

Are children with cerebral palsy perceived by peers as having more social adjustment problems than typically developing children?



## Glossary of terms

- Social adjustment: Quality of social relations, peer acceptance, presence and reciprocity of friendships.

## Summary

The aim of this study was to describe the social experience of children with cerebral palsy (CP) in mainstream classes in Canada and compare it with that of their classmates without a disability. The findings showed that children with CP (mainly girls with varying types of CP) had fewer reciprocated friendships, exhibited fewer sociable/leadership behaviours, were more isolated and victimized by their peers than their classmates without a disability. This seems to suggest that girls and boys with CP are perceived differently from their peers in an integrated school setting. The paper also provides avenues of intervention relating to personal and environmental factors that could facilitate or interfere with the social experience of children with CP in a mainstream environment.

## Implications for families and practitioners

Children with CP (particularly females) have been shown in this study to differ quite significantly from their classmates with respect to social status, number of reciprocated friendships, sociability/leadership and social isolation behaviours and verbal and physical victimization. Certain tests (called 'sociometric measures') given at regular times by teachers or health professionals would help to identify children at risk of having social adjustment problems. It may help to focus on regulating emotions, interpreting the intentions of others and the positive reinforcement of social behaviours (sharing, helping and cooperating), three elements closely associated in the long term with a positive social status with peers.

## Reference

Nadeau, L., Tessier, R. (2006). Social adjustment of children with cerebral palsy in mainstream classes: Peer perception. *Developmental Medicine & Child Neurology*, 48, 331-336.

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