What are learning disabilities?

Learning disabilities, or learning disorders, are an umbrella term for a wide variety of learning problems. A learning disability is not a problem with intelligence or motivation. Kids with learning disabilities aren't lazy or dumb. In fact, most are just as smart as everyone else. Their brains are simply wired differently. This difference affects how they receive and process information.

Simply put, children and adults with learning disabilities see, hear, and understand things differently. This can lead to trouble with learning new information and skills, and putting them to use. The most common types of learning disabilities involve problems with reading, writing, math, reasoning, listening, and speaking.

While every kid has trouble with homework from time to time, if a certain area of learning is consistently problematic, it might indicate a learning disorder.

Children with learning disabilities can, and do, succeed

It can be tough to face the possibility for a parent that their child has a learning disorder. No parents want to see their children suffer. They may wonder what it could mean for their child's future, or worry about how their kid will make it through school. Perhaps they're concerned that by calling attention to their child's learning problems they might be labelled "slow" or assigned to a less challenging class.

But the important thing to remember is that most kids with learning disabilities are just as smart as everyone else. They just need to be taught in ways that are tailored to their unique learning styles. By learning more about learning disabilities in general, and the child's learning difficulties in particular, you can help pave the way for success at school and beyond.

Signs and symptoms of learning disabilities and disorders

Learning disabilities look very different from one child to another. One child may struggle with reading and spelling, while another loves books but can't understand math. Still another child may have difficulty understanding what others are saying or communicating out loud. The problems are very different, but they are all learning disorders.

It's not always easy to identify learning disabilities. Because of the wide variations, there is no single symptom or profile that you can look to as proof of a problem. However, some warning signs are more common than others at different ages. If you're aware of what they are, you'll be able to catch a learning disorder early and quickly take steps to get your child help.

The following checklist lists some common red flags for learning disorders. Remember that children who don't have learning disabilities may still experience some of these difficulties at various times. The time for concern is when there is a consistent unevenness in your child's ability to master certain skills.

Signs and symptoms of learning disabilities: Preschool age

- Problems pronouncing words

- Trouble finding the right word
- Difficulty rhyming
- Trouble learning the alphabet, numbers, colours, shapes, days of the week
- Difficulty following directions or learning routines
- Difficulty controlling crayons, pencils, and scissors, or colouring within the lines
- Trouble with buttons, zippers, snaps, learning to tie shoes

Signs and symptoms of learning disabilities: Ages 5-9

- Trouble learning the connection between letters and sounds
- Unable to blend sounds to make words
- Confuses basic words when reading
- Slow to learn new skills
- Consistently misspells words and makes frequent errors
- Trouble learning basic math concepts
- Difficulty telling time and remembering sequences

Signs and symptoms of learning disabilities: Ages 10-13

- Difficulty with reading comprehension or math skills
- Trouble with open-ended test questions and word problems
- Dislikes reading and writing; avoids reading aloud
- Poor handwriting
- Poor organizational skills (bedroom, homework, desk is messy and disorganized)
- Trouble following classroom discussions and expressing thoughts aloud
- Spells the same word differently in a single document

Paying attention to developmental milestones can help you identify learning disorders

Paying attention to normal developmental milestones for toddlers and preschoolers is very important. Early detection of developmental differences may be an early signal of a learning disability and problems that are spotted early can be easier to correct.

A developmental lag might not be considered a symptom of a learning disability until the child is older, but if you recognize it when the child is young, you can intervene early. Usually

parents and teachers know the child better than anyone else do, so if you think there is a problem, it doesn't hurt to get an evaluation. You can also ask your paediatrician for a developmental milestones chart.

Problems with reading, writing, and math

Learning disabilities are often grouped by school-area skill set. If the child is in school, the types of learning disorders that are most conspicuous usually revolve around reading, writing, or math.

Learning disabilities in reading (dyslexia)

There are two types of learning disabilities in reading. Basic reading problems occur when there is difficulty understanding the relationship between sounds, letters and words. Reading comprehension problems occur when there is an inability to grasp the meaning of words, phrases, and paragraphs.

Signs of reading difficulty include problems with:

- letter and word recognition
- understanding words and ideas
- reading speed and fluency
- general vocabulary skills

Learning disabilities in math (dyscalculia)

Learning disabilities in math vary greatly depending on the child's other strengths and weaknesses. A child's ability to do math will be affected differently by a language learning disability, or a visual disorder or a difficulty with sequencing, memory or organization.

A child with a math-based learning disorder may struggle with memorization and organization of numbers, operation signs, and number "facts" (like 5+5=10 or 5×5=25). Children with math learning disorders might also have trouble with counting principles (such as counting by twos or counting by fives) or have difficulty telling time.

Learning disabilities in writing (dysgraphia)

Learning disabilities in writing can involve the physical act of writing or the mental activity of comprehending and synthesizing information. Basic writing disorder refers to physical difficulty forming words and letters. Expressive writing disability indicates a struggle to organize thoughts on paper.

Symptoms of a written language learning disability revolve around the act of writing. They include problems with:

- neatness and consistency of writing
- accurately copying letters and words

- spelling consistency
- writing organization and coherence

Other types of learning disabilities and disorders

Reading, writing, and math aren't the only skills impacted by learning disorders. Other types of learning disabilities involve difficulties with motor skills (movement and coordination), understanding spoken language, distinguishing between sounds, and interpreting visual information.

Learning disabilities in motor skills (dyspraxia)

Motor difficulty refers to problems with movement and coordination whether it is with fine motor skills (cutting, writing) or gross motor skills (running, jumping). A motor disability is sometimes referred to as an "output" activity meaning that it relates to the output of information from the brain. In order to run, jump, write or cut something, the brain must be able to communicate with the necessary limbs to complete the action.

Signs that your child might have a motor coordination disability include problems with physical abilities that require hand-eye coordination, like holding a pencil or buttoning a shirt.

Learning disabilities in language (aphasia/dysphasia)

Language and communication learning disabilities involve the ability to understand or produce spoken language. Language is also considered an output activity because it requires organizing thoughts in the brain and calling upon the right words to verbally explain something or communicate with someone else.

Signs of a language-based learning disorder involve problems with verbal language skills, such as the ability to retell a story and the fluency of speech, as well as the ability to understand the meaning of words, parts of speech, directions, etc.

Auditory and visual processing problems: the importance of the ears and eyes

The eyes and the ears are the primary means of delivering information to the brain, a process sometimes called "input." If either the eyes or the ears aren't working properly, learning can suffer.

Auditory processing disorder – Professionals may refer to the ability to hear well as "auditory processing skills" or "receptive language." The ability to hear things correctly greatly impacts the ability to read, write and spell. An inability to distinguish subtle differences in sound, or hearing sounds at the wrong speed make it difficult to sound out words and understand the basic concepts of reading and writing.

Visual processing disorder – Problems in visual perception include missing subtle differences in shapes, reversing letters or numbers, skipping words, skipping lines, misperceiving depth or distance, or having problems with eye–hand coordination. Professionals may refer to the work of the eyes as "visual processing." Visual perception can affect gross and fine motor skills, reading comprehension, and math.

Common types of learning disabilities

Dyslexia – Difficulty with reading

- Problems reading, writing, spelling, speaking

Dyscalculia – Difficulty with math

- Problems doing math problems, understanding time, using money

Dysgraphia – Difficulty with writing

- Problems with handwriting, spelling, organizing ideas

Dyspraxia (Sensory Integration Disorder) – Difficulty with fine motor skills

- Problems with hand-eye coordination, balance, manual dexterity

Dysphasia/Aphasia – Difficulty with language

- Problems understanding spoken language, poor reading comprehension

Auditory Processing Disorder – Difficulty hearing differences between sounds

- Problems with reading, comprehension, language

Visual Processing Disorder – Difficulty interpreting visual information

- Problems with reading, math, maps, charts, symbols, pictures

Other disorders that make learning difficult

Difficulty in school doesn't always stem from a learning disability. Anxiety, depression, stressful events, emotional trauma, and other conditions affecting concentration make learning more of a challenge. In addition, ADHD and autism sometimes co-occur or are confused with learning disabilities.

ADHD – Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), while not considered a learning disability, can certainly disrupt learning. Children with ADHD often have problems sitting still, staying focused, following instructions, staying organized, and completing homework.

Autism – Difficulty mastering certain academic skills can stem from pervasive developmental disorders such as autism and Asperger's syndrome. Children with autism spectrum disorders may have trouble communicating, reading body language, learning basic skills, making friends, and making eye contact.

Hope for learning disabilities: The brain can change

How does understanding the brain help a learning disorder?

Using a telephone analogy, faulty wiring in the brain disrupts normal lines of communication and makes it difficult to process information easily. If service was down in a certain area of the city, the phone company might fix the problem by re-wiring the connections. Similarly, under the right learning conditions, the brain has the ability to reorganize itself by forming new neural connections. These new connections facilitate skills like reading and writing that were difficult using the old connections.

Science has made great strides in understanding the inner workings of the brain, and one important discovery that brings new hope for learning disabilities and disorders is called *neuroplasticity*. Neuroplasticity refers to the brain's natural, lifelong ability to change. Throughout life, the brain is able to form new connections and generate new brain cells in response to experience and learning. This knowledge has led to ground breaking new treatments for learning disabilities that take advantage of the brain's ability to change. Innovative programs, such as the Arrowsmith program, use strategic brain exercises to identify and strengthen weak cognitive areas. For example, for children who have difficulty distinguishing between different sounds in a word, there are new computer-based learning programs that slow down the sounds so that children can understand them and gradually increase their speed of comprehension.

These discoveries about neuroplasticity provide hope to all students with learning disorders, and further research may lead to additional new treatments that target the actual causes of learning disabilities, rather than simply offering coping strategies to compensate for weaknesses.

Diagnosis and testing for learning disabilities and disorders

As you've already learned, diagnosing a learning disability isn't always easy. Don't assume you know what your child's problem is, even if the symptoms seem clear. It's important to have your child tested and evaluated by a qualified professional. That said, you should trust your instincts. If you think something is wrong, listen to your gut. If you feel that a teacher or doctor is minimizing your concerns, seek a second opinion. Don't let anyone tell you to "wait and see" or "don't worry about it" if you see your child struggling. Regardless of whether or not the child's problems are due to a learning disability, intervention is needed. You can't go wrong by looking into the issue and taking action.

Keep in mind that finding someone who can help may take some time and effort. Even experts mix up learning disabilities with ADHD and other behavioral problems sometimes. You may have to look around a bit or try more than one professional. In the meantime, try to be patient, and remember that you won't always get clear answers. Try not to get too caught up in trying to determine the label for your child's disorder. Leave that to the professionals. Focus instead on steps you can take to support your child and address their symptoms in practical ways.

The diagnosis and testing process for learning disabilities

Diagnosing a learning disability is a process. It involves testing, history taking, and observation by a trained specialist. Finding a reputable referral is important. Start with the child's school, and if they are unable to help, ask experts mentioned below depending upon the case -

Types of specialists who may be able to test for and diagnose learning disabilities include:

1. Clinical psychologists
2. School psychologists
3. Child psychiatrists
4. Educational psychologists
5. Developmental psychologists
6. Neuropsychologist
7. Psychometrist
8. Occupational therapist (tests sensory disorders that can lead to learning problems)
9. Speech and language therapist

Sometimes several professionals coordinate services as a team to obtain an accurate diagnosis. They may ask for input from the child's parents and teachers. Recommendations can then be made for special education services or speech-language therapy within the school system.

Integration, sequencing and abstraction: Technical terms for how the brain works

A professional learning disorders specialist might refer to the importance of "integration" to learning. Integration refers to the understanding of information that has been delivered to the brain, and it includes three steps: sequencing, which means putting information in the right order; abstraction, which is making sense of the information; and organization, which refers to the brains ability to use the information to form complete thoughts.

Each of the three steps is important and the child may have a weakness in one area or another that causes learning difficulty. For example, in math, sequencing (the ability to put things in order) is important for learning to count or do multiplication (as well as learn the alphabet or the months of the year). Similarly, abstraction and organization are important parts of numerous educational skills and abilities. If a certain brain activity isn't happening correctly, it will create a roadblock to learning.

Getting help for children with learning disabilities (for Parents)

When it comes to learning disabilities, it's not always easy to know what to do and where to find help. Turning to specialists who can pinpoint and diagnose the problem is, of course, important. You will also want to work with your child's school to make accommodations for your child and get specialized academic help. But don't overlook your own role. You know your child better than anyone else, so take the lead in looking into your options, learning about new treatments and services, and overseeing your child's education.

Learn the specifics about your child's learning disability. Read and learn about your child's type of learning disability. Find out how the disability affects the learning process and what cognitive skills are involved. It's easier to evaluate learning techniques if you understand how the learning disability affects your child.

Research treatments, services, and new theories. Along with knowing about the type of learning disability your child has, educate yourself about the most effective treatment options available. This can help you advocate for your child at school and pursue treatment at home.

Pursue treatment and services at home. Even if the school doesn't have the resources to treat your child's learning disability optimally, you can pursue these options on your own at home or with a therapist or tutor.

Nurture your child's strengths. Even though children with learning disabilities struggle in one area of learning, they may excel in another. Pay attention to your child's interests and passions. Helping children with learning disorders develop their passions and strengths will probably help them with the areas of difficulty as well.

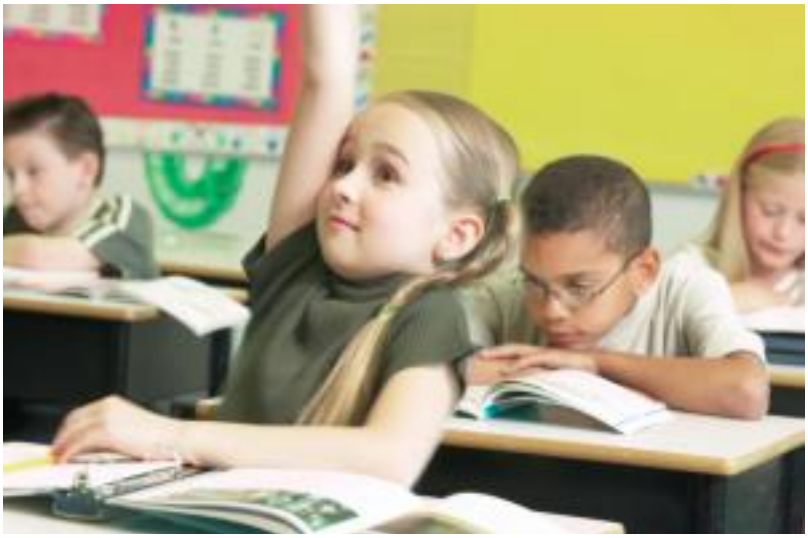
Social and emotional skills: How you can help

Learning disabilities can be extremely frustrating for children. Imagine having trouble with a skill all of your friends are tackling with ease, worrying about embarrassing yourself in front of the class, or struggling to express yourself. Things can be doubly frustrating for exceptionally bright children with learning disabilities–a scenario that's not uncommon.

Kids with learning disabilities may have trouble expressing their feelings, calming themselves down, and reading nonverbal cues from others. This can lead to difficulty in the classroom and with their peers. The good news is that, as a parent, you can have a huge impact in these areas. Social and emotional skills are the most consistent indicators of success for all children—and that includes kids with learning disorders. They outweigh everything else, including academic skills, in predicting lifelong achievement and happiness.

Learning disabilities, and their accompanying academic challenges, can lead to low self-esteem, isolation, and behavior problems, but they don't have to. You can counter these things by creating a strong support system for children with learning disabilities and helping them learn to express themselves, deal with frustration, and work through challenges. By focusing on your child's growth as a person, and not just on academic achievements, you'll help them to learn good emotional habits that set the stage for success throughout life.

How to create a Well-Rounded Learning Atmosphere for Students with Special Needs



Learning disabilities impact the way children are able to process and understand information; they are neurological disorders that might manifest themselves as difficulty listening, thinking, writing, speaking, spelling, or doing mathematical

calculations. Dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dyspraxia, visual perception disorders, auditory processing disorders, and language disorders fall under the umbrella of learning disorders. Many children with ADHD also have comorbid learning disorders.

An idea teachers must understand is that students with special needs such as learning disabilities need to be taught differently or need some accommodations to enhance the learning environment. Not everyone learns in the same way, and you can follow some tips to create a well-rounded learning atmosphere.

1. **Maintain an organized classroom and limit distractions**. For students with special needs, maintaining a healthy balance of structure and unstructured processes is important. For example, on each student's desk, have a place for everything that is clearly labeled (use words or colors, for instance). Also consider using checklists and help students keep their notebooks organized; teach them how to do so on their own, but also check at the end of each day and offer suggestions for keeping it more organized. On the unstructured side of things, allow students with special needs to change their work area while completing homework or studying and assign tasks that involve moving around the room. For students with special needs and learning disabilities, hearing instructions or following directions can be made difficult if there are too many distractions. Schedule breaks throughout the day and seat students with special needs in an area of the classroom that limits distractions; for example, do not sit these children by a window, in front of an open door, or by the air conditioner, as people walking by or additional noises might be too distracting.
2. **Use music and voice inflection**. When transitioning to an activity, use a short song to finish up one task and move to another. Many of us have sung the "clean up" while cleaning up before the next activity; use a similar approach in the classroom. Students with special needs might also respond well to varied voice inflection and tone, so use a mixture of loud, soft, and whisper sounds. Using proper pronunciation and sometimes slightly exaggerating proper speech will help a child model the same principles.
3. **Break down instructions into smaller, manageable tasks**. Students with special needs often have difficulty understanding long-winded or several instructions at once. For children with learning disabilities, it is best to use simple, concrete sentences. You might have to break down a step into a few smaller steps to ensure your students with special needs understand what you are asking. You might even want to put the directions both in print and saying them verbally. Ask your students with special needs to repeat the directions and ask them to demonstrate that they understand. Do not give further instructions until a student has completed the previous task.
4. **Use multi-sensory strategies**. As all children learn in different ways, it is important to make every lesson as multi-sensory as possible. Students with learning disabilities might have difficulty in one area, while they might excel in another. For example, use both visual and auditory cues. Create opportunities for tactile experiences. You might need to use physical cues, such as a light touch, when a student might get distracted or inattentive. Get creative with your lesson plans, and students with special needs will appreciate the opportunity to use their imaginations or try something new; use a balance of structure and familiar lessons with original content.
5. **Give students with special needs opportunities for success**. Children with learning disabilities often feel like they do not succeed in certain areas, but structuring lessons that lead to successful results is a way to keep them motivated. Provide immediate reinforcement for accomplishments, be consistent with rules and discipline, correct errors and reward students when they make these corrections themselves, explain behavioral expectations, and teach and demonstrate appropriate behaviors rather than just expecting students with special needs to pick them up.

While these suggestions are ideal for classroom settings, parents of students with special needs can also implement these principles. Helping children with learning disabilities both in and out of the classroom is the best way to help your students with special needs achieve success

TEACHING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Teaching learning disabled youngsters will present you with some unique and distinctive challenges. Not only will these students demand more of your time and patience; so, too, will they require specialized instructional strategies in a structured environment that supports and enhances their learning potential. It is important to remember that learning disabled students are not students who are incapacitated or unable to learn; rather, they need differentiated instruction tailored to their distinctive learning abilities. Use these appropriate strategies with learning disabled students:

- Provide oral instruction for students with reading disabilities. Present tests and reading materials in an oral format so the assessment is not unduly influenced by lack of reading ability.
- Provide learning disabled students with frequent progress checks. Let them know how well they are progressing toward an individual or class goal.
- Give immediate feedback to learning disabled students. They need to see quickly the relationship between what was taught and what was learned.
- Make activities concise and short, whenever possible. Long, drawn-out projects are particularly frustrating for a learning disabled child.
- Learning disabled youngsters have difficulty learning abstract terms and concepts. Whenever possible, provide them with concrete objects and events—items they can touch, hear, smell, etc.
- Learning disabled students need and should get lots of specific praise. Instead of just saying, "You did well," or "I like your work," be sure you provide specific praising comments that link the activity directly with the recognition; for example, "I was particularly pleased by the way in which you organized the rock collection for Karin and Miranda."
- When necessary, plan to repeat instructions or offer information in both written and verbal formats. Again, it is vitally necessary that learning disabled children utilize as many of their sensory modalities as possible.
- Encourage cooperative learning activities (see Teaching with Cooperative Learning) when possible. Invite students of varying abilities to work together on a specific project or toward a common goal. Create an atmosphere in which a true "community of learners" is facilitated and enhanced.

Students Who Have Higher Ability

Students of high ability, often referred to as gifted students, present a unique challenge to teachers. They are often the first ones done with an assignment or those who continually ask for more creative and interesting work. They need exciting activities and energizing projects that offer a creative curriculum within the framework of the regular classroom program.

Characteristics of Gifted Students

Gifted students exhibit several common characteristics, as outlined in the following list. As in the case of learning disabled students, giftedness usually means a combination of factors in varying degrees and amounts. A gifted student …

- Has a high level of curiosity.

- Has a well-developed imagination.
- Often gives uncommon responses to common queries.
- Can remember and retain a great deal of information.
- Can not only pose original solutions to common problems but can also pose original problems, too.
- Has the ability to concentrate on a problem or issue for extended periods of time.
- Is capable of comprehending complex concepts.
- Is well organized.
- Is excited about learning new facts and concepts.
- Is often an independent learner.

Teaching Gifted Students

If there's one constant about gifted students it's the fact that they're full of questions (and full of answers). They're also imbued with a sense of inquisitiveness. Providing for their instructional needs is not an easy task and will certainly extend you to the full limits of your own creativity and inventiveness. Keep some of these instructional strategies in mind:

- Allow gifted students to design and follow through on self-initiated projects. Have them pursue questions of their own choosing.
- Provide gifted students with lots of open-ended activities—activities for which there are no right or wrong answers or any preconceived notions.
- Keep the emphasis on divergent thinking—helping gifted students focus on many possibilities rather than any set of predetermined answers.
- Provide opportunities for gifted youngsters to engage in active problem-solving. Be sure the problems assigned are not those for which you have already established appropriate answers but rather those that will allow gifted students to arrive at their own conclusions.
- Encourage gifted students to take on leadership roles that enhance portions of the classroom program (Note: gifted students are often socially immature.)
- Provide numerous opportunities for gifted students to read extensively about subjects that interest them. Work closely with the school librarian and public librarian to select and provide trade books in keeping with students' interests.
- Provide numerous long-term and ex-tended activities that allow gifted students the opportunity to engage in a learning project over an extended period of time.

How to teach students who have Hearing Impairments

Other students can be responsible for taking notes (on a rotating basis) for a hearing impaired student.

Hearing impairment may range from mildly impaired to total deafness. Although it is unlikely that you will have any deaf students in your classroom, it is quite possible that you will have one or more who will need to wear one or two hearing aids. Here are some teaching strategies:

- Provide written or pictorial directions.
- Physically act out the steps for an activity. You or one of the other students in the class can do this.
- Seat a hearing impaired child in the front of the classroom and in a place where he or she has a good field of vision of both you and the chalkboard.
- Many hearing impaired youngsters have been taught to read lips. When addressing the class, be sure to enunciate your words (but don't overdo it) and look directly at the hearing impaired student or in his or her general direction.

- Provide a variety of multisensory experiences for students. Allow students to capitalize on their other learning modalities.
- It may be necessary to wait longer than usual for a response from a hearing impaired student. Be patient
- Whenever possible, use lots of concrete objects such as models, diagrams, realia, samples, and the like. Try to demonstrate what you are saying by using touchable items.

Students Who Have Visual Impairments

All students exhibit different levels of visual acuity. However, it is quite likely that you will have students whose vision is severely hampered or restricted. These students may need to wear special glasses and require the use of special equipment. Although it is unlikely that you will have a blind student in your classroom, it is conceivable that you will need to provide a modified instructional plan for visually limited students. Consider these tips:

- Tape-record portions of textbooks, trade books, and other printed materials so students can listen (with earphones) to an oral presentation of necessary material.
- When using the chalkboard, use white chalk and bold lines. Also, be sure to say out loud whatever you write on the chalkboard.
- As with hearing impaired student, it is important to seat the visually impaired student close to the main instructional area.
- Provide clear oral instructions.
- Be aware of any terminology you may use that would demand visual acuity the student is not capable of. For example, phrases such as “over there” and “like that one” would be inappropriate.
- Partner the student with other students who can assist or help.

Students Who Have Physical Impairments

Physically challenged students include those who require the aid of a wheelchair, canes, walkers, braces, crutches, or other physical aids for getting around. As with other impairments, these youngsters' exceptionalities may range from severe to mild and may be the result of one or more factors. What is of primary importance is the fact that these students are no different intellectually than the more mobile students in your classroom. Here are some techniques to remember:

- Be sure there is adequate access to all parts of the classroom. Keep aisles between desks clear, and provide sufficient space around demonstration tables and other apparatus for physically disabled students to manoeuvre.
- Encourage students to participate in all activities to the fullest extent possible.
- Establish a rotating series of “helpers” to assist any physically disabled students in moving about the room. Students often enjoy this responsibility and the opportunity to assist whenever necessary.
- Focus on the intellectual investment in an activity. That is, help the child use his or her problem-solving abilities and thinking skills in completing an assignment without regard to his or her ability to get to an area that requires object manipulation.
- When designing an activity or constructing necessary equipment, be on the lookout for alternative methods of display, manipulation, or presentation.

- Physically impaired students will, quite naturally, be frustrated at not being able to do everything the other students can accomplish. Be sure to take some time periodically to talk with those students and help them get their feelings and/or frustrations out in the open. Help the child understand that those feelings are natural but also that they need to be discussed periodically.

Students Who Have Emotional Problems

Students with emotional problems are those who demonstrate an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships, develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems, exhibit a pervasive mood of unhappiness under normal circumstances, or show inappropriate types of behavior under normal circumstances.

Although you will certainly not be expected to remediate all the emotional difficulties of students, you need to understand that you can and do have a positive impact on students' ability to seek solutions and work in concert with those trying to help them. Here are some guidelines for your classroom:

- Whenever possible, give the student a sense of responsibility. Put the student in charge of something (operating an overhead projector, cleaning the classroom aquarium, re-potting a plant), and be sure to recognize the effort the student put into completing the assigned task.
- Provide opportunities for the student to self-select an activity or two he or she would like to pursue independently. Invite the student to share his or her findings or discoveries with the rest of the class.
- Get the student involved in activities with other students—particularly those students who can serve as good role models for the child. It is important that the emotionally disturbed child has opportunities to interact with fellow students who can provide appropriate behavioral guidelines through their actions.
- Discuss appropriate classroom behavior at frequent intervals. Don't expect students to remember in May all the classroom rules that were established in September. Provide "refresher courses" on expected behavior throughout the year.
- Emotionally disabled students benefit from a highly structured program—one in which the sequence of activities and procedures is constant and stable. You will certainly want to consider a varied academic program for all your students, but you will also want to think about an internal structure that provides the support emotionally impaired youngsters need.
- Be sure to seat an emotionally impaired child away from any distractions (highly verbal students, equipment, tools, etc.).
- Whenever possible, keep the activities short and quick. Provide immediate feedback, reinforcement, and a sufficient amount of praise.

Students Who Have ADHD

Students with **Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder** (ADHD) offer significant and often perplexing challenges for many teachers. ADHD students comprise approximately 3 to 5 percent of the school-age population. This may be as many as 35 million children under the age of 18. Significantly more boys than girls are affected, although reasons for this difference are not yet clear. Students with ADHD generally have difficulties with attention, hyperactivity, impulse control, emotional stability, or a combination of those factors.

As you consider this list of signs of ADHD, know that several of these traits must be present in combination before a diagnosis of ADHD can be made. A student who has ADHD …

When working with ADHD students in your classroom, keep the following in mind:

- Make your instructions brief and clear, and teach one step at a time.
- Be sure to make behavioral expectations clear.
- Carefully monitor work, especially when students move from one activity to another.
- Make frequent eye contact. Interestingly, students in the second row are more focused then those in the first.
- Adjust work time so it matches attention spans. Provide frequent breaks as necessary.
- Provide a quiet work area where students can move for better concentration.
- Establish and use a secret signal to let students know when they are off task or misbehaving.
- Use physical contact (a hand on the shoulder) to focus attention.
- Combine both visual and auditory information when giving directions.
- Ease transitions by providing cues and warnings.
- Teach relaxation techniques for longer work periods or tests.
- Each day be sure students have one task they can complete successfully.
- Limit the amount of homework.
- Whenever possible, break an assignment into manageable segments.

You are not alone when you're working with special needs students. Often specialists, clinicians, and other experts are available in the school as part of an educational team. Included on the team may be special education teachers, diagnosticians, parents, social workers, representatives from community agencies, administrators, and other teachers. By working in concert and sharing ideas, you can provide a purposeful education plan for each special needs student.

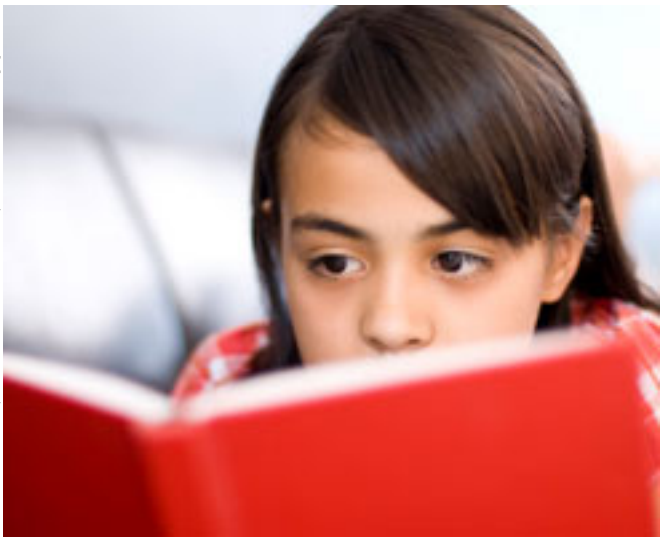
For students with learning disabilities

Academics & Organization

- Break learning tasks into small steps.
- Probe regularly to check understanding.
- Provide regular quality feedback.
- Present information visually and verbally.
- Use diagrams, graphics and pictures to support instruction.
- Provide independent practice.
- Model what you want students to do.
- Clearly define and post classroom expectations for work and behavior.
- Explicitly teach study and organizational skills.
- Teach student how to use planner or agenda to record assignments and due dates.
- Provide prompts of strategies to use and when to use them.
- Ask process-type questions such as "*How is that strategy working*?
- Use Direct Instruction.
- Provide simple instructions (preferably one at a time).
- Sequence slowly, using examples.
- Speak clearly and turn so students can see your face.
- Allow time for students to process requests and allow them to ask questions.
- Use graphic organizers to support understanding of relationships between ideas.

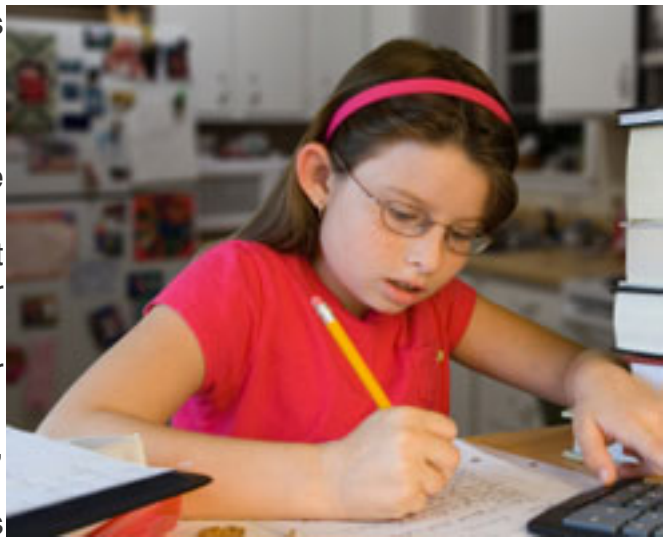
- Use adaptive equipment if appropriate (books on tape, laptop computers, etc.).
- Ask questions in a clarifying manner, then have student describe understanding of the questions.
- Use an overhead projector with an outline of the lesson or unit of the day.
- Reduce course load.
- Provide clear photocopies of notes and overhead transparencies.
- Provide a detailed course outline before class begins.
- Keep oral instructions logical and concise and reinforce them with brief cue words.
- Repeat or re-word complicated directions.
- Frequently verbalize what is being written on the board.
- At the end of class, summarize the important segments of each presentation.
- Eliminate classroom distractions (e.g. excessive noise, flickering lights, etc.).
- Give assignments both in written and oral form.
- Have more complex lessons recorded and available to the students.
- Have practice exercises available for lessons, in case the student has problems.
- Have student underline key words or directions on activity sheets (then review the sheets with them).
- Provide and teach memory strategies, such as mnemonic strategies and elaborative rehearsal.
- Write legibly, use large type, and do not clutter the board.
- Assist the student in borrowing notes from a peer if necessary.
- Clearly label equipment, tools, and materials, and use color-coding.
- Consider alternate activities/exercises that can be utilized with less difficulty for the student, while maintaining the same or similar learning objectives.
- Review relevant material, preview the material to be presented, present the new material, and then summarize the material just presented.
- Provide a peer tutor or assign the student to a study group.
- Allow the student to use a tape recorder.
- Use specific language and state expectations.

Reading



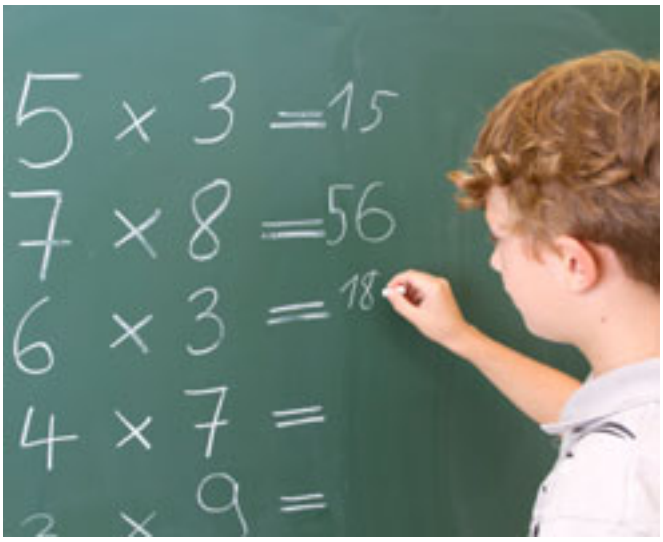
- Provide a quiet area for reading activities.
- Use books on tape, and books with large print and big spaces between lines.
- Provide a copy of class notes to student.
- Allow alternative forms for book reports.
- Have students use both visual and auditory senses when reading text.
- Present material in small units.
- Use graphic organizers to connect ideas.
- Read and share stories with students.
- Provide students with chapter outlines or study guides that highlight key points in their reading.
- Announce reading assignments well in advance.
- Offer to read written material aloud, when necessary.
- Share informational texts and invite students to wonder about the new ideas presented.
- Point out ways in which reading is important in everyday life (e.g., on labels, instructions, and signs).
- Teach students how books are organized.
- Use stories that have predictable words and words that occur frequently in the text.
- Label objects in classroom.
- Help students notice the letters in the environmental print that surrounds them.
- Engage students in activities that help them learn to recognize letters visually.
- Teach students to attend to the sounds in language.
- Model and demonstrate how to break short sentences into individual words.
- Have students clap out syllables and listen for and generate rhymes.
- Focus on activities that involve sounds of words, not on letters or spellings.
- Model specific sounds, and ask students to produce each sound in isolation.
- Teach students to blend, identify sounds, and break up words into sounds.
- When teaching the letters of the alphabet, activities should be explicit and unambiguous.
- When teaching decoding, begin with small, familiar words.
- Model sounding out words, blending the sounds together, and saying the word.
- Have students read new stories and reread old stories every day to build fluency.
- Engage students in discussion of reading topics that are of interest.
- Provide high interest reading selections whenever possible.
- Model comprehension strategies and provide students with guided assistance.
- Point out how titles, headings, and graphics reveal main ideas and tell what a book is about.
- Teach students to identify main ideas presented in the text, as well as the supporting details.
- Point out unfamiliar words, revisit them, and explore their meaning.
- Teach students to use contextual clues to figure out meanings of unfamiliar words.
- Build background for reading selections and create a mental scheme for text organization.
- Set a purpose for reading – to gain meaning from text.

Writing



- Use oral exams in place of written exams when possible.
- Allow use of tape recorder in class.
- Assign a note taker for student.
- Provide notes or outlines to reduce the amount of writing.
- Provide a partially completed outline that allows student to fill in details under major headings.
- Allow use of a laptop or other computer for writing assignments.
- Provide computer with spell check, grammar, and cut and paste features.
- Reduce copying that the student is required to do (e.g. offer pre-printed math problems).
- Have wide rule paper, graph paper, and pencil grips available.
- Provide alternatives to written assignments (video-taping or audio recording).
- Use mnemonic devices to teach writing process (e.g. COPS: Capitalization, Organization, Punctuation, Spelling).
- Teach students spelling conventions systematically, such as the “silent e” rule.
- Allow the student to use print *or* cursive.
- Teach pre-organization strategies, such as use of graphic organizers.
- Use a speech recognition program combined with the word processor so students can dictate rather than type (for older students).
- Do not count off for poor spelling on first drafts, in-class assignments, or on tests.
- Have student proofread papers using a checklist (not immediately after writing).
- Shorten writing assignments and allow extra time if necessary.
- Have students complete writing tasks in small steps.
- Stress or de-emphasize certain task requirements during a complex assignment.
- Allow use of abbreviations in writing assignments, and have student keep a list of appropriate abbreviations available.

Mathematics



- Allow use of fingers and scratch paper.
- Use diagrams and draw math concepts.
- Present activities that involve all sensory modalities – auditory, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic.
- Arrange peer assistance and tutoring opportunities.
- Have graph paper available so students can align numbers in math problems.
- Use colored pencils to differentiate problems.
- Offer manipulatives throughout instruction.
- Teach students to draw pictures of word problems.
- Use mnemonic devices to teach steps of a math concept (e.g. order of operations: “Please Excuse My Dear Aunt Sally”).
- Use rhythm and music to teach math facts and to set steps to a beat.
- Schedule computer time for drill and practice with math facts.
- Practice new strategies until students are comfortable with them.
- Explain why learning math strategies are important while teaching, and match strategies with the material.
- Encourage and monitor use of strategies to ensure correct usage and generalization.
- Teach students to understand the problem, develop a plan to solve the problem, carry out the plan, and look back to be sure the answer solves the problem.
- Use materials such as games for practice, which are interactive and motivational.
- Use distributed practice, meaning practice in small increments (e.g. two 15-minute sessions per day, rather than an hour session three times a week).
- Use small numbers of math facts per group for mastery, and frequently practice with mixed groups.
- Emphasize "reverses," or "turnarounds" (e.g., 1+ 2/2 + 1, 1x2/2x1) in vertical, horizontal, and oral formats.
- Have students self-chart progress by keeping track of how many and which facts are mastered, and how many more there are to go within a unit.

Testing & Accommodations

- Avoid overly complicated language in test questions and clearly separate items when spacing them on the exam sheet.
- Consider other forms of testing (oral, hands-on demonstration, open-book etc.).
- Eliminate distractions while students are taking exams.
- For students who may have difficulty transferring answers, avoid answer sheets.
- Allow student to write answers on the test.
- For students who have reading difficulties, have a proctor read the test to the student.
- For students with writing difficulties, have someone scribe the answers for them or use a tape recorder.
- Provide study questions for exams that demonstrate the format along with the content of the exam.
- Teach students how to proofread assignments and tests.
- Allow students to use a dictionary, thesaurus, or a calculator during tests.
- Develop a scoring guide, share it with students, and provide models of examples of each level of performance.

Some important concepts –

Person First Language - Always use Respectful Language

Priority Needs based Intervention

Individualized Education Plan