

**What is a Developmental Disability?**

A developmental disability is a severe mental or physical impairment. It begins before the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and is expected to continue indefinitely. Developmental disabilities include autism, cerebral palsy, epilepsy and mental retardation. Disabling conditions closely related to mental retardation or requiring similar treatment are also included.

**Autism**

Autism is a developmental disorder that affects multiple aspects of an individual's functioning. The disorder is characterized by impairment in social interaction (withdrawal, failure to engage in interaction with peers or adults), delays in both verbal and nonverbal communication skills, deficits in cognitive skills, and impairment in the ability to engage in make-believe play. Individuals may engage in repetitive activities (for example, rocking, hand flapping, and lining up toys), or a limited repertoire of activities. The number of characteristics present and their severity vary greatly. Onset of this disorder is usually before 30 months of age.

**Cerebral Palsy**

Cerebral palsy is a condition caused by damage to the brain, usually occurring before, during or shortly following birth. "Cerebral" refers to the brain, and "palsy" to a disorder of movement or posture. The resulting impairment can range from mild to severe. Some characteristics are: awkward or involuntary movements, poor balance, irregular walk, poor motor coordination, and speech disturbances. It is neither progressive nor communicable. It is also not "curable" in the accepted sense, although education, therapy and applied technology can help persons with cerebral palsy lead productive lives. Cerebral palsy is not a disease and should never be referred to as such.

**Epilepsy**

According to the Epilepsy Foundation of America, epilepsy is a physical condition that occurs when there is a sudden, brief change in how the brain works. When brain cells are not working properly, a person's consciousness, movement, or actions may be altered for a short time. These physical changes are called epileptic seizures. Epilepsy is therefore sometimes called a seizure disorder.

## **Mental Retardation**

Mental retardation is characterized by less than average intellectual functioning and significant limitations in at least two of the following areas: communication, self-care, home living, social skills, use of community resources, self-direction, academic skills, work, leisure, health and safety. Mental retardation is a condition, not a disease, nor is it a mental illness.