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Adapting for Special Needs - Eight Techniques for Helping Students Succeed

Here are several suggestions for adapting lessons based on behaviors teachers observe in class. The modifications here are designed for students with mild to moderate learning disabilities.

1. If your student needs help reading and comprehending...

- Shorten or edit student reading materials, or select a portion for the student to read.
- Allow students to read in pairs, a weaker reader and a stronger one.
- Highlight the main ideas that are important for the student not to miss.
- Record the reading and allow the student to listen to it being read to him/her.

2. If your student needs help understanding and following directions...

- Create a short instruction sheet of routine directions.
- Give directions to the class one at a time. (Once one task is completed, give the next step.)
- Have the student or a group of students repeat directions back to you to check for understanding.
- Use signals or symbols to indicate kinds of directions (a pencil for writing work, a book for reading, turning lights on and off to indicate a role play or moving activity).
- Show samples of what the completed work will look like to better communicate expectations.

3. If your student needs help writing...

- Modify the writing tool to make it more comfortable, such as pencil grips, felt tip markers, or larger pencils.
- Allow the student to compose on a word processor.
- Allow the student to audio-record his/her responses.
- Provide lined paper rather than blank paper, or draw lines on workbook pages.

4. If your student needs help working with other students in small groups...

- Carefully compose the groups based on what you know about students rather than letting students choose their own groups.
- Try the activity as a whole class.
- Prep the student and review behavioral expectations prior to beginning an activity.
- Have adult or teen volunteers work with the small groups.
- Give the student feedback with a checklist for behavior or a visual signal.

5. If your student needs help expressing him/herself orally...

- Choose simpler questions to ask him/her in front of the class.
- Prep the student by giving him/her questions privately before you ask them in front of the class.
- After you ask a question, wait. Give the student enough time to compose his/her thoughts.
- Give multiple choices or ask the student to recognize rather than recall.

6. If your student needs help understanding vocabulary...

- Teach difficult or new words at the beginning of the lesson.
- Create a simple glossary of terms for the student to keep on his/her desk.
- When you say or read a difficult word, stop and explain it again.

7. If your student needs help completing art activities or drawing assignments...

- Give students the option of pasting a collage or even circling objects rather than drawing or painting.
- Provide stencils for tracing.
- Provide larger crayons or markers that are easier to use.
- Pair the child with another child who is stronger in this area.

8. If your student needs help organizing materials...

- Only give him/her the materials for one step at a time.
- Provide a workspace where only materials needed for a given task are available at that time.
- Color-code materials so students have an easy reference cue.