

Resource Article

Children with Disabilities

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About 10 percent of the world's population (650 million) is disabled. One in every 10 children has a disability! Sadly only 2–3 percent of these children will receive any education or have a chance for a hopeful future.

All people are created in God's image. All children with disabilities should be loved as God's precious children. They should be nurtured and accepted.

What Is a Disability?

Disabilities can be physical or mental. They can be mild or severe. They can be temporary or permanent. No matter what kind they are, disabilities affect children's lives. These disabilities also affect the children's families and communities. This is especially true if the children live where there are fewer resources available for them.

Be careful about how you refer to a disabled child. It is important that the disability is not what defines the child. First and foremost, he is loved by his Heavenly Father.

Causes of Disabilities

Many things cause disabilities. Some children are born with disabilities, such as Down syndrome. Some disabilities are caused by poor prenatal care or by birth complications. For example, a child may have disabilities due to being born prematurely or born with the umbilical cord around her neck. These types of disabilities include mental retardation and cerebral palsy.

Children can also be harmed by not receiving certain vaccinations, such as for measles or polio. There are also preventable diseases, such as a vitamin A deficiency, that can harm a child. Malnutrition and long-term famine can harm the normal growth of a child. Children can be hurt in accidents. Lack of clean water and poor sanitation are also harmful.

Needs of Children with Disabilities

All children have similar basic needs. They need and deserve food, shelter, education, and health care. They should be loved and accepted, and they should be treated with respect and dignity. They should be allowed to participate fully in their communities, and they should be able to help make decisions about their lives. These statements are true for every child, including those with disabilities.

Children with disabilities also have additional, unique needs. They should be provided with adequate resources to meet these needs whenever possible.

How to Help Children with Disabilities

Children with disabilities are vulnerable to abuse, and they are often rejected by their communities. In many places, they are abandoned or placed in large, overcrowded institutions where their needs cannot be met.

If possible, caregivers should be trained to meet the special needs of children with disabilities. Do your best to ensure that the disabled child has the equipment, rehabilitation, and education that are required. Whenever possible, teach the child something that will help her to get a job.

If possible, seek counselling to help affected children deal with their losses and disabilities. For example, if a child loses his leg, he may feel rejected by his family and community. But he is still special to God. Work in your church and community to encourage acceptance of people with disabilities. Try to educate local churches about how God views children with disabilities. Encourage the families of disabled children to love, care for, and support these precious and special children.

Do not ignore the huge issues that often cause disability and hardship for children. Christians need to be involved. Work to end child labour. Support immunization of infants and children. Make efforts to improve health care for pregnant women. Coordinate the removal of land mines from fields. Do as much as you can to protect the health and welfare of children in your community and your country.

We can address these injustices at many levels. With our advocacy and support as caregivers, and with education and vocational opportunities, children with disabilities can learn and reach their God-given potential. They can lead meaningful lives. They can be integrated into their communities. They can be employed and contribute to their society.