

ABOUT CEREBRAL PALSY



Cerebral palsy is a broad term that refers to a group of disabilities or disorders affecting a person's movement, coordination, muscle control and tone, reflexes, posture and balance.

It is one of the most common physical disabilities in Australia.

Each learner with cerebral palsy is a unique individual. Educators and leaders who support learners with cerebral palsy should make sure adjustments to their learning and environment are tailored to their needs. When you understand the impact of cerebral palsy on the individual learner, you'll be better able to adjust to those needs.

See the online practice guides to find out more:
edi.sa.edu.au/practiceguidance



**Government
of South Australia**

Department for Education

Understanding cerebral palsy

Cerebral palsy results from damage or injury during pregnancy, birth or shortly after birth. Impaired movement can affect the arms or legs, with some forms also affecting the trunk, face and mouth. The most common form in South Australia is more pronounced on one side of the body (hemiplegia), and the next most common form affects the legs more than the arms (diplegia). More rarely, it may affect both sides of the body (quadriplegia).

It is not degenerative; this means cerebral palsy does not increase in severity over time. However, some common symptoms might, while others might improve.

Cerebral palsy and other conditions

There are many conditions commonly identified or diagnosed in children who have cerebral palsy. They may also require adjustments to ensure learners access and participate on the same or equal basis as their peers.

In South Australia, the most common disorders and disabilities diagnosed in children with cerebral palsy include:

- mild-severe intellectual disability
- vision impairment
- epilepsy
- speech impairment, including complex communication needs.

Impacts of cerebral palsy on learning

In a learning environment, learners can experience:

- difficulty moving around the class or between classrooms and learning environments
- difficulty grasping, holding, gripping tools or implements with precision
- weariness from maintaining posture
- difficulties or an inability to speak with their teachers, support people, and peers - causing isolation and frustration and potential behavioural issues.

Strengths of learners with cerebral palsy

Include:

- expressive abilities and enthusiasm when engaged in preferred activities
- resilience and self-advocacy
- perseverance, resilience, a sense of humour, cheekiness, and desire to have fun with their peers.

CEREBRAL PALSY ADJUSTMENTS

EXAMPLES OF ADJUSTMENTS



Setting tasks and activities

- Learn each learners profile and introduce adjustments for any co-existing disability or learning. If there are complex communication needs, use the practice guidance available on EDi.
- Provide group discussion time, so that learners can discuss problems or questions with their peers and build confidence answering to the class.
- Allow extra time in tasks for learners to rest when exhausted by physical exertion - both expected and uncontrolled. Even holding posture can be tiring for those with cerebral palsy.



Environmental

- Ensure modifications such as grab rails or ramps are installed to enable access to all facilities - see EDi practice guidance for supporting learners with physical disabilities.
- Keep areas clear and free of clutter or furniture to make movement with mobility devices easier and safer.
- Make classrooms and learning spaces safe for learners to transition before others, giving them more time to adjust to new environmental settings.



Movement

- Allow more time transitioning between tasks; pre-plan all movement to ensure it is necessary and accessible.
- Read reports shared by allied health care providers with clear descriptions of physical limitations and adjustments to support learners to engage with a range of physical activities.
- Plan rest breaks for all lessons; fine motor skills can be just as exhausting as big movement, especially when precision is wanted (e.g., art, writing).



Social development and emotional wellbeing

- Encourage active participation in social activities as early as possible, to support forming friendships.
- Explicitly teach the values of kindness and draw connections based on interests which might not be immediately visible.
- In teacher directed play or social interactions, rotate roles fairly and equitably with a focus on leadership roles. This can create space for learners with cerebral palsy to practice being leaders and advocates for themselves and others.