

PHYSICAL IMPAIRMENT

Produced as part of the *Toolkit for Disability-Inclusive Education - Fiji*

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Every person has the right to early childhood education, primary and secondary education and further education (Fiji Constitution)

All children should be given the opportunity to learn together wherever possible, regardless of difficulties, disabilities or differences (Fiji Ministry of Education Policy on Special and Inclusive Education)

Physical impairments are difficulties in moving parts of the body. This can include difficulties with large movements such as walking, bending, reaching, sitting and standing, as well as smaller movements using the hands. They can be related to a number of different health conditions, such as spinal injury, muscular dystrophy, club foot, traumatic brain injury, cerebral palsy or burns, amongst many others.

Many children with physical impairments do not have any difficulty learning and the only special needs are related to movement of the body, such as assistance getting to and from school, getting up steps or with smaller movements such as holding a pencil. These difficulties can all be assisted. Simple adaptations can be made, such as wrapping cloth around a spoon handle or a pencil to make grip easier; building a rail or ramp to assist in going up steps; or using a wheelchair or crutches.

Physiotherapists, Community Rehabilitation Assistants and families are important in improving or maintaining movement, strength, coordination and function. This can prevent deformities, which increase difficulties in functioning.

Who can help? Physiotherapists, Community Rehabilitation Assistants, CWM Hospital, district hospitals, teachers. Wheelchairs and other mobility devices are available through the Spinal Injury Association (Suva) and through CWM hospital.

Signs of physical impairments can include difficulties with:

- Co-ordination, strength and balance.
- Walking, running, sitting upright, lifting, carrying.
- Muscle tightness (spasticity) or floppiness (flaccidity).
- Fine movement skills e.g. doing up buttons, grasping objects, using a pen or pencil.
- Completing functional tasks e.g. getting changed, getting lunch out of bag.
- Feeling or sensation e.g. identifying hot from cold, being aware of touch.
- Knowing the position of their body in space e.g. being able to walk around objects, through doorways.

Families should provide a stimulating and supportive home environment, engaging the child in physical games and household responsibilities. Some ideas for improving physical function are: ball games, dancing, obstacle courses, or imitating the movement of different animals.