

# Disabilities In-Depth

*An Explanatory Manual of the Characters of  
“Realabilities/Addy & Uno” for Children and Adults*



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## ***ADD/ADHD In-Depth: Meet Addy!***



HI THERE!!!!

Whoops, sorry. Did I yell that out loud? I totally didn't mean to. I just got REALLY EXCITED to meet you!!! I LOVE meeting new friends so this is SO exciting for me!! My name is Addy!! What's yours? Wait, let me guess, is it-

OH MY GOSH LOOK AT THAT GORGEOUS BUTTERFLY!!!

Whoah, sorry! I'm getting a little scattered, aren't I? Sometimes, it's hard for me to focus because of my ADHD. What's ADHD you ask? Oh, I can

TOTALLY tell you that. I told the lady who delivers our mail all about it yesterday, and it was cool because she was wearing a nametag and I was thinking how we should all wear nametags, like I did on my first day of camp last year, which was really cool because I learned how to make a fire by rubbing two sticks together.....

### **What causes ADHD?**

So scientists aren't totally sure what causes ADHD, which stands for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, but that's because they don't think it's caused just by one thing, but by a whole lot of things working together, kind of like a game in gym class. Have I mentioned how awesome I am in gym?

Oh, right, back to ADHD. So my doctor told me that kids with ADHD have really special brains. See, our brains are made up of little circuits, which connect all the different parts of our brains together. This is how we think. Well, the brains of kids with ADHD are wired a little differently, meaning that we use our brains a bit differently than a lot of other kids. We may have some trouble with planning, thinking through decisions, waiting our turn or staying focused, but some of us are really CREATIVE!! I like this because it makes me feel special, like I can think of different solutions to problems in ways that other kids can't because of how my brain is wired. Since our brains are wired differently, it might take a little longer for our thoughts to catch up to our bodies, since they kind of have to take a longer route to get to that part of our brain. That's why we have trouble concentrating, waiting our turn, and paying attention to things for a long time.

### **What should I know about my friend with ADHD?**

Kids with ADHD can be REALLY awesome friends!! We might interrupt you or get distracted when you're talking, but that's totally unintentional. It's not that we don't care about what you're saying; it's that our bodies are taking a little time to catch up to our minds. Please don't get frustrated with us; we're not doing it on purpose. We're not trying to be rude or impolite.

OH MY GOSH, THAT BUTTERFLY IS BACK!!!

We also can be really forgetful at times, so if I forget your birthday, it doesn't mean I don't care about you. I once had a dream where everyone forgot my birthday, so I decided to run away to Canada and start a maple syrup farm. Have you ever seen them make maple syrup? It's SO cool!!

### **What limitations does a kid with ADHD have?**

Like I mentioned before, since our brains are wired differently, it takes a moment for our bodies to catch up to our thoughts, so we can be "impulsive," which is a fancy word to describe acting before thinking. We may forget to raise our hands in class and may have trouble waiting our turn. We also have a pretty short attention span. Math class just seems to take forever, for me! But my best friend Uno really likes math and he is SOOO good at it!!! He barely writes anything down. Sometimes I just picture equations pouring out of his head. He also really likes cheese, which I don't get because I think cheese is the WORST.

We also have a really hard time sitting still. That's the hyperactivity part of ADHD. Sometimes my body gets so worked up that it's just IMPOSSIBLE to sit in a chair without moving. Other kids think this is called being "fidgety," which almost sounds like the word fudge, and I LOVE fudge. Anyway, all of this stuff may make it difficult for us to focus in school.

### **What strengths does a kid with ADHD have?**

So kids with ADHD are TOTALLY awesome in so many ways! Since our brains are wired differently, we can think of really creative ways to solve problems. For example, yesterday my mom's pencil holder broke, so instead of getting a new one, I put all of her pencils in my favorite mug. That way, she'll always think of me when she needs a pencil! This creative thinking comes in handy when Uno and I are out on adventures, because sometimes the answer to a problem isn't in plain sight.

We're also really good at activities that involve using our bodies since we have so much energy. Like tag! You'd better run when I'm IT in tag, because I am the FASTEST RUNNER!!

Kids with ADHD also notice really small details. For example, when I look at a picture, I notice the little things in the background. In this picture my mom has of herself and my grandma, most people just see them, but if you look in the background, you can see my grandma's gardener outside watering the plants. Since the little details make up the big picture, it really

helps us to put together what's happening overall. It's like putting together puzzle pieces to make a complete picture! Speaking of puzzles, I got a puzzle for my birthday last year with cats on it!! Isn't that SO cool? One of the cats is doing a handstand!! I can almost do a handstand, want to see? I think I'm going to try to be in the Olympics one day and win a gold medal in hand-standing!! That would be SO cool, and I would be famous!!

### **What can you do to help your friend with ADHD?**

You can help your friend with ADHD by being really understanding. Remember, we don't mean to interrupt you or to call out in class, it just happens when our bodies work faster than our thoughts. Please don't yell at us or get mad at us – instead, maybe you can remind us to raise our hand when it looks like we're about to call out. Don't get frustrated with us if we forget something, instead, you can help us stay organized. That would help a lot!! Also, play with us! We LOVE playing with our friends!!

Well I hope that was helpful, and it was really nice to meet you! I'm SO glad we're friends now. What did you say your name was again? Oh, that's right, it's-

OH LOOK, THERE'S THAT BUTTERFLY AGAIN...I MUST TAKE A CLOSER LOOK!!

Bye for now!! See ya soon!!

## ***ADD/ADHD In-Depth: From an Adult's Perspective***

### **Definition/Description**

ADD/ADHD (Attention Deficit Disorder/ Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) is a cognitive disorder of a dimensional spectrum. Some researchers believe that there are seven variants, or types of ADD/ADHD, and new information is constantly surfacing from ongoing research into causal factors and treatment methods. The characteristics of ADD/ADHD can be broken down into three categories:

1. Impulsivity (difficulty waiting for one's turn, blurting out answers in class, interrupting others)
2. Hyperactivity (extreme fidgeting, inability to sit still, trouble staying quiet)
3. Inattention (Difficulty focusing on tasks, forgetfulness, difficulty following directions)



### **Signs/Symptoms**

Since most children with ADD/ADHD are born with the disability or develop it as a toddler, the symptoms are usually present before the age of seven. Some of the signs and symptoms of ADD/ADHD according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention includes:

- Failing to pay close attention to details or making careless errors in schoolwork, at work, or in other activities
- Trouble maintaining attention on tasks or during activities
- Not listening when spoken to directly

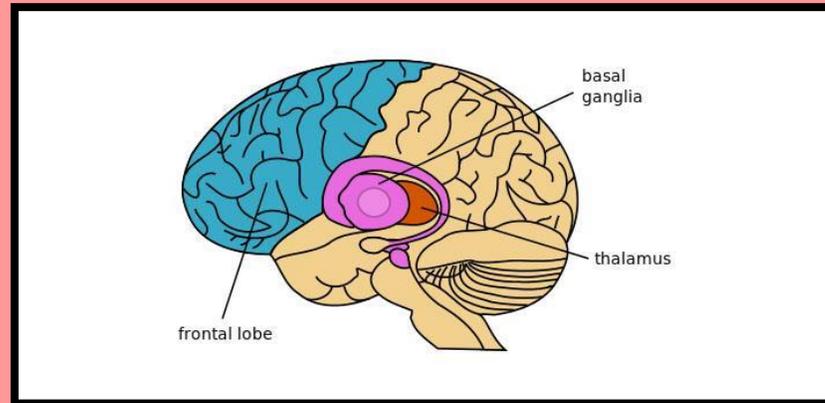
- Not following through on instructions and failing to finish schoolwork, chores, or duties in the workplace (e.g., loses focus, side-tracked)
- Trouble organizing tasks and activities
- Avoids, dislikes, or is reluctant to do tasks that require mental effort over a long period of time (such as schoolwork or homework)
- Loses things necessary for tasks and activities (e.g. school materials, pencils, books, tools, wallets, keys, paperwork, eyeglasses, mobile telephones)
- Is easily distracted
- Is forgetful in daily activities
- Fidgets with or taps hands or feet, or squirms in seat
- Leaves seat in situations when remaining seated is expected
- Runs or climbs in situations where it is not appropriate
- Is unable to play or take part in leisure activities quietly
- Talks excessively
- Has trouble waiting his/her turn
- Often interrupts or intrudes on others (e.g., butts into conversations or games)

### **Causes**

What causes ADD/ADHD is not entirely known. There are studies that suggest genetics are involved, however, it's most likely a combination of multiple factors rather than a single factor. There is research into many possible other influences such as social environment, brain injury, and nutrition. Brain scans have revealed that there is deficient blood flow to areas of the brain, specifically the prefrontal cortex and abnormal levels of dopamine, norepinephrine and serotonin during neural activity, yet that the brain may return to a state of normalcy when at rest. The prefrontal cortex is crucial for complex cognitive behavior like planning, decision-making, moderating or inhibiting social behaviors, and orchestrating internal thoughts. The prefrontal cortex may not be receiving as much blood flow as some other brain areas, which can lead individuals with ADD/ADHD to experiences difficulty with the aforementioned tasks.

Brain scans have also indicated that the brain circuits connecting different parts of the brain, such as the cerebellum and the basal ganglia, may be altered in individuals with

ADD/ADHD. Since the cerebellum, which coordinates balance and complex motor movements, and the basal ganglia, which is important for voluntary movement and is connected to the development of learning skills are both important in self-control and learning, it is unsurprising that individuals with ADD/ADHD experience difficulty with attention, hyperactivity and impulsivity.



### **Limitations**

Some of the limitations individuals with ADD/ADHD may experience are:

- Difficulty taking turns
- Difficulty focusing on one task at a time
- Difficulty sitting still
- Difficulty focusing on a single task
- Difficulty recalling information
- Difficulty completing tasks

### **Strengths**

Some of the strengths of an individual with ADD/ADHD are:

- Elaborate imaginations
- Talent in the visual and performance arts
- Seeing the big picture
- Excellence in problem solving
- Seeing connections that others miss
- Excellence in sports and other professions such as physical therapy

- Positive and flexible attitude around change
- Sensitivity to their environment
- Demonstrating Compassion
- Demonstrating Understanding

### **Home and School Accommodations:**

Some actions you can take to help your child or student with ADD/ADHD succeed in the classroom include:

- Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule
- Keeping specific belongings in specific places
- Leaving written reminders on mirrors, doors, etc.
- Pointing out that interrupting someone else isn't polite instead of punishing the child
- Color coding notebooks and folders for different subjects
- Giving the child a personal notebook to jot down answers instead of responding out of turn

### **Resources**

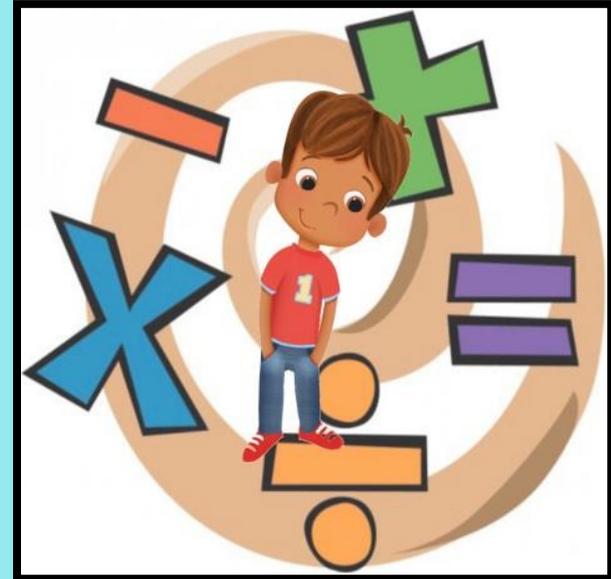
- The National Institute of Mental Health, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>
- Child and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, <http://www.chadd.org/>
- The National Research Center on ADHD, <http://www.help4adhd.org/>
- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/>
- AboutKidsHealth, [www.aboutkidshealth.ca/](http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/)

All information for ADHD in depth was found on The National Institute of Mental Health website, <http://www.nimh.nih.gov>, AboutKidsHealth, [www.aboutkidshealth.ca/](http://www.aboutkidshealth.ca/), and from Nava R. Sifton, PhD.

## ***Autism In-Depth: Meet Uno!***

This is my best friend Uno. He is sweet, loves books, and is THE smartest person I've ever met. When he's thinking, you can practically imagine blueprints and maps whizzing through his head, which comes in handy when we're out on adventures together. He is the detail-oriented concrete thinker to my outside-of-the box, zany and out-there thinking. My parents say he's like a mini Sherlock Holmes, who was some guy from England or something. I don't really know. English people sound smart with their accents, so it must be a good thing.

Why am I doing all the talking, you ask? Well, Uno doesn't really like to talk. In fact, he barely talks at all. He can't look most people in the eye and is shy and a bit awkward. It's something a lot of people with Autism deal with. It doesn't mean Uno doesn't communicate; he just does it in different ways. He likes to point, jot things down and use puzzles and patterns to show what is going on in that brilliant mind of his. He also has a crazy good memory!"



### **What causes autism?**

Autism is a disorder that develops as the brain is growing when you are very little. Scientists do not know exactly why or what happens yet but they know that your genes and environment play a part. Genes are very tiny bits of information that make up the cells in your body and determine your traits. Traits are features or characteristics that you get from your parents. They can determine what we are like physically, like having brown hair like your mom, or other things like how we laugh. The environment is anything outside the body that can affect your health. Scientists are doing more research to try and figure out exactly how genes and environment together contribute to autism!

### **What should I know about my friend with autism?**

Autism is a spectrum, which means some kids will have more symptoms and/or skills than others, like being shy or less communicative than others. Uno's really shy! Sometimes kids with autism will just want to answer yes or no questions and other times they might repeat what you say as a way of trying to communicate.

Sometimes, just like all of us, they may get frustrated because they cannot communicate what they need. When that happens, they might get more upset than you or I normally would. Sometimes they get excited and express that in different ways, like flapping their arms up and down. Kids who have autism won't look you in the eye a lot of the time. Uno can get really interested in one thing and do or talk about it a lot!

### **What limitations does a kid with autism have?**

Sometimes Uno has a hard time communicating needs verbally, reading social cues and situations, reading others' emotions, and making eye contact. Sharing, working with others, and managing feelings appropriately can also be challenging for a kid with autism.

### **What strengths does a kid with autism have?**

Kids with autism can exhibit a variety of strengths depending on where they are on the spectrum. Just a few of the really great strengths are:

- Strong Memory
- Attention to detail: they can remember really specific things!
- Significant skills in certain areas
- Great focus for a long time on things they think are cool
- Motivation to learn a lot about things they think are cool
- Making clear decisions, without getting upset
- Different ways of looking at things
- Thinking in pictures and videos
- Non-judgmental listening
- Intelligence
- Honesty
- Loyalty

### **What can you do to help your classmate who has autism?**

You can be best friends with a kid who has autism, just like I am with Uno! You can help them out by being really patient and nice to them and asking them about things that they like doing or things they know a lot about. Uno likes it when I draw pictures and act things out to help explain abstract concepts to him. You can show your friend how you share your things. You can give him/her space and talk in a quiet voice, repeat yourself or explain things in a different way if he/she does not understand. Uno also really likes when I give him a heads up when an activity is about to change, since he likes to follow a set routine.

Well, we're headed off to another exciting adventure!! We will see you later!!

## ***Autism In-Depth: From an Adult's Perspective***

Autism Spectrum Disorder is defined as a neurological impairment in communication and behavior that lacks a known cure. The CDC (2015) estimates that it affects 1 in 68 children today. The conventional treatment is Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) therapy, which addresses behavioral and learning skills through one-on-one, curriculum-based work, 30-40 hours per week.

### **Signs and Symptoms:**

Early signs include repetitive behaviors and lack of eye contact, including difficulties with social communication. Behaviors often become more noticeable when comparing children of the same age. Children with autism may look, listen and respond less to people trying to interact with them. They often do not share or bring others into their activities. They may respond unusually to situations with loud noises, crowds, or strange smells or textures by throwing tantrums. This is just their way of trying to express that they feel overwhelmed. Children with autism often express their excitement by waving or flapping their arms up and down. Often they will get very interested in a certain object or activity and will want to repeat it frequently. This repetition, of a single word or phrase, is called *echolalia*. For some, this redundancy usually brings some sense of comfort and control to the child with autism.



### **Causes:**

Autism is a highly heritable, complex neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by impairments of cognitive function in the field of social interaction and speech development. The specific genes associated with autism spectrum disorders are still unknown but occur from random, rare, and possibly from multiple mutations. Environmental factors (anything outside the body that can affect health) play a role but the specifics are still unknown. Factors such as parental age, exposure to toxins, complications during birth or pregnancy, family medical conditions and other demographic factors are being studied (Autism Spectrum Disorders, n.d.). Some parents believe that vaccines are linked to their child developing autism. Many studies have been conducted to

try to determine if vaccines are a possible cause of autism but none of them have found a link. Overall, as aforementioned, Autism appears to be highly heritable.

### **Limitations:**

Difficulties include communicating needs verbally, reading social cues and situations, reading others' emotions, and making eye contact. Sharing, working with others, and managing feelings appropriately can also be challenging for a child with autism. Obsessions can also be a challenge.

### **Strengths:**

Strengths of a child with autism vary depending on where the child is on the spectrum, but can include (and are certainly not limited to):

- Attention to detail (if the child is verbal, this can be even more helpful)
  - Often highly skilled in a particular area
  - Attention span for a particular area or object of interest
  - Deep examination of an area-resulting in encyclopedic knowledge on areas of interest
  - Tendency to be logical, which can be helpful in making concrete, non-emotional decisions
  - Some may show less concern for what others may think of them
  - Independent thinking that often results in "big picture" insights due to different ways of looking at things
  - Visual processing (thinking in pictures, videos)
  - Superior perceptual (auditory and visual) skills
  - Special connection to animals (some have noted this connection)
  - Nonjudgmental listening
  - Average to above average intelligence
  - Honesty
  - Loyalty
- (Shore, n.d.)

### **School and Home Accommodations**

Speak with your school's guidance counselor, teachers, and administration about formulating an IEP (individualized educational plan) or a Section 504 plan (a federal law designed to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs and activities that receive Federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education) (Protecting Students, n.d.). Inquiring about occupational, physical, speech, special instruction and Applied Behavioral Analysis therapy can help children learn to communicate and interact with the world around them more easily.

At home you can use:

- Visual or written daily schedules
- Verbal and written instructions
- Extra time for your child to respond to directions
- Pictures your child can point to when communication is difficult
- Repetition or rephrasing of instructions or questions
- Modeling tasks
- Posting rules of your home
- Providing simple social skills supports and instruction
- Breaking up tasks into smaller parts
- Allowing your child to move around
- Providing visual or verbal cues
- Minimizing distractions when trying to get them to complete a task
- Giving your child extended time to do things (like getting ready in the morning)
- Encouraging your child to have friends and play-dates
- Offering alternative activities when they get stuck doing something
- Having a stress ball or sensory toy to calm them down

Forming a team with your child's educational and therapeutic providers will ensure the best communication, support, and success of your child moving forward.

**Resources:**

Autism Speaks: <http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-guide>

<http://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-library/websites-families>

Autism NOW: <http://autismnow.org/at-home/>

Autism Resources Link: <http://www.autism-resources.com/links/index.html>

Recommended by parents: <http://eden2.org/top-10-autism-websites-recommended-by-parents/>

## ***Blindness In-Depth: Meet Melody!***



Hi! My name is Melody and I have low vision. My friends tell me I'm a great singer and I think that's because my hearing and my sense of pitch and rhythm are pretty good. My music teacher actually told me that I have perfect pitch! Pretty cool, right?

### **What causes blindness?**

There are various reasons why someone can be blind, like:

- Vitamin A Deficiency: Vitamin A is group of nutrients that helps the growth and development of our vision. If our eyes do not have the right amount of Vitamin A, the layer that covers our eyes will stop protecting them.
- Congenital Cataracts: is when there is cloudiness in the lens of the eye. It makes it so that what we see is blurry. This can happen before a baby is born or in the first year after the baby is born.
- Retinopathy of Prematurity (ROP): occurs when a baby is born before its due date. The retina of the eye does not develop properly and there is a problem with the blood development in the eye.
- Optic Nerve Atrophy: means there is damage to the optic nerve – the part of the eye that sends messages to our brain. When the brain can't receive messages about the pictures we see, we won't be able to put the pictures together.

### **What should I know about my friend with blindness?**

Blindness or visual impairment is when your eyes or parts of your brain which help with seeing do not work the way they should and you can't see like everyone else. I'm not in complete darkness; I can see light and some shadows. But just because I have low vision doesn't mean that I can't go to school and be just like everyone else. My gym teacher uses balls with bells inside, so I can play sports like my friends.

### **What limitations does a kid with blindness have?**

The biggest limitation for a kid with blindness is really having a hard time seeing certain things. It doesn't sound like a big deal, but you use your eyes for so many things! For example, reading is extremely hard when you can't see the letters on the page too well! We need to be extra careful when walking around to make sure we don't bump into anything or hurt ourselves. We also won't be able to do certain activities that can be dangerous without sight when we get older, like driving.

### **What strengths does a kid with blindness have?**

Still, there are lots of cool things a kid with blindness can do! First of all, since each of us has sections in our brain devoted to seeing, hearing, tasting, touching and smelling, we have extra room in the seeing section of our brains, which is usually taken over by another sense. That makes our other senses super strong! For example, the sound part of my brain decided to take up the extra room in the seeing part of my brain, so I'm REALLY good at music. I even have perfect pitch! That means that I can hear a sound and identify exactly what note it is. We're also what my mom calls "bilingual"- we can understand two different languages: English, which we speak at home and at school, and braille, which is a special language made with little bumps for people who can't see very well. Cool, right?

### **What can you do to help your friend with blindness?**

When you're walking with a friend who can't see very well, be patient, because your friend might walk a little slowly to make sure not to bump into anything. Allow your friend to rest his/her hands on your arm, rather than pulling him/her ahead. Also, if you see something that you want to talk about, describe it to your friend who is blind or who has low vision, so he/she doesn't feel left out and can join in the conversation!

Well it was so nice to meet you! I have to go to chorus practice now, but I bet I'll see you later!  
Bye!!

## ***Blindness In-Depth: From an Adult's Perspective***

### **Definition:**

Visual impairment is a functional limitation of the eyes or the visual system. While some people are born with visual impairment or blindness, this condition can also develop at any point in the lifespan and affects 285 million people who are estimated to be visually impaired worldwide, according to the World Health Organization.

### **Signs and Symptoms**

Some signs and symptoms that a child might be experiencing visual difficulties include:

- Closes or covers one eye
- Squints eyes, flutters eyes side-to-side or crosses eyes
- Complains that things are blurry or hard to see
- Has trouble reading
- Has abnormal responses to light
- Has a blunted gaze
- Has poor visual acuity
- Has issues with visual attention
- Has issues with visual navigation
- Has cloudy vision
- Has poor hand-eye coordination
- Is unable to see shapes
- Is only able to see shadows.
- Appears overly clumsy

- **Causes**

Some of the causes of visual impairment include:

- Infection – pink eye
- Crossed eyes
- Delayed visual attention
- Chronic eye redness
- Poor visual tracking – following objects
- Abnormal eye alignment



## **Limitations**

Some of the limitations of visual impairment include:

- Difficulty with all types of vision, including peripheral, long distance, short distance, and focused vision
- Difficulty with understanding and walking in open spaces and architecture
- Difficulty avoiding visual obstacles (for example, someone walking down the street)
- Inability or difficulty with reading
- Need for an enlarged monitor to accurately see computer and television screens

## **Strengths**

Some of the strengths individuals with visual impairment include:

- An increased ability in the other senses, such as hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching
- An increased sensitivity to the world around them
- Turn-taking skills
- Loyalty
- Understanding and acceptance towards peers
- Increased verbal and musical skills

## **School/Peer Accommodations**

Even if a child has a visual impairment, it does not necessarily mean there will be difficulty in school. There are multiple accommodations schools can make to help children with visual impairment have an easier time in school:

- Preferential seating (allowing them to sit up-close or in an opportune location)
- Oral descriptions of pictures shown in class
- The use of models instead of pictures
- Hands-on experiences
- Experiential learning (real-life objects or things – animals, etc.)
- Providing books, articles, etc. on audiotape
- Large-print books
- Braille and tactile graphics
- Extended time on homework and tests/quizzes

## **Resources**

- The World Health Organization, <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en/>
- The National Federation of the Blind, <https://nfb.org/blindness-statistics>
- The American Federation for the Blind, <http://www.afb.org/info/publications/jvib/12>

All information for the Blindness PSAs was found at the National Federation of the Blind website, <https://nfb.org>