomotor retardation. Anomalies of the hands, fingers, or toes, muscle spasms and seizures may also occur. Prognosis varies depending on degree of brain malformation.
- 23. Mental Illness** is a brain disorder that impacts the way a person thinks, behaves, and interacts with other people (American Psychiatric Association). Among the most prevalent conditions are personality disorders, major depression, bipolar, schizophrenia, dementia and anxiety disorders.
- 24. Microcephaly** – Abnormally small head due to failure of brain growth. Often equated with developmental delays and cognitive limitations, however, not all children with microcephaly have cognitive limitations. Development of motor skills and speed may be delayed and convulsions may also occur.

**25. Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD)** is a severe impairment in three areas of development: social skills, language development, and behavior, which includes the presence of stereotyped behavior, interests and activities. There are five diagnoses under this category. The three most common, which are referred to as “Autism Spectrum Disorders,” are: Autism, Asperger’s Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS). The other two diagnoses are “Childhood Disintegrative Disorder” and “Rett’s Disorder.” There may be a co-existing intellectual disability, but this is not part of the definition. As a development disorder, there will be peaks and valleys of ability, in contrast to an intellectual disability, in which there is a consistent level of disability. For more specific information, see the definition of each individual diagnosis.

For accuracy, it is better to use the term “autism spectrum disorder,” because the term autism is often used interchangeably for the three diagnoses in the group. The other two diagnoses within the category PDD should be referred to by their name for clarity.

**26. Pervasive Developmental Disorder Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS)** is one diagnosis under the category Autism Spectrum Disorder that incorporates the same three areas of concern: social, language and stereotypic behaviors, but not enough of them to have one of the other diagnoses under PDD category.

**27. Rett’s Disorder** is a rare form of Pervasive Developmental Disorder that is only recorded in females. After normal development, sometime between five months and four years old, these symptoms are presented:

- Deceleration of head growth
- Loss of previously acquired hand skills and addition of stereotyped hand movements
- Loss of social engagement early in the presentation of the disorder, though this may develop again later
- Poorly coordinated gait or trunk movements
- Severely impaired language skills

**28. Smith-Magenis Syndrome** – A developmental disorder that affects many parts of the body. The major features of the condition include mild to moderate cognitive limitations, delayed speech and language skills, distinctive facial features, sleep disturbances, and behavioral problems.

**29. Visual Impairment** is a loss of vision up to an including total blindness. See definition of blindness above. The term visual impairment may be used interchangeably with vision loss, partially sighted and low vision.

**30. Williams Syndrome** – Rare genetic disorder characterized by physical and developmental disabilities; characteristic facial appearance; overly friendly personality; developmental delay, learning disabilities and attention deficit. It has been noted that the Williams Syndrome child tests “like a child with intellectual limitations, talks like the gifted child, behaves like a disturbed child and functions like a learning disabled child.”

**Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)/  
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)**

3 characteristics:

- Inattention – the most basic trait is a lack of focused attention
  
- Impulsivity – a general lack of self control
  
- Hyperactivity – overactive

Other Characteristics:

- Disorganization
- Poor peer/sibling relations
- Aggressive behavior
- Poor self-concept/self-esteem
- Sensation-seeking behavior
- Daydreaming
- Poor coordination
- Memory problems
- Persistent obsessive thinking
- Inconsistency, the “hallmark” characteristic