

6. THE DAILY LIVING AND SOCIAL SKILLS OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES

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The preceding chapter described the manifestations of disability in terms of students' health and functioning in the physical, sensory, and communication domains. This chapter considers the implications of disability for students' capacities to carry out activities of daily living and to interact with others in family and social relationships.¹ It also expands our understanding of what youth can do through a discussion of parents' reports of the particular aptitudes of their adolescent children.

Findings are presented for youth with disabilities as a whole and for those who differ in primary disability classification, age, gender, household income, and race/ethnicity.

Daily Living Skills

As youth age, their competence to care for their personal needs generally grows, and their independence grows with it. Cognitive ability also increases for most youth as they reach adolescence and become increasingly able to deal with higher-order-thinking challenges. Furthermore, youth typically take on additional responsibilities for household tasks as they get older. However, disabilities of some kinds can delay or circumvent the usual development of competencies and independence for youth. Limitations in the ability to carry out tasks of daily living can place stress and burden on caregivers at home and can require school staff to address the personal-care needs of students as well their learning challenges. This section explores parents' reports of how well youth with disabilities are able to perform basic self-care tasks, common cognitive tasks, and the extent to which they perform several household activities.

Self-Care Skills

To assess the ability of youth to care for themselves, parents of youth with disabilities were asked to rate how well youth can feed and dress themselves without help. Abilities were measured on a 4-point scale ranging from "not at all well" to "very well." A summative scale of abilities ranges from 2 (both skills done "not at all well") to 8 (both skills done "very well").

According to parents, the vast majority of youth feed and dress themselves on their own "very well" (Exhibit 6-1); only 3% and 6% feed and dress themselves less well, respectively. Thus, virtually all youth (94%) have a high self-care skills scale score.

¹ Similar analyses were conducted for elementary and middle school students with disabilities as part of the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS). The results are reported in Cadwallader, Cameto, Blackorby, Giacalone, and Wagner (2002).

**Exhibit 6-1
SELF-CARE SKILLS OF YOUTH
WITH DISABILITIES**

| | Percentage | Standard Error |
|----------------------------------|------------|-------------------|
| Feeds him/herself without help | | |
| Very well | 96.8 | .5 |
| Pretty well | 1.9 | .4 |
| Not very or not at all well | 1.2 | .3 |
| Dresses him/herself without help | | |
| Very well | 93.8 | .8 |
| Pretty well | 3.8 | .6 |
| Not very or not at all well | 2.3 | .5 |
| Self-care scale score | | |
| High (8) | 93.5 | .8 |
| Medium (5 to 7) | 5.1 | .7 |
| Low (2 to 4) | 1.3 | .4 |

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

Functional Cognitive Skills

Parents were asked to use the same 4-point scale to evaluate four of their sons' or daughters' skills that often are used in daily activities: reading and understanding common signs, telling time on a clock with hands, counting change, and looking up telephone numbers and using the telephone. These skills are referred to here as "functional cognitive skills" because they require the cognitive ability to read, count, and calculate. As such, they suggest much about students' abilities to perform a variety of more complex cognitive tasks. However, they also require sensory and motor skills—for example, to see signs, manipulate a telephone, etc. Consequently, a high score indicates high functioning in all of these

areas, but a low score can result from a deficit in the cognitive, sensory, and/or motor domains.

Parents report that youth with disabilities have more difficulty performing functional cognitive skills than the self-care skills described previously. Still, most youth have mastered these tasks (Exhibit 6-2). Approximately 90% of youth read and understand common signs "very well" or "pretty well," whereas about 80% tell time or count change with these levels of skill. Looking up telephone numbers and using the telephone appears to be the most difficult task; about three-fourths of youth perform this task "very well" or "pretty well," according to parents.

A summative scale of parents' ratings of these functional cognitive skills ranges from 4 (all skills done "not at all well") to 16 (all skills done "very well"). Approximately half of youth with disabilities score in the high range on this scale (15 or 16); almost 6% score in the low range (4 to 8).

**Exhibit 6-2
FUNCTIONAL COGNITIVE SKILLS OF
YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES**

| | Percentage | Standard Error |
|---|------------|-------------------|
| Reads and understands common signs | | |
| Very well | 76.5 | 1.3 |
| Pretty well | 15.7 | 1.1 |
| Not very well | 5.6 | .7 |
| Not at all well | 2.2 | .5 |
| Tells time on an analog clock | | |
| Very well | 61.6 | 1.5 |
| Pretty well | 21.6 | 1.3 |
| Not very well | 16.8 | 1.2 |
| Not at all well | 5.4 | .7 |
| Counts change | | |
| Very well | 58.5 | 1.6 |
| Pretty well | 24.1 | 1.3 |
| Not very well | 13.5 | 1.1 |
| Not at all well | 3.9 | .6 |
| Looks up telephone numbers and uses the phone | | |
| Very well | 51.4 | 1.6 |
| Pretty well | 24.2 | 1.4 |
| Not very well | 17.7 | 1.2 |
| Not at all well | 6.7 | .8 |
| Functional cognitive skills scale score | | |
| High (15 or 16) | 48.9 | 1.6 |
| Medium (9 to 14) | 45.6 | 1.6 |
| Low (4 to 8) | 5.5 | .7 |

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

Household Responsibilities

As youth mature, it often is expected that they take on responsibilities within the home, such as fixing their own breakfast or lunch, straightening up their room or living area, and doing laundry. In addition, most youth begin to function more independently outside of the home, for example, by shopping for personal items. Thus, these kinds of daily living skills can measure both youth's competence and independence.

Parents were asked how often youth fix their own breakfast or lunch, straighten up their living space, do laundry, and buy a few things at a store when they are needed. The frequency of performing these tasks was reported on a 4-point scale ranging from "never" to "always."

A majority of youth (55%) are reported to fix their own breakfast or lunch "always" or "usually," and between 28% and 42% do their laundry, straighten up their room or living area, and buy items at a store that often (Exhibit 6-3). Between 61% and 92% of youth do each of these activities at least "sometimes." Youth are least likely to do laundry; 39% never do laundry, and 33% sometimes do it.

An overview of students' household responsibilities results from a summative scale of ratings of the frequency with which youth do the four activities investigated in NLTS2. The scale ranges from 4 (all activities "never" done) to 16 (all activities "always" done). Overall, 58% of youth score in the medium range on this scale, indicating that they usually or sometimes do these activities, and another 7% score in the high range, indicating that they almost always do these activities.

In interpreting these findings, readers should bear in mind that the extent to which youth perform these tasks may reflect their abilities and disabilities; however, it also may reflect other factors, such as youth's preferences, parental expectations, and/or family culture.

**Exhibit 6-3
HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES OF
YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES**

| | Percentage | Standard Error |
|---|------------|-------------------|
| Fixes own breakfast or lunch | | |
| Always | 32.0 | 1.5 |
| Usually | 22.8 | 1.3 |
| Sometimes | 37.1 | 1.5 |
| Never | 8.2 | .9 |
| Straightens up own room or living area | | |
| Always | 26.6 | 1.4 |
| Usually | 14.7 | 1.1 |
| Sometimes | 40.4 | 1.5 |
| Never | 18.3 | 1.2 |
| Buys items needed at a store | | |
| Always | 25.3 | 1.4 |
| Usually | 17.0 | 1.2 |
| Sometimes | 41.5 | 1.6 |
| Never | 16.2 | 1.2 |
| Does laundry | | |
| Always | 19.1 | 1.5 |
| Usually | 8.6 | .9 |
| Sometimes | 32.9 | 1.5 |
| Never | 39.4 | 1.5 |
| Household responsibilities scale score | | |
| High (15 or 16) | 6.9 | .8 |
| Medium (9 to 14) | 58.1 | 1.6 |
| Low (4 to 8) | 35.0 | 1.5 |
| Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews. | | |

Disability Differences in Daily Living Skills

Youth with different primary disability classifications differ dramatically in the frequency with which they perform the daily living activities described above. At least 90% of youth with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, or speech, hearing, or other health impairments score in the high range on the self-care scale (Exhibit 6-4). These are more difficult tasks for youth with orthopedic impairments, autism, multiple disabilities, or deaf-blindness; only about half score high on the scale.

However, these findings should be interpreted with caution. It can be tempting to think of these self-care skills as fundamental, and to think that youth who cannot perform these skills also cannot perform other tasks. This is not always the case; as exemplified by well-known figures, such as scientist Stephen Hawking and artist Christy Brown, some individuals with severe physical impairments who cannot take care of their own physical needs are very competent in other areas.

Youth in the categories that tend to have high self-care scores also tend to have high functional cognitive skill scores. More than half of youth with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, or speech, hearing, or other health impairments have high scores on functional cognitive skills. Youth with mental retardation, visual impairments, autism, multiple disabilities, or deaf-blindness appear to be more challenged by these types of tasks; more than 20% score in the low range.

There is much less variation in youth doing household responsibilities frequently; between 2% and 9% score high on the household responsibilities scale. However, there is greater variation at the low end of that scale, with variations across categories being similar to those of other scales. Youth with hearing and speech impairments or learning disabilities are least likely to score low on household responsibilities (26% to 32%), whereas more than half of those with autism, orthopedic impairments, or multiple disabilities do.

Exhibit 6-4
DAILY LIVING SKILLS OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES, BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

| | Learning Disability | Speech/Language Impairment | Mental Retardation | Emotional Disturbance | Hearing Impairment | Visual Impairment | Orthopedic Impairment | Other Health Impairment | Autism | Traumatic Brain Injury | Multiple Disabilities | Deaf-Blindness |
|--|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Percentage with self-care skills scale score: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High (8) | 98.1 (.7) | 96.0 (1.0) | 80.9 (1.9) | 96.7 (.9) | 97.5 (.9) | 73.2 (3.1) | 50.5 (2.7) | 90.5 (1.4) | 52.9 (2.7) | 76.7 (3.9) | 53.4 (2.7) | 56.0 (4.9) |
| Low (2 to 4) | .1 (.2) | .2 (.2) | 4.0 (1.0) | .3 (.3) | .1 (.2) | 6.3 (1.7) | 17.8 (2.1) | .8 (.4) | 6.6 (1.3) | 4.5 (1.9) | 21.7 (2.2) | 14.9 (3.5) |
| Percentage with functional cognitive skills scale score: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High (15 or 16) | 52.3 (2.4) | 61.6 (2.4) | 20.4 (2.0) | 62.7 (2.5) | 56.0 (2.8) | 33.4 (3.3) | 40.3 (2.7) | 53.0 (2.4) | 24.6 (2.3) | 46.4 (4.6) | 15.8 (2.0) | 20.4 (4.1) |
| Low (4 to 8) | 1.5 (.6) | 2.0 (.7) | 22.6 (2.1) | 2.5 (.8) | 3.9 (1.1) | 22.8 (3.0) | 15.0 (2.0) | 2.4 (.7) | 28.6 (2.4) | 8.2 (2.5) | 40.4 (2.6) | 33.1 (4.8) |
| Percentage with household responsibilities scale score: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High (15 or 16) | 7.4 (1.3) | 5.7 (1.1) | 7.4 (1.3) | 6.3 (1.2) | 8.6 (1.6) | 4.7 (1.5) | 4.2 (1.1) | 3.6 (0.9) | 1.5 (.6) | 6.9 (2.3) | 2.7 (.9) | 6.3 (2.4) |
| Low (4 to 8) | 30.8 (2.3) | 30.1 (2.3) | 43.3 (2.5) | 39.8 (2.5) | 26.3 (2.5) | 40.1 (3.5) | 63.0 (2.7) | 41.4 (2.3) | 56.2 (2.6) | 36.0 (4.4) | 63.4 (2.6) | 48.5 (5.0) |

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

Note: The category "medium" is omitted from the table.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

Demographic Differences in Daily Living Skills

Age. Few daily living skills differ between youth in the narrow 13- to 17-year-old age range. The one exception is that 17-year-olds are significantly more likely than younger teens to take on household responsibilities frequently. Approximately 13% of 17-year-olds score high on the scale, compared with 4% to 6% of 13- to 16-year-olds ($p < .01$). Youth represented by NLTS2 also have higher levels of household responsibility than younger students. About 60% of 6- to 13-year-olds represented in the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) score low on the household responsibilities scale, compared with 35% of older teens with disabilities ($p < .001$).

Similarly, compared with 6- to 13-year-olds, older teens with disabilities are more likely to score high on both the self-care scale and the functional cognitive scales (Cadwallader, Cameto, Blackorby, Giacalone, & Wagner, 2002). Just over three-fourths of younger students with disabilities score high on the self-care skills scale, and about one-fourth do so on the functional cognitive skills scale, compared with 94% and 49% of 13- to 17-year-olds, respectively ($p < .001$).

**Exhibit 6-5
DAILY LIVING SKILLS, BY GENDER**

| | Boys | Girls |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Percentage with functional cognitive skills scale score: | | |
| High (15 or 16) | 51.1 (1.9) | 44.4 (2.7) |
| Low (4 to 8) | 5.1 (.9) | 6.3 (1.3) |
| Percentage with household responsibilities scale score: | | |
| High (15 or 16) | 4.8 (.8) | 11.1 (1.7) |
| Low (4 to 8) | 38.1 (1.9) | 28.8 (2.4) |

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.
 Note: The category "medium" is omitted from the table.
 Standard errors are in parentheses.

Gender. Although boys and girls do not differ in their self-care abilities, boys are more likely than girls to be reported to have high functional cognitive skills (51% vs. 44%, $p < .05$; Exhibit 6-5). However, girls are more than twice as likely to score high on the household responsibilities scale than boys (11% vs. 5%, $p < .001$).

Household income. Youth with various levels of household income differ only on the functional cognitive skills scale, with higher income levels being associated with higher performance. Whereas 42% of youth with annual household incomes of \$25,000 or less are rated as having high functional cognitive skills, 55% of youth with household incomes of more than \$50,000 have high ratings ($p < .001$).

Race/ethnicity. Youth of the three

racial/ethnic groups differ only on the household responsibilities scale. African American youth are more likely than white youth to be rated in the high range (10% vs. 6%, $p < .05$).

Social Functioning

It is well established that competence in social exchanges is a key factor in school engagement and academic success (Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Coie, 1990; Dodge, 1990) and that problems in social functioning can signal difficulties in multiple domains (Magnusson & Bergman, 1990). Positive peer relations support adaptive behavior and can be an indicator of positive social, emotional, and cognitive development, whereas social isolation has been associated with confrontational, aggressive, and self-destructive behavior in children and adults (Cairns & Cairns, 1994).

The IDEA requires an IEP team to consider, if appropriate, strategies to address behavior that impedes a student’s learning or that of others [34CFR300.346(a)2(i)]. Students receiving special education include a disproportionate number of youth who are at high risk for delays or difficulties in social development, and it is these students who are most likely to be targeted for positive behavioral supports as part of an IEP or behavioral intervention plan.

NLTS2 helps shed light on students’ social adjustment by providing national benchmarks regarding their social skills against which the effects of national, regional, and local programs can be evaluated. Parents’ reports of the social skills of youth with disabilities are provided to assess their general social competence; the extent to which parents report that youth have been arrested also is reported as an important marker of youth’s social adjustment in the community.

Social Skills

The social skills of youth with disabilities were assessed by asking parents questions regarding 11 aspects of social interactions, most of which were drawn from the Social Skills

Rating System, Parent Form (Gresham & Elliott, 1990). Parents were asked whether their adolescent children engaged in each kind of interaction “never,” “sometimes,” or “always.” The 11 items and the three skill areas into which they group are:

- **Assertion**—a student’s ability and willingness to become involved in social activities.
 - Makes friends easily.
 - Seems confident in social situations, such as parties or group outings.
 - Starts conversations rather than waiting for others to start.
 - Joins group activities without being told to, such as a group having lunch together.
- **Self-control**—a student’s ability to cope with frustration and to deal with conflict.
 - Avoids situations that are likely to result in trouble.
 - Controls his or her temper when arguing with peers other than siblings.
 - Ends disagreements with parent calmly.
 - Receives criticism well.
- **Cooperation**—a student’s ability to cooperate and stay on task.
 - Speaks in an appropriate tone at home.
 - Keeps working at something until he or she is finished, even if it takes a long time.*
 - Behaves at home in a way that causes problems for the family.*

A scale was created from responses to items regarding each area of social ability. The assertion and self-control scales range from 0 to 8, and the cooperation scale ranges from 0 to 6. An overall measure of general social skills was created by summing these three scales; it ranges from 0 to 22. For the first two scales, ratings of low, medium, or high were created for youth by using the national means and standard deviations; for the overall and cooperation scales, ratings were created by using the means and standard deviations for youth with disabilities because no national norm data are available for them.²

A minority of youth with disabilities (18%) receive low scores on the overall social skills scale (Exhibit 6-6); a similar percentage (23%) score high. Youth are most likely to receive high scores for assertion and cooperation—approximately 13% on each scale; between 15% and 20% score low. The fact that a majority of students (54%) make friends easily contributes particularly strongly to high scores for assertion, whereas having a majority of students frequently speaking in an appropriate tone at home contributes to high cooperation ratings. Fewer youth are rated high on the self-control scale (5%), yet somewhat fewer also are rated low (11%). Lower scores on this scale result primarily from reports that relatively few youth (17%) frequently receive criticism well.

* An asterisk indicates items that were not drawn from the SSRS.

² See Appendix A for details on the creation of these scales.

Exhibit 6-6
SOCIAL SKILLS OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES AND
YOUTH IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

| | Youth with Disabilities ^a | | Youth in the General Population ^b | |
|--|--------------------------------------|---------------|--|---------------|
| | Low | High | Low | High |
| Social skills scales (percentage with score) | | | | |
| Overall social skills | 17.9 (1.2) | 22.9 (1.3) | NA | NA |
| Assertion | 19.9 (1.3) | 12.5 (1.0) | 8.1 (2.1) | 12.6 (2.5) |
| Self-control | 10.9 (1.0) | 5.4 (.7) | 7.5 (2.0) | 6.3 (1.8) |
| Cooperation | 15.4 (1.1) | 13.4 (1.1) | NA | NA |
| Components of scales (percentage with frequency of activity) | | | | |
| | Never | Very Often | Never | Very Often |
| Assertion | | | | |
| Makes friends easily | 8.6 (.9) | 53.8 (1.6) | 2.9 (1.3) | 56.9 (3.8) |
| Starts conversations rather than waiting for others to start | 11.4 (1.0) | 42.3 (1.6) | 12.6 (2.5) | 32.8 (3.6) |
| Seems confident in social situations, such as parties or group outings | 15.6 (1.1) | 38.7 (1.5) | .0 | 62.1 (3.7) |
| Joins group activities without being told to, such as a group having lunch together | 22.0 (1.3) | 34.8 (1.5) | 12.1 (2.5) | 44.3 (3.8) |
| Self-control | | | | |
| Avoids situations that are likely to result in trouble | 11.6 (1.0) | 48.4 (1.6) | 2.3 (1.1) | 53.5 (3.8) |
| Controls his or her temper when arguing with peers other than siblings | 12.5 (1.1) | 38.8 (1.5) | 9.2 (2.2) | 35.1 (3.6) |
| Ends disagreements with parent calmly | 16.1 (1.2) | 34.1 (1.5) | 7.5 (2.0) | 38.5 (3.7) |
| Receives criticism well | 27.3 (1.4) | 16.7 (1.2) | 14.4 (2.7) | 20.7 (3.1) |
| Cooperation | | | | |
| Speaks in an appropriate tone at home | 4.3 (.6) | 52.0 (1.6) | .6 (.6) | 50.6 (3.8) |
| Keeps working at something until he or she is finished, even if it takes a long time | 16.4 (1.2) | 35.0 (1.5) | NA | NA |
| Behaves at home in a way that does not cause problems for the family | 14.3 (1.1) | 35.8 (1.5) | NA | NA |

^a Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

^b Source: American Guidance Service Social Skills Rating System national norms data.

Note: The categories "medium" and "sometimes" are omitted from the exhibit.

NA=Not available.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

Compared with youth in the general population, youth with disabilities are more likely to receive low ratings on the assertion scale and on several of its components. Parents of youth in the general population rate only 8% of them as low on this scale, compared with 20% of youth with disabilities ($p < .05$). This difference results from the fact that parents of students with disabilities are more likely to report that their children never make friends easily, join group activities without being told to, or are confident in social situations ($p < .05$ for all differences). On the other hand, youth with disabilities appear to be better than youth in the general population at starting conversations; parents report that 42% of them start conversations on their own “very often,” compared with 33% of youth in the general population ($p < .05$).

Youth with disabilities and youth in the general population receive similar ratings with regard to their self-control skills; however, there is considerable differentiation between the two groups on the individual items that comprise the scale. Parents of youth with disabilities and youth in the general population are about equally likely to report that youth do each of the social skills “very often,” but parents of youth with disabilities are less likely than those of youth in the general population to report that their children never avoid situations that result in trouble, end disagreements calmly, or receive criticism well ($p < .001$ for all differences).

Disability Differences in Social Skills

There are reasons to expect that differences in disabilities might influence youth’s social skills. For example, youth with severe cognitive or speech/language limitations might have problems with social functioning because of communication difficulties, whereas youth with learning disabilities or most orthopedic impairments may not face those types of challenges. Findings from NLTS2 support these expectations. Ten percent or fewer of youth with learning disabilities, speech impairments, or hearing, visual, or orthopedic impairments are rated low on the overall social skills scale (Exhibit 6-7). In contrast, from 20% to 31% of youth with mental retardation, autism, or multiple disabilities score in the low range on overall social skills.

Difficulty in social situations is a diagnostic criterion for youth with autism or emotional disturbances, and their social skills ratings also are predictably low. Youth with autism have the weakest assertion skills of any of the disability groups—parents report that 61% of them have low skills in this domain. Youth with emotional disturbances receive significantly lower ratings than youth with all other types of disabilities for self-control and cooperation, with 20% rated low and only 1% rated high on the former scale and 29% rated low and only 6% rated high on the latter scale.

Although one-fourth of youth with emotional disturbances are rated low on the assertion scale, according to their parents, most youth with emotional disturbances are not asocial, shy, or withdrawn. In fact, approximately 90% of them are reported to make friends and/or start conversations easily, 80% are reported to seem confident in social situations, and 72% are reported to join group activities without being told to do so. These reports lend support to evidence that peer rejection and social ostracism are not the inevitable burden of youth with behavioral and emotional difficulties (Farmer & Farmer, 1996; Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl, & Van Acker, 2000; Sandstrom & Coie, 1999).

Exhibit 6-7
SOCIAL SKILLS OF YOUTH, BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

| | Learning Disabilities | Speech/Language Impairment | Mental Retardation | Emotional Disturbance | Hearing Impairment | Visual Impairment | Orthopedic Impairment | Other Health Impairment | Autism | Traumatic Brain Injury | Multiple Disabilities | Deaf-Blindness |
|--|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Percentage with overall social skills rated: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High | 11.3 (1.6) | 13.1 (1.7) | 5.2 (1.1) | 3.2 (.9) | 18.5 (2.2) | 19.7 (2.8) | 16.7 (2.1) | 7.9 (1.3) | 3.1 (.9) | 7.6 (2.4) | 9.8 (1.6) | 8.2 (2.8) |
| Low | 10.1 (1.5) | 8.8 (1.4) | 15.0 (1.8) | 25.2 (2.2) | 7.7 (1.5) | 5.3 (1.6) | 9.6 (1.6) | 15.4 (1.7) | 30.8 (2.5) | 13.3 (3.1) | 20.2 (2.2) | 16.9 (3.8) |
| Percentage with assertion skills rated: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High | 14.1 (1.7) | 12.7 (1.6) | 7.1 (1.3) | 9.0 (1.5) | 14.8 (2.0) | 14.6 (2.5) | 15.3 (2.0) | 14.2 (1.7) | 2.2 (.8) | 9.3 (2.7) | 8.9 (1.5) | 6.8 (2.5) |
| Low | 16.5 (1.8) | 20.3 (2.0) | 26.8 (2.2) | 24.3 (2.2) | 21.0 (2.3) | 18.1 (2.7) | 22.2 (2.3) | 22.2 (2.0) | 61.2 (2.6) | 19.5 (3.6) | 35.3 (2.6) | 36.4 (4.8) |
| Percentage with self-control skills rated: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High | 5.8 (1.1) | 7.3 (1.3) | 5.4 (1.1) | 1.2 (.5) | 9.4 (1.7) | 8.3 (2.0) | 10.2 (1.7) | 5.7 (1.1) | 4.9 (1.2) | 5.8 (2.2) | 8.7 (1.6) | 10.6 (3.1) |
| Low | 9.9 (1.5) | 4.1 (1.0) | 10.5 (1.5) | 19.8 (2.0) | 3.8 (1.1) | 4.5 (1.5) | 4.8 (1.2) | 12.2 (1.5) | 11.4 (1.7) | 10.1 (2.8) | 11.1 (1.7) | 12.2 (3.3) |
| Percentage with cooperation skills rated: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| High | 14.4 (1.7) | 21.9 (2.0) | 12.3 (1.6) | 5.6 (1.2) | 24.9 (2.5) | 30.7 (3.3) | 21.5 (2.3) | 8.9 (1.3) | 10.0 (1.6) | 10.0 (2.8) | 13.1 (1.8) | 20.1 (4.0) |
| Low | 12.7 (1.6) | 10.3 (1.5) | 17.8 (1.9) | 28.6 (2.3) | 9.3 (1.7) | 4.7 (1.5) | 11.1 (1.7) | 20.0 (1.9) | 19.1 (2.1) | 14.2 (3.2) | 16.9 (2.0) | 11.9 (3.2) |

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

Note: The category "medium" is omitted from the exhibit.

For youth in other disability categories, there is quite a wide range of ratings on the assertion scale, but youth with multiple disabilities or deaf-blindness stand out as being the most likely to receive low ratings (35% and 36%, respectively). Ratings on the self-control scale vary somewhat less; between 5% and 11% of youth are rated high, and between 4% and 12% are rated low. Youth with visual impairments are the most likely to be rated high (31%) regarding cooperation and the least likely to be rated low (5%). At the other end of the cooperation continuum are youth with learning disabilities, mental retardation, other health impairments, or multiple disabilities, between 9% and 14% of whom are rated high and between 13% and 20% are rated low.

Demographic Differences in Social Skills

There are no consistent or significant age-related differences in parents' reports of the social skills of youth in the NLTS2 age range. However, there are notable differences when teens are compared with younger students with disabilities (Cadwallader et al., 2002). Unlike self-care and functional cognitive skills, stronger social skills are demonstrated by younger students. Compared with older teens, students with disabilities in the 6- to 13-year-old age range are less

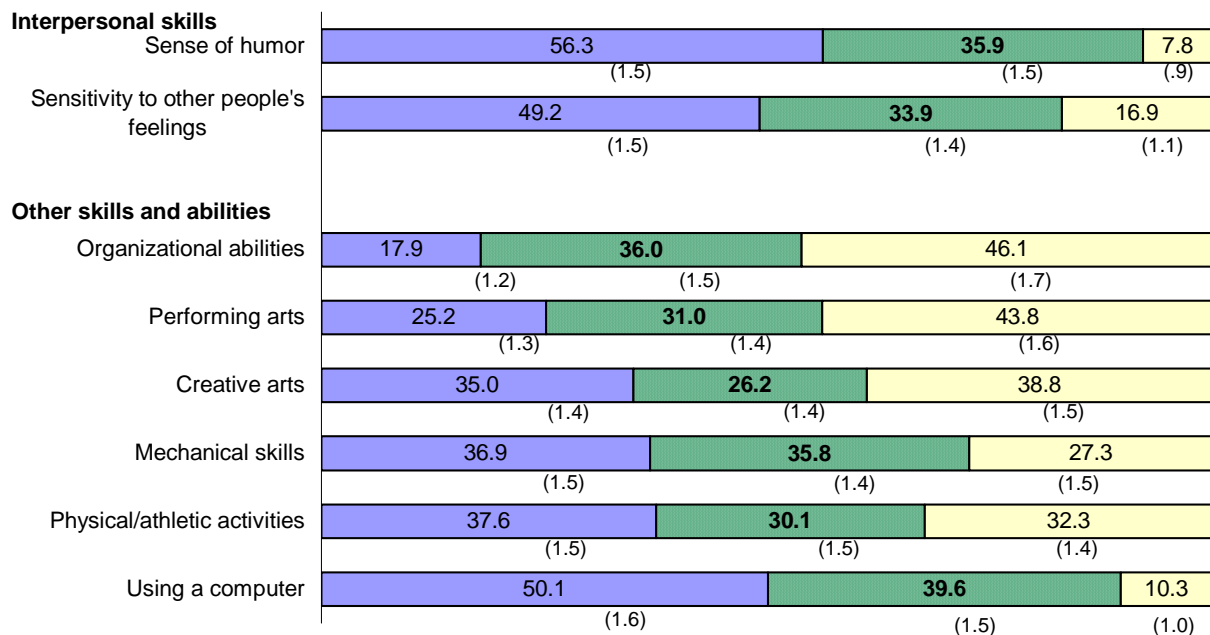
likely to be rated low by their parents on their overall social skills (13% vs. 18%, $p < .001$) and on the assertion scale (8% vs. 20%, $p < .001$). They also are more likely to be rated high on their self-control skills (18% vs. 5%, $p < .001$). Cooperation skills of younger and older students are rated similarly by their parents. Also, parents of boys and girls do not rate their social skills differently.

The assertion scale is the only one on which there are differences in the ratings of youth with different levels of household income or of different races/ethnicities. Youth from households with incomes of more than \$50,000 are more likely than youth from households with incomes of \$25,000 or less to be rated high on this scale (16% vs. 10%, $p < .05$), and youth from low-income families are more likely to be rated low (23% vs. 16%, $p < .05$). In addition, white youth are more likely than African American youth to be rated high on this scale (14% vs. 10%, $p < .05$).

Parents' Reports of Youth's Aptitudes

The skills and abilities described thus far focus on areas of functioning that are important to the ability of youth to participate and succeed at home, in school, and in their communities. However, there are other areas in which youth might demonstrate aptitude. To identify other strengths or abilities of youth, parents were asked how good they thought their adolescent children were in the variety of areas indicated in Exhibit 6-8. Parents perceive a sizable percentage of youth as having at least some aptitude in each of these areas. The percentage of youth rated as "pretty good" or "very good" ranges from 54% to 92% across the areas. Youth reportedly are best at interpersonal skills, with 56% reported to have a very good sense of humor

Exhibit 6-8
PARENTS' REPORTS OF APTITUDES OF YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES



Source: NLTSS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.
Standard errors are in parentheses.

■ Very good ■ Pretty good □ Not very or not at all good

and 49% to be very sensitive to others' feelings. There is quite a range of ratings on the other skills and abilities. Half of youth are rated as "very good" at using a computer, and another 40% are rated as "pretty good." At the other end of the continuum are performing arts and organization; approximately 45% of youth are rated as not good in these areas. Physical and athletic activities, mechanical skills, and creative arts fall between the two poles.

Disability Differences in Aptitudes

There are dramatic ranges in aptitudes among youth with different primary disability classifications (Exhibit 6-9). Youth with hearing impairments are among the most likely to be reported to be good at each of the areas, as are youth with speech impairments to a somewhat lesser extent. Youth with autism or multiple disabilities are among the least likely to be rated by parents as strong in each of the areas.

Youth with most types of disabilities mirror the pattern of youth with disabilities as a group, scoring higher on the two interpersonal skills and on computer use than in other areas. Youth with emotional disturbances are an exception to this pattern in that they are rated lower on sensitivity to others' feelings than on several other abilities and skills.

Exhibit 6-9
PARENTS' REPORTS OF APTITUDES OF YOUTH, BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

| | Learning Disability | Speech/ Language Impairment | Mental Retardation | Emotional Disturbance | Hearing Impairment | Visual Impairment | Orthopedic Impairment | Other Health Impairment | Autism | Traumatic Brain Injury | Multiple Disabilities | Deaf-Blindness |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Percentage reported to be "very skilled" at: | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Having a sense of humor | 60.2 (2.4) | 59.4 (2.4) | 46.0 (2.5) | 47.5 (2.5) | 62.8 (2.9) | 64.2 (3.4) | 68.5 (2.6) | 50.8 (2.4) | 39.2 (2.6) | 56.7 (4.6) | 49.9 (2.7) | 55.0 (5.0) |
| Being sensitive to others' feelings | 53.6 (2.4) | 55.1 (2.4) | 42.9 (2.5) | 30.8 (2.4) | 59.5 (2.9) | 58 (3.5) | 57.9 (2.7) | 44.1 (2.4) | 26.4 (2.4) | 45.4 (4.6) | 48.0 (2.7) | 48.1 (5.1) |
| Using a computer | 52.7 (2.5) | 59.0 (2.5) | 28.9 (2.3) | 55.1 (2.6) | 61.2 (2.9) | 46.9 (3.6) | 50.1 (2.8) | 57.1 (2.4) | 39.4 (2.7) | 45.5 (4.7) | 28.2 (2.5) | 38.9 (5.0) |
| Physical/athletic activities | 40.7 (2.4) | 40.8 (2.4) | 29.0 (2.3) | 31.9 (2.4) | 44.3 (2.9) | 22.1 (2.9) | 15.2 (2.0) | 33.1 (2.2) | 14.2 (1.9) | 21.6 (3.8) | 16.3 (2.0) | 24.4 (4.3) |
| Mechanical skills | 43.2 (2.4) | 33.4 (2.3) | 19.3 (2.0) | 38.9 (2.5) | 35.5 (2.8) | 15.9 (2.6) | 14.0 (1.9) | 33.8 (2.3) | 16.3 (2.0) | 26.0 (4.1) | 13.8 (1.9) | 18.7 (4.0) |
| Creative arts | 38.3 (2.4) | 32.2 (2.3) | 19.4 (2.0) | 40.8 (2.5) | 42.5 (2.9) | 32.5 (3.3) | 24.5 (2.4) | 30.7 (2.2) | 23.1 (2.3) | 24.9 (4.1) | 15.4 (2.0) | 23.2 (4.3) |
| Performing arts | 27.1 (2.2) | 25.7 (2.2) | 19.8 (2.0) | 23.9 (2.2) | 25.5 (2.6) | 36.9 (3.5) | 23.5 (2.4) | 20.8 (2.0) | 20.4 (2.2) | 19.9 (3.8) | 14.8 (2.0) | 18.2 (3.9) |
| Organization | 18.4 (1.9) | 25.0 (2.1) | 22.5 (2.1) | 9.9 (1.5) | 29.6 (2.7) | 17.9 (2.7) | 18.6 (2.2) | 8.5 (1.3) | 21.5 (2.2) | 11.9 (3.0) | 20.5 (2.2) | 24.8 (4.4) |

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.
Standard errors are in parentheses.

Demographic Differences in Aptitudes

There are no differences among the various demographic groups in parents' reports of aptitudes regarding sensitivity to others' feelings or creative arts. The only difference among the age groups relates to organizational abilities; 17-year-olds are more likely than 16-year-olds to be rated by their parents as very skilled (25% vs. 15%, $p < .05$).³

According to parents, boys are more likely than girls to have a good sense of humor (59% vs. 52%, $p < .05$; Exhibit 6-10) and to excel at physical or athletic activities (42% vs. 27%, $p < .001$) and mechanical skills (48% vs. 16%, $p < .001$). In contrast, girls are more likely than boys to have an aptitude for the performing arts (33% vs. 21%, $p < .001$).

Youth from the highest-income group reportedly have a better sense of humor (60% vs. 51%, $p < .05$) and are better at using a computer (56% vs. 44%, $p < .01$), but youth from the least-affluent households are better organized (23% vs. 13%, $p < .001$).

White youth are significantly more likely than African American youth to be reported to have strong mechanical abilities (41% vs. 29%, $p < .01$), but more African American youth are reported to be good at the performing arts (38% vs. 21%, $p < .001$) and organization (23% vs. 16%, $p < .05$).

Exhibit 6-10
PARENTS' REPORTS OF APTITUDES OF YOUTH,
BY DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

| | Gender | | Household Income | | | Race/Ethnicity | | |
|---|---------------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|---------------------|---------------|
| | Boys | Girls | \$25,000 or Less | \$25,001 to \$50,000 | More than \$50,000 | White | African American | Hispanic |
| Percentage reported to be "very skilled" at: | | | | | | | | |
| Having a sense of humor | 58.6 (1.9) | 51.9 (2.7) | 51.2 (2.6) | 58.3 (2.9) | 60.5 (2.9) | 57.4 (2.0) | 56.5 (3.4) | 52.3 (4.4) |
| Using a computer | 51.4 (2.0) | 47.5 (2.7) | 44.3 (2.6) | 51.6 (3.0) | 55.5 (3.0) | 51.3 (2.0) | 46.5 (3.5) | 50.2 (4.6) |
| Physical/athletic activities | 41.7 (1.9) | 27.2 (2.4) | 34.3 (2.5) | 38.4 (2.9) | 37.5 (2.9) | 36.0 (1.9) | 39.2 (3.3) | 37.1 (4.3) |
| Mechanical skills | 48.2 (2.0) | 15.9 (2.0) | 33.4 (2.4) | 40.9 (2.9) | 38.2 (2.9) | 40.7 (2.0) | 29.1 (3.1) | 36.9 (4.3) |
| Performing arts | 21.3 (1.6) | 32.7 (2.6) | 28.7 (2.4) | 22.6 (2.5) | 23.3 (2.6) | 21.0 (1.7) | 37.5 (3.3) | 27.6 (4.0) |
| Organizational skills | 16.3 (1.4) | 21.1 (2.2) | 22.6 (2.2) | 17.7 (2.3) | 12.9 (2.0) | 15.7 (1.5) | 23.3 (2.9) | 20.3 (3.6) |

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.
Standard errors are in parentheses.

³ The aptitudes of youth with disabilities in the NLTS2 age range cannot be compared with those of younger students with disabilities, as was done for their daily living and social skills, because SEELS data do not use the response categories used in NLTS2 for parents' reports of aptitudes.

Summary

Daily living skills set the stage for subsequent performance in school and independent living. The vast majority of youth with disabilities are able to perform the tasks that are fundamental to self-care. Functional cognitive skills present significantly greater challenges; only about half of youth perform tasks like counting change and reading common signs “very well.” Fixing their own breakfast or lunch is the only household chore investigated in NLTS2 that a majority of youth are reported to do “always” or “usually”.

There are significant differences in parents’ perceptions of students’ daily living skills, social abilities, and strengths. Disability classification clearly differentiates among youth, with some disability groups demonstrating significant limitations while others do not. Youth with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, or speech, hearing, or other health impairments tend to have good self-care and functional cognitive skills. Self-care is more difficult for youth with orthopedic impairments, autism, or multiple disabilities, and functional cognitive tasks are difficult for a comparatively large proportion of youth with visual impairments or deaf-blindness, as well as for youth with mental retardation, autism, or multiple disabilities.

There also is a broad range of social abilities among youth with various types of disabilities; youth with hearing, visual, or orthopedic impairments are reported to be the most socially adept, whereas youth with autism or emotional disturbances have the most difficulty socially. Their difficulties lie not in their social assertion skills, however, but in their abilities to control themselves and cooperate with others.

Age-related differences between youth in the NLTS2 age range are not particularly pronounced, but comparisons between their skills and those of younger students, as measured in SEELS, demonstrate the developmental nature of self-care and functional cognitive skills and household responsibilities. Teens are more likely than younger students with disabilities to have high ratings on these skills and activities. In contrast, older teens are more likely to be rated lower on their social skills. It is unclear whether this difference results from a deterioration of social skills as youth age, a difference in the disability distributions among younger and older students with disabilities (e.g., there are fewer students with speech impairments and more students with emotional disturbances in the upper age range), or the use of different standards by parents of older and younger students with disabilities in assessing their children’s social skills.

Although gender, family income, and racial/ethnic background do not distinguish youth in their self-care skills, demographic factors are associated with differences on some other dimensions. Boys are more likely than girls to be reported to have strong athletic and mechanical abilities, a better sense of humor, and greater functional cognitive skills. On the other hand, girls are more likely to excel in the performing arts and in organization, and they also are more likely to take on household responsibilities.

A higher family income is associated with stronger functional cognitive, assertion, and computer skills, and a better sense of humor. However, a lower family income is associated with stronger performing arts talents and organizational skills. Youth with disabilities of different racial/ethnic backgrounds are rated quite similarly in their self-care and functional cognitive skills. However, white youth are reported to be better than African American youth at mechanical tasks, whereas African American youth are reported to be better at the performing

arts and at organization. African American youth are reported to take on household responsibilities more frequently than white youth.

These findings confirm that youth with disabilities are a heterogeneous group with a range of competencies and limitations. Strengths and weaknesses can vary among individuals in ways that are unpredictable and that may be overlooked in understanding the aggregate experiences of youth with disabilities.