

Introduction to Disabilities

Introduction to Disabilities – Study Notes

1. What Is a Disability?

Definition	Key Points
Medical Model	Views disability as a problem located in the individual's body or mind that needs treatment or cure.
Social Model	Considers disability the result of societal barriers (physical, attitudinal, institutional) that limit participation.
Biopsychosocial Model	Integrates medical and social perspectives; disability arises from the interaction of health conditions, personal factors, and the environment.

2. Types of Disabilities

Category	Examples	Typical Functional Areas Affected
Physical / Mobility	Cerebral palsy, spinal cord injury, muscular dystrophy, amputation	Movement, balance, dexterity, stamina
Sensory	Vision loss, blindness, hearing loss, deafness	Seeing, hearing, spatial orientation
Intellectual / Developmental	Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, intellectual disability	Learning, reasoning, communication, adaptive skills
Psychiatric / Mental Health	Depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, PTSD	Mood regulation, perception, behavior, social interaction
Chronic / Health-Related	Diabetes, epilepsy, multiple sclerosis, chronic pain	Energy levels, pain management, daily routine
Multiple/Complex	Combination of any of the above (e.g., a person with visual impairment and autism)	Overlapping functional domains

3. Core Concepts & Terminology

Term	Meaning
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Accessibility	Design of products, environments, and services that can be used by all people, regardless of ability.
Inclusion	Full participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of life (education, work, community).
Reasonable Accommodation	Adjustments or supports that enable a person with a disability to perform a job or access services, without causing undue hardship.
Universal Design	Creating spaces and products that are usable by the widest range of people without the need for adaptation.
Assistive Technology (AT)	Devices or software that help individuals perform tasks (e.g., screen readers, wheelchair, communication boards).
Person?First Language	"Person with a disability" (emphasizes the individual before the condition).
Identity?First Language	"Disabled person" (used when the individual prefers it; respects disability as part of identity).

4. Legal & Policy Framework (U.S. focus, but similar principles exist globally)

Law / Convention	Main Purpose
Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) – 1990	Prohibits discrimination in employment, public services, public accommodations, and telecommunications.
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – 1975 (reauthorized 2004)	Guarantees free appropriate public education (FAPE) and individualized education programs (IEPs).
Rehabilitation Act – Section 504	Bars discrimination in programs receiving federal funds; requires reasonable accommodations.
UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) – 2006	International treaty promoting, protecting, and ensuring full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by persons with disabilities.

5. Barriers to Inclusion

Barrier Type	Examples	Strategies to Reduce
Physical	Inaccessible buildings, lack of ramps, narrow doorways	Universal design, ramps, elevators, accessible restrooms

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Barrier Type	Examples	Strategies to Reduce
Communication	No sign?language interpreters, lack of captions,	