

2. Youth With Disabilities' Views of Themselves and Their Lives

Adolescence is a time of rapid development physically, psychologically, and emotionally (Erikson 1968; Harter 1990). Along with the maturational changes during this developmental period comes a heightened awareness of self that often focuses on individuality, personal identity, and fitting into the social mainstream (Damon and Hart 1988; Draper and Belsky 1990; Levine and Wagner 2005; Peetsma et al. 2005). Adolescents' views of themselves and their lives “serve to shape goals...and to provide self-guides that aid in appropriate social behavior and self-regulation” (Harter 1999, p. 2).

This chapter addresses the “self-descriptions” (Harter 1999, p. 3) of youth with disabilities—how they represent to others via interview or survey both “who I am” and “how I feel” about various aspects of self and life. To ascertain their self-descriptions, youth with disabilities were asked their views about their personal attributes and their feelings about positive and negative aspects of themselves and their lives. This chapter presents findings regarding these kinds of self-descriptions for youth with disabilities¹ as a whole and for those who differ in disability category and, when statistically significant, age, gender, household income, and race/ethnicity.

“Who I Am” Self-Descriptions

Youth with disabilities were asked to communicate their self-descriptions related to six attributes—being a nice person, being able to handle challenges, having a sense of humor, being sensitive to others' feelings, being well organized, and having a disability. They were asked to report on a 3-point scale whether being a nice person and being able to handle most things that come their way is “very much like [them]” (3 points), “a little like [them],” or “not at all like [them]” (1 point), and on a 4-point scale whether they thought they were “very good” (4 points), “pretty good,” “not very good,” or “not at all good” (1 point) at having a sense of humor, being sensitive to others, and being well organized.

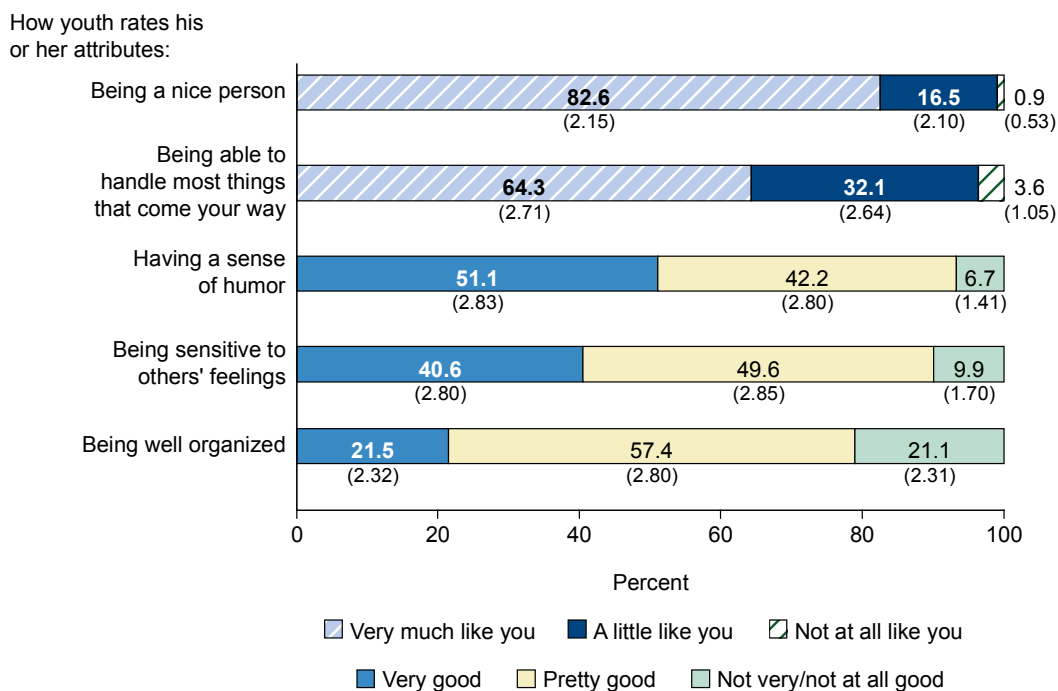
Youth with disabilities report higher estimations of some attributes than others. Most youth report viewing themselves as being nice; 83 percent state that being a nice person is “very much” like them, and fewer than 1 percent report that being a nice person is “not at all” like them (figure 1). Youth are more likely to give high ratings to themselves for being a nice person than to appraise other self attributes so positively ($p < .001$ for all comparisons). Almost two-thirds (64 percent) describe themselves as being very able to handle most challenges that come their way. They are more likely to give high ratings to their ability to handle challenges than to having a sense of humor, being sensitive, or being well organized ($p < .001$ for all comparisons). Slightly more than half (51 percent) assert they have a “very good” sense of humor, with an additional 42 percent stating they have a “pretty good” sense of humor. Youth are more likely to describe themselves as having a very good sense of humor than to describe themselves as being very sensitive or well organized ($p < .001$ both comparisons). Forty-one percent report a “very

¹ Readers are reminded that findings are national estimates for the subsample of youth with disabilities who could report their own perceptions and expectations, not a sample of all youth with disabilities in the NLTS2 age range. See chapter 1 for further details on the group that is the focus of this report.

good” sensitivity to others’ feelings, whereas one-quarter (22 percent) describe themselves as “very good” at being well organized ($p < .001$).

When values on the response scales for each attribute were correlated, youth who describe themselves more positively with regard to one aspect of their personality are more likely to report being positive about other aspects. For example, youth who describe themselves as being able to handle most things also are more likely to state that they have a good sense of humor $r = .21$ ($p < .001$). Correlations between the various self-attributes range from $r = .09$ ($p < .001$) for the relationship between responses to being a nice person and being well organized to $r = .26$ ($p < .001$) for responses related to being sensitive to others’ feelings and being a nice person.

Figure 1. Youth with disabilities’ reported perceptions of self attributes



NOTE: Response categories “not very good” and “not at all good” have been collapsed for reporting purposes. Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

Parents of youth included in this report were asked to share their perceptions of their children, using the same 4-point scale in three of these areas: having a sense of humor, being sensitive to others, and being well organized. Ratings do not differ significantly between parents and youth for these attributes, including having a sense of humor (59 percent “very good” vs. 51 percent), being sensitive to others’ feelings (50 percent vs. 41 percent), or being well organized (19 percent vs. 22 percent). In addition, parents’ and youth’s perceptions are related to each other in that youth who hold higher estimates of their abilities tend to have parents who also hold high estimates of the youth’s abilities. Correlations of parents’ and youth’s scale scores regarding perceptions range from $r = .18$ ($p < .001$) for ratings related to having a sense of

humor, $r = .20$ ($p < .001$) for ratings related to being sensitive to others, and $r = .39$ ($p < .001$) for being well organized.

Beyond the perceptions of the types of attributes shared by all youth, those with disabilities have views about their disability. To explore whether youth consider themselves to have a disability, youth were read the statement “Some people have a disability or special need that makes it hard for them to do some things” and then were asked, “Do you consider yourself to have any kind of disability or special need?” Fewer than one-third (32 percent) of those who had received special education services when they were ages 13 through 16 describe themselves as having a disability or special need when they are 15 through 19 years old.

“How I Feel” Self-Descriptions

In addition to self-perceptions related to “who I am” types of attributes, youth with disabilities were asked to share their feelings about both positive and negative aspects of themselves and their lives.

Positive Aspects

Youth with disabilities were asked to report their self-descriptions related to three positive aspects of their lives—being proud of who they are, that life is full of interesting things to do, and feeling useful and important—on a 3-point scale: “very much like you” (3 points), “a little like you,” or “not at all like you” (1 point). Two aspects—enjoying life and feeling hopeful about the future—are reported on a 4-point scale: “most or all of the time” (4 points), “a lot of the time,” “sometimes,” or “rarely/never” (1 point).

Approximately three-quarters of youth with disabilities report feeling proud of who they are (73 percent), and fewer than 1 percent report that this attribute is “not at all” like them (figure 2). Three of five strongly state that they feel that life is full of interesting things to do, and fewer than 7 percent state that life is “not at all” interesting. More than half (59 percent) respond that the statement “you feel useful and important” is “very much” like them, although almost 1 of 10 (9 percent) report that feeling useful and important is “not at all” like them.

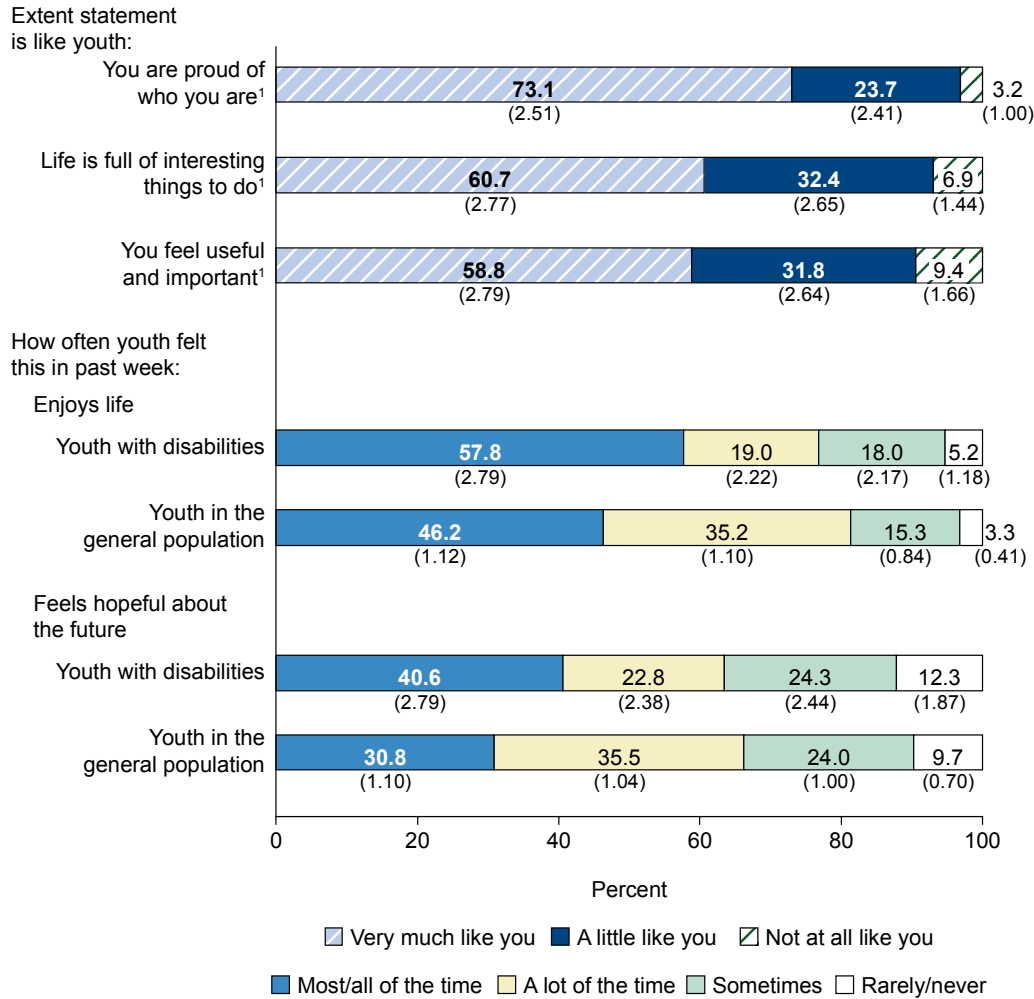
When youth were asked how frequently in the previous week they felt they enjoyed life, more than half (58 percent) of those with disabilities stated they enjoyed life “most or all of the time,” and approximately 95 percent reported enjoying life at least sometimes. Youth with disabilities are 12 percentage points more likely than those in the general population to report that they enjoy life “most or all” of the time (58 percent vs. 46 percent, $p < .001$).² Feelings of “rarely or never” or only “sometimes” enjoying life do not differ for youth with disabilities and those in the general population.

Many also describe themselves as being hopeful about the future, with 41 percent reporting they are hopeful about the future “most or all of the time” and an additional 23 percent reporting being hopeful “a lot of the time.” In contrast, 12 percent report “rarely or never” feeling hopeful about the future. Youth with disabilities are more likely than their peers in the general population

² All comparisons with youth in the general population included in this chapter are calculated for 15- through 19-year-olds using data from Wave II youth interviews of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), 1996 (Udry 1998). Items in the NLTS2 and Add Health instruments are identical in wording and response options.

to state they are hopeful “most or all of the time” (41 percent vs. 31 percent, $p < .01$). Youth with disabilities and those in the general population do not differ in their rate of reporting “rarely or never” feeling hopeful about the future. However, those with disabilities tend to be less positive in their descriptions of feelings about the future than about other aspects of their lives. They are less likely to report frequently feeling hopeful about the future than to describe themselves as feeling very proud or useful, or to assert that they frequently feel life is interesting or enjoyable ($p < .001$ for all comparisons with hopeful about the future).

Figure 2. Youth with disabilities’ reported feelings about positive aspects of self and life



¹ Comparison data are not available for youth in the general population.

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave II youth interviews, 1996.

Youth who report feeling positive about one aspect of their life tend to be more positive about others; the same relationship holds for less positive feelings. For example, youth who assert they are proud of who they are, are more likely also to state they feel useful and important

$r = .37$ ($p < .001$). Values on the response scales for each positive aspect of life are correlated, producing correlation coefficients that range from $r = .24$ ($p < .001$) for the relationship between feeling useful and important and feeling hopeful about the future, to $r = .38$ ($p < .001$) for the relationship between feeling useful and important and feeling that life is full of interesting things to do.

Negative Aspects

Switching the focus to negative feelings, youth were asked to report on a 4-point scale whether they felt depressed, lonely, or disliked “most or all of the time” (4 points), “a lot of the time,” “sometimes,” or “rarely or never” (1 point). Youth with disabilities are less likely to report negative than positive perceptions of life (figures 2 and 3). For example, 5 percent report feeling depressed “most or all of the time” during the prior week, and 4 percent report feeling depressed “a lot of the time” during the week. These percentages are significantly lower than the percentages of youth who report enjoying life “most or all of the time” during the preceding week (58 percent) or who report that feeling that life is full of interesting things to do is “very much” like them (61 percent; $p < .001$ for all comparisons). [$F = 349.32, 325.79, 310.38, 366.27$]

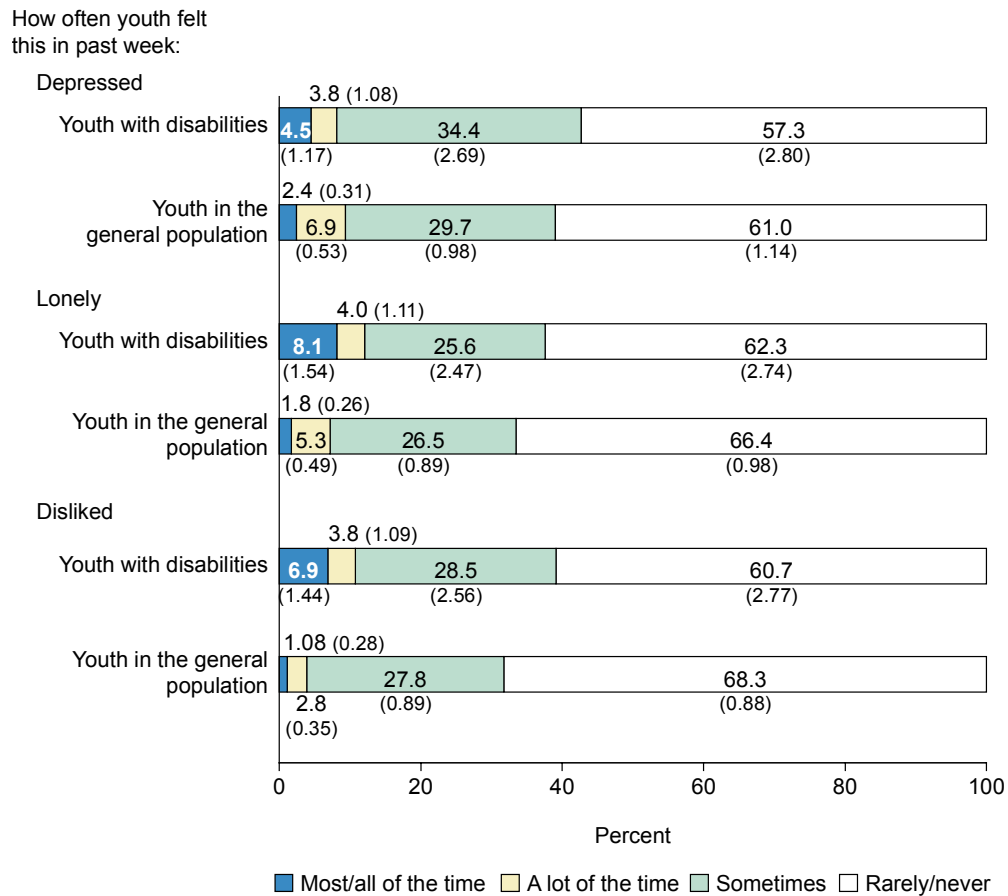
Whereas 58 percent report “rarely or never” feeling depressed in a given week, approximately one-third (34 percent) report feeling depressed “sometimes.” When focusing on the two ends of the frequency spectrum—in the prior week feeling depressed “most or all of the time” or “rarely or never”—youth with disabilities and their peers in the general population do not differ significantly. However, youth with disabilities are less likely than their peers to say they are depressed “a lot of the time” (4 percent vs. 7 percent, $p < .01$).

About 6 in 10 youth with disabilities (62 percent) indicate “never” or “rarely” feeling lonely during the previous week, with most of the remaining youth (26 percent) feeling lonely “sometimes”; these percentages are not statistically significantly different from percentages for youth in the general population. However, youth with disabilities are significantly more likely than general-population peers to report feeling lonely “most or all of the time” (8 percent vs. 2 percent, $p < .001$).

Feelings of being disliked are about as prevalent among youth with disabilities as feelings of being lonely or depressed. Sixty-one percent report they “rarely” or “never” felt disliked in the previous week, and 29 percent report feeling that way “sometimes.” The extent to which youth with disabilities report feeling disliked differs significantly from that of youth in the general population, among whom fewer report feeling disliked “most or all of the time” (1 percent vs. 7 percent, $p < .001$).

Similar to the relationship reported earlier for positive aspects of their lives, correlations between youths’ responses to negative items were statistically significant. Those who report they frequently are depressed also are likely to report frequently feeling lonely $r = .46$ ($p < .001$) or disliked $r = .38$ ($p < .001$), and youth who state feeling that others dislike them also are more likely to report feeling lonely $r = .39$ ($p < .001$).

Figure 3. Youth with disabilities' reported feelings about negative aspects of self and life



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

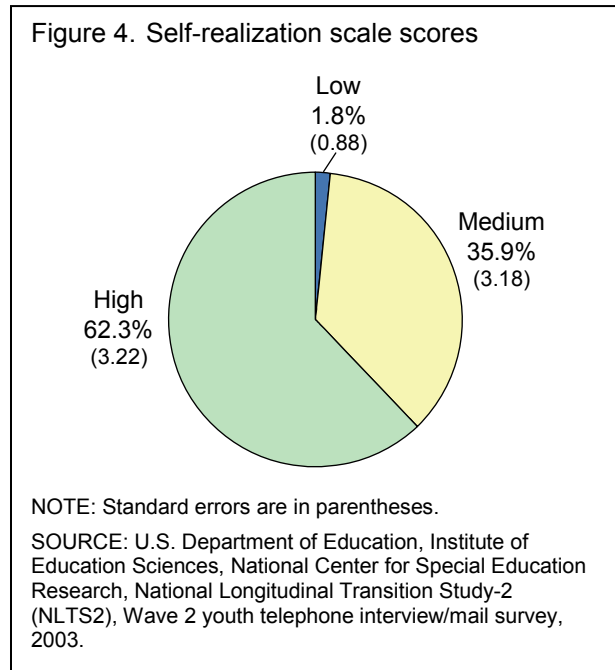
SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave II youth interviews, 1996.

Self-Realization Scale

To obtain a broader picture of youth with disabilities' self-descriptions and perceptions of their lives, NLTS2 asked youth to report in an in-person interview³ the extent to which their behavior reflects skills associated with the self-realization subscale of The Arc's Self-Determination Scale (Wehmeyer 1997). Items in this subscale were selected from those in the original instrument with the highest factor loading and face validity to reflect the self-realization domain. Responses to all items are self-reports by youth.

According to Wehmeyer (1997), self-knowledge and self-understanding form through experiences in one's environment, influences from significant others, and reinforcement of one's

³ Although the in-person interview was conducted with all youth for whom a direct assessment of academic skills was completed, responses are included here only for the subsample of youth who were able to respond for themselves to the Wave 2 telephone interview or mail survey.



behavior. Items included in the self-realization subscale⁴ assess how youth perceive their strengths, limitations, and confidence in their abilities and interactions with others.

On each item, youth’s self-realization is measured on a 4-point scale ranging from “never agree” to “always agree” with a series of statements. A summative scale of self-realization ranges from 5 (all responses “never agree”) to 20 (all responses “always agree”) and are reported as low (5 to 9), medium (10 to 15), and high (16 to 20) (figure 4). Nearly all youth score in the medium (36 percent) or high range (62 percent).

Disability Category Differences in Self-Descriptors and Life Descriptions

Youth’s self-reported perceptions of their attributes and their lives differ somewhat across disability categories.

“Who I Am” Self-Descriptions

Disability category differences are apparent for self-reported perceptions of some attributes. Youth with emotional disturbances are less likely to feel that being a nice person is “very much” like them (78 percent) than are those with orthopedic impairments (92 percent, $p < .01$; table 1). When asked their perceptions related to being a person who can handle challenges, youth with visual impairments are more likely to think of themselves as being “very much” someone who can handle what comes their way (73 percent), compared with 39 percent of those with autism ($p < .001$). Conversely, 8 percent of those with other health impairments consider themselves to be “not at all” able to deal with life’s challenges, compared with fewer than 1 percent of youth with visual impairments ($p < .01$).

Youth do not differ significantly by disability category in their reporting of having a sense of humor or being sensitive to others’ feelings. Ratings of having a “very good” sense of humor range from 41 percent for youth with autism to 59 percent of those with deaf-blindness, and “very good” ratings related to being sensitive to others range from 37 percent of youth with other health impairments to 54 percent of youth with deaf-blindness. However, youth with mental retardation are more likely to assess their organizational skills as “very good” (34 percent) than are those with speech/language impairments (19 percent, $p < .01$) or other health impairments (16 percent, $p < .01$).

Within each disability category, youth appraise their skills and abilities as being stronger in some areas than others. For example, youth with learning disabilities are more likely to report considering themselves to be a nice person (83 percent) or able to handle challenges (67 percent)

⁴ Self-realization items include: I can like people even if I don’t agree with them; I know what I do best; I like myself; I know how to make up for my limitations; and I am confident in my abilities.

Table 1. Youth with disabilities' reported perceptions of self attributes, by disability category

Extent statement is like youth	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
	Percent / standard error											
You are a nice person												
Very much like you	83.0 (3.20)	85.7 (3.12)	82.3 (4.42)	77.5 (3.88)	82.2 (4.70)	90.4 (3.72)	92.1 (3.10)	83.0 (3.53)	81.4 (5.69)	80.1 (7.19)	87.7 (4.87)	89.8 (5.46)
A little like you	17.0 (3.20)	14.2 (3.11)	14.8 (4.11)	18.7 (3.62)	17.8 (4.70)	7.9 (3.40)	7.6 (3.05)	16.1 (3.45)	16.5 (5.43)	19.5 (7.13)	12.0 (4.82)	10.2 (5.46)
Not at all like you	0.1 (0.27)	0.1 (0.28)	3.0 (1.98)	3.7 (1.75)	‡	1.7 (1.63)	0.3 (0.63)	0.9 (0.89)	2.0 (2.05)	0.5 (1.27)	0.3 (0.81)	‡
You can handle things that come your way												
Very much like you	66.6 (4.01)	60.6 (4.36)	53.3 (5.82)	68.3 (4.29)	66.3 (5.80)	73.3 (5.60)	63.8 (5.51)	59.4 (4.61)	39.4 (7.24)	62.9 (8.73)	55.6 (7.41)	57.5 (9.02)
A little like you	31.2 (3.94)	36.1 (4.29)	39.1 (5.69)	26.9 (4.09)	30.8 (5.67)	26.2 (5.57)	34.0 (5.44)	32.2 (4.39)	53.4 (7.40)	35.7 (8.66)	34.3 (7.08)	40.4 (8.95)
Not at all like you	2.2 (1.25)	3.3 (1.59)	7.7 (3.11)	4.7 (1.95)	2.9 (2.06)	0.4 (0.80)	2.2 (1.68)	8.4 (2.60)	7.3 (3.86)	1.4 (2.12)	10.1 (4.49)	2.1 (2.62)
How youth rates his or her attribute:												
Having a sense of humor												
Very good	50.5 (4.25)	46.7 (4.46)	51.3 (5.83)	57.7 (4.56)	43.0 (6.08)	56.0 (6.28)	50.1 (5.74)	48.3 (4.68)	41.2 (7.21)	46.4 (9.02)	55.8 (7.50)	58.5 (8.89)
Pretty good	44.4 (4.22)	46.4 (4.46)	35.4 (5.58)	34.5 (4.38)	43.8 (6.09)	41.2 (6.22)	44.2 (5.70)	45.7 (4.66)	50.6 (7.32)	51.1 (9.04)	33.0 (7.10)	31.0 (8.35)
Not very or not at all good	5.1 (1.88)	6.8 (2.26)	13.2 (3.95)	7.9 (2.48)	13.2 (4.16)	2.7 (2.05)	5.7 (2.67)	5.9 (2.21)	8.1 (4.00)	2.4 (2.78)	11.1 (4.75)	10.5 (5.53)
Being sensitive to others' feelings												
Very good	40.2 (4.18)	38.3 (4.33)	45.1 (5.75)	38.6 (4.54)	41.6 (6.08)	50.5 (6.30)	46.8 (5.73)	37.2 (4.55)	39.6 (7.22)	48.3 (9.02)	42.7 (7.34)	53.9 (9.00)
Pretty good	51.7 (4.26)	51.3 (4.45)	42.6 (5.71)	44.6 (4.64)	46.8 (6.15)	42.5 (6.23)	44.7 (5.71)	55.3 (4.68)	43.4 (7.32)	38.5 (8.78)	41.3 (7.30)	40.0 (8.84)
Not very or not at all good	8.2 (2.33)	10.3 (2.71)	12.3 (3.80)	16.8 (3.49)	11.6 (3.94)	6.9 (3.20)	8.5 (3.20)	7.6 (2.49)	17.0 (5.55)	13.1 (6.09)	16.0 (5.44)	6.1 (4.33)
Being well organized												
Very good	18.6 (3.31)	18.9 (3.49)	33.7 (5.51)	25.9 (4.05)	30.3 (5.64)	22.1 (5.22)	21.0 (4.66)	16.4 (3.47)	22.6 (6.16)	18.3 (6.96)	30.2 (6.83)	16.5 (6.70)
Pretty good	60.6 (4.15)	63.7 (4.28)	51.7 (5.82)	50.5 (4.63)	52.2 (6.13)	61.4 (6.13)	46.7 (5.71)	50.5 (4.68)	39.3 (7.20)	58.7 (8.87)	44.9 (7.40)	51.7 (9.02)
Not very or not at all good	20.7 (3.45)	17.5 (3.38)	14.6 (4.11)	23.6 (3.93)	17.5 (4.67)	16.5 (4.67)	32.4 (5.36)	33.1 (4.41)	38.1 (7.16)	23.0 (7.58)	24.9 (6.43)	31.9 (8.41)

‡ Responses for items with fewer than 30 respondents are not reported.

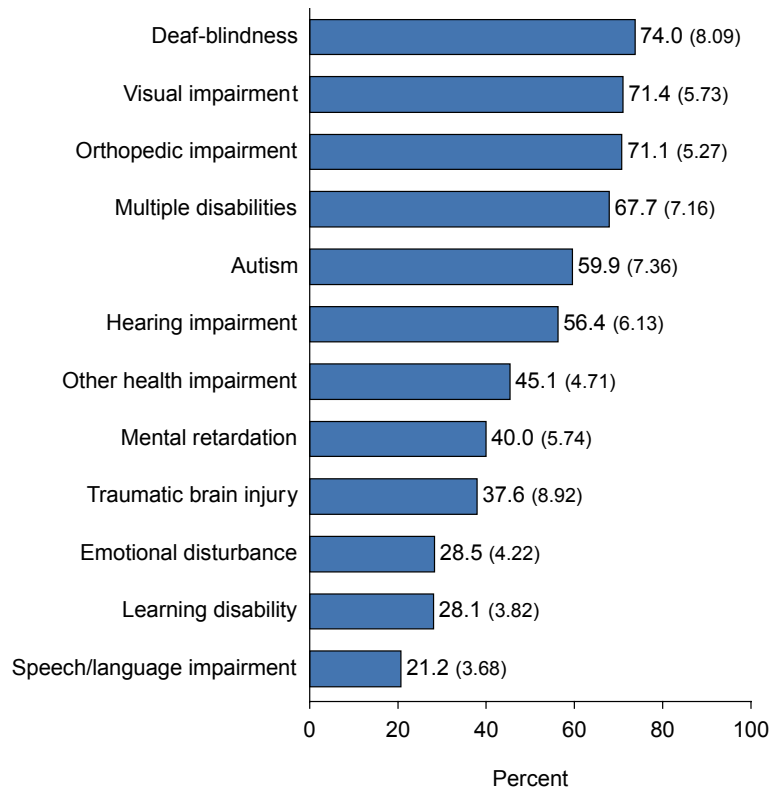
NOTE: Response categories "not very good" and "not at all good" have been collapsed for reporting purposes.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

than to give high ratings to their ability to be sensitive to others (40 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons) or be well organized (19 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons).

Identifying oneself as an individual with a disability is more common for youth with some kinds of disabilities than others, although there are at least a quarter of youth in every disability category who report that they do not consider themselves to have a disability. Percentages of youth identifying themselves as having a disability range from 21 percent of those with speech/language impairments to 74 percent of those with deaf-blindness (figure 5). Approximately one in five youth with speech/language impairments consider themselves to have a disability (21 percent), significantly fewer than those in 8 of the 11 other disability categories—deaf-blindness (74 percent), visual impairment (71 percent), orthopedic impairment (71 percent), multiple disabilities (68 percent), autism (60 percent), hearing impairment (56 percent), other health impairment (45 percent), and mental retardation (40 percent; $p < .001$ for all comparisons other than with mental retardation, $p < .01$). Similarly, youth with learning disabilities are significantly less likely to report they have a disability or special need (28 percent) than are those in seven other disability categories (deaf-blindness, visual impairment, orthopedic impairment, multiple disabilities, autism, and hearing or other health impairment; $p < .001$ for all comparisons other than with other health impairment, $p < .01$). Youth with emotional disturbances are less likely to identify themselves as having a disability (29 percent) than youth with other health impairments (45 percent, $p < .01$) or autism (60 percent, $p < .001$).

Figure 5. Youth’s self-reports of a disability, by disability category



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

“How I Feel” Self-Descriptions

Youth’s descriptions of their feelings about themselves and their lives—particularly in responses to questions about negative feelings—vary somewhat by disability category.

Positive aspects. Youth do not differ significantly by disability category in their reports related to feeling proud of themselves. The proportions of youth who report that the statement “you are proud of who you are” is “very much” like them range from 66 percent of youth with autism to 82 percent of those with visual impairments (table 2).

Table 2. Youth with disabilities’ reported feelings about positive aspects of self and life, by disability category

Extent statement is like youth	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
	Percent / standard error											
You are proud of who you are												
Very much like you	73.9 (3.74)	73.6 (3.96)	71.7 (5.22)	70.2 (4.25)	75.7 (5.27)	81.6 (4.88)	77.1 (4.84)	66.8 (4.43)	66.1 (6.94)	80.1 (7.23)	81.3 (5.82)	81.4 (7.02)
A little like you	23.8 (3.63)	25.5 (3.91)	21.9 (4.80)	24.9 (4.02)	20.9 (4.99)	17.4 (4.78)	20.6 (4.65)	28.6 (4.25)	29.9 (6.71)	18.9 (7.09)	15.7 (5.43)	16.6 (6.72)
Not at all like you	2.4 (1.30)	0.9 (0.85)	6.5 (2.86)	4.9 (2.01)	3.4 (2.23)	1.0 (1.25)	2.3 (1.73)	4.5 (1.95)	4.0 (2.87)	0.9 (1.71)	3.0 (2.55)	2.0 (2.53)
You feel life is full of interesting things to do												
Very much like you	61.1 (4.14)	61.2 (4.33)	61.3 (5.67)	62.0 (4.50)	61.6 (5.97)	57.1 (5.80)	60.3 (5.63)	51.4 (4.69)	61.7 (7.18)	58.7 (8.89)	58.8 (7.36)	62.4 (8.74)
A little like you	33.0 (4.00)	33.8 (4.21)	26.8 (5.15)	30.9 (4.29)	32.1 (5.73)	35.1 (5.60)	33.6 (5.43)	39.5 (4.59)	32.2 (6.90)	37.7 (8.75)	34.5 (7.11)	33.5 (8.52)
Not at all like you	5.9 (2.00)	5.0 (1.94)	11.9 (3.77)	7.1 (2.38)	6.2 (2.96)	7.9 (3.16)	6.1 (2.75)	9.2 (2.71)	6.1 (3.53)	3.5 (3.32)	6.7 (3.74)	4.1 (3.58)
You feel useful and important												
Very much like you	61.6 (4.15)	56.1 (4.43)	49.5 (5.81)	57.8 (4.59)	51.4 (6.15)	53.7 (6.33)	66.5 (5.42)	48.9 (4.70)	54.3 (7.32)	67.7 (8.42)	62.0 (7.27)	58.4 (8.90)
A little like you	30.1 (3.91)	37.8 (4.33)	31.8 (5.42)	34.2 (4.41)	38.5 (5.98)	41.9 (6.26)	28.9 (5.20)	41.6 (4.63)	42.0 (7.25)	28.7 (8.15)	31.9 (6.98)	35.5 (8.64)
Not at all like you	8.3 (2.35)	6.0 (2.12)	18.8 (4.54)	8.0 (2.52)	10.1 (3.71)	4.4 (2.60)	4.7 (2.43)	9.5 (2.75)	3.6 (2.74)	3.6 (3.35)	6.2 (3.61)	6.1 (4.32)
How often youth felt this in past week:												
Enjoys life												
Most or all of the time	59.2 (4.18)	58.3 (4.40)	56.4 (5.74)	55.8 (4.59)	46.7 (6.14)	52.7 (6.31)	53.7 (5.72)	52.5 (4.69)	43.3 (7.38)	65.6 (8.57)	56.2 (7.43)	52.1 (9.02)
A lot of the time	18.0 (3.27)	20.1 (3.57)	18.7 (4.51)	19.5 (3.66)	28.7 (5.56)	30.9 (5.84)	23.0 (4.83)	24.0 (4.01)	34.4 (7.07)	10.7 (5.58)	23.3 (6.33)	29.0 (8.19)
Sometimes	18.2 (3.28)	19.2 (3.51)	15.7 (4.21)	16.5 (3.43)	23.0 (5.18)	12.3 (4.15)	21.1 (4.68)	21.6 (3.86)	19.8 (5.93)	21.9 (7.46)	17.5 (5.69)	14.8 (6.41)
Rarely or never	4.6 (1.78)	2.4 (1.36)	9.1 (3.33)	8.2 (2.53)	1.5 (1.49)	4.1 (2.51)	2.2 (1.68)	2.0 (1.31)	2.4 (2.28)	1.8 (2.40)	3.1 (2.59)	4.1 (3.58)

See note at end of table.

Table 2. Youth with disabilities' reported feelings about positive aspects of self and life, by disability category—
Continued

Extent statement is like youth	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
	Percent / standard error											
Hopeful about the future												
Most or all of the time	41.9 (4.21)	38.2 (4.34)	28.8 (5.35)	47.7 (4.65)	36.8 (5.95)	46.2 (6.33)	47.0 (5.76)	36.7 (4.56)	33.9 (7.05)	46.8 (9.08)	36.4 (7.21)	56.3 (8.95)
A lot of the time	23.3 (3.60)	19.9 (3.57)	24.4 (5.08)	19.1 (3.66)	28.3 (5.55)	25.4 (5.53)	23.1 (4.86)	21.1 (3.86)	28.8 (6.75)	10.0 (5.46)	25.7 (6.55)	20.8 (7.33)
Sometimes	22.9 (3.58)	30.2 (4.10)	29.6 (5.39)	22.8 (3.91)	28.4 (5.56)	20.2 (5.10)	21.9 (4.77)	27.7 (4.24)	30.2 (6.84)	31.1 (8.42)	24.3 (6.43)	18.8 (7.05)
Rarely or never	11.9 (2.76)	11.8 (2.88)	17.1 (4.45)	10.4 (2.84)	6.6 (3.06)	8.2 (3.48)	8.1 (3.15)	14.5 (3.33)	7.1 (3.83)	12.2 (5.96)	13.6 (5.14)	4.1 (3.58)

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

The extent to which youth agree with the statement “you feel your life is full of interesting things to do” does not vary significantly by disability category, nor does their frequency of reporting enjoying life “most or all of the time.” Rates of reporting enjoying life most or all of the time in the preceding week range from 43 percent of those with autism to 66 percent of those with traumatic brain injuries, and rates of reporting that feeling that life is full of interesting things to do is “very much” like them range from 51 percent of youth with other health impairments to 62 percent of those with deaf-blindness. Youth vary somewhat in their descriptions of feeling useful and being hopeful about the future. Youth with mental retardation are more likely to say that the statement “you feel useful and important” is “not at all” like them (19 percent) than are those with orthopedic impairments (5 percent, $p < .01$), visual impairments (4 percent, $p < .01$), autism (4 percent, $p < .01$), or traumatic brain injuries (4 percent, $p < .01$). Those with mental retardation are less likely to state that they felt hopeful about the future “most or all of the time” during the past week (29 percent) than are youth with emotional disturbances (48 percent, $p < .01$).

Negative aspects. Reports of feeling depressed “rarely or never” in the previous week range from 70 percent for those with visual impairments to 44 percent for those with multiple disabilities; these are the only two disability categories that differ significantly from each other on this measure ($p < .01$). Across disability categories, few report feeling depressed most or all of time, with rates ranging from 2 percent of youth with deaf-blindness to 12 percent of those with multiple disabilities (table 3).

Youth do not significantly differ by disability category in their frequency of reporting feeling lonely. From 3 percent to 11 percent of youth with disabilities report feeling lonely “most or all of the time” during the past week, and from 46 percent to 66 percent report “rarely or never” feeling lonely in the preceding week, not statistically significant differences.

In contrast, youth with traumatic brain injuries are significantly more likely to report feeling disliked “most or all of the time” than are those with learning disabilities (10 percent vs. 2 percent, $p < .01$). Conversely, three-fourths of youth with learning disabilities indicate they

“rarely or never” feel disliked, whereas fewer than half of youth with multiple disabilities, other health impairments, or traumatic brain injuries report “rarely or never” feeling disliked ($p < .01$ for comparisons with youth with multiple disabilities or other health impairments, $p < .001$ for comparison with youth with traumatic brain injuries).

Table 3. Youth with disabilities’ reported feelings about negative aspects of self and life, by disability category

How often youth felt this in the past week	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
	Percent / standard error											
Percentage who feel:												
Depressed												
Most or all of the time	2.8 (1.40)	5.9 (2.10)	11.0 (3.65)	5.6 (2.12)	4.3 (2.49)	3.0 (2.17)	7.2 (2.97)	4.8 (2.00)	5.6 (3.40)	6.2 (4.35)	12.3 (4.91)	2.0 (2.53)
A lot of the time	3.1 (1.47)	4.0 (1.74)	4.8 (2.49)	5.6 (2.12)	4.3 (2.49)	4.1 (2.52)	10.2 (3.48)	4.4 (1.92)	7.0 (3.77)	5.4 (4.08)	2.1 (2.14)	4.1 (3.58)
Sometimes	36.3 (4.09)	29.3 (4.05)	32.3 (5.45)	29.4 (4.21)	31.1 (5.68)	22.8 (5.34)	18.1 (4.43)	33.6 (4.43)	36.4 (7.11)	32.4 (8.44)	42.0 (7.38)	37.4 (8.73)
Rarely or never	57.8 (4.20)	60.8 (4.34)	52.0 (5.82)	59.3 (4.54)	60.4 (6.01)	70.1 (5.83)	64.6 (5.50)	57.2 (4.64)	51.0 (7.39)	56.0 (8.96)	43.6 (7.42)	56.5 (8.95)
Lonely												
Most or all of the time	5.7 (2.93)	7.6 (2.26)	5.2 (4.01)	8.4 (2.47)	8.9 (2.67)	8.4 (2.57)	9.9 (3.42)	10.9 (4.71)	3.3 (2.20)	10.7 (3.58)	8.5 (4.11)	6.4 (4.42)
A lot of the time	4.0 (2.48)	3.2 (1.50)	10.4 (5.51)	3.4 (1.61)	5.9 (2.21)	4.5 (1.92)	6.3 (2.78)	5.1 (3.33)	7.8 (3.30)	6.1 (2.77)	9.0 (4.22)	12.5 (5.97)
Sometimes	24.3 (5.42)	24.1 (3.64)	19.4 (7.14)	24.6 (3.83)	21.9 (3.87)	24.2 (3.96)	25.2 (4.98)	28.3 (6.81)	35.2 (5.87)	35.1 (5.53)	34.7 (7.02)	35.5 (8.64)
Rarely or never	66.0 (5.99)	65.2 (4.05)	64.9 (8.61)	63.5 (4.28)	63.3 (4.51)	62.8 (4.47)	58.6 (5.64)	55.7 (7.51)	53.7 (6.13)	48.1 (5.79)	47.8 (7.37)	45.6 (8.99)
Disliked												
Most or all of the time	1.6 (1.59)	6.2 (2.06)	13.6 (6.19)	4.5 (1.86)	6.3 (2.28)	9.0 (2.67)	5.8 (2.68)	8.2 (4.15)	6.6 (3.07)	10.2 (2.28)	6.3 (3.62)	8.4 (5.01)
A lot of the time	2.7 (2.05)	3.6 (1.59)	3.6 (3.36)	3.9 (1.74)	5.2 (2.09)	4.6 (1.95)	5.5 (2.62)	3.5 (2.78)	2.3 (1.85)	3.6 (2.16)	8.4 (4.14)	4.1 (3.58)
Sometimes	20.4 (5.10)	28.0 (3.83)	15.9 (6.60)	29.2 (4.08)	25.8 (4.11)	21.3 (3.82)	21.7 (4.73)	39.0 (7.38)	32.0 (5.77)	38.3 (5.64)	37.1 (7.20)	31.2 (8.36)
Rarely or never	75.3 (5.45)	62.3 (4.14)	66.9 (8.49)	62.3 (4.35)	62.7 (4.54)	65.1 (4.45)	67.0 (5.40)	49.3 (7.57)	59.1 (6.08)	47.9 (5.79)	48.1 (7.45)	56.3 (8.95)

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

Self-Realization Scale

With the exception of youth with orthopedic and other health impairments, more than half of youth in all disability categories achieve high scores for self-realization (table 4). Proportions across disability categories range from 67 percent to 44 percent. Youth with learning disabilities are more likely to have high self-realization scores (67 percent) than are those with orthopedic or other health impairments (44 percent for both disability categories; $p < .01$ for both comparisons).

Table 4. Self-realization scores of youth, by disability category

Score level	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
Percent / standard error												
Percentage of youth with scores:												
Self-realization												
High	67.2 (4.70)	54.1 (5.01)	51.0 (7.25)	61.2 (5.73)	58.9 (6.67)	64.9 (7.19)	44.4 (6.79)	44.3 (5.55)	51.6 (8.24)	53.8 (9.67)	60.8 (8.74)	64.5 (9.59)
Medium	30.9 (4.62)	44.8 (5.00)	47.2 (7.24)	36.9 (5.67)	41.1 (6.67)	35.1 (7.19)	55.0 (6.80)	54.4 (5.56)	44.0 (8.18)	45.0 (9.65)	35.6 (8.56)	33.0 (9.42)
Low	1.9 (1.36)	1.1 (1.04)	1.7 (1.90)	1.9 (1.60)	#	#	0.6 (1.02)	1.3 (1.25)	4.4 (3.39)	1.2 (2.11)	3.7 (3.37)	2.5 (3.14)

Rounds to zero.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

Demographic Differences in Self-Perceptions

Youth with disabilities' reported perceptions of who they are and how they feel about themselves and their lives do not differ significantly by age, household income, or race/ethnicity, and for the most part by gender. The one exception is that girls are more likely than boys to evaluate their sensitivity to others' feelings as being "very good" (55 percent vs. 32 percent, $p < .001$).

Summary

This chapter presents findings regarding youth with disabilities' self-descriptions related to six attributes—being a nice person, being able to handle challenges, having a sense of humor, being sensitive to others' feelings, being well organized, and having a disability—as well as their feelings about themselves and their lives.

Youth report higher estimations of some attributes than others. Youth are more likely to describe themselves as being nice and having a sense of humor than to state they are sensitive, well organized, or can handle challenges. Youth are least likely to report considering themselves to be well organized. Those who describe themselves more positively related to one of these attributes are more likely to report being positive about other aspects. Parents' reported perceptions of their children are similar to those described by their children, and parents' and youth's perceptions are related to each other in that youth who hold higher estimates of their abilities tend to have parents who also hold high estimates of the youth's abilities and vice versa.

Fewer than one-third of youth who had received special education services when they were ages 13 through 16 consider themselves to have a disability or special need when they are 15 through 19 years old.

Overall, more than half of those with disabilities report that three positive attributes—being proud of themselves, feeling useful and important, and feeling that life is interesting—are "very

much” like them, and that they enjoy life “most or all of the time.” Youth are less likely to report feeling hopeful about the future than to describe themselves as being proud or useful, or to assert that life is interesting or enjoyable. Those who report feeling positive about one aspect of their life tend to be more positive about others. When compared with those in the general population, youth with disabilities are more likely to report that they enjoy life and feel hopeful about the future “most or all” of the time.

When asked to share their feelings about themselves and their lives, youth are more likely to report positive than negative feelings toward life. They are 8 to 12 times more likely to state they enjoy life and are hopeful “most or all of the time” and to feel that life is interesting, than to report that they frequently feel depressed. When focusing on the two ends of the frequency spectrum—in the prior week feeling depressed “most or all of the time” or “rarely or never” feeling depressed, youth with disabilities and their peers in the general population do not differ in reporting feelings of being depressed. However, those with disabilities are more likely than youth in the general population to report feeling disliked or lonely “most or all of the time.” Youth with disabilities who report they are depressed also are likely to report they feel lonely or disliked.

Youth’s reported perceptions of their attributes and their lives differ somewhat by disability category. Perceptions vary both within and across disability categories. For example, youth with emotional disturbances are less likely to describe themselves as a nice person than are those with visual or orthopedic impairments. Within each disability category, youth appraise their skills and abilities as being stronger in some areas than others. For example, youth with learning disabilities are more likely to report considering themselves to be a nice person and someone able to handle challenges than being sensitive to others’ feelings.

Identifying oneself as an individual with a disability is more common for youth with some kinds of disabilities than others, although sizable percentages of youth in every disability category report that they do not consider themselves to have a disability. Youth with speech/language impairments or learning disabilities are less likely to report having a disability than youth in most other disability categories.

Overall, youth’s reported perceptions about themselves and their lives do not differ significantly by age, household income, race/ethnicity, or gender, other than girls being more likely than boys to evaluate their sensitivity to others’ feelings as being “very good.”

This chapter has focused on youth with disabilities’ perceptions about themselves and their lives; chapter 3 presents youth’s self-evaluations of various competencies.