



## Information about Physical Disabilities

### What is a physical disability?

A physical disability is any condition that permanently prevents normal body movement and/or control. There are many different types of physical disabilities.

### Causes of physical disabilities

There are many different causes for physical disabilities. These include:

- *Genetic* Disorders are inherited, such as muscular dystrophy
- *Congenital* conditions present at birth, such as spina bifida
- *illness* affecting the brain, nerves or muscles, such as meningitis
- *Injury* to Spinal Cord or Brain



### Types of Physical Disabilities

There are many different types for physical disabilities. These include:

- **Muscular Dystrophies** When a child has muscular dystrophy, this means that the muscle fibers in the body gradually weaken over time. Children can have different types of muscular dystrophy. The most common type is Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy which occurs only in boys. All types of muscular dystrophy are genetic even though other family members may not have the condition.
- **Acquired Brain and Spinal Injuries** Physical disabilities may result from permanent injuries to the brain, spinal cord or limbs that prevent proper movement in parts of the body.
- **Spina Bifida** Sometimes, a baby's spinal cord (the nerves that run down the spine) do not develop normally during pregnancy. When this happens, the child can have a physical disability called spina bifida. The type and amount of disability caused by spina bifida will depend upon the level of the abnormality of the spinal cord. Children with spina bifida may have partial or full paralysis of the legs.
- **Cerebral Palsy** is caused by damage to the parts of the brain which control movement during the early stages of development. In most cases, this damage occurs during pregnancy. However, damage can sometimes occur during birth and from brain injuries in early infancy (such as lack of oxygen from near drowning, meningitis, head injury or being shaken). Children with cerebral palsy may have difficulties with:
  - ♦ posture (the ability to put the body in a chosen position and keep it there)
  - ♦ movement of body parts or the whole body
  - ♦ muscle weakness or tightness
  - ♦ involuntary muscle movements (spasms)
  - ♦ balance and coordination
  - ♦ talking and eating.
- **Multiple Disabilities** Some children with physical disabilities will have other disabilities, such as intellectual, visual or hearing impairments. They may also have communication difficulties or other medical conditions such as epilepsy or asthma. When a child has several different types of disability, professionals talk about multiple disabilities rather than listing separate conditions.