## Personal Development

# Experiencing Disabilities

**TIME FRAME**
This lesson is designed for a group meeting between 30 and 60 minutes.

**BACKGROUND**
Every day children encounter people with various disabilities. Help them develop a positive attitude towards these conditions by temporarily experiencing them for themselves. Encourage the group to find out what it's like to be blind, deaf, and physically disabled. Encourage a feeling of respect and admiration rather than sympathy; emphasize that people with handicaps can do more things than they can't do.

**LIFE SKILL AREAS**
The group games, discussions, and role playing activities will help develop social and decision making skills. Eye-hand coordination and large motor skills will be developed by participation in the exercises.

**IDEAS FOR VOLUNTEERS**
*Try these suggestions:*
• Choose one or two of the following activities from each section.
• Try to create appropriate atmosphere by decorating the room with posters and props, using costumes related to the activity, pre-meeting preparation by the 4-H members, thinking about special seating arrangements and background music.

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ALABAMA COOPERATIVE Extension SYSTEM

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# GETTING STARTED

**ACTIVITY:** *Experiencing Blindness*
(5 - 7 minutes)

**Materials:** eyeglasses, bag of common objects (spoon, pencil, paper clip, etc.); three underwater face masks or goggles - leave one as it is, cover one with wax paper, and cover the third with black construction paper.
Show the children the eyeglasses. Ask if they know what they are for and if they know anyone that has them. Pass the glasses around and ask if they can think of other things that help our vision (binoculars, contact lenses, a magnifying glass, etc.). Explain that some people cannot see well enough to read or even see faces. People who can't see are blind. Introduce the goggles to the group and invite the children to try to identify objects by looking through each pair of goggles. When the children discover they have no vision with the black goggles, ask them if they can identify the objects they feel. Explain that this is how people who are blind are able to do many things. Encourage each child to experience the varying degrees of blindness and then discuss these questions:

- What could you see when you looked out of the goggles with wax paper on them?
- Do you think you could get dressed, eat, and go to school if your vision was like that?
- How did it feel when you had the black goggles on?
- What do you think you would have to do differently if you were blind?

**Application**: Encourage the children to be aware of people with blindness in their community. What kinds of things do they have to help them? Do they have white canes or a guide dog?

**ACTIVITY:** *What Is Braille?*
(5 - 7 minutes)

**Materials:** book printed in Braille (check the local library, community agencies for the blind, or borrow one from a friend who is blind), Braille alphabet cards (write for free cards to e.g. Vision Center of Central Ohio, 1393 N. High Street, Columbus, Ohio 43201), paper, glue, and dried peas.
Show the children the Braille book; give each child an alphabet card. Explain that people who are blind can read by feeling the raised dots. Encourage them to feel the raised dots and trace the letters of their name. Pass out the paper, glue, and dried peas.
Invite the children to use their charts to create their names or a special message in Braille.

**Application**: Ask the children to look for examples of Braille signs in their community.

**ACTIVITY**: Walk with Me (7 - 9 minutes)

**Materials**: chairs and tables or other furniture arranged in an unfamiliar pattern.
Demonstrate to the children how to correctly guide a person who is blind when walking (the blind person holds onto the sighted person by linking arms and holding onto the sighted person's lower arm). Ask for a volunteer.
Ask the volunteer to close their eyes (blindfolds are not recommended) and pretend they cannot see. Walk around the room carefully, describing to the child where things are located or if there are steps or other obstacles. Let the children be a sighted guide for a friend who is "blind" and then reverse the roles. Caution them to be very careful and to carefully guide their friend through the maze of furniture. After each child has had an opportunity to experience both roles, ask these questions:

- How did it feel to be guided?
- Did you trust your sighted guide?
- Did you ever open your eyes?
- Was it difficult to be the guide?

**Application:** Ask the children to look for special traffic signals in their community that are designed to make it safer for people who are blind to cross the street.

## DIGGING DEEPER

**ACTIVITY:** *Finger Painting in The Dark*
(4 - 6 minutes)

**Materials:** newspaper, finger paint, spoons, finger paint paper, and blindfolds.
Spread the newspaper out. Give each child a blindfold, (or if they would rather, they can close their eyes) and a piece of finger paint paper. Help them spoon out paint onto their papers using no vision. Let them paint. Encourage them to pay attention to how it feels and smells. Ask them to try and make a picture of a recognizable object such as a house or face. Have them look at their picture. Can they identify it? Can anyone else?

**Application**: Encourage the children to be aware of all of their senses. How many things can they hear or smell? How many different textures can they feel?

**ACTIVITY:** *What Did You Say?*
(4 - 6 minutes)

**Materials:** none.
Ask the children to imagine what it would be like if they could not hear. Explain that people who cannot hear are deaf. Some people who are deaf can be helped with hearing aids; some use sign language; and some can read lip movements. Ask the children to watch as you "speak" and see if they can understand what you are saying. Mouth each child's first and last name. Exaggerate the movement of your lips and tongue. Try mouthing song titles or nursery rhymes everyone is familiar with to see if they can "read your lips." Some words look the same as others when they are mouthed. Try this experiment to illustrate that reading lips is not an easy task. Mouth the words "olive juice." What does it look like you are saying? Most will probably guess that you are saying "I love you!"

**Application**: Ask the children to turn down the volume the next time they watch television. Can they tell what the characters are saying?

**ACTIVITY**: *Communicating with Sign Language* (5 - 7 minutes)

**Materials**: an American Sign Language (ASL) alphabet chart, pattern for "I Love You" in ASL, scissors, and markers.
American Sign Language is used to communicate with people who cannot hear. There are signs for most words and an alphabet for finger spelling names or uncommon words. Show the children how to sign the letters of the alphabet using the chart. Help them finger spell their names. Show them the sign for "I love you." Give each child an outline of the sign to cut out and decorate.

**Application**: Ask the children to share their new sign with their families.

## LOOKING WITHIN

**ACTIVITY:** *Physical Disabilities - What Are They?* (5 - 7 minutes)

**Materials:** several pairs of garden gloves, a variety of "construction" toys such as building blocks, train tracks, or puzzles, coloring books, and crayons.
Explain to the children that some people have physical disabilities. This means that some parts of their body aren't able to work very well, or maybe not even at all. Some people are born with disabilities and some people become sick or injured, which leaves them with a physical disability. Stimulate discussion by asking these questions:

- Can you think of any physical disabilities that involve the arms or legs?
- How would having this kind of disability prevent a person from doing anything?
- What could this person do or use to help them do things that they need to do?

Tell the children that you are going to experience what it would be like to not have very much control over your hands. Put on the garden gloves and show them how it is difficult to do even very simple things such as tying a shoe or buttoning a button. Let each child try to play with the various toys while wearing gloves.

Ask them to draw in the coloring book and write their names with crayons. Ask them to think of other things that would be difficult to do.

**Application**: Ask the children to think of ways people with a physical disability accomplish goals and contribute to their families or schools.

**ACTIVITY:** *Wheelchair Mobility*
(7 - 9 minutes)

**Materials:** a borrowed wheelchair.
Ask the children if they know anyone who has a wheelchair or if they have ever seen anyone use one. Sit in the wheelchair and demonstrate how to go forward, backward, turn corners, and lock the brakes. Ask if they can think of types of disabilities that would make a wheelchair necessary. Let the children take turns maneuvering the wheelchair? Encourage them to try it in the following places:

- entering or exiting the building
- sitting at a table
- maneuvering around furniture
- going down a hall and around corners
- using the restroom
- using a drinking fountain

Ask them to think about things people who use wheelchairs have to deal with everyday. How would their lives be different if they used a wheelchair? What changes at home and school would have to be made?

**Application**: Ask the children to look in their community for examples of "wheelchair accessibility."

**ACTIVITY:** *Handicapped Accessible Scavenger Hunt* (7 - 9 minutes)

**Materials**: public place with handicapped accessible signs, parking spaces, etc. (optional).
Take the children through a public building, school, restaurant or shopping center, or have them think of places they have seen examples of handicapped accessibility, such as:

- ramps
- handicapped parking spaces
- automatic door openers
- handicapped accessible restrooms
- handicapped license plates or identification in cars
- special spaces for wheelchairs in movie theaters or churches

Are there places in your community that a person in a wheelchair could not go? Where are they? What kinds of barriers are there for wheelchairs?

**Application**: Encourage the children to look for "handicapped accessible" places everywhere they go.

## Reaching Conclusions

**ACTIVITY:** *Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*
(3 - 5 minutes)

**Materials**: none.
Sing this old favorite song through once regularly. Sing it a second time with your eyes closed. The third time don't sing it, but do the actions.

*Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes*
*Head, shoulders, knees and toes.*
(touch each body part as you sing each word)
*Head, shoulders, knees and toes.*
*Eyes and ears and mouth and nose.*
*Head, shoulders, knees and toes.*

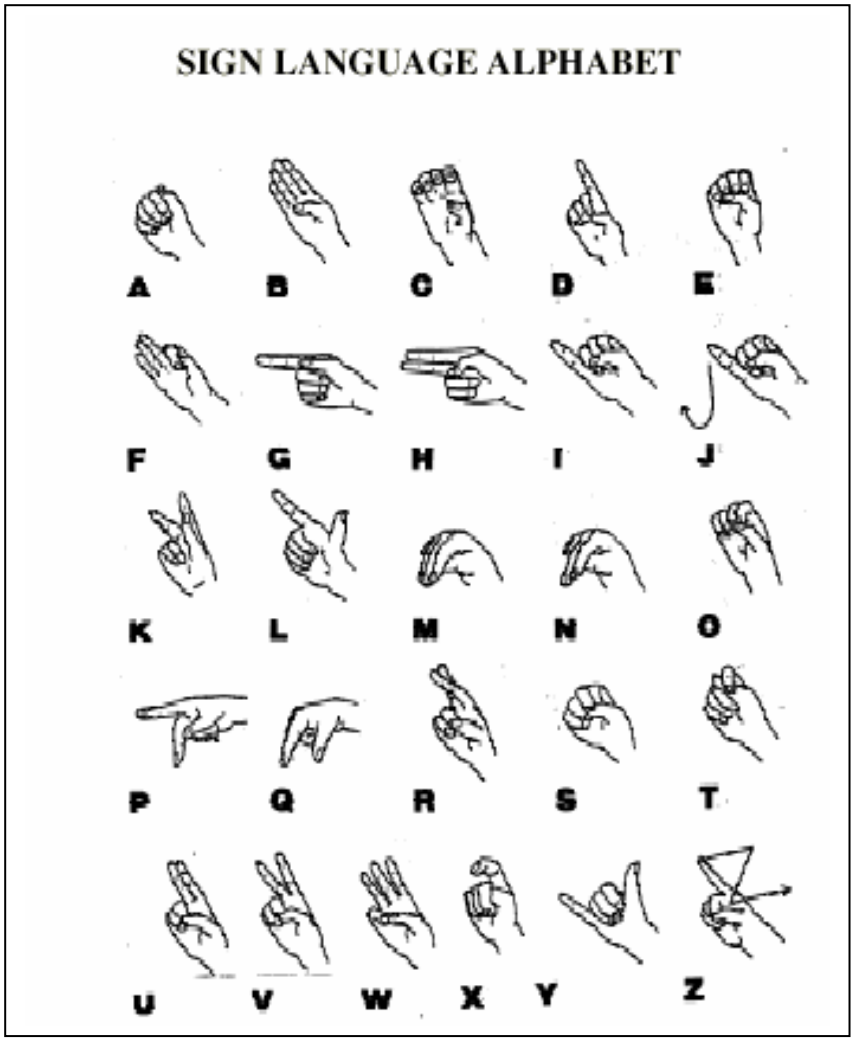
Try doing the song at different speeds. Is it easier or harder to do with your eyes closed? With no words?

**ACTIVITY:** *What We Can Do!* (4 - 6 minutes)

**Materials**: none.
Have the children sit in a circle. Ask them to think about the different disabilities they have experienced. Go around the circle and ask someone to name one thing they could not do if they had a particular disability. Then, ask them to think of two things they could do. For example, "If I were blind, I could not watch a movie, but I could listen to music and dance."

Ask each child the same thing, rotating the type of disability.

**Application**: Encourage the children to look at people with disabilities and focus on what they can do, not on what they can't.

**Reading Adventures**
This listing of reading materials can be used by you as background, or for sharing before to set the stage for the lesson or for sharing afterwards to reinforce the lesson.
*Sign Language ABC* with Linda Bove, by Linda Bove
*A Button in Her Ear*, by Ada B. Litchfield
*Roly Goes Exploring*, by Phillip Newth
*Our Teacher's in a Wheelchair*, by Mary E. Powers
*My Favorite Place*, by Susan Sargent

*Adapted from materials developed by Ohio State University Extension and Penn State University Cooperative Extension.*