



INCLUSIVE 4-H: VISUAL, HEARING, AND SPEECH DISABILITIES

Visual disabilities, hearing disabilities, and speech disorders may be present individually or in conjunction with each other or other disabilities. Each condition is unique and will affect individuals in different ways.

VISUAL DISABILITY

Visual disability is defined as severe or complete loss of vision. A person with a vision disability is someone whose vision negatively impacts their everyday tasks even with correction, medicine, or surgery. People are considered legally blind if they have a visual acuity of 20/200 or more and/or have a field of vision that is 20 degrees or less. Severe visual disability is defined as a visual acuity between 20/70 and 20/200 and/or a field of vision of 30 degrees or less.

A **visual acuity** of 20/200 means that in order for the individual to see something that people without a visual disability would be able to see from 200 feet away, they would have to be within 20 feet of it.

The **field of vision** for someone without a visual disability is 180 degrees. Loss of the field of vision can occur centrally (impairment of what is seen in the center of either eye) or peripherally (what is seen from the side).

Visual disabilities may result from congenital defects, eye diseases, or injuries to the eye. There are different classifications of blindness and visual disability. Few people are considered completely blind, as many who are classified as "blind" still have some usable vision.

HEARING DISABILITY

Hearing disability is the loss or absence of the ability to hear some or all sounds. There are different types of hearing disability that can be acute (occur suddenly) or insidious (occur gradually) and may be temporary or permanent. There are many causes for hearing disability, and a disability can occur before birth or at any point in a person's life. Hearing disability can range from very mild, to almost imperceptible, to complete loss. Some types of hearing disability may be able to be corrected through surgery and/or special hearing devices, such as cochlear implants, which can improve hearing.

There are many different forms of communication used by those with hearing disabilities. Some people may be able to communicate through speaking and reading lips, especially if they lost their hearing after developing speech (post-lingual). People whose hearing disability occurred at birth or during infancy (pre-lingual) may have limited to no speech capabilities. Others may communicate using sign language. This can be challenging in hearing communities where most people do not understand sign language. Many people with hearing disabilities will use a combination of sign language and speech. Writing and communication devices can also be used by those with hearing disabilities.

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DISORDERS

Speech and language disorders are a grouping of disorders that involve problems in communication. Speech disorders refer to difficulties producing speech sounds or problems with voice quality. Language disorders refer to impairment in the ability to understand and/or use words in context either verbally, nonverbally, or both. These disorders range in severity from sound substitutions to the inability to comprehend or use language. Speech and language disorders can have various causes including hearing loss, neurological disorders, brain injury, and physical disabilities, among others. There are multiple types of speech and language disorders.

Someone with speech problems may:

- Not say sounds clearly
- Have a raspy or hoarse voice
- Repeat sounds or pause when speaking, called stuttering

Someone with a language disorder may have problems:

- Understanding
- Talking
- Reading
- Writing

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS

- Have contact information for parents or guardians and the member's doctor in accessible places. An example of this would be behind the child's nametag and in the medical forms box in the main office at 4-H events. This form should include information such as what kinds of medications the child is taking, allergies, if any adaptive devices are used, and other health conditions.
- Vision disabilities, hearing disabilities, and speech and language disorders vary in severity, type, and treatment. Visit with the member and his or her parents about the member's needs.
- Understand that some people may not feel comfortable talking about certain aspects of their condition or disability. Do not force someone to answer questions that make them uncomfortable. Remind them that any information they share is voluntary, confidential and not required.
- Consider offering training to 4-H volunteers about interacting with 4-H members who have medical conditions and disabilities.
- If requested, allow another 4-H member or family member to help with communication and/or navigation in the environment during 4-H events and activities.

- Having access to adaptive communication devices might be useful for children with hearing disabilities and/or speech and language disorders. Consider collaborating with your local high school special education program or disability resource center in finding a device that would work for your needs.
- Be alert to any other students who may not understand the child who has one of these disabilities. Put a stop to any bullying attempts made by other children, and help these children understand how we can all support one another.
- When creating workshops, events, and programming, always ask if there are access needs to be considered and provide a contact name/number/email to request those ahead of time.

VISUAL DISABILITY TIPS

- Questions to be asked include:
 - a. What information is helpful to understand your disability?
 - b. In what format do you prefer your materials to be provided?
 - c. What do you need access to for an accessible 4-H experience?
- Educational materials may need to be transferred to a different format (audio, large print, braille or electronic) for use by the member with a visual disability.
- Children with visual disabilities may use different methods to navigate the physical environment. This may include a cane, service animal (dog), or sighted guide. Take the individual's choices into account when planning events.
- If the child uses a service animal (dog), educate other members about service animals and that this particular animal is working and should not be engaged with unless permission is granted by the owner. Limit the presence of other animals that might interfere with the service animal, such as untrained dogs.

HEARING DISABILITY TIPS

- Questions that can be asked include:
 - a. What information is helpful to understand your disability?
 - b. Do you use any types of technology or devices to support communication?
 - c. What is your preferred method of communication?
- The child may wish to use an interpreter. It is best to let the child and his or her family choose the interpreter.
- If a child chooses to use an interpreter, familiarize yourself with interpreting agencies in your area.
- Learn some basic sign language and teach it to 4-H volunteers and/or 4-H members. This can create a more inclusive environment for the member with a hearing disability and provide a learning opportunity for others.

SPEECH & LANGUAGE DISORDER TIPS

- Members with speech and language disorders should not be discouraged from giving oral presentations. Giving oral presentations is an excellent way for a member to improve his or her speech and language skills.
- If the child is uncomfortable giving oral presentations, find other ways for members to relay their accomplishments in 4-H, such as using a book containing photos or stories.
- Keep in mind that some speech and language disorders worsen in stressful situations.
- Some situations such as project judging may be challenging for members with speech and language disorders. Some children with speech and language disorders can communicate by pointing to words or photos in a book. In this case, work with the member and his or her family to create a book with some pictures or words that might be used in 4-H situations.
- Questions that can be asked include:
 - a. How do you prefer to communicate?
 - b. Are there situations in which you feel more/less comfortable communicating?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- More information about vision and hearing disabilities can be found at www.who.int
- More information about speech and language disorders can be found at <https://www.asha.org/public/speech/disorders/>
- Links active as of March 2021.

Updated March 2021 by Molly Bull Childers. Reviewed by Mandie Waling, Purdue Disability Resource Center. Adapted from original resources developed by: Patricia Tatman, Department of Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Wyoming.

Visit us at purdue.ag/inclusive4h for more information!



Extension - 4-H Youth
Development

