

TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERIES

**VOLUME 12**

# **PHYSIOTHERAPY**

INFORMATION BOOKLET



This pamphlet is one of a series of resources prepared by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) and First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) to share information about how to support all First Nations students, regardless of their needs.

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**FNSA MANDATE:**

to collaborate with First Nation schools to create nurturing environments that develop learners' pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and equip them to realize their full potential within self-governing First Nations communities.

**FNESC MANDATE:**

to facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information to and soliciting input from First Nations. FNESC's primary goal is to promote and support the provision of a quality education to First Nations learners.

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We hope that these pamphlets provide a useful overview of key special education topics, representing an introduction to issues that some people may want to investigate in more detail. Anyone who requires more information or has specific questions is welcome to contact the FNESC/FNSA special education staff.



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Suite 113 - 100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2 [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca)

Phone (604) 925-6087 | Toll-free in BC 1-877-422-3672

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# WHAT IS PHYSIOTHERAPY?

Physiotherapy, often also called physical therapy, refers to a range of treatments that help to restore, maintain, and enhance a person's mobility, physical functioning, and well-being. Physiotherapy services can be beneficial for promoting physical rehabilitation, injury prevention, and overall health and fitness.

Generally, a “physical performance issue” is identified when a person is unable to participate in the activities that they need or want to do.

When physical performance challenges occur, assistance from a physiotherapist (PT) can help to restore movement and function.

**NOTE:** in this pamphlet, we use the term “parent” for simplicity, but the information is intended to be inclusive of all family members/caregivers of students with special needs. FNESC and the FNSA respect and appreciate the invaluable contributions of everyone who works to support all First Nations students - regardless of their special talents, gifts, or challenges.

# SCHOOL-BASED PHYSIOTHERAPY

**Physiotherapists (PTs) are registered health care professionals who are trained to enhance a student’s ability to participate in school activities. PTs take a “whole person” approach to health and well-being to help students navigate their environments as safely and independently as possible.**

This means that PTs examine students’ levels of mobility and the physical abilities they need to interact with their environments. PTs also can help plan for safe and accessible educational environments, and they can assist classroom teachers and other school staff to effectively incorporate movement and activity into the school-day for all students – including those who experience mobility challenges.

School-based PTs perform standardized and non-standardized assessments to assess students who may have physical performance challenges. They also review students’ school files and any medical reports, and they work with learning assistance teachers, special education coordinators, principals, educational assistants, and parents or guardians to identify appropriate support services.

Based on the information they gather, PTs will provide a report with recommendations for the design of individualized physical activity programs for students, with the goal of improving

how students can physically participate to the best of their ability while at school. PTs also may participate in Individual Education Plan meetings and assist with the development of SMART goals for students.

PTs often train educational assistants (EAs) to implement individual programs with students, sometimes one-on-one and sometimes in a group setting, such as in the gym. PTs check with EAs at regular intervals to evaluate how programs are working and students’ progress. PTs may also link with outside agencies, such as BC Children’s Hospital or Sunnyhill Children’s Centre, if medical equipment is needed.

In performing their work, PTs will consider:

## **THE STUDENT:**

- Do they have an illness, injury, or disability?
- Does the student have a diagnosis?
- What is the student’s physical mobility status?

- What outside agencies are involved in the student's program?

#### **MOBILITY CONSIDERATIONS:**

- How does the student navigate the school environment, including the classroom, gym, playground, etc.?
- What are the reasons for the student's mobility challenges?
- Does the student use equipment such as a wheelchair, walker, cane, braces, or orthotics?
- How does the student manage transfers within the school environment – i.e. moving from one surface to another?

#### **ENVIRONMENT:**

- How is the classroom set up to assist or hinder the student's mobility?
- What types of equipment are available in the gym?
- How is the playground equipped and set up?
- How far do the students need to travel within the school to participate in various activities?
- If the student uses a wheelchair, is the school fully wheelchair accessible?

PTs commonly work with students on the following issues, among others.

- Gross motor skills (i.e. activities that involve the large muscles in the arms, legs and torso, and are important to everyday physical

activities like walking, running, throwing, lifting, kicking, etc. ...)

- Balance and coordination
- Strength and endurance
- Agility
- Movement and range of motion
- Posture
- Functional activities and/or modifications (i.e. daily movements such as bending, lifting, carrying, reaching, catching, etc. that require whole body integration)
- Transfers between varying surfaces (such as tile floor to carpet, moving over thresholds, etc.)
- Use of appropriate medical equipment
- Foot positioning

It is important to note that children who present mild motor delays that do not impact their participation in the school curriculum may not require physical therapy services. For example, some children may have difficulty skipping or riding a bike, but in gym class they may handle most activities fairly easily. That student may not require ongoing services, although a PT may be able to suggest some practice exercises to help the student progress. However, if a student cannot safely and independently navigate the school environment and join in classroom activities, more intensive interventions may be needed. PTs can be invaluable in helping to determine appropriate responses and the right level of supports needed for each student.

# TIPS FOR SCHOOLS TO HELP FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS

School teams, including relevant specialists, can help families and caregivers understand and respond to a student's physical performance challenges in the following ways, among others.

- Provide adequate information to families and caregivers about their child's physical performance difficulties, using language that is clear and understandable.
- Encourage families and caregivers to participate in the development of their child's Individual Education Plan by sharing their valuable knowledge to assist with the development of appropriate SMART goals.
- Help families and caregivers understand how to integrate their child's physical activity program in the home setting, if the caregivers are comfortable doing so. Practising the recommended physical activities at home can promote improved mobility in all areas.
- Connect families and caregivers with other resources and educational opportunities, as needed, including resources to help them advocate for their children and themselves.
- Check to confirm that families and caregivers feel comfortable and adequately informed about their child's physical therapy and overall education program, and help them feel included in making school and home interventions as consistent and seamless as possible.

## SUMMARY

If a student may have a physical challenge that is limiting their access to and enjoyment of the learning opportunities that are available to all students, an appropriate assessment and intervention plan should be a priority. PTs' understanding of human development and motor proficiency make them uniquely equipped to positively influence school programs, routines, and curricula to help address students' physical needs and build on their unique strengths.

Motor skills are among the many important tools that are essential for academic success, and addressing student's physical therapy needs in the school setting can be invaluable in helping students achieve the best possible educational outcomes within their school environment. Establishing a strong foundation for students to access learning opportunities beginning in their early school years is critical; it means students will be able to learn, socialize, and advance along with their peers, creating positive, lasting benefits for their long-term school and life success.

VOLUMES AVAILABLE IN THE

*TALKING ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION* SERIES:

VOLUME 1: AN OVERVIEW

VOLUME 2: AN INTRODUCTION FOR PARENTS / FAMILIES

VOLUME 3: INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

VOLUME 4: A PARENT'S GUIDE TO INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLANS

VOLUME 5: SPEECH AND LANGUAGE THERAPY

VOLUME 6: ATTENTION DEFICIT / ATTENTION DEFICIT HYPERACTIVE  
DISORDER

VOLUME 7: FETAL ALCOHOL SPECTRUM DISORDERS

VOLUME 8: AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

VOLUME 9: GIFTED EDUCATION

VOLUME 10: TRAUMA

VOLUME 11: OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

VOLUME 12: PHYSIOTHERAPY

VOLUME 13: ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY

VOLUME 14: POSITIVE BEHAVIOURAL INTERVENTIONS

FOR MORE INFORMATION:



FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE  
FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION

#113 - 100 Park Royal South, West Vancouver, BC V7T 1A2

604-925-6087 | Toll-free in BC 1-877-422-3672  
info@fnesc.ca

[www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca)