

Celebrating Differences

Over the past 5 years, we have reached out to the student body in many different ways to open the discussion around Disabilities and “PossAbilities.” Key messages we have shared with the students include:

What is a disability?

A condition that makes it harder for someone to do certain things like most other people do. A disability is not contagious nor can it be passed to friends or family.

What causes a disability?

Some people are born with a disability. Some people could have a disability caused by an accident or injury. Some people could develop a disability with old age.

What kinds of disabilities are there?

- Sometimes disabilities affect the way a person moves or limits their movements
- Some people have visual impairment or vision loss
- Some people have hearing impairment or are deaf or hard of hearing
- Sometimes disabilities affect the way a person learns and how they can use what they learn. A disability can make it harder for people to listen, speak, read, write or do math. Some things may just take longer to learn.

Although we are all different, we all have so many PossAbilities!

- We are all good in different things
- We can all learn in different ways
- We can all communicate in different ways
- We all have feelings and emotions
- And...we can all be friends!

What if I want to understand more?

It is OKAY to ask questions and want to learn about disabilities. You may want to know more about...

- What makes someone different?
- What help might someone need?
- How can I be their friend?

It is NOT OKAY to make jokes about someone with a disability or treat someone differently.

- Everyone has feelings
- Everyone can be included
- Everyone can be your friend

More About Disabilities

On the following pages you will find additional information about five different disabilities that are present in our Camelot school community (Autism Spectrum Disorder, Dyslexia, DHH, Down Syndrome, Angelman Syndrome). If you want to continue the conversation about specific disabilities, we hope this additional information helps guide discussion around celebrating differences and provides more information about learning how we are each different and unique.

Autism Spectrum Disorders/ASD

Definition: Autism is a condition that changes some people's brains. Their brains work differently and might not be like everyone else's brains. This does not mean someone with autism isn't smart. They are just different.* There is a wide spectrum for those diagnosed with Autism or ASD.

People with autism may act differently because of:

- **Communication:** It can be hard to understand what people say. Some people with autism have a hard time talking and some people with autism can't talk at all.*
- **Repeating Things (Perseveration):** They like to talk about the same subject that they are interested in.
- **Socialization-**That means they have a harder time making friends.*

Other Helpful Information:

- 1 in 68 people have autism. That means if you are in a small movie theater, one person in that theater would have autism.
- Autism is a different kind of disability because you can't tell someone has it by just looking at them. You can't see autism.
- Autism is a big spectrum, meaning there is a large range of abilities or disabilities. **Notes from the book, "The Autism Acceptance Book", by Ellen Sabin*

Dyslexia

Definition: Dyslexia is a language-based learning disability. Dyslexia refers to people having difficulties with specific language skills, particularly reading. Students with dyslexia usually experience difficulties with other language skills such as spelling, writing, and pronouncing words.*

People with dyslexia may act differently because of:

Difficulty: The core difficulty is with word recognition and reading fluency, spelling, and writing. This may make it harder to communicate.*

They may find it difficult to express themselves clearly, or to fully understand what others mean when they speak.*

Other Helpful Information:

Perhaps as many as 15–20% of the population as a whole—have some of the symptoms of dyslexia, including slow or inaccurate reading, poor spelling, poor writing, or mixing up similar words.*

The impact that dyslexia has is different for each person and depends on the severity of the condition and the effectiveness of instruction or remediation.*

Someone with dyslexia can be very smart. They can learn to read. However, reading and spelling can be difficult.

Dyslexia is a big spectrum, meaning there is a large range of abilities or disabilities.

Many famous people have or had dyslexia: Whoopi Goldberg, Jay Leno, and even Albert Einstein.

**Source: International Dyslexia Association*

Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH)

Definition: Although the term “deaf” is often mistakenly used to refer to all individuals with hearing difficulties, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) actually describes “deaf” as those individuals who do not hear well enough to rely on their hearing to process speech and language. Individuals with mild to moderate hearing loss may be “hard of hearing,” but are not “deaf.” These individuals differ from deaf individuals in that they can use their hearing to assist in communication with others.

What causes hearing loss:

A hearing loss can be caused by many physical conditions (e.g., childhood illnesses, pregnancy-related illnesses, injury, heredity, age, excessive or prolonged exposure to noise), and result in varying degrees of loss. Generally, hearing loss is categorized as mild, moderate, severe, or profound. An individual with a moderate hearing loss may be able to hear sound, but have difficulty distinguishing specific speech patterns in a conversation. Individuals with a profound hearing loss may not be able to hear sounds at all.

Communication: The many different circumstances under which individuals develop hearing loss can affect the way they experience sound, communicate with others, and view their hearing loss. For example, some individuals may use American Sign Language (ASL) and others may rely on lip reading and voice.

Other Helpful Information:

- About 2 to 3 out of every 1,000 children in the United States are born with a detectable level of hearing loss in one or both ears.
- More than 90 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents.
- One in eight people in the United States (13 percent, or 30 million) aged 12 years or older has hearing loss in both ears, based on standard hearing examinations.

Down Syndrome (Trisomy 21)

Definition: Down Syndrome (DS), also called Trisomy 21, is a genetic condition where a person is born with an extra copy of chromosome 21. This additional genetic material changes the course of development and causes the characteristics we have associated with Down Syndrome.

People with Down Syndrome (DS) may act or look differently because of the extra genetic material (extra copy of the 21st chromosome) that is present in all of their cells:

A person with Down Syndrome has 47 chromosomes, microscopic structures that resemble socks (that's why we wear crazy socks!) that carry genetic information to determine almost everything about a person. You can think of them as the "directions" inside our bodies. Most people have only 46 chromosomes. It's the "extra" chromosome that can mix up the directions in the body and cause certain physical characteristics (such as shorter stature and an upward slant to the eyes) and speech and developmental delays. Still, people with Down syndrome are much more like you than they are different: They are unique people with unique strengths and talents.

Communication: People with Down Syndrome (DS) usually take a little more time to learn to speak or have trouble pronouncing words. Some people with DS are not able to speak at all (non-verbal) and may use helpful things like communication devices (iPads, etc.) to communicate with friends and family.

Health Conditions: People with Down syndrome are much more likely to have certain medical conditions including congenital heart defects, sleep apnea, and Alzheimer's disease. There is also evidence of an increased risk of celiac disease, autism, childhood leukemia and seizures. This increased risk is also caused by the extra genetic material that is present in people with DS.

Other Helpful Information:

Children and adults with Down Syndrome share some common features, but naturally the individuals will more closely resemble their immediate family members than other people with Down Syndrome.

Roughly 25% of families in the U.S. are affected by Down Syndrome.

One in every 691 babies (about 6,000 babies) in the U.S. is born with Down Syndrome, making it the most common chromosomal condition.

There are more than 400,000 people living with Down syndrome in the U.S. and roughly 25% of all families are affected by DS.

While behavior, mental ability, and physical development varies from person to person, many individuals with Down syndrome grow up to hold jobs, live independently, and enjoy normal recreational activities. The exact cause of the extra chromosome that triggers Down syndrome is unknown.

In 1983, the average life expectancy of a person with Down syndrome was a mere 25-years-old. Today, it's 60 and with time and research that number will only get bigger.

Children and adults with Down syndrome share some common features, but naturally the individuals will more closely resemble their immediate family members than other people with Down syndrome.

While behavior, mental ability, and physical development varies greatly from person to person, many individuals with Down syndrome grow up to hold great jobs, live independently, and enjoy normal recreational activities.