

## The Role of the LSA working with Pupils with Physical Disabilities

### Aims

Many pupils with physical disabilities, particularly those with complex or progressive conditions, rely heavily on adult support to carry out many day to day tasks such as dressing, going to the toilet and recording their work.

The aim in supporting pupils with physical disabilities is not necessarily to encourage the pupil to do everything for themselves, as this may not be achievable, but rather to encourage the pupil to manage, direct and control the type and level of help they need.

The role of the LSA is to enable the pupil to access the curriculum and encourage them to become as independent as possible.

### Empowerment

The key to independence is choice. "Choosing to complete a task without assistance or choosing to complete a physical task with assistance whilst being in control of how and when that assistance is offered..." (*Taken from 'Passivity to Empowerment' by Melissa Fenton and Pippa Hughes*)

Any support you give should be:

- Discreet
- Unobtrusive
- Sensitive
- Respectful
- maintain the pupil's dignity

### Health Warning!

Making assumptions about what help the pupil wants takes away their control and forces them into a passive role.

Gaining independence inevitably means taking risks and making mistakes. This should be discussed with the teacher and other professionals to decide what is a 'reasonable' or 'acceptable' risk.

Be aware that there are lots of emotional issues that will routinely surface, especially in relation to working with pupils who have life threatening conditions. However, remember, 'Empathy enables (the pupil); sympathy disables.'

## Top Tips for Learning Support Assistants Supporting Pupils with Physical Disabilities

1. Build up an accurate profile of the pupil's disability, needs, strengths, learning styles and interests before you start working with them.
2. Request any special training needed e.g. Manual Handling, Risk Assessments, Toileting, Epilepsy Awareness, ICT Skills, Cerebral Palsy
3. Develop a good, age appropriate working relationship with the pupil and agree general principles of how they would like to be helped. The 'velcro' or 'helicopter' analogies of how your support is provided are NOT good models. Support should always be targeted and match the needs of the child.
4. Develop a good working relationship with the class teacher(s). Establish a clear understanding of the teacher's and LSA role. Ensure the pupil with physical disabilities has the same access to the teacher and specialist input as all the other pupils in the class.
5. Communicate regularly with the class teacher to gain prior knowledge of activities/learning objectives in order to differentiate and have the correct materials/equipment available for the task. Maintain good communication with other LSAs involved in supporting the pupil to ensure you are consistent in your approach, particularly in relation to promoting the pupil's independence.
6. Keep written/photographic evidence of observations over time as these will make a valuable contribution to record keeping. You have a crucial role to play in monitoring, tracking and promoting the progress of the pupil, particularly in relation to IEP targets.
7. Treat pupils with dignity and respect, particularly when supporting them with their personal care needs such as toileting.
8. Do what the pupil has asked and record their answers, even if it means they get it wrong. (The teacher needs to know what the PUPIL can do, not what YOU can do!) It is good practice for the LSA to annotate the pupil's work indicating what level and type of support has been given, signing and dating the annotation.
9. Have the same expectations for good behaviour as you would for other pupils. Sanctions should be applied as appropriate but be aware that some pupils with physical disabilities may have sleep issues or experience pain and discomfort and that this may affect their concentration in class and make them more irritable.
10. Be proactive but discreet about ensuring and maintaining the social inclusion of the pupil with physical disabilities, for example:
  - using peer support rather than using adult support to collect equipment and do recording in pair work
  - ensuring an inclusive seating position in class
  - ensuring furniture is the correct height and size so the pupil with the disability can sit with a friend
  - planning all class trips and social activities well in advance so that adjustments can be made to fully include the pupil with physical disabilities