



# Vulnerable Population: Children and Youth with Disabilities

*The purpose of this document is to provide background information on Children and Youth with Disabilities.*

## **Defining Disability**

The federal government defines a person with a disability as someone who (1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more "major life activities," (2) has a record of such an impairment, or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment <sup>1</sup>

A **physical disability** is a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting, or carrying.<sup>2</sup>

A **learning disability** is a condition in which one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations (i.e. perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia).<sup>3</sup>

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## References

<sup>1</sup> [Frequently Asked Questions](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Definitions of Disability](#)

## **Fast Facts on Children and Youth with Disabilities**

In the 2014-15 school year the number of children and youth ages 3-21 receiving special education was about 13 percent of all public school students.<sup>4</sup>

Around 35 percent of youth with disabilities had a learning disability, 21 percent had a speech or language impairment, 7 percent had an intellectual disability, and around 5 percent had an emotional disability.

Youth with disabilities varied between demographics – 13 percent of disabled youth with disabilities were White, 15 percent were Black, 12 percent were Hispanic, 6 percent were Asian, 11 percent were Pacific Islander, 17 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native, and 12 percent were two or more races. <sup>5</sup>

## **Federal Laws Regarding Youth with Disabilities**

[Americans with Disabilities Act](#)

[Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Federal Definition](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Children and Youth with Disabilities](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Children and Youth with Disabilities](#)